

**Speaking Immorality through the Mouth of a Moralist:
The Irony of Nietzsche's Zarathustra**

Copyright 2006 Paul Corey

Voegelin and the Significance of Zoroaster

In religious studies one will often encounter the argument that Zoroaster, the Persian prophet, introduced something radically new and unprecedented into history. These lofty claims date back until at least the mid-nineteenth century, and they have stubbornly refused to disappear. In the nineteenth century, the German cultural historian Friedrich von Hellwald argued that Zoroaster was the first to symbolize the world as a dualistic moral order, divided between the forces of good and evil, and that, consequently, humans must make a moral choice to align themselves with either one side or the other (Hellwald, 128). Norman Cohn, in his 1993 book *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, argues that Zoroaster marks "a major turning point in the history of human consciousness" (Cohn, 227).

Hearing this may come as something of a shock to those of us who study the writings of Eric Voegelin — especially since Cohn's earlier text *Pursuit of the Millennium* is often read in conjunction with Voegelin's *New Science of Politics*. Zoroastrianism plays a very small part in Voegelin's philosophic and historical reflections. In the entire *Order and History*, only ten pages are dedicated to Zoroastrianism — roughly six in *Israel and Revelation* and four in *The Ecumenic Age*. Other than that, there are a few minor references to Zoroastrianism scattered throughout *Order and History* and his other writings, but no extended meditation in the works

that he published during his lifetime. Voegelin effectively reduces Zoroastrianism to a footnote in history. In the ten pages of *Order and History* where Voegelin discusses Zoroastrianism at any length, he concentrates on how Zoroastrian symbolism was employed for pragmatic reasons by Persian kings during the expansion of Achaemenian Empire (550-331 BCE). He examines various royal inscriptions from the period and outlines the "Achaemenian imperial theology" that can be gleaned from these writings (OH I, 46), but nowhere does Voegelin discuss the sacred scriptures of Zoroastrianism contained in the *Avesta*, nor does he consider the seventeen hymns in the *Avesta* that are thought to have descended from Zoroaster himself ♦ the *Gathas*.

It is also difficult to discern exactly what Voegelin thinks of Zoroastrianism. In *Israel and Revelation*, he characterizes Zoroastrianism as a "dualistic theology" with an "immanent logic" (OH I, 51, 49). For Voegelin, Zoroastrianism depicts a world-immanent conflict between good and evil, symbolized by the struggle between two divinities: the benevolent creator deity Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd), the god of light, truth, and peace, and the evil spirit Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) who sows darkness, lies and discord. The Achaemenian kings, according to Voegelin, transposed this cosmic struggle into a political struggle, depicting themselves as the earthly agents of Ahura Mazda, and depicting all resisters and hostile nations as agents of the destructive Angra Mainyu. Though Voegelin speaks of "Zoroastrian religiousness" as possessing a "higher degree of rationalism" than earlier cosmic myths, he nevertheless speaks of it as a relatively compact symbolism. Whatever "monotheistic overtones" can be discerned, Zoroastrianism falls short of a "leap in being" out of cosmic symbolism, which, according to Voegelin, "requires a monistic symbolism for expressing the differentiating experience of a world-transcendent divine being" (OH I, 50-1). Instead, Zoroastrianism, with its immanent understanding, is interpreted by Voegelin as a prototype of "ancient Gnosis" and the deformative

"Western political movements since the high Middle Ages." In other words, Zoroastrianism is a source of the "great spiritual world forces in rivalry with Christianity and the classic tradition" (OH I, 50).

In his later writings, Voegelin seems to have altered his position somewhat. In *The Ecumenic Age*, Voegelin now claims that Zoroastrian symbolism during the Achaemenian period offered a "new, differentiated experience of order" that was "no longer cosmic" but rather referred to the "spiritual and moral substance" of a cosmically-transcendent God ♦ in this case, Ahura Mazda (OH IV, 152). Zoroastrians also live in hope of a final transfiguration of the world in which good triumphs over evil forever. But, as Voegelin points out: "Zoroastrianism, like Christianity, had to shift its eschatological hopes to the indefinitely distant end of the world, thus giving room to the historical interlude of an order in the spirit of truth" (152). Now Zoroastrianism, in Voegelin's new interpretation, is not a prototype for the spiritual movements that challenged Christianity, but rather a precursor of Christianity itself. Voegelin also suggests in his later unpublished essay "What is History" that Zoroaster himself had an experience of transcendence similar to the leap in being experienced by the Israelites, the Greeks, and the Christians. However, Zoroaster was ineffective at communicating this experience to his contemporaries:

If an experience of transcendence, fully actualized, were to occur in an undisturbed cosmological society, it would probably be incommunicable and meet with no social response, so that there would be no historical record of it. Still, the possibility of such occurrences cannot be roundly dismissed, because there exists the puzzling case of Zoroaster. The curious history of Zoroastrianism, as well as the difficulties we still have today in understanding what happened, will hardly bear any other explanation than the appearance of a prophet in a society insufficiently prepared to receive the truth he has to communicate. The comparatively primitive tribal society in the Iranian hinterland of Mesopotamia's

old imperial civilization apparently had not yet developed the sensorium for a spiritual irruption of the rank represented by Zoroaster. (CW 28, 23)

Voegelin immediately concludes that the experience of transcendence that inspired Zoroaster's *Gathas* was deformed because the cosmological society surrounding Zoroaster was not ready to accept it and record it in a historiography. It fell to the Israelites to develop a historiography out of the experience of transcendence.

All of which is to say that Zoroaster, for Voegelin, does not mark a major turning point in human consciousness ♦ regardless of whether Voegelin interprets him as a proto-Gnostic or proto-Christian. He does consider Zoroaster to have been a part of a key moment in history ♦ the so-called "axial age," Karl Jaspers' term for the period extending from 800 to 300 BCE in which there were numerous spiritual outbursts that challenged "the truth of the cosmological empires" (NS, 60) and marked a "breaking away from the primary experience of the cosmos" (CW 28, 43). Regarding the axial period, Voegelin writes in *New Science*: "In China it is the age of Confucius and Lao-Tse as well as of other philosophical schools; in India , the age of the *Upanishads* and the Buddha; in Persia , of Zoroastrianism; in Israel , of the Prophets; in Hellas , of the philosophers and of tragedy" (NS 60). But notice how Zoroastrianism is buried in this passage amongst a list of major movements ♦ a common feature of Voegelin's treatment of Zoroastrianism. It is usually mentioned in a list of other religions and cultural movements but given little consideration of its own (see CW 12, 100-01; CW 28, 43; OH IV, 139, 141). Zoroaster lived at an important time, but the historical uniqueness of Zoroaster, and what he may have unleashed, is not elucidated.

