

INCIPIIT PARODIA/INCIPIIT TRAGOEDIA*¹: A COMMENTARY ON PART ONE OF *ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA

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Parody and *Aufhebung*

In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche states, “Zarathustra adopts a parodistic attitude toward all former values as a consequence of his abundance.”² In reading *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, one immediately encounters Nietzsche’s deft parodies of Platonism and Christianity conceived as the core of the modernity whose rationalistic, Cartesian and moralistic, Kantian senses of self he wishes to overcome in a post-modern revaluation. Nietzsche resolves Platonism and Christianity into a common nihilistic will to power, itself not primarily rational, and so, it is appropriate that his philosophy be given the mytho-poetic form it receives in *Zarathustra*.³

Nevertheless, there is a way in which Nietzschean parody preserves the very tradition it is at great pains to reject.⁴ Excellence in parody is to be measured by the grasp of that which one parodies, by the capacity to imitate precisely its literary style and philosophical logic. In Nietzschean parody we have not only ridicule and deconstruction but a reworking, as it were, of motets and madrigals – a musical dimension which resonates with his notion of the hammer as tuning fork. This imitation will be destructive of previous forms of thought but it will also lure the honest scholar into deeper contact with the tradition which Nietzsche parodies. In other words, this parody involves both understanding and preservation.

Nietzsche’s philosophical parody, then, bears a certain kinship with Hegel’s concept of *Aufhebung*.⁵ Usually translated as sublation, the philosophical meaning of this common German word entails a state in which the independence of an element is canceled but preserved in relation to a comprehensive whole. There is, then, in the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*, an important dimension of negativity which reflects the contingency and finitude of objects conceived in an abstract independence from each other. This abstraction is sacrificed and what had previously

¹ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 4.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Kaufmann, New York: Random House, 1968, 617, p. 331.

³ Other dimensions of Nietzsche’s corpus reflect this conceptual and stylistic shift, for example, aphorism and genealogy.

⁴ Here I concur with Stanley Rosen, *The Masks of Enlightenment*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 21-2.

⁵ While Nietzsche makes only passing reference to Hegel, his engagement with Hegel is significant. Like Hegel, Nietzsche is an arch critic of moralism and dualism. Further, as Rosen suggests there is a connection between Hegel’s ‘concept’ and Nietzsche’s conception of eternal return (*The Masks of Enlightenment*, p.256, n.61). Also, as Gary Shapiro contends, Nietzsche’s criticisms of the modern state and teleological concepts of history may be convincingly read as directed at Hegel (“States and Nomads: Hegel’s World and Nietzsche’s Earth,” Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life, Santiago, Chile, November 3, 2009, and at the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, October 30, 2009. Text online at: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/philosophy/jns/ShapiroNiNY09.pdf>).

appeared self-subsistent is shown to have its cause in a more mediated substance. The possibility for such ideality occurs in self-consciousness. In the moment of consciousness, thought as object is distinguished from thought as subject. This difference is seen as a moment of self-consciousness and is preserved therein. But it is obvious that there would be no self-consciousness without the possibility of consciousness. This negative moment, present in conscious differentiation, is central likewise to Nietzschean parody, conceived in its deconstructive aspect. Further this negativity is reflected in Nietzsche's sense of the tragic negation of modern man and, therefore, in the movement of the argument of *Zarathustra* from man to overman.

For Hegel, however, *Aufhebung* is fundamentally a structure of self-consciousness, and involves a dialectical harmony in which the negation is comprehended and the element of otherness and difference preserved. Nietzschean parody will preserve what is in some sense the otherness of the western philosophical tradition but with a conception of rationality as a product of will to power.⁶ The twin moments of preservation and negation are central to the interpretation of both the content and structure of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

This essay is a consideration of Part One of *Zarathustra* in which Nietzsche announces the overman in opposition to nineteenth century humanism. In this consideration I wish to indicate how the moments of parody and tragedy are central to Nietzsche's concept of the overman and the reevaluation of western morality which he symbolizes.⁷ Through detailed textual reading, I wish to show that the argument of Part One has the following structure⁸:

(1) Prologue-Zarathustra's Speeches: Parody and Tragedy, brings out the aspects of Parody and Tragedy. In these sections Nietzsche vividly plays with religious and philosophical images. His parody of Platonism and Christianity sets the stage for Zarathustra's education beyond the last vestiges of nineteenth century humanism; beyond the tragedy of the bourgeoisie. One is simultaneously drawn into reflection on Platonism and Christianity, because the text mirrors their style and content, and drawn beyond them in Zarathustra's disappointment with "the herd". Zarathustra knows that God is dead, and as consequence, that man and society, as envisaged in the moralism and anthropology which emerge out of Christianity, is likewise dead. In dissolving his attachment to humanity (as individual and community), Zarathustra moves to a deeper awareness of the tragic vision of eternal return.

⁶ For the purposes of this essay, "will to power" signifies Nietzsche's attempt to conceive the nature of reality without the concept of an underlying truth, without a material or soul atomism, for example, (*Beyond Good and Evil*, in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Trans W. Kaufmann, New York: Modern Library, 1992, 12-13, pp. 209-211). For Nietzsche, will to power is a constant self-overcoming, a becoming without a final goal or purpose. He asserts that it is a *processus in infinitum* (*Will to Power*, 552, p.298).

