

NIETZSCHE'S MOST ABYSMAL THOUGHT

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It may seem strange on a panel concerned with religious experience to consider Friedrich Nietzsche. After all, he is generally regarded as a notorious atheist, whose famous assertion, "God is dead," has become so widely known that it is scrawled by schoolboys on restroom walls. His critique of Christianity is vicious and unrelenting. Why then should we consider an atheist such as Nietzsche when we are concerned with religious experience?

Atheism is a widely used but also a highly contested concept. Today, we generally take it to mean a disbelief in God. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, however, this was one of the few things that it did not mean. Then it was a term of opprobrium that was used by religious groups to castigate their theological opponents or to condemn those who believed in God but did not believe that they had to obey his laws. 'Atheist' thus did not describe one who rejected religion but one who occupied what others considered a heretical position. To be an atheist thus did not necessarily mean that one was irreligious. This ambiguity has characterized the use of the term throughout its long history and continues to bedevil us today.

We still recognize at least two different kinds of atheism today. The first, which we might call dogmatic or evangelical atheism, refers to those who hate all religion and see it as the source of much that is bad in the world. Daniel Dennet and Richard Dawkins, to take just two examples, defend such a position, arguing that God is not dead because he never existed, and that religious belief is not a source of anything good, but in fact ruins everything. The second kind of atheism includes those who find themselves unable to believe but who perceive this as something negative, as an absence or a deep spiritual abyss. They almost invariably seek some new form of religious or quasi-religious belief to fill this emptiness. Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky exemplify this position. Nietzsche, I want to suggest, is an atheist more in their camp than that of Dennet or Dawkins. His atheism is thus at its core a longing to believe, a recognition of the necessity of belief to a healthy human life.ⁱ

Many of the scholars who first wrote about Nietzsche recognized this fact. For example, Ernst Bertram who developed perhaps the most influential early interpretation of Nietzsche's thought in his *Nietzsche: Attempt at a New Mythology* (1918), portrayed Nietzsche's project as an attempt to revive or recreate a pagan mythology to replace a Christianity that had grown old and decrepit.ⁱⁱ While he and those like him thought of Nietzsche as theistic in some sense, they generally accepted his assertion that he was thoroughly anti-Christian. This interpretation of his thought, however, was derailed by his sister's falsifications of his manuscripts and the National Socialists' misuse of his thought for their own purposes. Moreover, in the period after World War II, the revival of interest in Nietzsche among Anglo-American philosophers often discounted the theological element of his thought, emphasizing instead his pragmatism and the experimental nature of his thinking. In recent years an increasing number of scholars have begun to consider the impact not just of religion but of Christianity on Nietzsche's thought. I have spelled out the theological genealogy of Nietzsche's thinking at length elsewhere and will not consider it in any detail here.ⁱⁱⁱ I want instead to describe the

experience and path of thinking that led Nietzsche to the thought that he sees as the foundation of his final teaching and then try to describe with some care the substance of this thought itself and its place between theology and philosophy.

Nietzsche's Account of his Experience of the thought of the Eternal Recurrence in *Ecce Homo*

The basis of Nietzsche's final teaching was what he called his “most abysmal thought,” the thought of the eternal recurrence of the same. This is the idea that the universe has no beginning or end but simply repeats itself over and over again, always following exactly the same course, a causal process that bites its own tail. On the surface this idea does not seem so profound or abysmal. Indeed, it seems to be merely a reiteration of an idea held by many primitive peoples.^{iv} Nietzsche's readers thus often find it difficult to take the idea seriously.

Some scholars such as Alexander Nehamas in his influential *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* dismiss it as mere irony. Many postmodern interpreters of Nietzsche grant that the concept becomes more important for the later Nietzsche but they generally see it as a betrayal of the anti-Christian, anti-metaphysical teaching of his earlier work (and particularly the work of his middle period that they seek to mine for their own moral and political purposes). Nietzsche himself, however, was unequivocal in his assertion of the importance of this idea. In his view, it was not merely his most profound idea, it is the most profound idea that could ever be thought. He makes the significance of the idea had for him clear in his discussion of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*:

I recount now the story of *Zarathustra*. The fundamental conception of the work, the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest principle of affirmation that can ever be attained, belongs to August of 1881. At the time, I wrote on a sheet of paper the words: “6000 feet beyond man and time.” I was walking that day around the lake Silvaplana through the woods. I stopped by a powerful pyramidal stone not far from Surlei, and there this thought came to me.^v

He makes several claims here. First, the idea of the eternal recurrence is the basis of *Zarathustra*. Second, it is the highest principle of affirmation possible. Third, he seemed to be beyond man and time when it came to him. And fourth, it came to him at a specific time and in a specific place. He does not explain where the thought came from, but he implies that it was not deduced or reached as the result of a dialectical examination. Moreover, being struck by the thought, he felt himself to be transported into a superhuman and atemporal realm. It was also no ordinary thought, but in his view the greatest possible thought, greater than any other religious or philosophical principle that ever was or could be articulated. Finally, it was a form of inspiration. The language he uses here is not the language of logic or scientific reasoning but of revelation, and what he describes is more characteristic of a mystical experience than what we would typically consider a philosophical experience. He signals this as well by clearly demarcating the “sacred” time and place where it occurred, tying the thought to the high mountains, to solitude, to thin air, to the realm of *Zarathustra* as he was later to call it.^{vi}

Continuing his account, he claims that he had had a premonition of the thought in a decisive change in his musical taste that occurred several months before. This might seem an odd or irrelevant remark but it is more than just a passing observation. For Nietzsche nothing was more central to the immediate revelation of the truth than music. Following Schopenhauer, he believed that music (in contrast to philosophy and the other

arts) provided the deepest experience of reality. In our experience of music we thus stand immediately in the force that invisibly governs all reality. Nietzsche in fact argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* that it would be better to describe the heart of existence as primordial music than as primordial will. This sudden change in his musical taste that he connects to the revelation of the idea of the eternal recurrence thus suggests a basic reattunement to the world, a fundamental transformation in the structure of his existence in relation to the heart of the reality. Indeed, he describes this new attunement as a rebirth out of the spirit of music.^{vii} Or to translate his German more accurately, he claims to have been born again. Here the theological language from the pen of a Lutheran pastor's son is unmistakable

The depth and profundity of the thought of the eternal recurrence elevates *Zarathustra* (and presumably its author) to an unparalleled height. Nietzsche writes: This work stands alone. If we leave the poets aside, there has perhaps never been something created out of such a superabundance of strength. My concept of the Dionysian here becomes the highest deed; measured against it all the rest of human activity is poor and conditional. A Goethe or a Shakespeare would not for even a moment know how to breathe in the monstrous passion and height of this work. . . If one calculates the spirit and goodness of all the great souls as one, all together they would not be able to produce a single speech of Zarathustra. . . . [The book's] like has never been written, never felt, never suffered: so suffers a god, a Dionysus.”

