

The Rebirth of Nietzsche's Zarathustra

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Abstract: In this essay, I examine the conversation between Zarathustra and his soul in the concluding chapters of Part 3 of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Building on my study's claim that Zarathustra dies at the end of Part 3, I argue that this conversation is taking place between two of his person-stages: the person-stage who has grown old and is now ending his own life, and the person-stage who has been reborn and is now entering childhood. This conversation shows how Zarathustra's older self has awakened his own childhood consciousness and is now using all of his wisdom to shape and educate it—a wisdom that then informs and propels his many journeys and teachings throughout the narrative. This conversation also shows that Zarathustra's most important dying gift to his own childhood soul is his newly recovered knowledge of eternal recurrence. This knowledge lies dormant in Zarathustra's soul until he gains the lion's strength needed to summon it up and then perishes as a result. Nietzsche thus invents a parthenogenetic protagonist whose life illustrates what is perhaps the first time-travel paradox ever written.

The title of my essay indicates a kind of sequel point to my study of Nietzsche's book, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*. There I spent most of my time arguing that the published ending of Nietzsche's philosophical novel depicts the protagonist's tragic death. Here I want to dwell a little longer on my study's related claim that this ending also depicts the protagonist's triumphant rebirth. In referring to this published ending, I mean to emphasize the fact that Nietzsche completed the fourth part of his book in 1885 but never published it and then left it out of the collected edition that he published in 1886. Today we always see the collected editions of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as including Part 4 and, indeed, as ending with Part 4.¹ I think that

¹ The only exception, as far as I know, is the recently published Basler Nietzsche-Ausgabe of *Also sprach Zarathustra* by Ludger Lütkehaus and David Marc Hoffmann (2013, Stroemfeld). I am grateful to Charles Bambach for drawing my attention to this new edition. Some online sources are more careful to categorize and locate Part 4 as one of Nietzsche's unpublished texts, but they do not offer any guidance about how to study the entirety of

this editorial decision is a mistake that has led most interpreters to miss the significance of Nietzsche's ending in Part 3. If Part 4 were published as an appendix, or within editorial parentheses, or even separately, I think it would be much easier for readers to understand the overall design of Nietzsche's book. This design is supposed to match the ancient Greek plan of three related tragedies followed by a satyr play. In this Greek plan, the satyr play story had a flexible chronological place within the story told by the three preceding tragedies. In some cases, the satyr play functioned as a kind of extended flashback into events that had already taken place in the time of the story told by the tragedies. Similarly, I have argued, Part 4 of Nietzsche's book is a flashback narration of three sequential days in Zarathustra's life that come before the pivotal Part 3 moment in which he awakens his most abysmal thought.

However, when readers today open up any collected edition of Nietzsche's book, they are led to see the ending of Part 3 as depicting a moment in the temporal sequence of Zarathustra's life that is simply continued at the start of Part 4. Since Zarathustra is alive and well at the start of Part 4, just older and wiser, readers today are naturally inclined to overlook Nietzsche's many obvious indications that he had already killed off his protagonist at the end of Part 3—that is, in the ending of the book that he actually published. I believe that this is the chief reason why no one before had noticed the crucial narrative event of Zarathustra's death.² Of course previous scholars had commented on Nietzsche's many narrative anticipations of his protagonist's death—for example, Zarathustra's opening announcement of his impending downfall, or his

Nietzsche's book.

² See Loeb 1998 and 2000 for my first published arguments in support of this claim. For an interesting extension of these arguments to Nietzsche's engagement with Empedocles and Lucian, see Babich 2013.

later prediction that he himself would die at the right time and in the right way. But the editorial inclusion of Part 4 led all of these scholars to conclude that Nietzsche chose to postpone this death until some indefinite moment in some as yet unwritten text.³

I cannot hope to review here all of the textual evidence that I gathered together in my study, but I will mention one especially salient and compelling point. The narration in Part 4 begins by letting us know that years have gone by and that Zarathustra has grown much older and that his hair has now turned white. Since Part 4 is a flashback narration of Zarathustra's backstory, this aging process has not taken place *after* the ending of Part 3 but rather *before* it—indeed, before the pivotal Part 3 moment in which Zarathustra awakens his most abysmal thought. During the temporal gap and narrative ellipsis just before this pivotal moment, Zarathustra has grown much older and is therefore much closer to the moment of his death. So when he seems to drop dead after awakening his most abysmal thought, and is then unable to recover, we are supposed to notice that he is undergoing a convalescence that is only spiritual. After awakening his most abysmal thought, Zarathustra learns how to heal his spiritual ills, such as his guilt, melancholy, and spirit of revenge. But he has also had to confront his new and bitter

