Thus Spoke Zarathustra

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FRIEDRICH NEITZSCHE

Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the most influential philosophers in the modern period. He was the son of a Lutheran minister, and many of his later ideas were developed in reaction to Christian teachings. A brilliant young student, Nietzsche was appointed to a university chair in classical philology at Basel when he was only 24 years old. Nietzsche was not a great success in the academic world, however: he became chronically ill in 1871, and he resigned his professorship in 1879 because of the sustaining a teaching schedule was too difficult (not to mention that his colleagues' critiques led to his lectures being emptied out). He became a much more prolific writer after this, however, and developed his distinctive style, focusing on a critique of traditional morality and its European Christian foundations. In 1882, the year before he began writing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche also suffered the deepest romantic disappointment of his life when it became clear that he would never marry Lou Salomé, the woman he loved. Writing *Zarathustra* seems to have been part of how he resolved this heartbreak, and the book was also an intellectual breakthrough that helped him overcome his earlier nihilism. During the last decade of his life, Nietzsche suffered increasingly from dementia and was cared for by his sister, Elisabeth. He died of a stroke in 1900. After Nietzsche's death, Elisabeth saw to the initial publication of his writings, though her anti-Semitic beliefs had an editorial influence on his work that Nietzsche would probably have rejected.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Two of Nietzsche's biggest influences were the German philosopher Schopenhauer and the scientific theory of evolution. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), like Nietzsche, espoused atheism; however, Nietzsche's rejection of Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism is evident in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Furthermore, even though Nietzsche may not have studied or agreed with every element of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory (introduced in *On the Origin of Species* in 1859), Darwin's ideas clearly impacted Nietzsche's thinking about the possibility of ongoing change in the world instead of fixity, especially the idea that humanity could evolve yet further into the Superman. The titular Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, was a real-life historical figure, the founder of the ancient Persian religion Zoroastrianism. He is believed to have lived in the 7th century B.C.E. In a later book, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche explains that he chooses Zarathustra as his book's "prophet," because the historical figure based his religion on the struggle between good and evil, thus creating that "most fateful of errors, morality."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Nietzsche was influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), reacting against the pessimism of this book in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He also draws on ideas from Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) in his musings about human origins and ongoing evolution. Some of the ideas that Nietzsche presents in *Zarathustra* were introduced in his preceding book, *The Gay Science* (1882), and were further developed in subsequent books *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), which especially critiques the idea of altruism. Nietzsche also loosely bases the book's style on the New Testament of the Bible and on Plato's philosophical dialogues.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One
- **When Written:** 1883–1885
- **When Published:** 1885
- **Literary Period:** Realism
- **Genre:** Philosophical Novel
- **Setting:** An unidentified mountain and surrounding towns
- **Climax:** Zarathustra announces that the higher men are coming and the noontide is near; overcoming his pity, he allows the higher men to follow their own way.
- **Antagonist:** The mob or herd; the "good and just"
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Packing a Punch. Nietzsche's style is unusual for philosophical writing, relying on aphorisms—short, punchy sayings that present general truths—rather than a strong narrative structure or consistent line of argument. Sometimes, the first part of an aphorism presents an idea and then undercuts that idea with an unexpected twist that elicits deeper reflection from the reader.

Musical Legacy. In 1896, German composer Richard Strauss wrote the tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra*, based on Nietzsche's novel. The piece's opening fanfare is recognizable to many people because it was used in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

PLOT SUMMARY

Zarathustra, a 30-year-old sage and prophet, has retreated into the mountains. After 10 years of solitude, he emerges from his cave, wanting to descend to humanity in order to bestow his wisdom. He ventures down the mountain into a forest, where he's surprised to encounter an old saint who doesn't yet know that "God is dead."

Arriving at a town, Zarathustra addresses the people who are assembled for a tight-rope walker's performance. He tells them, "I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome." The Superman, a more mentally and spiritually evolved version of humankind, is the meaning of life; the people should believe in him instead of in heavenly hopes. However, the people just laugh at Zarathustra. Suddenly, the tight-rope walker, startled by a mocking buffoon, falls off his rope. After the tight-rope walker dies, Zarathustra carries his corpse away from the town and buries it. The next day, he realizes that his calling is not to address the people but to lure individuals away from the masses. He will find other "creators of values" and teach *them* about the Superman.

Zarathustra goes on to addresses his followers through a long series of discourses. He teaches them that the spirit evolves through three changes: from burdened camel to freedom-loving **lion** to innocent child. Though the lion destroys conventional values, only the child can create *new* values; this symbolizes the spirit's ability to will its own will. Zarathustra also teaches that he has overcome his belief in God, and he urges his followers to do the same. This is because belief in the afterlife was created by people who resent life itself—people who cannot be bridges to the Superman. Instead of listening to those who despise the earth and preach death, Zarathustra's followers should be warriors who fight for the overcoming of man. This overcoming, the creation of new values, generally occurs in solitude, far away from the masses.

Zarathustra then says that different groups of people have different values: what seems praiseworthy to one group is considered shameful by another. He concludes that values aren't handed down to people from heaven—rather, values are an exertion of power. In other words, there are no such things as objective values. An example is love of neighbor. While this is traditionally regarded as one of the highest moral values, Zarathustra argues that it's just a way of hiding from the Superman. Another example is the valorization of death. Zarathustra believes that even Jesus Christ died too soon because he had not yet learned to love the earth; others have suffered from this example ever since.

Zarathustra eventually retreats into solitude again, exhorting his disciples not to slavishly imitate him, but to go forth and repay him by finding themselves. Years later, he dreams that his old followers are portraying him as a devil, and he rejoices at this, knowing that it's time to teach them anew. In the ensuing discourses, Zarathustra touches on many topics, including pity. In his view, compassion for one's neighbor is misplaced, because pity only creates obligation and resentment. Great love should go beyond pity. In a similar vein, protests for "equality" should be resisted. Agitation for equality is usually the weak's envy and vengeance in disguise; human beings are not equal, or else there would be no need for the Superman. Zarathustra also elaborates on the concept of the will to power, an "unexhausted, procreating life-will," which is the fundamental human drive. Everyone possesses will to power, though only the strong express this will fully, overcoming themselves again and again.

Zarathustra then tells a story about overthrowing a mocking dwarf, the Spirit of Gravity, who symbolizes humanity's guilty conscience. He also has a vision of a shepherd biting the head off of a snake that's choking the shepherd to death, then jumping up laughing—symbolizing the need to reject burdensome, conventional values in order to live freely and exercise one's will to power. He wanders among the people and is disgusted by people's contentment with mediocre virtues and easy lives. He implores people to "be such as *can will*!"

After this, Zarathustra makes his way back to his cave, rejoicing once more in solitude. Since it's not yet time to approach humanity again, he discourses to himself, revisiting his major teachings. He reiterates the need for humanity's higher individuals, or creators, to discover new values, a new good and evil. The old value systems must be shattered by a new nobility, who will rebuild a new system, despite the supposedly "good and just" people who will oppose this.

One morning, Zarathustra awakens, overwhelmed by a new thought. Talking with his animal companions (an eagle and a serpent), Zarathustra realizes that everything in existence has recurred an infinite number of times and will do so again. This doctrine of Eternal Recurrence is different from an afterlife—rather, it's an endless return to the same life. Only a creator, a higher man who exercises the will to power, can embrace the eternal recurrence; mediocre people are too burdened by sin, regret, and dread to embrace it. Zarathustra then sings a song expressing his "lust for Eternity."

Years later, Zarathustra awaits a sign that it's time to descend to humanity once more. A gloomy prophet visits him and draws his attention to a distant cry of distress. Shaken by this, Zarathustra decides to help the distressed. He wanders through the forests of his domain, encountering a number of those he considers to be Higher Men. They include two kings, a scientist, a sorcerer, and an old pope. He also finds the "ugliest man," a pitiful figure who killed God rather than be pitied by a deity too soft and compassionate to exist. In addition, Zarathustra meets a beggar and the shadow of a freethinker. Though these people are all just bridges to the Superman, Zarathustra invites them back to his cave for a celebratory

feast and a discussion the Higher Man's role and characteristics. He reiterates the importance of overcoming man in pursuit of the Superman, something achieved by means of the will to power. That night, the Higher Men make a misguided attempt to worship a donkey, leading Zarathustra to both scold their ignorance and praise their progress beyond belief in God. The Higher Men then rejoice with Zarathustra in the idea of the Eternal Recurrence.

The next morning, Zarathustra is approached by a laughing lion, which he recognizes as the sign that it's time for his final descent to humanity. When the Higher Men spring back from the lion in fear, Zarathustra realizes that he has overcome his lingering weakness: his temptation to pity them. He is now ripened and perfected; his children (the race of the Superman) is near; and the great **noontide** will soon rise. With this, Zarathustra leaves his cave, shining like the sun.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Zarathustra – Zarathustra is a sage and prophet. Practically no personal details are given about him in the novel; his identity consists of his teachings and his travels among his disciples. At age 30, he retreats to a mountain cave—but after 10 years of solitude, he decides that he must descend to humankind in order to bestow his wisdom. After the people reject Zarathustra's teaching of the Superman (his vision of a more mentally and spiritually evolved human race), he realizes that he should proclaim his message not to the masses, but only to individuals who are already receptive to his teachings. He then addresses a long series of discourses to his followers, teaching them to reject the idea of objective values, instead becoming creators of *new* values in order to overcome the current version of humanity in pursuit of the Superman. He also teaches them to exercise the will to power, an inexhaustible procreative drive that cannot be contained or quelled by conventional values. Zarathustra is disgusted by the masses' failure to embody this will to power, so he retreats back into solitude. When he awakens from sleep, he and his animal companions discuss the concept of the Eternal Recurrence: the infinite recurrence of all existence in the past and the future. Because Zarathustra is unburdened by conventional morals and their associated guilt, he fully accepts life, allowing him to welcome and even lust after Eternity. In the last part of the book, Zarathustra is visited by a gloomy prophet who tempts him to relieve the Higher Man's distress. Zarathustra then searches through the forest and welcomes a number of people—include a scientist, a sorcerer, an old pope, and the ugliest man—into his cave to feast and discuss the Higher Man. The next day, a **lion** appears at Zarathustra's cave, signaling that it's time for Zarathustra's final descent to humanity. Zarathustra realizes that he has finally overcome his weakness of pity for the Higher Man—and, being perfected, he can now go in search of his children, the Supermen of the future.

The Old Saint – Zarathustra meets the old saint in the forest when he first comes down from the mountain. The saint has dwelt in the forest for many years, praising God in solitude. He tries to discourage Zarathustra from rejoining humanity. Zarathustra marvels that the saint doesn't yet know that "God is dead."

Tight-rope Walker – When Zarathustra descends from the mountain, the townspeople are gathered in the square to watch the tight-rope walker's performance. During the performance, a buffoon chases him, causing him to lose his balance, fall, and suffer fatal injuries. Before the tight-rope walker dies, Zarathustra comforts him. He then carries the tight-rope walker's corpse with him and buries him, to honor him for pursuing (and dying for) a dangerous calling.

The Ugliest Man – Among the group of Higher Men whom Zarathustra finds in the forest and invites into his cave, the ugliest man is "the murderer of God." He killed God because God pitied his misfortunes, prompting the man to resentment and revenge. In Zarathustra's view, the ugliest man is one of the most promising of the Higher Men, as he's in the process of overcoming himself and being reconciled to the Eternal Recurrence.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Buffoon – During the tight-rope walker's performance, the buffoon appears and chases and mocks him, causing the tight-rope walker to fall to the ground and suffer fatal injuries. The buffoon also warns Zarathustra to flee the town, because the townspeople hate him and regard him as dangerous.

Zarathustra's Animals – In his mountain cave, Zarathustra lives with an eagle (symbolizing pride) and a serpent (symbolizing wisdom). They are sentient creatures that keep Zarathustra company, bring him food, comfort him in his solitude, and sometimes discuss his teachings with him.

The Prophet – A gloomy prophet visits Zarathustra's cave and tempts him to have pity on the Higher Men. The prophet symbolizes Arthur Schopenhauer, a pessimistic philosopher who influenced Friedrich Nietzsche.

Two Kings – Among the group of Higher Men whom Zarathustra finds in the forest and invites into his cave, the two kings are traveling with their donkey in an attempt to escape the masses.

The Scientist – Among the group of Higher Men whom Zarathustra finds in the forest and invites into his cave, the scientist studies leeches and is so committed to his work that he almost bleeds to death in the course of his research.

The Sorcerer – Among the group of Higher Men whom Zarathustra finds in the forest and invites into his cave, the

sorcerer is a wily, deceptive, self-pitying old man. He symbolizes (and satirizes) Nietzsche's youthful friend Richard Wagner. The sorcerer briefly succeeds in tempting the rest of the Higher Men into melancholy.

The Old Pope – Among the group of Higher Men whom Zarathustra finds in the forest and invites into his cave, the old pope no longer believes in God. He explains to Zarathustra how God "died" through the decline of Christianity.

The Beggar – Among the group of Higher Men whom Zarathustra finds in the forest and invites into his cave, the beggar, symbolizing the Buddha, has retreated from ungrateful humanity in order to preach to cows instead. Zarathustra is especially fond of him.

The Shadow – Among the group of Higher Men whom Zarathustra finds in the forest and invites into his cave, the shadow is a wandering freethinker who has lost sight of his ultimate goal.

TERMS

Superman – **Zarathustra** descends from the mountain to proclaim the Superman to the people. The Superman is a mentally and spiritually evolved version of humanity that's characterized by a form of higher morality (itself marked by the creation of new values and the exercise of the will to power). Zarathustra teaches that humanity, in its current state, must be overcome; people must long for, strive for, and evolve to become the Superman. Therefore, in the absence of a deity or a system of objective values, the Superman is the meaning of the world; the current day's best and highest individuals are still just bridges to the Superman. When the great noontide comes, Zarathustra will descend from his mountain for the last time, and the Superman will come.

Will to Power – The will to power is an inexhaustible, irrepressible creative will for more and more power. It is a characteristic of all creatures, and a fundamental human drive in particular. In other words, everyone *has* the will to power, but the will to power is (in Nietzsche's view, as taught by Zarathustra) only fully manifested by those he calls Higher Men, the strong, or the new nobility. Such people exercise their will to power by destroying old values, creating new ones, and fully embracing life—not only in its current form, but in the Eternal Recurrence.

Eternal Recurrence – The Eternal Recurrence is **Zarathustra**'s concept of the infinite recurrence of all creatures in both the past and the future. Only someone who casts off old values and their associated guilt—someone who exercises the will to power—is capable of accepting and rejoicing in the Eternal Recurrence. Such a person fully accepts life, both good and bad, and is therefore able to embrace its recurrence without regret or dread. This stands in contrast to the weak who, burdened by guilt, are only capable of longing for a different and better afterlife.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RETHINKING MORALITY

Thus Spoke Zarathustra introduces some of Friedrich Nietzsche's most important philosophical ideas, as presented by a fictional ancient prophet named Zarathustra. Most of the novel's action consists of Zarathustra proclaiming his ideas to various followers and opponents in the form of poetic aphorisms (short sayings), which are often esoteric and can be difficult to understand. A foundational idea is moral relativism. Early in the book, Zarathustra observes that different people view "good" and "evil" differently and concludes that these values are not objective but are human creations. Most often, these values keep the weaker masses of humanity oppressed; that is, they're just an expression of power. (So, the Christian value of "loving one's neighbor," for instance, is really a cynical way of exploiting one's neighbor while neglecting what's more important—humanity's long-term progress.) Those capable of recognizing that morality is relative, Nietzsche argues, should tear down traditional values of good and evil so that a more freeing and forward-looking morality can be established.

Zarathustra argues that morality is relative. He observes that different lands and peoples have different concepts of good and evil, and that these conflict with one another. He explains, "Much that seemed good to one people seemed shame and disgrace to another." In other words, "good" and "evil" are relative, as they depend on the contexts in which they are defined. From his observation that good and evil differ in various contexts, Zarathustra concludes that people construct values and give them meaning; values aren't objectively meaningful. He proclaims, "Evaluation is creation: [...] Valuating is itself the value and jewel of all valued things." This means that there's no inherent meaning in values; their meaning is given to them by those who create them. That's why it's necessary for those who are capable of understanding this idea to reject traditional morality's distinction between "good and evil"—the category of "evil" is simply meant to constrain people, but it doesn't objectively exist.

Those who are capable of recognizing moral relativism must therefore destroy traditional systems of morality. Breakers of values will be misunderstood and reviled for doing so. After his

first failed attempt to address the masses with his ideas, Zarathustra reflects, "Behold the good and the just! Whom do they hate most? Him who smashes their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker – but he is the creator [...] The creator seeks fellow-creators, those who inscribe new values on new tables." By "the good and the just," Zarathustra refers to self-righteous people who believe that their values—based on good and evil—are inherently correct. Such people see a value-breaker as merely a destroyer, but Zarathustra stresses that a value-breaker actually destroys in order to create a new, higher morality. The destroyer of values must create something better. Zarathustra describes a threefold vision of the spirit that is liberated to create in this way: the spirit is transformed from a burdened camel to a lordly **lion** and then to an innocent child. The lion creates freedom by refusing to be enslaved to the oppressive "Thou shalt" of traditional morality (in the King James version of the Bible, most of the Ten Commandments begin with the phrase "Thou shalt not," like "Thou shalt not kill"). Having gained this freedom, the lion-spirit then becomes a child, who is able to be "forgetfulness, a new beginning." This series of images shows that the spirit doesn't simply smash existing moral structures for destruction's sake, but for the sake of his and others' freedom from oppressive burdens, as well as the building of something entirely new.

According to Zarathustra, submission to traditional morality just perpetuates people's enslavement to it; the aim of the new, higher morality should be the arrival of the "Superman," a higher form of humanity. Zarathustra gives concrete examples of elements of traditional morality that he believes ought to be rejected. For instance, he rejects the traditional Christian teaching to "turn the other cheek," or to avoid retaliation when someone commits a wrong against another. He does this through a story in which an adder (a type of snake) bites him, and Zarathustra thanks the adder for awakening him in time for his long journey and makes the snake suck the deadly venom out of his wound. The moral of this story is that when "you have an enemy, do not requite him good for evil: for that would make him ashamed. But prove that he has done something good to you." The badness of the snake's bite is a matter of perspective—Zarathustra thanks the snake for it because it allowed Zarathustra to wake up and embrace life. What's more, just forgiving somebody who has hurt you shames the other person, puts them in your debt, and creates resentment, thereby allowing the moral system to persist. Zarathustra also urges people to love the Superman more than they love their neighbor. While love of neighbor is one of the foundational elements of Christian morality, Zarathustra thinks that it aims at the wrong thing: "You crowd together with your neighbours and have beautiful words for it. But I tell you: Your love of your neighbour is your bad love of yourselves. [...] May the future and the most distant be the principle of your today: [...] you should love the Superman as your principle." In other words, it's better for oneself *and* other people if one loves and pursues humanity's progression, instead of shortsightedly loving one's neighbor, which after all is a desire to be loved and admired in return.

It's important to note that, for Nietzsche, destroying current forms of morality is a creative work that comes from love—it's not destruction for destruction's sake. Rather, it looks forward to the progression of humanity as a whole into a higher, more noble form of morality that isn't artificially constrained by ideas of good and evil.

THE SUPERMAN AND THE WILL TO POWER

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche conceives of a race called the Superman that has evolved mentally and spiritually beyond humanity as it currently exists. In the novel, a spiritual teacher named Zarathustra has spent the last 10 years meditating in solitude in a mountain cave but now reenters society to spread his teachings. Indeed, Zarathustra himself is a kind of ancient forerunner of the Superman to come. The Superman creates new values, throwing out made-up concepts of good and evil; thus, humanity is evolving toward the Superman as they evolve beyond traditional ideas of morality. Related to the concept of the Superman, the concept of "the will to power," humanity's basic instinct, is the desire to exert one's strength upon the outside world—an exertion that replaces traditional ideas of good and evil. Nietzsche argues that, though not all people are capable of fully exercising their will to power (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a book aimed at "higher" individuals), those heroic people who *are* capable have a responsibility to progress toward the Superman for the sake of humanity as a whole.