Nietzsche thus claims that this work and its fundamental thought, the eternal recurrence, are the highest expression of his concept of the Dionysian, and that the suffering of its hero is the suffering of Dionysus. In this way Nietzsche gives the idea an explicit divine name.^{viii} He also calls his articulation of this idea the supreme deed, greater in fact than all the other human deeds put together. Measured against things human, it is something monstrous, beyond the conceptual abilities of even a Goethe or a Shakespeare.

Nietzsche's titanic claims here gives us some insight into the reasons for his extraordinary estimation of the idea. He apparently considers it the greatest thought because it is the highest possible affirmation, and it is the highest affirmation because it affirms without exception everything that can be. As such, however, it is also the most abysmal of all thoughts because it means not merely accepting but the active willing of everything horrible, detestable, and ugly as well as everything wonderful, admirable, and lovely. And as the most encompassing and most abysmal thought it also engenders the greatest suffering in those who think and will it. The reason for this, however, is not immediately obvious. On one level suffering is clearly the result of having to affirm what one does not like or prefer, but for Nietzsche this is a minor aspect and one that is in any case misguided. To affirm absolutely means not to hate or detest anything.

He gives us a hint about the deeper meaning of this suffering by giving the thought (and those who think it) the name Dionysus. In Greek mythology Dionysus is the god who is reborn every year and every year torn to pieces by his maenadic followers. His festival is in the spring. It is a festival of rebirth but it is also a drama festival that portrays and celebrates the tragedy of existence itself, the recognition that at the heart of things is the contradiction of the one and the many, the recognition that all of existence is both one and many, that the many are constantly transmuted into the one and the one into the many. The destruction of individual forms is thus intrinsic to the life of the whole.

While the fate of Oedipus is tragic, in its connection to the life of the whole it is an affirmation, a recognition that in its fecundity life can and does sacrifice even its greatest individual forms. The figure of Dionysus embodies this contradiction, and the idea of the eternal recurrence is thus the conceptual form of this mythological figure. It both unifies existence and at the same time asserts its multiplicity. It is the deep joy in renewal but also the pain of dismemberment, the recognition of the inevitable loss of the individual in a unification with the whole.^{ix} To think and to live this thought in its fullest sense for Nietzsche is to become a god who is eternally reborn into his individuality and eternally torn to pieces to become one with the manyness of the natural world. To think this thought is to be the moment in which nature becomes conscious of itself and affirms itself, including all of the pain and suffering of its contradictions.

This emphasis upon the suffering and rebirth of Dionysus also suggests why Nietzsche believed that his god is both similar and superior to the God of Christianity. Nietzsche recognized that Christ claimed that he came to redeem the sins of the world by dying on the cross, but he points out that the Church asserted that he only came to redeem the elect. Nietzsche's Dionysus who comes into existence with the articulation of the idea of the eternal recurrence redeems not just the elect but all of humanity and indeed all of existence.

Nietzsche explains the difference in both *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*. Christianity in his view is a slave religion that grew up in opposition to the master morality of antiquity. It was driven by resentment and a desire for revenge but a revenge that could never be attained in this world. It was able to affirm the life of the downtrodden only by promising them ultimate happiness in an afterlife in which they would be able to watch their masters being tortured in hell. Nietzsche's Dionysian idea of the eternal recurrence is an act of pure affirmation that is not motivated by the spirit of revenge. It thus redeems everything that ever has been or can be. Just as Christ's suffering redeemed the elect, the suffering of Dionysus and all those who think and live the idea of the eternal recurrence will redeem existence as such.

Not everyone would agree with this interpretation of the meaning and importance of the idea of the eternal recurrence as Nietzsche describes it in *Ecce Homo*. In fact, a number of scholars have dismissed these passages which lavishes such praise upon the idea and *Zarathustra* as examples of megalomania and describe them as the first signs of the mental illness that completely overwhelmed him soon after he finished the work.^x Scholars who follow this line of interpretation typically read these passages in light of notes that he wrote to friends during and after his breakdown in early 1889 when he described himself as a god and signed a number of his letters as either Dionysus or the Crucified. While there can be no doubt that there is a connection between his last thoughts/ravings and the assertions in his preceding work, it seems more likely that his unhinged thoughts exaggerated his more sober and indeed razor-sharp judgments in *Ecce Homo* rather than the reverse. It would be more plausible to see these passages in *Ecce Homo* as evidence of a mind already unhinged, if Nietzsche had not said and written very similar things much earlier. It thus seems unlikely that his claims were the result of mental illness. Indeed, his claims here, as we will see, are in fact already implicit in the idea of the eternal recurrence in 1881, fully 7 years before his collapse, and were fully spelled out in *Zarathustra*. It would make more sense to argue that what characterized his descent into madness was not an exaggerated sense of his self-worth but a profound

loss of inhibitions about expressing these claims in public. Moreover, such proclamations may have more to do with his quite accurate sense that he stood on the verge of greatness and widespread recognition.^{xi} We thus cannot dismiss his claims out of hand but must give them a more careful consideration.

Others have seen these extravagant assertions as a consequence of Nietzsche's hyperbolic style, seeking to dismiss or at least depreciate their philosophical or theological significance by arguing that they are only rhetorical flourishes meant to shock and unsettle the reader. This claim is somewhat more plausible than the preceding one since Nietzsche himself points out in *Ecce Homo* that he had and has a tendency to dramatize and over-dramatize everything he writes, including even his early philological essays. However, if his claims in *Ecce Homo* were merely the result of such over-dramatization, one would expect that Nietzsche's judgments would be less extreme in his notes, letters, and conversations with friends, but exactly the opposite is the case. The biographical evidence overwhelmingly supports the view that he was deadly serious about the supreme importance of this idea. His letters and conversations testify to the extraordinary value he attributed to it. Indeed, he only spoke of it in hushed tones to his closest friends. We also know that he attempted to gather these friends around him to prepare for the crisis of nihilism that he believed was imminent and inevitable. Finally, his realization of the idea of the eternal recurrence led him to rethink everything he had previously done and written. As a result, he decided to reissue all of his earlier works with new prefaces in order to show that while they might seem to contradict some of the things he now believed, they were in fact only steps on the way to a realization of his great idea.

