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A Christian Response to the Impact of Nietzschean Philosophy on Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*

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Abstract

This article explores the way Friedrich Nietzsche's worldview influenced the compositions of Richard Strauss, specifically Strauss's most famous work—a tone poem called *Also sprach Zarathustra*. This tone poem is a fascinating piece of music because it reflects Strauss's philosophical inquiries into the nature and meaning of life. Although Strauss left relatively limited explanations of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, his few words regarding the tone poem reveal his intention to convey in music an idea of man's evolution from his original state up to Nietzsche's idea of a superman. First, this article surveys the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche as it is displayed in his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Secondly, this article explains the way Nietzsche's worldview and writings influenced Richard Strauss's personal life and consequent compositions. As Strauss stated explicitly, he did not intend to put Nietzsche's book to music, yet the tone poem still bears the marks of a philosophical journey investigating the nature and purpose of human life. Finally, this article suggests a thoughtful Christian response to music which reflects an anti-God worldview.

Keywords

Friedrich Nietzsche, philosophy, worldview, nihilism, Christianity, Übermensch, Superman, Richard Strauss, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, purpose, meaning, religion, humanity, anthropology, music

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A Christian Response to the Impact of Nietzschean Philosophy on Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*

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Science fiction. Space and time. Showdown between man and machine. Connection between past and future. When the opening notes of Richard Strauss's famous tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* pierce the air, Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* likely comes to mind. However, have you ever stopped to consider the man behind the music? Do you wonder what kind of mental capacity, creativity, and even angst might be at the core of such a powerful, iconic masterpiece? This article aims to show how Strauss's embrace of an anti-metaphysical worldview impacted his life and compositions. Because of its distinctly philosophical themes, *Also sprach Zarathustra* provides an insightful example.

In 1896, Richard Strauss composed his tone poem called *Also sprach Zarathustra*. A tone poem is a one-movement musical piece intended to portray an extramusical idea. This concert work received widespread acceptance as well as criticism, as did Strauss himself. *Also sprach Zarathustra* is a fascinating piece of music because it reflects the composer's philosophical journey through deep questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life. Strauss was greatly influenced by the works of several philosophers, especially Friedrich Nietzsche. Although Strauss left relatively little explanation of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, his few words regarding the tone poem reveal his aim to depict in music an idea of man's evolution from his original state, "through the various phases of development, religious as well as scientific," up to Nietzsche's idea of a superman.¹ This idea was largely

¹ Michael Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 112.

inspired by Nietzsche.² Named after Nietzsche's book, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen), the tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* contains Nietzschean subtitles, although these were added after the tone poem was already composed. As Strauss stated explicitly, he did not intend to put Nietzsche's book to music.³ *Also sprach Zarathustra* both reflects the impact of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* on Strauss's philosophical inquiries and begs a thoughtful Christian response.

Richard Strauss's Life and Philosophy

Richard Strauss composed his music in Germany during the late Romantic and early Modern era. Born into a musical family in 1864, Strauss composed his first work ('Schneider' Polka for Piano) in 1870 at the age of six.⁴ By his ninth birthday, young Strauss had completed no less than thirty-five compositions in every major genre of his day: symphonies, symphonic poems, operas, songs, piano solos, and choral and chamber works.⁵ His most famous works include three operas (*Salome*, *Arabella*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*), and four tone poems (*Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Juan*, *Tod und Verklärung*, and *Till Eulenspiegel*). Many of Strauss's compositions can be read as a history of his struggle with specific intellectual-philosophical concerns.

Although Richard Strauss attended a Cathedral School as a child, he later became a confirmed atheist.⁶ According to Strauss, Christianity only had the capacity to be uplifting for a certain time.⁷ Germany would gain renewed strength by being released from the weak-minded thinking of Christianity.⁸ Strauss thought that Christian faith resulted in child-like religious feelings and that maturity meant rejecting Christianity in favor of independent thinking.⁹ Throughout his lifetime, Strauss wrestled with deep philosophical and existential questions. He steeped himself in the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer, a nineteenth-century philosopher who

² Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 112.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Raymond Holden, *Richard Strauss; A Musical Life* (Cornwall: TJ International Ltd, 2011), 8.