First a clarification is necessary. Zoroaster, according to a prominent Zoroastrian tradition, is said to have lived 258 years before Alexander, which would place him in the middle of the sixth century BCE ❖ in other words, during the axial period. However, scholarship has started to accumulate, revealing that this date is a later computation based on a Greek falsehood. For more than a century, evidence has been mounting that suggests Zoroaster lived during a much earlier period in a pastoral society in Iran , somewhere between 1500 and 1200 BCE (see Kingsley, 245-64). Voegelin, to his credit, acknowledges that the dates placing Zoroaster in the sixth century BCE are speculative and that some scholars place the prophet in an earlier time (CW 28, 43). The weight of the evidence now suggests that the sixth century dating is erroneous. We cannot identify Zoroaster as a part of the so-called axial age.

If it is true that Zoroaster lived during an earlier period, then Cohn's claim that Zoroaster marks a major turning point in human history is even more remarkable. Using over a century's worth of scholarship, Cohn discusses the *Gathas* and other texts in the *Avesta* that probably originate from a time between 1500 and 1200 BCE, and which were passed down orally for centuries before being established in written form. On the basis of this scholarship, Cohn makes the following claim: Zoroaster was the first to symbolize the eschatological understanding of history. That is, Zoroaster was the first to understand history as a linear movement towards an end, at which point there would be a once and for all transformation of *this* world at the hands of the supreme god Ahura Mazda, and the establishment of an eternal paradise. This understanding, according to Cohn, marks a categorical break from the cosmological symbolism that preceded Zoroaster and is the source of all subsequent eschatological understandings that followed.

At the end of *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, Cohn provides a summary of his argument, which I will quote at length:

Until around 1500 BC peoples as diverse as Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Indo-Iranians and their Indian and Iranian descendents, Canaanites, [and] pre-exilic Israelites were all agreed that in the beginning the world had been organized, set in order, by a god or by several gods, and that in essentials it was immutable. For each people, security ♦ meaning fertility of the land, victory in war, stable social relations sanctioned by custom and law, was the outward and visible sign that a divinely ordained order did indeed exist.

However, that order was never untroubled, it was always threatened by evil, destructive forces ♦ sometimes identified as flood or drought, famine or plague, inertia or death itself ♦ but sometimes also as hostile peoples or tyrannical conquerors. In the combat myth, in its various formulations, the conflict between universal order and the forces that threatened and invaded and impaired it ♦ between cosmos and chaos ♦ was given symbolic expression. A young hero god, or divine warrior, was charged by the gods with the task of keeping the forces of chaos at bay; and in return he was awarded kingship over the world.

Some time between 1500 and 1200 BC Zoroaster broke out of that static yet anxious world-view. He did so by reinterpreting, radically, the Iranian version of the combat myth. In Zoroaster's view the world was not static, nor would it always be troubled. Even now the world was moving, through incessant conflict, towards a conflictless state. The time would come when, in a prodigious final battle, the supreme god [Ahura Mazda] and his supernatural allies would defeat the forces of chaos and their human allies and eliminate them once and for all. From then on the divinely appointed order would obtain absolutely: physical distress and want would be unknown, no enemy would threaten, within the community of the saved there would be absolute unanimity; in a word, the world would be for ever untroubled, totally secure.

Unheard of before Zoroaster, that expectation deeply influenced certain Jewish groups [after their exposure to Zoroastrianism during the Achaemenian Empire] ♦ as witness some of the apocalypses and some of the writings found at Qumran . Above all, it influenced the Jesus sect, with incalculable consequences. (227-8)

The claim that Zoroastrianism eschatology is the cultural source of subsequent Jewish and Christian apocalypticism is not unique to Cohn. A growing body of scholarship testifies to this

possibility.¹ [1] Overall, these studies testify that Zoroaster's prophetic utterances are a key moment in history, and perhaps introduced a symbolism that was absolutely unprecedented and would have global influence. Zoroaster, by this understanding, is *the* source of all the religious eschatologies that followed ♦ Jewish, Christian, Islamic, ancient Gnostic ♦ as well as modern secular eschatologies, such as Marxism, Communism, Nazism, and certain forms of progressive liberalism.

Of course, as Voegelin's work so compellingly demonstrates, the question of eschatology is perhaps the key question of modernity. After the radicalization of eschatological symbols in modern political ideologies, and the recent resurgence of violent religious eschatological movements, particularly within the Islamic world, we are faced with a basic question as we confront these excesses: Is our ultimate aim as a civilization to revert to a moderate form of eschatological expectation (along the lines of a revamped Augustinianism)? Or should we consider eschatological symbolism itself ♦ moderate or immoderate, Christian or Gnostic, Islamic or secular ♦ a deformation of experience? If we choose the latter, then our ultimate goal is to encourage a radically non-eschatological ethos. To tackle this question is to confront Zoroaster. Regardless of whether the claims of Cohn and others are correct, Zoroaster stands as symbol for a type world-view which, mounting evidence suggests, he was the first to symbolize.

Nietzsche's Response to Zoroaster



¹ [1] For a comprehensive list of the scholarship, see Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 263-64.

One person who understood the historical significance of Zoroaster was Nietzsche. Even before the political excesses of the twentieth century, Nietzsche diagnosed eschatological symbolism as a symptom of nihilism that needed to be reconsidered. He made a radical effort to break away from the eschatological tradition altogether ♦ to destroy our lingering eschatological hopes and the tablets of morality that accompanied these expectations. And he would attempt to do this, ironically, through the mouth of Zoroaster himself. Nietzsche uses the more precise Persian version of the prophet's name, Zarathustra, rather than the Greek derivative "Zoroaster," and he casts him as the central character in his most ambitious book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.² [2]








Nietzsche creates a new Zarathustra, one who tries to overcome the eschatological understanding ♦ the understanding that Zarathustra was the first to formulate. Though Nietzsche, like Voegelin, is more explicitly concerned with the effects of Platonism and Christianity on the West, he seems to have thought that the true father of Platonism and Christianity was Zoroaster. To overcome the symbolism of a "good beyond being," of final judgment, of eternal rewards and punishments, and of a transformed creation, one must ultimately confront the Persian prophet.

