

Cambridge University Press

0521602610 - Friedrich Nietzsche: Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin

Excerpt

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Thus Spoke Zarathustra  
A Book for All and None  
First Part

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## Zarathustra's Prologue

## I

When Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains. Here he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude and for ten years he did not tire of it. But at last his heart transformed, – one morning he arose with the dawn, stepped before the sun and spoke thus to it:

“You great star! What would your happiness be if you had not those for whom you shine?

For ten years you have come up here to my cave: you would have tired of your light and of this route without me, my eagle and my snake.

But we awaited you every morning, took your overflow from you and blessed you for it.

Behold! I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey. I need hands that reach out.

I want to bestow and distribute until the wise among human beings have once again enjoyed their folly, and the poor once again their wealth.

For this I must descend into the depths, as you do evenings when you go behind the sea and bring light even to the underworld, you super-rich star!

Like you, I must *go down*<sup>1</sup> as the human beings say, to whom I want to descend.

So bless me now, you quiet eye that can look upon even an all too great happiness without envy!

Bless the cup that wants to flow over, such that water flows golden from it and everywhere carries 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>1</sup> German uses *untergehen*, literally “to go under” for the expression the sun “goes down.” Nietzsche throughout *Zarathustra* uses wordplay to signify that Zarathustra's “going under” is a “going over” or transition, *übergehen*, from human to superhuman, from man to overman. After Zarathustra draws his first analogy between himself and the sun, I use “going under” for *untergehen* and its noun form *Untergang*. In setting or going down the sun marks a transition. Zarathustra meanwhile has been higher than human in both figurative and literal terms, and so his “going under” has the effect of him transitioning to human again. However, on the ecumenical level, when human beings transition or go under, and when they “overcome” the human, they should achieve the superhuman (overman).

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Zarathustra climbed down alone from the mountains and encountered no one. But when he came to the woods suddenly an old man stood before him, who had left his saintly hut in search of roots in the woods. And thus spoke the old man to Zarathustra:

“This wanderer is no stranger to me: many years ago he passed by here. Zarathustra he was called; but he is transformed.

Back then you carried your ashes to the mountain: would you now carry your fire into the valley? Do you not fear the arsonist’s punishment?

Yes, I recognize Zarathustra. His eyes are pure, and no disgust is visible around his mouth. Does he not stride like a dancer?

Zarathustra is transformed, Zarathustra has become a child, an awakened one is Zarathustra. What do you want now among the sleepers?

You lived in your solitude as if in the sea, and the sea carried you. Alas, you want to climb ashore? Alas, you want to drag your own body again?”

Zarathustra answered: “I love mankind.”<sup>2</sup>

“Why,” asked the saint, “did I go into the woods and the wilderness in the first place? Was it not because I loved mankind all too much?

Now I love God: human beings I do not love. Human beings are too imperfect a thing for me. Love for human beings would kill me.”

Zarathustra replied. “Why did I speak of love? I bring mankind a gift.”

“Give them nothing,” said the saint. “Rather take something off them and help them to carry it – that will do them the most good, if only it does you good!

And if you want to give to them, then give nothing more than alms, and make them beg for that too!”

“No,” answered Zarathustra. “I do not give alms. For that I am not poor enough.”

The saint laughed at Zarathustra and spoke thus: “Then see to it that they accept your treasures! They are mistrustful of hermits and do not believe that we come to give gifts.

<sup>2</sup> “Ich liebe die Menschen” means literally “I love human beings.” Earlier translators ignored the ecological framework in which Nietzsche wrote *Zarathustra* by using expressions like “man.” The prologue establishes a prevailing semantic field, a framework in which human beings, animals, nature and earth interact or should interact as never before.

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To them our footsteps sound too lonely in the lanes. And if at night lying in their beds they hear a man walking outside, long before the sun rises, they probably ask themselves: where is the thief going?

Do not go to mankind and stay in the woods! Go even to the animals instead! Why do you not want to be like me – a bear among bears, a bird among birds?”

