

INTERPRETATION

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ZARATHUSTRA'S DANCING SONG

LAURENCE LAMPERT
Indiana University

There have been no chairs established for the interpretation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; Nietzsche's wild anticipation has not yet come true.¹ Had any been established, we might have been spared such widespread and superficial views as this by Arthur Danto: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* has no "ordered development . . . or . . . direction of argument or presentation. [It] may be entered at any point."² Or this by G. Wilson Knight: "There is little meaning in his structure; each disquisition relies on itself alone, his repetitions are seldom elucidations."³

In fact, *Zarathustra* does have an ordered development, each disquisition is not self-reliant, many repetitions are elucidations. I want to argue this in miniature by examining the three Songs in *Zarathustra*, Part II. These songs have not been well understood. *Zarathustra's* latest translator calls them "autobiographical, for the most part fretful, plaintive, disgruntled."⁴ Walter Kaufmann pays them less attention than any other section in his brief commentary on *Zarathustra*.⁵ The Notes appended to *Zarathustra* in *The Complete Works* edited by Oscar Levy virtually ignore them.⁶

Nevertheless, the Songs are the dramatic heart of the whole of Part II of *Zarathustra*. They are not mere interludes, nor are they momentary lapses or weakenings of resolve that express the ever-present if ever-suppressed underside of Zarathustra's positive teachings. The Songs represent a victory won with difficulty but won once and for all. They express a profound discovery in Zarathustra's "going under" and herald the dramatic development in Zarathustra's teaching that appears in the second half of Part II, namely, the discovery of life as will to power and anticipation of eternal return.

The central song, "The Dancing Song" (#10), contains the essential episode that moves Zarathustra from the despair of "The Night Song" to the eventual triumph of "The Tomb Song." As the central event, The Dancing Song is framed by a series of episodes and reflections that point to its singular importance: It is framed in prose by a prelude and a retrospective; by the other two Songs which have no prose settings (#9 and #11); by two sections on wisdom which demonstrate the results of the struggle (#8 and #12); by extensive investigations that have a "before and after" quality (#2-#8, and #12-#19); and by the opening and closing sections of Part II (#1 and #22) which show what a difference the insight of "The Dancing Song" has made. The central occurrence is the Dancing Song itself; what

happens there makes all the difference for Zarathustra. The episodes that frame it stand like permanent ripples surrounding and announcing its centrality.

As is evident, the specific claims I make for the Songs entail the larger claim that Part II of *Zarathustra* has a dramatic and philosophical unity that has not been recognized by the commentaries. When the Songs have been properly understood that unity begins to come to light—and not only the unity of Part II but of *Zarathustra* as a whole, for if Part II chronicles the discovery of life as will to power, Part I antedates that discovery and contains a teaching not informed by it, and Part III contains the urgent investigation of the most astounding implication of will to power, namely eternal return. (Part IV is triumph.) In this paper I cannot of course, demonstrate the truth of these larger claims but I will point out at the relevant locations just how the unity of Part II is to be understood. In what follows I will discuss first the two sections that frame the Songs (#8 and #12), then the Songs themselves, and finally Part II as a whole understood from the perspective of the Songs.

“On the Famous Wise Men” and “On Self-Overcoming”

The three Songs, which in their own way are all concerned with wisdom, are framed by sections on wise men, “On the Famous Wise Men” (Part II, #8) and “On Self-Overcoming” (Part II, #12) which is addressed to “you who are wisest” (repeated six times). But while these two sections are both addressed to wise men whom Zarathustra seeks to enlighten, they are quite different from one another. The different ways in which Zarathustra understands the wisdom of the wise in these two sections indicates clearly the fundamental discovery about wisdom and life recorded in the Songs. The very fact that he sings the stages of this discovery shows how far Zarathustra is from the wise men of the two surrounding sections.

Before the Songs the Famous Wise Men (#8) are seen as beasts of burden who seek “to prove your people right in their reverence.” They may have the skin of the lion but they have revering hearts. As beasts of burden they are not even the camels of “On The Three Metamorphoses” but are “asses.”

There is much that the Famous Wise Men do not know, as Zarathustra indicates in the second half of this section. But above all they do not know “spirit” which is “the life that itself cuts into life.” They lack daring and depth, “no strong wind and will drives you.” The section ends with the challenging question to these spiritless ones, “how could you go with me?” and is followed by the Songs which chart one of Zarathustra’s most harrowing journeys of the spirit.

Zarathustra already understands these famous wise men better than they understand themselves. He knows much that they do not know including the secret reasons that lie behind their wisdom. But he has not yet achieved the deepest insight that unriddles the wisdom of the wise. That insight is turned against “you who are wisest” in “On Self-Overcoming.”

