



Zarathustra's Pedagogy

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EDITORIAL

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Truth is best (of all that is) good. As desired, what is being desired is truth for him who (represents) the best truth. (Irani & Tagore: *The divine songs of Zarathushtra*, 1924, 27.14)

Zarathushtra was the greatest of all the pioneer prophets who showed the path of freedom to men, the freedom of moral choice, the freedom from blind obedience to unmeaning injunctions, freedom from the multiplicity of shrines which draw our worship away from the single-minded chastity of devotion. (Tagore: *Forward to The divine songs of Zarathushtra*, 1924)

Thus spoke Zarathustra: A book for all and none, is Nietzsche's remarkable philosophical novel, first published as a single volume in 1887, that changes the tone and style of philosophy and represents Nietzsche's crowning achievement. The book chronicles Zarathustra's travels and pedagogy from the 'mouth of the first immoralist', that is, one who turns morality on its head. In *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche writes

[t]he self-overcoming of morality from out of truthfulness; the self-overcoming of the moralists into their opposite—into me—that is what the name Zarathustra means coming from my mouth. (1967, §3, p. 145)

Nietzsche's Zarathustra is based on the Iranian–Arian prophet and founder of the ancient religion Zoroastrianism. Born at least six centuries before Christ, Zoroaster (*Zarathuštra*) was a Parsi/Persian credited with the *Gathas*, some 17 hymns or religious poetry that are the sacred texts of the faith and view the human condition as the mental struggle between *aša* (confessional truth) and *druj* (lie). Using this Iranian prophet and the genre of religious poetry written as dithyrambs echoing the New Testament and Platonic dialogues, Nietzsche discusses his concept of the *Übermensch* (self-overcoming, self-mastery), the doctrine of the eternal return of the same and the proposed transvaluation of all values. Thus, Nietzsche turns to Zarathustra and the narrative form to address his central teaching concerning 'self-overcoming' as a self-transcending response to the question of nihilism that realizes the will to power. Nietzsche's work carries many of the marks of style of the wisdom literature and the influence of Montaigne. In many ways it can be considered a classic *pedagogical* text. As Robert B. Pippin expresses the point:

In keeping with the unsystematic form of the clear models for TSZ—biblical wisdom literature, the French moral psychologists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Montaigne, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld), Emerson, Goethe—it is of course appropriate that we be ‘taught’ nothing about this by Zarathustra, ‘taught’ if at all only by his ultimate silence about this new possibility and so its challenge to us, to make it ‘our own’. No lessons can be drawn from it, no summary credo articulated, no justification for a position formulated, any more than any ‘gift of love’ like this, any image of a life worth living under these conditions, can be interrogated in this way. The work seems to function as the same kind of ‘test’ for the reader as the soothsayer’s doctrine for Zarathustra. (p. xxxiv)

Zarathustra invokes his followers to sing his song ‘whose name is “One More Time”, whose meaning is “in all eternity!”’ (p. 262):

Oh mankind, pray!
 What does deep midnight have to say?
 ‘From sleep, from sleep—
 From deepest dream I made my way:—
 The world is deep,
 And deeper than the grasp of day.
 Deep is its pain—,
 Joy—deeper still than misery:
 Pain says: Refrain!
 Yet all joy wants eternity—
 —Wants deep, wants deep eternity.

All these elements of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* have become central to the ‘new’ French revival and reappropriation of Nietzsche (Foucault, 1977; Derrida, 1978/1979; Deleuze, 1962/1983; Klossowski, 1969/1993; Kofman, 1983/1993; see also Allison, 1977; de Man, 1979; Schrift, 1995), and one of the driving forces prefiguring the main themes of what is called ‘poststructuralism’:¹ the emphasis on history (against structuralism) and perspectivism; the turn to narrative and genre studies; the deconstruction of deep metaphysical dualisms; the use of literary tropes and the emphasis on philosophy as a kind of writing; the use of irony; the will to power; the preoccupation with nihilism as the crisis of value; the emphasis on creativity and a philosophy of the future; and the philosophy of subjectivity with its perpetual self-transcending or self-overcoming. These are also useful pointers to a poststructuralist philosophy of education and its critique.

Note

1. See the Friedrich Nietzsche French documentary by Victor Eremita (in French) at http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xi9oyf_friedrich-nietzsche-french-documentary-8-8_creation#.USa2cRkyEZc. See also *New Nietzsche Studies* at http://faculty.fordham.edu/babich/nns_journal_description-2011.html

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