³ Krell (1986: 43 ff.) cited Part 4 in his explicit argument for this postponement thesis and supported this thesis with Nietzsche's unpublished notes and plans regarding the death of Zarathustra—especially those plans alluding to Hölderlin's project about the self-sacrificial death of Empedocles. More recently, Allison (2001: 157-79) followed Krell in this argumentation and contrasted Nietzsche's depictions of Zarathustra's death in his unpublished notes with Nietzsche's depiction of the continuation of Zarathustra's life in Part 4. My new account of Part 4 allowed me to show, contrary to Krell and Allison, that Nietzsche did indeed complete his parallel of the self-sacrificial deaths of Zarathustra and Empedocles *within the text he published*—and, indeed, his additional parallels with the self-sacrificial deaths of Dionysus, Socrates, Jesus, Faust, and Wotan (Loeb 2010: 82-83, 118). Babich (2013: 158, 170) cites Jung and a couple of obscure early scholars as having discussed the issue of Zarathustra's death, but all of them were reading Part 4 as a chronological sequel to the published ending of Nietzsche's book. Babich (2013: 158; 2015: 248-9) also suggests that Zarathustra dies toward the end of Part 1 after being bitten by an adder. But Zarathustra says that a dragon like him cannot be killed by snake poison. He thanks the adder for waking him up on time and then commands the adder to take back his poison (since the adder is not rich enough to give it to him) (Z I.19).

knowledge of humankind's eternal return and this struggle has dealt his body a mortal blow.

Influenced by their reading of the ending of Part 3 as chronologically leading into the beginning of Part 4, scholars have always assumed that Nietzsche's reference to Zarathustra's convalescence points toward his eventual recovery into the full physical health that is displayed during his vigorous activities in Part 4. These scholars have thus been led to overlook Nietzsche's many narrative indications that Zarathustra is actually dying as he convalesces. These indications include, in order:

- his pale, trembling and supine state that lasts for seven days after his death-like collapse;
- his subsequent inability to get out of bed;
- his inability to forget the great pain, suffering, nausea, sadness, and death-like weariness that he has just experienced in his struggle with his most abysmal thought;
- his description of himself as still sick and weary;
- his animals' suggestion that he might want to die now;
- his *return* to a supine position after sitting up to smell one of his apples;
- his failure to respond to his animals' last speech, along with his inability to hear that they have become silent;
- his final sleep-like stillness and closed eyes.

It is true that Nietzsche did not end his published book with some completely explicit and literal assertion of Zarathustra's death—such as “Thus died Zarathustra.” But we cannot emphasize the poetic logic of Nietzsche's design while at the same time demanding textual evidence in terms of

completely explicit and literal assertions.⁴ Nietzsche's book is poetic precisely because he refuses to spell out all of its meanings in their entirety. It does not follow, however, that these meanings cannot be understood or that Nietzsche did not want his readers to figure out these meanings. On the contrary, my study shows just how much extensive and detailed guidance Nietzsche gave us for understanding his poetic depiction of the death of Zarathustra.

Let me venture a little further afield here by comparing the final scene in Nietzsche's published book to the controversial final scene in the final episode of the pioneering long-form television show, *The Sopranos*. In this scene, Tony Soprano looks up to see his daughter enter the restaurant, then there is an abrupt cut to a silent black screen, after which there is a cut to the credits. Careful students of this scene have rightly concluded that the writer and director, David Chase, gave his viewers extensive visual, auditory and narrative guidance for understanding that this last scene showed the point of view of Tony Soprano at the very moment when he is shot and killed.⁵ Still, the last episode does not include any explicit and literal depiction of Tony's death, so there remains some argument and controversy as to whether Chase did indeed kill off his protagonist at the very end of his long-running show.