The discovery of “will to power” as the principle of life itself enables Zarathustra to “solve the riddle of your heart, you who are wisest” (Part II, #12 “On Self-Overcoming”). In #8 Zarathustra had understood wisdom’s way to fame—it is a way of service to the people who accord their wise the reward of fame. That motive Zarathustra can understand without knowing that life is will to power. But in #12 it is not just the famous wise men but the wisest as such that Zarathustra comes to understand. Those whose pursuit is wisdom (and not fame) also have a superficial “will to truth” that hides something deeper and now Zarathustra can understand even these. Their will to truth is not the will “to prove your people right in their reverence” (#8) but “a will to the thinkability of all beings” (#12). Such a will is called in *Beyond Good and Evil* “the most spiritual will to power”⁷ in that it seeks to dominate and control the world conceptually. When Life confides to him that life itself is will to power Zarathustra can at last understand the riddle of the wisest.

In this section on will to power (#12) Zarathustra seeks to explain his “word concerning good and evil.” While this refers to the immediately preceding paragraphs, it also recalls “On 1001 Goals” (Part I #15), which is an extensive discussion of good and evil and which contains the only previous mention of “will to power” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There, will to power refers to a people’s self-overcoming, its creation of value and purpose for itself. Will to power is there confined to an explanation of “peoples” whose unique self-disciplines have resulted in unique excellences. In the section “On Self-Overcoming” where Zarathustra further explains his word concerning good and evil, he also explains and broadens his previous reference to will to power. Here life itself is will to power. It is this truth about life that Zarathustra uses to solve the riddle of the wisest. This truth explains their wisdom. Furthermore, this new truth *replaces* their wisdom by understanding it more deeply than it can ever understand itself. It explains the reason for being of this wisdom. Zarathustra ends this section by inviting the wisest to speak of his new truth with him, by inviting them to become wise as he is wise.

“On the Famous Wise Men” and “On Self-Overcoming” frame Zarathustra’s three Songs. They provide the context for the Songs and as such they offer before and after sketches of Zarathustra’s understanding of the wise. In the Songs Zarathustra achieves his new wisdom—not completely, of course, for Zarathustra’s “going under” is not complete until “The Con-

valescent” in Part III (#13). But the Songs represent a significant discovery along that way, second in importance only to the final insight which is itself made possible by this discovery.

These two sections (#8 and 12) contain many points that reappear in *Beyond Good and Evil*, which as the first book Nietzsche wrote after *Zarathustra*, bears a special relationship to *Zarathustra*.⁸ Nietzsche explained that relationship in *Ecce Homo* but his explanation has frequently been ignored because of the difficulty of *Zarathustra* and the relative straightforwardness of *Beyond Good and Evil*. That is, *Beyond Good and Evil* (along with the subsequent works) has been taken as the guide to *Zarathustra*. But Nietzsche sees the relationship otherwise. “The Yes-saying part of [his] task” having been “solved” (in *Zarathustra*) Nietzsche turns, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, to “the No-saying, *No-doing* part.” Calling *Beyond Good and Evil* his “recuperation” from the “squandering of good-naturedness” in *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche ends his explanation of their relationship this way:

Theologically speaking—listen closely, for I rarely speak as a theologian—it was God himself who at the end of his days’ work lay down as a serpent under the tree of knowledge: thus he recuperated from being God.—He had made everything too beautiful.—The devil is merely the leisure of God on that seventh day.⁹

This crucial matter for understanding Nietzsche’s works would be superfluous for this paper were it not for the especially close affinity between *Beyond Good and Evil* and Part II of *Zarathustra*. Both are concerned with “wisdom” (*Zarathustra*) or “philosophy” (*Beyond Good and Evil*). *Beyond Good and Evil* is “a critique of modernity” and a liberation from traditional philosophy that anticipates the philosophers of the future. The basis of the critique and liberation is will to power. That doctrine explains traditional philosophy and provides the insight for the philosophers of the future—for which *Beyond Good and Evil* is the “Prelude.” In these fundamental respects *Beyond Good and Evil* presents in a different form the liberating discovery heralded in the three Songs and utilized in the subsequent sections of Part II of *Zarathustra*. Because *Beyond Good and Evil* provides this additional insight and confirmation for the Songs, some specific details of this relationship will be indicated in what follows.