⁵ David Hurwitz, *Richard Strauss: An Owner's Manual* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Amadeus Press, 2014), Preface.

⁶ Holden, *Richard Strauss; A Musical Life*, 8.

⁷ Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 175.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

argued that human action is ultimately directionless, driven by the dissatisfied, metaphysical will. After his deep study of Schopenhauerian philosophy, Strauss described a person (probably himself) who had mastered the details of Schopenhauer but had not yet come to understand that perpetual suffering is necessary to all life.¹⁰

Even as he formed his own worldview, Strauss critiqued Arthur Schopenhauer extensively. Strauss disagreed with Schopenhauer's philosophy that life was primarily driven by the metaphysical "Will" and found himself agreeing with an anti-metaphysical worldview. An anti-metaphysical worldview holds that "perspectives are positions from which meaning is imposed" (essentially, there is no objective truth, only subjective opinion), and "the imposition of meaning is a function of the will to power."¹¹ This critical view of Schopenhauer was largely influenced by Strauss's interest in Nietzschean philosophy.

In addition to his study of Schopenhauer, Strauss explored Nietzsche's writings. Nietzsche's book, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (Human, All Too Human), "addressed the very doubts that were afflicting Strauss and provided answers that the composer had been laboring to devise for himself."¹² Strauss was concerned with self-justification of the individual, and this corresponded with Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity, of which Strauss approved.¹³ Like Strauss, Nietzsche also subscribed to an anti-metaphysical worldview.

Yet, Strauss was still plagued by doubts about his developing anti-metaphysical aesthetic.¹⁴ Both the tonal structure and handling of themes in *Also sprach Zarathustra* depict Strauss working through existential anxieties to completely embrace an anti-metaphysical worldview.¹⁵ In his 1998 research on Strauss and *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Charles Youmans commented, "That Strauss found in *Zarathustra*'s new self-awareness an analogue of his own struggles with metaphysical longing

¹⁰ Charles Youmans, *Richard Strauss's Orchestral Music and the German Intellectual Tradition* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005), 81.

¹¹ Victor Wolfenstein, *Inside/Outside Nietzsche: Psychoanalytic Explorations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 69.

¹² Charles Youmans, "The Private Intellectual Content of *Also sprach Zarathustra*," *19th-Century Music* 22, no. 2 (1998): 111, doi:[10.2307/746853](https://doi.org/10.2307/746853).

¹³ Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 111.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁵ Youmans, *Richard Strauss's Orchestral Music*, 194.

is suggested not only by the substance of his private philosophical inquiries, but also by his choice of the subtitles situated throughout the poem."¹⁶ Strauss used his music as a means of expressing some elements of his philosophical dilemma: pure physicality, human doubt, and an imagined state of reconciliation. Although the symphonic poem does not resemble the philosophical text itself, it exposes a "Nietzschean paradox"—Zarathustra's rebellion, as a man, against his own human characteristics.¹⁷

Notably, significant controversy exists over whether Strauss meant to write music 'about' Nietzsche and his ideas or 'about' himself, using Nietzsche's book as a sort of peg on which to hang musical ideas formulated by a reading of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.¹⁸ Ever since Richard Wagner, no composer has been more extensively associated with Nietzsche than Richard Strauss.¹⁹ Theodor Adorno (who was profoundly influenced by Nietzsche himself) called Nietzsche Strauss's "mentor."²⁰ These associations are certainly not unfounded; however, they are not as strong as they seem. According to Michael Kennedy in his study of Strauss, "There is no reason to believe that Strauss subscribed to an [*Übermensch*] philosophy. The poetic visions of the poem, he said in a 1946 letter to Martin Hurlimann, afforded him 'much aesthetic enjoyment.'"²¹ Interestingly, none of Strauss's letters, compositions, or programs presented a complete system of thought reliant on Nietzschean philosophy.²² Instead, Nietzsche's writings influenced Strauss's personal worldview enough to inspire him to write a tone poem depicting his subjective thoughts and observations. An early critic of Strauss's work argued that *Zarathustra* embodied "the development of the higher man into the *Übermensch*," or "the composer's subjective observations and thoughts concerning Nietzsche and his work."²³

Strauss's own words regarding the composition and his subsequent reactions to its performance provide the few existing hints regarding

¹⁶ Youmans, "The Private Intellectual Content," 113.