During interviews regarding this last episode, Chase has refused to spell out the meaning of the last scene and said that any such explicit and literal assertion would diminish the emotional power of his artistic ending. Since Chase believes that death is the absolute end for the one who dies, he chose the traditional symbols of silence and blackness to communicate the

⁴ Cf. Ruin 2011: 391 and Marsden 2011: 5.

⁵ For a rigorous and detailed analysis supporting this conclusion, see:
<http://masterofsopranos.wordpress.com/thesopranos-definitive-explanation-of-the-end>.

complete termination of Tony's auditory and visual experience. Because Chase believes that death can come at any time and without warning, he hoped that viewers watching this final scene would be abruptly cut off from the immersive narrative and left disoriented, disturbed, and in denial. He planned that viewers would have entered Tony's point of view just before this last moment and that they themselves would experience something like this same complete termination and thereby be forced to confront the prospect of their own inevitable death.

In my study, I argued that Nietzsche had the same kind of design in mind when he wrote the ending of the book he published. The narration at the ending of the "Convalescent" chapter lets us know that last three chapters are relating Zarathustra's point of view after he has been shattered by his struggle with his most abysmal thought. In these final chapters Zarathustra sees himself as an overripe grapevine who weeps over his longing to die and who anxiously waits for the approaching bark of voluntary death carrying the vintager with his harvesting knife. In these final chapters, Zarathustra also admits to life that he will want to leave her when the ancient bell strikes the hour of midnight. Furthermore, Zarathustra's very last song, in which he joyfully affirms all of his life, is sung immediately after the ancient bell has finished tolling the twelfth bell for the hour of midnight. The ending of this song is unique in omitting the usual narrative closure or signature line that is included at the end of every other chapter in the book. Here Nietzsche trusts his readers to notice his poetic allusion to Goethe's famous concluding scene in which the clock stops at midnight and Faust dies during his life's supremely joyful moment.

Like Chase, then, Nietzsche chose to conclude his poetic artwork by showing his

protagonist's own point of view on his own moment of death. Like Chase, Nietzsche thought that it would be more powerful to *show* Zarathustra dying without making some explicit and literal assertion to this effect. Unlike Chase, however, Nietzsche does not believe that death is the absolute end of life for the one who dies. Instead, he believes that the moment of death initiates an immediate return back into the awakening awareness of this same life. Thus, the one who dies immediately begins to relive his life exactly as he lived it before. This difference helps to explain the divergence in their artistic depictions of the protagonists' experience of the moment of his own death. Tony Soprano is experiencing an affectionate conversation with his family, the music of Journey, the comings and goings of other patrons, the taste of onion rings, and so on. All of a sudden, the entirety of this experience is cut off by a silent black screen. Chase's point is not that the dead Tony is now experiencing a silent black nothingness, but rather that Tony no longer exists to experience anything at all. Chase's artistic design thus recalls the ancient Epicurean perspective on death. By contrast, Nietzsche shows us that the dying Zarathustra experiences a final revelation that prompts him to joyfully declare his love for a life that he now recognizes to be eternal. For Nietzsche's protagonist there can never be any final end to all of life's experience, but only a continuous reliving of this same experience.⁶

⁶ Keith Ansell Pearson (2011: 14-15) has asked whether my interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return involves a theory of personal immortality that is inconsistent with his endorsement in *Dawn* (Section 72) of the Epicurean idea of a final, definitive, or permanent death (*der endgültige Tod*) and with his Epicurean critique in the *Antichrist* (Sections 41, 43, 58) of the Christian concept of personal immortality that he traces back to Paul. My reply is that of course Nietzsche's discovery of eternal recurrence leads him to abandon his earlier belief in permanent death and to deny the Epicurean teaching that "[w]e are born only once, and we cannot be born twice; and one must for all eternity exist no more" (*Vatican Sayings*, no. 14; Inwood and Gerson 1988: 29). Nevertheless, as key passages from *Zarathustra* make clear (Z P:6, III.13:2), Nietzsche continues to agree with the Epicurean claims that the human soul is always embodied and mortal and that the human life span is therefore finite (albeit endlessly repeated). Eternal return does not bring any redemption from these facts of human embodiment, mortality, and finite life span. It is true that eternal return does involve a kind of renewed concern with the "after-death" (das "*Nach-dem-Tode*," in *Dawn*

