Thus Spoke Zarathustra as Philosophical Art

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Thus Spoke Zarathustra *as a work of philosophical art whose literary-fictional form is not incidental to its philosophical significance. Zarathustra resists assimilation to standard genres of philosophical writing and conventional literary categories, combining prose narrative, poetic song, allegory, parody, and myth. I argue that this formal hybridity generates distinctive interpretive problems: the text resists paraphrase without philosophical loss; Zarathustra's sincerity as a speaker is repeatedly called into question; and the relation between what is said and what is enacted within the narrative remains unstable. These features undermine straightforward attempts to extract doctrines from the work or to identify Zarathustra's voice with Nietzsche's own. Situating Zarathustra alongside Nietzsche's reflections on art, illusion, and error in* The Gay Science *and his later writings, the paper develops a tentative aestheticist reading on which the work aims to achieve philosophical effects that cannot be separated from its status as literary fiction. However, this strategy generates internal tensions that threaten the unity of the project. The paper concludes by suggesting that developments in Nietzsche's later philosophy destabilize Zarathustra's distinctive claim to philosophical priority.*

1. *Zarathustra* as Literature, Fiction, and Philosophy

Above all else, the challenge facing the philosophically-minded reader of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is its status as a work of literary-fictional art.[1] Indeed, it is not one, but several related challenges, which this paper aims to pick apart. I end, speculatively, by combining some of them to offer a way of thinking about *Zarathustra* and what happened next in Nietzsche's work.

Zarathustra, I shall assume, is philosophical and literary and fictional. That it is the first is not uncontested. It contains little in the way of traditional philosophical argument and that, in some eyes at least, has been sufficient to rule it out.[2] The latter two terms are hardly transparent, but neither implies the other: "what you just said was a complete fiction" is not to engage the interlocutor's remarks on the level of their artistic or aesthetic value, whereas treating something as literature is to consider it in those terms. Literary works need not be fictional in the sense of "made up." Indeed, some of Nietzsche's other books might be thought examples of that and their literary aspect is challenging in its own right.[3] I will tend to speak of the dyadic relation between *Zarathustra* as philosophy and as literary fiction. Sometimes, it will be necessary to divide the literary aspect from the fictional.

Zarathustra is not just any combination of philosophy and literary fiction. It is a "peculiar literary experiment"[4] that does not neatly sit within any recognizable literary-fictional genre. Originally conceived as a play, likely a tragedy, the final text is largely prose fiction, but at key points, Zarathustra reverts to "songs" in poetic verse. The text blends,

1 Translations are Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Translations are sometimes modified.

2 See Alan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 61-62.

3 See Robert Pippin, "Figurative Philosophy in Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*" in *The New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Tom Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 195–221.

4 Bernard Williams, introduction to *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), vii.

among other things, burlesque, religious narrative, parable, dialogue, allegory, myth, and subtly altered proverbs.[5] Its choice of main character, Zarathustra, further clouds the waters: it is extremely difficult to pinpoint his relation to the historical figure who shares his name or even to the text through which that figure is best known.[6] This is not a variation on a common artistic theme, and it is unclear which generic tools may best be put to work on it. Nietzsche's later remarks on *Zarathustra* tend only to exacerbate these difficulties. He asks us to treat it as sui generis, for it "stands entirely on its own" in "solitude" (EH "Books" Z: 6),[7] without equals in "literature *and* philosophy."[8] Turning to the philosophical side, Nietzsche's approach to philosophy in his nonfictional writing is, of course, manifestly idiosyncratic. His are works that ask the question of how, if it all, they may be taken as a whole.

There are other combinations of philosophy and literary fiction, and, to be sure, one can place *Zarathustra* in the company of "Platonic dramas," but usually such designations provoke more questions than they satisfactorily answer.[9] Even within the genre of philosophical fiction, Zarathustra's status is stubbornly unique. Unlike Plato (as the historical record has reliably preserved him), Nietzsche does write other philosophical works in which his thoughts appear more directly expressed. If we wish to know where Plato stood towards his dialogues, we have little choice but

5 See Wolfgang Mieder, "'Mein Mundwerk—ist des Volks'. Zur sprichwörtlichen Sprache von Friedrich Nietzsches 'Also sprach Zarathustra,'" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 114, no. 4 (2013): 423–54.

6 See David Aiken, "Nietzsche and His Zarathustra: A Western Poet's Transformation of an Eastern Priest and Prophet," *Zeitschrift* für Religions- und *Geistesgeschichte* 55, no. 4 (2003): 335–53.

7 Translations are from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69–151.

8 Nietzsche to Fritzsch, August 29, 1886, Letter 740 in *Nietzsche Source: Digital Critical Edition* (eKGWB), ed. Paolo d'Iorio. My translation.

9 On Platonic drama as a category, see Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); on Nietzsche's relation to theater, see David Kornhaber, *The Birth of Theater from the Spirit of Philosophy: Nietzsche and the Modern Drama* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016).

to ask the dialogues. At the other end of this spectrum, Schopenhauer's fictional dialogues are presented as merely summarizing positions that are available more directly elsewhere. Schopenhauer's dialogue on religion[10] divides between its two characters two different views, both of which are fundamentally consistent with Schopenhauer's philosophical position, but which are superficially at odds: that religion is shallow and manifestly false; and that religion is a profound force for the true and the good. Dividing these, dramatically, is useful pedagogically (Schopenhauer thinks), but it is also strictly unnecessary, since the conflict can be explained away by means of a direct statement of the view that reconciles them both.

In contrast, *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche often suggests, takes priority over the other works (with the likely exception of *The Antichrist*, on which more later).[11] Nietzsche writes of its "special place for [him] in [his] writings" (EH "Preface" 4). He appears to suggest that it offers something significant that the other works lack. We are not obliged to agree with him about that. An early reviewer, Carl Spitteler, lamented Nietzsche's detour (*Seitensprung*) into poetic form, which Spitteler considered a cowardly retreat from the force of Nietzsche's own ideas, all the more regrettable because Nietzsche was not a good poet.[12] Andrew Huddleston calls *Zarathustra* an "ill-judged, pompously-inflated, crudely-didactic, and nearly unreadable confection of outlandish mock-biblical mumbo jumbo."[13]

Even if we follow Nietzsche's lead in placing the book at the pinnacle (again, *Antichrist* likely excepted), it does not guarantee that whatever is extra has something to do with *Zarathustra*'s literary-fictional status. Lucretius, for all we know, may have composed ordinary prose that was inferior, in clarity, rigorous argument, or depth, to the philosophical poem

10 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 6, *Parerga und Paralipomena II*, ed. Arthur Hübscher (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1947), sec. 174.