⁷ Nietzsche conceives moralism as in some respects at the root of western metaphysics. He states, Indeed if one would explain how the abstract metaphysical claims of a philosopher really came about it is well (and wise) to ask first: at what morality does all this (does he) aim" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 6, p.203).

⁸ The hermeneutical validity of this structure will depend not only on the evidence I have presented, but on whether the reader finds it useful in detailed explorations of the text.

(2) **Teachers of Virtue-Pale Criminal: Revaluation of Morality:** Having achieved a vision of eternal return, albeit faint and imagistic, these next sections develop a criticism of life-denying morality and its nihilistic history.

(3) **On War and Warriors-On Free Death: Self, Other and the Overman,** reinterprets the relation of self and other in human community in the light of the overman. Just as the ascetic ideal is a means to the preservation of life, all human relations are conceived as a means to the birth of the overman. The tragedy of the last man gives rise to an agonistic community, where Christian love and socialistic equality are overcome by the “warrior” ethic of the overman.

(4) **On the Gift Giving Virtue: Conclusion,** concludes the argument of Part One, linking will to power, eternal return and overman at the level of image.⁹

(1) Prologue-Zarathustra’s Speeches: Parody and Tragedy

The first section of “The Prologue,” is brimming with parodistic suggestions of Plato’s sun analogy as well as Pauline Christology.¹⁰ Zarathustra stands before the sun and announces that each morning he has taken the sun’s overflow. Plato, speaking of sight, states, “it receives from the sun the power it has, just like an influx from an overflowing treasury.”¹¹ Like a philosopher king, Zarathustra wants to carry wisdom back to a world he has left behind, and he identifies with this overflow: “Bless the cup that wants to overflow, that the water may flow from it golden and carry everywhere the reflection of your delight.”¹² The imagery here, however, is more than Platonic; there is more than overflow, there is also descending: “Like you I must go under – go down, as is said by man, to whom I want to descend.” Similarly, Zarathustra says, “Behold this cup wants to become empty again.”¹³ Theologically this concept of self-emptying invokes Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: “Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Jesus Christ, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality

⁹ Throughout this essay I make the assumption that the doctrines of will to power, which is the focus of Part Two, and of eternal return, which is the focus of Part Three, are implicit in various images in Part One. It is beyond the scope of the present essay to develop a full interpretation of eternal return; such an interpretation would stray too widely from the close textual reading with which this essay is concerned. Nevertheless, for our current purposes, I see eternal return in the light of *Will to Power* section 617. There Nietzsche states, “That everything recurs is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being.” I interpret eternal return therefore as the stability of will to power, the self of its self-overcoming. On the presence of eternal return as image, see Paul S. Loeb, in “Finding the *Übermensch* in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 30, 2005, pp. 84-7, and Robert Gooding-Williams in *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 45-100. Loeb’s account of the latency of the knowledge of eternal return is of great interest. See Paul S. Loeb, “The Thought-Drama of Eternal Recurrence,” and Robert Gooding-Williams, “Ruminations and Rejoinders: Eternal Recurrence, Nietzsche’s Noble Plato, and the Existentialist Zarathustra,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* Issue 34, 2007. See also Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment*, p. 27.

¹⁰ See also, Martha Kendal Woodruff, “*Untergang und Übergang*: The Tragic Descent of Socrates and Zarathustra,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 34, 2007, p. 66. Gooding-Williams puts the matter succinctly, “His artful repetition and revision of these “precursor texts” is ironic, and to that extent mischief-making, because it argues implicitly against the metaphysical perspectives (Christian asceticism and Plato’s understanding of the relationship between time and value) that he believes these texts articulate” (*Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, p. 52).

¹¹ Plato, *Republic*, Tr. G.M.A. Grube, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992, 508 b.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, New York: Modern Library, 1995, Prologue, i, 10.

¹³ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, i, 10.

with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”¹⁴ This Pauline “emptying”, according to Nietzsche, signifies a revaluation of noble values and a spiritual revenge.¹⁵

There is a dialectical dimension in Zarathustra’s emptying. Zarathustra will empty himself until “the wise among men find joy once again in their folly, and the poor in their riches.”¹⁶ Note again the Pauline resonance: “If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.”¹⁷ As in the Christian narrative, Zarathustra’s dialectic is to be embodied, is to be incarnate: Zarathustra “wants to become man again”.¹⁸

The Christological imagery is developed here as Zarathustra, an image of the good which overflows, takes on determinate form as expressed in the Hermit’s question: “Alas would you again drag your own body?”¹⁹ Here, to mix religious metaphors, there is a sense of Christ reincarnate, through “love of man;” there is also a play of judgment and repentance, purifying fire and ashes of atonement. The hermit says, “You carried your ashes to the mountain; now would you carry your fire into the valleys?”²⁰ While Zarathustra asserts here his love of man, the hermit sacrifices love of man for love of God: “Man is for me too imperfect a thing. Love of man would kill me.”²¹ But the hermit does not know what Zarathustra knows – that God is dead. And yet Zarathustra does not tell the hermit; he does not want to take away his belief. Zarathustra does not yet see beyond man, only beyond God. There is in Zarathustra at this point a humanism that prevents his realization of the anti-humanism of the overman and eternal recurrence.