According to Zarathustra, humanity's evolution toward the Superman demands assertion of the will to power. In other words, one shouldn't passively submit to others' teachings, even Zarathustra's. Zarathustra urges his followers not to slavishly follow him, but to go on to create their own values: "One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil. And why, then, should you not pluck at my laurels? You respect me; but how if one day your respect should tumble? Take care that a falling statue does not strike you dead! [...] Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you." The point of heeding Zarathustra is not to do exactly as he does; rather, it's to exert one's will to power in order to overcome good and evil oneself. Elevating Zarathustra is a way of avoiding this effort. Giving another example of the will to power, Zarathustra tells a story of a shepherd who is choking on a snake. The shepherd must bite off the snake's head in order to survive: "He spat far away the snake's head—and sprang up. No longer a shepherd, no longer a man—a transformed being, surrounded with light, *laughing*! Never yet on earth had any man laughed as he laughed!" The snake represents conventional values, which are choking and killing

the man. His biting off the snake's head represents the grim work of freeing oneself—upon which man evolves to become the Superman. The Superman can only emerge when people exert their will to power in order to live freely.

Indeed, Zarathustra believes that, in order to progress toward the Superman, those who are capable of exercising their will to power must determine their own value systems. He sums up the will to power this way: "Unchanging good and evil does not exist! […] You exert power with your values and doctrines of good and evil […] And he who has to be a creator in good and evil, truly, has first to be a destroyer and break values." Asserting objective good and evil is a way of keeping higher people on top and lower people in subjection. In Zarathustra's view, "good" should mean the progression of human to Superman, not adherence to traditional values.

Not everyone is equipped to become the Superman. Zarathustra seeks to draw a higher class of human beings to himself through his proclamations: "My happiness itself shall I cast far and wide, between sunrise, **noontide**, and sunset, to see if many human fishes will not learn to kick and tug at my happiness […] For I am *he* […] a drawer, trainer, and taskmaster who once bade himself, and not in vain: 'Become what you are!'" This call is to those higher individuals who are capable of hearing Zarathustra and won't shrink from exerting the will to power—something all people possess but few exercise.

DEATH OF GOD AND CHRISTIANITY

Early in the novel, Zarathustra comes upon a praying saint in the forest and is surprised to discover that someone exists who doesn't yet know that "God is dead." This is one of Nietzsche's best-known statements, but it's often misunderstood. More than an avowal of atheism, it is meant to announce the death of an old value system and an obligation to seek a new one (at least for those stronger individuals capable of it). In that sense, it isn't an entirely hopeless statement. As portrayed in the book, traditional religion, especially in its focus on sin and the afterlife, keeps people from wholeheartedly affirming *this* life and asserting their will to power. Religion, in other words, keeps weaker people bound to a "good and evil" value system. But for the strong—people who are capable of creating their *own* values—the idea that "God is dead" is an opportunity to affirm life and human potential. Nietzsche argues that the statement "God is dead" should spur higher individuals not to despair, but to greater agency and creativity.

Nietzsche argues through Zarathustra that religion, and specifically Christianity, is a human invention that, whatever its usefulness to society in the past, is no longer believable in the modern world. Zarathustra explains that those who were incapable of wholeheartedly affirming life created religion in order to comfort themselves: "It was the sick and dying who despised the body and the earth and invented the things of heaven and the redeeming drops of blood […] They wanted to escape from their misery and the stars were too far for them. Then they sighed: 'Oh if only there were heavenly paths by which to creep into another existence and into happiness!'—then they contrived for themselves their secret ways." Zarathustra suggests, in other words, that there *aren't* "heavenly paths," but that the weak fall back on "contrived" beliefs for solace—beliefs that allow people to pretend this world can be escaped.

Zarathustra argues that Christianity has outlived its usefulness because its God is too weak. This is demonstrated by the story of an ex-pope he encounters. The old pope narrates the death of God: "When he was young, this god from the orient, he was hard and revengeful and built himself a Hell for the delight of his favourites. But at length he grew old and soft and mellow and compassionate, more like a grandfather than a father […] Then he sat […] world-weary, weary of willing, and one day suffocated through his excessive pity." In other words, Nietzsche sees the Judeo-Christian God as being most godlike when he was "revengeful" and punitive; but as God "softened" to the point of sacrificing himself on humanity's behalf (a reference to Jesus dying on the cross), he ultimately brought about his own death in humanity's collective consciousness. The fearsome god was at least respectable to the strong; but the "grandfatherly," pitying god is useful only to the weak and therefore obsolete. Because he is "world-weary, weary of willing," the obsolete god does not encourage the strong to exercise their own wills.

Nietzsche argues through Zarathustra that the "death of God" can spur the strong to greater freedom and agency. In one passage, he envisions a more liberating form of belief: "I should believe only in a God who understood how to dance. And when I beheld my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, solemn: it was the Spirit of Gravity […] Come, let us kill the Spirit of Gravity! I have learned to walk: since then I have run. I have learned to fly: since then I do not have to be pushed in order to move." In this complicated passage, Zarathustra equates the "Spirit of Gravity," or the "devil," with the heavy, solemn, demanding ways of traditional religion—dragging humanity earthward. On the other hand, if there *were* a god, Zarathustra would only believe in one who could "dance"—who does not exert an oppressive, dragging effect on humanity, but rather lets them "fly" and move freely. The strong, set free from belief in an oppressive god, can embrace life and exert their creative will upon the world. "Once you said 'God' when you gazed upon distant seas," Zarathustra prophesies to the strong, "but now I have taught you to say 'Superman' […] And you yourselves should create what you have hitherto called the world: the World should be formed in your image by your reason, your will, and your love! And truly, it will be to your happiness, you enlightened men!" Instead of the world being

seen as created in God's image, in other words, the strong should regard it as theirs to create. When the strong realize this, they not only needn't despair over the death of God, they can even be happy.

In Nietzsche's view, religion has traditionally kept the weak bound to moral systems like "good and evil," which make life burdensome and weaken people's wills. Since Nietzsche's goal in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is to prophesy a higher form of humanity, declaring the "death of God" is not simply a cynical avowal of atheism; it's a necessary step toward freeing people from moral systems, like Christianity, that oppress their potential. It's also worth noting that, though Nietzsche does not make many overt political statements in the novel, he considered the state to be a fellow "beast" alongside the church—suggesting that these institutions share an oppressive, stunting effect on human potential which the strong must fight. Like the church, the state has an interest in perpetuating systems of good and evil that keep human wills in check.

ETERNAL RECURRENCE

Throughout the novel, Zarathustra speculates about something called the eternal return, or recurrence. Eternal recurrence is the idea that everything in existence has been recurring for an infinite number of times across time and space and will continue to do so. (This isn't the same thing as the concept of reincarnation, because Nietzsche posited that beings would return in the same bodies.) For Nietzsche, eternity isn't "better" than this life—it's the *recurrence* of this life, both good and bad. While Nietzsche acknowledged that the idea of the eternal return could be a paralyzing burden for the weak (because of their guilt over sin and dread of life's hardships), he saw one's ability to embrace the eternal return as the ultimate expression of the will to power. Put another way, because the strong are capable of throwing off the guilt imposed by old values and accepting both the good and bad of existence, they alone are capable of relishing Eternity without dread. Nietzsche uses Zarathustra's praising of eternity to suggest that eternity—because it involves embracing and exerting one's will within *this* life, not in a better, future one—is the ultimate happiness for the strong. Eternal recurrence is a playground for the strong, precisely because the strong fully embrace life as it is.

Eternal recurrence is the ultimate happiness for the strong, because it's the ultimate affirmation of this life instead of its denial. Though eternal recurrence is a dreadful prospect to those who bear guilt for sin and who fear suffering, it isn't a burden for the strong, because they carry no such guilt or fear. When Zarathustra's companion animals discuss this teaching with him, they state, "You would say, without trembling, but rather gasping for happiness: […] 'I shall return, with this **sun**, with this earth […] *not* to a new life or a better life or a similar life: I shall return eternally to this identical and self-same life […] to speak once more the teaching of the great noontide of earth and man, to tell man of the Superman once more." Whereas eternal recurrence would be reason for the weak to "trembl[e]," it's a source of happiness and liberation for the strong. While the weak despise life and long for a better one, the strong, affirming all of life, are not only content but happy to return to this one an infinite number of times. Eternity is the ultimate joy for the strong, because it's the highest affirmation of life. In a hymn to eternity, Zarathustra sings, "if ever I sat rejoicing where old gods lay buried, world-blessing, world-loving, beside the monuments of old world-slanderers: for I love even churches and the graves of gods, if only heaven is looking, pure-eyed, through their shattered roofs […] Oh how should I not lust for eternity and for the wedding ring of rings—the Ring of Recurrence!" Zarathustra contrasts himself, as one who blesses and loves the world, with those dead gods and their prophets who "slandered" the world. Eternity disproves the world-denying teachings of those "slanderers" and is the ultimate vindication of the strong, who embrace the world.

Because eternity affirms life, it's also the ultimate expression of the will to power that the strong exert. Another verse of Zarathustra's song exclaims, "If my virtue is a dancer's virtue […] if my wickedness is a laughing wickedness, […] for in laughter all evil is present, but sanctified and absolved through its own happiness […] Oh how should I not lust for eternity[!]" While this aphorism is rather confusing at face value, it basically means that, for Zarathustra, the "dancer" is one who's liberated from "good and evil" and who fully embraces life, meaning that neither the dancer's "virtue" nor "wickedness" are bound by the morality of the weak. "Goodness," for the strong, is happiness and exertion of the will to power. Because the strong person embraces eternal recurrence, they are completely free to exert his will and is fully happy, meaning that even what the weak would call his "wickedness" is fully absolved. It's no wonder that such a person would love "eternity." Like the "death of God," Nietzsche's concept of the eternal recurrence completely subverts traditional religion and morality by locating ultimate happiness not in an otherworldly afterlife, but in *this* very life.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

SUN, NOON, NOONTIDE

The diffusion of the sun's rays symbolizes the generous bestowal of wisdom, namely Zarathustra's. The sun's position at noon, or the great noontide, symbolizes the time when humanity is midway through its course between animal and Superman and is therefore

journeying toward its highest hope. That is, noontide represents the time when humanity embraces the death of God; the will to power; and the coming of a fully free, self-determining, and evolved human race. At the end of the novel, Zarathustra emerges from his cave "like a morning sun emerging from behind dark mountains," anticipating the coming noontide.

LION

The lion is Zarathustra's symbol of a soul that embraces its freedom from society's conventional values, retreating into the desert to fight against and ultimately destroy these so that new values are able to be created. At the end of the novel, the appearance of a lion at Zarathustra's cave is the sign that it's time for Zarathustra's final descent to humanity. In this way, the lion is associated with the symbol of **noontide**—the time when humanity is ready to embrace its potential through the will to power and the coming of the Superman.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* published in 1969.

Zarathustra's Prologue Quotes

"With singing, weeping, laughing, and muttering I praise the God who is my God. But what do you bring us as a gift?"

When Zarathustra heard these words, he saluted the saint and said: "What should I have to give you! But let me go quickly, that I may take nothing from you!" And thus they parted from one another, the old man and Zarathustra, laughing as two boys laugh.

But when Zarathustra was alone, he spoke thus to his heart: "Could it be possible! This old saint has not yet heard in his forest that *God is dead*!"

Related Characters: Zarathustra, The Old Saint (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

When Zarathustra, a sage and prophet, comes down from his solitary mountain, he encounters an old saint in the forest. The saint explains that he spends his own solitude praising God, and after they've parted, Zarathustra marvels that the saint doesn't know that "God is dead." With this, Zarathustra is perhaps expressing an atheistic outlook—God is not only "dead," He never existed. This statement could also mean that "God is dead" in the sense that the *idea* of God no longer exists in modern society—that is, that religion (particularly Christianity) has lost its relevance as the moral underpinning of civilization.

Regardless, Zarathustra's crossing paths with the saint represents a parting of the ways between atheists—those who don't believe in anything beyond this world—and theists, who believe in a God beyond the world. Through this divergence, the passage poses the problem which the rest of the book seeks to resolve. If God is dead, in other words, then what will humanity replace God with? The answer that Zarathustra will later proclaim is the Superman, a mentally and spiritually evolved version of humanity. In other words, humanity should not seek God, which Zarathustra sees as humanity's creation, but should instead pursue a higher version of themselves.

I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man? [...]

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

I entreat you, my brothers, remain true to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes! They are poisoners, whether they know it or not.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Zarathustra proclaims his central teaching, which will echo as a refrain throughout the book: that humanity as it currently exists must be overcome itself, leading to the coming of the Superman (a spiritually superior version of man). The coming of the Superman, in Zarathustra's estimation, is the meaning of existence—and therefore, people should not believe in something beyond this world ("superterrestrial hopes"). Those who preach such things are "poisoners," because by teaching people to place their hopes in an invented afterlife, they stunt the progress of

humanity and thwart the Superman's coming.

People should therefore heed Zarathustra's call by placing their hopes in humankind and the material world. These ideas make up the core of Nietzsche's philosophy, which the rest of Zarathustra's discourses will explore in greater detail. However, Zarathustra soon learns that the mass of humanity isn't ready for these teachings, prompting him to leave the town and to preach his ideas to individuals who *are* prepared to hear them.

❝ A light has dawned for me: Zarathustra shall not speak to the people but to companions! Zarathustra shall not be herdsman and dog to the herd! [...]

Behold the good and the just! Whom do they hate most? Him who smashes their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker—but he is the creator. [...]

The creator seeks companions, not corpses or herds or believers. The creator seeks fellow-creators, those who inscribe new values on new tables.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Zarathustra describes his breakthrough realization: that he will no longer seek to attract the masses to his teachings and will instead find and teach companions who are already receptive to his ideas. This is what he means by saying that he won't be a sheepdog to the "herd," guiding those who can't think for themselves. Zarathustra's language is elitist on purpose—Nietzsche believed that only a select aristocracy was capable of becoming the Superman, Nietzsche's conception of a more mentally and spiritually evolved version of humanity. Zarathustra's shift away from the masses is consistent with Nietzsche's perspective.

Zarathustra also says that the "good and just," or the self-satisfied adherents of orthodox beliefs, will hate and persecute those who resist traditional values, seeing them as destroyers. In fact, those who resist are *creators*; destroying the old is only a preliminary step toward making something new. Creators seek out other creators instead of trying to placate or appeal to the "good and just."

This passage sets the tone for the rest of the novel. After this, Zarathustra will not address people at large but will address his own followers in a long series of discourses.

Of the Afterworldsmen Quotes

❝ It was the sick and dying who despised the body and the earth and invented the things of heaven and the redeeming drops of blood: but even these sweet and dismal poisons they took from the body and the earth!

They wanted to escape from their misery and the stars were too far for them. Then they sighed: 'Oh if only there were heavenly paths by which to creep into another existence and into happiness!'—then they contrived for themselves their secret ways and their draughts of blood!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Zarathustra expands on his ideas about the death of God. He does this by criticizing those who maintain belief in an afterlife. By "the sick and dying," he refers to those who are not capable of fully embracing life. Because they resent and despise the suffering that's inherent to life, these people invent things beyond human life to aspire to (and, in so doing, also to allow them to exert power over others). These include ideas of heaven and "redeeming drops of blood" (a reference to the death of Christ, believed by Christians to redeem sinners and grant them eternal life).

Zarathustra asserts that such things aren't real—they're mere contrivances that have emerged from people's wishful thinking. Such contrivances allow people to imagine a better existence rather than accepting the one that's in front of them. Someone who fully embraces life, by contrast, would presumably strive for "the stars" without recourse to heavenly myths. Only the latter is capable of progressing toward the Superman, a more highly evolved human race.

Of Reading and Writing Quotes

❝ I should believe only in a God who understood how to dance.

And when I beheld my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, solemn: it was the Spirit of Gravity—through him all things are ruined.

One does not kill by anger but by laughter. Come, let us kill the Spirit of Gravity!

I have learned to walk: since then I have run. I have learned to fly: since then I do not have to be pushed in order to move.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

Nietzsche's perspective is atheistic, and this passage does not contradict his stance. In fact, it indirectly supports Nietzsche's belief in the "death of God." Zarathustra doesn't believe that there *is* a God who "[understands] how to dance," but only such a God could reflect what Zarathustra sees as human destiny—to live free of conventional morality. In contrast to a "dancing" God, Zarathustra believes that a "Spirit of Gravity"—or guilty conscience—weighs humanity down and must be cast off in order for people to live fully and authentically. This can only be done by means of gravity's opposite—laughter (suggesting that joy and guilt cannot exist together in a person's conscience). Because Zarathustra can move under his own power, even "flying," he has no need for a god to motivate or restrain him. Zarathustra therefore urges human beings to cast aside the weight of their own guilt and embrace life, living under the power of their own will.

Of the Thousand and One Goals Quotes

Zarathustra has seen many lands and many peoples: thus he has discovered the good and evil of many peoples. Zarathustra has found no greater power on earth than good and evil. [...]

Much that seemed good to one people seemed shame and disgrace to another: thus I found. I found much that was called evil in one place was in another decked with purple honours. [...]

Truly, men have given themselves all their good and evil. Truly, they did not take it, they did not find it, it did not descend to them as a voice from heaven.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

This passage illustrates Nietzsche's belief in perspectivism, or the lack of objective truth. Zarathustra has surveyed the beliefs of many different peoples and discovered that they all have different perspectives on what constitutes "good and evil." These perspectives contradict one another, since what one group of people lauds as virtuous might be decried as dishonorable by another group.

This leads Zarathustra to conclude that "good and evil" has not been handed down by God; rather, people have created values of good and evil for themselves. He therefore determines that the idea of "good and evil" itself is the most powerful thing on Earth. In other words, value systems are powerful tools of humanity, regardless of the *content* of those values. Often, that tool is used by the powerful to oppress the weak. Through Zarathustra, Nietzsche will go on to argue that throwing off belief in objective "good and evil" is a step toward assuming one's will to power and progressing toward the Superman, a more evolved version of humankind.

Of Love of One's Neighbour Quotes

Do I exhort you to love of your neighbour? I exhort you rather to flight from your neighbour and to love of the most distant!

Higher than love of one's neighbour stands love of the most distant man and of the man of the future [...]

You cannot endure to be alone with yourselves and do not love yourselves enough: now you want to mislead your neighbour into love and gild yourselves with his mistake.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is an example of Nietzsche's challenge to conventional morality—namely Christian morality. Here, Zarathustra exhorts his followers not to adhere to the Christian command to love one's neighbor. The underlying reason is that, in his view, loving one's neighbor is misplaced; one should instead love humanity as it will exist in the distant future.

The "man of the future" refers to the Superman, the evolved version of humanity toward which current people must progress. Zarathustra argues that love of the Superman surpasses love of one's neighbors today, and in fact is a higher form of love, because it promotes the greater happiness of humanity as a whole. Love of neighbor, on the other hand, is merely a distraction from that higher love. In fact, it's selfish, because it not only prevents a person from improving his own self (being "alone with yourselves") but discourages one's neighbors from doing the same. It also allows a person to claim an unwarranted sense of moral

superiority and self-satisfaction.

Of Voluntary Death Quotes

Truly, too early died that Hebrew whom the preachers of slow death honour: and that he died too early has since been a fatality for many.

As yet he knew only tears and the melancholy of the Hebrews, together with the hatred of the good and just—the Hebrew Jesus: then he was seized by the longing for death.

Had he only remained in the desert and far from the good and just! Perhaps he would have learned to live and learned to love the earth—and laughter as well!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Zarathustra teaches that a person should die at the right time—ideally, when they wish to die. This is only possible when a person is mature enough to understand life and is able to leave behind heirs who likewise "love the earth" (that is, embrace life fully).

Zarathustra argues that Jesus ("that Hebrew") died too soon, leading others astray in so doing. The "preachers of slow death" are those who misunderstand the value of both life and death and therefore embrace neither. Because Jesus's religion was "melancholy"—the opposite of Nietzsche's encouragement of a whole-hearted embrace of life—he never fully understood life and desired death too early. Ever since, his followers have valorized his premature death at the expense of their own love of life.

Zarathustra believes that if only Jesus had avoided the "good and just" (the religious leaders who persecuted him), then his perspective on life would have matured, he would have learned to love life, and he would have been able to die at the right time. This example shows how thoroughly Nietzsche challenged traditional Christian views, even rejecting the teaching that Jesus's death was redemptive for his followers.

