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Future Past:
The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra and Eternity
Or
What is the Weight of the Greatest Heavy Weight?

Babette Babich



If you believed more in life, you would devote yourselves less to the moment. Z I: *Of the Preachers of Death*

The first version of *The Gay Science* was published in 1882 and the aphorism that concludes this book also serves for Nietzsche as *incipit* for his next book: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. This essay looks at the notion of eternal recurrence, which Nietzsche also happens to introduce at the end of Book Four of *The Gay Science*, and is thus addressed to the intimate connection between *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, two books, both of which were published in unfinished versions. In fact, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was published in several unfinished versions.¹ To be precise, Nietzsche publishes the individual books of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, seriatim: beginning with the first book in 1883: *Also Sprach Zarathustra, Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*, which appeared with E. Schmeitzner in Chemnitz and then a little later that same year of 1883, publishing the second part: *Also Sprach Zarathustra, Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen, 2*.

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Karl Schlechta's *Nietzsche-Chronik* reports that "Zarathustra I was written out in ten days in January,"² giving us an ontic calendar-month illumination of the *Sanctus Januarius* metaphor of a "flaming spear" and "highest hope and goal" which Nietzsche foreground in his epigraph to Book Four of *The Gay Science*, located and dated, Genoa, January 1882. Januaries were manifestly good months for Nietzsche's productivity as he himself noted.

Nietzsche published the third book and officially (in terms of *public* publication) the last book of Zarathustra in 1884, again appearing with same publisher under the likewise duly numbered title: *Also Sprach Zarathustra, Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*, 3. Notoriously, Nietzsche restricted the circulation of the fourth and parodic book to a 'limited' edition — i.e., for 'friends only' — printed in 1885. Thereafter he would attempt to reacquire all of the extant copies, which is a bit like hitting send after writing an email and wishing that one might later unsend or undo the message. That Nietzsche meant to "unsend" or repress the fourth book is clear because in 1886 he published the first three books as *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, but left out the fourth. That this exclusion was deliberate is also plain given the listing of the author's 'other published works' featured on the back-cover of *Beyond Good and Evil*. There Nietzsche emphasizes that 'the fourth and last part of the just mentioned work from the start of the year 1885, was not as yet to be made available to booksellers.'³

Of course, we Nietzsche scholars could seemingly care less about this and nearly everyone writes as if there were indeed four books to the Zarathustra cycle rather than three (an issue complicated though I will not discuss this here by Nietzsche's characterization of his Zarathustra as music and the form or parts of the piece, as — either — sonata or symphony).

There has been a great deal written about Nietzsche's writing of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, including what one author calls his aesthetic calculus,⁴ but also about the meaning of the book and its metaphors, explications of its style, its origins whether based as a small percentage argue on Wagner, or as is maintained by the majority of scholars, based on the gospels, whereby Nietzsche presents the prophet Zarathustra contra the evangelist, on the model of the new testament convention as Nietzsche also expresses this conventionality to conclude his ultimate author's catalogue of his own books (as of his own life) on the last page of *Ecce Homo* — "Dionysus against the crucified."

For my part, I am going to update these older accounts in the contemporary context by situating Nietzsche's Zarathustra among the genre of parody, particularly of the parabolic sort. I argue that Nietzsche draws on Lucian, the 2nd century AD author because I find echoes of this satirical author throughout, backwards and forwards, but especially given the 'true stories' or 'serious' or 'earnest lies'⁵ characteristic of Lucian, the stylistic genius and satirist of antiquity, both Roman and Greek, both Jew and Christian, including all schools of philosophy and so on.

Everyone notes that Lucian was an outstanding stylist and so quite the writer. But for me what is decisive is that Lucian happened to have been Diogenes Laertius' contemporary and as we know, Diogenes Laertius wrote, a tad less flashily, on the same themes that occupy Lucian in his dialogues, writing on all the philosophers, especially Empedocles, as well as topics Roman and Greek, Jew and Christian.

For me this is the most relevant detail as Nietzsche specialized in Diogenes Laertius⁶ — and that Diogenes Laertius would almost certainly have been the topic of his doctoral dissertation, had Nietzsche submitted one (as he did not in fact although he wrote extensively in preparation for such a text. And as we all know, a philologist, a Graecist, especially one of Nietzsche's

formation (and especially under Ritschl, especially one whose friend Erwin Rohde specialist emphases included Lucian from the start), for anyone who wrote on either Lucian or Diogenes Laertius could not dispense with the other.

I've written several essays now on Lucian and Nietzsche,⁷ but I believe that you can only take the point *not* if I say so, and especially *not* if you take my word for it, but, and this is also in Zarathustra's spirit as it is also the point of exigent or rigorous philology and philosophy of the continental kind, *only* if you yourself go and read Lucian for yourself. If you do you may recognize many of Nietzsche's reflections in *The Gay Science*, especially those on truth and lie and including his reflections "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" are Lucianic and have less to do with Plato than many of us suppose, especially those influenced overmuch (but that would be all of us, as Whitehead tells us) or directly by Plato, or indirectly, but even more powerfully by Leo Strauss.