Nietzsche's Longing for Spiritual Renewal

That Nietzsche perceived this idea as a revelation is not surprising given what we know about his life-long attitude toward religion. He famously claimed that German philosophy was born in the Lutheran pastor's house and this was certainly true in his own case. His father and both his paternal and maternal grandfathers were Lutheran ministers, and Nietzsche was intended for the profession as well. His piety as a child was apparently deeply emotional and very much tied to the experience of the liturgy, and church music. He recounts his own experience of listening to the music at his father's funeral with great emotion but even more poignantly the experience of Mozart's *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah*, and *Judas Maccabeus*, and Hayden's *Creation* in the Naumburg Cathedral.^{xii} While Nietzsche apparently remained conventionally pious during his school years at Pforta and still intended to enter the ministry when he first went to the university, his faith in Christianity began to wane. This said, it is clear that he never lost his desire to believe. This is evident in his poem "To the Unknown God," written in 1864 when he was twenty.

Once more, before I wander on
And turn my glance forward,
I lift up my hands to you in loneliness —
You, to whom I flee,
To whom in the deepest depths of my heart
I have solemnly consecrated altars
So that
Your voice might summon me again.

On them glows, deeply inscribed, the words:
To the unknown god.
I am his, although until this hour
I've remained in the wicked horde:
I am his—and I feel the bonds
That pull me down in my struggle
And, would I flee,
Force me into his service.
I want to know you, Unknown One,
You who have reached deep into my soul,
Into my life like the gust of a storm,
You incomprehensible yet related one!
I want to know you, even serve you.

The poem clearly reflects his doubts about Christianity but is permeated with a longing to believe. The substance of the poem is also very revealing. Constructing an altar to the unknown god was a Greek convention that was intended to avoid the wrath of gods that the Greeks did not know of and consequently would have failed otherwise to honor properly. Presumably this would include the Judeo-Christian God. In Nietzsche's case, however, he seems to already have a much more profound relationship to the unknown god. Indeed, this god seems to be more a *deus absconditus* that was once known and then lost rather than a strange or foreign god. Indeed, such a god is surprisingly akin to Luther's hidden God, and only a short step away from the incomprehensible God of nominalism. Nietzsche clearly longs for a more immediate experience of or union with this god, even as he feels pulled away from religion by "the wicked horde," and repeats Luther's prayer to be taken prisoner by this god.

Nietzsche's loss of faith in Christianity and his concomitant desire to believe was undoubtedly one of the reasons he was so attracted to Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was an atheist, but not in a traditional sense. He denied the existence of God as Christianity understood him, but at the same time he asserted that the world was governed by a dark and irrational will that exercised absolute dominion over all things. In his view we are all subservient to this will and all thus condemned by it to be both criminals and victims. The only appropriate response to our situation, as he saw it, was thus to reject the will to life by practicing asceticism.

While Nietzsche adopted many of Schopenhauer's ideas, he was not attracted to his asceticism. Instead, he tried to build on Schopenhauer's idea of the will and its immediate expression in music to develop an aesthetic solution to the problem presented by the decline of Christian faith and practice. This was powerfully reinforced by the influence of Wagner whom Nietzsche met and befriended in 1868. He was particularly taken with Wagner's project for cultural renewal through music which spoke to hopes he had harbored since he was a teenager. He and Wagner admired both Schopenhauer and the Greeks and the conjunction of these various factors gave birth to Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. It was in this book that he first developed a conception of the Dionysian.^{xiii} He argued that Greek culture had once come into being out of the Dionysian power of music and that German culture could be similarly revived by the transformative power of Wagnerian music. The secret of Greek tragedy in his view was that it allowed human beings to peer into the Dionysian heart of

existence, what he calls the “contradictory primordial one,” without being consumed or driven mad by it. This experience gave the Greeks their great profundity. They were saved from the debilitating consequences of such a vision, because it always appeared to them wrapped in the dream image of the Olympian gods who provided a beautiful, Apollinian veil through which to peer into the Dionysian abyss. The contradiction at the heart of things thus always appeared to them as the tragic fate of a heroic individual who rises to greatness but is then destroyed. In Nietzsche's view, however, until the time of Sophocles these heroes were all merely masks for Dionysus, the god of masks, and it was thus his annual epiphany and destruction that all of the dramas reenacted and celebrated. This Dionysian celebration in Nietzsche's view was the core of Greek piety and culture and was precisely the sort of faith he hoped to see restored in Germany through the experience of Wagner's music.

The revival of German cultural life for him was thus connected with a renewal of piety and culture in the post-Christian world. This renewal he argued depended upon the genius, the lyric poet/musician, who is able to transmute the experience of the abyss into a form that others can view through images and sounds without being driven mad by the experience. He believed that only in this way, through art, could existence be justified and redeemed.

The manifest failure of Wagner's project to achieve such a renewal and Nietzsche's subsequent break with Wagner, led to him to conclude that such a renewal could not be achieved in the post-Christian world through public performance and festival. He came to see that this was not possible because of the continued influence of a Platonized Christianity that manifested itself in Kantian morality, liberalism, egalitarianism, and other forms. Platonic or Socratic rationalism in Nietzsche's view was originally a flight from the truth of existence that Greek tragedy had opened up into a second reality or ideal world set over against the actual world. At the end of modernity, however, the rationalistic demand for truth within Christianity undermined the faith in God and then the faith in reason itself. Kant's demonstration in his antinomy doctrine that reason could not provide an explanation of the fundamental cosmological facts of existence and Schopenhauer's generalization of this insight shattered the claims of reason, and opened up the door to a full-blown nihilism. Most modern Europeans, however, had not yet come to recognize this fact; they did not understand that God was dead, and until they did they would be unable to understand the need for a new Dionysian religion and morality.