How well did Nietzsche understand Zoroaster? When Nietzsche wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, there was major academic interest in Germany over Zoroastrianism. In the half century before *Zarathustra* was published, over twenty major studies of the *Avesta* and Zoroaster had been published in German (Parkes, xi). Nietzsche would have certainly been aware of this literature and, indeed, the first two sentences of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are a paraphrase of a passage written by the historian Friedrich von Hellwald concerning Zoroaster (Parkes xi-xii,

2 [2] For this paper I have used Graham Parkes translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2005). I refer to the text by page number in brackets.

288). That said, Nietzsche was probably even less of a Zoroastrian scholar than Voegelin. Most of his knowledge seems to have been derived from other scholars, at a time when the scholarship was still in its infancy. He does not provide much evidence in his writings of having developed his own sophisticated account of Zoroastrianism. Nevertheless, whatever academic subtlety may be lacking in Nietzsche's understanding, he seemed to have sensed  correctly, if recent scholarship is any indication  that the Persian prophet introduced a new account of things that shaped human consciousness definitively. Nietzsche says in *Ecce Homo*, "My genius is in my nostrils"(EH, 782). Regarding Zoroaster, his sense of smell may have been stronger than Voegelin's.

Shortly following Nietzsche's comment about his nostrils in *Ecce Homo*, he discusses why he chose the Persian prophet as the mouthpiece for his radically new understanding:

I have not been asked, as I should have been asked, what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth, the mouth of the first immoralist: for what constitutes the tremendous historical uniqueness of that Persian is just the opposite of this. Zarathustra [the original Persian prophet] was the first to consider the fight of good and evil the very wheel in the machinery of things: the transposition of morality into the metaphysical realm, as a force, cause, and end in itself, is *his* work. Zarathustra created this most calamitous error, morality; consequently, he must also be the first to recognize it. Not only has he more experience in this matter, for a longer time, than any other thinker  after all, the whole of history is the refutation by experiment of the principle of the so-called "moral world order"  what is more important is that Zarathustra is more truthful than any other thinker. His doctrine, and his alone, posits truthfulness as the highest virtue; this means the opposite of the cowardice of the "idealist" who flees from reality; Zarathustra has more intestinal fortitude than all other thinkers taken together. To speak the truth and to *shoot well with arrows*, that is Persian virtue.  Am I understood?  The self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness; the self-overcoming of the moralist, into his opposite  into me  that is what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth. (EH, "Destiny," 3)

The original Zoroaster was, according to Nietzsche, the first "moralist." This is not to say that Zoroaster was the first to create a tablet with rank orders of value. All human societies, including the earliest ones, have, according to Nietzsche, had their "values" ♦ that is, their rules, their practical guidelines, their goals, their taboos, their hierarchies of worthiness, their understandings of good and bad. As Nietzsche's analysis in *The Genealogy of Morals* makes clear, it is impossible to be human without having rank orders of value (Higgins 104).

Zoroaster's innovation was to break away from the ancient cosmic valuations of good and bad, and claim that the tension between good and bad was, in fact, meta-cosmic, or metaphysical. The division between good and bad was not, for Zoroaster, something that applied only to this world in its present constitution; rather, it signified a metaphysical world beyond this one, a world to come, a world that would replace the current cosmos. Blessed immortality awaits those who make the conscious moral choice to work on the side of good, on the side of Ahura Mazda, whereas eternal punishments await those who choose to work for the forces of chaos and destruction, the side of Angra Mainyu. Zoroaster is not unique because he predicted eternal rewards and punishments for individuals after death. We can see very ancient myths ♦ pre-dating Zoroaster ♦ which speak of everlasting rewards and punishments in the afterlife, most noticeably in ancient Egypt . But the Egyptians merely spoke of the fate of individuals, not the cosmos itself, which, for the Egyptians would remain in its present condition ♦ a combination of good and bad, cosmos and chaos ♦ forever. Zoroaster is unique because he claimed that *this* world would be transformed by the ultimate creator God, Ahura Mazda, leading to the creation of a new world without conflict ♦ a possibility that neither the Egyptians nor any other people had ever imagined. Zoroaster claimed that all historical events are leading up to a grand meta-cosmic conclusion, after which this world is obliterated and replaced by both a utopia to house

the morally righteous and a fiery netherworld to punish the unrighteous. In the oldest Zoroastrian symbolism contained in the *Gathas*, all human beings will be bodily resurrected and judged, after which they will live in either eternal bliss or eternal punishment depending on the moral choices they have in this life. For the righteous, the world to come will be incomparably blissful, and infinitely preferable to the present cosmos (see Hultgard, 66-70; Cohn, 96-99). For this reason, moral choice takes on a greater significance in Zoroastrian symbolism than in previous types of mythologies.

Nietzsche, thus, uses the mouth of the first eschatological moralist to introduce a non-eschatological "immorality." Nietzsche's Zarathustra is a self-proclaimed "immoralist" who encourages his disciples to be "evil." Zarathustra is proud of his reputation as an "annihilator of morals" (59) and he finds "much that is worthy of wonder in those who are evil" (125). Indeed, Zarathustra proclaims that he has "found human wickedness to be less than its reputation" ♦ a reputation that Zarathustra himself, as the original Persian prophet, helped to establish (125). But we must not be misled by the flamboyant and shocking rhetoric that Nietzsche puts in the mouth of Zarathustra. Zarathustra is "immoral" insofar as he wants to overcome the very teaching he established ♦ a teaching that denigrates this world and encourages us to expect a better one. Nietzsche, through Zarathustra, wants to affirm the inherent integrity of *this* world ♦ a world that Zarathustra was the first to denigrate. This denigration has culminated in the experience that our world lacks value and needs to be redeemed by another world in the future ♦ an experience Nietzsche called "nihilism." By proclaiming himself an "immoralist," Zarathustra is not saying that the world is empty, that there are no standards, and that everything is permitted; on the contrary, he holds himself and others to the highest standards. Zarathustra

proclaims an arduous set of principles that will bring out our creative and life affirming powers once again.

At the start of the *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra descends from his cave with a new teaching, one that he hopes will overcome the errors of the first. Central to defeating his old teaching is his immediate refutation of any life to-come. Zarathustra says, early in his ministry:

At one time Zarathustra too cast his delusion beyond the human, like all believers in a world behind [or "world to come"]. The work of a suffering and tortured God the world seemed to me then◆.

Ah, brothers, this God that I created was humans'-work and ◆madness, just like all Gods!