Writing in Zarathustra, "the poets lie too much," (Z II, *Of Poets*) Nietzsche is quotes Lucian, the same Lucian whose 'true story,' his *alethe diegammata*, a tall tale about being caught in the belly of a whale and travelling beyond the pale, to the island of fantastic delights.⁸ The same section, "Of Poets," follows "Of Scholars" in Thus Spoke Zarathustra and invokes Lucian's "betwixt heaven and earth of which only the poets have let themselves dream." Of course, and literary scholars have made this point before me, it is Lucian's language that inspires Shakespeare. And Zarathustra reflects rather more of Lucian's satirical critical dream than Hamlet's metaphysical musings especially where he goes on to say: "and especially above heaven: for all gods are poets' images, poet's surreptitiousness!" The reference is, as many references are, overdetermined, and we are "drawn upward" as Nietzsche says, wafted like the hero of Lucian's *Icaromenippus* (the first science fiction story so we pretend, because it involves an extraterrestrial flight,⁹ wherein Menippus the storied inventor of the satire that carried his name,¹⁰ tells a friend of his voyages in the heavens, outfitted with mismatched wings (echoes of Plato's soul), taken from two different giant raptors ("taking a good large eagle and also a strong vulture and cutting off their wings, joints and all").¹¹ This fantastic story would already be a quite a lot, if this were all, as we read Zarathustra saying that "we set our motley puppets on the clouds and then call them gods and overhumans." (Z II, *On Poets*)

As we know, though some scholars prefer to discover this source in Goethe or New Testament and Patristic sources, the original source for Nietzsche's language (not to mention the constellation of the first appearance in Zarathustra) of the so-named *Übermensch*, given Nietzsche's own expert specialization in the second century BCE Diogenes Laertius, is the similarly second century Lucian, but if we go on to read Lucian's tall tale or 'true story' we find additional resonances with Zarathustra especially detailing boat voyages and adventures to strange lands inspiring Jonathan Swift among others but in the same locus in Lucian we also meet Rhadamanthus and the souls of the departed, and a miraculous description of the Isles of the Blest.¹² Reading further in Zarathustra's *Of the Poets*, we are find offering drawn from what can seem to be catalog of Lucian's dialogues including *The Dead Come to Life or the Fisherman*¹³ as well as Lucian's *Philosophies* — sometimes rendered as *Creeds* — *for Sale*,¹⁴ "Ah indeed, I cast my net into their sea and hoped to catch fine fish; but always I drew out an old god's head." (Z II: *Of Poets*) And as we move to the section in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* "Of Great Events," set on an island "not far from the Blissful Isles of Zarathustra," we read that Zarathustra himself, like Menippus, likewise has taken to the air, flying not above the clouds, but downward, as in Lucian's *Downward Journey*, which dialogue is, of course, where we read

about the overman, the *hyperanthropos* or the tyrant.¹⁵ *Or the tyrant* is the subtitle of the dialogue and the tyrant is the kind of man who ought to be, and who inevitably will be, overcome. We all go down to the dark.

Earnest liars, as both Nietzsche and Lucian may be described as being,¹⁶ they are also, like Aristotle, better or greater friends to the truth (preserved by inversion) than they are to Plato. Thus one can compare the advantage given Hesiod over Homer in Nietzsche's discussion of the same (a lie, but a serious lie — shades of the fourth century AD sophist and historiographer, Eunapius's epithet for Lucian himself, that is: a good lie, a white lie: one that preserves peace rather than promoting the cause of war). Thus Lucian observes: "on reading all these authors, I did not find much fault with them for their lying, as I saw that this was already a common practice even among men who profess philosophy"¹⁷ where these other authors present their lies as truths his own lying would have to be accounted as "more honest than theirs, for although I tell the truth in nothing else, I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar."¹⁸

In the same way, Erasmus and Thomas More would read Lucian, as would Hume who made it a point to read Lucian's dialogues of the dead, particularly the dialogue that offered Nietzsche the source for his term Overhuman, *hyperanthropos*, as we have already noted Lucian's dialogue *Kataplous*, variously translated as *The Downward Journey*, that is indeed the *Journey into Port*, the port in question being Charon's home port. As Nietzsche writes "The beauty of the *Übermensch* came to me as a shadow." (Z II, *On the Blissful Islands*) For Lucian as indeed for all Greeks, the underworld is the world of shades and all of us as mortal are companions, one with another, on that downward journey. In this sense, the overman is the man on the surface, the same surface upon which we find ourselves, here and now. But if all these philosophers from Erasmus to Hume to Nietzsche were reading Lucian, if Jonathan Swift was reading Lucian (his *Tale of a Tub* echoes this as does his *Battle of the Books* not to mention his *Gulliver*), the only philosophers not reading Lucian would be most philosophers today.