Under these circumstances, Nietzsche believed that it was first necessary to intensify his critique of Christianity and prevailing values. This he called the no-saying part of his work. In conjunction with this he believed it was necessary to formulate new values, rooted in a new Dionysian “piety.” This yes-saying side of his project, however, depended upon an experience of this Dionysian abyss in all of its depths and dangers and an affirmation of existence that was rooted in this experience. Or to connect both sides of his project, what was needed was the recognition of the death of God and the affirmation of the idea of the eternal recurrence. To understand more clearly what this project entailed, however, we need to examine more carefully the story he tells of his alter-ego, Zarathustra.^{xiv}

The Idea of the Eternal Recurrence in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is the story of Zarathustra's dawning recognition and

affirmation of the idea of the eternal recurrence. He is the first to do so and as such realizes that it is his destiny to be the teacher of the eternal recurrence. He recognizes this fact, however, only at the end of a long spiritual journey. The work begins the statement that when Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains where he lived alone for ten years. There is no explanation for his flight into solitude, although it obviously frames everything that follows. Nietzsche, however, gives us a clue to the reasons for his withdrawal in the second section of the "Prologue" when an old saint who sees Zarathustra coming down the mountain remarks that when Zarathustra first went up ten years before he had been carrying ashes but that he now has become a child and an awakened one, bringing his fire down to the valley. What drove him from home was thus apparently the loss of whatever had become ashes and what has brought him back is the fact that he has found some way to kindle a new fire. The ashes, as we learn in several places later in the work, are the ashes of a dead god, and for ten years Zarathustra thus apparently mourned this god and the spiritual emptiness his death produced before finally finding a way to live in the face of this fact.^{xv} The life that he had led before going up the mountain had been ordered by divine commandments both internally and externally. With the death of his god and the collapse of all the values that had been build upon him, life had become meaningless for him. In the absence of god and his commandments, everything was permitted, but as Zarathustra learned, without such transcendent standards to depend upon, he had no moral resources to help him choose or formulate a conception of happiness or a good or healthy life.^{xvi} His life was in ashes.

When he comes down from the mountain he tells the old saint that he is bringing man a gift, which turns out to be the idea of the superman. The nature of the insight that led to the idea of the superman is never explicitly stated but we are given a hint about its nature in Zarathustra's speech to the rising sun in the first section of the "Prologue." The sun was closely associated by the ancient Persians with their god Ahura Mazda, and as such was an object of worship. Zarathustra, however, addresses the sun and tells it that it does not have any value or meaning in itself, but only for and through him. During the ten years living in his cave, Zarathustra has come to realize that gods are not something external and in themselves but always only "for and through me," something produced by and for human beings. The god-power, the power to establish values, in this sense comes not from something external but from human beings themselves.^{xvii} But in order for them to become capable of establishing values and lighting a new fire, they must first free themselves from their beliefs in the existence of gods external to and independent of themselves. Only then can they be creative. And only then can they become superhuman. Having reached this conclusion and overcome his despair, Zarathustra returns to men to liberate them from their bondage to their own mistaken notions of god and divine law. The old saint, however, does not understand this. According to Zarathustra, this is because he has not yet realized the decisive fact that the old God is dead. And that it is now time for the superman to live.

When he descends from his mountain Zarathustra thus has all of the optimism of the Left Hegelians who under the spell of Feuerbach were convinced of their own godlike powers. What Zarathustra doesn't realize and what he only comes to see near the end of part three of the work is that godlike power and authority entail godlike responsibility. That is, in order to be a god in any sense of the term one must take responsibility for

one's own creation. And this, as we will see, means that one must think and will the eternal recurrence of the same.

The story that Nietzsche recounts in the first three parts of *Zarathustra* (which together constituted the whole work as it was originally conceived) is the account of the path that Zarathustra follows to the recognition of this titanic thought, his struggle to bring it to consciousness, and his final supreme effort to affirm it. For reasons of space, I can only briefly summarize the development that leads to the revelation of this idea. In the first part of the work, Zarathustra recognizes and explains that he has come to understand that the ego is an illusion, a mere projection of the self or body. The self itself, however, is nothing other than the collection of passions that struggle with one another for dominance and control. The strength of the self depends in part upon the strength of these passions but more importantly on their coordination in pursuit of a single goal. The establishment of a rank order within the self is thus the first step to mastery and this is achieved by the dominance of one passion—what Zarathustra calls one's virtue—over all the others. Behind or beneath all of these passions, however, are basic biological drives and instincts and behind them the will to power that characterizes and motivates all things.

The will to power, according to Zarathustra, is a will to overcome opposition but its ultimate goal is self-overcoming in the sense that it constantly aims to become more than it is. This applies not merely to individuals but to peoples, states, and everything else at all levels of organization.^{xviii} As Zarathustra discovers in the second part of the work, however, such a will always finds itself already in the flow of time and thus always already conditioned by a past that is beyond its control. In this sense it can never be truly free or creative, and thus can never truly will. The rage of the will against this dead hand of the past, against the “it was,” engenders what Nietzsche calls the spirit of revenge, the desire to take revenge against one's own impotence by finding something or someone in the present to blame and punish.^{xix}

In confronting this problem Zarathustra recognizes that in order for the will to be truly causal and to escape from the spirit of revenge, it would have to will backwards. On the surface this seems to pose an insurmountable obstacle to truly willing since the past seems to be always beyond our control, something over which we never have power. Nietzsche, however, believed he had an answer to this problem. Indeed, the great insight that frees us from mere reactivity and allows us to be truly positive, active beings is the thought of the eternal recurrence.

The reasons for this are not immediately apparent, even to Zarathustra himself. He clearly has some inkling of the titanic importance of this thought long before he is able to articulate it or affirm it. In his first account of the idea near the beginning of part 3 of the work, in “The Riddle and the Vision,” Zarathustra recounts to his fellow seafarers that once not long before when he was walking one evening in the mountain he found the spirit of gravity, half-dwarf and half-mole, sitting on his shoulder whispering to him of the futility of all things. Zarathustra becomes more and more dispirited until his courage brings him to confront the dwarf, telling him that it is “You or I.” In this confrontation he warns the dwarf that he does not know his (Zarathustra's) most abysmal thought. This is the setting for the first presentation of the idea of the eternal recurrence.

As they are stopped by a gateway, Zarathustra tells the dwarf that there is an eternal path that leads back the way they have come and an eternal path ahead of them on

the way they are going. He says that they contradict one another and come together at this gateway which is named "Moment." He then asks the dwarf if he believes they contradict one another eternally. The dwarf replies that all that is straight lies, and that time itself is a circle.^{xx} Zarathustra warns the dwarf not to be too easy on himself, and spells out the consequences of the idea. On the eternal path leading up to the moment all things that can happen must already have happened and on the eternal path going forward all things that can happen must yet happen. He asks the dwarf then whether everything including the very moment they are now in must not eternally recur,^{xxi} But at this point in the discussion, terrified of his own thoughts he grows quieter and quieter, and then has a vision in which he sees a shepherd choking on a snake that has crawled into his mouth. Something cries out of him to the shepherd to bite and he does so, spitting out the snake's head and leaping up, filled with a laughter that is no human laughter, transfigured into a godlike being. Nietzsche wonders how he can go on living without hearing that laughter and how he can die now that he has heard it.