“And what does the saint do in the woods?” asked Zarathustra.

The saint answered: “I make songs and sing them, and when I make songs I laugh, weep and growl: thus I praise God.

With singing, weeping, laughing and growling I praise the god who is my god. But tell me, what do you bring us as a gift?”

When Zarathustra had heard these words he took his leave of the saint and spoke: “What would I have to give you! But let me leave quickly before I take something from you!” – And so they parted, the oldster and the man, laughing like two boys laugh.

But when Zarathustra was alone he spoke thus to his heart: “Could it be possible! This old saint in his woods has not yet heard the news that *God is dead!*” –

## 3

When Zarathustra came into the nearest town lying on the edge of the forest, he found many people gathered in the market place, for it had been promised that a tightrope walker would perform. And Zarathustra spoke thus to the people:

“*I teach you the overman.*<sup>3</sup> Human being is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All creatures so far created something beyond themselves; and you want to be the ebb of this great flood and would even rather go back to animals than overcome humans?

<sup>3</sup> “Ich lehre euch den Übermenschen.” Just as *Mensch* means human, human being, *Übermensch* means superhuman, which I render throughout as overman, though I use human being, mankind, people, and humanity to avoid the gendered and outmoded use of “man.” Two things are achieved by using this combination. First, using “human being” and other species-indicating expressions makes it clear that Nietzsche is concerned ecumenically with humans as a species, not merely with males. Secondly, expanding beyond the use of “man” puts humans in an ecological context; for Zarathustra to claim that “the overman shall be the meaning of the earth” is to argue for a new relationship between humans and nature, between humans and the earth. Overman is preferred to superhuman for two basic reasons; first, it preserves the word play Nietzsche intends with his constant references to going under and going over, and secondly, the comic book associations called to mind by “superman” and super-heroes generally tend to reflect negatively, and frivolously, on the term superhuman.

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### *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

What is the ape to a human? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And that is precisely what the human shall be to the overman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment.

You have made your way from worm to human, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now a human is still more ape than any ape.

But whoever is wisest among you is also just a conflict and a cross between plant and ghost. But do I implore you to become ghosts or plants?

Behold, I teach you the overman!

The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!

I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes! They are mixers of poisons whether they know it or not.

They are despisers of life, dying off and self-poisoned, of whom the earth is weary: so let them fade away!

Once the sacrilege against God was the greatest sacrilege, but God died, and then all these desecrators died. Now to desecrate the earth is the most terrible thing, and to esteem the bowels of the unfathomable higher than the meaning of the earth!

Once the soul gazed contemptuously at the body, and then such contempt was the highest thing: it wanted the body gaunt, ghastly, starved. Thus it intended to escape the body and the earth.

Oh this soul was gaunt, ghastly and starved, and cruelty was the lust of this soul!

But you, too, my brothers, tell me: what does your body proclaim about your soul? Is your soul not poverty and filth and a pitiful contentment?

Truly, mankind is a polluted stream. One has to be a sea to take in a polluted stream without becoming unclean.

Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this sea, in him your great contempt can go under.

What is the greatest thing that you can experience? It is the hour of your great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness turns to nausea and likewise your reason and your virtue.

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my happiness? It is poverty and filth, and a pitiful contentment. But my happiness ought to justify existence itself!'

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The hour in which you say: 'What matters my reason? Does it crave knowledge like the lion its food? It is poverty and filth and a pitiful contentment!'

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my virtue? It has not yet made me rage. How weary I am of my good and my evil! That is all poverty and filth and a pitiful contentment!'

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my justice? I do not see that I am ember and coal. But the just person is ember and coal!'

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my pity? Is pity not the cross on which he is nailed who loves humans? But my pity is no crucifixion.'

Have you yet spoken thus? Have you yet cried out thus? Oh that I might have heard you cry out thus!