“The Night Song”

The Night Song, “the loneliest song that has ever been written,” was written some months before the rest of Part II.¹⁰ It is a song of Zارا-

thustra's despair at being what he is, or at least, at being what he attempts to be in Part I of *Zarathustra*. In this song Zarathustra sings to himself and his lament renounces bitterly the brave conclusion of Part I which celebrated the gift-giving virtue, the virtue for which Zarathustra strove, as the highest virtue. Zarathustra now says "my virtue tired of itself in its overflow." Zarathustra's single virtue is here called into question and with it his total independence as giver.

As Zarathustra now sees it, because he can only give he cannot love. As pure sun, pure giving, Zarathustra is cold against all other suns, so cold that ice burns him. Zarathustra's first words in the Prologue to Part I had disparaged the sun itself because its shining gained significance only from those on whom it shined. In the conceit of the Prologue Zarathustra could declare his own worth as the source of the sun's importance. But now the same one-sided perspective can be used against Zarathustra. As sun himself, Zarathustra needs those on whom he shines and yet his very shining demands a denial of that need, demands absolute self-sufficiency.

This song must be sung to himself alone for "the taciturnity of all who shine" forbids his sharing even a hint of the need for love. Zarathustra is utterly separate from both receivers and givers. As a pure giver he is forbidden the gifts of other givers. Earlier Zarathustra had said that the loss of the gift-giving virtue was "degeneration." Now he feels the full force of that judgment and catalogues the consequent vices: he seeks to hurt those to whom he gives; he seeks revenge against receivers; he has lost his sense of shame at those who receive; and, most importantly, he shares the enmity of the light against anything that shines.

As pure light Zarathustra can accept no light and no enlightenment from others. All meaning must be his own creation. Yet, Zarathustra craves to be one who can receive, one who can not only give meaning but who can let it shine upon him. Zarathustra here yearns no longer to be simply the destroyer/creator of meaning; he yearns to discover meaning. In the imagery of the next song he needs to escape the dizziness of life taken as unfathomable and discover instead a meaning that can be fathomed. Life would necessarily be unfathomable to one who can receive no meaning and must everywhere create it. "The Night Song" is pure lament because no such promise of discovery or receiving seems possible. As we shall see, the Dancing Song is more hopeful because Life mocks his despair and coyly suggests that she can be fathomed, and the final song, "The Tomb Song," is a song of overcoming in which Zarathustra discovers the means of his deliverance from the oppression of the gift-giving virtue.

"The Dancing Song"

Prose Prelude—Unlike the other two songs, "The Dancing Song" is pro-

vided with a prose setting, an audience and a retrospective prose conclusion.

At the beginning Zarathustra is walking with his disciples seeking a well when he comes across a green meadow in which girls are dancing with each other. They stop dancing as soon as they recognize Zarathustra. Apparently they see him as neither a dancer nor a fit audience for dancing. They expect him to condemn their dancing. But with a friendly gesture and assuring words Zarathustra corrects their mistake and later provides music for their dancing with his song.

In explaining himself to the girls, Zarathustra says he is "God's advocate before the devil: but the devil is the spirit of gravity." The girls cannot and need not know it but Zarathustra is also the advocate of the overman and later of life, suffering and the circle (Part III, #13). In advocating God to the audience of girls in his song, Zarathustra advocates life against wisdom. In putting himself on the side of the Gods—particularly the girls' favorite god, Cupid—Zarathustra wins their confidence and causes them to resume dancing. The song will mock what they perceived in him—a spirit inimical to dancing.

Zarathustra describes his song as a "dancing and mocking song on the spirit of gravity, my supreme and most powerful devil of whom they say that he is 'master of the world.'" From the song itself and from the context of the Songs, the spirit of gravity can be seen as the spirit of the wise men. It is a spirit that Zarathustra clearly shares but one from which he needs to be delivered. While the girls dance their carefree dance with Cupid, Zarathustra sings of his deepest struggle.

According to *Ecce Homo* "Zarathustra is a dancer."¹¹ But in *Zarathustra* itself, Zarathustra has to *become* a dancer. In the only place where Zarathustra dances in Part I, a god dances through him in order to kill Zarathustra's devil, the spirit of gravity. Many of the elements of "The Dancing Song" are present in this section: wisdom as a woman to please; love of life; Zarathustra's devil as the spirit of gravity; the spirit of gravity killed by laughter. In this section Zarathustra is a warrior who seeks primarily to please wisdom and while Zarathustra is "well disposed toward life," "life is hard to bear" and is best borne by lightness and dancing. This episode with wisdom, life and dancing occurs in a section entitled "On Reading and Writing" (Part I, #7). The first half of this section celebrates the style of the aphorism and disparages prose accessible to all readers. The second half practices what the first half preaches. This aphoristic style is characteristic also of the three Songs of Part II. That is, the instructions and warnings on reading in "On Reading and Writing" are important for reading the Songs.¹²

The Dancing Song—The mocking song on the spirit of gravity opens with

Zarathustra himself being mocked. He is mocked for his spirit of gravity which calls life unfathomable and which causes him to sink into that unfathomable depth. But Life has a golden fishing rod that lifts him out of his dizzying error.