¹⁷ Youmans, *Richard Strauss's Orchestral Music*, 195.

¹⁸ Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 111.

¹⁹ Youmans, *Richard Strauss's Orchestral Music*, 83.

²⁰ Theodor Adorno, "Richard Strauss. Born June 11, 1864," trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber, *Perspectives of New Music* 4 (1965): 22.

²¹ Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 112.

²² Youmans, *Richard Strauss's Orchestral Music*, 83.

²³ *Ibid.*, 194.

Nietzschean influence. At *Also sprach Zarathustra*'s Berlin premiere on November 30, 1896, Strauss wrote:

I did not intend to write philosophical music or to portray Nietzsche's great work musically. I meant rather to convey in music an idea of the evolution of the human race from its origin, through the various phases of development, religious, as well as scientific, up to Nietzsche's idea of the *Superman*. The whole symphonic poem is intended as my homage to the genius of Nietzsche which found its greatest exemplification in his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.²⁴

Strauss's depiction of nature and human creativity in *Also sprach Zarathustra* is essentially Nietzschean. Regarding the tone poem, Strauss called it "glorious—by far the most important of all my pieces, the most perfect in form, the richest in content and the most individual in color. . .the climaxes are immense and. . .faultlessly scored."²⁵ *Also sprach Zarathustra* is not an attempt to set Nietzsche to music, nor is it an effort to express a system of philosophy through sound. Rather, it is the musical portrayal of a quest—a longing to solve the problems of life, finding at the end of a varied pilgrimage that which he had left at the beginning: nature—deep and inscrutable.²⁶ The nine sections and their subtitles show a man seeking purpose and meaning in religion, science, passion, beauty, and nature, only to remain in the end a "Night Wanderer;" unsatisfied, and still longing for something more. Man discovers that there is nothing meaningful in life but the eternal recurrence of nature—life is a mysterious, endless cycle. The depiction of this philosophy naturally stems from Strauss's beliefs in moral justification by the method of one's own work, liberation through labor, and worship of the glorious eternal nature.²⁷

Overview of Nietzsche and *Zarathustra*

Born in 1844, Friedrich Nietzsche was the firstborn son of a Lutheran pastor. Nietzsche was a nineteenth-century philosopher known for his

²⁴ Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 112.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁶ Gustav Kobbé, "Richard Strauss and His Music," *The North American Review* 174, no. 547 (June 1902): 790, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25119259>.

²⁷ Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 175.

writings on religion, morality, philosophy, science, and culture. He proposed controversial ideas such as the “death” of God, the *Übermensch*, the eternal recurrence, and the will to power. These famous ideas garnered him worldwide criticism, as well as acclaim. Many political leaders of the twentieth century were relatively familiar with Nietzsche’s works, yet reactions to and incorporations of Nietzsche’s philosophies were varied and selective.

During his lifetime, Nietzsche suffered numerous personal difficulties, including the death of his father and brother, serious health issues, and relationship rejection. After one of these difficulties, the despair of rejection from Lou, a girl he had long admired from a distance, Nietzsche wrote his famous *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. “In the wake of ten absolutely bright and bracing January days, *Zarathustra* was born, the most emancipated of my offspring.”²⁸ Nietzsche wrote *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in four parts between 1883 and 1885. Sadly, Nietzsche wrote *Thus Spake Zarathustra* from a condition of self-doubt, disturbance, and obsession over failed relationships.