In section three, Nietzsche announces the overman and gives voice to the revaluation which he entails: “Once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died, and these sinners died with him. To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth.”²² Zarathustra’s revaluation teaches neither love of God nor love of man which together defined the doctrinal parameters of the Christian ethos. He conceives the overman not as the meaning or expression of an otherworldly deity, nor as the meaning of a worldly humanism. Rather, for Zarathustra, the overman is the meaning of the earth: the reconfiguration of man-nature-God that is a demand of the post-Christian west.

¹⁴ “The Letter of Paul to the Philippians” 2: 5-7.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Trans W. Kaufmann, New York: Modern Library, 1992, I, vii, 469-70.

¹⁶ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, i, 10.

¹⁷ “First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians” 3:19-19.

¹⁸ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, i, 10.

¹⁹ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, ii, 11.

²⁰ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, ii, 10.

²¹ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, ii, 11.

²² *Zarathustra*, Prologue, iii, 13.

Here we find the ironic measure of Zarathustra's love of man. Man in the Platonic-Christian paradigm, is for Nietzsche a discordant hybrid (*Zwiespalt und Zwitter*) of plant and ghost, matter and spirit. On this paradigm, which Nietzsche takes to be fully explicit in his time, it appears from the side of the soul, that the body is "polluted", while from the side of the body, the soul is polluted. Zarathustra asserts that the whole dualistic, hence moralistic division must be overcome. This I take to be the meaning of "earth" in this passage. We are speaking, beyond the Platonic dualism, neither of body without spirit nor spirit without body. This dualism has been overcome such that nature and man are no longer conceived relative to an otherworldly form – the new paradigm is of overman and earth. In its light, all past constructs of happiness, reason, virtue, compassion are found contemptible. This contempt can "go under" in the overman. Nietzsche understands man and loves man only relative to what is beyond man; he loves man only so far as he is a "going under".

In terms of musical parody Nietzsche sees man as an overture. He is taken up into the overman in the sense that he is redeemed there. "*What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under.*"²³ This is a further echo of the Christian economy of death and resurrection expressed as "going under" and "crossing over". But the overman redeems man only in the passing of man. There is not here a resurrection of soul and body but a sacrifice which frees one from the boundaries of the Platonic/Christian concept of man. The earth does not point beyond itself in an eschatological teleology; rather, it remains with itself and with the overman. Also there is here a criticism of the teleology of modernity and nineteenth century humanism with its glorification of man and sense of man's liberation as the goal of history.

In contrast with the fundamentally Christian redemption of man in an earthly or otherworldly paradise, Zarathustra advances a tragic redemption in the notion of going under. The emphasis is on an earthly sacrifice: "they sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the overman's."²⁴ Knowledge and virtue, the totality of man's intellectual and practical life, are drawn into this tragic orbit. Man is unconfined by the relative contingencies and necessities of chance or promise. There is here a movement beyond self-preservation and the individual spirit: "I love him whose soul is overfull so that he forgets himself and all things are in him: thus all things spell his going under."²⁵

There is in Nietzsche's account a Feuerbachian move from the projection of an ideal beyond man to a recognition that man is himself the ideal.²⁶ But, for Nietzsche, this humanism is defined from the standpoint of herd mentality and becomes subsumed into the goalless nihilism of the last man.²⁷ Having oneself as the goal is a 'right' that is not shared by the herd because its notion of selfhood is defined by and subsumed by otherness, that is by its relation to humanity or

²³ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, iv, 15.

²⁴ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, iv, p.15.

²⁵ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, iv, p.16.

²⁶ Lampert also comments on the Feuerbachian dimension of *Zarathustra*. Lawrence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. p. 38. Lampert's work is an invaluable guide to *Zarathustra* even if one is not a Straussian.

²⁷ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, v, p.17.

community, which from Nietzsche's standpoint is other to self. So Nietzsche's arguments are directed against what humanism sees as the species-being of man. He indicates what to him is contemptible about the last man, and the crowd clamors for what Zarathustra finds contemptible. His "brightness" appears as coldness to the crowd, and Zarathustra perceives them to be laughing with hatred at him. Zarathustra's going under does not lead to a tragic identity with the community conceived in its immediate unindividuated relation to the primal will, where not man, but nature or will is revealed. Here what is revealed is not primal will but the mediocrity of individuals who have no horizon beyond themselves and their herd.²⁸

"Then something happened that made every mouth dumb and every eye rigid."²⁹ The relationship between the jester and the tight-rope walker exhibits both the tragic dimension of the text as well as the implicitude of eternal return at this stage of the argument. The tightrope walker has made "danger" his "vocation". For Nietzsche this is not contemptible and indeed warrants Zarathustra burying the tight-rope walker. The jester jumps over the danger and presumably does not go under. At his death, the tight-rope walker sees Zarathustra as the devil, but Zarathustra informs him that there is no devil or hell, this inference following from the death of God.

Here Zarathustra is lonely; he is in a position distinct from his original solitude, and he has been rebuffed by the herd. It is a moment of death and a forgetfulness of time.³⁰ Where memory draws together past, present and future, forgetfulness might be seen to separate them or dissolve them. The jester or fool plays with necessities; he reveals a realm of foolishness and contingency contrasting with the end of play in death, the absence of contingency in the necessary limit of the human. Nietzsche draws these concepts together in the image of a jester who can become a cause of what is necessary: a jester who can become man's fatality. This connection is further reflected in the sense of Zarathustra as "the mean between a fool and a corpse," which I interpret as a mean of contingency and necessity, or, perhaps, ludic self-overcoming and gravity.³¹ In this light we have a faint representation of the concepts of will to power and eternal return. But this is still an inadequate presentation because still in relation to the perspective of the herd.