If my interpretation of Nietzsche's book is convincing, we might wonder why he would design his most important book around the theme of death. Isn't Nietzsche the philosopher of life and life-affirmation? Didn't he write at one point in *The Gay Science* that he would like to help people think about life rather than death? "It makes me happy to see that people really don't want to think about death! I would like to do something to help them feel that thinking about life is a hundred times worthier" (GS 278). Adrian Del Caro, when reviewing my study, expressed this worry well (2011: 83-84). He felt that the focus of my interpretation was morbid and ruined the joyful, salutary, and life-affirming aspects of Nietzsche's book. According to Del Caro, Nietzsche was a spokesman for life and therefore chose to dwell on life instead of death, on how to live instead on how to die. This is why Nietzsche invented a protagonist who, unlike Socrates and Jesus, lives for his beliefs instead of dying for them. Del Caro worried that I had assimilated Nietzsche too much to the Platonic and Christian life-denying approaches by writing about the death of Zarathustra in a way that closely parallels the deaths of Socrates and Jesus.

As I mentioned in my response to Del Caro's review (Loeb 2011: 109-13), I think that the best first answer to this worry is to recall Nietzsche's view that every issue, including the issue of death, can be considered from a life-affirming or life-denying perspective. Indeed, Nietzsche writes, those who long to escape death are actually expressing an aversion to life:

We simply cannot conceal from ourselves *what* is really expressed
by all that willing that has received its direction from the ascetic

72), but this after-death is always only a return to life and indeed to the identical and always embodied life *before* death. Thus, Nietzsche is still in a position to endorse the Epicurean critique of fear-inducing theories of eternal damnation—such as the theory advanced in Plato's *Phaedo*. He is also still in a position to offer an Epicurean criticism of the Platonic and Christian doctrines of personal immortality as attempts to devalue the world, and to remove the center of gravity from life, through the related teachings of salvation and damnation in some new, different, better, or worse afterlife.

ideal: this hatred of the human, still more of the animal, even more of the material, this abhorrence of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and of beauty, this longing for the beyond away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, desire, longing itself—all of this means, let us dare to grasp this, a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental preconditions of life ... (GM III: 28).⁷

According to Nietzsche, those who promote the ascetic ideal are interested in advancing the idea of an afterlife in order to deny the phenomenon of death. But death is an essential aspect of life and cannot be evaded without evading life itself. So affirming life means affirming the reality of death.

More specifically, Nietzsche argues that the way for human beings to approach death from a life-affirming perspective is to die at the right time and in the right way. As I argued in my study, this is why he shows Zarathustra exemplifying his own teaching by actually dying at the right time and in the right way. What this means is that he courageously dies at a moment that he himself has freely chosen. This is a moment when he is victorious, when he is surrounded by beloved companions who can witness his triumph, and when he has just accomplished all that he had hoped to achieve and is therefore in a position to be grateful to all of his life as leading up to this supreme moment. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche sums up this approach to the hour of death and contrasts it with the Christian desecration of this same moment. A death, he writes, should be “brightly and cheerfully accomplished amid children and witnesses: so that a real farewell is still possible, where the one who is taking leave is still there; also a real estimate of what has been achieved and willed, a summation of the life” (TI IX: 36). Thus, the celebration

⁷ Here, and throughout this essay, I have consulted the translations of Nietzsche's texts that are listed in my

of death does not have to be a life-denying, nihilistic, or ascetic concept, but can actually be an ultimate expression of life-affirmation.

I think this is a good first answer to the worry I have mentioned, but I do not think that it is the complete answer. Yes, Nietzsche designed his philosophical novel around the theme of death in order to show how life-affirmation can be extended to everything, including death. He ended his book by showing the life-affirming death of his protagonist in order to ensure that his narrative affirms the whole extent of Zarathustra's life, even its ending. But this would not show that Nietzsche's design is in fact essential to his plan to help his readers feel that thinking about life is a hundred times worthier than thinking about death. Yet I think that this much stronger statement is also the case. In my study I argued that Nietzsche constructed his narrative around the theme of death because there was simply no better way for him to communicate his philosophy of life and life-affirmation.