With these and other even more recondite distinctions in mind, I mean to begin (I can hardly finish here) to compare both *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as initially or first published as avowedly incomplete (which incompleteness is perhaps the most Lucianic joke, if we needed another one, of all: Lucian promises to finish his tale of his adventures at the conclusion of his *True Story*, but, of course, never does). And, to be sure, the final book of *The Gay Science*, 'We Fearless Ones,' foregrounds the question of parts and wholes in what Nietzsche regarded (in a musical context) as the art of endings. Endings matter for Nietzsche as a writer (and of course as a composer, failed or not) because the end of the fourth book of *The Gay Science*, features a demon, that favorite philosopher's familiar now adding Nietzsche's version to that of Socrates' negative or cautionary *daimon* to Descartes' evil genius, a strange demon who predicts or foretells a future that includes no new news, as it were. This future is nothing but the past again, one's own past repeated — no chance for a new age discovery of having been Cleopatra or even Nietzsche himself in one's former life, just the same old, same old with everything great and small in it, repeated, *da capo* and without alteration, without exception. What returns is the everyday time of everydayness itself: that is what was, that is the stone fact, like Mozart's stone guest, the uncanny insight of the persistence of what has been that would prove to be so fruitful — *es war* — for Freud's theory of the unconscious, where all this sameness resides, the same: the past untouched by present reality. The future told by Nietzsche's demon is a future of the past: neither a cycle of recycled stars or souls (not even an unknown day laborer as Odysseus — yet another Lucianic hero — elegized in Plato's dream of the

underworld) just and only the past one already knows so well that (according to Freud again) one spends most of one's waking life and all of one's dream-time revisiting and transforming it. No wonder the second book of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* begins with *The Child with the Mirror*, pre-Dionysus, little Zagreus, who comes to Zarathustra to show him his mirror and to ask him to look into it, whereupon Zarathustra cries out as he does not recognize himself "but the sneer and grimace of a devil." (Z II: *The Child with the Mirror*) What follows are denunciations — fairly hard ones (the Nietzsche of *The Antichrist* proves to be much kinder) — of the redeemer and those who preach the word of the redeemer, of redemption, of paradise: the future perfected, life eternal: "You want to be paid as well, you virtuous! Do you want reward for virtue and heaven for earth and eternity for your today." (Z II: *Of the Virtuous*) This is the life of those of whom Zarathustra can mock — and the often strident, polemical, hammer-precision of Nietzsche is clearly at stake as he characterizes the virtuous as he already does in *The Gay Science* but explicitly so in *Beyond Good and Evil* and again, in case we missed it, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* — "We bite nobody and avoid him who wants to bite; and in everything we hold the opinion that is given us." (Z II: *Of the Virtuous*) This biting, also crucial as a word for parodic, satirical wit, turns out to be central.

For Nietzsche, this same past focus becomes the concern with the 'it was' that he will go on to express as the musing, brooding pre-occupation with the past that is the ultimate poison of *ressentiment*. The focus will be on the teaching of the eternal return expressed as a recurrence of the past raised to eternity and the challenge of affirming the standing past, like the *nunc stans*, throughout all possibilities of what will be.¹⁹

The last lines of the first published book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a promise, a prayer, an oath, that expresses the heart of Nietzsche's teachings of the death of god, the *Übermensch* or overhuman, and arguably, the will to power: "All gods are dead; now we want the Overhuman to live' — let this be our last will one day at the great noontide." (Z I: *Of the Bestowing Virtue*, §3)

What resounds, of course, in the notion of the great noontide is the standing moment of the cycle of the world year, both Empedocles and Heraclitus. Gadamer emphasizes this in his "The Great Year of Zarathustra" as I also argue for a parallel for Empedocles and Heraclitus for Nietzsche, especially with respect to Zarathustra.²⁰

Some scholars overlook the connection perhaps because the eternal return is such a complex notion. It's been argued that the Eternal Recurrence doesn't even appear in the first book.²¹ Of course it does but for readers who require a label (one wonders if this is the best approach with Nietzsche) the reference can be elusive but there it is nonetheless. If I had more time, I would point out the connection between *The Gay Science* and *Beyond and Evil* and all the other published works as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* functions as a cautionary fulcrum intervening between them.

Here however I am simply noting the focus on the past (and the present) in Nietzsche's idea of the future as he speaks of it in terms of eternal recurrence as it is this that links the two texts under consideration here.