Addressing Zarathustra, Life denies that she is unfathomable, though many have taken her to be so. Their mistake, she says, is that they think that “what *they* do not fathom is unfathomable.” They have taken Life to be what she is not and Zarathustra has been guilty of this in his “recent” look into her eyes (in “The Night Song”). Moreover, he continues in this error for after she has finished speaking Zarathustra shows his misunderstanding of her mocking. Zarathustra calls her “the incredible one” and says he never believes her when she speaks ill of herself.

And just here we need to pay the most careful attention because Zarathustra is wrong. Life has not spoken ill of herself. She has called herself “unchangeable—wild and a woman in every way, and not virtuous” and *not* unfathomable. In taking this to be “speaking ill of herself” Zarathustra shows why she mocks him, why the spirit of gravity causes him to despair. Zarathustra’s judgment is a mistake based on his own spirit of gravity. To use the words of *Beyond Good and Evil*, he has approached Life with a “gruesome seriousness” and “clumsy obtrusiveness” that “have been awkward and a very improper method for winning a woman’s heart.”¹³ Zarathustra should have believed her for these words can deliver him from his despair; this is her golden fishing rod and it can raise him from the despair of the Night Song. As is shown in “On Self-Overcoming,” when he finally does believe what she confides to him he is able to understand the wisdom of the wise as he never understood it before, i.e., profoundly and correctly. Life *can* be fathomed and what she will whisper to him will enable him to fathom all previous wisdom. But Zarathustra does not yet believe her; he is not yet reconciled to life.

Zarathustra next talks “in confidence” with his wild Wisdom: Life is not present at their conversation. Wisdom is angry with him because she is jealous of Life. She berates him for his *reasons* for praising Life: “You will, you want, you love—that is the only reason you *praise* Life.” For Wisdom these reasons are inadequate, they are not wisdom’s reasons. Zarathustra almost answers his Wisdom with the truth—that is, he almost tells her that these are the best of reasons, the only reasons that matter. His wild Wisdom does not know that and Zarathustra delicately spares her the truth. But Zarathustra now knows better than his wild Wisdom. That is to say, he is beginning to extricate himself from the wisdom that causes the despair of the Night Song and that causes him to think mistakenly that Life speaks ill of herself when she says she is fathomable. That wild Wisdom which is only giving and making is beginning to be overcome by a deeper knowing

that loves Life as she is.

In the first two episodes of this mocking song, Life laughs and mocks Zarathustra; Wisdom by contrast is angry and raging. That is, it is Zarathustra who can mock Wisdom with the truth; he is *able* to mock her but forbears. His wild Wisdom here embodies the spirit of gravity that the Song mocks.

Zarathustra then confesses that he can hardly distinguish Life and Wisdom. He loves his Wisdom because she resembles Life so much to him—right down to her golden fishing rod. To Zarathustra it has seemed that Wisdom too can fish him out of despair; she too seems to offer redemption. His love for Wisdom is the result of confusion but he refuses to hold himself responsible. Zarathustra shares with the famous wise men the illusion that wisdom is life itself.¹⁴

These famous wise men are, of course, absent from the meadow where young girls dance with Cupid. The girls would have been right to have stopped dancing on *their* arrival. But the wise men are present in Zarathustra's song. Zarathustra has to break completely with them to love life more than wisdom or to cease identifying the two. The wise are mocked—"even the oldest carps"—for the error that tempts Zarathustra. It is in the presence of the young dancing girls that Zarathustra begins to overcome his error. Clearly these girls love life more than the meaning of it. They would never mistake Wisdom for Life and it is fitting that Zarathustra sing his song for their dance with Cupid. They could never understand his song but they have no need to. They dance naturally with their god. Zarathustra has to learn to dance with his.

But Life once asked Zarathustra about this Wisdom of his and he responded passionately and rashly, telling Life the truth of his love for Wisdom. But as he described Wisdom, Life closed her eyes; Zarathustra could not see into Life's depths while enthralled with his Wisdom. His description of Wisdom is closely reminiscent of Life's description of herself. Zarathustra calls Wisdom "evil, false and a female in every way" while Life had said of herself that she was "changeable, wild and a woman in every way." Moreover, Zarathustra says that Wisdom is most seductive when she speaks ill of herself. For Wisdom to speak ill of herself is to speak of skepticism or perhaps of Socratic ignorance. If Wisdom has seduced Zarathustra with her alluring talk of skepticism or ignorance, it is no wonder that Zarathustra finds Life incredible when she suggests she is not unfathomable. It is no wonder that Zarathustra is mistaken about Life, having fallen prey to Wisdom's seductive skepticism.