The questions raised in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* regard suffering and the nature of human life, as Nietzsche struggled through those questions himself. Additionally, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is both an attack on and mockery of the Christian faith.²⁹ Although Nietzsche was the son of a pastor and was raised in a Christian home, he rejected Christianity. To Nietzsche, religion (specifically Christianity) was a crutch for those who lacked the strength of will to fight and accept their hopeless fate. In a June 1883 letter to Carl von Gersdorff, Nietzsche said, “Don’t be put off by the mythic style of the book: my entire philosophy is behind those homey and unusual words, and I have never been more serious. It is a beginning at self-disclosure—nothing more! I know perfectly well that there’s no one alive who could write anything like *Zarathustra*.”³⁰ According to Nietzsche, Christianity was a “religion of low self-esteem which sank mankind all the way down into the deep sludge in which it already found itself.”³¹ Essentially, Nietzsche thought that Christianity

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, ed. and trans. Peter Fuss and Henry Shapiro (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), 71.

²⁹ Kathleen Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 12.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 74.

³¹ Rudiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2002), 192.

gave man a false sense of absolute value, attributed meaning to suffering and evil in order to justify it, and made people regard the world as valuable.³² Nietzsche's nihilistic worldview declared that both humankind and the world held no value and that suffering and evil were unjustifiable. In Nietzsche's mind, Christianity wrongly protected the underprivileged world from nihilism and gave false hope to those who might otherwise have despaired.³³ Therefore, Christianity was incompatible with the kind of nihilism posited by Nietzsche.

Immediately following the publication of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in 1891, Nietzsche wrote, "I've lost interest in everything. . . I no longer see why I should live for even half a year more. I feel so inexpressibly conscious of having botched my whole creative life. It's all hopeless. Why do anything anymore!" Nietzsche then proceeded to refer to *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as his "latest folly."³⁴ Nietzsche himself wrote, "When I have looked into my *Zarathustra*, I walk up and down in my room for half an hour, unable to master an unbearable fit of sobbing."³⁵ Nevertheless, Nietzsche considered *Thus Spake Zarathustra* to be his most noteworthy writing in the end. Since Nietzsche called the book his "self-disclosure," it is reasonable to consider Nietzsche's embrace of nihilism as an explanation for his inconsistent attitude toward the work—first loving, then hating, and finally valuing *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.³⁶ According to Nietzsche, a philosopher presents a kind of personal confession and an involuntary and unconscious memoir through his writings.³⁷ Nietzsche thought that philosophy itself is the medium by which the philosopher communicates who he is. In philosophical writing, the specific ideas and thoughts of the philosopher are communicated by a transient person, not a system of thought.³⁸

Thus Spake Zarathustra begins with the prophet Zarathustra coming down from a mountain after ten years of solitude in a cave. Zarathustra wishes to share his wisdom regarding the *Übermensch* (superman) with humanity. Zarathustra, the *Übermensch*, is a human who has

³² Rudiger Safranski, *Nietzsche; A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2002), 296.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Nietzsche, *A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 73.

³⁵ Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, ix.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 74.

³⁷ Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

successfully freed himself from all the prejudices and moralities of human society, who creates his own values and purpose, and who exercises the will to power to accept his fate of the eternal recurrence. Zarathustra discovered that all events will repeat themselves over and over throughout eternity (this is Nietzsche's definition of the eternal recurrence). Exercising the psychological will to power over his inevitable fears, doubts, and preconceptions, Zarathustra accepted the eternal recurrence and arrived at the state of being an *Übermensch*. Zarathustra believes he has discovered that God is dead and that the *Übermensch* is the only purpose and highest reality attainable in life. Mankind is merely a bridge between animals and the *Übermensch*; therefore, mankind must be overcome. When the multitudes fail to heed Zarathustra's ideas, Zarathustra resolves to speak to the individuals who wish to separate from the herd.