The Greatest Weight

The teaching Zarathustra comes down from his mountain to teach is not quite the Good News but and much rather and once again, the eternal return is not just anamnesis, recycling the soul for a new playing of a new life, expiating karma and all that, like the eternal whirl of the cosmos in all its complexity, like the spin around our own sun and everything it brings round, again and again, but — Nietzsche emphasizes this — *the same. Das Gleiche.*

It is the sameness that I wish to emphasize as it is this that offers the light of eternity and the love song, the round with which Nietzsche concludes the third book of his *The Gay Science*. This sameness makes the demon who comes at the end of the fourth book to tell us that we will not be ushered into *either* heaven or hell, the kind of demon only philosophical minds like Descartes or, responding to Laplace, scientists like Maxwell could dream up. And the reference to science is important because the mathematician Emile Poincaré offered a wonderfully stochastic proof of nothing less than the Eternal Return, quite independently of Nietzsche and just given the second law of thermodynamics together with the assumption that the universe was, for example, closed or finite. This was the assumption for Nietzsche and for others in his day, and some scientists still assume it.

The philosophic question however turns on the sameness of the eternal return of the same, this is also of course echoed in the full presence of eternity which is of course not *in* time and thus the beautiful word scene or painting that Nietzsche gives us in Zarathustra's conversation with the dwarf in *Of the Vision and the Riddle*, claiming that the dwarf could not bear the weight of the thought itself. It is at this moment, that Zarathustra himself is no longer weighted down with the weight of the dwarf but lightened: the dwarf literally takes a load off, springing to the ground from Zarathustra's shoulder where he had been pouring thoughts of lead into his ear (do not forget leaden type, as you read this: do not forget the dwarves among philologists and philosophers, and do not forget the obstacles to made by the dead weight of everything they write). The gateway, *Augenblick*, has, as Zarathustra goes on to say, two aspects, two colliding, opposing, aspects: paths along which no one has ever travelled to their end. "The lane behind us," Zarathustra says to the dwarf, "an eternity, the long lane ahead of us, another eternity." (*Z, Vision, 2*) And now we are counting with Cantorian dimensions. Zarathustra asks a geometer's question, because the point is a matter of mapping the points along the path — tracing the path, namely supposing that one were to "follow them further and ever further," he asks, "do you think, dwarf, that these paths would be in eternal opposition?" (*Z, Vision, 2*) The thought of the circle is evident here, but the key to the problem is the problem of the parallel postulate that shatters Euclidean geometry. And the circular answer is the answer given, disdainfully, if we remember, by the dwarf "All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle" (*Z, Vision, 2*)

The question, the riddle Zarathustra riddles the dwarf, is cosmological, the domain of Ernst Mach's concern and it was Schrödinger's field when he taught at the Dublin Institute of Cosmology.²² This is the riddle of the *Timaeus*, the riddle of Kant's antinomy concerning the eternity of the world.²³ Zarathustra repeats the point in his own recounting:

'Behold this moment,' I went on, 'From this gateway Moment a long eternal lane runs back: an eternity lies behind us.

'Must not all things that can run have already run along this lane? Must not all things than *can* happen *have* already happened, been done, run past? And if all things

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have been here before: What do you think of this moment, dwarf? Must not this gateway, too, have been here – before?

And are not all things bound fast together in such a way that the moment draws after it all future things. *Therefore* — draws itself too. For all things that *can* run *must* run once again forward along this long lane.” (Z, *Vision*, §2)

The solution to the riddle of the crossroad of past and future, fore and aft is, the howling dog, the dog of Hecate,²⁴ Cerberus, and so on, and “stillest midnight, when even dogs believe in ghosts” and Zarathustra finds himself, as at the end of the fourth book of *The Gay Science* “alone, desolate, in the most wild moonlight.” There Zarathustra sees what so agitates the dog, “a young shepherd, writing, choking, convulsed, his face distorted; and a heavy, black snake was hanging out of his mouth.” The man Zarathustra wondered had perhaps been asleep and perhaps thus the snake had “crept into his throat — and there it had bitten itself fast.” The recommendation that comes to him, — ‘a voice cried from me — ‘Bite! Bite!’ as nothing else works to dislodge the snake is the sudden insight that one is not ‘in disgust and pallid horror’ to be paralyzed or frozen but act against the biting snake: to bite back. This is the riddle, ‘Who is the shepherd? ... who is the man ...’ But while he asking his venturers and adventurers and those of you who have embarked with cunning sails upon undiscovered seas, he also reports the shepherd’s response who “bit as my cry had advised him; he bit with a good bite! He spat far away the snake’s head — and sprang up.”

Thereby, so we read, he is transformed, literally transfigured: “surrounded with light, laughing” a human being like no other Zarathustra had ever seen. I guess the snake’s blood is magical, or maybe it’s just the magnificent spitting out of the head that does it. But the result is a other-human laughter “Never yet on earth had a human being laughed as he laughed.” (Z, *Vision*, §2)

So far so good, and all of us, know this passage. But how can the thought of “what is heaviest and blackest” work as Nietzsche says it does and what does it mean to say that one must bite into it. How would this “thought of thoughts” as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra names it, change one’s life, assuming we were *able* to think it to begin with? Like all paradoxes, it is hard to think as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra also underscores this difficulty — but, still, to ask an easier version of the same question: *why* on earth would thinking it, assuming we *could* think it, change us utterly?

Well — *it’s the same*.