But Life can laugh even when Zarathustra speaks of his love for her rival Wisdom. Her words mock Zarathustra and show that his reasons for loving Wisdom are reasons for loving Life—she knows he has made a

mistake: “‘Of Whom are you speaking?’ she asked; ‘no doubt, of me.’” She knows that she alone is worthy of Zarathustra’s love. But she adds: “And even if you are right—should *that* be said to my face?” Even if Zarathustra has been speaking of Wisdom and his love for her, should Zarathustra have said that so boldly to Life? Should anyone say to Life that he loves Wisdom more? But unlike Wisdom, Life does not become angry with him; she invites him to speak of Wisdom. But this time Zarathustra is silent because Life has opened her eyes. Zarathustra’s enthusiasm for Wisdom fades as he looks into Life’s eyes and he cannot speak of her. He has no true and wicked answer for Life as he had for his wild Wisdom. Life is superior to his Wisdom even in understanding. When Life opens her eyes, Zarathustra again seems to be sinking into the unfathomable.

The Prose Afterword—The dance ends, the girls leave, the sun sets, and Zarathustra grows sad. The disciples remain and at the end Zarathustra finds it necessary to ask their forgiveness for the words that he utters in sadness.

Something unknown asks him why he is still alive. “Why? What for? By what? Whither? Where? How? Is it not folly still to be alive?” What asks must be Wisdom herself or that part of him that loves her. Where wisdom is called in question is there any point in living? In the aftermath of the struggle in the song what remains is the sense of loss—the loss of the purpose that sustained him as it sustained the wise. The questions that come uninvited are reminiscent of the litany of questions raised by the madman who knows that God is dead.¹⁵ The madman’s questions show graphically the depth of the loss of meaning and purpose and hope occasioned by the death of God. For Zarathustra, now, the death of his love of Wisdom seems like the death of God, like death itself. The girls who danced to his song would ask such questions too if their love failed them, if Cupid died.

Zarathustra apologizes to his disciples for his questions and evades responsibility for asking them. But he also asks them to forgive him that evening has come. The coming of these questions is as natural and as fitting as the coming of evening. Zarathustra can no more hold back the questions than he can hold back the evening. They are Zarathustra’s questions necessarily. He cannot avoid questioning the reasons for being alive if wisdom is not supreme. How can the eclipse of wisdom not be the eclipse of life?¹⁶ *After “The Dancing Song”*—Of course “The Dancing Song” is not Zarathustra’s last word on his love for life. The song itself ends with Zarathustra uncertain about his love but subsequent events leave no doubt about life’s victory. The next song (“The Tomb Song”) is a song of recovery and life is now understood to be the means for that recovery. In the section following this final song (“On Self-Overcoming”), Zarathustra shows that he

is on the best of terms with life for it is life's confidential message that enables him to understand the wisdom of the wisest men in a different and better way than they ever understood it. He now believes Life when she tells him that she can be fathomed, that she is, in fact, will to power.

But it is in "The Other Dancing Song" (Part III #15) that Zarathustra shows most clearly that his song for the young girls has changed him and turned him from his own wild wisdom to life. That Dancing Song occurs after "The Convalescent," (Part III, #13), that is, after the end of Zarathustra's "going under." There is no prose setting for this dancing song. No setting is necessary: There are no auditors, only Zarathustra and Life are present. This song begins exactly as the first one began. "Into your eyes I looked recently, O life" but there follows no dizzy sinking into the unfathomable. Zarathustra is equal now to looking into Life's eyes and is delighted by what he sees. No longer is Zarathustra simply the singer for the dance of others, now he dances with life on their own "green meadow." Still, the dance is not easy and they parry with one another. Life reveals herself as a more permissive lover than Wisdom for she says she loves Zarathustra because of his wisdom and his love for Wisdom. Were his wisdom to leave him so too would Life's love. Zarathustra has not abandoned wisdom of course, but his wisdom is now life's wisdom, a wisdom that could never be jealous of life, nor vengeful or nauseous at life. And he knows life's wisdom completely, for at the end of the song he whispers to her that he will not leave her as she had complained he would. He now knows her deepest secret: eternal return. The coming of evening at the end of this dancing song finds Zarathustra and Life together in love on their own green meadow.