Of the Bestowing Virtue Quotes

You solitaries of today, you who have seceded from society, you shall one day be a people: from you, who have chosen out yourselves, shall a chosen people spring—and from this chosen people, the Superman.

Truly, the earth shall yet become a house of healing! And already a new odour floats about it, an odour that brings health—and a new hope!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is part of Zarathustra's last exhortation to his followers before departing into solitude for a while. He has just been teaching them about "the bestowing virtue," a love that gathers all things into itself in order to overflow to others. When the human will begins wanting to command all things in this way, that's when a new virtue—a "new good and evil"—begins to develop. Zarathustra tells his followers that after this happens, the Superman, an advanced form of humanity, will spring forth from them. He urges them to remain loyal to the earth so that this "health" and "new hope" has the opportunity to emerge.

Notably, it's only from the "chosen people," those who've departed from conventional society, that the Superman will come. Nietzsche believed that the race of the Superman would be a select, higher form of humanity that would be capable of following a higher morality, separate from the value system that the masses follow.

One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil. And why, then, should you not pluck at my laurels? [...]

Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you. [...]

And once more you shall have become my friends and children of one hope: and then I will be with you a third time, that I may celebrate the great noontide with you.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

Before Zarathustra says farewell to his followers, he gives them an unusual series of warnings and encouragements. Instead of telling them to remain faithful to him, he urges them to seek to become his rivals (to "pluck at [his] laurels," referring to the victory wreath worn by an athlete in ancient Greece). In fact, his followers should try to "lose" Zarathustra altogether, instead finding themselves—even to the point of denying Zarathustra altogether.

Zarathustra's point is that *he* should not be the object of his followers' loyalty; they should instead exercise their own wills, master themselves, and create their own values in life, refusing to be subject to him. This is how a human being overcomes themselves in order to progress toward the Superman. Zarathustra encourages his followers that after he rejoins them in the future, they will be united anew, and they will all celebrate the coming of the "great noontide," a symbol of the emergence of the Superman (a more evolved version of the human race). Zarathustra's closing exhortation to his disciples shows that he doesn't want to be followed like a traditional religious teacher but seeks to create something entirely new—a class of people who are masters of themselves instead of being under the mastery of anyone or anything else.

On the Blissful Islands Quotes

❝ This will lured me away from God and gods; for what would there be to create if gods – existed!

But again and again it drives me to mankind, my ardent, creative will; thus it drives the hammer to the stone.

Ah, you men, I see an image sleeping in the stone, the image of my visions! [...]

The beauty of the Superman came to me as a shadow. Ah, my brothers! What are the gods to me now!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

In this discourse, Zarathustra expands further on his teaching about the death of God. His will to create, he explains, drew him away from believing in the Christian God—or any gods, for that matter. He ceased believing in gods beyond humankind because if there were gods to create things, then his own creative will would have no outlet and would therefore be useless.

Lured away from gods, Zarathustra is instead driven to humankind by his creative will. Humankind makes up the "stone" upon which Zarathustra hammers, implicitly carving the Superman (a spiritually and mentally evolved human race) out of it—the image sleeping within it came to him "as a shadow." The vision of the Superman is so glorious that, next to it, the gods are nothing by comparison. Zarathustra's comparison of the Superman to the gods shows how highly Nietzsche's conception of the Superman really was. If humanity were to develop its full creative potential, there would be no room left in Nietzsche's universe for divinity; the gods would simply have no more work to do.

Of the Famous Philosophers Quotes

❝ Free from the happiness of serfs, redeemed from gods and worship, fearless and fearful, great and solitary: that is how the will of the genuine man is.

The genuine men, the free spirits, have always dwelt in the desert, as the lords of the desert; but in the towns dwell the well-fed famous philosophers – the draught animals. For they always, as asses, pull—the *people's* cart!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

The "genuine man" is the person who is evolving toward becoming the Superman (a more highly evolved version of humanity), although they're not quite there yet. The genuine man is capable of fully exercising their will—they no longer labor for someone else, like a serf, and they no longer worship supposedly higher beings. Because of these freedoms, genuine men, or "free spirits," are desert-dwellers, like the lion-willed spirit that Zarathustra described in an earlier discourse. The lion-spirit is no longer burdened by traditional morality, beliefs, or obligations, even if he is not yet free enough to create his own (as the Superman will be).

In contrast, "well-fed famous philosophers" live in towns where they can enjoy common people's approval and patronage. Not only that, they are essentially beasts of burden (draught animals) for the people, pulling them around where they wish to go. With this image, Zarathustra

suggests that, unlike "genuine men," most of the philosophers of the day remain captive to popular whims and are content to earn their living by telling people what they want to hear.

Of Self-Overcoming Quotes

❝ That is your entire will, you wisest men; it is a will to power; and that is so even when you talk of good and evil and of the assessment of values.

You want to create the world before which you can kneel: this is your ultimate hope and intoxication. […]

[W]hat the people believe to be good and evil betrays to me an ancient will to power.

It was you, wisest men, who put such passengers in this boat and gave them splendour and proud names – you and your ruling will!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

Zarathustra discusses the "will to power" and its role in human history and society. Will to power is Nietzsche's concept of the fundamental drive in human beings: it is an overwhelming will to create which constantly risks expending and destroying itself for the sake of more power. When exerted fully, the will to power desires to "create the world."

Everyone *has* will to power, but not everyone exercises it. Zarathustra argues that what ordinary people (those who don't exert their will to power) take as objective values of "good and evil" are actually relative, expressions of stronger people's will to power in times past. When Zarathustra addresses the "wisest men," he is talking about those who are in a position to determine and teach what is generally accepted to be good or evil to a given group of people (traditional values). Such people "create the world" that the masses (lesser people) inhabit.

Of the Sublime Men Quotes

❝ Today I saw a sublime man, a solemn man, a penitent of the spirit: oh, how my soul laughed at his ugliness! […]

Hung with ugly truths, the booty of his hunt, and rich in torn clothes; many thorns, too, hung on him – but I saw no rose.

As yet he has not learned of laughter and beauty. This huntsman returned gloomily from the forest of knowledge.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

This quote captures the joyful attitude that characterizes Nietzsche's philosophy. Zarathustra mocks the "solemn" and "penitent" "sublime" individuals who, though celebrated by society, make themselves ugly with their heavy thoughts. To Nietzsche, as expressed through Zarathustra, such a temperament is unbefitting of an individual who is more spiritually and intellectually evolved than the masses.

Zarathustra argues that the truly wise person is filled with laughter, not solemnity. Instead of finding reasons to grieve and despair in the "forest of knowledge," that person fully embraces life and beauty. They are not encumbered by the values upheld by the world or the expectations of the masses. In the end, such a person "laughs" because they acknowledge and accept the world completely and overcomes themselves; they are therefore free of guilt and fear and ready to exert their own will in the world, even at risk of their own death. This quote hearkens back to the earlier chapter "Of the Famous Philosophers"—the "sublime men" are akin to the thinkers whom Nietzsche critiques there.

Of Manly Prudence Quotes

❝ My will clings to mankind, I bind myself to mankind with fetters, because I am drawn up to the Superman: for my other will wants to draw me up to the Superman. […]

And he who does not want to die of thirst among men must learn to drink out of all glasses; and he who wants to stay clean among men must know how to wash himself even with dirty water.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Zarathustra describes the attitude he's trying to embody while disseminating his teachings among humankind. He wants to pursue the Superman—the higher, more evolved form of humanity—wholeheartedly, but he attaches himself to humanity instead, in order to find companions among them who are receptive to his teachings and might themselves become "bridges to the Superman." Someone accustomed to conventional values might expect a person like Zarathustra to brag or flaunt his knowledge before other people. But Zarathustra explains that, instead, he tries to "drink out of all glasses" and "wash himself [...] with dirty water." This suggests that the truly superior person has no need to make his superiority obvious to the less enlightened—rather, he tries to inhabit the world of ordinary people as best he can in order to understand and better instruct them. These ideas are further developed in Nietzsche's later work, *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Of the Vision and the Riddle Quotes

'Spirit of Gravity!' I said angrily, 'do not treat this too lightly! Or I shall leave you squatting where you are, Lamefoot—and I have carried you *high*!

'Behold this moment!' I went on. 'From this gateway Moment a long, eternal lane runs *back*: an eternity lies behind us.

'Must not all things that *can* run have already run along this lane? Must not all things that *can* happen *have* already happened, been done, run past?'

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Zarathustra first articulates Nietzsche's idea of the Eternal Recurrence—something that's not fully explained in the novel and therefore remains somewhat mysterious. In the narrative, Zarathustra carries a dwarf up a mountain, naming the creature the "Spirit of Gravity," a symbol of humanity's guilty conscience. After casting the Spirit of Gravity aside, freeing himself from lingering guilt, Zarathustra shows the dwarf a crossroads and proclaims that on each of the two paths, an eternity lies behind and before them. Everything that *could* have already happened has done so, and so, then, will everything happen again, an infinite number of times.

The connection between the Spirit of Gravity and the idea of the Eternal Recurrence is this: once a person has cast aside guilt (and all the burdens associated with traditional moral codes), then that person is able to fully accept what's happened in his or her life, both good and bad, and look forward to the recurrence of the identical life without dread or regret. For Nietzsche, this is an ideal expression of one's will to power (the creative drive that motivates every person).

The shepherd [...] bit as my cry had advised him; he bit with a good bite! He spat far away the snake's head—and sprang up.

No longer a shepherd, no longer a man—a transformed being, surrounded with light, *laughing*! Never yet on earth had any man laughed as he laughed!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

After Zarathustra tells his followers about the vision of the Spirit of Gravity, he then tells them a riddle about a shepherd and a snake, in which a shepherd is being choked to death by a snake that has lodged in its throat. Zarathustra begs the shepherd to bite the snake's head off; it's a gruesome act, but the shepherd has no other hope for survival. The shepherd does as Zarathustra suggests, and afterward, he leaps up, completely transformed.

This strange scene summarizes the steps necessary to the coming of the Superman: a person must fully exercise their will to power in order to free themselves from conventional morality (symbolized by the snake). After a person does this, their entire being is changed: they have a triumphant, cheerful attitude about life, no longer encumbered by guilt, fear, or society's expectations. The riddle shows that this is not an easy or pleasant transformation—but in Nietzsche's view, it was necessary for humanity to become what it's meant to be.

Of the Three Evil Things Quotes

❝ Whether one be servile before gods and divine kicks, or before men and the silly opinions of men: it spits at slaves of *all* kinds, this glorious selfishness!

Bad: that is what it calls all that is broken-down and niggardly-servile, unclear, blinking eyes, oppressed hearts, and that false, yielding type of man who kisses with broad, cowardly lips. [...]

And he who declares the Ego healthy and holy and selfishness glorious – truly he, a prophet, declares too what he knows: '*Behold, it comes, it is near, the great noontide!*'

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

Zarathustra reconsiders selfishness as a *positive* trait according to his view of morality. (Alongside sensual pleasure and lust for power, selfishness is one of the "three evil things" that Zarathustra believes mediocre people mistakenly condemn.)

Though Nietzsche doesn't use the term in this text, he would later describe conventional values as "slave morality," and this quote gives an idea of what he means by that description. Zarathustra contrasts "glorious selfishness," which he associates with the will to power (the creative driving force of humanity), with cowardice and servility, which are far from it. Someone who exemplifies the will to power through "selfishness" does not bow before either gods or other people.

Such a person never tries to appease others or flatter others' egos; he disdains such behavior as cringing, resentful, and unbefitting the coming of the Superman (a more mentally and spiritually evolved version of the human race). Instead, a "selfish" person rejoices in the world and delights in exerting the will to power for the sake of all humanity. In that sense, their egos only appear "selfish" to the short-sighted. Only such "selfish" people can prophesy the "great noontide"—the midpoint in humanity's evolution between animal and Superman.

The Convalescent Quotes

❝ Man is the cruellest animal towards himself; and [...] all who call themselves "sinners" and "bearers of the Cross" and "penitents" [...]

Ah, my animals, this alone have I learned, that the wickedest in man is necessary for the best in him,

that all that is most wicked in him is his best strength and the hardest stone for the highest creator; and that man must grow better and wickeder: [...]

[I cried] 'Alas, that his wickedest is so very small! Alas, that his best is so very small!'

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker), Zarathustra's Animals

Related Themes:

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

Zarathustra speaks to his companion animals (an eagle and a snake) about the concept of the Eternal Recurrence. First, he talks about humanity's self-imposed cruelty, especially through its preoccupation with sin, solemn religious duties, and the suppression of wickedness. Zarathustra goes on to suggest that, actually, humanity's wickedness is a strength.

In order to understand this idea, it's necessary to contextualize it alongside Nietzsche's belief that good and evil are relative concepts. If this is the case, then it could be that those characteristics traditionally viewed as "wicked" are actually the strongest expressions of humanity's will to power (human beings' fundamental creative drive). Zarathustra's praising of "selfishness" is one example of this.

Such characteristics are solid material for "the highest creator" to work with in bringing about the Superman, Nietzsche's vision of a more highly evolved version of the human race. Sadly, however, humanity isn't there yet: both people's "wickedest" and their goodness, Zarathustra laments, are still "very small." The Superman has not yet been created; not only that, but even the most mediocre person recurs eternally. Whereas Eternal Recurrence is welcome to a higher individual, those who are still oppressed by traditional moral cannot relish the repetition of their sorrowful lives.

'For your animals well know, O Zarathustra, who you are and must become: behold, you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence, that is now your destiny!

That you have to be the first to teach this doctrine—how should this great destiny not also be your greatest danger and sickness!

Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally and we ourselves with them, and that we have already existed an infinite number of times before and all things with us.

Related Characters: Zarathustra's Animals (speaker), Zarathustra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

Zarathustra's companion animals (his eagle and serpent, sentient creatures who tend him in his cave and sometimes converse with him) proclaim Zarathustra's teaching on the Eternal Recurrence. Though this concept isn't fully defined or developed in the novel, it essentially means that all creatures have already existed an infinite number of times, and they will go on to exist an infinite number of times in the future.

The significance of this concept for Nietzsche's philosophy is that only those who exert their will to power, who are seeking the Superman—a more mentally and spiritually evolved version of humanity—can accept and even rejoice in the idea of the Eternal Recurrence. This is because such people are not burdened by traditional notions of sin, regret, or dread with regard to their lives; therefore, they can face the possibility of eternally recurring lives with equanimity.

In that way, Eternal Recurrence is a kind of ultimate expression of the will to power—the irrepressible overflowing of the creative will. Though Zarathustra regards it as good news, proclaiming this teaching is burdensome for him, because he knows it won't be understood or warmly received by most of humanity in its current state.

The Seven Seals (or: The Song of Yes and Amen) Quotes

If ever my anger broke graves open, moved boundary-stones, and rolled old shattered law-tables into deep chasms:

[...]

for I love even churches and the graves of gods, if only heaven is looking, pure-eyed, through their shattered roofs; I like to sit like grass and red poppies on shattered churches:

Oh how should I not lust for eternity and for the wedding ring of rings—the Ring of Recurrence!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

This chapter is a long hymn praising Eternity. Zarathustra praises Eternity because Eternal Recurrence, or the infinite recurrence of all creatures and events, is a liberating expression of the will to power (humanity's fundamental creative drive). In other words, someone who fully accepts and embraces life, letting go of the burdens of traditional morality and its attendant guilt, has no dread of the eternal repetition of every part of existence.

This section of the hymn specifically touches on the role of religion in Nietzsche's thought, especially the "death of God." The reference to "old shattered law-tables" is a reference to conventional religious morality, which Zarathustra and fellow creators reject. Zarathustra sings that even abandoned churches and dead gods are lovable to him, if their demise clears the way for new values that liberate humanity—unlike religion, which largely limits and corrodes the human race. This reinforces the point that Nietzsche did not teach destruction of old values for destruction's sake; rather, he believed that old morals must be destroyed for creation's sake—by way of a creative will to power that finds its fullest expression in the eternal "ring of recurrence."

Retired from Service Quotes

❝ When he was young, this god from the orient, he was hard and revengeful and built himself a Hell for the delight of his favourites.

But at length he grew old and soft and mellow and compassionate, more like a grandfather than a father, most like a tottery old grandmother.

Then he sat, shrivelled, in his chimney corner, fretting over his weak legs, world-weary, weary of willing, and one day suffocated through his excessive pity.'

Related Characters: The Old Pope (speaker), Zarathustra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

In the last part of the novel, Zarathustra wanders through the forest, encountering various "higher men" whom he invites back to his cave. In this chapter, he meets a retired pope who has rejected belief in God. Zarathustra asks the pope how the "death of God" came about. By way of explanation, the pope surveys the history of Judeo-Christian religion, and it's an unflattering portrayal: it's easy to see Nietzsche's disdain for the Christian view of God as falling drastically short of his ideal of the will to power.

The old pope has a more favorable view of the wrathful, damning "god from the orient" (presumably the God of the Bible's Old Testament). Yet, as God grew more tender and pitying toward humanity (like a frail, indulgent grandparent), the pope suggests that God basically made himself obsolete. This pitying God had no love for the world and was a poor example of the will to power (the creative drive that defines humanity); if God could not do these things, then he fell short of what humanity itself is meant to be and deservedly died. This portrait of Christianity illustrates Nietzsche's belief that traditional religion suffocates human potential and should be abandoned by stronger individuals in favor of a new, better value system.

The Greeting Quotes

❝ You are only bridges: may higher men than you step across upon you! [...]

From your seed there may one day grow for me a genuine son and perfect heir: but that is far ahead. You yourselves are not those to whom my heritage and name belong. [...]

It is for *others* that I wait here in these mountains and I will not lift my foot from here without them, for higher, stronger, more victorious, more joyful men, such as are square-built in body and soul: *laughing lions* must come!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

After searching through the forest and gathering many "Higher Men" into his cave, Zarathustra formally greets them. The Higher Men are figures who have been actively seeking Zarathustra, even if they are not yet sufficiently evolved for the Superman (Nietzsche's vision for a more highly evolved human race) to emerge. Indeed, Zarathustra acknowledges here that the Higher Men aren't the Superman but merely "bridges" for yet higher men. They are not the children for whom Zarathustra longs and whose perfection he still awaits.

The "stronger [...] more joyful men" to come are further described as "laughing lions," recalling the imagery of the lion as a free, brave soul that destroys conventional morality. This symbol (a lion actually appearing at Zarathustra's cave and frightening the Higher Men) will also shortly become the signal that it's time for Zarathustra to descend once more to humanity. Zarathustra's laborious search for the Higher Men, and the fact that the Superman doesn't actually appear in the flesh at the end of the book, suggests that Nietzsche believed humanity had not yet progressed past the Higher Men's admirable yet imperfect level of progress.

The Ass Festival Quotes

❝❝ And Zarathustra began to speak once more. 'O my new friends,' he said, 'you strange men, you Higher Men, how well you please me now [...]

Truly, you have all blossomed forth: for such flowers as you, I think, *new festivals* are needed.

a little brave nonsense, some divine service and ass festival, some joyful old Zarathustra-fool, a blustering wind to blow your souls bright.

Do not forget this night and this ass festival, you Higher Men! You devised *that* at my home, I take that as a good omen—only convalescents devise such things!

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 325

Explanation and Analysis

After the Higher Men gather in his cave, Zarathustra mistakenly leaves them to their own devices too soon. When he checks on them, he discovers that they have begun worshiping a donkey. In their own defense, they argue that in the absence of gods, they must worship something.

At first, Zarathustra is unhappy with this development, but he soon changes his mind. He tells the Higher Men that such "brave nonsense," as long as they recognize that it's laughable nonsense, is a worthy festival for Higher Men embarking on a new way of life. After all, it is characterized by laughter and rejection of God, both markers of those who exercise their will to power.

Furthermore, if they were not "convalescents"—people who are healing—they would not have created such a festival, so it's a good sign. So, while this quote undoubtedly aims further mockery at the religious beliefs Nietzsche rejected, it's also more than that: it's an example of the uproarious, convention-defying attitude toward life in general that Zarathustra has been teaching throughout the novel.