Indeed, isn’t the point Nietzsche underscores nothing but the exclusion of any change, much less any utter change, all change, any alteration, big and small, excluded at the outset? Isn’t this also part of the mathematician’s paradox that Hilary Putnam borrows from Abbot’s *Flatland* (a topological insider’s plagiarism none of us would care to fault, so I presume) when Putnam points out that, and this is just Leibniz’ point regarding a difference that would not (in this case because it could not) make a difference, that *were we all*, in fact, so many brains in vats, the very idea of being one would mean nothing (to us) and would-could not be true (there’s a hermeneutic rider here, but I am not going to do work Putnam never bothered to do).

The frozen temporal tableau of the ‘Moment’ in *Vision and the Riddle* reprises the personal dynamism of a lifetime, as Nietzsche puts the same insight into the mouth of the tightrope walker better said, tightrope dancer [*Seiltanzer*], the performing acrobat who falls to his death in the middle of Zarathustra’s first speech. (Z, *Prologue*, §6)

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The figure of the tightrope-walker is essential rather than decorative because after the death of God — as Hegel puts in quite explicitly in the wake of Kant — we are all of us dancing without a net, suspended in our human, all-too-human lives as Nietzsche puts it: an interval, a breath, “a hiatus between two nothingnesses.” (KSA 12, 473)

Zarathustra pays no attention at all to the tight rope dancer — he doesn't see him and the drama is played out, as if in Plato's cave, above and behind the speaking Zarathustra.²⁵ And the dwarf is there too, this time in the guise of an evil hunchback, causing all manner of trouble, jumping over the tightrope dancer and causing him to lose his footing, crashing to his death in the marketplace below.

Zarathustra, who goes to the side of the broken performer as he dies, comforts the dying man by telling him just what follows from the Enlightenment account: “...there is no Devil and no Hell. Your soul will be dead even before your body; therefore fear nothing anymore!” (Ibid., §6), the crushed man is not comforted as he hears the logical and nihilist implications of naturalist science:

If you are speaking the truth,' he said, 'I leave nothing when I leave life. I am not much more than an animal which has been taught to dance by blows and starvation. (Ibid.)

You, you yourself return but not as you are now, that is, you return but not with everything you take yourself to be: you as you now suppose (or imagine) yourself to have been and you now as expect yourself to become.

Rather what returns is exactly what was: *and there will be nothing different in it.*

The title I have given this discussion of Nietzsche's teaching of eternal recurrence between *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is *Future Past* because what is at stake is the past, the same as it was and every tiny and every major aspect of it: this is *das Gleiche*: the same old, same old.

And the point of it all is death.

If I had longer I would take this reading as suggested above to a discussion of *Beyond Good and Evil* inasmuch as the problem of *Beyond Good and Evil* is nothing other than the problem of truth, considered as a problem and just as Nietzsche also raised the problem of science viewed in

the same light and questioned *as a problem*. Most of us are so keen to emphasize art or life that we have forgotten that it was Nietzsche's emphasis to raise the question he pronounced himself the very first to raise, namely the very radically and in the spirit of the first critique, the very critically Kantian question of science, as such.²⁶

But I don't have more time — and part of the point of this essay is that *none of us* ever do — so let's go back to the thought Zarathustra calls his 'most abysmal thought' as this echoes the conversation with the demon in *The Gay Science*. As noted this is also the thought of death and *The Gay Science* has an aphorism titled with the same name, suggesting that the brotherhood of death that we share as mortal beings is the only brotherhood there is for living subjects of consciousness, for subjects of desire, for subjects such as ourselves, all of us, born to mortality and thus bound to die, whether we think about it or not.

Nietzsche's point is the philosophical point that living subjects abjure the thought of death: it is the furthest thing from their minds.

For his part, the economically (or dimly) minded Schopenhauer reflected that life was a business that did not cover its costs, a business that from an economic point of view, a *business point of view*, made absolutely no sense "as an enterprise," and therefore was the only thing that really compelled reflection. Nietzsche added more biology and more thermodynamic statistics to the same reflection, recognizing that abundance and waste was the way of life — and of death. Hence he could argue with the best of 19th century cosmology that a dancing star was born of chaos, excess, confusion. Not that it mattered given that that dancing star too would have to die.

Elsewhere, in an essay on Schrödinger and Nietzsche and life, I point to the parallels that may be made if one likes, beyond Nietzsche, to the philosophical problem of consciousness and personal identity but also with eastern philosophy.²⁷ Thus it matters that here is (and for the Stoics it was essential to reflect that there could be) no difference between the you that says I and the universe. You are already everything *and* you do not know it, with the one crucial exception that you can master the trick of thinking this identity, as Nietzsche also mused. To this extent, we know that we are those who have figured out that we are figures in the dream of a god who dreams.