The jester leaps over man but is not yet the overman. He has passed over but not under man; he is not born of a tragic passing away. Moving from the jester, Zarathustra passes gravediggers and hermits. For the former, in the hands of moralism, there is a sense of the devil and eternal damnation while for the latter, there is an ascetic indifference for which the distinction between the living and the dead is not present: "Zarathustra replied: 'My companion is dead; I should hardly be able to persuade him.' 'I don't care,' said the old man peevishly, 'Whoever knocks at my door must also take what I offer.'³²

²⁸ I will address this tragic dimension further in my discussion of section x below.

²⁹ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, vi, p.19.

³⁰ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, vii, p.20.

³¹ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, vii, p.21.

³² *Zarathustra*, Prologue, viii, p.22.

Zarathustra, however, identifies himself with the life-affirming, the creators, whom he sees to be lawbreakers, valuers, despisers of good and evil. He wishes to show these creators “the rainbows and all the steps to the overman”.³³ It is to these few free spirits that he must speak not to the herd. They see only the destructive but not the celebratory dimension of his project. He states, “Companions the creator seeks, not corpses, not herds and believers.” He also states, “No shepherd shall I be nor gravedigger. Never again shall I speak to the people: for the last time have I spoken to the dead.”³⁴

This movement beyond the herd mentality of the last man allows Zarathustra to bring into clearer focus the most dangerous thought, that of eternal return. But, as with its expression relative to the jester, eternal return is still portrayed in image: “An eagle soared through the sky in wide circles, and on him there hung a serpent, not like prey but like a friend: For she kept herself wound around his neck.”³⁵ With the emergence of this concept it is possible to bring out the tragic structure of the argument of the prologue.³⁶ My contention here is based on the supposition of an analogy between the concept of primal will in the *Birth of Tragedy* and the conceptual pair of will to power and eternal return. For all the differences between his earlier and later thought, there is a common emphasis on fate, self-overcoming and will.

The allusions to light at the very beginning of *Zarathustra* strike us as Apollonian.³⁷ The snake is the animal of Apollo as the eagle is of Zeus. In his solitude Zarathustra seems an Apollonian figure, representing the *principium individuationis*. In Nietzsche’s account of tragedy there are two distinctive but coalescing moments. The first moment reveals a unity with the community beyond the individual: “Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or ‘impudent convention’ have fixed between man and man are broken. Now with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him...”³⁸ The second moment, made distinct only through abstraction, is a unification with the primal will: “We are really for a brief moment primordial being itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence.”³⁹ In his “Attempt at Self-Criticism” Nietzsche describes this will: “The world – at every moment the attained salvation of God, as the eternally changing, eternally new vision of the most deeply

³³ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, ix, p.24.

³⁴ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, ix, p.24.

³⁵ *Zarathustra*, Prologue, x, p.25. While the full expression of eternal return does not occur until Part Three, Heidegger’s reflection on the snake and eagle is telling here. He states, “The eagle soars in vast circles high in the air. The circling is an image of eternal return.” He remarks, “The serpent hangs suspended from the eagle, coiled about his throat. Again, the coils of the serpent, wound in rings about the eagle’s throat are symbolic of eternal return.” Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Vol. II*, trans. David Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984) p. 46, cf. also p. 214. Also Rosen, “The eagle is the eternal return as a natural force: merciless and strong. The serpent is the human interpretation of eternal return” (*Mask of Enlightenment*, p76).

³⁶ Here my account differs somewhat from Gooding-Williams (*Dionysian Modernism*, pp.92-3) who focuses on the tragedy of the tight-rope walker. I see the tragic vision as one obtained by Zarathustra. See also, Martha Kendal Woodruff, “*Untergang und Übergang*: The tragic Descent of Socrates and Zarathustra,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 34, 2007.

³⁷ Cf. Lampert, p. 16.

³⁸ *Birth of Tragedy*, I, 37.

³⁹ *Birth of Tragedy*, 17, 104.

afflicted, most deeply discordant, and self-contradictory being who can find salvation only in appearance.” He goes on to articulate the significance of this work: “Here perhaps for the first time, pessimism ‘beyond good and evil’.”⁴⁰

In *Zarathustra*, the first moment occurs as the protagonist sacrifices his isolation and returns to humanity. The mediocrity of the herd, however, its scientism, socialism, and optimism, remain Apollonian veils which prevent the full tragic revelation.⁴¹ Already in his early work he criticized the scientism, humanism and optimism of modern man.⁴² Whereas the unity with the ancient community could provide a unity with the primal will, Zarathustra can obtain an analogous union only in recognizing a community beyond the herd, a community which he must create.