Not your sin – your modesty cries out to high heaven, your stinginess even in sinning cries out to high heaven!

Where is the lightning that would lick you with its tongue? Where is the madness with which you should be inoculated?

Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this lightning, he is this madness! –"

When Zarathustra had spoken thus someone from the crowd cried out:

"We have heard enough already about the tightrope walker, now let us see him too!" And all the people laughed at Zarathustra. But the tightrope walker, believing that these words concerned him, got down to his work.

4

Now Zarathustra looked at the people and he was amazed. Then he spoke thus:

"Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman – a rope over an abyss.

A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and standing still.

What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*.

I love those who do not know how to live unless by going under, for they are the ones who cross over.

I love the great despisers, because they are the great venerators and arrows of longing for the other shore.

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I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, who instead sacrifice themselves for the earth, so that the earth may one day become the overman's.

I love the one who lives in order to know, and who wants to know so that one day the overman may live. And so he wants his going under.

I love the one who works and invents in order to build a house for the overman and to prepare earth, animals and plants for him: for thus he wants his going under.

I love the one who loves his virtue: for virtue is the will to going under and an arrow of longing.

I love the one who does not hold back a single drop of spirit for himself, but wants instead to be entirely the spirit of his virtue: thus he strides as spirit over the bridge.

I love the one who makes of his virtue his desire and his doom: thus for the sake of his virtue he wants to live on and to live no more.

I love the one who does not want to have too many virtues. One virtue is more virtue than two, because it is more of a hook on which his doom may hang.

I love the one whose soul squanders itself, who wants no thanks and gives none back: for he always gives and does not want to preserve himself.<sup>4</sup>

I love the one who is ashamed when the dice fall to his fortune and who then asks: am I a cheater? – For he wants to perish.

I love the one who casts golden words before his deeds and always does even more than he promises: for he wants his going under.

I love the one who justifies people of the future and redeems those of the past: for he wants to perish of those in the present.

I love the one who chastises his god, because he loves his god: for he must perish of the wrath of his god.

I love the one whose soul is deep even when wounded, and who can perish of a small experience: thus he goes gladly over the bridge.

I love the one whose soul is overfull, so that he forgets himself, and all things are in him: thus all things become his going under.

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<sup>4</sup> See Luke 17:33. This is the first of approximately 135 direct allusions to the Bible, in which Nietzsche typically applies Christ's words to Zarathustra's task, or inverts Christ's words in order to achieve a life- and earth-affirming effect. Whenever possible, these passages will be translated using the phrasing of the Bible. For drafts and alternative versions of the various chapters, biblical references, and other references see vol. XIV of the *Kritische Studienausgabe*, which provides commentary to vols. I–XIII and treats TSZ on pp. 279–344.

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I love the one who is free of spirit and heart: thus his head is only the entrails of his heart, but his heart drives him to his going under.

I love all those who are like heavy drops falling individually from the dark cloud that hangs over humanity: they herald the coming of the lightning, and as heralds they perish.

Behold, I am a herald of the lightning and a heavy drop from the cloud: but this lightning is called overman. —”

5

When Zarathustra had spoken these words he looked again at the people and fell silent. “There they stand,” he said to his heart, “they laugh, they do not understand me, I am not the mouth for these ears.

Must one first smash their ears so that they learn to hear with their eyes? Must one rattle like kettle drums and penitence preachers? Or do they believe only a stutterer?

They have something of which they are proud. And what do they call that which makes them proud? Education they call it, it distinguishes them from goatherds.

For that reason they hate to hear the word ‘contempt’ applied to them. So I shall address their pride instead.

Thus I shall speak to them of the most contemptible person: but he is *the last human being*.”

And thus spoke Zarathustra to the people:

“It is time that mankind set themselves a goal. It is time that mankind plant the seed of their highest hope.

Their soil is still rich enough for this. But one day this soil will be poor and tame, and no tall tree will be able to grow from it anymore.

