



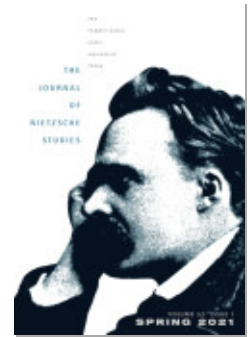
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Zarathustra's Blessed Isles: Before and After Great Politics

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Abstract: This article considers the significance of the Blessed Isles in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. They are the isolated locale to which Zarathustra and his fellow creators retreat in the Second Part of the book. I trace Zarathustra's Blessed Isles back to the ancient Greek paradisiacal afterlife of the *makarōn nēsoi* and frame them against Nietzsche's Platonic conception of philosophers as "commanders and legislators," but I argue that they represent something more like a modern Epicurean Garden. Ultimately, I suggest that Zarathustra's Epicurean impulse toward withdrawal (whether into a sequestered friendship community or mountain solitude) undermines his Platonic attempts at great politics.

Keywords: Zarathustra, Blessed Isles, great politics, Epicurus, Plato, withdrawal

Nietzsche's *Z* is structured in terms of its prophet's recurrent descents into, and withdrawals from, political life. But given his ambitious desire to present new transformative values to humanity, it is curious that the book ends with Zarathustra withdrawn.¹ Having perfected his teaching by articulating and affirming the eternal recurrence of all things, we expect Zarathustra to go down one last time into the human world and disseminate his wisdom. Yet there is no indication by the end of the book that he will do so.² If Zarathustra is supposed to be a "commander and legislator," as Nietzsche will say *all* genuine philosophers are,³ if his task is really that of "great politics"⁴—the creation of new world interpretations, values, meanings, and goals, the consequent transfiguration of the human being, and the determination of its overall possible future—then it seems he may ultimately have shirked his political responsibility.⁵

As a number of commentators have pointed out, Nietzsche can be situated within the Platonic tradition, insofar as he envisions the ideal

coincidence of political power and philosophical wisdom.⁶ Indeed, *Z* as a work of philosophy is deeply rooted in Plato's *Republic* and often refers back to it—sometimes to parody and critique it, but other times to recuperate and reanimate it.⁷ And the *Republic* is of course the *fons et origo* of the “philosopher-king” ideal. Yet it has also been described as “suppl[ying] the most magnificent cure ever devised for every form of political ambition,” and perhaps something similar might be said about *Z*.⁸ On the one hand, the figure of Zarathustra can be seen as a kind of late modern Platonic philosopher-ruler and prophet-legislator, responsible for establishing new this-worldly values and cultivating healthier, more aristocratic forms of life. Yet this ambitious nomothetic task is frequently derailed by distortions of his teaching and Zarathustra's intense, recurrent need for solitude. Just as Plato's philosopher-rulers would prefer to remain in rapt noetic contemplation of the Forms, far beyond the confines of the city-cave (were they not compelled to govern), Zarathustra's mountain solitude—a kind of post-theistic *bios theōrētikos*—might be said to constitute the apex of his life.

Here, however, I want to focus on a less dramatic kind of frustration and withdrawal from the political world—one that still retains a degree of community and friendship. And that's best exemplified by Zarathustra's residency on the Blessed Isles. The aim of this article is to unpack the significance of that place within the larger context of the Zarathustra drama. I shall argue that they represent the residually Epicurean dimension of Nietzsche's thought, which had loomed large in his middle-period writings, but which was now rapidly being displaced by his ambitious retrieval of Platonic political philosophy. Ultimately, I suggest that the lingering appeal of the Blessed Isles remains at odds with Zarathustra's utopian attempts at grand politics. In saying this, I am not insisting that Zarathustra's recurrent need for sociopolitical distancing somehow invalidates his legislative task; indeed, it seems sometimes to play an essential preparatory role in it.⁹ Yet the desire for withdrawal cannot always be tethered to his Platonic ambitions. In short, neither drive entirely supersedes the other: in *Z* the Epicurean and Platonic orientations of Nietzsche's thought exist side by side in a dynamic, irresolvable tension, each calling the other into question.¹⁰

The Blessed Isles

The Blessed Isles first appear at the beginning of the Second Part of the book. After Zarathustra's initial awkward re-descent into the human world,

in which he indiscriminately presents his teaching of the superhuman to the vulgar multitude and is met with boredom, derision, and hostility (Z I: Prologue 2–10), he decides to seek out a select group of “companions” and “fellow creators” (Z I: Prologue 9).¹¹ He finds them in the Motley Cow—a kind of modern-day Platonic democracy—and presents them with a preliminary version of his teaching. However, by the end of the First Part, Zarathustra has withdrawn from them and returned to his mountain solitude, ostensibly so they can “lose [him] and find [them]selves” (Z I: “Bestowing Virtue”), but also (as he later suggests in private) so that his teachings have time to take root (Z II: “Child with the Mirror”). Years go by, until he is finally jolted into action by a bad dream in which his teachings have become twisted and distorted. He decides to return to his companions, but they are no longer living in the Motley Cow. They have moved from the city to a small, isolated locale named the Blessed Isles.

The establishment of this community constitutes an extension of Zarathustra’s rhetorical shift from the many to the few: just as Zarathustra by the end of the Prologue had chosen to reserve his message for a select group of fellow creators recruited in the archetypal city, the Blessed Isles represent the eventual withdrawal of that elite few from the city into a kind of hermetic circle.¹² This distance from the noise and busyness and masses is necessary for their experimental self-cultivation, as Nietzsche will elsewhere suggest.¹³ But more generally, the Blessed Isles offer a striking alternative to the cities Zarathustra travels through, which are clearly hostile to his new teachings and philosophy in general.¹⁴ They enable him to move beyond the mythopoetic condensations, partial truths, and noble lies necessary when communicating to a popular audience, and give him the opportunity to fine-tune his teaching for a more qualified inner circle. Indeed, Zarathustra’s first speech to them there indicates that he is now offering a more advanced, mature, autumnal version of his philosophical vision. It broaches a variety of important themes: the figure of the superhuman as this-worldly alternative to God, the rhetorical need for a new mythopoetic “justification” of time-becoming-impermanence, creation as the “great redemption” from suffering, willing as the “great liberator.” The speech famously culminates in a symbolic depiction of the creative philosopher-legislator attempting to liberate human potentiality from the natural-historical prison in which it finds itself: Zarathustra sees the “image of [his] images” sleeping in the hard, ugly stone of humanity, his sculptor’s hammer rages fiercely against the prison, fragments fly every which way.¹⁵ The speech concludes with the following lines: “I want to perfect it: for a

shadow came to me . . . the beauty of the superhuman came to me as a shadow. What are the gods to me now!—” (Z II: “Blessed Isles”).¹⁶

From this moment until the final speech of Part II, Zarathustra and his disciples dwell together on the Blessed Isles.¹⁷ It is worth noting that this period comprises at least a quarter, if not a third, of the book; indeed, the only locale to which more time is devoted is Zarathustra’s mountain retreat.¹⁸ Now, I will not attempt here to recapitulate Zarathustra’s teachings as they continue to unfold throughout this part of the book. I want rather to take a step back and ask: what are the Blessed Isles supposed to be? As some commentators have pointed out, the name itself (*die glückseligen Inseln*) points back to the ancient idea of the *makarōn nēsoi*, or Isles of the Blessed.¹⁹ In Greek myth, the Isles of the Blessed are an eschatological paradise located in the far western streams of the Okeanos at the outermost margins of the earth.²⁰ They begin as a conception of the afterlife, where the embodied souls of the elect live eternally and happily. In early descriptions (in Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar) they are pictured as a distant and virtually inaccessible sanctuary for divinely affiliated mortals, heroes, or the righteous. Blessed with an optimal climate and abundant crops, life there is easiest and best for human beings. In historical and biographical texts, they are increasingly naturalized and often given a more concrete geographical location.²¹ In others, they are cast as a symbolic utopia of sorts, where wandering souls seek stable respite from political strife, tyranny, and war.²² In this respect, the ancient lineage of Zarathustra’s Blessed Isles may simply be an ex-philologist’s attempt to evoke a vision of a noble, earthly paradise.