The Sign Quotes

❝❝ 'Pity! Pity for the Higher Man!' he cried out, and his countenance was transformed into brass. 'Very well! *That*—has had its time! [...]

'The lion has come, my children are near, Zarathustra has become ripe, my hour has come!

This is *my* morning, *my* day begins: *rise up now, rise up, great noontide!*'

Thus spoke Zarathustra and left his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun emerging from behind dark mountains.

Related Characters: Zarathustra (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 336

Explanation and Analysis

The morning after Zarathustra has feasted with and instructed the Higher Men, he separates himself from them once and for all. Though he does not repudiate the Higher Men, he realizes that in showing them pity, he has succumbed to his greatest temptation. In Nietzsche's view, pity is a counterproductive, self-defeating virtue that doesn't actually serve to advance humanity's wellbeing. Zarathustra has indulged in pity by heeding the Higher Men's cry of distress.

After the Higher Men recoil from Zarathustra's lion, however, he refrains from pitying them. He realizes that the time for pity has passed. Now that he has overcome this temptation, Zarathustra is "ripe," and the great noontide (the midpoint between humanity's evolution from a primal animal to more highly evolved race called the Superman) is near. Zarathustra is perfected in his wisdom and can now descend to humanity to seek his children, the race of Supermen. In his overflowing will to power, he resembles the sun, which glows effortlessly and inexhaustibly on everything it touches.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ZARATHUSTRA'S PROLOGUE

1. At the age of 30, Zarathustra leaves his home and retreats into the mountains. For 10 years, he enjoys living in solitude—but one morning at dawn, he addresses the **sun**, praising it for giving light to him and his animals. Like the sun, Zarathustra wants to give something away: his wisdom. To do this, he must descend to humankind.

Zarathustra, a prophet and seer, enters and then emerges from his solitude, wanting to share the wisdom he's accumulated. The German verb used to describe his emergence, untergeben, *has several meanings—to descend, to set (like the sun), and to be destroyed. There are many plays on this word throughout the book. Its use here suggests that perhaps Zarathustra must sacrifice or destroy a part of himself to emerge from solitude and share his wisdom with others.*

2. Zarathustra ventures down the mountain alone. In the forest, he meets an old saint who recognizes Zarathustra, though Zarathustra looks different—more childlike and awake—than he used to. The saint asks Zarathustra why he wants to be among people again, and Zarathustra explains that he wants to give humanity a gift. The saint tries to discourage Zarathustra from leaving his solitude, explaining that he himself praises God when he's alone in the forest. After Zarathustra and the saint part ways, Zarathustra marvels that the old hermit doesn't yet know that "God is dead."

This is the first appearance in the novel of Nietzsche's famous phrase "God is dead." By this, Zarathustra may mean that the Christian God has literally ceased to exist—or perhaps that the modern era's emphasis on science and rationality has rendered the idea *of God irrelevant. Either way, as the role of God has diminished in modern society, most people are no longer limited to living according to religious orthodoxies. The old saint, meanwhile, symbolizes those who continue to hold onto religious beliefs. The novel implies that religious doctrine, unlike Zarathustra's wisdom, is no longer relevant to the mass of humanity; its usefulness is limited to forest hermits.*

3. Zarathustra arrives in a town, where people are waiting for a tight-rope walker's performance in the market square. Zarathustra addresses the people, saying, "*I teach you the* Superman. Man is something that should be overcome." Compared to the Superman, he says, man is an embarrassment, like an ape compared to men.

Zarathustra proclaims his central teaching, the Superman, to the people. The Superman is an evolved form of humanity, similar to how modern human beings are an evolved form of apes.

The Superman is and shall be the meaning of the world. Zarathustra urges people to believe this, instead of believing in "superterrestrial hopes" taught to them by those who despise life. Once, the soul despised the body—but now, the soul is as starving, just as the body once was.

The Superman is intricately related to the fate of the whole world. Most people, however, believe in a heavenly afterlife and in the superiority of the soul to the body. Zarathustra implies that those who teach these beliefs despise life, and that the soul isn't benefited by such beliefs any more than the body is.


Zarathustra says that the greatest thing a person can experience is "contempt." A person feels this contempt when they realize that their happiness, reason, and virtue are not what they should be. They also realize that it's not sin but *moderation* in sinning that offends heaven. Zarathustra says that the Superman is the cleansing lightning that such a person needs. But the people, eager to watch the tight-rope walker, just laugh at Zarathustra.

By "contempt," Zarathustra means something like the realization that one is not living with one's whole heart and effort. He extends this idea further, and hints at his departure from conventional morality, when he describes half-hearted sin as more offensive than sin in itself. According to Zarathustra, humanity's evolution to become Superman will liberate people from those things that garner contempt—but the people reject Zarathustra's teaching. They don't understand, and they aren't interested anyway—they'd rather watch a spectacle.

4. Zarathustra marvels at the people and then continues. He explains that "man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman," and that this rope stretches across a dangerous abyss. Zarathustra loves the one who cannot help but venture across to the other bank, who sacrifices himself for the sake of the Superman someday coming to Earth. He loves those with full souls and free hearts, who "prophesy the coming of the lightning." Zarathustra is a prophet of that lightning, which is called Superman.

Zarathustra likens humanity's situation to the tightrope "between animal and Superman." Venturing beyond humanity's current situation to become the Superman is a risky, self-sacrificial endeavor, since doing so means casting off one's current mental and spiritual substructures—that is, the very framework of a person's existence—to make way for a morally superior version of humanity. In this way, the Superman sacrifices the present to the future for the sake of humanity's progress.

5. Zarathustra falls silent, knowing that the people don't understand—they're are proud of their culture, so they're resistant to his words about contempt. For that reason, he tells them about the "Ultimate Man," who's the most contemptible. Ultimate Men believe that they've discovered happiness, and they all want the same thing. They think they know everything, and they are content with small pleasures.

The "Ultimate Man" is the antithesis of the Superman because the Ultimate Man sacrifices the future to the present. In other words, the Ultimate Man represents the pinnacle of current culture and society, content with humanity's current situation and (unlike the Superman) uninterested in changing it.

Zarathustra's first discourse comes to an end. The crowd just laughs and mocks him, saying that they'd prefer the Ultimate Man—he can keep the Superman. Saddened, Zarathustra wonders if he has lived in solitude for too long.

Zarathustra's prediction comes to pass: the idea of the Superman doesn't appeal to self-satisfied humanity. They don't want to sacrifice their comforts and certainties for the sake of humanity's betterment.

6. Just then, as the tight-rope walker reaches the middle of his rope, a brightly dressed buffoon bursts out the door and pursues him across the rope, calling mockingly to him. Then, the buffoon springs over the walker with a cry. Shocked, the tight-rope walker loses his balance and falls to the ground. Zarathustra kneels beside the shattered figure, who isn't quite dead. He tells the tight-rope walker that he will bury him with his own hands, to honor him for voluntarily facing danger.

The sudden interruption of the tight-rope walker's performance symbolizes humanity's journey toward the Superman. The buffoon symbolizes Zarathustra shocking humanity (the tight-rope walker) out of complacency about existence. The tight-rope walker's plunge and death parallel Zarathustra's words about the dangers involved in seeking the Superman—in this journey, one must be ready to sacrifice everything.

7. By evening, the crowd disperses. Zarathustra sits thinking beside the man (now dead) for a long time. He didn't catch anyone today, he reflects, except for a corpse. He thinks that human existence is mysterious, susceptible even to a buffoon. He still wants to teach people about the Superman, but he can't seem to reach them.

Though Zarathustra came down from the mountain in hopes of winning over humanity, nobody was receptive. A dead man is all he has to show for his efforts—a symbol of humanity's weakness and how little apparent sense human life makes.

8. As Zarathustra picks up the corpse and sets off, the buffoon catches up to him and warns him to flee. According to him, the "good and just" and the "faithful of the true faith" hate Zarathustra, calling him a danger. Zarathustra proceeds out of town, wandering through the woods with the corpse until he is hungry. He knocks on the door of a lonely house, and an old man gives him bread and wine. Zarathustra journeys on for a while before reaching a hollow tree, which he tucks the corpse protectively inside. Then, Zarathustra goes to sleep.

By the "good and just" and the "faithful," the buffoon refers to those who teach and adhere to conventional ideas. These people perceive Zarathustra as a danger to their ways and threaten him accordingly. The disapproval of the "good and just" will recur throughout the novel. The meal of bread and wine alludes to the Christian sacrament of Communion, though here, it gives Zarathustra strength in solitude, not in a religious community.

9. Zarathustra sleeps for a long time. The following day, he wakes suddenly, rejoicing over a new truth: he has realized that he needs not dead companions, but living ones who want to follow the same path he does. Zarathustra will speak to these companions instead of to the crowds. His purpose is to "lure many away from the herd."

Given that the tight-rope walker's fall and death symbolize Zarathustra shocking humanity out of complacency, the man's corpse seems to symbolically parallel humanity's "deadness" or unreceptiveness to Zarathustra's teachings. Zarathustra realizes that, from now on, he should direct his message not to the masses, or "the herd"—whom he seems to view as dead weight on society, so to speak—but to individuals who are capable of hearing his message and rejecting convention.

Zarathustra knows that the "herdsmen" will call him a robber. The herdsmen are the "good and the just" and the "faithful of the true faith." These people hate the one who destroys "tables of values," not understanding that he is the creator. The creator looks for "fellow-creators" who write "new values on new tables." Zarathustra now knows that he isn't meant to be a herdsman or a gravedigger, or to speak to the people. Instead, he will join other creators and teach *them* the Superman.

By the "herdsmen," Zarathustra again refers to the masses, the conventional, and those who reject him. "Tables of values" refers to sets of beliefs or value systems that Zarathustra questions. Others see his questioning as destructive, but Zarathustra sees destruction as a vital step toward creating something new. He will seek out others who see the world in the same way and will join his efforts.

10. Zarathustra has this realization at **noon**. Above, an eagle circles, with a serpent coiled around its neck—these are Zarathustra's animals (the proudest and wisest, respectively). Zarathustra wishes that he were wise like the serpent and that his pride, like the eagle, would always fly along with his wisdom. This is how Zarathustra's "down-going" begins.

In the novel, noon symbolizes the time when wisdom is ripe and ready to be bestowed. Zarathustra's companion animals symbolize the characteristics needed—wisdom and pride—in order to carry out his prophetic work on humanity's behalf.

OF THE THREE METAMORPHOSES

Zarathustra names "three metamorphoses of the spirit": the spirit becomes a camel, the camel becomes a **lion**, and the lion becomes a child. The "weight-bearing" spirit, like a laden camel, takes heavy things upon itself—things like self-abasement, hunger of the soul, and loving one's enemies. This spirit then goes into a lonely desert.

Following the Prologue, this is the beginning of Zarathustra's discourses. This first discourse concerns the evolution of the spirit, which changes into three different creatures that each symbolize a stage of its evolution. The camel symbolizes self-discipline: in this state, the soul undertakes self-denying practices that are traditionally seen as spiritually beneficial.

In the desert, a second metamorphosis occurs: the spirit becomes a **lion**, wanting to be free and lord over its own desert. The lion will fight against the "great dragon" called "Thou shalt." By contrast, the lion says, "I will!" The dragon's glittering scales include all values that have been created. The dragon wants to get rid of "I will."

The lion represents the soul's independence—its desire to throw off traditional restraints, while the dragon, "Thou shalt," refers to the archaic language of ancient commandments. Instead of submitting to these, the lion exerts its will in order to fight them, while the dragon resists.

Through its might, the **lion** is capable of creating "freedom for new creation." However, the lion must undergo another metamorphosis into a child. This is because the child can do what even the lion can't: in its innocence, it can create *new* values. Now, the spirit can bring its own will into being.

The lion can win its freedom, but only the child—because it's untouched by old constraints—can make entirely new values for humanity. But the evolution from camel to lion to child can only occur when the soul is first willing to bear old values and labor under them; it can't simply dismiss them without experiencing them. This suggests that old values aren't worthless—they must be put into practice and thoroughly examined before something new can arise out of them.

OF THE CHAIRS OF VIRTUE

Zarathustra is living in a town called The Pied Cow. One day, he goes to listen to a famous wise man speak about sleep and virtue. The wise man praises sleep; sleep is difficult because one must remain awake all day in order to do it. And, while awake, one must overcome oneself many times and develop virtues, like peace with God and neighbor, and obedience to authorities. At night, the wise man ponders his what he's overcome until sleep, "the lord of virtue," overtakes him.

In the next discourse, Zarathustra challenges traditional ideas about the practice of virtue. The wise man basically teaches that virtue is the avoidance of wrongdoing, the reward for which is a peaceful soul. One practices virtue, then, for the sake of untroubled sleep, or "the lord of virtue" that washes over a person when they've avoided wrongdoing—there's no higher aim.

Zarathustra laughs at the wise man, coming to a realization. The wise man teaches that one must stay awake in order to sleep well, but Zarathustra believes that those who've sought wise men desire "good sleep and opium virtues to bring it about," and to wise men, wisdom means a dreamless sleep. They can't find any higher meaning in life. But teachers like this, Zarathustra thinks, will soon fall asleep for good.

From Zarathustra's point of view, the wise man's virtues don't do humanity any good. Those who seek out his teachings just want to feel secure and satisfied with themselves, numbed by the "opium" of feeling virtuous. Following these teachings just lulls people into a dreamless state—that is, they don't spur people to anything beyond themselves.

OF THE AFTERWORLDSMEN

Like those who believe in an afterlife, Zarathustra once imagined something existing beyond humankind. The world appeared to him like the work of a suffering God: a suffering person finds joy in looking away from himself, so maybe God is the same way. Zarathustra realized that this "God," like all gods, was his own creation—it didn't come from somewhere beyond humanity. Knowing this, Zarathustra "overcame" himself. Now, it would be a torment for him to believe in afterworlds.

Zarathustra's implication is that, much as his imagined God looked away from himself to create the world, humanity finds solace in looking away from its sufferings and instead creating the idea of gods as a way of finding meaning to justify the suffering that's inherent to life. When Zarathustra came to believe that there was no God beyond his imagination, he experienced a liberation that he couldn't return from.

Zarathustra says that the Ego is the "measure and value of things." Even when the Ego makes up fables and tries to exist as its own separate entity, it is still attached to the body. Zarathustra tells humanity to lift their head instead of burying it in "heavenly" sand. He teaches them a "new will," to desire the path that the "sick and dying" have avoided. The sick and dying, who despised the body and the physical realm, invented heaven and spiritual redemption—but even these inventions are earthly.

Zarathustra says that the self, or Ego, is inescapably linked to the body, no matter what tales it tells itself about an eternal soul. Only the "sick and dying"—those who lack the will to face life otherwise—cling to the belief in redemption from Earth and life beyond it. The irony is that these beliefs are invented by human beings who are, of course, earthly creatures.

Zarathustra isn't hard on those who remain "sick" in this way, desiring that they, like him, will turn into "overcomers." Some of these sickly people, however, hate the enlightened and their honesty. Zarathustra appeals to people to listen to purer and healthier preachers to learn the meaning of life.

The "sickly" aren't inherently bad people—rather, Zarathustra teaches in the hope that they will someday embrace his views. Some of them, however, actively despise and persecute their opponents.

OF THE DESPISERS OF THE BODY

Zarathustra addresses whose who despise the body. He says that while a child sees himself as body and soul, an enlightened person sees himself as entirely body; that is, even the soul is part of the body. The body is a "multiplicity" that includes intellect, which is just a tool of the "great intelligence," or instincts. Intellect and instincts try to persuade the body that they are ultimate, but the Self lies behind these and uses them as instruments, prompting a person to feel pain and joy.

With his theory of the relationship between the mind and the body, Zarathustra anticipates the theory of the "will to power," which he will later discuss. Here, he elevates the body as the primary aspect of a human being: it contains the intellect and instincts, with the latter being superior to the former. Nietzsche's philosophical ideas about the Self are abstract, but a big part of his point is that the intellect isn't the ultimate part of a person—a person is fundamentally his or her body.

Zarathustra tells the despisers of the body that the Self creates esteem and disesteem, including disesteem for the body. The Self wants to create beyond itself, but it can no longer do so; therefore, it wants to perish. Such selves become despisers of the body, angry with life on Earth. Despisers of the body are "not bridges to the Superman."

Among the despisers of the body—those who teach something beyond the Self—the Self creates hatred for its own body. It wants to create something beyond itself, but lacks the ability to do this, so it turns against the body and the earth. Because these "despisers" reject the truth of what humanity is, they cannot progress to the Superman.

OF JOYS AND PASSIONS

Zarathustra believes that if someone has a virtue, they have that virtue in common with nobody else. If they try to name their virtue, they begin to have that virtue in common with other people and thus become part of the herd. It's better to regard virtue as too lofty to be named—too lofty even to be named as a law of God or humanity.

This discourse addresses the nature of virtue as Zarathustra sees it. Basically, if people name and classify their virtues, they melt into the mass of humanity—for that reason, it's better to avoid naming one's virtues.

People used to regard passions as evil, but virtues grew out of passions. It's better to have one virtue and go more easily over the bridge than to be a battleground of many virtues, alone in the desert. Every virtue envies the other virtues and wants to be the strongest, trying to kill the others. Because humankind's present form is something that must be overcome, a person must love their virtues; even though they will someday die by them.

Traditional morality has drawn a distinction between untamed passions and cultivated virtues—but since virtues arise from passions, the latter shouldn't be seen as bad. Furthermore, focusing on one virtue is a better path to the Superman than being pulled between many different ones. Anyway, all virtues must be overcome as humankind progresses to Superman.

OF THE PALE CRIMINAL

The "pale criminal" judges himself and wants to overcome his Ego by killing it. Such killing is merciful, the only way to be reconciled with the Ego; it is love for the Superman.

The "pale criminal" is essentially someone who wants to judge himself instead of submitting to society. In Zarathustra's estimation, embodying the pale criminal is a step toward evolving into the Superman.

The criminal is pale because he cannot endure the image of the deed he has committed. Zarathustra calls it "madness" for the criminal to see himself as the perpetrator of the deed. It's necessary to look deeper in his soul to see a madness that predates the deed. The criminal wanted to kill, but his mind persuaded him to steal instead, and he ended up committing *both* crimes; now, he is burdened with guilt that he will not allow himself to shake off.

Zarathustra isn't talking here about a master criminal who's out for blood. The pale criminal is someone who, despite his desire to overcome himself, still doesn't quite take ownership of his own desires, even after he acts on them—perhaps suggesting that this is the condition of most people. Society places the burden of guilt and indeed of the label of "criminal" on him, restraining him.

Zarathustra wishes that so-called "good people" possessed a madness through which they could die, like the pale criminal. But people hold onto their virtue in hopes of living long and at ease.

Zarathustra suggests that the self-described "good," who cling to their virtue, are further from the Superman than the pale criminal, who is at least willing to die for his desires. Most people only want comfort and security.

OF READING AND WRITING

Zarathustra only loves writings that are written in blood. In the long run, when everyone learns to read, both writing and thinking will be ruined. The one who "writes in blood and aphorisms" wants not to be read, but to be learned by heart. Aphorisms are like mountain peaks that can be traversed by those with legs long enough.

Zarathustra's words echo Nietzsche's elitist outlook that mass literacy will tend to diminish the quality of thought. Writing "in blood" suggests writings, like Nietzsche's own aphorisms, that appeal straight to the hearts of those capable of understanding them.

People say that life is hard to bear, but Zarathustra says that people are built to bear burdens. When Zarathustra sees light, dainty things fluttering around, it moves him to tears. He could only believe "in a God who understood how to dance." To him, the devil is the "Spirit of Gravity," which is serious and profound—it ruins everything. Zarathustra has learned to fly, and he no longer has to be pushed in order to move. Now, a god dances inside him.

Zarathustra holds that if there were *a god, he would only believe in one that wasn't heavy and earthbound like the crushing "Spirit of Gravity." Because Zarathustra himself is no longer weighed down by the expectations of most of humanity, he no longer relies on the fear or dread of such a god to motivate his actions.*

OF THE TREE ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE

Zarathustra notices that a young man is avoiding him; one evening, he finds the young man on a mountainside. He grasps a nearby tree and tells the young man that he couldn't shake this tree if he tried, yet the wind invisibly bends it. Similarly, invisible things torment us the most.