The spirit of gravity is a pessimist, and makes everything small with his crushing teaching that everything is in vain, that everything that is born dies. Zarathustra's will rebels against this notion, and he confronts the dwarf's pessimism with a deeper pessimism. Everything that has been or will be has already occurred not just once but over and over an infinite number of times. The world in other words has no beginning or end, as Christianity claimed, nor does it have an ultimate purpose or goal. And yet it is eternal. However, Zarathustra does not assert this point but only poses it as a question. It is not something that can be dispositively known and therefore cannot be asserted. Moreover, Zarathustra is clearly terrified by the possibility that he might be correct.

The reason that Zarathustra told the dwarf he was being too easy on himself was that he only thought of the idea the eternal recurrence in terms of a circle, that is, in a Cartesian fashion as a representation within consciousness, and thus as merely something for a disembodied ego. The ego, however, is only the ephemeral surface of the self. It isn't enough merely to think the doctrine of the eternal recurrence as a representation independent of the self; it must also be lived or experienced. It is only when it is not merely thought but experienced and willed with the whole self that the thought of the eternal recurrence can be understood. Affirming the doctrine of the eternal recurrence thus does not mean merely accepting it as something that is necessary in theory but as something practical that we are always already a part of. It is thus not enough for one to say "Yes I understand that everything horrible and petty is necessary as part of the whole;" one must also will them, want all of the horrible and petty things with all one's heart; not merely accept them but also love them. In doing so one takes upon oneself the responsibility for all things as one's own deed. This of course means in a certain sense becoming all things insofar as one becomes or becomes one with the will behind all things. To will affirm the eternal recurrence one must thus give up the illusion of individuality and notion of the independent integrity of the ego, and thereby become or become one with Dionysus.

Zarathustra recounts the vision to his fellow travelers, but clearly does not understand it or know how to interpret it. He is in fact afraid to recognize consciously what he already has experienced at some level of his being, what he already in a sense is. But the desire to understand the thought behind his thoughts festers and grows in him until he eventually forces it to the surface and into consciousness. The experience,

however, nearly kills him, first filling him with nausea and then knocking him out and leaving him unconsciousness for seven days.

What happened to him during those seven days is never explicitly stated, but the section is entitled, "The Convalescent," so presumably it is focused on his recovery from the thought. From the stories his animals (his eagle and snake) tell when he regains consciousness, we gain some insight into what occurred since Zarathustra remarks that they understand what he experienced during those seven days. His animals watched over him during this time of convalescence and when he awakens they chatter at him. Their chattering apparently helps him reattach himself to life. He remarks that because of their chattering the world seems to lie before him like a garden. Words and sounds he asks rhetorically, are they not dream bridges and rainbows among things that remain eternally apart?

This remark is among the most important in *Zarathustra* because it gives us some insight into the ontological character of reality for Zarathustra (and Nietzsche). All things, he suggests (again indirectly and interrogatively) remain eternally apart and are held together only by the dream bridges of symbols, words, gestures, sounds, etc. Ontologically, this is a classical nominalist claim in the tradition of William of Ockham and Thomas Bradwardine. He suggests in this way that there are no universals, no species or genera, but only radically individualized beings. The order that we perceive in the world is then created by symbols of various sorts that we use to group things together. The world is then a sheer manyness of radically different beings, although even to call them beings or things is a stretch since that attributes some form of universality to them. In view of this difficulty, it might be better to say simply that the world in its core is a manyness of differents. The experience of this manyness for Zarathustra is thus analogous to the experience of Dionysus, the experience of being torn to pieces.^{xxii} The world experienced in this way is a sheer abyss, the original *chaos* out of which Hesiod imaged the world to arise.^{xxiii} It is only words and sounds, logos and music, that form the world into a whole. Or to put it in terms Nietzsche used elsewhere, it is only the power of art that gives names and order to things. Through art the world thus ceases to appear as a chaotic manyness and becomes a world, a beautiful multiplicity within a well rounded whole, or as Zarathustra puts it, a garden.^{xxiv}

But even here there is a further complication. Each soul, Zarathustra goes on to say, lives in its own world, radically and eternally separate from every other soul. This absolute alienation follows, of course, from the earlier ontological claim, but is also part and parcel of our subjectivity. The world through art and language is always as it is only for me. The world as others perceive it is always then merely an afterworld for me. On the surface, this claim very much resembles Descartes' claim that the *cogito ergo sum* experience can only demonstrate to me my own existence and not that of others. Nietzsche, however, takes this insight one step further than Descartes (whose argument still relies in a number of ways upon the existence of God) and draws the radical but not unwarranted conclusion that if everything is for and through me, then there is no outside of me. I am everything that is. Or to put it another way, if God is dead, I am god.

Here we have some insight into not just the idea but the experience of the eternal recurrence, but the difficulty of affirming it. If there is no outside me and everything that is is through me, then affirming the eternal recurrence means affirming everything without exception in its radical and absolute difference, as primordial Hesiodic *chaos*, as

abyss. This Dionysian insight is made bearable only by words and sounds that in Apollinian fashion make us believe in a world and thus make the insight into this abyss bearable. We get some inkling of this from the words of Zarathustra's animals who recount to him what he has learned during those seven days:

Everything goes round and everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of being is built. Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the ring of being remains faithful to itself. In every Now, begin begins; round every Here rolls the sphere There. The center is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity.^{xxv}

For one who thinks the thought of the eternal recurrence there is no outside himself because in thinking and affirming it he becomes one with all things and is thus shattered into thousands of pieces in the way that Dionysus is torn to pieces and distributed in the world. But even in the agony of destruction and dismemberment, he knows that everything comes back together again. This single thought sustains him and empowers him.

Why though is Zarathustra able to affirm this thought? Why is it not for him as for the dwarf or later the soothsayer a source of pessimism and despair? Zarathustra's claim here seems to be that to the strong, to the healthy examples of what Nietzsche would later call, ascending life, this is a joyful realization in spite of the pain because it means that they will live their lives over and over again. Because they can say, "Once more!" in the face of all pain and suffering, in the face of all that is petty and disgusting, the world of the eternal recurrence is a beautiful world. Joy as Zarathustra indicates in the "Drunken Song" is deeper than agony. For the strong the world is justified. Because they realize the world is the product of their will and that they are therefore not determined by the dead hand of the past, they are beyond the need for revenge. In this way they cease to be reactive and become active beings, or, as he puts it in one of his notes, they become a Caesar with the soul of Christ.^{xxvi} Strong and powerful but also innocent and affirmative.