11 See Thomas H. Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Magnum Opus," *History of European Ideas* 32, no. 3 (2006): 278–94; Andreas Urs Sommer, *Nietzsche-Kommentar: Der Antichrist; Ecce Homo; Dionysos-Dithyramben; Nietzsche contra Wagner* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 3–8; and Tom Stern, introduction to *New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, 13.

12 Quoted in Sommer, *Nietzsche-Kommentar*, 451–52; for Nietzsche's response, see EH "Books" 1.

13 Andrew Huddleston, "Nietzsche's Aesthetics," *Philosophy Compass* 15, no. 11 (2020), 6.

that made him famous. If so, he might have justifiably pointed his reader to *De rerum natura*, despite its poetic form. But Nietzsche evidently treats *Zarathustra* as the work of one of the "great poets" (EH "Clever" 4) and he is keen to rank it alongside works by Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, if only to say that they stand far beneath (EH "Books" Z: 6). This paper treats seriously the idea that its literary-fictional status *is* supposed to contribute to *Zarathustra*'s purported superiority. We will see what happens from there.

2. The Riddle of *Zarathustra*'s Status

How might it contribute? We do not need to give one single answer, and no answer can avoid looking at the detail of the text itself. But we can begin by noting some general problems. First, for some, we do not naturally think of literary-artistic works as making assertions at all, in any final sense: that is one way in which they are opposed to standard philosophical works.[14] In Pippin's view, good literary works present an enticing combination of revealing and concealing, calling to be discussed and debated, in contrast to conventional philosophy's attempt to lay out its claims. Regardless of whether this is a characteristic of literature *as a whole*, it is certainly true of *Zarathustra*, as we shall see. But it would be an unnecessarily restricted form of philosophical thinking that left no room for questions, for play, and for other uses of language which do not assert.

Pippin also hints at a second, different tension.[15] It is a commonplace claim that literature, typically poetry, and especially *good* poetry, cannot be paraphrased without loss of some kind, where paraphrasing means repeating something, using different words, usually in order to make the original meaning clearer.[16] Conversely, one thing we might naturally take ourselves to be doing, when giving a reading of a work of philosophy, is paraphrasing, even if that is not where we usually stop. If philosophical

14 Robert B. Pippin, introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xv.

15 Ibid.

16 For classic statements, see A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 3-34, and Cleanth Brooks, "The Heresy of Paraphrase," in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947), 192–214.

interpretation requires paraphrase, and if paraphrase is impossible without sacrificing *Zarathustra*'s full significance, then we are faced with a more serious objection to the project of interpreting, philosophically, the literary-philosophical text. (While much of the recent literature has focused on the paraphrasability of *poetry*, there is no reason why the problem cannot be extended to literary prose fiction. In any case, at crucial points in the text, Zarathustra speaks in verse.[17]

The objection is not insurmountable. Philosophical interpretation is a broad church. Some interpreters would reject the claim that paraphrase is a necessary condition for what they do. In any case, what is lost in paraphrase might not be *philosophical*. This would not rule out a *role* for the literary-artistic features of the text in the success of the philosophical project, as long as the significant content could be accessed independently of the artwork in question: they might contribute as stimulus, useful illustration or a sugarcoating for the pill, making the philosophical content more enticing or simply less dull.[18] Moreover, though the idea of literature's resistance to paraphrase is widespread and intuitive, it is also controversial. Some have argued that successful paraphrase is not only possible but desirable, even in poetry.[19] And those who have defended literature's resistance to paraphrase have, in recent papers, tended to treat such resistance not as a given fact about a work, but as an imposition or demand, brought to the work by the right kind of reader[20] who treats it as though its form and its content are merged. The "how" is *read as* significant in relation to the "what." They could therefore reply–as some in fact have–

17 On novels compared with poems, see Peter Lamarque, "The Elusiveness of Poetic Meaning," *Ratio* 22, no. 4 (2009): 413.

18 "Sugarcoating" is borrowed from Peter Kivy, "Paraphrasing Poetry (for Profit and Pleasure)," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69, no. 4 (2011): 367–77; see also Gary Shapiro, "The Rhetoric of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*," *Boundary 2*, 8, no. 2 (1980): 184.

19 See Peter Kivy, "Paraphrasing Poetry (for Profit and Pleasure)" and "Appendix: Paraphrasing Poetry," in *Once-Told Tales: An Essay in Literary Aesthetics* (Oxford: Wiley, 2011), 165-89.

20 See Lamarque, "Elusiveness of Poetic Meaning," Rafe McGregor, "Poetic Thickness," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54, no. 1 (2014): 49–64; and Owen Hulatt, "The Problem of Modernism and Critical Refusal: Bradley and Lamarque on Form/Content Unity," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74, no. 1 (2016): 47–59.

that reading *as* literature is different from reading *as* philosophy.[21] The latter does not activate the demand of form-content inseparability, so nothing *philosophical* would be lost when paraphrasing.

My guess is that, for many readers, the claim that nothing philosophical is lost in paraphrasing *Zarathustra* will ring hollow. Though it is less common now, Nietzsche's philosophical writing *in general* has been taken, by some, to combine form and content such that they are inseparable.[22] Sebastian Gardner offers three different models relating art to philosophy.[23] These, in turn, help us think about the relationship between *Zarathustra* and the wider philosophical world.

The "parallelist" claims that philosophy is in no way dependent on art for cognition: there is nothing in philosophy that requires art, and art may be worse at doing the same job as philosophy, if it tries to do so. The views we have considered up to now are parallelist, insofar as they treat the philosophical content of the book as extractable, with no special philosophical contribution from the literary-fictional dimension. This seems to capture the view, for example, of Dirk Johnson, for whom *Zarathustra* adds no new doctrines, but merely articulates in a "bold and original way . . . Nietzsche's already fully developed philosophical perspectives."[24] Johnson could call on one significant witness, Nietzsche himself, who suggests, in a letter to Burckhardt, that *Beyond Good Evil* "says the same things as my Zarathustra, only differently, very differently,"[25] albeit that Johnson views the texts *before Zarathustra* as the location of Nietzsche's doctrines. At the other end of the spectrum, Gardner's "subversivist" holds that philosophy and art are antagonists and that *art* is superior, revealing something deficient about philosophy more broadly. Megill, mentioned

21 Lamarque, "Elusiveness of Poetic Meaning," 411.

22 See Wayne Klein "The Philosopher as Writer: Form and Content in Nietzsche," *New Nietzsche Studies* 2, nos. 3–4 (1998): 45; Peter Kivy, "Paraphrasing Poetry (for Profit and Pleasure)," also briefly considers Nietzsche.