Yet one finds references to the Isles of the Blessed in Plato as well.²³ In his dialogues, they are typically reserved not for the heroic or righteous, but for a new elect: the philosophers. The most interesting mention is in *The Republic*, where the *makarōn nēsoi* play a particularly tricky role. In Kallipolis, the “fine and noble” city, the philosophers will receive an extensive education, in preparation for their duties as rulers. But in discussing the nature of this education, Socrates makes a curious observation, almost in passing. He says that “those who have been allowed to spend their time in education to the end” will not be “adequate stewards” of the city because “they won’t be willing to act, believing they have emigrated to a colony on the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive” (*Rep.* 519c). It is not clear to whom this is supposed to refer, since the philosophers will ultimately be *compelled* to rule—a prospect about which they are not terribly delighted. To make this burdensome distraction more agreeable, Socrates and his

companions allow that once the philosopher-rulers have discharged their civic duty, they will be permitted to return to the contemplative life, this time on the Isles of the Blessed, while new guardians take over and pay back their own debt to the city (*Rep.* 540b). Whether the philosophers ever really liberate themselves from the tyranny of the city depends on whether we understand this concession as the prospect of a happy retirement or simply a blithe recognition of their eventual death (*Rep.* 498c). Either way, behind the Platonic utopia of Kallipolis (the city in which the tension between philosophy and the city is ostensibly resolved) lies an even more improbable utopia: the paradisiacal Isles of the Blessed, in which philosophers are actually free to pursue their preferred way of life, ostensibly the best one available to human beings.²⁴ In Plato's philosophical reinterpretation, then, the *makarōn nēsoi* serve as a symbol of the *bios theōrētikos* and the space, freedom and leisure it requires.²⁵ Now, given *Z*'s deep kinship and parallelism with the *Republic*, the Blessed Isles may very well represent the prospect of a philosophical life untethered from the compromises and constraints of the city—a respite from the petty politics of the state and a liberation, perhaps, from even the great politics of nomothesis.

There is, however, an important difference here: in *Z*, the Blessed Isles are more than just some mythical sop thrown to dissatisfied philosophical statesmen who yearn for the contemplative life. They emerge as a concrete reality, an actual alternative to the imperfect—and imperfectible—cities of Europe. To appreciate the full symbolic freight of Zarathustra's Blessed Isles, then, we need to bring one more philosophical lineage into the picture, this one decidedly *anti*-Platonic: the Epicurean tradition. For in many ways, Epicurus's school—the Garden—offers us a miniaturized and naturalized version of the Isles of the Blessed. Consider the structural similarities: (1) both function as peaceful sanctuaries sequestered away from the trials and tribulations of mundane political strife, (2) both are physically set on the outermost periphery of the worlds they reject (the Isles of the Blessed in the far western streams of the world-encircling Okeanos, the Garden beyond the walls of Athens), (3) both privilege simple, natural, necessary desires and provide conditions that can easily satisfy them, and (4) both offer the prospect of an optimal, almost godlike life relatively free of physical pain and mental anxiety (albeit still embodied and embedded in the physical world).²⁶ The Garden in many ways represents a return to a prelapsarian golden age, much as Hesiod's concept of the Isles of the Blessed did.²⁷ Indeed, the Epicurean sage is presented as having access to “a life worthy

of the gods”: divine blessedness (*makariotēs*) is within our grasp, potentially immanent and present in every moment, if only we sculpt and cultivate ourselves properly.²⁸ And one thing this requires is *withdrawal* from political life into a friendship community insulated from the larger polis.²⁹ Bernard Frischer sums this all up nicely when he writes, “[Epicurus] does not believe that the purely contemplative life is possible only for the denizens of the Isles of the Blessed and so must occasionally be interrupted while civic duties are pursued; to the contrary, he claims that the Golden Age is immediately available to the individual willing to apply his philosophy to everyday life.”³⁰ We might think of his Garden then as the ideal of the *makarōn nēsoi* made this-worldly, no longer a distant promissory note, but a realizable way of life in the here and now.³¹ In this respect, Zarathustra’s Blessed Isles are distinctly Epicurean.³²

The Isles as Epicurean Garden

Did Nietzsche himself envision Zarathustra’s Blessed Isles as a kind of Epicurean Garden? We know that he had a profound appreciation for the achievements of Epicurus and drew actively upon his thought and way of life.³³ This is especially true in the middle period works leading up to *Z*, where he is valorized as a formative naturalist who waged preemptive war on the Christian metaphysico-moral interpretation of the world.³⁴ He’s also held up there as an ancient predecessor in the art of living and self-cultivation,³⁵ a noble model of the “heroic-idyllic” mode of philosophizing,³⁶ and a symbol of the advantages of the hidden life (*lathe biōsas*), or retreat from politics.³⁷ Nietzsche’s notes and letters from the middle period up through the writing of *Z* similarly convey a deep appreciation for the power, integrity, and magnetism of Epicurus’s character, as well as a fascination with the apolitical discretion of his friendship community. It is hardly surprising, then, that Nietzsche would sometimes dream of founding his own philosophical school, as a kind of modern Epicurean Garden.³⁸ One can find anticipations of this idea in his first trip to Sorrento (taken while on sick leave from the University of Basel in 1876–77), when Nietzsche lived in a temporary friendship community of sorts with Malwida Von Meysenbug, Paul Rée, and his pupil Albert Brenner.³⁹ There they fixed upon the idea of creating a distinctly Epicurean “monastery for freer spirits [Kloster für freiere Geister]” that they called the School of the Educators.⁴⁰ This project,

which excited Nietzsche greatly, never came to fruition, but it seems to have lingered and evolved in his mind during the middle period. On March 26, 1879 (immediately after the publication of *AOM*, and just two months before resigning from his professorship), he wrote to Peter Gast, “Where do we want to renew the Garden of Epicurus?”⁴¹ He would revisit this prospect in subsequent letters to Gast and others, up through the composition of *Z*.⁴²

So, Epicurus’ Garden seems to have loomed large for Nietzsche in the period immediately preceding, and during which, *Z* was composed. But what about Zarathustra’s Blessed Isles themselves—is there any non-circumstantial reason to believe that they’re modeled on an Epicurean friendship community? In a letter to Peter Gast dated August 3, 1883 (that is, composed soon after completing the Second Part, but before formal publication of the First Part), we find a suggestive link between the Blessed Isles, Epicurus’ Garden, and Nietzsche’s own pivotal Epicurean experiences in Sorrento. Gast had expressed misgivings that *Z* betrayed an “unjustified contempt for humanity” unworthy of the philosopher (*KSB* 6:446). Nietzsche responds by reiterating his conviction regarding a natural hierarchy of human types, and the hygienic need for these higher types to stand on a different level and feel the “*affect of distance* [*Affekt der Distanz*].”⁴³ “If I entirely understand the first *Zarathustra*,” he writes, “he wants to appeal to those who are living amidst the bustle and the rabble, [who have] *either* completely become the *victims* of this affect of distance (perhaps of disgust!), *or* have to cast it off: he encourages them to escape to a solitary Blessed Isle—or to Venice.” He goes on: “It is precisely Epicurus that I regard as a negative argument for my claim: up to the present the world has made him *pay*, as it did even in his own day, for the fact that he *allowed* himself to be confused for others, and that he treated the question of public opinion *about himself* lightly, with godlike levity. Already in the last days of his fame, the *pigs* crowded into his Garden, and it is one of the ironies of *fama* that we have to *believe* a *Seneca* in favor of Epicurean manliness and loftiness of soul.”⁴⁴

It is strange that Epicurus should be cast here as providing the “negative argument” for Nietzsche’s claim. A hasty reading of this passage might mistake it as a wholesale critique of the Garden philosopher. But note that Nietzsche concludes with a reaffirmation of Epicurus’ “manliness and loftiness of soul [*Männlichkeit und Seelenhöhe*].” He thus seems more disappointed in his predecessor’s lack of prudence than anything else—a curious detail, since *phronēsis* was the cardinal Epicurean virtue. One could take issue with the particularities of his account here; for instance, that it greatly

exaggerates the hostility Epicurus encountered while alive, that there is no credible evidence the Garden was ever overrun by vulgar hedonists, that Epicurus himself would not have cared a whit about his posthumous reputation given his credos that “death is nothing to us” and that we should live and die unknown.⁴⁵ But what is most striking is precisely that Epicurus warned about, and preemptively took precautions against, the very thing that concerns Nietzsche here. Indeed, his Garden is an attempted answer to Nietzsche’s problem: it was situated on the outskirts of Athens (thus providing distance from the masses and the hubbub of daily political life), it espoused an ethos of inconspicuousness and modesty, and it concretized the Isles of the Blessed in the here and now. Whatever the reason that Nietzsche seeks to downplay his predecessor’s prescience here, his critique is essentially an internal one and his own stance constitutes a kind of hypertrophic Epicureanism. The philosophical substance of the letter ends at this point, but before closing, he interjects an apparently irrelevant personal aside: “I have just learned that I have once again escaped death: for a while it was very likely that I would spend the summer on Ischia, in Casamicciola.” As it turns out, however, this is a crucial detail for understanding the significance of the Blessed Isles.