What calls such universal affirmation into question for Zarathustra is the recognition that not only the strong and noble recur but also the last man, the ugly, low, and despicable man. All efforts to improve man, to set him on a course to becoming a superhuman being all still come back to this moment, to the unbearable pettiness of the moment that he wants to escape. To affirm the eternal recurrence he thus has to say yes to everything that he wants to overcome as well as to everything he longs for. He has to love what he most detests. The recognition of this fact was the snake that crawled into Zarathustra's throat, the snake of disgust whose head he had to bite off and spit out. And in doing so, he was, he tells us, able to redeem himself, to redeem himself from the abyss of his most abysmal thought. For Nietzsche as for Christ (and for Wagner) the goal in the end is thus redemption through love. Nietzsche's claim, however, is different and his love is at least arguably equal to or perhaps even greater than that of Christ's because he actually does love all of his enemies. Moreover, in his eternity no one is damned and everyone has a place although the world is not paradise to all who are in it.^{xxvii}

After affirming the thought of the eternal recurrence, Zarathustra promises his soul something like a coming beatitude, urging it finally to:

sing with a roaring song till all seas are silenced, that they may listen to your longing—till over silent, longing seas the bark [*Nachen*, 'small, flat boat'] floats, the golden wonder around whose gold all good, bad, wondrous things leap—also many great and small animals and whatever has light, wondrous feet for running on paths blue as violets—toward the golden wonder, the voluntary bark and its master; but that is the vintager who is waiting with his diamond knife—your great deliverer, O my soul, the nameless one for whom only future songs will find names.

He does not, and indeed cannot, name the one who is approaching. The golden wonder who is drawing near, however, is portrayed as his deliverer and as one around whom all nature turns and dances.. The reference is almost certainly to Dionysus and refers to a well-know story about the god and his confrontation with a group of pirates. They board his boat while he sleeps and think they have taken him prisoner, but when he awakes he turns them all into dolphins who swim around him caught up in his ecstasy.^{xxviii} It is Dionysian ecstasy that Zarathustra foretells here, an ecstasy that Nietzsche imagines replacing the emotional religious ecstasy of Christianity.

If any further evidence of this connection to Dionysus is needed, the reference to the vintager, the one who cuts the grapes to turn them into wine is a clear reference to the god of wine. As I mentioned above, at the end of the "Vision and the Riddle," Zarathustra asked himself how he could go on living without the superhuman laughter he heard in his vision and how he could die without having heard it. Here he is filled with the anticipation of such ecstatic laughter, waiting like Ariadne for the arrival of his god, yet certain of his arrival precisely because he has been able to affirm the eternal recurrence and thus to become one with his god.^{xxix}

To understand the background of this reference, it would be useful to put it in the context of Nietzsche's understanding of religion. Nietzsche was a student of the history of religion and was deeply influenced by Friedrich Creuzer's *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* (1836). Creuzer argued that all Aryan or Indo-European religions were essentially connected, that there had been an initial revelation in India and that this revelation in one form or another had moved westward taking on ever new forms and names. This included even Christianity which was understood in this context not merely by Creuzer but also by German Romantics such as Hölderlin and even Hegel as the final realization of a religious process that had begun in the East and come to fruition in Europe or what he called the Germanic world. While Nietzsche accepted the idea of a continuity in Indo-European religions and a transference from East to West, he was convinced that Christianity was not a perfection or completion of the original revelation but its antithesis, that Christianity in other words rejected everything that the ancient Greco-Roman world had achieved in matters of religion. Indeed, in his view the birth of Christianity coincided with the death of paganism.^{xxx} Thus, with the death of the Christian God, he hopes Dionysus may return again, although perhaps under a new name produced by future songs, but exercising the same force he had in the ancient world.^{xxxi}

Nietzsche imagines this return as an apocalyptic event. He points in this direction with the title of the last section of part three of *Zarathustra*, "The Seven Seals (Or: The Yes and Amen Song)." It becomes explicit at the end of part four. Zarathustra is waiting for a sign that the world is ready for his return and for the proclamation of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. He is convinced, however, that this will only occur when the the

level of distress has risen to its peak, that is, only when all of the consequences of the death of God have been realized and swept away all of the moral and political structures of Christianity. Only then will it be time for what Zarathustra calls, the Great Noon. The last section of part four is called the sign and ends with Zarathustra's imperative, "*rise now, rise, thou great noon!*" He then begins his descent back to man to proclaim the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Part four was originally intended as the beginning of a second Zarathustra cycle. Only a few copies were published and distributed to friends, and Nietzsche actually asked they they be returned when he abandoned plans for the completion of the project. However, in the sketches for further installments in the *Nachlass* Zarathustra unequivocally portray the apocalyptic character of the event. The world that he descends into is a world at war. One sketch is set in a burning city. He proclaims his doctrine and then dies. After doing so in one sketch he is torn to pieces by a mob and in another throws himself into a volcano.^{xxxii}

The Great Noon is a theme that arises repeatedly in Nietzsche's later thought and is an integral part of his final teaching. Indeed, he considered it as a possible title or subtitle for his unfinished magnum opus. It is the moment when humanity must decide its future, whether to pursue the path to the superman or becomes the last man. This moment as Zarathustra explains occurs when man is midway between beast and superman. The meaning of this passage becomes clear when we view it against the background of Zarathustra's description of man in the "Prologue" as a line stretched between beast and superman. There are three stages between these two that he describes in "The Three Metamorphoses," the first section in part one: the camel (or believer), the lion (or destroyer), and the child (or creator). The last man stands between the beast and the camel/believer.^{xxxiii} For the last two thousand years, humans have been believers. With the death of God this is no longer a possibility. Man must either follow the the path toward the superman or he will inevitably degenerate into the last man. The Great Noon is the moment when man stands midway on the line. To go on he must transform himself from a camel/believer into a lion/destroyer. To follow this path is thus a choice for war and destruction. To follow this path humans must become hard, as Zarathustra points out in section 29 of "On Old and New Tablets." This means above all purging oneself of pity, which Zarathustra characterizes in part four as his final sin.

