

the last moments of his life – perhaps he would then belong to a still higher order of minds. Whether it was death or the poison or piety or malice – something loosened his tongue and he said: ‘O Crito, I owe Asclepius a rooster.’ This ridiculous and terrible ‘last word’ means for those who have ears: ‘O Crito, *life is a disease*.’<sup>31</sup> Is it possible that a man like him, who had lived cheerfully and like a soldier in plain view of everyone, was a pessimist? He had merely kept a cheerful demeanour while all his life hiding his ultimate judgement, his inmost feeling! Socrates, Socrates *suffered from life*! And then he still avenged himself – with this veiled, gruesome, pious, and blasphemous saying. Did a Socrates really need *revenge*? Was there one ounce too little magnanimity in his overabundant virtue? – O friends! We must overcome even the Greeks!

341

*The heaviest weight.* – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this again and innumerable times again?’ would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have

<sup>31</sup> See Plato, *Phaedo* 116–18, esp. 118a.5–8. Asclepius was the god of healing and a rooster would have been a usual thank-offering to him from someone whom he had cured of an illness. Nietzsche’s interpretation of what Socrates said was not standard in the ancient world, and became common only in the Renaissance. It is rejected by some modern scholars.

to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

342

*Incipit tragoedia.*<sup>32</sup> – When Zarathustra<sup>33</sup> was thirty years old, he left his homeland and Lake Urmi and went into the mountains. There he enjoyed his spirit and solitude, and did not tire of that for ten years. But at last his heart changed – and one morning he arose with rosy dawn, stepped before the sun, and spoke to it thus: ‘You great heavenly body! What would your happiness be if you did not have those for whom you shine! For ten years you have climbed up to my cave; without me, my eagle, and my snake, you would have become tired of your light and of this road; but we awaited you every morning, relieved you of your overabundance, and blessed you for it. Behold, I am sick of my wisdom, like a bee that has collected too much honey; I need outstretched hands; I would like to give away and distribute until the wise among humans once again enjoy their folly and the poor once again their riches. For that I must step into the depths, as you do in the evening when you go behind the sea and bring light even to the underworld, you over-rich heavenly body! Like you I must *go under*, as it is called by the human beings to whom I want to descend. So bless me then, you calm eye that can look without envy upon all-too-great happiness! Bless the cup that wants to overflow in order that the water may flow golden from it and everywhere carry the reflection of your bliss! Behold, this cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become human again.’ Thus began Zarathustra’s going under.

<sup>32</sup> ‘The tragedy begins’. At this point, on completing Book iv, Nietzsche went on to write *Also Sprach Zarathustra (Thus Spoke Zarathustra)*, the most prophetic in style among his philosophical works, in 1883–5. He added Book v to *The Gay Science* in 1887.

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche takes the name from that of the Persian religious thinker of the seventh/sixth century BC who propagated a strongly dualistic doctrine, sharply distinguishing between good and evil.