23 Sebastian Gardner, "Philosophical Aestheticism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*, eds. Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 84–85.

24 Dirk R. Johnson, "*Zarathustra*: Nietzsche's Rendezvous with Eternity," in *New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, 174.

25 eKGWB Letter 754 (September 22, 1886), my translation.

above, may offer one example of a reading along these lines. Subversivism also captures an important aspect of Gooding-Williams's account, at least insofar as it treats *Zarathustra* as changing the subject away from the concerns of traditional Western philosophy, producing "new philosophical vocabulary and new philosophical problems"[26] through the depiction of a fictional form of life. For Gardner himself, *Zarathustra* occupies a middle position, forming part of Nietzsche's "philosophical aestheticism." Aestheticism treats philosophy as dependent on art, insofar as art makes a distinctive cognitive contribution to philosophy that cannot be accessed any other way. Art is "philosophical, yet inaccessible to philosophy."[27] The aestheticist is capable of saying *something*, in conventional philosophical terms, about the specific contribution of the artwork to the philosophical enterprise–so, contra Gooding-Williams, the subject has not completely changed. But philosophy's attempt at giving an explanation is inevitably incomplete for the aestheticist, an incompleteness Gardner compares, in fact, to "the relation between a poem and its paraphrase,"[28] where the latter fails to capture the former "in its full significance." In Nietzsche's case, that full significance is tied to something called the "aesthetic state," interpreted by Gardner as a "proto-cognitive and pre-practical" mode of engagement that Nietzsche (Gardner claims) transfers from works of art to the philosophical domain.[29] Presumably, any extraction from *Zarathustra* to Nietzsche's more conventional works loses something in the process. But ultimately, Gardner claims, *any* propositional paraphrase of a Nietzschean doctrine loses something *philosophical* thereby.[30]

My intention is not to choose definitively between these three broad positions, let alone between specific variants on them. Some of the details are controversial. Gardner's "aesthetic state," for example, is reconstructed via close readings of *The Birth of Tragedy* (and some later

26 Robert Gooding-Williams, "Literary Fiction as Philosophy: The Case of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 11 (1986): 667–75, 675.

27 Gardner, "Philosophical Aestheticism," 80.

28 Ibid., 81.

29 See Sebastian Gardner, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Aestheticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, eds. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 599–628; see also Gardner, "Philosophical Aestheticism," 95–96.

30 Gardner, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Aestheticism," 623.

Nachlass passages) which I do not wish to take for granted. Nor can we assume Rorty's conception of philosophy, on which Gooding-Williams explicitly draws, or Johnson's reading of Nietzsche's middle works.

My point, instead, is about the kind of evidence we could provide to make such a choice. On the one hand, *Zarathustra*'s philosophical import is difficult to draw out on its own terms, owing not only to any inherent ambiguities in interpreting works of literary fiction, but, more importantly, to the special kinds of ambiguities which we turn to shortly. On the other hand, Nietzsche's (relatively) less ambiguous works cannot be *assumed* to express *Zarathustra*'s philosophical import exhaustively or satisfactorily: as Shapiro puts it, "how one reads *Zarathustra* may determine . . . how one reads Nietzsche generally."[31] If *Zarathustra* merely repeats, poetically, philosophical claims or moves that Nietzsche makes elsewhere, then why does he find *Zarathustra* superior? A parallelist answer is available, of course: Johnson, for example, ties *Zarathustra*'s significance to its expression of subjective moods. But, here again, the problem reappears: How, in principle, would we establish which *way* it is that he finds superior, or *which* effect Nietzsche thought it could have? Either by looking at what he says in his other writings or by turning to the ambiguous text itself. Anything from a different, nonfictional work may in principle be rejected as lesser; anything from within has–we shall see–a questionable status of its own. This is not merely difficult to settle: it is impossible–an unsolvable riddle that Nietzsche bequeathed to his readers. Speculation on the significance of the riddle itself, while tempting, would face the same problem: Where would we find a firm foothold? Perhaps this riddle can only be investigated within the context of a thorough interpretation of *Zarathustra* of the kind offered by a number of different scholars.[32] But what interests me is what can be said while remaining

31 Shapiro, "Rhetoric of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*," 184.

32 See Gooding-Williams, "Literary Fiction as Philosophy"; Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Nietzsche's "Zarathustra"* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); Robert B. Pippin, "Irony and Affirmation in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," in *Nietzsche's New Seas*, eds. Tracey Strong and Michael Gillespie (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), also Pippin, introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); to some extent, Shapiro, "Rhetoric of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*."

as neutral as possible about such broad interpretative readings–that is, by stepping back and considering *Zarathustra*'s literary-fictional status, both in and of itself and in relation to Nietzsche's oeuvre. The way I have chosen to examine this status is, *faute de mieux*, precisely via the two faulty means that I have just rejected: to look, first, at *Zarathustra* itself, and then at what Nietzsche says elsewhere about the significant contribution of art to philosophy. The tentative reading that emerges is aestheticist in Gardner's sense, but subsequent changes in Nietzsche's wider philosophy call *Zarathustra*'s distinctive philosophical contribution into question.

3. The Question of Zarathustra's Sincerity

The previous section drew attention to the relationship between form and content, and the common idea that, in a literary work, their inseparability may be desired by the reader, who "attends not to some content beyond or behind the mode of presentation but to the mode of presentation itself, to the fact that what is being said is being said in this way."[33] In what *way* are things being said in *Zarathustra*? And what is being said?

With respect to any work of art, the distinction between form and content is likely to be drawn contextually, according to need, rather than according to any universal schema. As we shall see, what counts as the "how" in one context may well be the "what" in another. But *Zarathustra* poses specific difficulties, for the distinction between the *how* and the *what* is part of the problem Nietzsche left us. *Zarathustra*'s lack of a comparison class is relevant because form is often defined in terms of the conventions of genre: the marriage plot, the sonnet, the sonata. Moreover, Nietzsche himself may have been interested in playing with the distinction: he at least notes down the idea that, for the artist, what others call form *becomes* the content – the "how" becomes the "what" (see KSA 12:9–10, NF-1887 and 13:533, 11[3]; NF-1888, 18[6]). There is a hint, here, of a modernist ideal: that the painter paints a picture, not a picture *of* something; that works of art are about themselves.