Thus Spake Zarathustra conveys the general themes of Nietzsche's mature philosophy in symbolic form. These themes include the value of struggle and hardship, the criticism of all mass movements (especially Christianity), and the will to power. Nietzsche asserted that the will to power is essentially self-transcendence, or the decision to rise above oneself, and that there is no endeavor that could or should be attempted without the will to accomplish that endeavor.³⁹ According to Zarathustra, Christianity attempts to deny both body and earth by believing in the spirit and an afterlife. Nietzsche thought that those who are not strong enough to face the nihilistic struggle turn to religion, nationalism, democracy, or some other means of escape from embracing their destiny. This destiny is found in the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Only the *Übermensch* can embrace this doctrine since he has the strength of will to take responsibility for his life.

Analysis of *Also sprach Zarathustra*

Amid his philosophic wrestling with concepts of self-transcendence, the will to power, and self-justification, Strauss composed *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Having read Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Strauss was undoubtedly impacted by the nihilistic philosophies presented. Strauss's first idea of *Also sprach Zarathustra* is recorded in his diary on July 9, 1895. Strauss wrote "Thought about a new tone poem:

³⁹ Safranski, *Nietzsche; A Philosophical Biography*, 281.

contemplation, worship, experience, doubting, recognition, despair.”⁴⁰ Beginning the tone poem on December 7, 1895, Strauss completed the full score on August 24, 1896. He scored *Also sprach Zarathustra* for his largest orchestra to date, with distinct color, divided strings, unmatched virtuosity, and the character of a concerto for orchestra.

Strauss utilized the dramatic juxtaposition of the tonalities of C major and B minor to represent nature against man.⁴¹ Throughout each of the tone poem’s nine sections, the harmony is complex and avant-garde, containing unresolved dissonance which destabilizes the composition. Superimposed against each other, the keys of C major and B minor both organize and undermine the tonal structure of the work. As Strauss commented to Dr. Anton Berger in Frankfurt in 1927, “I only wanted to show that it is impossible to bring B minor and C major together. The entire piece demonstrates all possible attempts, but it does not work.”⁴²

In the Nature-motif, the dramatic juxtaposition of the tonalities is clearly seen. The Nature-motif is a three-note sequence (C-G-C) in the intervals of a fifth and octave. This Nature-motif (also known as the “world riddle theme”) is repeated in the key of B minor using the three-notes B-F#-B and juxtaposed against the Nature-motif in C major. At the end of the tone poem, the Nature-motif is played in soft pizzicato by the basses in the original key of C major, while the woodwinds play the Nature-motif in the key of B minor. This may depict Strauss’s idea of the unsolvable riddle of the universe. The unresolved harmonic progression at the end suggests the eternal recurrence—unfinished for eternity.

The content of *Also sprach Zarathustra* explores abstract metaphysical ideas. As Strauss told his friend Romain Rolland, he wanted to express “the hero’s inability to satisfy himself, either with religion or science or humor, when confronted with the enigma of nature.”⁴³ While there is no distinct “hero theme,” the entire piece follows man’s gradual process into a state of self-transcendence through the will to power. Each of the nine sections of *Also sprach Zarathustra* possess Nietzschean subtitles which allude to these abstract ideas. According to Charles Youmans, “So far as we can ascertain, the Nietzschean subtitles were applied to a work

⁴⁰ Willi Schuh, *Richard Strauss: A Chronicle of the Early Years 1864-1898*, trans. Mary Whittall (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 408.

⁴¹ Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 113.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 113.

already highly developed, although not quite a finished product. That does not mean that Strauss added them for the sake of a superficial Nietzschean appeal.”⁴⁴

Although Nietzsche's writings brought him global renown after his death, Nietzsche was not a symbol of popularity in his day, nor was he well known. “Thus, the relevance of Strauss's ‘thoughts’ to the philosophical dilemma that entangled him, and to the solution that he hoped to find in Nietzsche, is if anything more direct than that of the subtitles themselves.”⁴⁵ From the few words by Strauss regarding *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the most coherent message of *Also sprach Zarathustra* is the idea of man exercising the will to power to accept the doctrine of the eternal recurrence.⁴⁶ This message is not explicitly found in the music, but is implied by the section subtitles, the juxtaposed tonalities of B minor and C major, and the unresolved tonality at the end of the piece suggesting eternity.