Having encountered eternal return as imaged in eagle and snake, Zarathustra can now articulate the authentic *Untergang* as it leads to the overman beyond man and community as envisaged by humanism.⁴³ The three metamorphoses can be considered stages in the development of the overman. This section is strikingly parodistic. Here, we find a cluster of allusions to the mytho-poetic history of Christianity: The Garden of Eden (humbling, and mocking of wisdom); John the Baptist (feeding on acorns); Job (sending home the comforters); Moses (stepping into the filthy water, toads and frogs); and Jesus (tempting the tempter, loving those who would despise us). The desert here provides the setting for the biblical narrative of fall and redemption; Moses’ exodus towards freedom and Job’s demand for a mediator which in Christianity is fulfilled in the person of Christ. This, however, is an ironic portrayal, symbolizing for Nietzsche a history of nihilism, in which the will to truth, symbolized by the *camel*, begins by posting an otherworldly meaning and destiny for humankind and ends by turning against itself severing the subject from relation to an underlying object. This signifies a passive nihilism.⁴⁴

The next stage which Nietzsche envisages is nihilism made active. Here the *lion* contends with the dragon of value, and replacing the reactive ‘No’ of the slave with an active naysaying, he creates a freedom from the past valuations and the right to new values. The *child* reveals the overman as creative of new value. He is a “self-propelled wheel” who “wills his own will”. Here the overman is explicitly portrayed in the image of eternal return. In the absence of a moralistic dualism which posits otherworldly forms, there is a ready unity between the overman and eternal return/will to power.

(2) Teachers of Virtue-Pale Criminal: Revaluation of Morality

⁴⁰ *Birth of Tragedy*, “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” V, 22.

⁴¹ Cf., for example, *Will to Power*, 1, 51, 209, 753 and *Genealogy*, III, 23-26.

⁴² *Birth of Tragedy*, XVIII, 110 and XIX, 118, 119.

⁴³ Here I differ, at least in emphasis, from Rosen who stresses the continuity in Zarathustra’s character. Relative to the tragic *Untergang*, he states, “Zarathustra will be neither destroyed nor transformed; he comes and goes, but always as himself” (*Masks of Enlightenment*, p.51).

⁴⁴ See *Will to Power*, 23.

These next sections establish a reevaluation of morality based on the tragic insight Zarathustra has obtained. Having engaged Platonism and Christianity, albeit parodistically, he now expresses more explicit criticism of them as systems of value.

The watchman, like the Shepherd before his herd, realizes that those he protects do not understand herding and watching. They do not know the nothingness of the ideal they follow; they remain unaware of the genealogy of nothingness. The thief who would rid them of their sleep must use their drowsiness to his own benefit. The Ten Commandments and the virtues which lie at their base are indeed expressions of self-overcoming⁴⁵ but they are self-overcoming for the sake of life-denying.

The third essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* is relevant here.⁴⁶ According to Nietzsche, it must be a necessity of the first order that promotes a life-inimical species. He argues that it must be in the interest of life itself that such a self-contradictory type does not die out. Ascetic life, he maintains, is self-contradiction; *ressentiment* without equal.⁴⁷ What appears contradictory is that ascetics find pleasure in self-sacrifice.⁴⁸ The ascetic will grows more triumphant the more its own presupposition, that is, its physiological capacity for life, decreases.⁴⁹ Further, Nietzsche contends that, physiologically considered, the ascetic will is a self-contradiction (life against life) and can only be apparent. The ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of degenerating life. He contends that life wrestles in it and through it, with and against life. The ascetic ideal is, therefore, an artifice for the preservation of life, the ascetic man, a means to the creation of more favourable conditions for life. Thus on Nietzsche's view, the ascetic priest is among the greatest conserving forces of life. He states, "The No he [the ascetic priest] says to life brings forth, as if by magic, an abundance of tender Yeses; even when he wounds himself, this master of destruction, of self-destruction - the very wound afterward compels him to live."⁵⁰ For Nietzsche, the slave revolt and the development of the ascetic ideal must therefore be interpreted as means of the will to power: "Man was saved thereby [by the ascetic ideal] he possessed a meaning, ... he could now will something; no matter at first to what end, why, with what he willed: the will itself was saved."⁵¹

These otherworldly "Despisers of the Body" are not the bridge to the overman; theirs is mere self-negation: "Your self wants to go under, and that is why you have become despisers of the body! For you are no longer able to create beyond yourselves."⁵² These despisers of the body do not form the bridge to the overman. The bridge comprises those who turn to the body over and against the otherworldliness.

⁴⁵ *Zarathustra*, "The Teachers of Virtue," p.29.

⁴⁶ For the relation of the *Genealogy* and *Zarathustra* cf. Paul S. Loeb, "Finding the *Übermensch* in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 30, 2005.

⁴⁷ GM, III, 11, p.553.

⁴⁸ GM, II, 18, p.523.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche sees religion as the projection of the human will. He argues that Christianity is the projection of an ascetic will. And he refers to its representation as "the ghastly paradox of God on the cross" (GM, I,8,p.471) .

⁵⁰ GM, III,13, p.557.

⁵¹ GM, III,28, p.599.

⁵² *Zarathustra*, "On the Despisers of the Body," p. 35.

Subsequent to the criticism of the dualism and life-denying of the despisers of the body, Zarathustra advances a revaluation of morality in terms of passion: “in the end all your passions became virtues and all your devils angels”. Also there is a movement beyond God and beyond humanity. In language redolent of *Romans* 7, he states, “This is my good; this I love; it pleases me wholly; thus alone do I want the good. I do not want it as divine law; I do not want it as human statute and need: it shall not be a signpost for me to overearths and paradises.”⁵³ Against the manifold virtues of the ancient and Christian worlds, Nietzsche sees the precursors of the overman, the bridges, as having only one virtue; this is perhaps the will to truth.