Nonetheless, we can usefully approach different aspects of *Zarathustra*'s content. First, content may be the traditional subject of some

33 Lamarque, "Elusiveness of Poetic Meaning," 416.

myth, folk tale, or historical event, with form as the way it is treated. Zarathustra, however, has no such subject matter. Second, content may be what Zarathustra himself says, with form as the surrounding actions and events of the book. Third, though these actions and events are, themselves, *narrative* content, they are presented, as we shall see, in their own unusual manner. Finally, of course, we speak of a philosophical content, identical to none of these. This last kind is, I take it, what the philosophical reader is after. But our problem is precisely what it is and how to access it. A consideration of the other three is illuminating, precisely in relation to that problem–to which I return at the end.

It remains tempting, when constructing a philosophical interpretation of Nietzsche, to treat Zarathustra's words as equivalent to Nietzsche's in his other, more direct books.[34] In limited ways, the text invites such behavior (Z I "Hinterworldly"), as does Nietzsche on occasion: he says, in *Ecce Homo*, that UM IV was not about Wagner but about himself, so "you can put *my name or the word 'Zarathustra'* without hesitation wherever the text has the word 'Wagner'" (EH BT 4, my emphasis). One could be forgiven for concluding that Zarathustra and Nietzsche are identical, or at least indistinguishable in any significant sense, though alternative interpretations have been offered of these words.[35] But it has, it seems to me, become common to emphasize that identifying Nietzsche with his protagonist is a dangerous game.[36] Some of the reasons are familiar: Zarathustra is a fictional character, prone to error, occasionally the butt of a joke. His actions in "Zarathustra's Prologue" are a spectacular, comic failure by his own standards: he changes and learns during the book, so that earlier speeches have a different status from later speeches. More ambitious interpretations of the temporal framework of the book only add to the difficulty just described,[37] insofar as what comes "before" and what comes "after" is disputed.

34 This is largely the approach, for example, of Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

35 Klein, "Philosopher as Writer," 58.

36 Pippin, introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, xvi n14; Johnson, "*Zarathustra*: Nietzsche's Rendezvous with Eternity," 177.

37 See Loeb, *Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*.

Less attention has been paid to a further complicating factor. To put it simply, Zarathustra's sincerity is repeatedly called into question. According to one prominent definition, insincerity is a matter of not asserting what one takes oneself to believe.[38] The usefulness of this definition lies in its recognition that one can be sincere and also wrong about oneself (if, for example, I tell you I am not resentful, and I believe I am not resentful, but I nonetheless am), just as one can be insincere and still, despite one's best efforts, communicate accurately (for example, involuntarily). The definition captures the thought of the insincere person as one who is not a reliable guide to himself insofar as *he* understands himself. In "On Poets" (Z II), Zarathustra is telling a disciple that, since he has come to know the body better, "*Geist*" has become *gleichsam Geist* ("quasi-*Geist*"; more loosely: "so-called '*Geist*'"). He adds: "And all that is 'everlasting'–that, too, is just a *Gleichniss* ['parable' or perhaps 'symbol']."[39] The connection, one supposes, is that *Geist* is meant to be everlasting (*unvergänglich*). The disciple points out that Zarathustra has said this before and that, last time around, Zarathustra had added that "the poets lie too much." "Why then," asks the disciple, "did you say that the poets lie too much?"

Zarathustra first rejects the very idea that he is one of "those whose Why may be questioned": he does not remember the reasons for his opinions, and some never had reasons at all. But upon re-entertaining the thought that the poets lie too much, he adds: "But Zarathustra too is a poet. Do you believe now that he speaks the truth here? Why do you believe that?" (The disciple, it seems, *does* belong to those whose *Warum* may be questioned.) Later, he adds: "But supposing that someone said in all seriousness [*allen Ernstes*] that the poets lie too much: he would be right, – *we* lie too much. We also know too little and are bad learners: so we just have to lie." Zarathustra is not merely saying that he may, sometimes, be a liar. Poets are often treated as liars or life-negators in

38 See Richard Moran, "Problems of Sincerity," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 105, no. 1 (2015): 325–45.

39 For discussion, see David F. Tinsley and Paul S. Loeb, "Translating and Interpreting Nietzsche's Philosophical Concept of the Übermensch," in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 14 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 744.

Zarathustra, but the first time he had uttered the phrase in question it was to *contrast* poetic creations with his ideal of the *Übermensch* (Z I "On the Blessed Isles"). Now, he says that "we [poets] set our multicolored brats [upon the clouds] and call them gods and *Übermenschen*." Zarathustra thus deliberately suggests that he might be lying both in this casual conversation with the disciple and, more generally, about his apparent philosophical ideal, the *Übermensch*.

What Zarathustra says of himself in "On poets" is of a piece with a number of other claims and behaviors. Speaking out loud and in front of his hearers, he imagines them asking themselves: "is [Zarathustra] a poet? Or a truthful man?" (Z II "On Redemption"). At the end of Part One, Zarathustra encourages his disciples to "guard yourselves against Zarathustra! . . . Perhaps he has deceived you." (Z I "On the Bestowing Virtue": 3). In Z I "On the Friend," he addresses the question of the extent to which one ought to reveal one's thoughts to one's friends. His chosen metaphor is that of clothing: "you want to wear no garb before your friend?" Instead, the "friend should be the master of guessing and keeping silent [*Stillschweigen*]: you must not want to see everything." Later, he instructs his hearers to "keep your reasons [*Gründe*] secret!" (Z IV "Higher Man": 9). He later advertises his reticence to the "higher men" (and his trusted animals), making it clear that he "would sooner die, die, than tell you what my midnight heart is thinking right now." (Z IV "Sleepwalker Song": 4) In one instance (Z II "The Stillest Hour"), Zarathustra *appears* to make a counterclaim: that he is, in fact, hiding *nothing* from his friends (against the principles of "On the Friend") and that he "must tell [them] everything." But he immediately adds that he is still the most reticent (or secretive; *Verschwiegenster*) of all humans and wants to remain so–and furthermore, that there is indeed something he could say, but he *has not* said it. This is not someone who reliably presents himself as engaged in a project of telling people around him what he takes himself to believe. If we take the content of Zarathustra's speeches seriously, then we must include that aspect of the content that casts doubt on whether *he* takes it seriously. From this, it would not follow that *Zarathustra* or its protagonist are not to be taken seriously.