Human he was, and just a meager piece of human and ◆I'. From my own ashes and blaze it came to me, this specter, and verily! Not from the Beyond did it come to me! (27)

The God that Zarathustra originally proclaimed is dead. He admits that his original revelations were not truly from the "Beyond." This God is a human creation, an invention of Zarathustra's, and not a truth from another world. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* begins with Zarathustra's conclusion that "God is Dead." It is not just the God of Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic faiths. For Zarathustra, to believe that "God is dead" is to accept that there is no underlying providence, progress, or rational purpose at work in nature or history leading to an eschatological fulfillment. At the same time, accepting the death of God also means recognizing that there can be no comprehensive human understanding of the cosmos and history through nature, reason, or revelation. Holy books, science, and ideology cannot provide a transparent and thorough account of the world. Zarathustra understands that all religious and secular "meta-narratives"

have passed, even if this has not been understood by his contemporaries. His central task ♦ and, indeed, Nietzsche's central task ♦ is to create an adequate response to the death of God.

Is Nietzsche/Zarathustra triumphant in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*? Does Zarathustra truly escape from the nihilism that he is responsible for creating and arrive at an acceptable, life-affirming ethos? *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* must be assessed by this measure. There is, in fact, development within the book. Zarathustra does not come down from his mountain at the start fully formed; the teaching he comes to accept at the end, which he understands as the true overcoming of nihilism, is the eternal recurrence of the same. The cosmos and history recur in exactly the same way for eternity. With this understanding, Zarathustra thinks he defeats the linear, eschatological account of the cosmos and history that he first established as a Persian prophet. But his final teaching of eternal recurrence is somewhat different from the one he proclaims at the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It is important to understand how Zarathustra's thought develops over the first three parts of the book, for it reveals the difficulties involved with truly overcoming the eschatological account, and it points to problems with Zarathustra's final position. Nietzsche/Zarathustra does not, in my estimation, truly escape from the eschatological tradition, and, thus, he does not successfully overcome the nihilism that he claims is the essence of all eschatological movements.

From Overhuman to Eternal Recurrence: Zarathustra's Effort to Overcome the Persian Zoroaster

The teaching that Zarathustra emphasizes at the start of the book is that of the "Superman" or "Overhuman" (*Übermensch*). Zarathustra descends from his mountain to proclaim the Overhuman to the masses. In his first public speech after ten years of solitude, he makes numerous proclamations about his projected being of the future:

I teach to you the Overhuman. The human is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome it?

The Overhuman is the sense of the earth. May your will say: *Let* the Overhuman be the sense of the earth!

I beseech you, my brothers, *stay true to the earth* and do not believe those who talk of over-earthly hopes!

The human is a rope, fastened between beast and Overhuman *—* a rope over an abyss.

What is greatest in the human is that it is a bridge and not a goal: what can be loved in the human is that it is a *going-over* and a *going-under*. (11-13)

Though Zarathustra proclaims "I love human beings" before descending from his mountain (10), it turns out to be a strange, tough, love. Zarathustra's philanthropy calls for our "going under," for our extinction, so that the Overhuman may emerge like a phoenix out of the ashes. But given that Zarathustra criticizes his younger self for "casting his delusion beyond the human" (27) like all those who believe in a life to come, it is ironic that the first lesson of his new teaching proclaims something beyond the human. Granted, Zarathustra does say that the Overhuman has a "sense of the earth" and stays true to this world. Nevertheless it would appear that humans are incapable staying true to the earth to the fullest extent. Paradoxically, only something more than human can truly embody a thoroughly earthly existence. So there is a tension, if not an outright contraction, in Zarathustra's teaching: on the one hand, he points us towards this world which includes human beings; on the other hand, he directs us beyond the human.

What is the Overhuman? First of all, he is the opposite of the "Last Human," the type of human that has resulted from centuries of eschatological morality. The Last Human, as depicted by Zarathustra in the Prologue (15-17), is a slovenly, weak and uncreative being. He lacks all higher aspirations and seeks nothing but his own comfortable self-preservation, along with his other fellow Last Humans, who huddle together in a herd. As described by Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, the Last Human is the "ultimate couch potato" (Solomon, 47). Zarathustra's portrait of this type of human is real enough, but what about the reality of the opposite ❖ the Overhuman? Zarathustra does not provide much precise detail about this being. This much we can gather: the Overhuman is everything the Last Human is not. He is strong, courageous, and refined; he lacks the timidity of normal human beings; he feels no pity for what he loves but rather creates what he loves (77); and he is a solitary creator rather than a passive member of the herd. The Overhuman is primarily a spiritual aspiration for Zarathustra, not a biological or racial category ❖ though Nietzsche was certainly a strong advocate of health and flourishing physicality. In the First Part of *Zarathustra*, Zarathustra encourages his disciples to reach higher by cultivating virtue that promotes the creation of the Overhuman, so that one day humans might "go over" (31-33). His advice provides us with a general sense of the Overhuman. Zarathustra tells his disciples to avoid the rabble and politics, and seek solitude instead (43-7); to choose only those friends who can challenge you to be greater than you already are (49-50, 53-4)); to avoid the sleep-inducing opium of traditional religion and seek out spiritual conflict and challenge (41-42); to be chaste, but marry only if such a union can give birth to the Overhuman (48-9, 57-8, 60-2); to love the earth, and reject all those who denigrate the body and the passions (30-1).

Whoever or whatever the Overhuman might be, it is intimately connected to Nietzsche's understanding of the will. As the First Part proceeds, the "will" becomes a more central topic. Zarathustra first speaks of the "will to power" in the section entitled "On the Thousand Goals and One." He says: "A tablet of things held to be good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of its overcomings; behold it is the voice of its will to power" (51). Again, Zarathustra claims that understandings of good and evil are not transmitted to humans from a beyond or arrived at through detached contemplation of the universe ("immaculate perception" as he calls it [106]). Meaning and value are not discerned through the intellect or revealed through the spirit, but rather created through an act of will. Zarathustra proclaims: "The human being first put values into things in order to preserve itself ♠ it created a meaning for things, a human's meaning! Therefore it calls itself ♠human' ♠ that is, the evaluator" (52). We are, once again, faced with a tension in Zarathustra's formulations: he has implored us to stay true to this world, to the earth, as opposed to those who would denigrate this world in the name of another. The suggestion is that this world is something *inherently* valuable. But in this section we discover that it is human beings who "first put value into things," as if the world is without value ♠ a fallen creation that needs human beings instead of God to redeem it through their will to power. Meaning, it would seem, does not emerge through the encounter between humans and the different orders of the world; rather, humans are the measure of all things who give value to things. In this way, humans overcome a mere animal existence. To create good and evil has been the most tremendous expression of the will to power so far.