Here I begin the final section of this essay, by noting that Nietzsche held that if was perhaps "inhuman to bless where one was cursed," (BGE §181) what was by contrast divine he also called "the humaneness' of the future," (GS §337). This was 'the happiness of a god,' a happiness possible for the human being who might indeed learn the ultimate trick divinity, which is blessing, yes-saying, affirmation: to bless life, to love fate, *amor fati*. Note that perhaps, and this is the all-too-human element, one fails to achieve this possibility. Thus one might also fail to be able to this, being unable to "endure this immense sum of grief of all kinds while yet being the hero who, as the second day of battle breaks, welcomes the dawn and his fortune, being a person whose horizon encompasses thousands of years of past and future." (Ibid.)

In any case, no matter whether one is able to contain or fails to contain in one soul "the oldest, the newer, losses, hopes, conquests, and the victories of humanity ... and crowd it into a single feeling," (ibid.) what remains significant is the long run. This is the highest feeling. This is eternity. Thus when Nietzsche writes contra the usual role of the promises of the afterlife in an early unpublished note, he explains the inexorable or factive force of his imperative here: "My teaching says, Thus to live that you would *wish* to live again is the task — you will do so in any case."²⁸

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In other words you will, in any case, be reborn, again and again. But qua reborn, your consciousness is no more connected to your consciousness than your consciousness is identical with the consciousness of drinking this morning's cup of coffee, assuming you were conscious enough *to remember to have* a cup of coffee to begin with. We do not remember our own present lives, how can we remember our past lives? It is the past that does not change, our memories do nothing but change.

Thus Nietzsche reflects on pride and memory: “‘I have done that’ says my memory. That I cannot have done — says my pride and remains inexorable. Finally — memory yields.” (BGE §68) You are no longer present to the past self that you were, you are not conscious of the past.

Thus Nietzsche's emphasis is on *the same* and where do we find this in our experience? Thus this sameness is the curse that Nietzsche emphasizes in his account of the greatest heavy weight – *das grösste Schwergewicht* – in his *The Gay Science*, as he breaks off the fourth book which he concludes before going on to write his Trojan Horse, his seductive gift to the masses, his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, A Book for All and None*.

For we all recall that the demon does not come to one in one's loneliest loneliness to ask one to consider one's life in the light of eternity, as the Stoic philosophers might have done, as the desert fathers would also do.

Much rather the demon foretells a future that is not so much about a further future, this is not the substance of what the demon emphasizes, but announces a future prospect that is all about the past as we cannot have done with it. The future is a future of the past, your past, the past you already happen to know so well that, as already mentioned, Freud insists that you spend most of your living and dream time revising. Nothing like a repetition compulsion. Nor do we fail to retell ourselves to ourselves such that on the story we tell ourselves the wretched things we have done can all of them be laid to someone's else's account, some other cause, god, what have you. This is the “dangerous perhaps” (BGE §2), this is why we baptize our convictions, our prejudices as fact or as ‘truths’ (BGE §5), and it is the reason Nietzsche suggests that “every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of its author and kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir.” (BGE §6) Ultimately this is also why Nietzsche proposes in place of the antinomies so many “questions of conscience for the intellect, namely, ‘Whence do I take the concept thinking? Why do I believe in cause and effect? What gives me the right to speak of an “I,” and even of an “I” as cause of thought’” (BGE §16)

Da Capo: Once More with Woody Allen

For Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, our focus on the past explains the reference to the concern with the stone fact, the ‘it was,’ the musing, brooding preoccupation on the past that is the poison of *ressentiment*. Let's spell this out a bit further by recalling what Nietzsche's aggressive demon says in *The Gay Science*:

What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you and into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence —

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even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" (GS §341).

The emphasis here, the eternity here, focuses on the past, indeed a past elevated to an eternity of the past and not merely the generic idea of the past per se. Living life once, that was bad enough, we might say, living it eternally (and this is worse than infinity: "once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it"), is far, far worse: "every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence." (Ibid.)

Yuck.

The past Nietzsche's demon foretells reliving again and again is *not* Woody Allen's phantom vision of sitting infinitely bored through an infinite number of seatings at the Ice Capades, this is not a video replay of *Groundhog Day*, again and again — as one attempts to shatter the monotony of the same, *déjà vu* — but and only the self-same. Not the similar, not the rather like and already seen done drudgery of the been there, lived through that ennui of modern life as we live it, bored as we live our days, but and again but rather: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it..." (Ibid.)

This demon does not say as we read in Revelations, "Behold, I make all things new."

Nietzsche's emphasis on life, and the revenge that we mean to take on life, is an emphasis on created things, "what can be shaken" (Hebrews 12:27) It is an emphasis on all the things we condemn as philosophers as he writes in *Twilight*, "Death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth, are to their minds objections —refutations even."

Thus Nietzsche's call to us is to love what becomes, what changes, *including* old age and death, because if one can say yes to one thing, anything at all, everything else is also necessary and nothing can be dispensed with: everything must be blessed. Nietzsche shares this insight with the ancient Stoics and with Heraclitus and with Empedocles and indeed Anaximander.