One could imagine textual and philosophical considerations being drawn upon in order to mitigate the questioning of Zarathustra's sincerity. As for "On the Poets," alternative critical readings are by all means available.[40] Zarathustra clearly alludes at least to Goethe's *Chorus Mysticus*, whose remarkably obscure lines end the second part of *Faust*. It is much easier to say that Goethe's lines are a constant presence in these passages than it is to say what they are doing there, but perhaps a reading could be constructed according to which this mystical intertext challenges Zarathustra's plain-sounding denouncement of himself and his ideal.[41] Anyway, the book is far from over at this point: perhaps Zarathustra's description of himself as a liar is, itself, a transitory moment of self-doubt as he comes to terms with the eternal recurrence. Moreover, Zarathustra is defending the transient against the eternal: the memory and opinions of the defender of transience might not need to be constant. When Zarathustra tells his hearers that he would sooner die than reveal what he is thinking, he immediately adds: "Now I've died already." Perhaps that means that he *can* and *does* tell them, although the text is hardly reassuringly explicit.

In terms of Nietzsche's philosophical standpoint, three obvious candidates might be sought: his truth-skepticism; his denial of the traditional notion of the self; and his concerns about successful philosophical communication, at least in any kind of public forum.[42]

40 Tinsley and Loeb, "Translating and Interpreting Nietzsche's Concept," 760–61.

41 Shapiro, "Rhetoric of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*," 177–79.

42 The first two are sufficiently well known that they hardly require citation, but see Ken Gemes, "Nietzsche's Critique of Truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 1 (1992): 47–65; Ken Gemes, "Life's Perspectives" in *Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, 553–75; R. Lanier Anderson, "Nietzsche on Truth, Illusion, and Redemption," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13, vol. 2 (2005): 185–225; Béatrice Han-Pile, "Transcendental Aspects, Ontological Commitments, and Naturalistic Elements in Nietzsche's Thought," in *The Transcendental Turn*, eds. Sebastian Gardner and Matthew Grist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 195-227, for the first; on the second, see, e.g., Ken Gemes and Simon May, eds., *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Tom Stern, "Against Nietzsche's 'Theory' of the Drives," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, no. 1 (2015): 121–40; for the third, see Tom Stern, "Nietzsche, the Mask, and the Problem of the Actor," in *The Philosophy of Theatre, Drama and Acting*, ed. Tom Stern (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2017), 67–87.

Zarathustra can plausibly be read as entertaining at least the second and third (Z I "On the Despisers of the Body"; Z III "Convalescent" 2), and the first, less overt, may well be present.[43] Perhaps someone who thought that every claim was necessarily false or erroneous would not draw a sharp, stable distinction between sincerity and insincerity: what would it mean to present yourself as you take yourself to be, if you think that all your "takings" are faulty? As for the denial of the traditional notion of the self, the model of sincerity I am using works most intuitively with two different parts: a relatively stable and transparent inner realm and a separate consciousness that can comment upon that stable realm, reliably or otherwise. Nietzsche himself is hostile to such a model. The inner realm is unstable; introspection is highly misleading. It is telling that *Zarathustra*'s own inner realm–that *to which* the sincere person attempts to act as guide–is itself presented as one of deception and concealment. Zarathustra does not tell his own "Wisdom" the truth (Z II) and his "Wisdom" is itself "perhaps . . . evil and false." "The Other Dance Song," found at the climax of Part 3, is sung not to an external audience but, following the imagery, *by* Zarathustra's soul *to* Zarathustra (the song itself is Z III "The Other Dance Song"; for his soul as singer, see Z III "Convalescent": 2; "On Great Longing"). The action of the song concludes with Zarathustra whispering a secret to "Life" (again, a personified female figure), but we are told neither what the secret is nor even whether the singer of the song takes it to be true or certain. Life replies: "You *know* that, oh Zarathustra? No one knows that"–but Life's own reliability has itself been called into question in the "Dance Song." Peeling back the layers of performance to find increasing intimacy–from public, to friends, to trusted animals, to just Zarathustra and his soul–we still find Zarathustra unable to speak plainly, without artifice or concealment.

Finally, Nietzsche later claims, in effect, that seeming to have views other than your own is a way of protecting yourself and your integrity and, indeed, that *attacking* your own views is a good way to come across

43 See Albert Cinelli, "Nietzsche, Relativism and Truth," *Auslegung: A Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1993): 38-39, who argues that Z II "On Self-Overcoming" echoes earlier truth skepticism; perhaps also Z I "On the Flies of the Market Place."

as a serious seeker of truth.[44] Some misdirection may therefore be a defensive measure, meant to prevent the philosopher from turning into a kind of actor or insincere performer. Zarathustra suggests that having a settled view on something is a requirement of social life, not of solitary reflection (Z I "Flies of the Market Place"). Since Zarathustra wants an audience of some kind, one plausible and pragmatic response to such doubts and concerns might be to call one's own views into question and to remind one's audience that one does not speak with the sort of authority they might mistakenly expect. This, of course, is reminiscent of the way of reading Nietzsche (as a whole) that was defended by Alexander Nehamas[45]–but Nehamas tends to focus on stylistic variation in general[46] rather than on sincerity, and he is himself happy to take Zarathustra's words as Nietzsche's, on the particular understanding he has of what "Nietzsche" means.[47] A defense might be put together according to which Zarathustra's questioning of his own sincerity is meant to confront, head on, the sort of challenge facing anyone doing philosophy in public: these include becoming too concerned with what others think of us, overstating one's case (and coming to believe that overstatement), and playing to the crowd.[48] Zarathustra's own behavior, and his relation to Nietzsche himself, could be read as a means of avoiding some of these pitfalls.

The suggestion here is not by any means that there is an easy route from any one of these to an explanation of Zarathustra's flirtation with insincerity, which concluded that he was in fact completely sincere. We can note the well-documented difficulty of drawing any stable conclusions from his truth-skeptical views, at least in the radical ways in which Nietzsche sometimes states them.[49] The denial of the traditional picture of the self is prima facie consistent with the distinction between insincerity

44 See, e.g., BGE 25, discussed in Stern, "Nietzsche, the Mask and the Problem of the Actor."

45 See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

46 Ibid., 37.

47 On this, see Klein, "Philosopher as Writer," 50.

48 For discussion of each, see Stern, "Nietzsche, the Mask, and the Problem of the Actor."

49 Gemes, "Life's Perspectives," gives an excellent overview.

and sincerity, as described: Nietzsche tends to say that we *take ourselves, falsely,* to have a stable, independent inner realm (TI "Errors" 3), so even if we are completely wrong about that, we can still guide or mislead with respect to what we take to be the case. In fact, while the communication problem may have implications for how we read *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche seems, if anything, to be *recommending* insincerity–as we shall see.