The will to power [*der Wille zur Macht*] is not exclusive to human beings. Consider Zarathustra's statements in the Second Part, in the section entitled "On Self-Overcoming":

the will to power ♦ the unexhausted procreative life-will.

Where I found the living, there I found will to power; and even in the will of one who serves I found a will to be master.

And this secret did Life herself tell to me. "Behold," she said, "I am *that which must always overcome itself*. (98-99)

All living entities have the will to power, the will to "overcome." But Zarathustra is not speaking about a "will to life"; rather, life itself is a will to power. As Nietzsche writes in the *Genealogy of Morals*, the will would rather "will nothing" ♦ would rather will the annihilation of the world ♦ than not will at all, if "willing nothing" means power. By willing, each living creature pursues its own self-enhancement, striving to become the best it can be, realizing its true nature, with the aim of overcoming itself and evolving into something higher. The ultimate act of "overcoming" by any living creature was accomplished by human beings, who dared to evaluate things and, on the basis of this evaluation, write tablets that distinguish good and bad. The most radical overcoming was achieved by Zarathustra, who transformed the tension between good and evil into a metaphysical conflict with a final apotheosis. But now Zarathustra is claiming that the morality he established through a nihilistic will to power must now be overcome through a life-affirming will to power. Zarathustra speaks of the "thousand peoples" who have articulated a "thousand goals" through their tablets of good and evil, but "there is lacking the one goal. Humanity still has no goal" (52). The single goal of humanity, which must transcend the thousand other goals, is the Overhuman, which, like the previous tablets of good and evil, must be willed into existence. In his last statement of the First Part, Zarathustra encourages his disciples to say: "♦*Dead are all Gods*: now we want the Overhuman to live' ♦ may this be at the Great Midday our ultimate will!" (68).

The Overhuman is presented as the ultimate future hope of humanity. For Zarathustra, human virtue is today measured by whatever promotes the birth of the Overhuman and the passing away of humanity. But if the Overhuman symbolizes a new type of redemption, what is the true meaning of redemption for Zarathustra, and what exactly are we being redeemed from? Over the course of the Second Part of *Zarathustra*, the question of what constitutes true redemption becomes more central. This leads, in the Third Part, to a change in Zarathustra's central teaching, from the Overhuman to Eternal Recurrence.

The issue of "redemption" emerges in the chapter "On the Tarantulas," where Zarathustra rails against those "teachers of equality" who preach that all humans are created equal. Zarathustra refers to such teachers as "tarantulas" who seek "revenge" with their poison doctrine. The tarantulas are vengeful because they want to defame all those who, they say, "are not the same as us" ♦ those who are superior (86). To proclaim "all are equal" is seek revenge against the world, for the world, according to Zarathustra, is not constituted by equality, nor is the doctrine of equality "just":

With these preachers of equality I will not be confused and confounded.
For thus does justice talk *to me*: "Human beings are not equal."
And they shall not become so either! For what would my love for the
Overhuman be if I spoke otherwise? (87; also see 109)

Justice means accepting that this world is constituted by inequalities and distinctions, such as "good and evil, and rich and poor, and high and lowly, and all the names of values; they shall be clashing signs that life must itself overcome itself again and again" (87). The Overhuman represents the greatest affirmation of life, if life is characterized by inequality, for he would be the ultimate height. But what makes the Overhuman such a high standard, and what exactly is

the quality of his redemption? Zarathustra says: "For *that humanity might be redeemed from revenge*: that is for me the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after lasting storms" (86).

The Overhuman, thus, is the highest hope and a rainbow because he will liberate humanity from the spirit of revenge. The tarantulas of equality are one manifestation of the spirit revenge ♦ a spirit that was conceived by Zarathustra himself in his initial incarnation as a Persian apocalypticist. Any teaching that seeks to transfigure the world into a perfect world free of sickness, pain, inequality or death is a form of revenge. The Overhuman is thus presented as the ultimate redemption from the spirit of revenge and an affirmation of life-enhancing creativity.

Later on in the Second Part, in the section entitled "On Redemption," Zarathustra provides us with more detail about the true meaning of redemption from revenge. Here Zarathustra teaches that revenge is humanity's hatred for what has occurred in the past ♦ a hatred aggravated by the fact that humans have no control over past events. Human inequality, mortality, and suffering were all established in the past. The inability of the will to change this, to alter the past and change what has occurred, leads to a denigration of this world. As outlined by Zarathustra, humans started to proclaim: "Everything passes away, therefore everything deserves to pass away" (122). Our suffering and mortality, according to Zarathustra, started to be interpreted as "punishment" ♦ as just retribution for human sin. Eventually, this would lead to eschatological notions of eternal punishment (122). But if the will could not will backward, it could ostensibly will forward. In the eschatological traditions, the righteous and justified get their revenge against the past, in the form of a culminating apotheosis, which would see saved rewarded, and all those who harmed the saved punished eternally. Zarathustra says: "Thus did the will, the liberator, take to hurting: and upon all that can suffer it takes revenge for its inability

to go backwards. This, yes this alone, is what revenge is: the will's ill-will toward time and its
◆It was'" (121).

If true redemption is liberation from revenge, and yet if revenge is linked with our anger against what has happened in the past, then how can true redemption be actualized? Zarathustra says: "To redeem that which has passed away and to re-create all ◆It was' into a ◆Thus I willed it! ◆ that alone should I call redemption" (121). The point, according to Zarathustra, is not to seek revenge against all the sufferings of the past by expecting a perfect future. We must not expect the future to *correct* what has happened in the past. Instead, to get beyond revenge, we must will the past *as it has already occurred*, in every single detail, including all suffering. The "will to power" must "will backwards and *want* back as well" (123, my italics). True redemption is to actually want all the joys and sufferings of the past, and to wish for nothing else ◆ no regrets, as it were.

But there is a problem with Zarathustra's initial understanding of willing the past, because it is still based on the future redemption of the Overhuman, who, despite Zarathustra's claims to the contrary, still constitutes a "beyond." Zarathustra encourages his disciples to look at every "It was" as necessary stages for a future overcoming. As he says: "When you are willers of one will ◆ this turning of all need is for you called necessity: there lies the origin of your virtue" (66). In other words, those who wish to give birth to the Overhuman must turn every past "need" or distress into something necessary for both self-fulfillment and the coming of the Overhuman (see Parkes, 296-7). In this manner, perhaps, it is possible to say about the past "Thus I willed it." But the past, by itself, lacks its own inherent integrity; we want the past only insofar as what it leads to in the future. Furthermore, this understanding is still rooted in revenge, manifest in the

understanding that humans must eventually pass away to make way for the Overhuman. The Overhuman is Zarathustra's revenge against what is human-all-too-human. It is particularly the "small human," the "last human," or the rabble, that disgust Zarathustra. In the section "On the Rabble" Zarathustra says:

But once I asked, and almost choked on my question: what? Is the rabble, too, *needed* for life?