"The Tomb Song"

Unlike the other songs, "The Tomb Song" is a song of victory although the bulk of it is a melancholy reminiscence over lost virtues. There are three parts to this song with three separate addresses: "the visions and apparitions" of his youth whose death he here mourns; "my enemies" who have caused the death of these visions; and "my will" which effects the overcoming.

The dying of a love in this song unites it with the dying in "The Dancing Song," that is, with the eclipse of Wisdom. Zarathustra's mood of despair at the end of "The Dancing Song" caused by the loss of Wisdom carries him back now to an earlier dying, the destruction of "the visions and apparitions" of his youth. That loss too caused Zarathustra to despair. "How did I endure it? How did I get over and overcome such wounds? How did my soul rise again out of such tombs?"

His means of recovery then is also the means of his recovery now. "For me, you are still the shatterer of all tombs. Hail to thee my will." The will that he hails as his deliverer is shown in the next section ("On Self-Overcoming") to be life itself. On the occasion of the earlier dying he simply withstood his loss; now, through love of life and the discovery of life's secrets, he knows how he withstood and withstands. Then, he "walked as a blind man along blessed paths"; now, Zarathustra is beginning to walk those paths with open eyes.

But not only the means of deliverance is the same. In learning to love life more than wisdom Zarathustra *returns* to the visions and apparitions of his youth. The visions whose loss he laments are the very ones he recovers in the gradual self-overcoming that culminates in the convalescence at the end of Zarathustra's "going under" (Part III, #13). These include his "noblest vow," the renunciation of all nausea; and the words of his purity, "all beings shall be divine to me;" and the words of the "gay wisdom" of his youth, "all days shall be holy to me." These are the truths that Zarathustra rediscovers through his love of life and along with them he regains the ability to dance which he had lost.¹⁷ He dances only when he has fully recovered the visions and apparitions of his youth in complete awareness, that is, when he has fully recovered *from* the teachings which cost him those visions. ("The Other Dancing Song" Part III, #15)

Those visions and apparitions were destroyed by those whom Zarathustra now addresses as "my enemies." These are the wise men to whom Zarathustra had fallen prey and whose wisdom had cost him the still innocent wisdom of life itself, a wisdom which he then unknowingly had and now knowingly and with pain recovers. His "enemies" had so successfully won him that the eclipse of their wisdom in "The Dancing Song" makes life itself seem worthless to him. But Zarathustra sees better now and recognizes that the enemy is not life that calls his wisdom into question ("The Dancing Song"); the enemy is a wisdom that calls life into question.

"The Tomb Song" is a recovery, a recovery through life seen as will. Like the other songs it has sung of love but only this song is a love song, only this song declares his love. Whereas "The Night Song" has sung of an ever-unrequited love and "The Dancing Song" has ended in a conflict of two loves, "The Tomb Song" sings of the resurrection of his love of life. And this love puts an end to the despair of "The Night Song" for he discovers what he could never invent, that life can be fathomed, that life is will to power. Zarathustra has overcome the enmity of the light against anything that shines.

Part II of Zarathustra

Part II, which contains the three songs as its centerpiece, begins with

Zarathustra storming and it ends with his stillest hour. At the beginning, a dream of the failure of his disciples sends him in rage from the cave back to his friends and enemies. At the end, a dream of his own failure sends him in sadness back to his solitude again. Zarathustra's failure is a failure of will. He *will* not embrace what he knows when his mistress the stillest hour speaks to him. The stillest hours are the hours of the greatest events (Part II, #18 "On Great Events") and the event that awaits him is his becoming the teacher of the eternal return. At the beginning of Part II he was all mouth with no restraint;¹⁸ at the end he holds back from thinking what he is coming to know and he holds back from telling his disciples. What Life has already revealed to him of will to power is not the end of her truth, as "On Redemption" (Part II, #20) makes clear. The struggle of the Songs is not the final struggle of Zarathustra's "going under." To follow Life and Life's truth to the end, Zarathustra will have to become the teacher of eternal return.