Zarathustra talks with a young man about the nature of upward striving toward the Superman. In this chapter, he emphasizes the individual nature of such striving; obstacles to attaining the Superman ideal are primarily internal rather than external.

The more a person wants to rise to the heights, Zarathustra tells the young man, the more his "roots" plunge earthward, into evil. The young man agrees: the higher he climbs, the more he despises his climbing, and the lonelier he is. Zarathustra says that when a tree grows high, it finds no companions to whom it can relate. It seems to wait for a lightning strike.

Zarathustra further explains that progressing toward the Superman is an individual and therefore lonely pursuit. One's earthbound roots tend to entangle a person, and a seeker becomes misunderstood and friendless as he pursues a higher version of themselves.

The young man agrees again; he thinks that Zarathustra is that "lightning" for which he has been waiting, to destroy him. He begins to weep as he and Zarathustra walk together. Zarathustra comforts the young man, urging him not to give up. He draws a distinction between the noble man (who wants to create a new virtue) and the good man (who wants to preserve the old). The risk for the noble man is not that he might become a good man, but that he might become a destroyer, without a goal. Such people become "sensualists" instead of heroes.

Zarathustra explains the risk of the lonely striving for the Superman: if a noble man, desiring to create a new virtue, isn't focused on a goal, he can go astray. Instead of heroically creating a new virtue, then he might simply destroy the old one in a kind of aimless indulgence.

OF THE PREACHERS OF DEATH

The world has many preachers of death, or those who teach departure from life. Such preachers have not even become men yet. When they see suffering, aging, or death, they see these things as confirmation of their denunciation of life, but they're really refuting themselves: they're seeing only one aspect of life.

Zarathustra picks back up on the concept of those who despise life. Because they only see the worst things of life, these "preachers of death" denounce life as a whole. Not only do they fall short of the Superman, they aren't even wholly human.

Zarathustra says that those who gain from preaching death, or "eternal life," entangle others. He says that those who really love life ought to be less devoted to the moment.

To Zarathustra, preaching an afterlife is no different from preaching death—it's just another way of denouncing life. These "preachers" put obstacles in front of susceptible people. Those who love life, from Zarathustra's perspective, are less concerned about the present moment than about the future of humanity—that is, the Superman.

OF WAR AND WARRIORS

Zarathustra says that he is the best enemy of his companions, and since they would not wish to be spared by him, he will tell them the truth. He calls them to be warriors, always on the lookout for enemies. They should always wage war for their opinions, even if that means honest defeat, and peace should just be the prelude to a new war. Zarathustra says that courage is better than charity, bravery better than pity—it's bravery that actually saves those who are in need.

The Superman must be fought for—and Zarathustra's companions must therefore be ready to go into battle for the truth at all times, and not tire of this. For warriors, courage is more active and effective than mere pity, which doesn't do anything for the needy.

Zarathustra urges his listeners to love life with an eye toward their highest hope, and their highest hope should be aimed at their highest idea—which is that man should be something to be overcome. It's in light of this that one should conduct one's warfare, fighting unsparingly.

Zarathustra's followers must always be guided by their belief in the Superman, striving to overcome themselves. This is what love for life looks like: it is always oriented toward the future instead of the present.

OF THE NEW IDOL

Instead of peoples and herds, there are now states. Zarathustra calls these the coldest of monsters and liars. The state claims that it is "the people"—but really, it was creators who created peoples. Destroyers, on the other hand, set snares and call these the state.

Zarathustra opposes the state, meaning the government or the nation as a concept. He believes that the state overrides the people while pretending to act in their interest. It's worth noting that Nietzsche himself was an officially stateless individual—he had his Prussian citizenship voluntarily annulled, meaning that he chose not to be an official citizen of any nation.

Zarathustra points out that every group of people has its own language of good and evil, its own customs and laws—but no matter what the language, the state lies. The confusion of the language of good and evil is a sign of the state: the state claims that there is nothing greater than itself, and it wants to use the virtues of the strong for its own purposes. It steals the accomplishments of inventors and of the wise and calls these "culture."

The state uses the people's values to shore up its own power and ensure that it's on top. It tries to exploit the "strong," or those who resist the herd, and it also appropriates the creations of individuals as its own.

Zarathustra urges free souls to flee the state and be solitary. Where the state ceases, the man who is not "superfluous," the necessary man, can begin. Where the state ceases, that's where the bridges to the Superman can be found.

The free person can never truly be at home within the confines of a nation—only the "superfluous," or the herd, can submit to the state. The Superman can only be discovered outside of it, which is why Zarathustra encourages his followers to forgo society and live in solitude instead.

OF THE FLIES OF THE MARKET-PLACE

Zarathustra urges his friends to flee into solitude. The market-place, he says, is filled with uproar and poison—the world doesn't revolve around those who display their supposed greatness in the market-place. Rather, it revolves around the "inventor of new values." Those in the market-place are merely actors, and they only create belief in themselves.

Zarathustra tells his followers to avoid those who try to make a name for themselves. These people are not true originators of ideas—they are only interested in their own fame. The strong prefer solitude.

The lover of truth should not fear such people, no matter how much they pressure the truth-lover for a "yes" or a "no." Truly great things—the invention of new values—happen far away from the market-place. It's not worth lifting one's arm to swat at those who buzz in the market-place, who have narrow souls, because these people feel their smallness and will always hate those who are greater.

The people in the market-place will try to fit the lovers of truth into their own mold. The lover of truth should resist this pressure and not even be troubled by such people; his business is outside the market-place, and lesser people will always see such a person as a threat.

OF CHASTITY

Zarathustra loves the forest because too many lustful people live in the towns. Zarathustra exhorts his followers to an "innocence of the senses." For some people, chastity is a virtue, but to others, it could almost be considered a vice. They might abstain, but they do so from a spirit of sensuality. For those not suited to chastity, attempting chastity can become the gateway to a lustful soul. Those to whom chastity comes naturally, however, are hardly aware that they are practicing it.

Zarathustra resists a too-strict approach to the idea of chastity; lust is to be avoided, but there is no universal way of curtailing it. Pursuing chastity too strictly might actually make a person's soul more *lustful, even if they don't indulge physically. His point is that conventional morality doesn't necessarily* produce *ideal behavior—often, people who are naturally inclined to these conventions behave this way without trying.*

OF THE FRIEND

Zarathustra says that "I and Me" are always in such earnest conversation that a third person, the friend, is needed. But this longing for a friend is a betrayal of oneself—often, love for a friend is only an attempt to avoid envy. It's almost better to confront someone as an enemy. If you really want a friend, you have to be willing to wage war for that person, which means that you must be capable of being an enemy. Ultimately, your friend should be your best enemy, and you should feel closest to your friend when you most oppose them.

The novel is marked by Nietzsche's disillusionment regarding friendship, especially his youthful friendship with composer Richard Wagner. He channels this into Zarathustra's belief that friends are an interruption to the soul's inner conversation, and that friendship is inevitably contentious; thus, it becomes an obstacle to evolving into the Superman.

To your friend, you should be "an arrow and a longing for the Superman." Man is something that must be overcome; neither a slave nor a tyrant can be a friend. This is why Zarathustra believes that women are not capable of friendship—woman is both slave and tyrant. Women are unjust toward all whom they don't love. But, for that matter, most men aren't yet capable of friendship. Zarathustra gives more to his enemy than most can give to a friend.

A friend should be nothing more or less than a spur to one's pursuit of the Superman. This is why, in Zarathustra's view, a woman can't be a friend; Nietzsche held that women lack the will to power and therefore cannot overcome their current selves to evolve into something better.

OF THE THOUSAND AND ONE GOALS

Zarathustra has seen many lands and peoples and discovered their good and evil; what seems good to one people seems shameful to another. "A table of values hangs over every people [...] the voice of its will to power." Each table praises what it finds difficult, and it deems "holy" what relieves people's greatest need. All people have given themselves their version of good and evil—it wasn't handed down to them from heaven.

In this chapter, Zarathustra delves more deeply into the idea of moral relativism. Different groups of people have different standards for good and evil. Zarathustra determines that each group's "table of values," or set of moral teachings, is an expression of the will to power—that is, stronger people exert that power over the weaker by setting moral standards. The standards aren't God-given.


Humankind gives things values. "Evaluation is creation," and evaluating is itself the value of things. When values change, that means there is a change in the creators of values, and creators first must destroy. It used to be that entire groups of people were creators, but more recently, individuals have been creators. Although there have been a thousand individual goals, the overarching goal for humanity is still lacking.

This section restates Nietzsche's belief that human beings' decision to call things "good" and "evil" is subjective—things aren't objectively good or evil. People strong enough to become "creators," by exercising the will to power, destroy old values and make new ones. Humanity as a whole, however, lacks a common goal (though Nietzsche believes that it should be to become the Superman).


OF LOVE OF ONE'S NEIGHBOUR

Zarathustra says that people's love of neighbor is really just "bad love of yourselves." Rather than rushing toward one's neighbor, a person should instead love "the most distant"—in other words, "the man of the future," or the Superman. But people fear the Superman and hide by loving their neighbor instead.

In this chapter, Nietzsche contrasts the German nächsten *(nearest) with* fernsten *(most distant—particularly, those of the distant future). He does this in order to subvert the traditional Christian moral teaching of "love they neighbor." Rather than loving the neighbor—that is, fellow human beings in their current state—it's better to love the Superman version of humanity that could exist in the future, although the Superman is much more distant.*

Zarathustra says that it's better to find a neighbor's company unendurable; then, a person has to find a friend in oneself. Most of the time, a neighbor only serves to prop up one's own self-perception; solitude is far better, since the "distant man" ends up paying for love of neighbor.

Nietzsche's discussion of the neighbor is another example of his contention that one ought to sacrifice the present for the future. Too much love of neighbor ends up being self-serving, and it shortchanges humanity's future.

Zarathustra distinguishes between the "friend," who is a preview of the Superman, and the neighbor. The friend is creative, a whole world unto himself. In a friend, the future and the Superman can be loved.

Zarathustra teaches that instead of loving neighbors indiscriminately, one should instead befriend a fellow creator who is also striving toward the Superman.

OF THE WAY OF THE CREATOR

The herd says that solitude is criminal. It is difficult to rid oneself of the herd's lingering voice; the way to oneself is a path of affliction. When one pursues freedom, it's less important what they're being freed *from* than what they're being freed *for*. Freedom is possible when one can decide good and evil for oneself, following one's own will as law. But being one's own lawgiver and judge is dangerous—facing one's solitude is a fearful thing, so one must be prepared to kill one's emotions. One must also bear the envy and contempt of those one surpasses.

Solitude requires one to choose the contempt of the herd, because the masses see solitude as bizarre and threatening. Choosing solitude isn't so much about freeing oneself from something as using one's freedom to reach for something else—namely, exercising the will to power. The masses don't understand this path, making it a difficult journey internally and a dangerous one externally, since others will surely misunderstand or judge the person who surpasses them.

Zarathustra advises that the solitary must be on guard against the "good and just," who hate anyone who devises their own virtue. One must also resist one's tendency to love and pity others. To become new and a "creator," one must despise what one loves about oneself.

Zarathustra is essentially saying that one cannot expect affirmation from the rest of the world (particularly from the self-righteous guardians of virtue), and one cannot indulge in pity for others or oneself.

OF OLD AND YOUNG WOMEN

One day, an old woman asks Zarathustra to speak to her about women. Zarathustra says that everything about women is a riddle, and that the solution is pregnancy. For women, man is the means to an end—a child. As for man, he wants "danger and play"—and a woman is "the most dangerous plaything."

Nietzsche did not have an especially high view of women in and of themselves. Here, he sees them as useful for humanity's progress toward the Superman (and man's pleasure in the process)— women are ultimately a "plaything" for men as they pursue this ideal.

Man is a warrior, and woman is for the recreation of the warrior; a woman's hope should be that she might bear the Superman. Zarathustra describes woman's nature as "a changeable, stormy film upon shallow waters," while a man's nature is a deep "torrent" in underground caves. The old woman thanks Zarathustra for sharing the truth about women. She tells him that if he is going to visit women, "do not forget your whip!"

Zarathustra continues to illustrate his vision of the differences between men and women, with men being by far the deeper, more active, and more consequential, although women have the hope of being able to aid humanity's progress through procreation. In essence, Zarathustra views women as fundamentally chaotic and men as fundamentally stable. He sees women as properly being dominated by men.

OF THE ADDER'S BITE

One day, while Zarathustra is sleeping, an adder comes along and bites his neck. When the snake is about to leave, Zarathustra thanks it—it woke him up at just the right time. The adder warns him that its poison is deadly, but Zarathustra smiles and says that a snake's venom can't kill a dragon, and that the snake should take back its poison. The snake obliges, licking the poison from Zarathustra's wound.

This story illustrates Nietzsche's ongoing challenge to conventional morality. Zarathustra's insistence that the snake lick his wound is meant as a challenge to the Christian teaching on "turning the other cheek," or returning evil with goodness. Zarathustra also interprets the wound as something that benefits him instead of harming him, since it wakes him up from complacency. With this, Zarathustra hints that people shouldn't ignore or resent their suffering—rather, they should confront it head-on and conceptualize it in a nuanced way.

When Zarathustra told this story to his followers, he explained its moral. The "good and just" accuse Zarathustra of destroying morals, but Zarathustra says that one must not repay one's enemy with good for evil—that would make the enemy ashamed. Instead, he should prove that his enemy has done him good. It's better to be angry and to curse back than to shame one's enemy. Zarathustra says that revenge is more "human" than no revenge.

Zarathustra sees himself not primarily as a destroyer of morals but as a creator of new ones. Zarathustra teaches that shaming an enemy or withholding vengeance are bad because such actions fall short of asserting one's will to power.

OF MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

According to Zarathustra, any person who is a self-conqueror, a lord of one's own virtues, should desire a child. A child is a "living memorial" to one's liberation; one can't build something beyond oneself without first building oneself. Similarly, the role of marriage is to help someone build beyond himself: marriage should be the will of two to create something more than the two. The "superfluous" do not have such marriages, although they claim that God has blessed them.

Zarathustra sees children as expressions of the creative will to power, and the role of marriage is to promote that goal. By "the superfluous," Zarathustra refers to the masses. Such people claim their marriages are sacred, but in Zarathustra's view, they really serve no purpose for humanity.

Zarathustra thinks that most marriages are nothing more than a match between a "saint and a goose," and a series of small follies followed by "one long stupidity." Love for woman is just an impersonated love that ought instead to lead a man to a higher calling. The bitterness in even the best love should make someone long for the Superman, the desire of every creator.

In Zarathustra's view, a man shouldn't settle for marriage when he could be focusing on progressing the human race toward the Superman instead. The typical marriage is "one long stupidity" that falls far short of Zarathustra's vision for humanity.

OF VOLUNTARY DEATH

Zarathustra says that many people die too late, and some die too early. He teaches that one should die at the "right time," and that the "consummating" death should be triumphant and a spur to those still alive. Ultimately, Zarathustra's kind of death is voluntary—one that comes because one wishes it. This is possible when a person has a goal and an heir: when they has these, they will stop desperately clinging to life.

For Zarathustra, exercising one's will to power ideally extends even to one's death. Death should serve one's will to power, in other words: once a person has an "heir" to further one's goal (implicitly the Superman), that person has exhausted their purposes in life. Their death can then be "consummating"—a fitting end to their life.

Zarathustra says that there are too many preachers of patience and slow death. The "Hebrew" honored by these preachers died too early, and this fact has since caused the death of many others. If he had remained in the desert instead of coming among the "good and just," then perhaps he might have learned to laugh and to love the earth. He might have lived to recant his own teaching.

The "Hebrew" refers to Jesus Christ, and the "preachers of death" refer mainly to Christian clergy. Zarathustra says that if Christ hadn't been persecuted by the self-righteous, then he might have lived longer and might not have preached death himself, thereby leading countless others to untimely deaths.

One who is mature enough to understand life and death is able to choose death at the right time. In such a man's death, his spirit will be outwardly virtuous, causing others to love the earth more. This is what it means to have a goal and an heir.

When a person exercises their will to power, they're able to both live and die in such a way that they leave a valuable legacy for others—one that betters humanity as a whole.

OF THE BESTOWING VIRTUE

1. Zarathustra leaves the town called the Pied Cow, and many of his disciples follow him. They reach a crossroad, and Zarathustra says that he wants to continue on his way alone, so the disciples give him a golden staff as a parting gift. Zarathustra leans on the golden staff and tells his followers that gold is valuable because, in its shining, it constantly "bestows itself." As such, gold is symbolizes the highest virtue—this virtue is a bestowing virtue.

Gold is an image of Zarathustra's wisdom constantly shining forth—and by extension, it's an image of the creative will to power overflowing from a person and "bestowing," or giving, constantly and inexhaustibly.

The bestowing love wants to gather all things into itself so that that they may flow back as gifts of love. This is a holy sort of selfishness. The sick sort of selfishness, on the other hand, wants to steal what the givers have—this is degeneration. Zarathustra and his followers, by contrast, are progressing upward to the Superman.

The "holy" selfishness embraces life in order to give. In contrast, a sickly selfishness grasps things in order to hoard them. The former promotes humanity's thriving, while the latter thwarts it.

The body advances through history, and the spirit is its herald. The elevated body wants to become a creator and evaluator of all things. Virtue originates when the will starts wanting to command all things—this is a "new good and evil." According to Zarathustra, this is the essence of power; it's a "golden **sun**."

This is a summary of Nietzsche's view of the higher individual (the one who's capable of evolving to the Superman) within history, and that individual's role in creating new values. New virtues flow forth from his will to power, meaning that it's virtuous for higher individuals to follow their natural instincts. Given that the sun is an ongoing symbol for wisdom and the path toward enlightenment, Zarathustra's comparison of the will to power to a "golden sun" suggests that pursuing the will to power will lead higher individuals toward the Superman ideal.

2. Zarathustra falls silent for a while and then changes his tone. Lovingly, he tells his disciples to remain loyal to the earth and to bestow their love toward the earth. Too often, virtue has "flown away." There is much of the earth, and many paths to healing, that are still undiscovered. Today's solitaries will one day be a "chosen people," out of whom will spring the Superman. Then, the whole earth will become a place of healing.

Here, Zarathustra gives a charge to his disciples. Even if his disciples themselves do not become the Superman, the Superman might emerge from the class of higher individuals they create. His disciples should strive toward this fate for the sake of the entire planet.

3. Then Zarathustra tells his disciples that he is going away alone. They, too, should go away to be alone—in fact, they should guard themselves against him. After all, a pupil should not remain a pupil forever, since this does not repay his teacher well. Belief in Zarathustra *himself* is not ultimately important—it's more important that his followers "lose me and find yourselves"; Zarathustra will return to them only after they've denied him. Then, he will rejoin them, love them anew, and "celebrate the great **noontide**" with them.

The point of being Zarathustra's disciple is not to imitate him perfectly. Higher men are supposed to create their own values rather than copying what's gone before—even if that means denying Zarathustra himself. Zarathustra sees this separation and denial as a key to the coming of the Superman, which will be signaled by the "great noontide."

The great **noontide** is when a human being stands in the middle of the course between animal and Superman and celebrates his journey toward his highest hope. At that time, the sun of knowledge will stand at noontide, and such a man will be able to say that "all gods are dead." He will only want the Superman to live.

For Zarathustra, the "great noontide" is the moment when a person has fully rejected belief in the gods and the constraints of lower morality. This is the state midway between animal and Superman, when a person truly desires the Superman's coming.

THE CHILD WITH THE MIRROR

Zarathustra withdraws into the mountains once again, away from humanity. He has spread his teaching and must wait for the results—but he is filled with impatience. Months and years pass by as Zarathustra's wisdom grows. Finally, he wakes one morning before dawn and ponders a dream he's just had. In the dream, a child brought Zarathustra a mirror and invited him to look at his reflection. When Zarathustra does so, he is shaken by what he sees: a sneering devil. He realizes that this means his teaching has been distorted; it's time to seek out his disciples once more.

This chapter is a counterpart to "Zarathustra's Prologue" at the beginning of the novel, as Zarathustra retreats into solitude once again. After years alone in the mountains, he dreams that his disciples have begun to proclaim a distorted version of his teaching. As he'd predicted, his disciples have strayed, even to the point of contradicting what he taught them—and this signals to him that it's time to leave his mountain once more.