The place Nietzsche speaks of here is a small volcanic island off the coast of Italy in the Gulf of Naples. He had been enchanted by it during that first formative stay in Sorrento in 1876–77 and planned to revisit it with his sister in summer 1883. However, an earthquake destroyed a considerable part of the island before his plans came to fruition. As he explains in a follow-up letter to Gast written less than two weeks later (August 16, 1883), Ischia was in fact the inspiration for *Z*’s Blessed Isles. The disclosure is suggestively prefaced by casual talk of Epicurus: “Where do you get all these delightful *Epicurea*?” he asks his friend. “I mean not only your Epicurean epigrams but everything reminiscent of the air and fragrance of Epicurus’ Garden that has emanated from all your letters of late. Oh, I am so badly in need of such things—including that divine feat ‘to avoid the masses.’ For, to tell the truth, I am almost crushed” (*KSB* 6:452). The topic then snaps into focus: “The fate of Ischia has shaken me more and more; and aside from what concerns everyone else, there is something about it that touches me personally, in a haunting way that is entirely my own. This island was so present in my thought: once you have read *Zarathustra* II to the end, it will be clear to you *where* I sought my ‘Blessed Isles.’ ‘Cupid dancing with the maidens’ is immediately comprehensible only in Ischia (the women in Ischia say

'Cupedo'). I have hardly finished my poem when the island collapses."⁴⁶ The Blessed Isle of Ischia had represented for Nietzsche his original liberation from what Epicurus had once called "the prison of daily duties and politics," the vision of a sequestered friendship community of like-minded free spirits, and the possibility of a new Garden.⁴⁷ Its destruction was a symbolic but nonetheless painful blow.⁴⁸ All that remained for Nietzsche was its depiction in *Z*, which was, as we will see, already beginning to outlive its purpose.

Leaving the Garden

I have so far been arguing that Zarathustra's Blessed Isles constitute a late modern Garden of sorts, and thus that the Second Part of *Z* can be read as a kind of Epicurean interlude from Zarathustra's Platonism. This is not to say that the teachings presented there are uniquely indebted to Epicurus. There are of course certain identifiably Epicurean themes that can be excavated from *Z* II, but no more so than *Z* I, III, or IV—or perhaps any other comparable chunk of Nietzsche's corpus.⁴⁹ The point is rather that its mood and function are distinctly Epicurean. A teaching that begins with the paradigmatic image of grand politics—Zarathustra as philosophical legislator sculpting the rough, ugly stone of humanity to reveal its superhuman potential (*Z* II: "Blessed Isles")—leads to withdrawal, philosophical reflection, and private, experimental individual self-sculpting with a small sequestered group of like-minded "companions" and "fellow creators."⁵⁰ On the Blessed Isles Zarathustra can, as Epicurus might have put it, "found a school, but not so as to draw a crowd."⁵¹

But of course, by the end of Part II Zarathustra has taken leave of them again, this time unhappily (*unlustig*) (*Z* II: "Stillest Hour"). Why? Zarathustra himself offers various reasons at different moments. We get an early intimation of dissatisfaction when Zarathustra sings (for the first time) a lament to himself on being the only solitary spirit there, and complains about his uniquely burdensome role as gift giver (*Z* II: "Night Song"). This of course is the very task that drove him down from his mountain retreat in the first place (*Z* I: Prologue 1–2), and one might assume that he has finally found his ideal audience and setting. But the role of philosophical prophet has made him isolated and lonely—much more so than he was in his mountain retreat—and he is profoundly relieved when he is finally able to return to solitude (*Z* III: "Return Home").⁵²

Zarathustra's departure is also prompted by pivotal challenges from less sympathetic audiences (for instance, the Soothsayer and the "cripples and beggars"). These challenges reveal the existential incompleteness of his teaching, test his mettle as a philosophical legislator, and make him doubt his ability to command.⁵³ And at the very beginning of the Third Part, we find yet another reason. On his mountainous journey to the coast, where he will set sail from the Blessed Isles the following day, Zarathustra observes, "Whoever has constantly protected himself will at last become sickly [kränkelt] from so much protection. Praised be what makes hard! I do not praise the land where butter and honey—flow!" (Z III: "Wanderer"). The Epicurean Garden and its apolitical life strategy of living secretly among a closed circle of like-minded comrades has its advantages, but it cannot constitute a terminus. This remains true in spite of the admittedly agonistic nature of Zarathustran friendship.⁵⁴ The sheltered life of any friendship community will on this account eventually become counterproductive and even enfeebling. This point is further developed in a subsequent speech, in which Zarathustra muses on why he has left the Blessed Isles and what lies ahead for him (Z III: "Blissfulness [Seligkeit]"). He reflects on his task, which thus far had been the creation of his "children." However, his transformative work on others now requires further work on himself: "for the sake of his children," he says, "Zarathustra must perfect himself." Zarathustra's children are still coming into being and need a select, isolated, insular community to do so; their provisional protection is making them stronger rather than sickly. But Zarathustra's own self-cultivation, which is ultimately subordinated to "the greater perfection of all things," must be undertaken alone. Here he confesses that he had remained on the Blessed Isles for too long because of his love for his children but was increasingly stultified by its insularity. His most difficult "abysmal thought"—the eternal recurrence—remained dormant and was still waiting to be summoned up. Ironically, it is the articulation and affirmation of this thought that will ultimately bring Zarathustra true blessedness.

One last passage bears mention here, this one an unpublished note from Autumn 1883, which I think helps to tie together Zarathustra's over-determined cluster of reasons for leaving the Blessed Isles. In a sketch for the as-yet-unwritten Third Part of *Z*, Nietzsche writes, "You want to teach the superhuman—but you have fallen in love with your friends and with yourself and made a refreshment of life. The Blessed Isles make you soft [verweichlichen]—now you grow *gloomy* and passionate and scold your

enemies. A sign of weakness: you evade a thought" (*KSA* 10:16[89], p. 532). And then, a little explanation in parentheses (Nietzsche playing commentator to himself): "The reformer slackens in his own community: his enemies are not strong enough. And so a greatest enemy must emerge for him, a thought. Thought as an objection *to* life and to the continuation of life [Leben und Fortleben]." The idea then seems to be that to sequester oneself away from opposition and challenges, to surround oneself with like-minded if agonistic comrades, to make an Epicurean "refreshment [Labsal]" of life, is to untense the bow and ultimately abandon the project of self-overcoming.⁵⁵ Zarathustra's "softness" manifests itself most notably in the lapse of intellectual conscience or perhaps courage: he "evades" a thought. The thought, as suggested earlier, is the eternal return of the same, which after further struggle will eventually become his final, culminating doctrine. But living in the modern Garden with his disciples has enabled Zarathustra to dodge the troubling ramifications of his own teaching by repressing them. This, in a nutshell, is Nietzsche's reservation regarding the Epicurean Garden as a philosophical way of life: while it provides formative opportunities for self-exploration, self-cultivation, and self-overcoming, it ultimately can make us spiritually atrophied and unphilosophical.⁵⁶ Historically, others have of course offered comparable criticisms.⁵⁷ However, such critiques typically point toward a return to the city and emphasize the need for some kind of political engagement, if only indirect.⁵⁸ Zarathustra's move is unique, in that it points not back to the city, but toward the need for a longer, purer, and more rigorous solitude.

Aftermath

The Blessed Isles are mentioned only three more times in the book after Zarathustra's departure.⁵⁹ The first occurs in the Third Part when, on the way home to his mountain retreat, Zarathustra encounters his "ape" at the gates of the Great City and is subjected to a crude, derivative harangue about its various evils (*Z* III: "Passing By"). Zarathustra's ape is essentially a portrait of the reactive philosopher type who hates the city, yet chooses to remain within it to struggle against it. Zarathustra points out that the spirit of revenge has made him as petty and loathsome as the place he claims to despise and asks him why he has not simply left: "Why did you live for so long in the swamp that you yourself had to become a frog and a toad? [. . .]

Why did you not go into the forest? Or plough the earth? Is the sea not full of verdant islands [grünen Eilanden]?”⁶⁰ In short, if the philosopher cannot truly be at home in the city, there are always options of withdrawal: the life of the renunciant or anchorite (the forest, desert or cave), the life of the agrarian primitivist recluse (the self-sufficient farm), the life of the Epicurean friend (the “verdant island,” that is, Blessed Isle or Garden). In spite of Zarathustra’s recent abandonment of the Blessed Isles, we see here a residual acknowledgment of its abiding importance for nascent free spirits and higher types.⁶¹ If nothing else, Zarathustra’s impatient reply to the ape makes it clear that, wherever the appropriate place of the philosopher may ultimately be, it is *not* locked in a perpetual agonistic conflict with the traditional values and customs of the city.⁶²

The second mention occurs near the beginning of the Fourth and Final Part, when an aged Zarathustra encounters his old nemesis the Soothsayer and confesses to him that he is not really happy.⁶³ “How could one ever find happiness among recluses and solitaries!” he says, “Must I yet seek the ultimate happiness on the Blessed Isles and far away between forgotten seas?” (Z IV: “Cry of Need”). But when the Soothsayer responds wearily that “there are no Blessed Isles anymore,” Zarathustra grows angry, denies it, and insists that such places *do* still exist: “No! No! Three times no! he cried in a strong voice, and stroked his beard.—‘*That* I know better! There are still Blessed Isles! Be quiet about *that*, you sighing set of mourning-pipes!’” Why does Zarathustra now associate that which he has long since abandoned with “ultimate happiness [das letzte Glück]”? Why does the Soothsayer claim that the Blessed Isles no longer exist? And why is it so important to Zarathustra that they do?