Are the poisoned wells needed and stinking fires and dirt-soiled dreams and maggots in the bread of life?

Not my hatred but my disgust gnawed hungrily at my life! Ah, I often grew weary of the spirit when I found that even the rabble was spirited❖.

And like a wind I would blow them [the rabble] asunder one day and with my spirit take their spirit's breath away: thus my future wills it.

Verily, a strong wind is Zarathustra to all low-lying lands; and this counsel does he give to his enemies and to all the spits and spews: ❖Beware of spitting *into* the wind!' (84-5)

Notwithstanding Zarathustra's claim that he does not "hate" the rabble, his disgust for small men and his hope to "blow them asunder" cannot be interpreted as anything but vengeance.

Zarathustra says "it is hard for me to accept that small people are *needed*!" (145). But why are small people "needed"? Zarathustra claims that his "disgust" for the rabble helped him "create wings" and "water divining powers" so that he could fly to the highest heights and drink from a font with none of the rabble (84). In other words, small people are needed to inspire the disgust that helps higher men soar to the heavens. But this is not beyond revenge. If the rabble are affirmed by Zarathustra in this passage, and if he wills the past that created the rabble, then the low past is affirmed simply as a means to a higher end in the future ❖ Zarathustra's self-fulfillment and the Overhuman. The rabble has no integrity of its own. Existence, in Zarathustra's understanding, still needs to be redeemed; the lower human, and even the higher human, just will not do. We must will whatever is human-all-too-human into extinction. In

essence, this is not a substantial departure from the eschatological myth that Zarathustra is trying to overcome.

Throughout the Second and Third Parts of the book, *Zarathustra* gradually becomes aware of how his initial teachings of the Overhuman are rooted in the spirit of revenge. He must now come to accept a new, and more fundamental, teaching. Perhaps Zarathustra, notwithstanding his Persian reputation for truth, has not been entirely truthful with others, and, most especially, with himself. Consider how he counsels his disciples at the end of the First Part: "Verily, I counsel you: go away from me and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he has deceived you!" (68). By late in the Second Part, it is clear that if Zarathustra has deceived his listeners, the deception was contained in statements concerning the Overhuman. In his earliest pronouncements, Zarathustra presented the Overhuman as a real alternative to the imaginary gods who have died. The Overhuman, it was said, would stay true the earth, in opposition to the world-denigrating God that the Persian Zoroaster had created. Now, however, the Overhuman is understood as the product of Zarathustra's poetic imagination. In the section "On the Poets," Zarathustra says:

So what did Zarathustra once say to you? That the poets lie too much? ❖
But Zarathustra too is a poet.

Ah, there are so many things between Heaven and earth of which only the poets have let themselves dream!

And especially *above* Heaven: for all Gods are poets' allegories, poets' deceptions!

Verily, we are drawn ever upward ❖ but simply to the realm of the clouds: upon these we place our motley manikins and call them Gods and Overhumans: ❖

For they are just light enough for these cloud-chairs! ❖ all these Gods and Overhumans.

Ah, how weary I am of all this inadequacy that shall at all costs be an event! Ah, how weary I am of the poets! (110-11)

Clearly Zarathustra's enthusiasm for the Overhuman has diminished somewhat. He places his myth of the Overhuman in the same category as that of the gods ◆ as another lie created by a poet to make life more bearable, to give it meaning, and, in the case of the Overhuman, to give it a linear purpose and a historical end. Zarathustra's myth of the Overhuman is a lie ◆ a lie with an apocalyptic resonance ◆ created out of the spirit of revenge against the world. Like the Persian Zoroaster, Nietzsche's Zarathustra is too focused on the future.

Gradually, Zarathustra's focus shifts from the myth of the Overhuman to the myth of eternal recurrence. The first explicit articulation of eternal recurrence occurs near the beginning of the Third Part, in the section "On the Vision and the Riddle." The idea comes to Zarathustra in the middle of a nightmarish hallucination. Zarathustra does not repeat the ancient account of the cosmos as a perpetual cycle, moving in never-ending revolutions of birth, life, death, and rebirth that are similar; rather, eternal recurrence for Zarathustra means that all specific entities and events recur in exactly the same way and in exactly the same order for eternity. Zarathustra says, "must we not eternally come back again?" (137). This thought is accompanied by a vision of a shepherd choking on a heavy black snake stuck in his throat and hanging out of his mouth. At Zarathustra's urging, the shepherd bites the head off the snake, spits it out, and then springs up with renewed vigor. Zarathustra says: "No longer shepherd, no longer human ◆ one transformed, illumined, who *laughed!* Never yet on earth had a human being laughed as he laughed! / Oh, my brothers, I heard laughter that was no human laughter" (138).

Two issues emerge from this section. First, why does Zarathustra flirt with the notion of eternal recurrence? Second, why does Zarathustra's vision of the shepherd and the snake

immediately follow his first clear articulation of eternal return? Clearly, the shepherd has transformed into an Overhuman after he bites the head off of the snake, but what is the relation between Zarathustra, the myth of the Overhuman, and eternal return? The myth of the Overhuman becomes less significant as the teaching of eternal return becomes more prominent, but, as we shall see, it doesn't disappear entirely.

Eternal recurrence becomes Zarathustra's central teaching because, in his estimation, it is what redeems him from the spirit of revenge. The myth of the Overhuman, in its initial formulation, is, as we have seen, just another variation of the eschatological selection myth. The Overhuman is redemption, whereas the human is damned to extinction. Like Christians, who love humanity only insofar as the spirit of God within humans points to a salvation to come, so Zarathustra loves humanity only insofar as the most virtuous humans contribute to the conception of the Overhuman. This is a strange love, to say the least, and rooted in a fundamental hatred of humanity ❖ notwithstanding protests that this is actually the highest philanthropy. Humans are a means to an end. The Overhuman is the end goal of a linear, progressive history, after which nothing will be the same; he is Zarathustra's apocalyptic symbol of a once-and-for-all transfiguration.