Zarathustra leaps up happily, and his animal companions (the eagle and serpent) look at him with amazement. Zarathustra tells his animals that his love is overflowing—he has been in solitude for too long and has forgotten how to be silent. The secluded lake within him must stream downward toward the seas. Like any creator, he now finds that his old speech no longer suffices; he wants to speak in a new language. His "wild wisdom" can no longer be contained.

In keeping with "bestowing virtue," which Zarathustra described earlier—the uncontainable, inexhaustible will to power that overflows from a higher individual—Zarathustra now goes forth to share the wisdom he's accumulated with others.

ON THE BLISSFUL ISLANDS

Zarathustra tells his followers that once they gazed upon the seas and spoke of "God," but he has now taught them to say "Superman." God is something that the human will creates; likewise, the Superman is a creation. If Zarathustra's disciples don't create the Superman themselves, then they can at least be the ancestors of the Superman. This hope makes life endurable; the irrational can be no comfort.

In this chapter, Zarathustra expands upon the idea that "God is dead" and that the Superman replaces belief in God. Humanity once looked at the world as something divinely created; but now, with the loss of religion in the modern world, they realize that it's all up to them. Ultimately, belief in the supernatural cannot be a comfort to one who desires the Superman.

Zarathustra says that teaching about an unmoved, self-sufficient God leads only to spiritual sickness. Creators must be their own mothers, which is painful and heartbreaking—but such creative will is truly liberating. A person's will is what led them away from God, because if gods existed, then what would there be to create? Rather, a person's will drives them to humankind, to the beauty of the Superman. Compared to this, the gods are nothing.

Zarathustra argues that belief in God isn't actually comforting in the long run, and that being a "creator"—one who exercises the will to power—is truly liberating, even though it's very difficult and not for everyone. Giving up belief in God was actually a hopeful step because, if God is the creator, then there's no room for the creation of the Superman—for human beings to exercise their creative will.

OF THE COMPASSIONATE

The history of humanity is filled with shame, and Zarathustra thinks that the compassionate are too lacking in shame. If someone must be compassionate, then they should try to do it from a distance; doing things for those who are suffering is inferior to enjoying oneself. Humanity's "original sin" is too little enjoyment. The more they learn to enjoy themselves, the better they "unlearn" how to harm others.

Basically, Zarathustra argues that compassion is wrongheaded if it isn't accompanied by shame. If someone is aiming to create the Superman, they should be pained on humanity's behalf in the face of human weakness and suffering. And the happier such a person is, the more helpful they can actually be to humanity.

If one person sees another suffering, it's better to feel shame on his account than to injure his pride by helping him. Being obligated to another person makes a sufferer resentful, and stings of conscience only make him sting others. The best way to help a suffering friend is to be like an uncomfortable bed for him, since great love is beyond pity. Great love wants to create a neighbor like oneself.

Nietzsche teaches that the traditional values of pity and compassion actually harm their objects by placing sufferers in the debt of those who help them and thereby creating resentment. The most loving thing to do for a friend is to spur them on toward the Superman too.

OF THE PRIESTS

Zarathustra speaks to his followers about priests. He pities them, as they are enslaved to the one they call "Redeemer." By teaching them shame and penitence, their churches prevent their souls from reaching the heights; they taught people to love God only by nailing people to the Cross. Redemption can only come by a greater man than any who has yet existed—the Superman.

Zarathustra isn't referring only to literal clergy, but to all who preach and practice traditional Christian values. Nietzsche saw such values as obstructing souls, keeping them from realizing their full power by subjecting them to shame and repulsive ideas about redemption. Ultimately, only the Superman—created by people themselves—can bring redemption.

OF THE VIRTUOUS

Beauty appeals to awakened souls and laughs at the so-called virtuous. Zarathustra teaches that virtue isn't rewarded, not even by itself. Reward and punishment are lies—virtue is, in fact, the Self. The works of virtue travel forever, like a star's light even after it's extinguished.

Traditionally "virtuous" people believe that virtue is rewarded, even if it's not until an afterlife. Zarathustra teaches that virtue is simply the exercise of the will, which shines into the indefinite future, even after a person dies—there is no literal afterlife for the soul.

There are many different attitudes about virtue in the world. For some people, virtue is like the brakes on a heavy cart rushing downhill; to others, it's like the tick-tock of a wound-up clock. To others still, it's like sitting quietly in a swamp and holding the opinion one is taught, or holding an unvarying pose, while their heart knows nothing of virtue. Just about everyone, in fact, believes that they're practicing virtue, calling themselves experts in "good" and "evil." But Zarathustra has come so that people will grow tired of these mere words—virtue should instead be like the Self in action, like the mother in her child.

Zarathustra teaches that most attitudes about virtue are inauthentic and useless. They might temporarily restrain people; they might be unthinking or automatic; or they might not penetrate to a person's heart. In the end, all of these approaches to so-called "virtues" are fruitless—they are separate from the individual. Zarathustra teaches a different approach to virtue: it simply means living according to the truest and highest version of one's Self.

OF THE RABBLE

Zarathustra says that life is wonderful, but that the masses poisons the wells from which they drink. Many who think that they've turned away from life have, in fact, only turned away from the masses. For a long time, Zarathustra has lived as if deaf and blind, trying to avoid the masses; eventually, however, he learned how to free himself from this disgust. This is only possible in the extreme heights of solitude, where the unclean cannot reach and where one's purity reflects back to one in the well. Solitaries orient themselves toward the future.

Zarathustra suggests that the masses of humanity aren't really capable of fully enjoying life, and even those who retreat from life are really just fleeing from the masses in disgust. Only solitary people can truly separate themselves from the masses and enjoy life purely. Zarathustra further suggests that this is possible because solitaries live for the future—for the Superman.

OF THE TARANTULAS

Zarathustra tells a parable of a tarantula, which symbolizes "preachers of equality." Their "justice" is merely vengefulness in disguise. Tarantulas equate virtue with "will to equality," and they protest everything that has power. This protest is really a tyrannical appetite, a repressed envy.

The "preachers of equality" are those who proclaim that all people are the same. Nietzsche rejected this, believing that the fight for equality was just an envious grasping by the powerless.

Zarathustra warns his followers to mistrust anyone who has a strong desire to punish, especially when they are the "good and just." Even some of those who teach Zarathustra's doctrine are actually "tarantulas" who preach equality, but Zarathustra does not want to be confused with them. To him, justice says that people are *not* equal. If it were otherwise, he would not love the Superman. The whole point of life is that it must "overcome itself again and again." It therefore needs "conflict between steps and those who climb them."

The "good and just," or those who claim to be morally superior, will try to punish those who depart from the society's traditional values. They will often do this on the basis of alleged inequalities in the world. However, Zarathustra plainly teaches that there's no such thing as equality among people. If there were, it wouldn't be necessary for humanity to overcome itself, and people wouldn't admire or strive to embody the Superman ideal.

OF THE FAMOUS PHILOSOPHERS

Philosophers, Zarathustra teaches, have not served truth; they have served the people instead. The people have always persecuted seekers. Zarathustra will not believe in the genuineness of philosophers until they give up their veneration of idols and go into the desert like a **lion**—this is where free spirits live. Philosophers, even if they're decked out in golden gear, will always pull the cart of the people, like draft animals. Unlike Zarathustra's wisdom, philosophers are too respectable and stiff to sail on the sea.

Zarathustra differentiates between philosophers and true seekers: philosophers are mainly concerned about the approval of the masses. True seekers, free spirits, live in solitude without regard for the masses. Philosophers are incapable of truly pursuing wisdom because they're enslaved by the people's will. Seekers, in contrast, can go wherever wisdom takes them.

THE NIGHT SONG

At night, the "unquenchable" speaks out. Zarathustra constantly gives and doesn't know the joy of receiving; he has an unsated hunger and, like all givers, is alone. Zarathustra laments the necessity of being light; he yearns to be night instead.

Zarathustra sings about the pain and longing in solitude. The higher individual constantly pours out to others by means of the inexhaustible will to power and therefore cannot be emotionally or spiritually filled. This is a lonely life.

THE DANCE SONG

One evening Zarathustra walks through the forest with his disciples, looking for a well. In a meadow, he finds a group of girls dancing together. The girls stop dancing, but Zarathustra urges them to continue—he is not the Devil, or the Spirit of Gravity! He accompanies their dance with a song praising Life. After the girls go away and the **sun** sets, Zarathustra grows sad.

Dancing represents the freedom and joy of a fully exercised will to power. Zarathustra counters the dancing girls' shyness by reminding them that a heavy spirit of guilt and restraint has nothing to do with him; he stands for a whole-hearted embrace of life.

THE FUNERAL SONG

Zarathustra decides to go to the grave-island with a wreath of life, so he travels over the sea. He sadly recalls the loves of his youth, now dead. He laments that they died too early and curses his enemies whose arrows slew them. When he achieved his overcomings, his enemies caused his loved ones to be hurt by it. The only reason Zarathustra has overcome this youthful pain is that, deep within him, his will to power remains invulnerable. His will destroys all graves, and only among graves are there resurrections.

Zarathustra's journey to the grave-island recalls Nietzsche's loss of his youthful friendship with Richard Wagner, the famous composer whom he idealized, befriended, and had a falling out with. The chapter suggests that their separation had to do with misunderstandings or objections to Nietzsche's ideas. Zarathustra finds comfort in his solitary will to power, which implies that the older Nietzsche has found contentment in this as well.

OF SELF-OVERCOMING

Zarathustra addresses the subject of the will: he says that what urges his disciples on is the desire for all being to "bend and accommodate itself to you." This is called the will to power—a will that wants to create a world worth submitting to. The masses are like a river down which a boat, carrying value judgments, floats. What the masses believe to be "good and evil" actually shows "an ancient will to power." The wise, in contrast, put their own "passengers" in the boat by means of their will. The will to power is the "unexhausted, procreating life-will."

Zarathustra discusses the will to power, a central idea in Nietzsche's philosophy, in greater detail. The will to power is an unrestrained, all-embracing will to creatively exert one's power in the world. The will to power is what creates values—and the masses, composed of weaker individuals, generally accept the values imposed on them through others' will to power. Stronger individuals, capable of exerting their will, do not accept these.

Zarathustra shares his teaching about life and the nature of living creatures. First, he explains that all living creatures are first "obeying" creatures. Second, the creature who cannot "obey himself will be commanded." Finally, commanding is harder than obeying. This is because the one who commands "bears the burden of all who obey." This is even true when a person commands *themselves*, as they must be both the judge and the judged under their own law.

All creatures obey someone, but the stronger individual is not content to be commanded by others. This type of person obeys only themselves. But the stronger not only command themselves—they command others. Any command, whether of oneself or others, places one in the position of judge, which is much more difficult than obeying.

Every living creature possesses will to power; even a servant wills to be master. Every weaker person's will persuades them to serve the stronger, while they master those weaker than themselves. Meanwhile, the weaker always desire to steal the power of the stronger.

Those who lack will to power resent those who possess it—and in their envy, they try to wrest power from the more powerful.

Zarathustra says that life told him its secret—it is "that *which must overcome itself again and again*." Life would rather die than renounce this; and when life dies, it sacrifices itself for power's sake. Even an enlightened person is an expression of life's self-overcoming.

The purpose of life, in Zarathustra's view, is self-overcoming for the sake of ever more power. Such life spends and renews itself again and again.

Zarathustra tells his followers that good and evil do not exist; these things must overcome themselves again and again. Doctrines of good and evil are just exertions of power. Someone who wants to be a creator in good and evil must first be a destroyer of values.

Zarathustra doesn't claim that traditional notions of good and evil are necessarily bad; their objectivity is just illusory, expressions of others' power. This is why the superior person, in Zarathustra's view, will use their power to create new values of good and evil.

OF THE SUBLIME MEN

Zarathustra describes seeing a sublime, solemn, repentant man—Zarathustra laughed at this man's "ugliness." Such a man, Zarathustra explains, doesn't yet understand "laughter and beauty." Only when the sublime man tires of sublimity and "turns away from himself" will he really experience beauty. Because the man has sat for too long in the shadows, the earth has become contemptuous to him.

"The sublime man" is akin to a philosopher or a preacher of death—categories of people who take themselves, the world, and objective "good and evil" seriously. To Nietzsche, the excessively solemn person doesn't really understand beauty, because he is too weighed down by it and too focused on his inner life and spirituality. Someone who really understands beauty is able to embrace it, and it moves them to laughter.

For sublime men, standing relaxed and acting out of free will is the most difficult thing, the hardest overcoming of oneself. The secret of the soul is to abandon oneself—only then will the Superman approach.

A sublime man considers restraint of the will to be virtuous. For Nietzsche, however, a free and energetic will is the epitome of virtue and the key to the coming of the Superman.

OF THE LAND OF CULTURE

Zarathustra describes flying into the future too far and being horrified by what he sees: only time. He hurried back to the present, to the "land of culture." Here, he had to laugh, because the men of the present appeared to be painted with blotches, admiring themselves in mirrors. The signs of the present are painted over with new signs, making them unintelligible. Zarathustra feels that can't stand such men, whether naked or disguised—even the unfamiliar future is more appealing.

This chapter is related to Nietzsche's 1873 polemical pamphlet "Thoughts out of Season," in which he critiques the sterility of his former scholarly colleagues. Here, he suggests that the men of the present day aren't even sure of who they are—they're recognizable neither to him nor themselves. The day's "culture" seems to have no clear identity or goal.

The men of the present claim that they are "complete realists," lacking any beliefs or superstitions. But covered with the signs of *all* beliefs, how can they believe anything? Zarathustra says these men are unworthy of belief; they are unfruitful. In contrast, the creator never lacks "prophetic dreams" and believes in belief.

Zarathustra's claim about "believing in belief" is obscure, but he seems to mean that creators believe in prophecies of the future and therefore bear fruit—whether that be children of their own or more abstract contributions to achieving the Superman ideal. So-called "realists," on the other hand, are still immersed in the beliefs they claim to reject and cannot create anything worthwhile.

Zarathustra has no home; he finds no homeland, and the men of the present are a mockery to him. Instead, he loves the undiscovered land that his children will one day inhabit; he seeks this land instead.

The end of this chapter introduces Nietzsche's view of altruism, already hinted at in the chapter "On Love of One's Neighbour." For Nietzsche, love for others means seeking a future for one's children that's not burdened by the errors of the past and present.

OF IMMACULATE PERCEPTION

Zarathustra critiques hypocrites who seek so-called "pure knowledge." Such people purport to resent the earth, yet deep down they still lust for it. They lie to themselves, desiring an "immaculate perception" that gazes on things without touching them. Zarathustra says that this desire slanders desiring; such hypocrites do not love the earth as creators do.

Nietzsche believes that knowledge cannot be divorced from emotion and personality. Here, Zarathustra criticizes people, especially the day's scientists, who try to contemplate nature objectively. Such an attempt claims to be innocent, but it's actually hypocritical.

Zarathustra says that only the one who wills to create something beyond t is innocent, and only the one who wills with *all* this will is beautiful. Love and dying belong together—willing to love means being willing to die. But cowards want to contemplate from afar and call what they see beautiful, and such contemplation will never bring anything forth. Zarathustra himself was once led astray by this supposed knowledge, until he understood that knowledge is like the **sun**'s light, suffusing everything.

Only an unrestrained, creative will to power is truly pure, unlike the scientists who claim that perfect objectivity is possible. The scientists also stand apart from the object of their study. Zarathustra says that this will never yield anything beautiful. Like the sun's light, knowledge isn't separate from what it knows; it is the light within which things are seen and understood.

OF SCHOLARS

Once, while Zarathustra was sleeping, a sheep ate the ivy-wreath on his head and declared that he was no longer a scholar. Zarathustra considers this a blessed fate, since he prefers to sleep in the open air rather than on scholarly "respectabilities." Scholars are mere spectators in the shade, avoiding the scorching **sun**—they stare at passersby and think about others' thoughts. Their cleverness is deceitful. Scholars resent Zarathustra for walking apart from and above them.

Here, Nietzsche has German scholars—and his own breach with them—in mind. After Nietzsche published his The Birth of Tragedy, *a theoretical book about classical Greek tragedy, he was ostracized by many German philosophers. He now criticizes those philosophers as weak, uncreative, unobjective, and self-deceptive.*

OF POETS

Zarathustra tells one of his disciples that he knows the body so well that the spirit within him is only figurative, and everything that's permanent is only an "image."

This section, especially the discussion of the transitory as image, mimics Goethe's Faust Part Two, the "Mystic Chorus." Zarathustra means that his body and spirit are perfectly united, and that anything "unchangeable" in the world is an illusion.

Zarathustra tells one of his disciples that the poets—including himself—lie too much and know too little. They convince themselves that because of their tender feelings, they have a special connection to nature. They also create false ides about gods and supermen, and Zarathustra wearies of these supposed realities. Zarathustra reflects for a while and says that he is tired of all poets, who only pretend to be deep. They give birth to guilty, repentant people.

Nietzsche includes himself among those he is mocking in this section. He makes fun of poets for projecting their own sentimental ideas upon nature, faking profundity. In fact, such profundity is really self-absorbed and excessively solemn—traits that Nietzsche finds inconsistent with the will to power.

OF GREAT EVENTS

While Zarathustra is living on the Blissful Islands in the middle of the sea, a ship arrives, and sailors disembark to shoot rabbits. Toward noon, however, the sailors saw a man flying toward them through the air, calling, "It is high time!" They realize it is Zarathustra.

In this puzzling section, Zarathustra discusses revolution and anarchism and also tells a story about sailors and a flying prophet that his followers find much more interesting.

Five days later, Zarathustra reappears and tells his followers a story about his conversation with a "fire-dog." Zarathustra told the fire-dog that the subversive stories it tells are actually false and superficial. These stories proclaim freedom, yet Zarathustra mistrusts them. The world does not revolve around these stories; rather, it revolves around "inventors of new values."

Zarathustra's conversation with the fire-dog is Nietzsche's critique of revolution and anarchism. The fire-dog claims that its stories about political developments are the most important stories in the world. Zarathustra thinks the importance of such developments is an illusion and a distraction from a higher truth.


The state and church claim to be the most important beasts on Earth, Zarathustra continues, but this isn't true. The fire-dog is cowed by this, and it retreats. But Zarathustra's followers are more interested in the story about the sailors and Zarathustra's flight. Zarathustra wonders for *what* it is "high time."

Zarathustra concludes that society's major institutions are not as important as they proclaim themselves to be—he implies that individuals, especially higher individuals, are much more important. Though Zarathustra does not answer his own question, he suggests that it is "high time" to proclaim the teaching of the Eternal Recurrence, which he will soon explain.



THE PROPHET

A "great sadness" descends on humanity, and everything seems empty. Zarathustra hears a prophet speak, and what he hears transforms him. He grieves, wondering how to maintain his light through the coming darkness. After a long sleep, he tells his disciples about a dream in which he renounced life. He was thrown into a coffin by a fierce wind and mocked by masked children, angels, and creatures.

The prophet named here is a stand-in for the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who was influential on Nietzsche, and some of whose teachings (especially about pessimism) Nietzsche rejected. Here, Zarathustra at first seems swayed by the pessimistic prophet, and his dream about this is ominous.


Zarathustra's favorite disciple interprets the dream for him. He says that the wind in the dream is Zarathustra himself, and so are the different evils that burst forth from the coffin. Zarathustra invades many tombs and laughs at the gloomy watchers of graves, overthrowing them with his laughter. He is a prophet of life, capable of dreaming his own enemies. This shows that he will always overcome them. Gradually, Zarathustra emerges from his gloom.

Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer's teachings on pessimism and taught optimism in their place. Zarathustra's dream interpretation shows the same thing happening in the story, as Zarathustra mocks and overcomes gravity. The fact that he can create his own nightmares shows that he is always in control of them and need not fear.

OF REDEMPTION

One day Zarathustra is going across the great bridge when he's stopped by beggars, and a hunchback tells him that even "cripples" must be convinced of his teaching. In reply, Zarathustra argues that taking away people's physical infirmities just gives them opportunities to develop new vices. There are also people whom others regard as geniuses but whom Zarathustra calls "inverse cripples," because they have too much of a single thing (like hearing or sight).