Weaver Santaniello has suggested that the desperation of Zarathustra’s reaction is rooted in Nietzsche’s bittersweet memories of Wagner’s villa in Tribschen, which he had once referred to as a “distant Isle of the Blessed.”⁶⁴ But as we have seen, the island of Ischia, which Nietzsche first encountered during his pivotal Sorrento idyll, would soon overshadow Tribschen as a symbol of Epicurean freedom from the political realm, a potential laboratory for free spirits and an eventual model for Zarathustra’s Blessed Isles. So one thinks immediately here of the sad fate of Ischia and the crushing personal blow that its destruction dealt to his Epicurean hopes.⁶⁵ It is worth recalling that this event occurred approximately two weeks after the completion of the Second Part of Z and loomed large over the composition of the Third and Fourth parts.⁶⁶ Initially it seems that the event

was to be reflected in the Zarathustra narrative: between Autumn 1883 and Winter 1884–85, Nietzsche's notebooks are strewn with outlines, notes, and drafts for *Z* that envision the death (*Tod*) and sinking (*Untergang*) of the Blessed Isles.⁶⁷ Apparently, it was to be a significant plot point in the Third Part, linked in some symbolic way with the eruption of a broader "Great Revolution" aimed at leveling humanity.⁶⁸ If so, it would have entailed the destruction or at least diaspora of Zarathustra's children. However, all that remains of this event in the final version is the Soothsayer's single isolated remark in the unpublished Fourth Part, which is then vehemently repudiated by Zarathustra. It is tempting to see this exchange simply as a vestigial trace of Nietzsche's original plan, which had by then almost entirely fallen by the wayside.⁶⁹ So Zarathustra's insistence that they still exist could simply be read as a factual correction of the Soothsayer's relentlessly nihilistic and overactive imagination. But such an interpretation seems banal and ultimately leaves Zarathustra's anger dramatically underdetermined. If, on the other hand, we take the Soothsayer's observation as truthful bad news honestly delivered—a detail more in keeping with his persona (he is, after all, the *Wahrsager* or "truth teller")—Zarathustra's response takes on considerably more pathos and interest.⁷⁰

What then it would mean to insist that "there are still Blessed Isles" when the Isles themselves have in fact gone under? Paul Bishop, drawing upon Nietzsche's indebtedness to Goethe and Schiller, reads this as Zarathustra asserting the cultivated possibility of joy or blessedness in the eternal present, regardless of external circumstance: "Where are the blissful islands? *Exactly where you are right now.*"⁷¹ That is to say, those moments and places in the midst of everyday mundane or "profane" life that offer access to a kind of immanent godlike joy, if only we are oriented properly toward the world. And this seems to me right—although I take the point as paradigmatically Epicurean. The Blessed Isles are not some gauzy hereafter or distant mythical abode, but rather a lived experience realizable in the here and now. In accordance with what I have called Zarathustra's "hypertrophic Epicureanism," we might say that he appropriates and retains this conviction but pushes it yet a step further: the Blessed Isles are not just some particular, creatable place in this world; they can in principle be wherever we are. There are Blessed Isles whenever we can be joyful. If this is right, then by the Fourth Part of *Z*, the Blessed Isles come to signify more than just a philosophical withdrawal from the city: they symbolize a kind of sacred, self-sufficient, world-transfiguring bliss.⁷²

The third and final mention is placed in the middle of the Fourth Part of the book, when Zarathustra finds a motley assortment of superior humans (*höheren Menschen*)—whom the Soothsayer had prophesied—waiting for him in his cave (Z IV: “Welcome”). These “most wonderous human fishes” had awaited Zarathustra’s much-heralded return, but of course he never came back down to the cities of human beings, and so they were eventually drawn up to his mountain lair (Z IV: “Honey Sacrifice”). Although the superior humans would seem to exemplify the human potential for self-overcoming, they are still too hobbled by their incompleteness and imperfections, and Zarathustra soon finds their presence draining. At this point, he momentarily breaks from his role of the cheerful, gracious host and admits that it is not them that he was waiting for: they are neither “high and strong enough” nor “beautiful and well-born enough” for him. The philosopher-legislator is waiting rather for his carefully cultivated children, who are now, he is convinced, on their way.⁷³ Zarathustra then begins reflecting nostalgically on his long-abandoned Epicurean friendship community: “Speak to me [. . .] of my gardens [Gärten], of my Blessed Isles, of my beautiful new kind [neuen schönen Art],” he says, “what would I not give, that I might have one thing: *these* children, *this* living plantation, *these* trees of life of my will and of my highest hope!”⁷⁴ At this point he pauses, overcome with emotion, and the crowd of superior humans is (understandably) reduced to awkward silence as well.

Let us set aside the question of whether the Blessed Isles (as an actual place, rather than a symbol of world-transfiguring bliss) still exist.⁷⁵ Why the sudden yearning for them? Whence Zarathustra’s newly rediscovered love for his companion-children, who have in fact been mentioned only once in the text since his departure from that friendship community so many years ago?⁷⁶ The book ostensibly ends with their triumphant ascent to Zarathustra’s solitude—or at least his hopeful prediction of their imminent arrival (Z IV: “Sign”). But what that means remains unclear. Does it signify the attempted completion of Zarathustra’s great politics, a final descent into the human world to share at last the culminating gift of the eternal recurrence teaching? Or does it suggest a more strategic infiltration, back into select cities or discrete friendship communities full of promising new human exemplars? Does it point to the establishment of a new Garden in the mountains, this one composed of lone, independent trees, self-sufficient and blessed, like the Epicurean gods? Or is it all just wishful thinking?⁷⁷

In the end, will Zarathustra simply live out the rest of his years in blessed solitude, as he has done for so long?

The Philosopher's Blessedness

I do not expect that there are definitive exegetical answers to these questions. But *Z* is nonetheless constructed in such a way as to raise them deliberately for the careful reader. And such considerations in turn raise questions about the prospects of Zarathustra's great politics. For however we choose to conceive of Zarathustra's ultimate fate, his role as commander and legislator has been repeatedly interrupted by the lure of solitude and what Nietzsche will elsewhere call "the *good* solitude": withdrawal, concealment, and self-cultivation in a garden with friends (*BGE* 25). Indeed, the final interlude—his withdrawal from the Blessed Isles back up to his mountain world, to articulate and affirm the eternal recurrence of all things—seems for all intents and purposes permanent. Whether we take Part III or IV to constitute the proper end of *Z*, there is little reason to believe that the prophet's completed teaching will be transmitted to humanity. There is no final descent.⁷⁸

Perhaps it is misleading to look for some decisive moment of fruition in Zarathustra's great politics. Unlike Plato's philosopher-kings, Nietzsche's philosophical commanders and legislators are not "statesmen" in any strict sense at all, nor are they necessarily engaged in the active political implementation of their values and goals. Indeed, they are typically confined to the periphery of the city or state and divorced from all real institutions of power (Nietzsche's own disenfranchised, nomadic period is instructive here). And yet, as Zarathustra observes, the world revolves "invisibly" and "inaudibly" around inventors of new values (*Z* I: "Flies," II: "Great Events"; see also *BGE* 285). That is to say, the Platonic coincidence of philosophy and political power is not so much an ideal as a *fact*. So, we should not be surprised that a world-historical reevaluation of all values might take place in a distant, sequestered friendship community or even in solitude. But we are still faced with the question of why Zarathustra feels the need to descend from his mountain solitude in the first place, back into the political realm of human beings, and why this desire recurs throughout the book. And we are faced as well with the question of why Zarathustra hesitates and recoils so often from this task.

As I have suggested, these two tendencies—descent and withdrawal—reflect the alternately Platonic and Epicurean moods of Nietzsche’s thought, which remain in dynamic and irreconcilable tension throughout the text. “Blessedness it must seem to you,” Zarathustra says, “to press your hand upon millennia as upon wax” (Z III: “Old and New Tablets” 29). And indeed it sometimes seems as though Zarathustra’s bliss consists solely in his *vita activa* of legislating values, cultivating exemplars, and reshaping the human.⁷⁹ But perhaps an even greater blessedness—an “ultimate happiness,” as it were—consists in his contemplative affirmation of the world as it is and his consequent release from the desire to fix humanity. This is a possibility repeatedly intimated throughout the book, if only quietly, and perhaps it is even the culmination toward which Zarathustra’s *Bildung* silently points. It is the philosopher’s liberation from the temptation of great politics.

NOTES

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1. All quotations are taken from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), with occasional emendations. Translations of notebook passages and letters are mine, although I have consulted and sometimes defer to Paul S. Loeb and David F. Tinsley’s translation of the Z notebooks in *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Summer 1882–Winter 1883/84): Vol. 14 of The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

2. This is the case whether one takes the Third Part of Z (1884) as the formal conclusion of the cycle or includes the privately circulated Fourth and Final Part (1885); on the latter, see n. 63.

