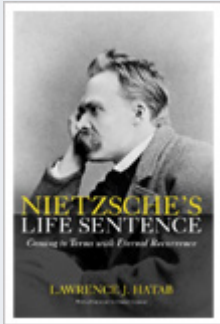


NIETZSCHE CIRCLE

JANUARY 18, 2006

WWW.NIETZSCHECIRCLE.COM



**Lawrence
Hatab's
Nietzsche's Life
Sentence:
Coming to
terms with
Eternal
Recurrence.**

**Reviewed by
Horst Hutter**

Hatab's new book on Nietzsche is a brilliant treatment of this seminal thinker's key idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. It is the fruit of a long engagement with the philosophy of Nietzsche, not merely in a propositional manner, but also in the form of an existential commitment. It argues that Nietzsche's texts call for a mimetic enactment of the images conveyed; textual artifices call for a performative reception. Nietzsche's language is a poetic-mythological structure of concepts and images that aims to dance, ... "off the page into the reader's life." It is hence insufficient, although not completely wrong, to read Nietzsche's books as merely conveying "doctrines." Nietzsche practiced philosophy as a mode of action, a radically agonistic, interpretative, addressive practice. It does not indulge the fantasy of achieving a fixed warrant for a foundational governance of culture by providing propositions that impartially examine philosophical "problems". Philosophy for Nietzsche was more than the professional of "doctrines" on such as, for example, truth, the good, knowledge and time, albeit in an imaginative and provocative manner.

Hatab suggests that, given Nietzsche's lived, personal engagement with philosophy, *Ecce Homo* may be his most philosophical book. In addition, Hatab not only preaches about Nietzsche's existential engagements with his ideas, but he also practices himself philosophy as a way of life. He admits that the idea of eternal recurrence has not only been a conceptual formula for Nietzsche's life sentence, but also has animated his own quest for meanings in his own existential commitments. He avows a long meditative practice of the thought of eternal recurrence, thus integrating it as a challenge in his own mode of life. Despite his focus on a non-propositional approach to the study of Nietzsche, Hatab nonetheless fulfills all the requirements of a purely doctrinal discussion of interpretations of Nietzsche. He exhaustively and succinctly reviews the standard interpretations of eternal recurrence, both those that see it as an internally contradictory notion, and those that see sense in it as an ontological, cosmological or temporal thesis. Most of these approaches miss the essential connection of eternal recurrence with life-affirmation and life-enhancement. This idea thus becomes a means for a global affirmation of all conditions of life, including those that run counter to one's own interests. Even nihilism and Christian world denial are welcomed as life-enhancing denials of traditional constructs, which enable a transition to new revaluations.

Hatab's discussion of Nietzsche's agonistic pluralism is especially insightful. It shows how in Nietzsche's understanding every perspective needs its other, how it can never escape some complicity with its own negation. Self-affirmation requires the affirmation of conflict; a self is formed in and through agonistic relations. Values only become values but being exposed to their radical denial. The positive positions of traditional systems, such as the good, purpose, unity and truth, are necessary counters and precursors to their exposure as "creative ornaments of nothingness". Eternal recurrence involves a listening posture of openness to the deep structures of life in oneself. In so doing, it can even affirm all negations of the flux in fictional houses of being as necessary forms of otherness to becoming.

Hatab reformulates some of his ideas expressed in an earlier study of a Nietzschean defense of democracy. He shows how Nietzsche's sustained critique of liberalism and its belief in a unitary subject, an "individual", that is substantive, autonomous and at least potentially controlled by "reason" implies ipso facto a political system of agonistic pluralism. The idea of will-to-power implies a "spiritualization of hostility" and enmity that call for an affirmation of oppositions. Democratic parties thus can appreciate having enemies and can find it in the interest of their desire to preserve themselves. Such spiritualization of enmity avoids stagnation and recognizes that the price of fruitfulness is to be rich in opposition. Nietzsche's model is thus very much opposed to the habit of traditional systems of authority, such as the Church, that aimed to destroy the opposition.

One of the most interesting aspects of Hatab's book is his discussion of a phenomenology of laughter. He proposes that the structure of Nietzsche's Zarathustra is a mimetic enactment of the structure of a Dionysian tragedy. The first three parts represent the tragic cycle, and part four is a satyr play in which the seriousness of the first three parts is disrupted but not invalidated. By involving laughter, laughing lions and animality in the figure of the satyr, Nietzsche is able to show the essential unity for life of tragedy and comedy. He thereby points to his new vision that sees human culture not as a transcendence of animal nature, but as a sublimation of natural energies that modulate, but never surpasses its animal base.

Overall, Hatab's book is rich in offerings, and a first-rate rendition of Nietzsche's abysmal thought, his central teaching of eternal recurrence. It appeals to both scholarly experts and beginners, especially in its emphasis on Nietzsche's own practice that is mimetically enacted in this reading of Nietzsche's texts. Given the author's emphasis on a philosophical practice, it seems odd for the writer of the foreword to suggest that Hatab "practices what Nietzsche and Zarathustra only preached".

This seems to be a particularly “otherly” reading of the drama of Nietzsche’s life as well as the dramatic and educational journeys of his fictional character Zarathustra.

Copyright Notice:

Copyright © 2005 NietzscheCircle.com Articles, Essays are copyright their respective authors. All rights reserved.