The Songs show Zarathustra becoming the teacher of the will to power. They show how he is able to understand the wisdom of the wise. In the sections that follow the songs (Part II, #11-#19) Zarathustra applies his new doctrine to the traditional wisdom. It is first directly revealed to "you who are wisest" in "On Self-Overcoming" (#11). There will to power is discussed in detail as the principle of life that unriddles their wisdom by exposing its deepest motives. At the end of "On Self-Overcoming" Zarathustra says, "Let us speak of this, you who are wisest, even if it be bad." And he does "speak of this" for the next seven sections, each of which deals with a kind of wisdom. Zarathustra discusses in turn "an ascetic of the Spirit" who resembles Jesus (#13), the cultured ones who are the products of modern education (#14), pure knowledge seekers (#15), scholars (#16), poets (#17), revolutionaries (#18), a teacher of pessimism and nihilism (#19).¹⁹

The love of life and the acceptance of her whispered message give Zarathustra access to the meaning of life. Now he knows what life is but this knowledge does not result in a disquisition on life itself, or on the doctrine of will to power as such. Rather, this discovery is here applied to a single field, to wisdom, the single rival for Zarathustra's devotion. This seemingly narrow application of the new discovery is for now the only one that counts for Zarathustra. It enables him to unriddle the wisdom that heretofore had been his temptation.

A somewhat broader application of will to power occurs in *Beyond Good and Evil* but the broadest application is in the *Nachlass*. The seemingly narrow and actually infrequent use of the term "will to power" in *Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* is not surprising given the nature of these works—and is certainly not a reason for denying the metaphysical

centrality of will to power as some have done. *Zarathustra* is the “vestibule” of Nietzsche’s philosophy and not the fully articulated structure.²⁰ But the post-*Zarathustra* published works are not that fully articulated structure either. As might be expected, in *Beyond Good and Evil* too, will to power appears most frequently and most directly in contexts that are devoted to the unriddling of philosophy.²¹ In *Beyond Good and Evil*, the doctrine of will to power first appears as the key to understanding and destroying past philosophy.²² Later the philosopher of the future is anticipated as a self-conscious director of his will to power, as one who uses religion (for instance) in conscious mimicry of the historically successful partnership of Platonism and Christianity, the aim being dominance.²³

In *Zarathustra*, after the discovery that life is will to power in “On Self-Overcoming,” Zarathustra uses this new insight to discuss the wisdom of the wise (#13-#19) and he does so without mentioning will to power again until “On Redemption” (#20). But in this extraordinary and climatic section Zarathustra elaborates the way of the new wisdom, life’s wisdom of will to power, and he does so in such a way as to show that it is still incomplete.

Zarathustra shows in this section (#20) what man must do to be saved. But in the process Zarathustra—who would be the first one to be saved—also shows that he can not yet achieve it. To put it another way—and to abandon the all-important imagery of the section itself—Zarathustra shows in a preliminary way what the necessary connection is between the will to power and eternal return. The liberated will to power—the will to power free of revenge—the will that wills its will to power—must learn to will the past. “But has the will yet spoken thus?” No it has not. Zarathustra is not yet saved. The hunchback points that out—and more—with his startling revelation that Zarathustra speaks differently to his disciples than he does to himself. That is, the hunchback tells us that the way Zarathustra has just spoken is the way Zarathustra speaks to himself, namely, to one as yet unredeemed. (Zarathustra usually speaks to his disciples as one fully enlightened and thereby fully redeemed.) The preceding speech has been Zarathustra’s most reckless public speech as he himself realizes when he regrets his failure to be silent. The next section reflects on the prudence of disguise and in the section following that Zarathustra takes his leave from his disciples. In the next Part, Part III, alone again, Zarathustra speaks to himself of redemption, and, in “The Convalescent,” is redeemed by embracing the doctrine of eternal return. The final step of learning life’s wisdom is thus taken. Zarathustra shows his possession of the redeeming secret when in “The Other Dancing Song” he reverses the procedure of “On Self-Overcoming” and whispers something in Life’s ear (in response to her complaint that he will leave her). She responds in amazement: “You

know that, O Zarathustra? Nobody knows that.” But Zarathustra has learned that Life who is will to power must also be eternal return. Only at that point (in “The Other Dancing Song” which follows “The Convalescent”) does Life become dearer to him than his wisdom ever was.

To return to the language of the three Songs, the full resurrection of the too early buried “visions and apparitions” does not occur in Part II. To resurrect the vision of “all beings shall be divine to me” and “all days shall be holy to me” and to again vow “all nausea . . . to renounce” Zarathustra has to be reconciled to one more truth from life, eternal return. The pursuit of that final truth will be the dramatic task of Part III of *Zarathustra*.

¹ *Ecce Homo*, in *On The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1967), “Why I Write Such Good Books,” #1.

² Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche As Philosopher*, (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 19–20.

³ G. Wilson Knight, *Christ and Nietzsche: An Essay in Poetic Wisdom*, (London: Staples, 1948), p. 195. See all of Chapter 5, “The Golden Labyrinth: An Introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,” pp. 158–218.

⁴ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, translated with an Introduction by R.J. Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 33.