3. On the Nietzschean notion of philosophers as “commanders and legislators [Befehlende und Gesetzgeber],” see BGE 211, as well as 61–62, 203, 208, 212; cf. KSA 11:26[407], 35[47], 37[8], 38[13]. For an excellent discussion, see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 196–201. This theme is anticipated by Z (see Z I: “Flies,” Z II: “Self-Overcoming,” “Great Events,” “Stillest Hour,” and Z III: “Old and New

Tablets”). Paul S. Loeb argues that Nietzsche’s elevated and demanding conception of the genuine philosopher is in fact fulfilled *only* by Zarathustra (“Genuine Philosophers, Value-Creation, and Will to Power: An Exegesis of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* §211,” in *Nietzsche’s Metaphilosophy: The Nature, Methods and Aims of Philosophy*, ed. Paul S. Loeb and Matthew Meyer [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 83–105, see esp. 99–103). For an examination of the legislator figure throughout the entirety of Nietzsche’s corpus, see Herman W. Siemens, “(Self-)legislation, Life and Love in Nietzsche’s Philosophy,” in *Neue Beiträge zu Nietzsches Moral-, Politik- und Kulturphilosophie*, ed. Isabelle Wienand (Freiburg: Academic Press Fribourg Schweiz, 2009), 67–90.

4. The expression “great politics” (*grosse Politik*), while widely used in Nietzsche studies, is relatively sparse and polysemic in his published texts (*HH* 481; *D* 189; *BGE* 208, 241, 254 [cf. *TI* “Germans” 3–4]; *GM* I:8; *EH* “Destiny” 1). The distinctly Nietzschean sense of the phrase emerges most clearly in the last three of these passages, where it signifies a world-historical reevaluation of values and cultural “war of spirits [Geisterkrieg]” for the future of the human. The phrase as such never appears in *Z*, but that text—perhaps more than any other—actually exemplifies what Nietzsche means by great politics and creates the template for his subsequent discussions in *BGE* and elsewhere. On this, see Birte Loschenkohl, “Nietzsche’s ‘Great Politics’ and Zarathustra’s New Peoples,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 51.1 (2020): 21–45, which casts it as primarily concerned with perpetual self-overcoming and the communal creation of new values aimed at pluralistic and dynamic forms of human flourishing (cf. Loeb, “Genuine Philosophers,” 99–103). The most extensive study currently of Nietzsche’s great politics is Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), which, while a remarkable work of scholarship in the Cambridge tradition of intellectual history, offers a somewhat unusual portrait. In my view, Drochon’s hypercontextualized interpretation of Nietzsche’s great politics as a “master morality politics of unifying Europe through a cultural elite ‘Good European’ caste—which has as its ideal the intermarriage of Prussian officers and Jewish financiers—to serve as a geopolitical counterweight to Russia and the British Empire” (2; chap. 6) overemphasizes its reactive dependence upon late nineteenth-century international political developments (Nietzsche’s own objection to this kind reading is best expressed in *D* 506), relies too heavily on the final notebook of the *Nachlass* (where Nietzsche considers sometimes rather ham-fisted strategies for the practical implementation of his task, e.g., the “party of life”), and ends up shoehorning Nietzsche’s notion of great politics into a more traditional conception of real politics instead of allowing the concept of the political to be questioned, rethought, and expanded by Nietzsche’s philosophy. The interpretation of great politics assumed in the present article takes its bearings from more cultural or “spiritual” readings that in various ways emphasize the creation of radically different interpretative-evaluative horizons within which new, affirmative shapes of life can be cultivated; see, e.g., Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and

Frederick J. Schmitz (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1965), 272–84; Henning Ottman, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche, Monographieren und Texte zu Nietzsche Forschung 17* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 239–81; Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau: A Study of Nietzsche's Moral and Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 200–224; Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1–27, 61–65; Alex McIntyre, *The Sovereignty of Joy: Nietzsche's Vision of Grand Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 74–99; Herman Siemens, “Yes, No, Maybe So . . . : Nietzsche's Equivocations on the Relation between Democracy and ‘Grosse Politik,’” in *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy to Political Thought*, ed. Herman W. Siemens and Vasti Roodt (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 231–68; Vanessa Lemm, “Nietzsche's Great Politics of the Event,” in *Nietzsche and the Political*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 129–96; and Gary Shapiro, *Nietzsche's Earth: Great Events, Great Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1–22. I am particularly indebted to Conway's account of *grosse Politik* as retrieving the founding question of politics (*What ought the human being to become?*) and aiming at the nonteleological completion or perfection of the human being.

5. For a reading of *Z* along these lines, see Peter S. Groff, “Cultivating Weeds: The Place of Solitude in the Political Philosophies of Ibn Bājja and Nietzsche,” *Philosophy East and West* 70.2 (2020): 699–739. Other commentators have offered comparably ironic or deflationary readings; see, e.g., Robert Pippin, “Irony and Affirmation in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,” in *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 45–71, and Daniel W. Conway, “Solving the Problem of Socrates: Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* as Political Irony,” *Political Theory* 16.2 (1988): 257–80.

6. On Nietzsche's political kinship with Plato, which becomes increasingly evident in the *Z* period and runs through the works of 1888, see Leo Strauss, “Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*,” in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 174–91; Catherine Zuckert, “Nietzsche's Rereading of Plato,” *Political Theory* 13.2 (1985): 213–38; Ottman, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche*, 239–65, 276–81; Georg Picht, *Nietzsche* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988), 226–41; Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), vii–xviii; Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 117–28 and “Nietzsche on Plato,” in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Paul Bishop (Suffolk, UK: Camden House, 2004), 205–19; McIntyre, *Sovereignty of Joy*, 74–99; Horst Hutter, *Shaping the Future: Nietzsche's New Regime of the Soul and Its Ascetic Practices* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), 2006, 1–8; Peter S. Groff, “Wisdom and Violence: The Legacy of Platonic Political Philosophy in al-Fārābī and Nietzsche,” in *Comparative Philosophy and Religion in Times of Terror*, ed. Douglas Allen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 65–81; and Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, 36–48.

7. See, e.g., the aforementioned motif of descent (*katabasis*): Socrates “going down” to the Piraeus at the very beginning of the dialogue (*Republic* 327a) and the escaped philosopher-prisoner going back down into the cave-city to share his wisdom after his encounter with the Form of the Good (the “Sun”) in the intelligible realm (516c–517a); cf. the Orphic descent into Hades mentioned in the concluding Myth of Er (618e).

8. Leo Strauss, *The Philosopher and the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 65.

9. One could read the Blessed Isles interlude in a more purely Platonic fashion, as a crucial formative moment in Zarathustra's grand political ambitions. For a pre-Zarathustran rationale of this sort, see *WS* 229, which emphasizes the occasional need for provisional withdrawal, concealment, and burying of one's spiritual capital in times of peril so as to economize and assemble forces for the subsequent regeneration of culture. For a good reading along these lines, see Hutter, *Shaping the Future*, 9–45.

10. In Nietzsche's later texts (1886–88), the Platonic element increasingly dominates while the Epicurean subsides. But *Z*, as the central and pivotal text in Nietzsche's corpus, allows us to see these two inclinations of his thought side by side, as it were, sometimes functioning in a complementary manner, sometimes at odds with one another. For an examination of the affinities and tensions between these two philosophical models—the Epicurean “therapist” and the Platonic “legislator”—see Peter S. Groff, “Great Politics and the Unnoticed Life: Nietzsche and Epicurus on the Boundaries of Cultivation,” in *Nietzsche and Epicurus*, ed. Ryan Johnson and Vinod Acharya (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 172–85.

11. I translate *Übermensch* as “superhuman” rather than “Overhuman,” as Parkes does; see Loeb and Tinsley, “Translators Afterword,” in *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 750–97.

12. Interestingly, in a notebook draft from this same period (Summer 1883), Nietzsche even refers to the Blessed Isles as “the isle of the superhumans [*die Insel des Übermenschen*]” (*KSA* 10:13[1], p. 429), suggesting that the companions and cocreators who have relocated there are the closest thing to Zarathustra's ideal—or perhaps that the Blessed Isles are a school of sorts for the creation of such beings.

13. See *Z* I: “New Idol” and “Flies,” *Z* II: “Night Song” and “Great Events”; see also Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, August 3, 1883 (*KSB* 6:446). On the use of solitude as spiritual practice for philosopher-types, see Peter H. Van Ness, “Nietzsche on Solitude: The Spiritual Discipline of the Godless,” *Philosophy Today* 32.4 (1988): 346–58; Hutter, *Shaping the Future*, 47–74, and Groff, “Cultivating Weeds.”

14. See *Z* I: Prologue, *Z* I: “New Idol,” and “Flies” (both of which take place in the Motley Cow). Conway sees the Blessed Isles as a “facile solution” to Zarathustra's aforementioned pedagogical challenges, describing it as a suspiciously “utopian community ‘discovered’ by Zarathustra, where receptive auditors anxiously await the arrival of a liberating teacher” and the prophet miraculously “need no longer concern himself with modifying his pedagogy to accommodate deficient auditors”

(“Nietzsche *Contra* Nietzsche: The Deconstruction of Zarathustra,” in *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra*, ed. Clayton Koelb [Albany: SUNY Press, 1990], 91–110, 97).

15. See *BGE* 61, 225. Sculpting is of course a key image of philosophical (self-) cultivation in Greek and Hellenistic thought. On Nietzsche’s appropriation of this trope, see Babette Babich, “Nietzsche and the Sculptural Sublime: On Becoming the One You Are,” *The Agonist* 1 (2012), and Paul Bishop, *On the Blissful Islands with Nietzsche and Jung: In the Shadow of the Superman* (London: Routledge, 2017), 79–142.