“On the Pale Criminal” registers the transformation of valuations required in the wake of his critique of moralism.⁵⁴ Suggesting *Matthew* 5, Nietzsche states, “‘Enemy’ you shall say but not ‘villain’; ‘sick’ you shall say, but not ‘scoundrel’; ‘fool’ you shall say, but not ‘sinner.’” This is a movement beyond revenge into a peculiarly Nietzschean form of pity: “Your killing, O judges, shall be pity and not revenge. And as you kill, be sure that you yourselves justify life!”⁵⁵

The next three sections perform a summarizing and transitional function. Nietzsche articulates in a certain fashion the history of nihilism: “Once the spirit was God, then he became Man, and now he even becomes rabble.”⁵⁶ The moralism and judgmentalism of the herd, its “tragic seriousness” constitute, for Nietzsche, the devil: “and when I saw my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, and solemn: it was the spirit of gravity – through him all things fall.” The ludic and parodistic moment in his thought enables the overcoming of the devil: “Not by wrath does one kill but by laughter. Come let us kill the spirit of gravity.” The overcoming of *ressentiment*, expressed in “The Pale Criminal” and made possible by a denial of otherworldly metaphysics, responds not with revenge but with a laughter which is beyond the ‘seriousness’ of good and evil, morally and metaphysically.

Passing beyond the thundercloud of nihilism, Nietzsche experiences the God who dances. He states, “Now I am light, now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a God dances through me.”⁵⁷ This Dionysian moment reflects the tragic structure of the text as well as the reinterpretation of tragedy implied by the principles of eternal return and will to power as imaged once again in the in the flight of eagle and snake.

But these lofty heights are not easily obtained. In “On the Tree on the Mountainside,” Zarathustra diagnoses a youthful journeyer as a lion, that is, as one who is not yet free but who searches for freedom.⁵⁸ He identifies nobility and creation and counsels the youth against falling into the old dualism from which standpoint it appears that the voluptuary is the opponent of the

⁵³ *Zarathustra*, “On Enjoying and Suffering the Passions,” p.36.

⁵⁴ For an interesting account of the treatment of the “Pale Criminal” in the thought of Freud and Jung, cf. Paul Bishop, “Estrangement from the Deed and the Memory thereof: Freud and Jung on the Pale Criminal in Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*,” *Orbis Litterarum*, 54: 1999.

⁵⁵ *Zarathustra*, “On the Pale Criminal,” p.38.

⁵⁶ *Zarathustra*, “On Reading and Writing,” p. 40.

⁵⁷ *Zarathustra*, p.41.

⁵⁸ *Zarathustra*, “On the Tree on the Mountainside,” p. 43.

good. Nietzsche sees the true opposition to be between the good and the noble. These “good” are the “Preachers of Death,” those who renounce life. Their eternity is not that of Dionysus but an eternal life which, by virtue of denying natural life, is itself a form of death. For Nietzsche, the preachers of death do not refute life but only themselves. As argued above, they are in fact means in the preservation of life.⁵⁹

(3) On War and Warriors-On Free Death: Self, Other and the Overman

In the sections from “On War and Warriors” to “On Free Death,” the primary structural theme has to do with a reinterpretation of human community in the light of the emergent doctrine of the overman and in opposition to the egalitarian humanist ethos of bourgeois prosperity and peace. This takes the form of a series of analyses of various formations of the relation of self and other: state, civil society, sexuality, love, friendship, justice, marriage, and death.

Against the Christian root of humanism and universal socialism, he claims, “War and courage have accomplished more great things than love of neighbor.”⁶⁰ But again this is war without revenge: “You may have only enemies whom you can hate, not enemies you despise. You must be proud of your enemy: then the successes of your enemy are your successes too.”⁶¹ Here there is a reconciliation of opposites, though not through the ‘cruelty’ of Christian redemption. Man as interpreted in relation to a Christian ethos is to be seen as the last man. Zarathustra states, “Your highest thought, however, you should receive as a command from me – and it is: man is something that shall be overcome.”⁶²

Nietzsche shares with communism a desire for the withering away of the state. He sees the state as life-denying and contrasts the ‘slow-suicide’ it induces with creativity and life-affirmation. He states, “State is the name of the coldest of all monsters. Coldly it tells lies too; and this lie crawls out of its mouth: ‘I, the state, am the people.’ That is a lie! It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life.”⁶³ The state is life-denying because it affirms bourgeois comfort and equality.⁶⁴ It buys virtue and subverts individual creativity through the modern narcotics of education and the press.⁶⁵

Zarathustra asserts the lesson of his earlier journey: “Where solitude ceases the market place begins; and where the market place begins the noise of the great actors and the buzzing of the poisonous flies begins too.”⁶⁶ He contrasts the invisible revolutions of the world around creators with the invisible revenge that animates the market place.⁶⁷ In *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche

⁵⁹ Cf. “Teachers of Virtue-Pale Criminal”.

⁶⁰ *Zarathustra*, “On War and Warriors,” p.47.

⁶¹ *Zarathustra*, “On War and Warriors,” p.48.

