An Untimely Co-Arising: Friedrich Nietzsche, the Presocratic Greeks, and Taoist Thought

Abstract
For most of the century following his death in 1900, the three things most people knew about Friedrich Nietzsche were false: that he “killed God”; that his work was a blueprint for Nazi ideology; and that he died a madman of peretic syphilis. These distortions originated with the ignorant, were embraced by the vindictive, and then persistently reiterated by the misled, including some of Nietzsche’s most prestigious admirers.

At the heart of everything Nietzsche has written is a profound awareness of the inseparability of all apparent contradictions and the rejection of dualistic split thinking, whether it is the Platonic ideal, Kant's subject/object dichotomy, or any other of the absolutes put forward by philosophers since the beginning of Western philosophy in Presocratic Greece. When Nietzsche writes that he prefers to be misunderstood, it is because he understands the fluidity of language and meaning, the multiplicity of perspectives, and the inescapable subjectivity of human thought.

This thesis views the often enigmatic nature of Nietzsche’s words and ideas through the twin lenses of Taoist philosophical thought and the systems of the Presocratic physikoi. I do not claim that Nietzsche thought himself a Taoist. My methodology, described in some detail in Chapter I, is a blend of scholarly research and creative intuition, a formula that enables me to understand my subjects on their terms. One way to explain the congruency of ideas between Nietzsche, the Presocratic Greeks, and Eastern philosophy is to ask whether there was a migration of ideas from China to ancient Greece and from there into the mind of Nietzsche. But another way of viewing such a congruency is to ask whether these are ideas that arise naturally when, in any time and in any space, we look beyond the limitations of dualistic thinking: hence the “untimely co-arising” in the title of this work.

These are times when we are uncertain about nearly everything, when we are as quick to condemn a “lie” as we are reluctant to accept the “truth.” “Why not untruth instead?” Nietzsche asks in Beyond Good and Evil.

When we begin with uncertainty, we are in reality.

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A number of early Greek philosophers active before and during the time of Socrates are collectively known as the pre-Socratics. Their inquiries spanned the workings of the natural world as well as human society, ethics, and religion, seeking explanations based on natural principles rather than the actions of supernatural gods. They introduced to the West the notion of the world as a kosmos, an ordered arrangement that could be understood via rational inquiry. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (15 October 1844 – 25 August 1900) was a German philosopher, whose critiques of contemporary culture, religion, and philosophy centered on a basic question regarding the foundation of values and morality. See also: Human, All Too Human (1878 - 1880). The Dawn (1881). Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883 - 1885). Beyond Good and Evil (1886). Twilight of the Idols (1888). Ecce Homo (1888). The Antichrist (1895). “Overman” refers to Nietzsche’s conception of a man who has literally overcome himself and human nature. In essence, an Overman is one who has superseded the bondage of the human condition and reached a liberated state — one of free play and creativity. This state can be seen as the state of the pure individual, a person unencumbered by the influences and authorities of society and other people. This person wills their own destiny, creates their own values, and dances with the game of life to the tune of their own spirit. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche writes of three spiritual metamorph