16. For a rich and sensitive interpretation of Zarathustra’s first speech on the Blessed Isles (Z II: “Upon the Blessed Isles”), which draws upon classical Greek and Neoplatonic philosophy, Patristic theology, mystical and alchemical texts, Goethe, Schiller, and Jung, see again Bishop, *On the Blissful Islands*.

17. The only exceptions to this are Z II: “Grave Song,” where Zarathustra visits the “graves of [his] youth” on an apparently distant island, and Z II: “Great Events,” where Zarathustra visits the nearby island of the fire-hound.

18. This would depend on what place we grant to the Fourth and Final Part of Z. Z I: Prologue 1, the last two-thirds of Z III, and the entirety of Z IV all take place in Zarathustra’s mountain retreat.

19. See Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 83; Conway, “Nietzsche *Contra* Nietzsche,” 97; Rosen, *Mask of Enlightenment*, 139–40; Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 152; Parkes, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 297–98 and “The Symphonic Structure of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: A Preliminary Outline,” in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Before Sunrise*, ed. James Luchte (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 18; and Bishop, *On the Blissful Islands*, 2–4. Oddly, few other commentators have even acknowledged the locale and its potential significance. I translate *glückseligen Inseln* as “Blessed Isles,” rather than “Isles of the Blest/Blessed” as Parkes does (and as *makarōn nēsoi* should be rendered), to highlight Nietzsche’s own departure from the more literal, scholarly rendering of the Greek (*Inseln die Seligen*) generally found in nineteenth-century philological studies and lexica. I leave aside here the question of why Nietzsche opts for this looser, and perhaps more literary, construction given his own philological predilections, but one possible influence may have been Johann Jakob Wilhelm Heinse’s popular novel, *Ardinghello und die glückseligen Inseln* (1787).

20. Homer, *Odyssey* 4.563–68 (which just refers to it as the Elysian Fields); Hesiod, *Works and Days* 166–73; and Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 2.57–83; see also Euripides, *Hippolytus* 748–49; and Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.867–76 and 890–94. For an overview, see Eckart Olshausen, “Makarōn Nēsoi” and Christine Sourvinou Inwood, “Elysium,” in *Brill’s New Pauly Encyclopedia of the Ancient World: Antiquity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006). For a more fine-grained discussion of its historical emergence in Homer and Hesiod, see the seminal study by Nietzsche’s fellow philologist and friend Erwin

Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Ancient Greeks*, trans. W. B. Hillis (London: Kegan Paul, 1925), 55–87. For two useful discussions of key passages from select Greek and Roman writers, see Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 212–22 and Bishop, *On the Blissful Islands*, 2–4.

21. See Herodotus, *Histories* 3.26.1 (oddly, near Thebes in Egypt), Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 6.37 (Canary Islands), Plutarch, *Life of Sertorius* 8.2–5 (the “Atlantic Islands,” probably Madeira and Porto Santo), Strabo, *Geography* 3.2.13, and Flavius Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 5.3 (off the coast of Libya). On this turn, see Paul T. Keyser, “From Myth to Map: The Blessed Isles in the First Century B.C.,” *Ancient World* 24.2 (1993): 149–68.

22. Joseph McAlhany, “Sertorius between Myth and History: The Isles of the Blessed Episode in Sallust, Plutarch and Horace,” *Classical Journal* 112.1 (2016): 57–76.

23. Plato, *Symposium* 179e, 180b; *Republic* 519c, 540b; and *Gorgias* 523b, 524a.

24. Olympiodorus, a sixth-century Neoplatonist, explains the philosophical significance of the Isles most clearly: “The philosophers liken human life to the sea, because it is disturbed and concerned with begetting and salty and full of toil. Note that islands rise above the sea, being higher. So that constitution which rises above life and over becoming is what they call the Isles of the Blessed” (*Commentary on Plato’s Gorgias*, trans. Robin Jackson, Kimon Lycios, and Harold Tarrant [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 302 [cited in Bishop, *On the Blissful Islands*, 4]).

25. Compare Aristotle, *Politics* 1334a.28–34 on leisure and the Blessed Isles. *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. X.7–8 presents the *bios theōrētikos* as the highest and most divine human life.

26. On Epicurus’s Garden and its relation to his philosophical way of life, see Diskin Clay, “The Athenian Garden,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, ed. James Warren (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9–28 and Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 71–82. Moses Hadas does not explicitly mention Epicurus in his definitive discussion of Greek “blessed landscapes and havens,” but he observes that “the pleasure appropriate to Elysium [i.e., the Isles of the Blessed] became the pattern for any delightful garden” (Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture*, 217); cf. Harrison, *Gardens*, 1–13, which examines the Isles of the Blessed, the Garden of the Sun (from *Gilgamesh*), and Eden as ur-gardens. The Epicureans were often likened—both negatively and positively—to Homer’s mythical Phaeacians as well: a tranquil, hedonistic people sequestered away on a distant and virtually inaccessible island (Scheria), and thus rarely impacted by the vicissitudes of the outside world. See Homer, *Odyssey* VI–VIII; on the historic Epicurean-Phaeacian comparison, see Pamela Gordon, *The Invention and Gendering of Epicurus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 38–71; on structural parallels between the land of the Phaeacians and the Isles of the Blessed as remote, isolated utopian communities, see Rohde, *Psyche*, 61, 63, 76.

27. Gordon Campbell, “Epicurus, the Garden and the Golden Age,” in *Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom*, ed. Dan O’Brien (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 220–31; cf. Rohde, who makes precisely the same point about the Isles of the Blessed (Rohde, *Psyche*, 76). This parallel may at first seem odd, given Epicurus’s tireless critique of mytho-religious worldviews and their fear-inducing fictions. But his approach to such phenomena is almost always more reductive than eliminative: he doesn’t simply reject ostensibly supernatural entities but rather tries to “save the phenomena,” as it were, by reinterpreting them naturalistically. Lucretius, for example, denies the existence of Hades but famously allegorizes classical myths of afterlife punishment as projections of the fears and desires that torment us in the here and now (*On the Nature of Things*, III.26). Of course, there is a certain asymmetry here since Epicurus actually *accepts* the existence of the gods. But again, he reinterprets them naturalistically: they become distant, unconcerned, and blessed (*makarion*) beings, no longer conscripted as creators of the universe, governors, or even judges of human actions, but at most exemplars for the optimal life of *ataraxia*. On Epicurus’s revisioning of the gods, see Norman Wentworth DeWitt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 249–88, André Jean Festugière, *Epicurus and His Gods*, trans. C. W. Chilton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), and David Konstan, “Epicurus on the Gods,” in *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition*, ed. Jeffrey Fish and Kirk R. Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 53–71. On the Epicurean gods as exemplars of *ataraxia* and *makariotēs*, see Michael Erler, “Epicurus as Deus Mortalis: *Homoiosis Theoi* and Epicurean Self-Cultivation,” in *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, Its Background and Aftermath*, ed. Dorothea Frede and André Laks (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 159–81.

28. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* III.322. Note that blessedness is a condition traditionally reserved for the gods themselves, so the fact the Epicurean philosophers—and, before them, Plato’s philosopher-rulers and the poets’ heroic dead—share in it suggests their proximity to the divine (one finds this as well in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7–8). On the meaning of *makar* in relation to other words signifying happiness *before* Plato, see Cornelis de Heer, *Makar–Eudaimōn–Olbios–Eutuchēs: A Study of the Semantic Field Denoting Happiness in Ancient Greek to the End of the 5th Century B.C.* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968). “In the *Iliad* the epithet *makar* is used as an adjunct to *theoi*. [. . .] Out of the 18 times it occurs in the *Iliad* it is employed 16 times as an epithet for the gods. [. . .] This contextual association indicates that one component of the sense of the name *makar* is a divine characteristic. [. . .] Thus the *makar*-sense is inseparable from the *theoi*-sense” (4). On Epicurus’s prominent language of blessedness (*makariotēs* and variants), see, e.g., *Letter to Herodotus* 76–81, *Letter to Pythocles* 84 and 97, *Letter to Menoceus* 123, 128–29, 134, *Principal Doctrines* I and XXVII, *Vatican Sayings* 17 and 52, and Fr. 138, 485, and 548 (Usener). Philodemus retains this language (see *On Death*, *On Piety*, and *On the Gods* III), but, oddly, there is no obvious Latin equivalent in Lucretius. Benjamin Farrington argues that *voluptas*, in an expanded yet nuanced

sense that now renders it more divine, is the salient term in *On the Nature of Things*; see B. Farrington, "The Meanings of *Voluptas* in Lucretius," *Hermathena* 80 (1952): 26–31. Cicero's coinages *beatitas* and *beatitudo* in *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.34 (composed ten or so years after Lucretius' death) would codify subsequent Latin translations of *makariotēs*.