The path to the superman, as Nietzsche makes clear in his plans for future works, involves a long and drawn out war against the remnants of Christianity and a struggle for power in the post-Christian world. The choice for this path in the short run is thus a choice for the formation of a warrior class willing to destroy and clear the ground for the new age, beyond all pity, and thus beyond even the last vestiges of Christianity. The next two hundred years in Nietzsche's view will thus be a time of wars, "the like of which the world has never seen."^{xxxiv} This period will serve to further harden man. At the end of this time he then imagines that the superman will arise out of this warrior elite, a Caesar with the soul of Christ, who will establish a thousand year Dionysian empire.

This Great Noon and the apocalyptic transformation of the world that Nietzsche imagines will follow it is decisively connected to the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Not only is the eternal recurrence proclaimed at this time, it is in Nietzsche's view the principle means by which the transformation is achieved. It works as Nietzsche repeatedly says in his notes as a hammer to shatter the weak and inspire the strong. For the healthy and strong, it will be a blessing for they will want their lives over and over

again with all of their pain and suffering. And they will know that what they do is not something that is ephemeral and lost forever, but something that is part of the eternal order of things. In their case, the doctrine of the eternal recurrence will work as a sculptor's hammer helping them to shape themselves into something magnificent. For the weak, however, it will have the opposite effect, taking away their hope for something better in an afterlife, forcing them to face the inevitability and eternity of their pettiness, their ugliness, their suffering. Instead of augmenting and encouraging their will to power, it will leave them crushed and dispirited. It will thus act as a hammer in a different sense, crushing the spirit of the weak.

In the end, Nietzsche suggests that this choice is easy for the strong, once they have liberated themselves from the shackles of a fading Christianity. He holds before them the necessity of war and pitiless destruction but he holds out for them the image of the superman and the ecstatic festival of Dionysus that waits on the other side of his great transformation. His most abysmal thought in this sense is the foundation for a new vision of man and nature, a new world order, and a new theology.

Conclusion

There are many more questions that one might ask about the status of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence in Nietzsche's thought and particularly whether it is best understood as a cosmological, theological, aesthetic, or psychological teaching. While there is no space here to deal with this question in any detail, it is perhaps possible to give a preliminary answer to this question, because if Nietzsche means what he says about the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, then there is no way of distinguishing these four. For Nietzsche, the psychological, cosmological, theological and aesthetic are one and the same.

This answer, however, can hardly satisfy anyone who does not share Nietzsche's conception of the all-embracing character of this fundamental thought. Martin Heidegger, for example, argued that philosophy demanded radical questioning that was incompatible with any form of faith. Leo Strauss pointed in a similar direction with his famous distinction of Athens and Jerusalem. The question, of course, is whether we should take their views as dispositive. I would suggest that such a strict separation is at odds with most of the thinkers in the Western tradition. With respect to medieval thought this is obvious. But this is also true of much of ancient and modern thought as well. Plato and Aristotle, for example, both seem to suggest that our understanding of first principles—whether of the ideas or the *archai*—requires a kind of intellectual seeing that is quite distinct from other forms of knowing and reasoning. In both cases the understanding of the foundational elements on which everything else is built depends crucially upon something like faith in our axioms. Both claim that some one or a few philosophers can understand these ideas but of course that means that nearly everyone must trust or have faith in those few. One might reasonably ask what the difference is between this faith in the philosophers and the faith in the testimony of the Apostles. Are there any reasons we should trust the former but not the latter, especially if we take account of the fact that Plato tells us that philosophers should lie for salutary purposes? Modern thinkers face a similar problem. Descartes famously claimed that we can never take anything on faith and that truth must rest upon an absolutely indubitable and self-evident foundation. He asserted that he had discovered such a foundation with his *cogito ergo sum* principle. but when his critics asked him what being, for example, was, he

simply asserted that all such simple things were innate ideas and universally known. Even his most dedicated followers found this claim hard to accept.

While both philosophy and theology have to accept some givens, one of the things that distinguishes philosophy is that it at least makes a claim to the possibility of understanding its premises. Religion for the most part makes exactly the opposite claim, that faith demands obedience to something that transcends our possibilities for understanding, because it is radically other than anything in our experience. Thus, religion suggests finally that there are somethings that we simply cannot understand and that the attempt to do so will destroy or at least unhinge us.

If this distinction is reasonably accurate, what are we then to make of the thought of the eternal recurrence? First, it is not and could not be a scientific truth justified by evidence. Nietzsche understands this. In his view it follows logically from three assumptions. First, time is infinite. Second, matter is finite. And third, because of this there are a limited (although very large) number of possible combinations of matter, in the long (long) run the cycle of things must therefore repeat. Nietzsche explicitly points to the first two as assumptions, and the third as a necessary conclusion. He does not imagine that the first two could ever be more than assumptions. The conclusion that the first two necessitate the third he seems to accept, and did not understand that it is fairly easy to demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case. In any case, while Nietzsche speculated about these issues in his notes, he never presented the idea as a cosmological theory in his published work. This does not mean, however, that the doctrine is necessarily false as a cosmological theory. But it does mean that Nietzsche did not rest his claim for the foundational character of this doctrine on its cosmological truth. There seem to be only two other possibilities. Either Nietzsche knew that it was indemonstrable but presented as if it were true as a salutary teaching that would enable his fellow Europeans to surmount nihilism, or he knew it was indemonstrable but believed it to be true on other grounds, to wit, because he was turned around by it, taken prisoner in the way he prayed for in his youthful poem "To the Unknown God." All of the biographical evidence suggests that the idea was rooted in such a primal conversion experience.^{xxxv}

If this is correct, we might ask why Nietzsche is captured by this thought. On the surface, it is not the most appealing idea. As Nietzsche himself describes it, it is in fact the most abysmal thought, the most uncanny and unsettling, and also the most terrifying. Its consequences are also monstrous, the collapse of European morality and two hundred years of war and destruction. While these factors might repel most people, however, they seem essential to Nietzsche. One does not think and will this thought because it will make life easier or more pleasurable. It thus seems unlikely that the thought is the result of hedonistic desires or even self-interest narrowly understood. Moreover, the fact that it threatens to shatter our humanity is an indication that it takes us to the very limit of human experience if not beyond it. Insofar as it forces the individual who thinks it to will the worst of all things, it also offers an escape from resentment and revenge, an absolute affirmation of everything. To will in this way, Nietzsche believes is to will as a god, a god of course in a universe that is irremediably tragic. At the end of the day, Nietzsche thinks that thinking this thought is something greater than human. To think it is to become one with Dionysus as the spectators of ancient tragedy did, and thus to participate in the Dionysian ecstasy of reunion and dismemberment. Finally, the thought opens up the possibility for an apocalyptic transformation of the world and the birth of

the superman.