Beware! The time approaches when human beings no longer launch the arrow of their longing beyond the human, and the string of their bow will have forgotten how to whirl!

I say to you: one must still have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star. I say to you: you still have chaos in you.

Beware! The time approaches when human beings will no longer give birth to a dancing star. Beware! The time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself.

Behold! I show you *the last human being*.



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‘What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?’ – thus asks the last human being, blinking.

Then the earth has become small, and on it hops the last human being, who makes everything small. His kind is ineradicable, like the flea beetle; the last human being lives longest.

‘We invented happiness’ – say the last human beings, blinking.

They abandoned the regions where it was hard to live: for one needs warmth. One still loves one’s neighbor and rubs up against him: for one needs warmth.

Becoming ill and being mistrustful are considered sinful by them: one proceeds with caution. A fool who still stumbles over stones or humans!

A bit of poison once in a while; that makes for pleasant dreams. And much poison at the end, for a pleasant death.

One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one sees to it that the entertainment is not a strain.

One no longer becomes poor and rich: both are too burdensome. Who wants to rule anymore? Who wants to obey anymore? Both are too burdensome.

No shepherd and one herd! Each wants the same, each is the same, and whoever feels differently goes voluntarily into the insane asylum.

‘Formerly the whole world was insane’ – the finest ones say, blinking.

One is clever and knows everything that has happened, and so there is no end to their mockery. People still quarrel but they reconcile quickly – otherwise it is bad for the stomach.

One has one’s little pleasure for the day and one’s little pleasure for the night: but one honors health.

‘We invented happiness’ say the last human beings, and they blink.”

And here ended the first speech of Zarathustra, which is also called “The Prologue,” for at this point he was interrupted by the yelling and merriment of the crowd. “Give us this last human being, oh Zarathustra” – thus they cried – “make us into these last human beings! Then we will make you a gift of the overman!” And all the people jubilated and clicked their tongues. But Zarathustra grew sad and said to his heart:

“They do not understand me. I am not the mouth for these ears.

Too long apparently I lived in the mountains, too much I listened to brooks and trees: now I speak to them as to goatherds.

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My soul is calm and bright as the morning mountains. But they believe I am cold, that I jeer, that I deal in terrible jests.

And now they look at me and laugh, and in laughing they hate me too. There is ice in their laughter.”

6

Then, however, something happened that struck every mouth silent and forced all eyes to stare. For in the meantime the tightrope walker had begun his work; he had emerged from a little door and was walking across the rope stretched between two towers, such that it hung suspended over the market place and the people. Just as he was at the midpoint of his way, the little door opened once again and a colorful fellow resembling a jester leaped forth and hurried after the first man with quick steps. “Forward, sloth, smuggler, pale face! Or I’ll tickle you with my heel! What business have you here between the towers? You belong in the tower, you should be locked away in the tower, for you block the way for one who is better than you!” And with each word he came closer and closer to him. But when he was only one step behind him, the terrifying thing occurred that struck every mouth silent and forced all eyes to stare: – he let out a yell like a devil and leaped over the man who was in his way. This man, seeing his rival triumph in this manner, lost his head and the rope. He threw away his pole and plunged into the depths even faster than his pole, like a whirlwind of arms and legs. The market place and the people resembled the sea when a storm charges in: everyone fled apart and into one another, and especially in the spot where the body had to impact.

But Zarathustra stood still and the body landed right beside him, badly beaten and broken, but not yet dead. After a while the shattered man regained consciousness and saw Zarathustra kneeling beside him. “What are you doing here?” he said finally. “I’ve known for a long time that the devil would trip me up. Now he is going to drag me off to hell: are you going to stop him?”

“By my honor, friend!” answered Zarathustra. “All that you are talking about does not exist. There is no devil and no hell. Your soul will be dead even sooner than your body – fear no more!”

The man looked up mistrustfully. “If you speak the truth,” he said, “then I lose nothing when I lose my life. I am not much more than an animal that has been taught to dance by blows and little treats.”