Zarathustra teaches that those with certain overdeveloped faculties are themselves "disabled" by this excess, much as someone might be disabled by a physical lack. And healing a disability isn't necessarily a spiritual advantage to a person. This all fits with Nietzsche's belief that the most important human drive is the will to power.

Zarathustra tells his followers that it is terrible to walk among fragmented human beings. If he weren't a seer of the future, he doesn't know how he would bear it. It is his goal to someday bring all these fragments together into one. The will's loneliest affliction is that it cannot liberate the past. In its frustration, the will can become vengeful. The spirit of revenge appeases itself by believing that it justly inflicts punishment.

Zarathustra's role as prophet is lonely, and his only consolation is that he knows humanity will someday evolve. Part of that evolution includes humanity's ability to accept the past. The "spirit of revenge" is an inability to accept the past, which leads to a futile desire to enact vengeance as an outlet for one's frustration with the past.

Eventually, the spirit of revenge goes mad, believing that because everything passes away, everything *deserves* to pass away. Existence begins to seem like "an eternally-recurring deed and guilt." The only escape is that the will redeems itself when the creative will says to the past, "I willed it thus," thereby unlearning the spirit of revenge. The will to power must learn to will *backwards*. At this point in the discourse, Zarathustra is terrified, and he falls silent.

For Nietzsche, redemption means being able to look at the troubled past and say, "I willed it thus." Someone with this ability can even be grateful for enemies and disasters, because he is able to turn the worst parts of life into the best.

OF MANLY PRUDENCE

Zarathustra speaks of his heart's "twofold will," gazing downward into the abyss and simultaneously grasping upward. His will clings to humanity and also toward the Superman. Zarathustra's first "manly prudence" is to allows himself to be deceived so that he will not be on his guard against deceivers; this allows him to be among humanity without becoming tainted by other people.

In Nietzsche's later work Beyond Good and Evil, *he says that the superior person must wear a mask. Here, Zarathustra introduces that idea: the true higher individual doesn't make his superiority obvious but adapts himself to other people, not wishing to be found out by others, so as not to shame them.*

Zarathustra second manly prudence is to be more considerate to the vain than to the proud. The vain are ease his melancholy and keep Zarathustra bound to humanity. His third manly prudence is that he doesn't let others' meekness spoil his delight in the wicked.

It's not obvious how Zarathustra distinguishes between the vain and the proud, but the reader can assume that, like the "wicked" in whom he delights, they do not allow traditional morality to stifle their wills.

The "good and just" are so unfamiliar with what is truly great that they would fear the Superman's goodness—they would even think that the Superman was a devil. Zarathustra wants to see his fellow humans disguised as the good and just. Then he, too, will sit among them disguised, in order to misunderstand them—that is his last manly prudence.

Self-righteous, conventional types cannot recognize the Superman for what he is: a higher form of humanity. The idea of "disguise" restates the fact that Zarathustra doesn't want to be recognized by humanity for what he is; maybe others are also disguised behind their self-righteous appearance.

THE STILLEST HOUR

Zarathustra must go into solitude again, because "the stillest hour" has ordered him to go away. He heard a voice saying, "You know, Zarathustra, but you do not speak!" Zarathustra tries to resist the voice, which informs him that he is not yet humble enough. Zarathustra says that he has failed to reach other people with his teaching. The voice retorts that what people need most is someone who "commands great things." Zarathustra has the power to rule, but he will not. The voice therefore orders Zarathustra to go "as a shadow of that which must come" and so command. In doing this, he must become a child. Because Zarathustra still resists this duty, the voice orders him back into solitude. Zarathustra is overwhelmed with grief at departing from his friends, and no one can comfort him. He goes away alone.

In this chapter, Zarathustra seems to wrestle internally with the need to impart his most obscure teachings. He resists proclaiming ideas that humanity is not yet ready for and that he knows they will reject; he feels ashamed of his inability to get through to them. For that reason, he must retreat into solitude again and develop a childlike humility and innocence.

THE WANDERER

Zarathustra journeys to the other side of his island to catch a ship. As he goes, he reflects that he has always lived, and will always live, as a wanderer. Now, he has to climb his most difficult path, but he does not shrink from it—even though there are no footholds to be found, and he will have to climb beyond himself.

In the following discourses, Zarathustra primarily addresses himself, not his disciples. Here, he consoles himself in the grief of his inescapable solitude and unmarked path.

Reaching the top of a mountain, Zarathustra laments that he must now descend to the sea, his deepest descent yet. When he reaches the seashore, he senses from the sea's warmth that it must be having a nightmare. He laughs at himself for wanting to soothe a monster. Love, he thinks, has been his downfall. Then he thinks of his friends and weeps.

This passage recalls the beginning of the book, when Zarathustra first descended to humanity. His desire to "soothe a monster" also anticipates the end of the book, when Zarathustra confronts his weakness—his short-sighted pity for humanity (as contrasted with joy in the coming Superman).

OF THE VISION AND THE RIDDLE

1. On board the ship, people are very curious about Zarathustra, but he remains sorrowful and withdrawn. After a couple of days, however, he begins listening to others again, since he is "a friend to all who take long journeys." Eventually, he begins to speak and tells them a riddle about his encounter with the most solitary man. First, Zarathustra was walking a mountain path in a grim twilight, resisting the mocking Spirit of Gravity, which sits on him like a "half dwarf, half mole." Eventually, Zarathustra summons his courage and tells the creature that either he or the dwarf must die.

The Spirit of Gravity is what Nietzsche saw as the distorting instinct created by the Judeo-Christian emphasis on sin and guilt. Zarathustra throws off this "dwarf," or guilty conscience, once and for all—something he sees as the most difficult effort for a person today. However, it's a necessary precursor to the Superman, since guilt is incompatible with the will to power.

2. The dwarf hops down from Zarathustra's shoulder. Zarathustra points out a nearby fork in the path; above the crossroad is a gateway marked with the word "Moment." He explains that an eternal path runs backward from here, and everything that *can* happen has already run along the path. All these things must also run *forward* along the lane. If he and the dwarf run down the lane before them, in other words, they will be returning eternally.

Having thrown off the Spirit of Gravity, Zarathustra is now free to regard the future with hope. In fact, having thrown off guilty conscience frees Zarathustra to embrace and teach the idea of all things eternally recurring. Being conscious of one's guilt would prevent a person from embracing this idea.

Suddenly, Zarathustra is transported to a desolate spot among wild cliffs. He sees a young shepherd, who is choking on a heavy snake that has crawled into his throat. Zarathustra vainly tugs at the snake and then urges the man to bite its head off. The shepherd does so, spits the snake's head aside, and springs up, transformed. He laughs as no human being has laughed before.

Here, the shepherd is the archetype of the most solitary man. Zarathustra calls upon the shepherd's will to free him from the choking snake. The shepherd symbolizes a modern person freeing themselves from the day's suffocating values. With this, Zarathustra calls on people to free themselves before they are choked to death—once this is done, humanity can freely evolve.

OF INVOLUNTARY BLISS

Within a few days, Zarathustra has overcome his bitterness and rejoices again. It is afternoon, the time when he found his companions for the first time; it is also the afternoon of his entire lifespan. He is in the process of creating his children by going to them, returning from them, and perfecting himself.

After passing through a time of sorrow and solitude, Zarathustra experiences a kind of rebirth. He is drawing closer both to his own perfection and to the emergence of the Superman.

Someday, Zarathustra's children, like trees, will each stand in solitude, "a living lighthouse of unconquerable life." Then, each tree will be tested to show whether it's master of its will, a "fellow-creator" with Zarathustra. For the sake of such trees, Zarathustra continues perfecting himself, no longer ensnared by loving his children. When he remained brooding in his love, he was shadowed by doubts and unable to hear the summons to perfection. He casts aside involuntary bliss, ready instead for pain. Happiness, however, keeps running after him.

Zarathustra's offspring will exemplify the will to power ("unconquerable life"), creators like himself. For their sake, he has to keep perfecting himself. That involves casting aside pity for his children—pity being something that Nietzsche considers a short-sighted weakness, shortchanging the future and the Superman. Pity also makes Zarathustra self-absorbed and slower to perfect himself; he must be vigilant not to indulge himself too much.

BEFORE SUNRISE

Zarathustra gives a hymn about the beauty of the sky, longing to disappear into its purity. He hates everything that obscures its clarity, things that neither "bless nor [...] curse from the heart." He longs for a declaration of "Yes! and Amen!" The one who can't bless should learn to curse.

This section is an expression of Nietzsche's optimistic view of life ("Yes! and Amen!"). Zarathustra rejects a halting, lukewarm attitude about life—someone who exercises the will to power does not settle for half-heartedness.

Zarathustra says that everything is "baptized [...] beyond good and evil," with good and evil themselves only being fleeting. There's no "eternal will" that acts upon things—rather, everything is subject to chance.

Like the idea of good and evil as relative, chance plays an important role in Nietzsche's philosophy. Chance doesn't toy with humanity; rather, it is liberating, because it means that there's no divine predeterminism of things.

OF THE VIRTUE THAT MAKES SMALL

1. On land again, Zarathustra undertakes many wanderings. He wants to find out whether humanity has grown bigger or smaller in his absence; he finds that everything seems to have grown smaller.

This chapter comments satirically on the people of Nietzsche's day, whose virtues belittle them. By "smaller," Zarathustra means that humanity has taken a collective step backward rather than mentally and spiritually evolving toward the Superman.


2. As Zarathustra goes among the people, they won't forgive him for the fact that he isn't envious of their virtues. Zarathustra determines that the cause of the people's smallness is the way they conceive of happiness and virtue—the people are modest in their virtues because they want an easy life. Zarathustra is especially offended by the fact that even those who command act like the ones who obey. Mostly, they simply don't want anyone to harm them, so they don't harm others. But Zarathustra calls this cowardice, not virtue, and mediocrity, not moderation.

The people expect Zarathustra to be impressed with their advanced outlook, but he sees that they live a dull, deadening life characterized by empty platitudes and bland contentment. Zarathustra calls modern virtues "cowardice" and moderation "mediocrity." Most people consider a good life to be one that's free of pain—such people do not exercise the will to power.


3. Zarathustra is received by these people as "godless," a label he accepts. He is disgusted by "teachers of submission." In contrast, anyone abides by their own will and renounces submission is Zarathustra's equal. Zarathustra makes chance submit to him, but everyone here is going to become smaller until they crumble into nothingness. He implores the people to "be such as *can will*!" Someday, the "great **noontide**" will arrive.

Zarathustra again expresses a positive attitude about atheism as something hopeful and creative, though ordinary people—"teachers of submission"—see it as destructive. He finds few who have the will to power, but despite this discouraging outlook, he still proclaims the coming of the Superman. Nietzsche himself believed that he lived during humanity's "noontide," a time of knowledge and potential progress that most people failed to recognize and embrace.


ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

Winter is an unwelcome guest in Zarathustra's house, so he flees to the sunny "mount of olives," where he can be joyful even in winter. He doesn't worship a "fire-idol," like the weak—he'd rather suffer a little in the cold than participate in idol-worship. Zarathustra has learned to conceal his "inflexible sun-will" in winter. Indeed, the truly profound cannot have their clearest depths disturbed—and if Zarathustra didn't obscure his happiness, others could not endure it. Meanwhile, he warms himself on the mount of olives.

This chapter portrays Zarathustra as a solitary—a state in which he finds joy and contentment, no matter the incomprehension of the outside world. He suggests that the "fire-idol" is a falsely warming faith in God. Zarathustra, in contrast, needs only his will to keep him warm.

OF PASSING BY

Zarathustra makes his way back to his cave by indirect wanderings. When passing a great city, he is blocked by a fool whom the people call "Zarathustra's ape." Raving at length, the fool tells Zarathustra to turn back—he will find nobody who is receptive to him, only the virtuous and pious. But Zarathustra stops the fool, scolding him for his revengeful spirit and his false use of Zarathustra's teaching. But he ultimately passes the city by; it contains nothing to make either better or worse, and before the great **noontide** comes, it must be destroyed.

Zarathustra's ape symbolizes his opposite, and someone for whom Zarathustra might be mistaken by the unwary. Those who don't understand Zarathustra's ways—that he destroys out of love, for instance—might confuse a "vengeful" person for someone who follows his teaching. Ultimately, even though the ape is a false prophet, Zarathustra agrees that the city is not worth addressing, though he passes it by without vengeance.

OF THE APOSTATES

1. Zarathustra laments that many who once danced and laughed are now creeping toward the Cross. There are few, he says, whose courage endures patiently; most are cowardly. Anyone like Zarathustra must accept that his seemingly lively companions will drift away—they cannot help it.

Here, Zarathustra criticizes those who eagerly accept his teaching and then quickly fall away from it, back into comfortable conventions.

2. Zarathustra tells his "apostates" that it is disgraceful for those with "conscience" to pray. This allows them to take life easier and appeal to others while pretending they are deep. Zarathustra laughs at people's foolish words about God, even their doubts. The time for doubts has passed—the gods "laughed themselves to death" long ago. Zarathustra continues on his way to the town called the Pied Cow.

Zarathustra doesn't say that it's wrong for anyone *to pray. He just means that "higher" (more intelligent and moral) men like himself ought to know better. When such people practice religion, they curry favor with the weaker majority. The strong should recognize that belief in gods should have been given up long before now.*

THE HOME-COMING

Zarathustra joyfully returns to his cave. He addresses his cave and himself, acknowledging that among other human beings, he will always be lonely; humanity, which wants to be indulged, cannot understand him. Solitude is his home, where he can be completely himself. He has now learned that it's wisest to pass by the masses of humanity, and that he hates being tainted by them.

Zarathustra contrasts the peace and enlightenment of his solitude with the superficiality of the masses. Nietzsche believed that the vast majority of people were not capable of accepting his teachings; he anticipated a small, select following.

Among humanity, there is nothing but noise and indulgence. Zarathustra tried to sit among humanity for their own sake and not to blame them for their "smallness," but he found himself pitying them, which is "stifling for all free souls." Ultimately, all Zarathustra learned from humanity was to conceal his own riches. It's better to live in the pure air of the mountains than among the bogs of the "gravediggers" (scholars).

In Nietzsche's philosophy, pity is a danger because it leads a person (specifically a higher individual like Zarathustra) to indulge the masses at the expense of future generations. "Pity" here takes the form of Zarathustra changing himself to accommodate the masses.

OF THE THREE EVIL THINGS

1. In the early morning, Zarathustra dreams that he weighs the world on a scale. By day, he decides to weigh "the three most evil things" on the scales. These things, which he believes have been unjustly condemned, are "sensual pleasure, lust for power, [and] selfishness."

Zarathustra judges for himself those things that traditional morality has judged as most evil. Again, given that religion (particularly Christianity) has fallen out of favor in the modern era, Zarathustra is trying to create a new value system—one that isn't limited to religious dogma or traditional moral standards.

2. Those who believe in the afterlife have condemned sensual pleasure as worldly. Zarathustra, however, sees it as innocent—in his estimation, it's the future's way of thanking the present. It is poison to the "withered" but fine wine to the "**lion**-willed." Sensual pleasure symbolizes the highest happiness. Lust for power, similarly, should more properly be called "bestowing virtue."

Zarathustra's aim is to praise a healthy sense of sensual enjoyment—not necessarily to advocate for unrestrained indulgence. To him, the "withered" or mediocre person might not be able to enjoy sensual pleasure, but the superior person can (and should) without guilt. Likewise, in the superior person, lust for power is the desire for others to enjoy the benefits of one's superiority.

Zarathustra's teaching also praises a "sound, healthy selfishness that issues from a mighty soul"—the rejoicing of such a soul is called "virtue." Cowardice, eagerness to please, excessive patience, and a servile nature are all disgusting to selfishness. "World-weary cowards" praise the supposedly "selfless," but when the great **noontide** comes, Zarathustra's judgment of selfishness will be vindicated.

The only way that "mighty souls" can fully experience their own greatness (and allow the wider world to benefit from it) is through freedom, which traditional morality attempts to restrain. So-called selflessness is repugnant to those who fully embrace life and exercise the will to power.

OF THE SPIRIT OF GRAVITY

1. Zarathustra's tongue is too glib, his writing too foolish, and his foot too joyful for ordinary people to understand. He is the enemy of the Spirit of Gravity.

Zarathustra praises his own incomprehensibility to the average person. But he isn't opposed to them—he only opposes the guilt (imposed by traditional morality) that burdens them.

2. The Spirit of Gravity teaches people to call life heavy, but Zarathustra teaches people to love themselves in order to become light and birdlike. One should not roam around with so-called "love of one's neighbour." Indeed, learning to love oneself is the highest art of all. From birth, people are taught "good and evil" by the Spirit of Gravity. They are taught that life is hard to bear—but this is because, like camels, people allow themselves to be burdened.

This section introduces Nietzsche's teaching on self-love. Nietzsche believed that the modern soul is incapable of loving itself, preferring to project that love onto other things. One form of diversion is love of neighbor—which, although it's praised as "good," just distracts humanity from evolving. They accumulate burdens, like camels, instead of learning flight for their souls.

Because of the Spirit of Gravity, it's difficult for a person to discover one's own goodness. A person achieves this when they silence the Spirit of Gravity by saying, "This is *my* good and evil." However, this isn't the same thing as calling *everything* good without distinction or endlessly waiting for gratification. One must have taste, and one should wait only for one's own validation.

Learning to love oneself is a process, not a sudden transformation, especially in a world that teaches guilt for sin. A higher person learns to determine good and evil for oneself. Nietzsche held that "taste," not any external measure, enabled such a person to make moral distinctions.

Zarathustra did not arrive at his truth once and for all, but by trying and questioning a wide variety of different paths. He has had to learn how to answer such questioning, but his answers are to his taste. His taste is not "good or bad," but simply *his*, and he is no longer ashamed of it. When others ask him "the way," he tells them that this is *his* way; where is theirs? *The* way does not exist.

Each individual's "way" is the right way. This is a succinct summary of Nietzsche's moral perspectivism, or relativism. Each (higher) person must explore and discover one's "way" for oneself and without apology; they cannot point others to the correct path, because there's no single, objective path.

OF OLD AND NEW LAW-TABLES

1. Zarathustra sits among "old shattered law-tables" and "new, half-written law-tables." He wants to descend to humanity once more, but he must wait for the right time. In the meantime, he talks to himself.

This chapter is one of the most important in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, *as it sums up many of the key points that have been introduced in the work so far. Here, Zarathustra is again trying to formulate a new value system ("new, half-written law-tables") than can replace traditional ones ("old shattered-law-tables"), which he believes are irrelevant in the modern day.*

2. When Zarathustra visited humanity, each person thought he already knew what was good and evil for everyone. Zarathustra disturbed humanity by teaching that nobody yet knows what is good or evil, unless it is the creator. The creator creates a goal for humanity, thereby giving the earth its meaning and future. He told people to laugh at the old masters of virtue. Often, Zarathustra's wisdom enraptured him and gave him a vision of the future, to an unrestrained world that repeated endlessly.

Zarathustra's proclamation of the Superman and the superior morality he creates is incomprehensible to the ordinary, mediocre person. However, this vision is the meaning and destiny of humanity. That destiny also includes the Eternal Recurrence, or the infinite repetition of all things.

3. In this envisioned future, Zarathustra saw the Superman and learned that humanity has to be overcome—it's a bridge to the goal, not the goal itself. Based on this, Zarathustra has taught the great **noontide**, and his goal of bringing together all chance in order to create the future—and also to redeem the past by creating it. Redeeming humanity's past means to "transform every 'It was'" into "I willed it thus." Now, Zarathustra awaits his own redemption—his last going-down to humanity.

Zarathustra revisits his teaching on redemption. It is based on the idea of the Superman and the gathering of all possible futures within the creative will to power—which is then exercised not only toward the future, but toward a reinterpretation of all things in the past. This reinterpretation accepts all things as an expression of the human will, not as predetermined or divinely willed into existence.

(4) Zarathustra's love commands distant humanity, "Do not spare your neighbour!" One must overcome oneself even in one's neighbor, seizing for oneself what one can't accept as a gift. (5) The noble soul doesn't want anything for free—that's what the masses want. The noble, in contrast, are always considering what they can give in return.