The myth of eternal recurrence, on the other hand, seems to get Zarathustra past the spirit of revenge and eschatology. Eternal return forces one to accept life in all of its joys and sufferings, its highs and lows, its greatness and pettiness. This is, without doubt, a difficult teaching to accept. For Zarathustra, true courage is the ability to say "Was *that* life? Well then! One more time!" (135). It is not merely a issue of willing the past but of *wanting* it back as well ❖ wanting to relive all moments and experiences, even the most painful, forever. Furthermore,

eternal return is the highest expression of love for human beings. In eternal return, human beings do not pass away eternally; on the contrary, they are resurrected *ad infinitum*. They have always been and will always be. Even if humans were to pass away and the Overhuman were to appear at some point in the future, eternal return demands that at one point the Overhuman "goes under" as well. Eventually, all humans and Overhumans return to the earth that Zarathustra claims to love, only to rise again. To embrace eternal return is to deny the eschatological expectation of a blissful fulfillment in the future and accept the eternity of what is human all-too-human.

It is this last point that Zarathustra has the hardest time accepting, calling it his "abyss-deep thought" (188). Near the end of Part Three, in the section "The Convalescent," Zarathustra confronts his abyss ♦ the idea that lowly humanity recurs eternally. In a paroxysm of disgust, Zarathustra collapses, and he sleeps for seven days. These are the new seven days of creation, after which Zarathustra awakes to take an apple in his hand, which, like Eve in Genesis, he finds "delightful." (189). This apple is also a fruit of knowledge, but unlike Adam and Eve, whose eating from the tree of knowledge leads to punishment, Zarathustra's apple is the source of his redemption. Zarathustra's animals, like the serpent in Eden, start to talk to him, and they sense that his eyes have been opened ♦ that a "new understanding" has come to him (189). The animals know that Zarathustra has accepted the idea of eternal return, for they say to him: "Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of Being. Everything dies, everything blooms again, eternally runs the year of being" (190). Zarathustra remarks that the animals are correct ♦ that they "know what had to be fulfilled in seven days" (190) ♦ but, even though he smiles at the animals and seems to be on good terms with them, he chastises them for tuning his deep understanding into a "hurdy-gurdy" song. Somehow, hearing his knowledge of eternal return articulated clearly seems to cheapen it, and make it seem less profound.

Nevertheless, Zarathustra accepts what the animals say, even if he does not like the way they say it.

He then proceeds to explain his earlier vision of the shepherd biting the head off of the snake:

◆ and how that monster crawled into my throat and choked me! But I bit its head off and spat it forth from me.

The great loathing for the human being ◆ *that* is what choked me and had crawled into my throat◆.


◆ Ah, the human being recurs eternally! The small human being recurs eternally! ◆




Naked I once saw them both, the greatest and the smallest human being: all-too-similar to each other ◆ all too human, even the greatest!

All-too-small the greatest! ◆ That was my loathing for the human! And eternal recurrence even of the smallest! That was my loathing for all existence!

Ah, disgust! disgust! disgust! (191-92)

As this passage makes clear, Zarathustra is the shepherd, and the snake in his throat is his disgust for the eternal recurrence. Specifically, humanity disgusts Zarathustra because the great and the small are too similar; and existence itself is appalling because even the smallest human beings recur eternally. Zarathustra claims that he finally accepts the eternality of human beings ◆ to have bit the head off the snake and overcome his disgust. But, as the animals make clear, he is still convalescing. Zarathustra can barely contain his feelings of nausea when he contemplates the eternal existence of humanity. Nevertheless, the change has occurred. As the animals announce to Zarathustra: "*behold, you are the teacher of eternal recurrence* ◆ *that is now your fate!*" (192). But what of the teaching of the Overhuman? In Zarathustra's vision of the shepherd and the snake, the shepherd becomes an Overhuman after he spits out the head of the serpent: he is "no longer shepherd, no longer human ◆ one transformed, illumined, who

laughed!" (138). It would appear, then, that Zarathustra, by biting off the head of his disgust for the eternal return of humanity, has become the Overhuman. He has overcome the spirit of revenge, the spirit of heaviness, that demeans this life with dreams of eternal rewards and punishments. The Overhuman, in this new version of the myth, is not an end state; he is, rather, a point on the eternal circle that affirms the circle itself. Zarathustra, as Overhuman, is now the teacher of eternal return. The animals declare, in their final words to Zarathustra: "Thus  ends Zarathustra's going-under" (193). He has now gone over.

Despite the animals proclamation of Zarathustra's fate, Zarathustra never provides an elaborate teaching of eternal return in his own voice  not even in the Fourth Part of the book, where he is tempted to deviate from his teaching out of pity for the higher men. It is, in fact, the animals who provide the clearest articulation of the teaching of eternal return in the section "The Convalescent," not Zarathustra himself, who compares their words to a tacky hurdy-gurdy song. Zarathustra is reluctant to say too much about eternal return. Nietzsche, as we know, attempted to formulate some scientific "proofs" of eternal recurrence in his notebooks, but, like Zarathustra, he was reluctant to make these statements public. They were never published during his lifetime. Nietzsche's general argument states that time is infinite, but that the number of possible energy states is finite, which means that the sequence of energy will eventually repeat itself (see WP 548-549). Like a proof for the existence of God, this proof  if we are charitable  may be internally logical, but we must accept certain presuppositions (such as time is infinite). The proof is certainly not existentially persuasive. Furthermore, the uncanny sense of *d~~er~~j~~e~~ vu* humans experience hardly constitutes empirical evidence of eternal recurrence.

Humans cannot actually know, with certainty, that eternal return is true. This point is suggested by Nietzsche himself, in the scene that takes place between Zarathustra and Life near the end of Part Three. Life is personified as a seductive, yet saucy, woman who must be disciplined by Zarathustra. The scene is both tender and sadistic. Life and Zarathustra declare their love for each other, but Zarathustra brings out his whip so that Life will "dance" and "scream" to his brisk tempo. Life perform the dance of eternal return, which she performs at the end of "The Other Dance Song," when Zarathustra cracks his whip twelve times, inspiring eleven responses from Life testifying to the joy of loving eternity. This violent image suggests that Zarathustra ❖ whatever his wisdom ❖ does not actually know that eternal recurrence is true. He has, rather, willed eternal recurrence as the highest type of myth ❖ one that affirms Life and truly loves this world. Life herself is suspicious that Zarathustra will be able to retain his love for her; she "knows" that Zarathustra will want to leave her soon. But Zarathustra immediately whispers something in her ear that he claims to "know," something that will testify to his loyalty. We do not hear what Zarathustra says to Life, but we can assume that he whispers his knowledge of eternal recurrence ❖ which, to accept, would represent the greatest possible love of Life. Life herself responds: "You *know* that, O Zarathustra? No one knows that" (198). Again, Zarathustra cannot *know* ❖ through nature, reason, or revelation ❖ that eternal return is true. Eternal return is a product of the will to power, just as are all previous myths. It may be the most life affirming myth, but he expresses this affirmation through force. Life dances to his tempo and crack of the whip.