Strauss's program notes for *Also sprach Zarathustra's* Frankfurt premiere reveal an important piece of evidence as to his intentions regarding the meaning of the tone poem. The opening fanfare of the first movement depicts a sunrise in which man feels the power of Nature, yet still longs for something more.⁴⁷ “Einleitung, oder Sonnenaufgang” (Introduction, or Sunrise), the introduction, represents the creation of the age of the *Übermensch*.⁴⁸ The introduction begins with a sustained low C from the upright basses, organ, and contrabassoon. With an initial glow and then a burst of light, the brass instruments introduce the “dawn” or Nature-motif.

The second section, “Von den Hinterweltlern” (Of the Forest Dwellers), represents a declaration of faith as the brass quote the Gregorian chant *Credo in unum Deum*. While Strauss did not explain the quotation of this chant, it may serve as a reference to Strauss's trial and ultimate rejection of religion. The listener is left to suppose that this section depicts man's pursuit of another avenue for purpose, only to be disappointed and

⁴⁴ Youmans, “The Private Intellectual Content,” 113.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Richard Strauss; Man, Musician, Enigma*, 112.

⁴⁷ Richard Strauss and Romain Rolland, *Correspondence Diary and Essays*, ed. and annotated by Rollo Myers (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 186.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

unfulfilled in the end. The cellos, basses, and organ provide a pedal tone before morphing into a heartrending theme in which the strings carry the melodic line. The third section is titled “Von der großen Sehnsucht,” (Of the Great Longing), and the fourth is titled “Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften” (Of the Joys and Passions). Both the third and fourth sections contain more chromatic motifs. The fifth section, “Das Grablied,” is translated “The Grave-Song.” The second, third, fourth, and fifth sections represent man’s desperate pursuit of purpose, yet without finding peace.⁴⁹

The sixth section, “Von der Wissenschaft” (Of Science), presents an unusual fugue beginning in the low strings. The fugue subject consists of all twelve notes of the chromatic scale and represents scientism and positivism. Possibly, the fugue depicts man’s futile attempts to solve the problems of life.⁵⁰ The seventh section completes the tension of the previous movement and acts as a reprise of the original three-note motif. This movement, “Der Genesende” (The Convalescent), ends with a magnificent orchestral climax. As Strauss wrote in the program notes, “The agreeable dance tunes sound and he [man] becomes an individual. His soul soars upward while the world sinks far below him.”⁵¹ In the eighth section, “Das Tanzlied” (The Dance Song), the solo violin presents a waltz in the grand Viennese style, accompanied by the orchestra. The final section is titled “Nachtwandlerlied” (Song of the Night Wanderer). In this final section, Strauss used the first title of the parallel chapter in Nietzsche’s book. This section also references Nietzsche’s statement in his opening paragraph to *Zarathustra*: “For too long, we have dreamt music, now let us awake. We were nightwalkers. Let us now be daywalkers.”⁵² The musical material of the finale begins with the tolling of the bell. Closing with a lyrical final section, *Also sprach Zarathustra* ends with the same eerie juxtaposition of the two tonalities: B minor and C major.

⁴⁹ Strauss and Rolland, *Correspondence Diary and Essays*, 186.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Philip Hale, *Philip Hale's Boston Symphony Programme Notes*, ed. by John N. Burk (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, & Company, 1935), 316.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/56208/56208-h/56208-h.htm>.

⁵² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra; A Book for All and None*, trans. by Alexander Tille (New York: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1896), 5.