For the moment, the point I am making is independent of any of these moves. Once the question of Zarathustra's sincerity is deliberately raised by the text, it is hard to shake off, even if we have no final proof either way, and even if we might reconstruct plausible Nietzschean exculpations. As we have seen, in one place he says that one should keep things from friends and in another he tells his friends he has kept nothing from them. Even if, in the latter case, he had not gone on immediately to say that there *was* something being concealed, these two statements are not perfectly balanced, such that we can charitably choose the one that seems best (presumably honesty). If a romantic partner tells you one day that he has been unfaithful and the next day that he has not, you *might* choose to believe the second claim and to ignore the first. But that is obviously a significant act of trust on your part and you could hardly claim that the two statements cancel each other out: the issue has been *raised*, when it had not been raised before.

Likewise, when it comes to his sincerity, Zarathustra poisons his own waters. We can theorize about *why*, just as we might find reasons for the romantic partner's claim to be unfaithful (which exclude that the claim was true and he was being honest). But, in Zarathustra's case, we are thrown back onto Zarathustra's own words and, precisely because his very sincerity has been called into question, thrown back ultimately onto ourselves. This, in the end, applies to using Zarathustra's philosophical views to inform the text. In appealing to Zarathustra's philosophical claims, we would be looking, among his statements about his views, for the reasons why Zarathustra presents himself as a liar who does not need to explain the reasons for his views. There is nothing stopping us from doing this but, as it were, we should go into such a project with open eyes, understanding that we are taking something on of our own accord.

In something closer to his own words–though still in quotation marks–Nietzsche himself would express this thought, in one of *Beyond Good and Evil*'s shorter aphorisms: "'I'm rattled, not because you lied to me, but because I don't believe you any more.'–" (BGE 183, my translation). In the end, it's not Zarathustra; it's us.

4. Words, Actions, and Narration: Further Challenges to the Reader

Whatever *Zarathustra* is saying, it is not merely what Zarathustra says. But plenty of works of literature contain insincere characters. We do not usually find ourselves stymied. Foxes in Aesop's fables are insincere, but we can figure out what they are after and summarize the stories in which they appear. As it happens, though, *Zarathustra* looks to work in exactly the opposite way: it is extremely difficult to figure out very much about Zarathustra independently of what he says.

Zarathustra himself is clear that he does not consider his utterances, taken in themselves, to be the focus. When he meets the "fool" who memorizes his words, he tells him: "And if Zarathustra's words were right even a hundred times: you would always *do* wrong with my words!" (Z III "On Passing By") Being right is subordinate to doing right. But what is Zarathustra doing? Some of the speeches and conversations are clearly framed within a kind of narrative arc, most obviously in Zarathustra's Prologue and in Part Four's test of Zarathustra's susceptibility to pity in his hunt for the source of the *Notschrei* ("cry of distress"). More common, though, are minute, suggestive actions that resist satisfactory integration. Z III "The Vision and the Riddle"–by any account, a central passage–describes Zarathustra in conversation with the spirit of gravity in an opaque preview of the idea of the eternal recurrence. The conversation itself occupies a peculiar space between reality and illusion: "Was I dreaming? Was I waking?" What is Zarathustra doing prior to this speech? He walks up a mountain and down to the sea, gets on a boat, says nothing for two days, and then tells of his vision to sailors and fellow-travelers, whom he characterizes as those who prefer to "guess" (*errathen*) than to

"deduce" (*erschliessen*; perhaps "unlock"; cf. EH "Books" 3). We never hear of them again, let alone what they guess about the vision. His friends and disciples are not privy to this story.

Often, in fact, it is just not clear what is happening, let alone how to link what happens to what is said. In "On the Tarantulas" (Z II), the overall direction of the speech is clear and Nietzschean enough: those who favor equality are those who feel lesser and want to bring others down; calls for justice mask desire for revenge; conflict and tension are inescapable and must be endorsed. But Zarathustra uses the image of the tarantula for those who support equality, and covertly seek revenge because he is standing next to a tarantula's web, near the ruins of a temple. He uses the architecture of the temple as a contrasting image of ascent (the tarantula lives in a hole) and of beauty through tension and conflicting forces: equality would be flattening. After Zarathustra's celebration of enmity, the tarantula bites him and Zarathustra asks his listeners to bind him to one of the temple's columns, so that he cannot "whirl" with revenge. There is a peculiarity here: dancing the tarantella is traditionally meant to *cure* the dancer of the poison, so Zarathustra's instructions appear counterproductive. Has he made a mistake? As the next speech (Z II "On the Famous Wise Men") begins, is Zarathustra untied and recovered? Or are we to imagine him bound to a pillar, his finger aching, a tarantula's poison making him seek revenge? That next speech certainly sounds bitter and vengeful. It also has an unavoidably comic ring to it, if we keep in mind the possibility that Zarathustra is tied up. He praises the "free spirit" as one who is the "foe of *fetters*" (my emphasis) and he asks the famous wise men: "how *could* you go with me?" How, indeed?

This was a relatively clear-cut example of a choice: tied or untied. Other passages are more challenging and suggest a further, intriguing sense in which action and speech cannot be easily discerned and interpreted. In Z II "The Dance Song," Zarathustra, walking in the woods with his disciples, looking for a well, happens upon some girls dancing in a meadow next to some trees. They recognize Zarathustra and stop dancing. He says:

> "I may well be a wood . . . yet whoever does not shrink from my darkness [will find] the little god, surely, who is the favorite of girls . . . Do not be angry with me, you beautiful dancing girls, if I chastise the little god a bit! He will probably yell and weep . . . And with tears in his eyes he shall ask you for a dance, and I myself will sing a song to his dance."

The image is of Zarathustra *as* the wood *in which* the god lives, is awoken, is chastised, and *will probably* weep and ask for a dance. But the passage continues: "And this is the song that Zarathustra sang *as Cupid and the girls danced together*" (my emphasis). While Zarathustra is describing himself as the wood, he has apparently also discovered, or conjured, a (real) Cupid in the real wood, woken him, chastised him, and so on. He now begins singing him a song. What Zarathustra "does" with his words may have a magical dimension. The metaphor, apparently from Zarathustra's speech, bleeds into the action of the story. Clearly, *Zarathustra* does not present a realm of clear-cut actions with which to interpret his speeches: the action is ambiguous, and the speeches seem to create action all by themselves.