29. On Epicurus's uniquely apolitical teaching, see Geert Roskam, "Live Unnoticed" (*Lathe Biōsas*): *On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

30. Bernard Frischer, *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 37–38.

31. In this respect, Conway seems off base when he suggests that "Zarathustra has engineered an afterworldly redemption of his pedagogical struggles" ("Nietzsche *Contra* Nietzsche," 97). As Gooding-Williams points out, this "overlook[s] the fact that the blessed isles of early Greek myth, unlike the Christian afterworld of which Zarathustra is the enemy, may be found *at the ends of the earth*" (*Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, 349 n. 6).

32. This paragraph is indebted to personal exchanges with Bernard Frischer, David Sedley, David Konstan, James Warren, Timothy O'Keefe, Michael Erler, and above all Michael McOsker.

33. For an overview of Nietzsche's take on Epicurus, see James I. Porter, "Epicurus in Nineteenth-Century: Germany Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism*, ed. Philip Mitsis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 761–90.

34. Laurence Lampert, "Who Is Nietzsche's Epicurus?," *International Studies in Philosophy* 24.2 (1992): 99–105; Howard Caygill, "Under the Epicurean Skies," *Angelaki* 11.3 (2006): 107–15; Keith Ansell-Pearson, "True to the Earth: Nietzsche's Epicurean Care of Self and World," in *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching: For Individuals and Cultures*, ed. Horst Hutter and Eli Friedland (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 97–116, and Peter S. Groff, "Out of the Garden: al-Rāzī and Nietzsche as Wayward Epicureans," *Philosophy East and West* 64.4 (2014): 983–1017.

35. Hutter, *Shaping the Future*, 9–45; Michael Ure, *Nietzsche's Therapy: Self-Cultivation in the Middle Works* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 5–6, 26, 55, 69; Ansell-Pearson, "True to the Earth," "Heroic-Idyllic Philosophizing: Nietzsche and the Epicurean Tradition," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 74 (2014): 237–63, and "We Are Experiments': Nietzsche on Morality and Authenticity," in *Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life*, ed. Vanessa Lemm (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 280–302; and Groff, "Great Politics and the Unnoticed Life." On the recuperation of this ancient model of philosophy as way of life or art of living, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

36. Marcin Milkowski, "Idyllic Heroism: Nietzsche's View of Epicurus," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 15 (1998): 70–79 and Ansell-Pearson, "Heroic-Idyllic Philosophizing."

37. Groff, “Great Politics and the Unnoticed Life.”

38. Hutter, *Shaping the Future*, 4–5.

39. One can find intimations of this dream even prior to this time; see, e.g., Letter to Edwin Rohde, December 15, 1870 (*KSB* 3:113), and *EH* “Books: *HH*” 2, where he describes Wagner’s home in Tribschen as “a distant Isle of the Blessed [eine ferne Insel der Glückseligen].” The initial Sorrento period (1876–77), however, seems to have brought it more sharply into focus. Indeed, the Sorrento friendship community (and its various imagined permutations in subsequent periods of his life) came to signify for Nietzsche an escape from the prison of daily duties and politics, convalescence, creative rebirth, philosophical autonomy, a secret, sequestered place for the cultivation of free spirits and higher types and, ultimately, hope for the future.

40. Letter to Reinhart von Seydlitz, September 24, 1876 (*KSB* 5:554). For an excellent discussion of this pivotal period in Nietzsche’s life, see Paolo D’Iorio, *Nietzsche’s Journey to Sorrento: Genesis of the Philosophy of the Free Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 37–43.

41. Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, March 26, 1879 (*KSB* 5:826).

42. See, e.g., Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, August 26, 1883 (*KSB* 6:457), penned soon after the completion of *Z* II and immediately after the publication of *Z* I: “What I envy in Epicurus are the disciples in his Garden, yes, in such circumstances one could certainly forget noble Greece and more certainly still ignoble Germany!” Nietzsche’s Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, December 10, 1885 (*KSB* 7:651), written after the composition of *Z* IV, again approvingly invokes the Garden and, more broadly, Epicurus’s *lathe biosas* strategy. See also Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, August 16, 1883 (*KSB* 6:452), discussed below. Surrounding these Epicurean yearnings one also finds broader gestures toward reconstructing the Sorrento friendship community of 1876–77. Nietzsche entertained a comparable arrangement with Paul Rée and Lou Salomé; see Rée’s Letter to Nietzsche, April 4, 1882, where he references their earlier Sorrento experiment and passes on Salomé’s expressed desire to live in a commune of sorts with them and perhaps Malwida von Meysenbug (*KGB* III:2, 118). The plan evolved a bit in the following months, but of course did not come to fruition; on this, see Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 340–41. Interestingly, when Nietzsche received Rée’s letter he was sojourning in Messina, Sicily, a place he also likened to the Blessed Isles; see Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, April 8, 1882: “So, I have arrived at my ‘corner of the earth’ where, according to Homer, happiness is said to dwell” (*KSB* 6:220). In the aftermath of the disappointing Salomé affair, Nietzsche still dreamed of establishing a cloistered friendship community of sorts; see his Letter to Ferdinand Laban, early March 1884 (penned about a month before the publication of *Z* III): “I dream that in the not-too-distant future I will live somewhere in the south, on the seashore, on an island surrounded by the most trustworthy friends and working-comrades;—and I probably thought you into this silent convent [diesen stillen Convent] too” (*KSB* 6:492).

43. This phrase anticipates Nietzsche's expression "pathos of distance [Pathos der Distanz]," which emerges over two years later, in the post-Zarathustran texts. The first three mentions of this phrase in the notebooks are *KSA* 12:1[7], 1[10], and 2[13], which is a rough draft for *BGE* 257 (as well as several other key sections, including 62 and 203). One might say there is a kind of conceptual resonance between the Epicurean gods, the pathos of distance, the notion of rank-order, and the figure of the noble; see *KSA* 11:35[73]; *BGE* 257, 287; *GM* I:2, *GM* III:14. On this aspect of Nietzsche's thought, see Peter S. Groff, "The Return of the Epicurean Gods," in *Nietzsche's Gods: Critical and Constructive Perspectives*, ed. Russell Re Manning, Carlotta Santini, and Isabelle Wienand (Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming).

44. Compare *Z* III: "Three Evils" 2: "I want to have fences around my thoughts and also even around my words, lest swine and swooners break into my gardens!—" As with the aforementioned Phaeacian comparison (see n. 26), the assimilation of Epicureans to pigs was a common trope in antiquity—used disparagingly by critics and as an in-joke by those in the school; see James Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 129–49.

45. One might even point out that although Nietzsche himself sometimes frets about being mistaken for someone else (*EH* Preface 1), he elsewhere often valorizes Epicurus's willingness "to be confused for others" (*WS* 227, *GS* 45, *BGE* 7, *BGE* 25). The emphasis on treating one's identity "lightly, with godlike levity [leicht, göttlich-leicht]" evokes the pervasive ethos of his middle-period works: *HH*, it may be remembered, was originally titled *Das leichte Leben* or "The Light Life" (*KSA* 8:16[8–9], 18[30], 21[9]), and in his early drafts Nietzsche described his free spirits as "gods who live lightly" (*KSA* 8:17[85]). See D'Iorio, *Nietzsche's Journey to Sorrento*, 16–19.

46. See *Z* II: "Dance Song" for the cupid vignette. As discussed below, in *Z* IV: "Cry of Need," the Soothsayer apparently acknowledges the destruction of the Blessed Isles.

47. Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings*, 58.

48. For a more detailed discussion of Ischia, see D'Iorio, *Nietzsche's Journey to Sorrento*, 79–88.

49. Although the imagery and claims of *Z* II: "Blessed Isles" are sometimes strikingly Epicurean—the talk of "distant seas," the rejection of an all-powerful creator God, the emphasis on the death-bound nature of all natural things—Zarathustra's teaching departs from Epicurus's on a more fundamental level when he insists that becoming goes "all the way down" ontologically (compare *GS* 109 on the atom as a residual "shadow of God") and emphasizes the emancipatory potential of willing and novel creativity, ideas that run counter to Epicurus's naturalism. On other Epicurean themes in *Z*, esp. in *Z* IV: "Midday," see Joseph P. Vincenzo, "Nietzsche and Epicurus," *Man and World* 27 (1994): 383–97.

50. The language of friendship and fellowship is evocative of Epicurus, who generally referred to his students as "friends" (*philoï*) and "fellow philosophers"

(*sumphilosophountes*); see Clay, “Athenian Garden,” 12, 15. Suggestively, just before Zarathustra departs for the Blessed Isles, he says that he is seeking a “soft greensward [sanften Rasen],” that is, a “lawn” or “turf” for his wild wisdom—a remark that evokes both Hesiod’s Isles of the Blessed and Epicurus’s Garden (Z I: “Child With the Mirror”); see also Z III: “Passing By,” where he holds up “verdant islands [grünen Eilanden]” as an attractive alternative to the philosopher’s traditionally reactive, zetetic existence in the sick city (Z III: “Passing By”). And of course, Z II: “Blessed Isles” famously begins with an image of earthly fecundity: it is autumn, the time of the harvest, and figs (Zarathustra’s ripe doctrinal fruits) are falling from the trees—another trope that evokes both the *makarōn nēsoi* and the Garden.

51. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 10.121b.