⁵ *The Portable Nietzsche*, selected and translated with an Introduction, Prefaces and Notes by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 193. Subsequent quotations from *Zarathustra* are from the Kaufmann translation and citations will be included in the text by section number.

⁶ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, translated by Thomas Common (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964, first published 1909), p. 418. The “Notes” are by Anthony M. Lodovici. There are useful comments on the songs in Kevin J. Earls, “A Commentary on Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*,” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duquesne University, 1974), pp. 254–68 and especially in Werner J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche’s View of Socrates* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 257–60. Still, neither Earls nor Dannhauser is an adequate guide to the meaning and significance of the songs. Early commentaries such as Hans Weichelt, *Zarathustra Kommentar* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1922, zweite Auflage), pp. 85–93, provide little insight on the songs. The single best example of how to read *Zarathustra* as a whole is Martin Heidegger’s short essay, “Wer ist Nietzsches Zarathustra?” in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1967, Dritte Auflage) Teil I, pp. 93–118.

⁷ Translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), #9.

⁸ See letters to Franz Overbeck, August 5, 1886 and to Jacob Burkhardt, September 22, 1886.

⁹ *Ecce Homo*, “*Beyond Good and Evil*.”

¹⁰ *Ecce Homo*, “*Zarathustra*,” #4. The importance of “The Night Song” is indicated by the prominence Nietzsche gives to it in *Ecce Homo* “*Zarathustra*,” #4, #7, #8, where it is quoted in full and lavishly praised.

¹¹ *Ecce Homo*, “*Zarathustra*,” #6; see *Zarathustra*, Part IV, #13, “On the Higher Man,” subsections #18–#20. On philosophy and dancing see also *Beyond*

Good and Evil, #213 and *Twilight of the Idols*, "What Germans Lack," #7 in *The Portable Nietzsche*.

¹² Additional guidance on reading *Zarathustra* can be found in *Ecce Homo*, "Preface," #4 and "*Zarathustra*"; *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974) #381, #383; *Beyond Good and Evil*, #30, #40, #44. See also the crucial observation by the hunchback that Zarathustra speaks differently to cripples than he does to his disciples and differently to his disciples than he does to himself, *Zarathustra*, Part II, #20. This being true, we must be careful to note what Zarathustra addresses to whom.

¹³ See *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Preface." The whole of the "Preface" is an attack on philosophical dogmatism which as a form of the spirit of gravity fails to appreciate truth.

¹⁴ The long history of the struggle between life and knowledge in Nietzsche's works is discussed in illuminating detail in Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates, passim*.

¹⁵ *The Gay Science*, #125, "The Madman."

¹⁶ "Wisdom" raises these questions about life again later (Part III, #13, "On Old and New Tablets," subsection #13) but there this wisdom is mentioned only to be disparaged and repudiated.

¹⁷ That these visions and apparitions represent the truths of Zarathustra's overcoming and not simply the lost and always to be lamented excesses of youth is shown in Part III, #2, #13 and in the celebrations of eternal return, Part III, #14–#16, Part IV, #19.

¹⁸ This is true of the beginning of Part I as well. In that Part too—in the "Prologue"—Zarathustra gradually learns the need for restraint.

¹⁹ There is a noteworthy sequence in *Beyond Good and Evil* which in some respects parallels this part of *Zarathustra* by carefully choosing the proper audience for the truth of will to power and its implications. It concerns the transition from Part I "On the Prejudices of Philosophers" to Part II "The Free Spirit." After a cheerful and mocking opening to Part II which repeats in different form the opening of Part I (#1), and which reveals the vaunted "will to knowledge" as a will to ignorance, Nietzsche addresses philosophers directly. He addresses them after the critique in Part I where philosophers are described in the third person (the exception is #9 where Stoics are addressed as representative of one of the great follies of philosophy). He addresses them after those scandalized by the attack on philosophy have been invited to leave (#23). He introduces them as "the most serious" and invites them to abandon the spirit of gravity in its most serious manifestation: the will to martyrdom. They are willing to die for their wisdom because wisdom is taken to be life itself. Nietzsche invites them to become "free, playful, light" in contrast to their predecessors. Later Nietzsche identifies himself with those addressed here as friends: "us philosophers" (#34). Nietzsche, of course, retains the "they" regarding philosophers of the future, #42–#44.

²⁰ Letter to Franz Overbeck, April 7, 1884.

²¹ See #9, #13, #23, #36, #51, #61, #211, #259.

²² #9 especially, also #22, #23, #35 and for unriddling another kind of wisdom. #51.

²³ #61, also, #204, #205, #211.