For Nietzsche the death of God rendered the spirituality of the last two thousand years impossible. His most abysmal thought in his view opened up a new path. This was a path filled with pain and suffering, a path of war and destruction, and filled with danger with danger. His experience of the idea of the eternal recurrence, however, led him to believe that it was the path humanity must follow, a fact reaffirmed in the title for the last chapter of his last work, "Why I am destiny."

i See beginning of BGE

ii Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie* (Berlin: Bondi, 1918). See also Karl Justus Obenauer, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Der ekstatische Nihilist; Eine Studie zur Krise des religiösen Bewusstseins* (Jena: Diederichs, 1924).

iii On this point see my *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), —

iv Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or Cosmos and History*, trans. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954).

v KGW

vi It is also probably worth noting that he dates the thought to 100 years after the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,

vii The connection here to his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* are too evident to need further discussion.

viii Obviously, from a theological point of view, 'the eternal recurrence of the same' should also be considered one of the names of God.

ix Goethe's Homunculus similarly is dissolved and passes through all of the forms of the natural world. Faust, ls. _____

x For a thoughtful discussion of this point Malek K. Khazaei, "The Case of Nietzsche's Madness," *Existenz* 3, 1 (Spring 2008):

xi One should also note that Nietzsche's publisher was urging him to sing his own praises and particularly the praises of his forthcoming (but never completed) magnum opus more loudly.

xii On this point see Curt Paul Janz, "The Form-Content Problem in Friedrich Nietzsche's Conception of Music," in *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*, ed. Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 97-116.

xiii In light of the preceding poem one might say he found his unknown god.

xiv On Zarathustra as Nietzsche's alter-ego see the "Aftersong," in BGE.

xv On the other worldly KGWVI 1.31, VI 1.170, V 2.530.

xvi *Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay 24

xvii Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*

xviii Interestingly, in his analysis of the pursuit of power at almost all levels, Nietzsche never seems to consider the possibility of a coalition or democratic settlement. When he first comes to discuss the will to power in Zarathustra in "1001 Goals" he suggests that the will to power originally characterized peoples and only later (and derivatively) was

understood to characterized individuals. What are people's though other than collections of individuals, at least by Nietzsche's account? In this respect Nietzsche seems to hover between something a radical individualism and a naturalistic communitarianism both of which are at odds with liberalism.

xix We would more characteristically call this displaced anger.

xx The phasing here is eerily similar to Ralph Waldo Emerson's lines in his poem "Uriel," with a similar conclusion:

"Line in nature is not found,
Unit and universe are round;
In vain produced, all rays return,
Evil will bless, and ice will burn."
As Uriel spoke with piercing eye,
A shudder ran around the sky;
The stern old war-gods shook their heads,
The seraphs frowned from myrtle-beds;
Seemed to the holy festival,
The rash word boded ill to all;
The balance-beam of Fate was bent;
The bonds of good and ill were rent;
Strong Hades could not keep his own,
But all slid to confusion.

xxi It is important to note that Zarathustra expresses this as a question (however rhetorical) and not as a positive assertion.

xxii All names in history

xxiii *Birth of Tragedy*_____

xxiv The reference to paradise and the garden also has to recall the Genesis story but with a very interesting twist if we take Nietzsche seriously. From the point of view that Zarathustra represents in this section, Eden is a paradise because there is no view of the abyss, and man is expelled from paradise, that is, no longer able to live naively because he eats from the tree of good and evil and learns the truth, that there is no absolute difference between good and evil.

xxv One might note that Zarathustra's animals here repeats the words the dwarf uttered in the "Riddle and the Vision."

xxvi KGW_____

xxvii Or perhaps it would be better to say that they are all consigned to live their lives over and over for all eternity. For some it will be paradise and for some hell, or as Sartre later put it in *No Exit*, "Hell is other people."

xxviii Dionysus' voyage is portrayed on many different Greek vases. One of the best examples is *Dionysos-Schale des Exekias* in the Antikensammlung Munich.

xxix In Nietzsche's *Nachlass* the sketch of this section is entitled "Ariadne's Lament."

xxx Nietzsche points to Plutarch's story of Pan's death in *On the Cessation of the Oracles*. The story originated with a man named Thamus who was sailing in the Aegean on a quiet evening opposite Palodes, and hears a loud voice cry out that "Great Pan is dead". There was then a great cry of lamentation and amazement from many voices. The story soon spread to Rome, and Tiberius Caesar sent for the pilot. Tiberius became so

convinced of the truth of the story that he caused an inquiry and investigation to be made about Pan. Plutarch lived from 45-125 AC and took the report seriously. Since these dates coincide with the time most of the New Testament was written, Nietzsche takes this to be an announcement of the end of the Pagan world. Pan the companion of Dionysus, the god of the natural, had been destroyed by the supernatural God of Christianity.

xxxi This may in part explain his choice of Zarathustra as the teacher of the eternal recurrence. The original Zarathustra was a conduit by which the religion of the East came to Greece, and thus the means by which Dionysus came to Greece. Nietzsche's Zarathustra in this sense may be imagined to play a similar role for the modern world.

xxxii Thus emulating Empedocles who was the central figure in the Zarathustra drama as it was originally conceived Empedocles Drama

xxxiii *Zarathustra*, I, 3 (KGW VI 1:23-27). This could be presented graphically as

follows:

←Man→

Beast Last Man Camel Lion Child Superman

xxxiv On the coming wars, see *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am Destiny" (KGW VI 3:364). Also see Elisabeth Kuhn, *Friedrich Nietzsches Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 213-14. Nietzsche longed for this transformation: 'I am glad about the military development of Europe; also of the internal states of anarchy: the time of repose and Chinese ossification, which Galiani predicted for this century, is over. . . . The barbarian in each of us is affirmed; also the wild beast. Precisely for that reason philosophers have a future.' *Nachlass*, KGW VII 2:261. He is quite clear that these wars are not just spiritual: 'The consequences of my teaching must rage furiously: but on its account uncountably many shall die.' *Nachlass*, KGW VII 2:84.

xxxv It is probably crucial to note that all of this evidence comes from Nietzsche himself, or from notes he wrote or letters to and conversations with his friends. All of these might have been intended to mislead, although it seems unlikely.