⁶² *Zarathustra*, “On War and Warriors,” p.48.

⁶³ *Zarathustra*, “On the New Idol,” p. 48.

⁶⁴ Lampert, p. 321 n. 85, helpfully refers the reader to *Anti-Christ* 16, 25, 57; *Genealogy* II, 23; and *Beyond Good and Evil*, 251.

⁶⁵ *Zarathustra*, “On the New Idol,” p. 50.

⁶⁶ *Zarathustra*, “On the Flies of the Market Place,” p. 51. Cf. Prologue v-vi.

⁶⁷ *Zarathustra*, “On the Flies of the Market Place,” pp.52, 53.

locates the origin of the market place in the idea that there is an equivalence between injury and pain. When a contract is broken, he argues, the creditor receives an equivalence, that is, the pleasure of being allowed to vent his power freely upon one who is powerless. The creditor gets to mimic the right of the masters, to despise others and consider them beneath oneself. Nietzsche makes the point that suffering can balance debts to the extent that to make suffer was pleasurable.⁶⁸ He argues further that disinterested malice was seen by primitive societies to be a normal quality of men.⁶⁹

The withdrawal from the market place and “the stings of the little men”⁷⁰ is not to be conceived as a monastic denial of the world. This is expressed in Nietzsche’s treatment of chastity. Against the valorisation of the unconditional which is characteristic of the shallow thought of the market place, Zarathustra contends, “Chastity is a virtue in some, but almost a vice in many.”⁷¹

“On the Friend” reiterates the argument of “On Warriors and War.” Nietzsche resists the bad conscience that often masks as friendship, weakness and envy: “Our faith in others betrays in what respect we would like to have faith in ourselves.”⁷² Thus he proffers resistance of the friend and a longing for the overman. He states, “In a friend one should have one’s best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him.”⁷³ The criticism of moralistic dualism is here present as well: “If one wants to have a friend one must also want to wage war for him: and to wage war, one must be capable of being an enemy. In a friend one should still honor the enemy.”⁷⁴ Further, “In a friend one should have one’s best enemy.”⁷⁵ Not a love of enemy but a unification of friendship and animosity which preserves one’s independence and the otherness of the friend, free from revenge.⁷⁶

“On a Thousand and One Goals” finds the source of values not in the community or the individual but in peoples: “A tablet of good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcoming; behold it is the voice of their will to power.”⁷⁷ The individual whose self-conscious freedom is seen as the ground of morality and political life is itself seen as a product of a people. “First, peoples were creators; and only in later times, individuals. Verily the individual himself is still the most recent creation.”⁷⁸ Further, “The delight in the herd is more

⁶⁸ *Genealogy*, II, 4, p.499 and II, 6, p.501.

⁶⁹ *Genealogy* II, 7, p. 502.

⁷⁰ *Zarathustra*, “On the Flies of the Market Place,” p. 51.

⁷¹ *Zarathustra*, “On Chastity,” p. 54.

⁷² *Zarathustra*, “On the Friend,” p.56.

⁷³ *Zarathustra*, “On the Friend,” p. 56.

⁷⁴ *Zarathustra*, “On the Friend,” p. 56.

⁷⁵ *Zarathustra*, “On the Friend,” p. 56.

⁷⁶ This notion of friendship receives further development by Derrida, in *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins, London: Verso, 1997. P. 154: “Friendship without presence, without resemblance, without affinity, without analogy.” In his “Who is Derrida’s Zarathustra? Of Fraternity, Friendship, and a Democracy to Come,” p.192, John D. Caputo writes that Derrida’s notion of friendship “invokes the dissymmetry of friendship and conceives the friend on the model of the *other* rather than of equality, intimacy, sameness” (“Who is Derrida’s Zarathustra? Of Friendship, Fraternity and a Democracy to Come. *Research in Phenomenology* 29 (1) p. 192).

⁷⁷ *Zarathustra*, “On the Thousand and One Goals,” p.58.

⁷⁸ *Zarathustra*, “On the Thousand and One Goals,” p.59.

ancient than the delight in the ego; and as long as good conscience is identified with the herd, only the bad conscience says: I.”⁷⁹ Here Nietzsche is reaching behind the modern liberal state to a more ancient source of value. It is not that he advocates a simple return as this would be inconsistent with the notion of the overman. Rather, he asserts this ancient source as an indication of the pretensions of the modern notion of the self-grounding individual.

In this light, that is relative to herd morality, particularly in its religious form, Nietzsche deconstructs love of neighbor as a product of self-loathing: “Your love of neighbor is your bad love of yourself.”⁸⁰ There is here a repetition of the tragic motif that runs through the First Part of *Zarathustra*, both the community and the individual are dissolved in the revelation of a deeper, more dangerous vision: “I teach you the friend in whom the world stands completed, a bowl of goodness – the creating friend who always has a completed world to give away. And as the world rolled apart for him, it rolls together again in circles for him as the becoming of pure purpose out of accident.”⁸¹

The overman is the goal and purpose of one who grasps the tragic nature of the modern individual: “I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus perishes.”⁸² It is the goal and purpose of the natural foundation of society in the relation of men and women. He states, “Let your hope be: May I give birth to the overman!”⁸³ Likewise, he urges, “Thirst for the creator, an arrow and longing for the overman: tell me, my brother, is this your will to marriage? Holy I call such a will and such a marriage.”⁸⁴