The Success of Nietzsche's Zarathustra

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche describes *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the "greatest present that has ever been made to [mankind] so far." It is, in his estimation, both the "highest" and the "deepest" book in existence (EH, 675). And, according to Nietzsche, the "fundamental conception" of *Zarathustra* is "the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable" (EH, 751). But does Nietzsche effectively escape the nihilism that he associates with the Persian Zoroaster and all permutations of the eschatological myth? In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche declares that within *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, no "◆prophet is speaking, none of those gruesome hybrids of sickness and will to power that humans call founders of religion◆. It is no fanatic that speaks here; this is not ◆preaching'; no *faith* is demanded here" (EH, 675). Certainly Nietzsche cannot be accused of offering humanity yet another utopia where there is no suffering. But is his assessment of his own work correct? Does he truly escape the spirit of revenge and nihilism? Is no "faith" demanded with eternal recurrence?

In commentaries on *Zarathustra* over the past twenty years, there have been two major strains of thought. Laurence Lampert, in *Nietzsche's Teaching*, argues that Nietzsche is successful in overcoming the nihilism he wants to overcome. Peter Berkowitz, in *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, and Stanley Rosen, in *The Mask of Enlightenment*, argue the opposite: that Nietzsche succumbs to nihilism and the spirit of revenge. My own interpretive inclinations tend towards the later commentaries rather than the former, (notwithstanding Lampert's excellent and essential insights into the text). I want to conclude by identifying a number of ways in which Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* does not overcome the Persian Zoroaster and the eschatological myth:

1) Nietzsche claims that no new religious "faith" is established in *Zarathustra*.

However, what kind of "belief" is demanded by the teaching of the eternal return? There is, as we have discovered, no "proof" for eternal recurrence. Like the gods and the Overhuman, it too is a creation of Zarathustra the poet. What makes the poem of eternal return preferable for Nietzsche is its affirmation of this life rather than a life to come. Nevertheless, if we, like Zarathustra, must endeavor to speak the truth, then we cannot lie to ourselves about eternal return. It is a hypothesis, and it can never be anything more than that. It may, arguably, be preferable to others mythologies, but, at the level of knowledge, it remains speculative, much like the myths of the life to come in the eschatological traditions.

There is what one might call a "common sense" approach to eternal return. In the common sense interpretation, eternal return is accepted as regulative ideal, similar to Kant: live your life *as if* you had to live it over and over again eternally. Eternal return becomes an injunction to make the most out of this life, and transform even tragedies into something that affirms existence and builds character. Accept that whatever does not harm you makes you stronger, as Nietzsche proclaims in *Twilight of the Idols*. Nevertheless, when one reads *Zarathustra*, one gets the sense that Nietzsche intended something more than this ♦ almost as if he wants us to accept eternal return as literally true even though we know that it cannot be known with absolute certainty. In the least charitable reading, Nietzsche wants us to be willfully blind to contrary hypotheses. Such an ethos certainly goes against Zarathustra's reputation as a truth teller.

2) Zarathustra emphasizes the importance of the free will in many of his statements throughout the book. Indeed, it is the fundamental distinguishing characteristic between the higher man and the last man; the higher man uses his free will to create and affirm existence, whereas the last man looks after his comfort. But what happens to the free will when everything eternally recurs? The future, if it is a replay of what has already occurred countless times before, is not something that humans can freely create; it is, rather, determined for eternity. Zarathustra, despite all of his affirmations of the free will, ends up affirming a doctrine that effectively destroys any possibility of free will. Some humans are fated to be high, some are fated to be low, and one is fated to be a teacher of the eternal return. With eternal recurrence, we encounter a problem similar to what we find in providential accounts of history, where God's omnipotence and omniscience seems to contradict the possibility of human free will. Zarathustra preaches a doctrine of predestination that is every bit as stringent as Calvin's, minus the eschatological conclusion.

3) Zoroastrianism, apocalyptic Judaism, Christianity and Islam all live in the hope of the resurrection of the body. Our individual existence, according to these traditions, is not transitory; we will be resurrected with the bodies we have now, only our bodies will be renewed and no longer be subject to decay. Nietzsche, for all of his criticisms of apocalyptic religion, ends up advocating a teaching of bodily resurrection and personal immortality. In the teaching of eternal recurrence, each of us lives forever in the same body. Granted, we must endure joys and sufferings of the body forever without any hope of blissful fulfillment, but we retain our individuality forever. In this regard, the doctrine of eternal return is still within the matrix of the

traditions Nietzsche is trying to overcome. Both the Persian Zoroaster and Nietzsche's Zarathustra believe in the resurrection of the body.

4) This brings me to my final point. Heidegger noted, I think correctly, that Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return expresses "a form of ill will *against* sheer transiency and thereby [is] a highly spiritualized form of revenge" (Heid., Vol 2, 228). For Heidegger, Nietzsche cannot accept the sheer ephemeral nature of human life. As an act of revenge against reality, Nietzsche proclaims the doctrine of eternal return as the highest and most life-affirming understanding. In this manner, humans assert their immortality in retaliation against a world that seems indifferent to their plight. For Heidegger, eternal return is a myth that emerges from the will to power, with the same psychological origins as the eschatological myth. Both are born out of revenge

There are moments where Nietzsche himself seems conscious of this, and where he might indicate some ambivalence about the teaching of eternal return. In the section "On the Tarantulas," Zarathustra rails against those "tarantulas" who claim, out of the spirit of revenge, that all humans are equal. At one point, Zarathustra is bitten by a tarantula, and he says:

Alas! The tarantula has just bit me, my old enemy! Divinely assured and beautiful, she bit me on the finger!

Yes, she has just avenged herself! And alas! Now she will make my soul whirl round with revenge!

But so that I do *not* whirl round, my friends, tie me fast to this column here! Rather would I even be a stylite than a whirlpool of vengeance!

Verily, no turning whirlwind is Zarathustra; and if he is a dancer, then never a tarantella-dancer! (88)

And yet it is precisely a circle dancer that Zarathustra becomes in the end. If circle dancing is the dance of revenge, then the eternal return does not redeem us from the nihilism that originated with the Persian Zarathustra. Nietzsche has either not gone far enough in his efforts to break from the eschatological traditions, or he has misunderstood something about them ♦ something from which even he could not escape.