Evaluation of *Also sprach Zarathustra* Through a Judeo-Christian Lens

Evidently, the study of Richard Strauss and of *Also sprach Zarathustra* raises philosophical and moral considerations from a Judeo-Christian perspective. Broadly speaking, how does the nihilistic music of *Also sprach Zarathustra* affect the musical world? Nihilistic music or music that portrays a naturalistic worldview offers a standing challenge to anyone who holds a contrary worldview to come and present an alternative interpretive framework. Atheism is a reaction to Christianity, especially for Strauss and Nietzsche. As the research has demonstrated, the underlying philosophy behind the works of Nietzsche and Strauss comprises both a rejection of and reaction to Judeo-Christianity. What response is demanded by such explicitly atheistic compositions? Since it is none other than the Judeo-Christian tradition in which these philosophies are couched, the Judeo-Christian standard (the Bible) should interpret and evaluate the philosophies presented.

Depending on how the doctrine of eternal recurrence is interpreted, its general idea (as presented in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*) is “the expression of a general attitude toward life, an attitude that contrasts with the past-obsessed perspective that Nietzsche believes goes hand-in-hand with the Christian moral worldview.”⁵³ Instead of evaluating human actions by any sort of conceptual apparatus (e.g. the Judeo-Christian doctrine of sin), eternal recurrence provides a subjective and intuitive basis for the understanding of human behavior. The anti-metaphysical doctrine of eternal recurrence has a present-centered temporal orientation, while Judeo-Christianity is based on a previously established standard (the Bible). Nietzsche’s self-confessed main idea in *Zarathustra*—the doctrine of eternal recurrence—advances his argument against Judeo-Christianity as an anti-tragic worldview.⁵⁴ Viewing the doctrine of sin as the essence of Christianity, Nietzsche asserts eternal recurrence as the tragic alternative.⁵⁵ To Nietzsche, an anti-tragic worldview such as Christianity ensures a sense of personal inadequacy (because of sin) and develops a vindictive spirit in its adherents.⁵⁶

⁵³ Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 160.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

Both nihilism and Judeo-Christianity are worldviews which must be accepted on the basis of faith. While the central, “tragic” message of *Zarathustra* is that meaning in life is to be found in simply loving life for its own sake, Christianity offers a hope that is not placed in the world or the self-transcendence of the individual. Those who subscribe to naturalism, atheism, nihilism, or an *Übermensch* have only introspection and self-promotion in which to find solace. According to the Bible, there is no *Übermensch*. In the beginning, God. At the end, God. Through a Judeo-Christian lens, there is no life, no truth, no hope apart from the revealed Word, who is God Himself.⁵⁷ The message of Christianity proclaims not a superman or an *Übermensch*, but the God-man; the last Adam; the second man; the creator-God; the Lord of heaven and earth.

The Christian gospel is the anti-testimony to the message of *Also sprach Zarathustra*. According to the Judeo-Christian standard of truth, the Bible, life is not a meaningless, eternal recurrence.⁵⁸ The Bible teaches that heaven and earth will pass away and that life on earth is transient.⁵⁹ Man only has one short life to live and afterwards must face the God who created him.⁶⁰ There is eternity: either eternal life and union with God or eternal punishment in hell.⁶¹ Self-transcendence is impossible, because humanity can never reach for anything above their corrupted state apart from Jesus Christ.⁶² As God incarnate, Jesus walked on earth, lived a sinless life, died on a cross bearing the sins of the entire world, and rose from the dead so that all those who believe in Him might have eternal life with God. Although Strauss certainly did not mean to portray this message, his tone poem shows the natural longing that all humans have for a faultless man. Likewise, Nietzsche unintentionally presented a philosophy that depicts a longing for perfect humanity. That perfect God-man has only ever existed in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has fulfilled all righteousness. Jesus is the “Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.”⁶³

⁵⁷ John 14:6, John 1:1, (New American Standard Bible).

⁵⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:11, Revelation 22:13, Isaiah 46:10, Psalm 102:26-27.

⁵⁹ Matthew 24:35.

⁶⁰ John 5:24, Hebrews 9:27, Revelation 20:11-15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² John 14:6.

⁶³ John 1:1.

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