This orientation of the human beyond bourgeois individuality is intended by Nietzsche to invoke an ethic beyond the subterranean vengefulness of the Christian focus on love: “Would that you might invent for me the love that bears not only all punishments but also all guilt! Would that you might invent for me the justice that acquits everyone, except him that judges!”⁸⁵

“On Free Death” completes the revaluation of Western morality in reflection upon death, the absolute limit of natural beings. Zarathustra is thus portrayed as providing guidance on both how to live well and how to die well. Whereas the otherworldly emphasis of Platonism, denies life and death by pointing beyond nature, to a world of forms and afterlife, on Nietzsche’s account, the affirmation of life entails an affirmation of death as well: “My death I praise to you, the free death which comes to me because I want it.”⁸⁶ By contrast with this affirmative position he mocks the death of Jesus: “Verily that Hebrew dies too early whom the preachers of slow death honor.”⁸⁷ Further, Nietzsche commiserates, “As yet he knew only the tears and melancholy of the Hebrew, and hatred of the good and the just – the Hebrew Jesus: then the

⁷⁹ *Zarathustra*, “On the Thousand and One Goals,” pp.59-60.

⁸⁰ *Zarathustra*, “On the Love of Neighbor,” p.60.

⁸¹ *Zarathustra*, “On the Love of Neighbor,” p.62.

⁸² *Zarathustra*, “On the Way to the Creator,” p.65.

⁸³ *Zarathustra*, “On Little Old and Young Women,” p. 66.

⁸⁴ *Zarathustra*, “On Child and Marriage,” p.71.

⁸⁵ *Zarathustra*, “On the Adder’s Bite,” p.68-69.

⁸⁶ *Zarathustra*, “On Free Death,” p. 72.

⁸⁷ *Zarathustra*, “On Free Death,” p.73.

longing for death overcame him. Would that he had remained in the wilderness and far from the good and the just! Perhaps he would have learned to live and to love the earth – and laughter too.”⁸⁸

Yet, having praised death, Zarathustra asks his friend’s forgiveness for living on in order to see them “throwing the golden ball.”⁸⁹ Here we have an image of the circularity characteristic of eternal return, portrayed in optimistic fashion by contrast with the preachers of “slow death.”

(4) On the Gift Giving Virtue: Conclusion⁹⁰

Part One concludes with a series of images of eternal return and will to power. First, the gift of the golden ball is reciprocated by Zarathustra’s followers: “His disciples gave him as a farewell present a staff with a golden handle on which a serpent coiled around a sun.”⁹¹ He interprets these in light of will to power: “Power is she, this new virtue; a dominant thought is she, and around her a wise soul: a golden sun, and around it the serpent of knowledge.”⁹² At this point, the moment of eternal return is not as vivid as is will to power which has received some definition, at least, as self-overcoming. Nevertheless, assuming that eternal return is the necessity of will to power, the moment of being with which Nietzsche wishes to stamp becoming, then we can see that there are strong allusions to eternal return here.⁹³ He states, “When you will with a single will and you call this cessation of all need ‘necessity’: this is the origin of your virtue.”⁹⁴ He couples this sense of necessity with two images of return. First he suggests a return of virtue: “Lead back to the earth the virtue that flew away, as I do – back to the body, back to life, that it may give the earth a meaning, a human meaning.”⁹⁵ Second, and more significantly, Zarathustra identifies at least metaphorically with eternal return: “Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.”⁹⁶

Zarathustra has not yet achieved full consciousness of will to power and eternal return. However, the meaning of the overman has emerged in contradistinction to the humanism of the nineteenth century and its fundamental doctrines of freedom and equality. In a movement which mirrors the structure of the tragic vision of Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, Zarathustra is educated beyond humanism, and this allows him to become the prophet of the overman. The concept of the overman allows Zarathustra to complete and deconstruct the nihilistic history of Platonism and Christianity and its humanistic nadir. On the basis of this overcoming, Zarathustra reevaluates the fundamental relations of human social life. The community he envisages is not caught in the web of bourgeois nihilism, and thus, does not veil from Zarathustra the full tragic implications of

⁸⁸ Zarathustra, “On Free Death,” p.73.

⁸⁹ Zarathustra, “On Free Death,” p.74.

⁹⁰ Rosen Notes that Leo Strauss, in a graduate seminar, suggested the three sections “On the Gift Giving Virtue” are “a parody of the New Testament and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity” (*Mask of Enlightenment*, p.126).

⁹¹ Zarathustra, “On the Gift-Giving Virtue 1,” p.74.

⁹² Zarathustra, “On the Gift-Giving Virtue 1,” p.76.

⁹³ *Will to Power*, 617.

⁹⁴ Zarathustra, “On the Gift-Giving Virtue 1,” p.76.

⁹⁵ Zarathustra, “On the Gift-Giving Virtue 2,” p.76.

⁹⁶ Zarathustra, “On the Gift-Giving Virtue 2,” p.78.

PEDDLE: *INCIPIT PARODIA/INCIPIT TRAGOEDIA*: A COMMENTARY ON PART ONE OF
ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA

eternal return and will to power. Parts Two and Three of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* comprise the narrative of this further education which parodistically both cancels and preserves modern moralism.