52. This is ironic since, as Anke Bennholdt-Thomsen points out, Zarathustra’s second descent to the Blessed Isles is effectively prompted by his loneliness and longing for his students: his whole blessedness at that point consists in his ability to speak (*Nietzsches Also Sprach Zarathustra als literarisches Phänomen* [Frankfurt: Athenäum Verlag, 1974], 106).

53. Specifically, the successive encounters with the nihilistic Soothsayer (Z II: “Soothsayer”) and the “cripples and beggars” (Z II: “Redemption”) constitute the turning point of the text, which anticipates the emergence of the eternal return of the same as Zarathustra’s final mature teaching (Z III: “Vision and the Riddle,” “Convalescent,” “Other Dancing-Song,” and “Seven Seals”). On Zarathustra’s inability to command, see Z II: “Stillest Hour.”

54. Lampert differentiates this from the friendship of fellow Epicurean philosophers (*Nietzsche’s Teaching*, 58). And as Zarathustra himself observes, both his friends and enemies dwell there (Z II: “Child and the Mirror”); one wonders whether these are two separate categories or rather two aspects of one group.

55. Along these lines, Zarathustra notes the “little hidden-away communities” full of devotees that he detects everywhere (Z III: “Apostates”). See also KSA 11:25[95], a short notebook entry from spring 1884: “I have presented such terrible images to knowledge that any ‘Epicurean delight [epikureische Vernügen]’ is out of the question. Only Dionysian joy is sufficient: *I have been the first to discover the tragic.*”

56. This critical mosaic anticipates the increasingly unsympathetic view of Epicurus one finds in Nietzsche’s later writings, specifically regarding his atomistic materialism (GS 109, 373; BGE 12; TI “Reason” 5), his hedonism (BGE 225), and his sickness and decadence (BT P:4; GS P:2, 370; GM III:6, 17; TI “Morality” 3; A 30; KSA 11:25[95]). Setting aside the question of whether Nietzsche’s critique of the Epicurean Garden is altogether fair, one might wonder whether it in any case misrepresents the Blessed Isles: as mentioned above, Zarathustra says that his enemies as well as friends dwell there (Z II: “Child with the Mirror”), so he is not without opposition.

57. For a discussion, see Roskam, “*Live Unnoticed*,” 29–66.

58. See, e.g., Leo Strauss, “Restatement on Xenophon’s *Hiero*,” in *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojeve Correspondence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 195.

59. That is, in addition to the passages mentioned above (Z III: “Wanderer,” “Blissfulness,” and “Return Home”).

60. I translate *grünen* here as “verdant,” rather than “grass-green” as Parkes does (154), so as not to obscure its evocation of the Hesiodic *makarōn nēsoi* and Epicurean *kēpos* (and, by extension, Zarathustra’s own *glückseligen Inseln*) as places of vegetal or agricultural abundance.

61. A point arguably anticipated in Z I: “Bestowing Virtue,” where Zarathustra evokes “a thousand hidden islands of life [tausend [. . .] verborgene Eilande des Lebens].”

62. As he finally says to the ape, “Where one can no longer love, there one should—*pass by!*” (Z III: “Passing By”; see also Z I: Prologue 2). This maxim condenses the second aspect of Nietzsche’s “dearest thought,” *amor fati*: “I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation” (GS 276).

63. I include a consideration of the “Fourth and Final Part” of Z despite its having been circulated only privately because, as Kathleen Higgins has rightly argued, it “casts a new and important light on the preceding parts” (*Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987], xvii, 203–32). Indeed, I would go so far as to say that it offers up some of the most powerful and precise articulations of the ideas presented there. It should be noted that the following discussion assumes the traditional chronology, which places the events of Z IV a good time after Zarathustra’s articulation and affirmation of the eternal recurrence at the end of Z III. Paul S. Loeb (who has similarly insisted on the integral importance of Z IV) has argued resourcefully for an alternative chronology in which the events narrated there actually precede the final speeches of Z III; see *The Death of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85–118.

64. Weaver Santaniello, *Zarathustra’s Last Supper: Nietzsche’s Eight Higher Men* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 8, on which, see n. 39 above.

65. D’Iorio, *Nietzsche’s Journey to Sorrento*, 79–88.

66. The Second Part of Z was written during the first two weeks of July 1883; the Ischia earthquake occurred on July 28, 1883, about two weeks after that. Nietzsche discusses the event in letters to Peter Gast dated August 3 and 16, 1883 (KSB 6:446 and 452). The Third Part of Z was composed in January 1884, and the Fourth Part from December 1884 to February 1885. See William H. Schaberg, *The Nietzsche Canon: A Publication History and Bibliography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 94–95, 98, and 101.

67. KSA 10:15[17], 17[54], 20[8], 22[4], and KSA 11:29[23]. KSA 10:22[5] evokes Nietzsche’s own correspondence on the fate of Ischia (“the greatest danger lies behind us—there in that direction, where the Blessed Isles are. We set forth at

just the right time. ‘Or too late,’ said Zarathustra”); cf. *KSA* 10:17[16] for an earlier version.

68. See, e.g., *KSA* 10:17[54] and 11:31[2]. On Nietzsche’s distrust of the “Great Revolution,” see *WS* 211 and *D* 534 (“*Small doses*”), as well as *D* 462 (“*Slow cures*”). For a suggestive comparison of the Blessed Isles and the less hospitable, volcanic island of the “fire hound” (*Z* II: “Great Events”) as representing Ischia and Mount Vesuvius—and, more broadly, the Epicurean strategy of gradual self-transformation vs. political revolution—see D’Iorio, *Nietzsche’s Journey to Sorrento*, 86–88.

69. Indeed, the last mention of the Blessed Isles in the notebooks (*KSA* 11:31[64], a Winter 1884–85 sketch for *Z* IV: “Superior Human” titled “The Rose Speech”) even seems to suggest its continued survival.

70. If the Soothsayer is a kind of Schopenhauer figure, as has often been suggested, then he represents not just pessimism and nihilism, but intellectual conscience and the virtue of honesty (*Ehrlichkeit*, *Redlichkeit*). It should be noted as well that nihilism is ultimately rooted in a world interpretation and evaluation, rather than facts (*SE* 3 [*KSA* I, p. 360]; cf. *GS* 357).

71. Bishop, *On the Blissful Islands*, 173–74.

72. I think an examination of the language of blessedness (*makariotēs*) in the Greek philosophical tradition and its translational history in the Judaic and Christian religious traditions (Hebrew *’ashrē* into Greek *makar*, the Gospels’ *makar* into the Latin Vulgate’s *beati* and the Luther Bible’s *selig*), along with a careful reading of comparable axiological terms in *Z* itself (*selig/Seligkeit*, *glücklich*, *Glück*, etc.) reinforces this interpretation, but I shall not make the argument here.

73. See *KSA* 11:31[2] for a clear explanation of the difference between the superior humans and Zarathustra’s children or “chosen people” (*ausgewählte Volk*).

74. Note the description of the Blessed Isles as Zarathustra’s own “gardens.” See *KSA* 11:31[64] for a rough draft of this speech.

75. *Z* IV: “Cry of Need” suggests not; *Z* IV: “Superior Human” *possibly* suggests so, but not decisively (compare, however, the unpublished rough draft in *KSA* 11:31[64]).

76. Despite the mention of the Blessed Isles in *Z* IV: “Cry of Need,” Zarathustra’s children are not mentioned again after *Z* III: “Blissfulness” until *Z* IV: “Welcome” and then one final time in the last speech (*Z* IV: “Sign”). However, if the traditional chronology of *Z* is wrong, as Loeb has argued, this ceases to be a problem (Loeb, *Death of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, 98–101).

77. On this possibility, see Pippin, “Irony and Affirmation,” 64, and Conway, “Solving the Problem of Socrates,” 274–76, both of whom point out that Zarathustra’s proclamation here is a function of hope rather than actual knowledge.

78. One might object that Zarathustra’s great politics don’t actually require one last descent, that the transmission of his new teachings (the death of God, the self-overcoming of the human and cultivation of the superhuman, the affirmation of the earth, the primacy of the body, the ubiquity of the will to power, the innocence of becoming, etc.) has already been accomplished, e.g., through his initial

descent into the marketplace, or in the Motley Cow, or on the Blessed Isles. But these communications are all marred by either misunderstanding on the part of Zarathustra's audience or the admitted incompleteness of his own teaching. Either way, Zarathustra walks away dissatisfied, and that hardly seems like a successful transmission. The great synthetic speech of Z III: "Old and New Tablets" might be the best candidate for the realization of Zarathustra's great politics, but that is apparently delivered in solitude (whether to imagined "brothers" or in preparation for a still-imagined final descent), and in any case before his full reckoning with the abysmal thought of the eternal recurrence. Nor can it be Zarathustra's final affirmation of the eternal recurrence in the concluding speeches of Z III, since they are addressed to no one but himself and Life.

79. See, e.g., the subordination of *Glück* to *Werk* that bookends the Fourth and Final Part of the book: "What does happiness matter!" Zarathustra says, "I am striving after my work" (Z IV: "Honey Sacrifice," "Sign").