Here, then, is a second and more complete answer to the worry I have mentioned. This answer includes Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same—a doctrine he describes as a formula for the most supreme affirmation of life that is at all attainable (EH Z:1). What he means by this formula is expressed most clearly in the notes that he wrote in 1881 when he first discovered eternal recurrence:

Not gazing toward distant unknown blisses *blessings* and *pardons*, but rather to live in such a way that we want to live again and that we want to live *thus* for all eternity! — Our mission pursues us at every moment. (KSA 9: 11[161])

My teaching says: to live in *such a way* that you must *wish* to live

again, that is the mission—you will *anyway*! He to whom striving brings a supreme feeling, let him strive; he to whom rest brings a supreme feeling, let him rest; he to whom alignment following obedience brings a supreme feeling, let him obey. Only **let him become aware of that which** brings him a supreme feeling and spare *no means*! *Eternity* is at stake! (KSA 9: 11[163])

According to Nietzsche, the best way to affirm life is always to keep seeking those activities that bring you a supreme feeling. Your mission in life is to maximize these activities throughout your life so that you will want to repeat your same life for all of eternity. However, living your life all over again means returning to this same life after you die. Hence Nietzsche's principle of life-affirmation must include an emphasis on the end of life as leading into the repetition of life. In order to show that his protagonist enacts a supreme affirmation of life, Nietzsche needs to depict the moment of Zarathustra's death as a rebirth into his identical life.⁸

So, how did Nietzsche present this formula in the ending of his published book, that is, in the concluding chapters of Part 3? The key, I think, is to look carefully at Nietzsche's central distinction in these chapters between Zarathustra, on the one hand, and Zarathustra's soul, on the other. The "Convalescent" chapter ends with the narrator telling us that Zarathustra is engaged in a conversation with his own soul. Then, in the next few chapters, Nietzsche actually presents both sides of this conversation. We first hear Zarathustra addressing his own soul, with every single sentence initiated by the phrase, "Oh my soul." We then hear Zarathustra reporting on his soul's answer and concluding his speech by commanding his soul to sing back to him. After that,

⁸ Babich (2015: 249, 257) suggests that Nietzsche's doctrine is alluding to Empedocles' theory of metempsychosis. But Nietzsche dismisses the Pythagorean version of eternal recurrence in his second *Untimely Meditation* (UM II:2). Instead, he traces his own version of the doctrine back to the Dionysian mystery cults (TI X:5, KSA 10: 8[15]) and to Heraclitus and the Stoics (EH BT:3). Also, I have argued (Loeb 2010: 37-40, 61-82) that Nietzsche intends his version of the doctrine to counter and refute the Pythagorean and Platonic theories of metempsychosis.

we hear Zarathustra's soul obeying this command by singing his reply in the last two chapters—"The Other Dancing Song" and "The Yes- and Amen-Song." Both of these songs are addressed to life and both relate a wedding celebration between the male figure of Zarathustra's soul and the female figure of life. In the first of these songs we hear an account of their wedding dance, which is then followed by a roundelay in which each verse is sung to the accompaniment of a new strike of the ancient bell tolling the twelve bells of midnight. The second song then appears designed to fill in the twelfth verse of this roundelay in response to the strike of the twelfth bell. In this last song, Zarathustra's soul declares his marriage vows to life and we hear him announce that his wedding ring of eternal recurrence has transformed her into his eternal companion.

Scholars had previously noticed Nietzsche's concluding distinction between Zarathustra and his soul. They all noticed that Zarathustra initiates some kind of dialogue with himself and they all interpreted the reference to Zarathustra's soul as Nietzsche's roundabout way of indicating this inner dialogue.⁹ But none of them had noticed that Zarathustra is dying in these chapters and therefore none of them were in a position to notice Nietzsche's use of this distinction to design a narrative enactment of eternal recurrence. This point is crucial because eternal recurrence implies the repetition of life after death. Indeed, Zarathustra's animals have just told him that according to his teaching he will come back after he dies and start reliving his identical life. However, the only moment in the sequence of Zarathustra's life when he can return after he dies is the same moment when he started reliving his life before—namely, the

⁹ Cf. Lampert 1986: 223-8; White 1990: 93-5; and Seung 2005: 194-6. Even on its own terms, this common interpretation is not quite adequate because Zarathustra also describes his soul as talking with itself: "Is not all weeping a lamentation? And is not all lamentation an accusation?" This is how you speak to yourself (*Also redest du*

moment prior to his death when he was first “born,” that is, first came into existence as a person. So what Nietzsche is actually showing in these concluding chapters is an inner dialogue between two temporally distinct person-stages of Zarathustra: the person-stage who has grown old and is now ending his own life and the person-stage who has been reborn and is now entering childhood.