We have moved from the content of the speeches, to the speeches in relation to actions, to ambiguities in the action itself, and the magical blurring of the line between speech and action. Finally, a simple question: Who is telling the story? *Zarathustra* is narrated by someone who is not Nietzsche in any straightforward sense. The narrator is situated *within* this fictional and magical world. Here is how the narrator describes the moment at which the so-called higher men encounter eternal recurrence and the affirmation of life: "even if, as some chroniclers opine, [the old soothsayer] was full of sweet wine at the time, then he was even more full of sweet life . . . There are even some who say that the ass danced then . . . Now this may have happened thus or otherwise…" (Z IV "The Sleepwalker Song"). Though hardly a full-fledged character, the narrator is now implied to be reporting on events that have been multiply chronicled and to be mediating rival accounts of Zarathustra's life, comparing them to his own. The narrator is also not above philosophizing in his own voice (Z II "Child with the Mirror"). We are not merely reading a narrative, but

something that is more like the result of a process of *Quellenkritik* by an opinionated narrator, thus placing a further barrier between Nietzsche and the reader.

Zarathustra's speeches say plenty of interest, but the reader should be "rattled" into doubting Zarathustra's credibility. The speeches must be related to the action of the book, but these are complex, confusingly interrelated, and ambiguous, nested within an unreliable frame. Even in the hunt for relatively stable domains of content, we find ourselves pushed away, unable to rely on Zarathustra's words and unable to do without them.

5. *Zarathustra* in the Context of Nietzsche's Other Works

We now turn to the place that *Zarathustra* occupies in the context of Nietzsche's thinking about art and, via art, to some of the central themes of his philosophy. Strictly, neither art nor fiction *needs* to state anything false. But it is abundantly clear that Nietzsche (in his own voice) views art, both immediately before and immediately after *Zarathustra*, as something in which 1) there is falseness or error and 2) this falseness or error has a value that could not, at least not easily, be achieved any other way. Though independent of either, these thoughts become connected with a further claim, to which we have already alluded: 3) we are cognitively entangled in error, and unavoidably so.

The parts of *The Gay Science* written immediately prior to *Zarathustra* are marked out by reverence for art and artistry (see GS 107, 276, 290, 299, 301), but the reverence in question is frequently connected with some sense in which artists falsify or distort (GS 107, 299). This is most clearly expressed in GS 107, the opening argument of which is simply the following. First, art is a cult of the untrue, that is, a form of activity in which getting things wrong is venerated, not despised. Secondly, *Wissenschaft* (scholarly or truth-seeking activity) has now demonstrated that "delusion and error are a condition of cognate and sensate existence"; he also calls this the "insight into general untruth and mendacity." Thirdly, without

some activity in which delusion, untruth, mendacity, and error were celebrated and revered (art), our situation would be simply intolerable, presumably because the thought of being inescapably and fundamentally error bound is incompatible with our sense of self-worth. Art invites us to mock our knowledge-seeking pretensions or, more neutrally, it allows us to adopt a viewpoint that diminishes the significance of knowledge, since we can manifestly admire falsehood and illusion (in art). This, for Nietzsche, is a counterforce to "honesty" about our cognitive fate.

There are different kinds of illusions operative at different levels and in different kinds of art,[50] some of which do not mandate error or untruth. But *for Nietzsche* the connection with untruth is important for his argument. The significance of artistic error is connected with a second thought in *The Gay Science*, which is the affirmation of life: artistic techniques may be employed to render life beautiful, most famously via the notion of *amor fati* (GS 276). There is an obvious problem here, which Nietzsche does not directly address: How can I deceive myself into affirming a picture of things I know to be distorting? Art may help us to celebrate error *in art* and therefore error in general, in a nebulous way. But knowingly and joyously producing specific, real-life error evidently provides a more significant challenge, and it might well be that *Zarathustra*'s literary-philosophical experiment was Nietzsche's way of accepting that challenge.

Thus, if we sought to think about *Zarathustra* as a work of important philosophical art in the sense that *Nietzsche* does in *The Gay Science*, we would expect something that shapes and creates values, perhaps consciously as opposed to nonconsciously. It might also encourage a similar act of shaping and creating on the part of its readership, one which–in its specifics–differs from that of its artist. Such a work would do either or both at the same time as being, itself, a kind of sanctified falsehood, reconciling us with something fundamentally or deeply error-bound in our cognitive apparatus, while laughing (with us) at our pretensions to an error-free engagement with the world. It would also be–and perhaps encourage in us–an instance of affirmation through artistic and falsifying

50 See Tom Stern, "Illusions at the Theatre," *Anglia* 136, no. 1 (2018): 121–37.

moderation of everyday life. The philosophical element would be enriched by its artistic status, so *Zarathustra* the artwork would rise above any bare statement of its author's philosophical stance towards art. *Zarathustra*, on this conception, would fail as merely non-literary-fictional philosophy, and indeed *Zarathustra* must be *fiction* and not merely *literary*: insofar as philosophy is *Wissenschaft*, it has been undermined by the "insight" described in GS 107, which is counteracted by valuable falsehood. It would also fail as a work of art like any other, for in that case, its author would just be a poet, and not a "poet . . . of life" (GS 301).[51]

6. Drawing the Threads Together: A Tentative Reading of *Zarathustra* as Philosophical Art

In this final part, we begin by drawing out three dimensions of the work as set out in the discussion so far. First, there is the substance of Zarathustra's speeches and the doctrines hinted at or directly offered by him. Second, there is the *way* in which these are presented by and through their fictional speaker: that is, the distance placed between them and both Nietzsche and Zarathustra himself. Finally, there is the brute fact of the work as literary-fictional, philosophical art, drawing on the remarks from *The Gay Science*. We can give a plausible, Nietzschean story for each of these, taken individually. The doctrines may be similar enough, at least in places, to what Nietzsche says in his own words. The self-distancing is of a piece with Nietzsche's mask advocacy. The brute fact of *Zarathustra*'s fictional status makes it a candidate for a celebrated illusion of the kind that we require, but one which, combined with the work's philosophical aspects, urges us towards finding a greater acceptance of error in general. We can take issue with each of these strands, taken separately. Instead, I propose to end by thinking about *Zarathustra* as a work of art that seeks to combine these three aspects–and about what happens next as they begin

51 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 171.

to unwind. To do so is, of course, to think about the relation between the "what" and the "how" of the text.