Like a speck of dust, as the demon says, the hourglass of existence is turned upside down, again and again. That is to say, so Nietzsche argues at the end of his 19th century, and we may think of this as an harmonic oscillator, the universe is so cycled.

So Schrödinger argues the point in his argument for eternal recurrence and in another essay I compare his argument to Nietzsche's argument. But Schrödinger, interested as he is in the presocratic philosophers is not echoing Nietzsche but Schopenhauer and the cycling in question is already a very old story, dating back before the tragic age of the Greeks: it is Empedoclean, it is Heraclitean, it is also Anaximandean and Parmenidean but it is perhaps especially known to us today as a Vedic notion, also resonant in Buddhism. This is the Atman and as Nietzsche says — more modern than any of us, making the same point Neils Bohr makes about his horse shoes and about superstition in the realm of the Real²⁹ — shaking his head: *du wirst es jedenfalls*. This is you in any case. *Tat tvam asi*.

Endnotes

¹ To this extent, the scholarly habit of citing the books of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Books 1-3 and 4, are textual, literally bookish, precisions.

² Karl Schlechta, *Nietzsche-Chronik. Daten zu Leben und Werk* (München: dtv, 1984 [1975]), p. 84.

³ Cited by Montinari in a prefatory note to his edition of *Zarathustra*. See Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Mazzino Montinari and Giorgio Colli, ed., [KSA], Vol. IV, p. 7.

⁴ Claus Zittel: *Das ästhetische Kalkül von Friedrich Nietzsches „Also sprach Zarathustra“* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2001).

⁵ See the translation of and commentary-contributions to Lukian, *Die Lügenfreunde oder Der Unglaubliche*, trans. and interpreted by Martin Ebner, Holger Gzella, Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, Ernst Ribbat (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001). And see for my own argument on Nietzsche and Lucian, along with a good many additional references, Babich, "Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Parodic Style: On Lucian's *Hyperanthropos* and Nietzsche's *Übermensch*," *Diogenes*, 58, 4 (November 2011 [March 2013]): 58-74 (originally published in French, see note 23 below).

⁶ See, Jonathan Barnes, "Nietzsche and Diogenes Laertius," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 15 (1986): 16-40 as well as Thomas Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 2008). Nietzsche's work on Diogenes Laertius in the doxographical context as established by Hermann Diels, his *Doxographi Graeci*, and in the specific context of Ritschl appears in β Jaap Mansfeld and David T. Runia, *Aëtiana: The Method and Intellectual Context of a Doxographer: The Sources. Volume I* (Brill: 1997), p. 93ff. Significant here, in a hermeneutic context is also Nietzsche's formation as these authors note the sophistication of "the use of the Lachmannian stemmatic method," pointing out that "as young student at Bonn he had become acquainted with the latest developments in New Testament criticism." *Ibid.*, p. 117. I discuss Lachmann in a related context in Babich, "Towards a Critical Philosophy of Science: Continental Beginnings and Bugbears, Whigs and Waterbears," *International Journal of the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 2010): 343-391. See also although regrettably too elliptically Lachterman's contribution to Daniel Conway and Rudolf Rehn, eds., *Nietzsche und die antike Philosophie* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag 1992).

⁷ Most recently I have elaborated the argument mad in the essay cited above to emphasize the political but still in connection with Zarathustra in Babich, "The Time of Kings: Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Nietzsche's Empedocles" in: Horst Hutter and Eli Friedlander, eds., *Becoming Loyal to the Earth: Nietzsche's Teaching as a Therapy for Political Culture* (London: Continuum, 2013), 157-174.

⁸ Lucian's *Icaromenippus* retells Menippus' tale of taking flight to visit the man in the moon (Empedocles, of course). The text of *Icaromenippus* (Or the One Who Flew Above the Clouds), was well-known to Nietzsche and any schoolboy — even those without Greek, translated as it was by Gottsched almost a century before Nietzsche was born and again in 1820 by Christoph Martin Wieland. See Lucianus (Samosatensis), *Auserlesene Schriften* Johann Christoph Gottsched, ed., and trans. (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1745), pp. 49-78, and plainly apotheosized at the start of Nietzsche's essay "On Truth and Lie." See, in a bilingual edition, translated as "Icaromenippus or the Sky Man" by A. M. Harmon in *Lucian: Volume II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915), pp. 267-323.

⁹ One can also see, just as the start, the influence of Lucian on Jules Verne: "It was three thousand furlongs, then, from the earth to the moon, my first stage; and from there up to the sun perhaps five hundred leagues; and from the

sun to Heaven itself and the citadel of Zeus would be also a day's ascent for an eagle travelling light." *Lucian: Volume II*, p. 269.