Nietzsche's opening prologue to his book has puzzled readers because it begins *in medias res* and does not seem to say anything about Zarathustra's life before he was thirty years old and climbed up his mountain to enjoy his solitude for ten years. Unlike the New Testament's *ab ovo* narrative, Nietzsche's book does not seem to give us Zarathustra's origin story. But this is because Nietzsche does not believe in the linear Christian story of birth, teaching, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Instead, he believes in circular recurrence. So he tells Zarathustra's story in such a way that we are led to see how his rebirth both follows and precedes his death. In contrast to the writers of the four Gospels, Nietzsche presents his protagonist's origin story at the end of his published book instead of at the beginning.

Of course, what is most striking about Jesus's origin story is that he is the child of an immaculate conception and a virgin birth. We might think that Nietzsche would be averse to designing a parallel origin story, especially since he ridicules these ideas elsewhere.¹⁰ Also, we might wonder how the doctrine of eternal recurrence could possibly lead to any analogy here. But in my study I argued that Nietzsche does indeed construct such a parallel origin story and

zu dir selber), and this is why, oh my soul, you would rather smile than pour out your suffering—” (Z III.14).

¹⁰ Cf. Section 34 of *The Antichrist*.

that his doctrine does indeed lead him to such an analogy.¹¹ I summarized this aspect of my reading by referring to Nietzsche's allusion to Dionysus in Section 56 of *Beyond Good and Evil*: Zarathustra is the *circulus vitiosus deus* who makes himself necessary. In the concluding chapters of his published book, Nietzsche shows how Zarathustra awakens his own returning consciousness and uses all of his wisdom to shape and educate it—a wisdom that then informs and propels his many journeys and teachings throughout the earlier narrative.

Speaking as a mother who has just given birth, Zarathustra tells his naked newborn soul about the umbilical cord of time that connects them together. He explains to his soul how he has washed him clean of his after-birth, baptized him with new names, and offered him many colorful toys to play with. There then ensues a debate between the two of them as to who should be more grateful, the giver or the receiver. Zarathustra tells his soul that he has given him all the gifts he had until his hands were empty. He sees that these gifts have helped his soul to grow into a tall living vine that is superabundant, comprehensive, and joyous. This inner dialogue thus depicts the anticipated third transformation of Zarathustra's spirit from a lion who seizes his own freedom into a child who actually expresses this new freedom. But it also depicts the process whereby the dying Zarathustra gives a virgin birth to his own soul through an immaculate conception—that is, brings himself into existence as a person.¹² He accomplishes this feat through the gifts of wisdom that he himself bestows upon his own returning and awakening consciousness. "Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it were

¹¹ See Loeb 2010: 105-9, 190-8.

¹² On my reading, however, Nietzsche does not represent Zarathustra as *biologically* giving birth to himself in the nonsensical *casua sui* sense of BGE 21. See Irigaray (1991) and Oliver (1995) for this much stronger reading that raises questions about Nietzsche's attempt to erase or usurp women's biological maternal roles. Passages like Z I.18,

this woman whom I love: for I love you, oh eternity! *For I love you, oh eternity!*"—these are the last words spoken by Nietzsche's parthenogenetic protagonist in the conclusion to his philosophical novel.

There is only one other place in Nietzsche's book where Zarathustra speaks about himself as a young child. In the "Vision and Riddle" chapter at the start of Part 3, Zarathustra relates his prevision of the events that take place at the end of Part 3. In this prevision, Zarathustra first awakens his most abysmal thought and then crosses the portal named "*Augenblick*" to find himself waking up into a scene that he recalls from his most distant childhood. In my study, I argued that this portal is the midnight instant that acts as a membrane between the last and first moments in the sequence of Zarathustra's life—that is, between his dying consciousness and his returning consciousness. During this instant, the dying Zarathustra is able to awaken his reborn childhood self and bestow upon him all of the wisdom that he has accumulated during his many journeys and teachings throughout the narrative.¹³ One such gift, the most important gift, is what his animals call his "new" knowledge of eternal recurrence. Of course, this knowledge is not actually new because it was lying there all along waiting to be summoned and awakened from its dormant state in his subconscious. But the reason it was lying

Z I.20, and Z III.12:23-24 certainly seem to contradict this stronger reading.