On one kind of construal, a kind of productive tension might arise between the three strands. Clearly, the first and the second are superficially at odds, insofar as they make substantive philosophical claims lurking in the background (if there are any) harder to access, interpret, and understand. Some early readers understandably concluded that doctrines like the *Übermensch* and the eternal recurrence are "great pedagogical lies in the mask of 'absolute truths.'"[52] Nietzsche might reply that some distancing is required to protect the integrity of the thinker (BGE 25), but he would have to acknowledge that, crucial as it may be, this comes at the cost of provoking confusion about the thoughts themselves. The third strand might act as a pressure valve here: if we can take ourselves less seriously and celebrate our errors, then the hunt for philosophical doctrines, when it threatens to overwhelm us, could be treated as appropriately comic. The third strand provokes, of course, all the uneasiness of a general error theory combined with the apparent doctrines of the first. Together, they further ask that we *celebrate* our error through being exposed, however obliquely, to some discussion of it. As we have noted, this makes the philosophical work of art more of a challenge than the ordinary work of art, which does not ask us to focus *directly* upon the general insight into error. Again, though, one might hope that the extra strand–here, the masking and self-distancing–could in principle help to soften the blow. It might keep us from the full force of philosophical revelation; it might even, itself, *be* a kind of playful celebration. To return to the three ways in which *Zarathustra* might relate to Nietzsche's other works, a productive tension of this kind would rule out parallelism since the third strand, at least, and narrative-fictional aspects of the second cast a light on the more conventional philosophical dimension of the text–the celebration of error as error, and of fictional distance as comic playfulness–which would be unavailable in a nonfictional work. We could at best remind ourselves of the effect of these features, but *Zarathustra* presents them simultaneously,

52 Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1920), 151.

casting its light on them as they are considered, calling them to mind altogether and at once. That would leave aestheticism or subversivism. In building from Nietzsche's claims in *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, I have not so much argued against subversivism as presupposed it out of existence: I am assuming we can safely use Nietzsche's more conventional works to illuminate the text that—for the subversivist–calls into question those very works. To repeat, this is a decision taken in the knowledge that this issue cannot be resolved.

In any case, looked at another way, the strands described above unravel. Insofar as the third strand is premised on the claim that there is "general untruth and mendacity," Nietzsche and Zarathustra's distancing activity obscures even *that* claim, which is hardly as prominent in *Zarathustra* as it is in the works either side of it. Turning to the second and third strands, we find nothing sharply contradictory, but we do find a tension. *Zarathustra* is a work of fiction, "untrue" in one relevant sense, whose character distances himself from his own views, and whose narrator and narrative techniques distance us from Zarathustra. But the effect of art (for Nietzsche) depends on its *success*, on its being something, the experience of which may itself be uncomplicatedly celebrated. Obviously, that has not been the case for all readers. One reason might well be the sorts of distancing and framing techniques–the secrets and promises, winks and hints–which so characterize the work. The very fact that it is philosophical means that it cannot be naively celebrated *as illusion*, since it promises so much more, and precisely such naivety is challenged by Zarathustra's distancing techniques. Whatever else we might say about reading *Zarathustra*, it is hardly the feeling that "we are carrying a *goddess*, and are proud and childish in performing this service" (GS 107).[53] Yet this is the affirmation of error that art can offer us, according to Nietzsche himself, and that, we said, might account for a Nietzschean literary-philosophical work. This is one sense, then, in which *Zarathustra*'s achievement as a work of philosophy does depend on whether we take it to have been a comparable achievement as a work of literary art.

53 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 104.

If *Zarathustra*'s reader is to attend to how it says what it says in the manner just described, then she might see the work as a failure (because the strands interfere with one another), a success (because form and content hold together in productive tension), or even as the self-referential modernist's attempt to play with the demand of unity itself.[54] To my mind, its internal forces render it unstable, and it collapses under its own great weight. But that is merely one reader's report. It is, in any case, just as much a philosophical judgment as a literary one. But it is tempered by the knowledge of what happened next.

Nietzsche's later works maintain the connection between art, error, and value expressed by (1) and (2) above. He also keeps (3), the view that error is all-pervasive and inescapable. But Nietzsche's later views cannot be understood without noting a tectonic shift in his understanding of values and their relation to nature and, ultimately, to art. In *The Gay Science*, the "higher human being" appears as an unwitting, artistic creator of values, not least because values are there to be created, never merely discovered. In the later works, in contrast–beginning in 1886, just after *Zarathustra*, and increasingly through 1887 and 1888–Nietzsche treats nature as the ultimate locus of values.[55] There *are* natural values, now, and Nietzsche's philosophical task becomes different: to uncover what these natural values are and to map various moral codes, religions, and philosophies onto them, to see whether and how they relate to the values and goals of nature. What, now, of the value of art, its errors and delusions? The answer is very different: artistic activity is still bound to error, and its value still lies therein. But the context is new. In essence, Nietzsche's claim is that something he calls "Life," "Will" (in the language of Nietzsche and his Schopenhauerian contemporaries), or "will to power," which operates through all living things at least, *requires* error (on our part) in order to flourish and achieve its ends. Life, so understood, is the source or locus of

54 On this aspect of modernism, see Hulatt, "The Problem of Modernism"; on *Zarathustra*'s alleged self-referencing, see Shapiro, "Rhetoric of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*."

55 Though stated dogmatically here, I argue for this in detail in Tom Stern, *Nietzsche's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) and "Nietzsche's Ethics of Affirmation," in *New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, 351–73.

value in these later works and art is a means to promote and engage the values of life (GM 3.25). Artistic error now affirms life in a different way, by affirming the error that is necessary for life.

Although Nietzsche's change of outlook does not neatly coincide with the publication of any one book, it begins to emerge as he is writing *Zarathustra*. Largely, *Zarathustra* seems to affirm the earlier view, at least in the (however compromised) words of its protagonist (Z I "Thousand and One Goals," cf. Z I). Will to power, in *Zarathustra*, is not overtly linked to a preexisting framework of value (Z II "Self-Overcoming"), as it obviously is later. But there are passages which, in retrospect, presage the later stance: Zarathustra's promotion of sex, selfishness, and the lust to rule (Z III "On the Three Evils"); his talk of the state as preserving those who ought to die off (Z I "On the New Idol"); or his claim that Christianity has preached against that which is required for life, motivated by "the sick and the dying-out" (Z I "Hinterworldly"; see also Z III "Old and New Tablets": 10; Z I "Preachers of Death"; Z II "On the Rabble"; Z II "On the Tarantulas").

Whatever their role in *Zarathustra* itself, claims like these would later be integrated into an unmistakably biological framework, forming the basis of Nietzsche's late critique of morality and culminating in *The Antichrist*–the work Nietzsche finally identified as his magnum opus, which operates explicitly with the notion of "natural values." There might still be a role for philosophical art in this later stage, as a contribution to the project of reinvigorating natural values. But such a work would not be a means for value creation, since values are, now, simply there to be found in nature. In historical terms, some aspects of *Zarathustra*'s content transformed themselves and broke free from their form, becoming more dogmatic and less hesitant. Something was lost in the process.