¹⁰ It is Lucian who exemplifies Menippean satire as Nietzsche speaks of it (and Nietzsche also speaks of Lucian by name to be sure). But as I note elsewhere it has been the custom for more than a century to celebrate Menippus above Lucian for rather less reason that the praise of peace that assured Hesiod's triumph over Homer. When Massimo Fusillo suggests in commenting on Bahktin that one might "understand 'Menippean' not as a definite genre" he is getting at this point while sidestepping it. Fusillo, "Modern Critical Theories and the Ancient Novel" in p. 277-306, here p. 280. Thus Fusillo remarks, rightly if parenthetically, that the 'features' of Menippean satire "would be very difficult to single out" (ibid.) for the plain reason that, as Fusillo neglects to note, we happen to have no single instantiation of any of Menippus' writings. By contrast, we have a lot of Lucian, and Menippus as a character comes via Lucian (see the note below). Hence Lucian, among the other ancients, is the reason we prize Menippus.

¹¹ Lucian, "Icaromenippus or the Sky Man," p. 273.

¹² Lucian, *Alethe Diegammata*, translated as "A True Story" (I and II) by A. M. Harmon in *Lucian: Volume I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), pp. 247-358.

¹³ In *Lucian: Volume III*, Harmon, trans. (Cambridge: Loeb, 1921), pp. 1-82.

¹⁴ The Greek title is *Bion Praxis*, and as Harmon notes speaking of 'philosophies' (or we might add of 'creeds') is a euphemism: the title refers to lives for sale. *Lucian: Volume II*, pp. 449-511

¹⁵ Lucian, "The Downward Journey or the Tyrant," *Lucian: Volume II*, pp. 1-58.

¹⁶ See Lucian' "The Lover of Lies or the Doubter" here. *Lucian: Volume III* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), pp. 319-382.

¹⁷ *Lucian: Volume I*, p. 251.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁹ I have used this comparison and constellation to make this point in different ways over many years, most recently in Babich, "*Flamme bin ich sicherlich* — Flame am I...: To Eternity," *Existence*, Volume 8, No. 1 (Spring 2013): 7-15 and "On Schrödinger and Nietzsche: Eternal Return and the Moment" in: Christopher Key Chapple, ed., *Festschrift for Antonio de Nicolas*, based on a lecture originally given at Fordham University, late September 2011. A video version, recorded in early November 2011, may be seen here: <http://digital.library.fordham.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/VIDEO/id/211>.

²⁰ Gadamer, "The Great Year of Zarathustra" and I develop this further in a recent essay that also includes further references to the literature on Zarathustra and Empedocles as well as Heraclitus, Babich, "The Time of Kings: Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Nietzsche's Empedocles" in: Horst Hutter and Eli Friedlander, eds., *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching: For Individuals and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 157-174.

²¹ This is a lynchpin of certain readings. See for one instance, Brusotti, „Die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen in Also sprach Zarathustra“ in: G. Merlio, ed, *Lectures d'une œuvre. Also sprach Zarathustra. Friedrich Nietzsche* (Paris: éd. du Temps, 2000), pp. 139-154.

²² See again, Babich, "On Schrödinger and Nietzsche: Eternal Return and the Moment."

²³ See Luc Brisson and F. Walter Meyerstein, *Inventing the Universe: Plato's Timaeus, the Big Bang, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). I thank Patrick Heelan for directing my attention, all these many years ago, to this very fine book on the notion and the nature of axioms.

²⁴ See Babich, « Le Zarathoustra de Nietzsche et le style parodique. A propos de l'*hyperanthropos* de Lucien et du surhomme de Nietzsche, » *Diogène. Revue internationale des sciences humaines*, 232 (October 2010): 70-93, here p. 97.

²⁵ Zarathustra is in fact, as I like to point out is only talking over the heads of those who assembled there not at all to hear Zarathustra but to see the spectacle of "the pre-announced" tightrope walker. (*Z, Zarathustra's Prologue* §3)

²⁶ See my book, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science* as well as two recent essays where I reprise this point, "Towards a Critical Philosophy of Science: Continental Beginnings and Bugbears, Whigs and Waterbears," *International Journal of the Philosophy of Science*. Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 2010): 343-391 and, in German, "Nietzsches hermeneutische, phänomenologische Wissenschafts-philosophie. Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen zu Altphilologie und Physiologie" in: Günter Abel and Helmut Heit, eds., *Nietzsches Wissenschaftsphilosophie. Hintergründe, Wirkungen und Aktualität* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012) pp. 291-311.

²⁷ I draw on this essay for some of the elements of the current essay, albeit not in the current constellation in: "On Schrödinger and Nietzsche: Eternal Return and the Moment." In: Christopher Key Chapple, ed., *Festschrift for Antonio de Nicolas*.

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²⁸ Nietzsche, KSA 9, 11 [163], S. 505.

²⁹ According to several reports, Niels Bohr was famously asked why he, a man of science, would keep a superstitious marker above his barn door, surely, the incredulous question came, he did not believe in such things. To which Bohr replied that he understood that the good luck of the charm worked whether he believed in it or not. See one account of this anecdote in Abraham Pais, *Inward Bound: Of Matter and Forces in the Physical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 210.