¹³ Immediately after awakening his most abysmal thought and proving that he must eternally return through the portal of death, Zarathustra hears a dog howling nearby and recalls that he heard and saw this same howling dog when his consciousness was first awakening during his most distant childhood. He then notices that this dog belongs to a stricken young shepherd lying nearby and that this shepherd dog has seen him arriving and is now howling and screaming so that he will come to the aid of his master. In my study (Loeb 2010: 182-5), I argued that Nietzsche is using both these images of the shepherd and his shepherd dog to symbolize the previsioned older Zarathustra who is stricken down and screaming for help while struggling with his most abysmal thought. Here too Nietzsche represents the interaction of two temporally distinct person-stages in Zarathustra's life: his older and embattled person-stage screams a cry for help that awakens his returning childhood person-stage.

there waiting for him is that he himself had deposited it there after having recovered it and after having used it to teach himself how to awaken his childhood self in order to teach him this same wisdom.

Put in more contemporary terms, Zarathustra's dying knowledge of eternal recurrence is the discovery about time travel that he then uses in order to communicate this same discovery to his younger self who then carries this same information within him so that he can learn it right before he dies.¹⁴ We are accustomed to thinking that H.G. Wells wrote the first time travel novel in 1895. But perhaps we should say that Nietzsche wrote the first such novel a decade earlier? At the very least, we should credit him with inventing what is now called the "bootstrap" paradox of time travel.¹⁵

I will conclude here by returning to my question about the relation between Nietzsche's narrative themes of death and life-affirmation. In order to completely affirm his life, Zarathustra has to die at the right time and in the right way. This is because otherwise he would not be in a position to bestow his dying gifts upon his returning self—which means that he never would have been in a position to accumulate all of these gifts in the first place. The dying Zarathustra wants to live again because he is looking forward to reliving his life with all of the wisdom, meaning, and joy that he is now giving to his own awakened soul. The maturing Zarathustra lives in such a way that he wants to live again because he has begun his journey with a storehouse of

¹⁴ In my study (2010: 173 ff.) and in my essay, "Nietzsche's Transhumanism" (Loeb 2011), I have argued that Nietzsche designs a narrative in which his protagonist becomes something more than human by gaining power over time through his discovery of backward-willing.

¹⁵ For a clear and persuasive philosophical discussion of this paradox, see David Lewis' essay on the two influential time travel stories written by Robert Heinlein (Lewis 1993). One of these stories, "By His Bootstraps," is the source of the term now attached to the kind of time travel paradox illustrated in Nietzsche's book.

wisdom, meaning and joy that was given to him by his dying perfected self.

This is a strange circular narrative about what Zarathustra calls his ultimate transformation into a self-propelling wheel. But perhaps we can agree that it fulfills Nietzsche's earlier hope that he would do something to help us feel more inclined to think about life rather than death. When expressing this hope, Nietzsche had observed—in keeping with ancient Epicurean ideas—that death and deathly silence seem to be the only certainty and commonality in everyone's future. Now he assures us instead that we will all be returning into our noisy, life-thirsty, and life-drunken pasts. In that earlier book, Nietzsche had imagined, along with Epicurus, that the silent shadow of death stands behind each of us, like a dark fellow traveler. Now he tells us instead that it is actually our own future selves who stand behind us at every moment, like enlightened fellow time-travelers. How strange, he had remarked then, that this approaching deathly silence makes almost no impression on people, that they do not feel how they form a fellowship of death. Not strange at all, he says now, for Epicurus was wrong. When we are, death has already arrived, and when death arrives, we simply are again. Death is indeed something to us, namely the eternal return to our same lives and to our fellowship of life with those who share them.¹⁶

¹⁶ An earlier draft of this essay was presented at the Nietzsche Society meeting in the SPEP conference in New Orleans on October 24, 2014. I would like to thank the participants for their helpful questions and comments, especially Babette Babich, Charles Bambach, Lorraine Markotic, Gary Shapiro, and Tracy B. Strong.

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