Zarathustra revisits his notion of altruism. One aspect of humanity's self-overcoming is in reaching toward the future, not being satisfied to help neighbors. The noble individual, because of the will to power, overflows with benefits for humanity.

(6) The first-born has always been sacrificed. "The old idol-priest" still lives on within the noble. Zarathustra loves those who don't wish to spare themselves and are willing to perish. (7) Few can be truthful. "Good" men never tell the truth; they do not even listen to themselves. Everything the good call evil must be brought together in order that a truth may be born; the old law-tables must be shattered.

Zarathustra revisits the idea of how the higher individual suffers at the hands of ordinary people. He alludes to the Bible's sacrificial system (in which God commands firstborn livestock to be sacrificed), saying that the noble willingly sacrifice themselves in their pursuit of truth. He also alludes to the Old Testament law-tables (and all comparable moral systems), which he believes must be destroyed and replaced with the will to power as the guiding principle of humanity.

8. Though people who live sheltered lives believe that everything is fixed, the "thawing wind" teaches that everything is constantly changing. When people realize this, nobody can continue to cling to good and evil.

According to Nietzsche, even concepts of good and evil are not fixed. Life is like a stream that appears to be fixed when frozen, yet when the thaw comes and the ice melts, it becomes clear that life is actually a wild, rushing stream that can engulf everything in its path.

9. Good and evil is a delusion that was once taught by prophets and astrologers and therefore believed. When people came to mistrust prophets and astrologers, they began to believe in freedom.

Prophets and astrologers stand for all teachers of traditional morality. Zarathustra suggests that, in the modern day, people increasingly suspect that such teachers are false.

10. People once believed such commandments as "You shall not steal!" You shall not kill!" However, such teachings created thieves and killers. Calling these teachings "holy" killed truth; it was a "sermon of death" in opposition to life. The old law-tables must be shattered.

Zarathustra boldly rejects the traditional moral order—the real key to life is not the old law-tables, but the will to power. The will to power includes exploiting and oppressing others—actions that seem evil from the short-sighted, unenlightened perspective of the weak.

(11) Zarathustra pities the mob because they don't remember any wisdom beyond their grandfathers' generation. A "new nobility" is needed that opposes mob rule—therefore, many noblemen are needed. (12) The new nobility will shape the future; their nobility is based in where they are *going*, not where they are from. This nobility will gaze outward, loving their offspring's land and redeeming the past according to a new law-table.

Zarathustra reviews the idea of the emergence of a select race of people, or "nobility." There are overtones here of the emerging science surrounding the theory of evolution at the time Nietzsche wrote the novel (the late 19th century). These superior people, according to Zarathustra, will oppose the masses. They will be distinguished not by their bloodlines but by the creation of new values and commitment to the Superman.

13. Old wisdom is childish and shrinks from life, calling it "vanity." But feasting well is an art. The law-tables of people who decry joy must be shattered.

"Vanity" recalls the pessimistic view of life that Nietzsche learned from Schopenhauer and later rejected. New wisdom, in contrast, embraces feasting and joy.

(14) Those who preach an afterlife see the world as filthy and needing to be overcome. (15) The "afterworldsmen" teach that the world should berenounced. Their lies must be rejected. (16) Even new law-tables must be shattered, like the one rejecting desire. The preachers of death have hung up this table; it is "a sermon urging slavery." Preachers of death do not understand how to delight. Willing, which is creating, liberates. In order to create, one must learn from Zarathustra. (17) The world-weary must pass away, but doing this requires courage.

Zarathustra summarizes his views on the rejection of the afterlife and of those who uphold the afterlife and associated morals. The heart of his objection is that "afterworldsmen" don't embrace the world, and their teachings enslave people. Zarathustra believes that he can liberate those who are able to become creators like himself—though not everyone has the courage to embrace the world and become like him.

(18) There are law-tables that have been made out of weariness and laziness. Sometimes, the lazy lie down inches from their goal. The "cultured" vermin must be scared away from them. (19) Zarathustra journeys over ever higher and holier mountains. He warns his followers to make sure that no parasite builds a nest in their weariness and grief; the highest souls possess the worst parasites. (20) Those who are not taught to fly must be encouraged to fall faster.

Zarathustra still talks about a pessimistic view of life; however, he is talking about the pessimism to which a heroic person is susceptible. Because the superior individual is continually challenged by the masses ("vermin"), that person can become weary and lazy. This is different from the person who never embraces life at all.

(21) The brave must not only be swordsmen; they must learn who their opponents are. It's also brave to know whom to pass by in favor of worthier enemies. (22) Man is the finest "beast of prey"; only the birds are beyond him. (23) Man should be fit for war and women for childbearing, but both should be fit for dancing. (24) Marriage should be contracted for the sake of the future and the Superman, not just for the sake of propagation.

An antagonistic attitude runs through Nietzsche's writings, which contrasts with the desire for peace and comfort that Nietzsche believed was characteristic of modern people. Superior people must be ready to fight (but not against just anyone) in order to seek a better kind of life. Generally, women play an inferior role to men in that quest, albeit a necessary one.

(25) An earthquake will cause new springs to rush from ancient things. Many "experimenters" will gather around the springs, ready to search for the commander of a new society. (26) The "good and just" are the most dangerous for the human future. They think they already know what is good, so they condemn those who are still searching for it. They hate the lawbreaker, the creator, most of all. By crucifying the creator, they sacrifice the future to themselves. (27) The good and just must be shattered.

These points restate Zarathustra's view of the coming new society, which will be imagined and led by higher individuals. The self-righteous moral leaders of society will oppose these new leaders, seeing them as a threat, but in persecuting them, the "good and just" undermine humanity's future. Therefore, they must be fought.

(28) Zarathustra's brothers must sail bravely into the human future amid the storms of their longing. (29) Creators must be hard. They must find it blissful to influence the future of humanity. (30) Zarathustra calls upon his will to be inexorable and ready for the great **noontide**, ready to be annihilated in the course of victory.

Nietzsche didn't take the work of destroying old values and creating new ones lightly. It was dangerous work that required great courage and fortitude, even self-sacrifice. That's why Zarathustra is adamant that only a few superior people are suited for it.

THE CONVALESCENT

One morning in his cave, Zarathustra springs out of bed, shouting like a "madman." His animals flee in terror. Zarathustra summons everyone to awaken—but then, under the weight of a staggering thought, he collapses as if dead. When he revives, he lies in bed, pale and trembling. His eagle brings him food. At last, he stirs, and Zarathustra's animals tell him that the "wheel of existence" turns unceasingly. Zarathustra smiles ruefully at them; his animals already understand the redemption that it has taken him all this time to realize. Humanity is cruel to itself, burdening life with sin, cross-bearing, and penitence. But Zarathustra has learned that humanity's wickedness is its greatest strength. Yet he is disgusted that man's best is yet so small. Even the "little man" recurs eternally, which grieves Zarathustra.

Zarathustra considers the paradoxical strength of what conventional morality sees as wickedness. If good and bad are purely relative, as Nietzsche taught, then repressing "wickedness" might be stifling what is actually best about humanity. The "wicked" person's boldness, courage, and self-determination, in other words, are mistaken for evil—when really, they're the traits that enable a person to work toward humanity's long-term betterment. In light of the Eternal Recurrence, ordinary humanity's feebleness is depressing to Zarathustra.

Zarathustra's animals urge him to go out into to the world now—he should sing new songs for humanity, accompanying himself with a "new lyre." It is his destiny to be "the teacher of the eternal recurrence." All things have already existed an infinite number of times—for Zarathustra, this is not a fearful truth, but a happy one.

The eternal recurrence is a fearful concept for those who struggle under belief in sin and guilt. For those who don't, like Zarathustra, it's actually liberating, and he should proclaim it to others.

Zarathustra's animals remind him that he teaches that his recurrence is not to a new or better life, but to the same life. He teaches the great **noontide** and the Superman. And now, it's time for Zarathustra's down-going. His animals fall silent, and Zarathustra silently communes with his soul.

The Eternal Recurrence must be distinguished from belief in an afterlife. It's not an escape from this life but an infinite recurrence of the very same—which can only be embraced when one fully accepts and embraces life as it is.

OF THE GREAT LONGING

Zarathustra breaks into song, addressing his soul. He sings of his self-overcoming, how he has purged all shame and virtues from his soul and granted it freedom over all things. His soul is now weighed down with wisdom and happiness. His soul longs to give out of its fullness. Until the future "nameless one" arrives and is open to free will, the soul will have to sing its longing.

Because the Superman has not yet come, and because humanity is not yet ready to accept Zarathustra's teaching, he can only sing of the future, and only to himself.

THE SECOND DANCE SONG

(1) Zarathustra sings a song to Life, praising it for what it has taught him. It entices him, seduces him, and mocks him. He chases Life constantly—it is a meek sheep that he carries and a sly witch who eludes him. He tires of dancing to Life's tune and threatens it with his whip. (2) Life answers Zarathustra; Life envies Zarathustra's Wisdom and scolds him for not being faithful enough to her; he is thinking of leaving Life soon. They weep together, and then Life is dearer to Zarathustra than his Wisdom has ever been.

Zarathustra addresses Life like a temptress and lover; the point of his song is that Zarathustra fully embraces and masters Life. In a way, even Zarathustra's preoccupation with his teaching (his Wisdom) can weaken his zest for Life—his will to power.

THE SEVEN SEALS (OR: THE SONG OF YES AND AMEN)

Zarathustra longs for eternity and for the wedding ring "of Recurrence." He has never wanted to marry or beget children with a woman, unless it's Eternity, for he loves her. If Zarathustra has ever shattered old law-tables, communed with the gods, laughed uninhibitedly, or lived according to his own will, how should he not lust for Eternity?

Zarathustra sings seven hymns to the Ring of Eternal Recurrence. The hymns are simply a poetic expression of the teaching of Eternal Recurrence, showing how fully Zarathustra embraces life and its recurrence. He can do this because his will to power is uninhibited.

THE HONEY OFFERING

Years pass; Zarathustra's hair turns white. One day he's sitting outside his cave overlooking the sea. His animals come before him and ask him if he is looking for his happiness. Zarathustra replies that happiness doesn't mean anything to him—only his work does. He is ripening, and there is honey in his veins that thickens his blood and quiets his soul. Zarathustra climbs a mountain and sends his animals back home. He claimed that he was going to offer a honey-offering, but this was simply a ruse so that he could get away alone.

Part Four of the novel begins here; it was written about a year after Nietzsche finished the book's first three parts. Zarathustra is preparing his soul in solitude for his final descent to humanity.

Zarathustra declares that he will go "fishing" in the world, using his happiness as a net to draw people up to his level and beg them to "Become what you are!" He is still waiting for the signs that it's time for him to descend to them. He doesn't know how far off his thousand-year "empire of man" will be, but that makes him no less certain of its coming.

Zarathustra's plea to "Become what you are" is a summons to the "highest" individuals to attain their full potential. The "empire of man" refers to the development of such a higher race of humanity, the Superman, which Nietzsche himself believed was coming.

THE CRY OF DISTRESS

The next day, Zarathustra is sitting in front of his cave again when he's alarmed by a shadow next to his own. A weary prophet has joined him, his eyes filled with evil premonitions. Zarathustra welcomes the prophet, who warns Zarathustra that soon, "waves of great distress" will surround his mountain.

In this chapter (and in the coming chapters), Zarathustra interacts with a number of symbolic "higher men." The prophet is the philosopher Schopenhauer, who influenced Nietzsche. In Schopenhauer's teaching, pity was considered to be the ultimate virtue. Pity will be Zarathustra's greatest temptation.

Zarathustra listens and hears the sound of a distant human cry. The prophet tells Zarathustra that he has come to seduce Zarathustra to his "ultimate sin": pity. The human voice cries to Zarathustra again and again, and he is shaken. The prophet tells Zarathustra that the Higher Man is calling for his help, and Zarathustra trembles.

According to Nietzsche's teaching, humanity should not be pitied; the best way to help humanity is to seek the Superman. That's why pity is a form of seduction and temptation to Zarathustra—it distracts him from the higher goal of helping humanity evolve.


The prophet criticizes Zarathustra, telling him that anyone who seeks happiness here will not find it, because it no longer exists. But this jolts Zarathustra out of his distress—he knows there are still "blissful islands." He resolves to seek out the Higher Man in the forest. Zarathustra bids the prophet to wait in his cave while he undertakes his search.

Zarathustra is finally overcome by the prophet, unable to bear the Higher Man's distress. He is also motivated by his steadfast belief that joy exists—a belief that the gloomy prophet doesn't share.

CONVERSATION WITH THE KINGS

After wandering through the forest for an hour, Zarathustra comes upon two kings driving a donkey before them. He hides behind a bush and wonders aloud about them. The kings stop and speculate about the voice they've heard—they figure it's the voice of a goatherd or hermit, who would no doubt be better company than the masses among whom they live. They are fleeing the mob out of disgust, tired of disguising themselves in the pomp of their forebears.

The kings (who probably don't symbolize any specific rulers) are higher than the average people of the day, because they recognize that they aren't what they could be. (They dress in traditional garments passed down to them, but these outward trappings obscure their own failings.)

Zarathustra emerges from his hiding place and introduces himself. He asks the two kings what they are doing in his domain—have they found the Higher Man whom he is seeking? Delighted, the kings admit that they have been searching for Zarathustra ever since his enemies showed them his devilish image in a mirror. They were intimidated by him, yet they were attracted by his "warlike" words and came in search of him. Zarathustra sends the kings back to his cave so that he can respond to another cry he hears.

Earlier in the book, Zarathustra was distressed by a prophetic dream in which his disciples taught a distorted version of his teachings. Yet it turns out that even this distorted teaching was effective in drawing receptive people toward Zarathustra, suggesting that the existence of the will to power in people is more important than the leaders they follow.

THE LEECH

Zarathustra walks deeper into the forest, lost in thought, and accidentally steps on a man, who angrily curses him. Zarathustra asks the man's forgiveness and offers him a parable—a story of a wanderer stumbling over a dog and then getting into a fight with the animal. When the man sits up, Zarathustra is horrified to sees that the man's arm is bleeding. He introduces himself and invites the man to his cave to heal. The man has been searching for Zarathustra, so he's overjoyed. He has been lying here, his bleeding arm being bitten by leeches; now, the "leech of conscience" has found him.

The bleeding man is a scientific specialist, focused on one narrow area of knowledge. He is pursuing this knowledge on Zarathustra's turf of philosophy (science being considered a subspecialty of philosophy) and has studied so rigorously that he has injured himself. He, too, is a kind of higher individual. He could be a symbol of biologist Charles Darwin, whose ideas (particularly the theory of evolution) Nietzsche knew and drew upon in his writings.

The man explains that he is the "conscientious man of the spirit." He says that he is an expert on the brain of the leech, something he has studied for a long time. He has sought to know just this one thing and to do so with strict honesty. Zarathustra's teaching has now seduced him. Zarathustra says that the blood pouring down the man's arm is evidence of this. The scientist heads to Zarathustra's cave, and Zarathustra, hearing another cry, continues his search.

Zarathustra respects the man's single-minded, honest search for knowledge and wishes to save him—like the prophet and the kings, the scientist belongs to the class of higher men.

THE SORCERER

As Zarathustra continues on his way, he comes upon an old man, a sorcerer, who is flinging himself around in a frenzied manner. When Zarathustra tries to help him, the old man seems oblivious. Finally, shaking, he begins to wail in verse, addressing a cruel "unknown God" who oppresses him and at last retreats from him.

The sorcerer symbolizes Nietzsche's former friend, operatic composer Richard Wagner, with whom he'd had a falling-out. (The young Nietzsche had idealized Wagner from afar, and when they became friends, the reality of who Wagner was didn't live up to Nietzsche's imagination.) The sorcerer's wailings are intended as a parody of Wagner's poetic style.


Zarathustra, impatient, whacks the sorcerer with a stick and orders him to stop his complaints, accusing him of being false. The sorcerer complains that Zarathustra strikes hard with his "truth." He says that his wailings were a portrayal of the spiritually repentant, a person who turns their spirit against themselves, tormented by his conscience. He was trying to deceive Zarathustra with mock distress. Zarathustra tells the sorcerer that there is nothing genuine about him, and the sorcerer admits that he is not a great man and can no longer pretend to be. But he is being honest now: he is seeking Zarathustra. Zarathustra allows the sorcerer to enter his cave.

Nietzsche disliked Wagner's overdramatic personality, his vanity, and his perceived insincerity. Ultimately, though, Zarathustra lets the sorcerer into his cave with the rest, suggesting that the sorcerer has the makings of a higher man—even if it has not come to full expression in him.

RETIRED FROM SERVICE

Next, Zarathustra encounters a haggard-looking man along the path and is distressed that some sort of priest has entered his kingdom. The man eagerly approaches Zarathustra, saying he seeks "the last pious man." He served the old God to the last, he explains, but is now retired—he is the last pope, and he's been seeking the old saint who praised God in the forest. Finding the saint dead, the pope decided to seek Zarathustra instead.

Zarathustra first mistakes the old pope for a conventional priest who teaches traditional morality—someone he can't imagine entering his kingdom. It transpires that the pope knows that God is dead. He was seeking the old saint Zarathustra met at the beginning of the book, but the saint seems to have died without learning of the "death of God."

Zarathustra asks the old pope *how* God died, and the pope explains that when God was young, he was hard and vengeful and built a Hell. But in old age, he mellowed and became more like a weak, fretting grandparent. Ultimately, he was destroyed by his pity for humanity.

This is Nietzsche's view of the progression of Judaism and Christianity: in the early days, the demanding, angry God was more worthy of being believed in. But gradually, both this God and his followers became weaker, to the point of self-sacrifice.

Zarathustra muses that if God was going to be so angry with humanity for misunderstanding him, then he should have spoken more clearly. He took vengeance on his own creation for turning out badly, which Zarathustra calls a sin against good taste. He says that it's better to will one's own destiny into existence; to be a fool. or even to be God oneself than to believe in such a god. The old pope says that Zarathustra is more pious than he realizes, even more holy, for not believing in such a god. His honesty will bear him "beyond good and evil." Zarathustra sends the old pope to his cave.

Zarathustra's musings reveal some of Nietzsche's quarrels with traditional Christian belief. Zarathustra faults God (or teachers of Christianity) for humanity's struggles and says that it's better for people to occupy God's place and determine their own future. The former pope believes that this attitude indicates genuine holiness, a gateway to a new moral code.

THE UGLIEST MAN

Zarathustra keeps searching for the one who has been crying in distress. He enters a deathly kingdom without grass, trees, or birds—only an old, ugly serpent. The snake seems familiar to him. At last, Zarathustra sees a manlike figure sitting on the path and is so ashamed of its appearance that he turns to leave. However, the figure speaks, asking Zarathustra to solve the mystery of his identity. Briefly overcome by pity, Zarathustra tells this "ugliest man" that he is "the murderer of God."

This chapter further illustrates some of Nietzsche's ideas about atheism. The setting of the decayed garden, including a familiar snake, suggests an inversion of the biblical Garden of Eden. The man's ugliness is puzzling, but it suggests that the one who proclaims that "God is dead" will appear to the masses to be the most despicable betrayer.

The ugliest man detains Zarathustra when he tries to leave. He says that Zarathustra is his last refuge; he is fleeing those who pity him. He should not be pitied, because he is "rich," and the people do not understand this, lacking "reverence for great misfortune." Zarathustra is the only one who rejects pity and is ashamed for the sufferer. The man explains that God had to die because God knew all of his darkest abysses and was compassionate. The man had to take revenge on God; a witness like this is unendurable.

Zarathustra feels pity, shame, and reverence in the presence of the man's ugliness and suffering. Nietzsche believed that pity without shame was just another form of pride, a failure to see oneself in the sufferer. The man's state makes Zarathustra feel pity on behalf of humanity as a whole; his appearance symbolizes humanity's real poverty. Because God pitied the man's condition, the man, who shares Zarathustra's disdain for pity, decided that God couldn't continue to exist.

Zarathustra is chilled by the ugliest man's words, but he encourages the man to find refuge in his cave. He walks on brooding, thinking how poor and contemptuous man is. Zarathustra still hears a cry of distress and wonders if it's the cry of a man who despises himself most of all. He loves "great despisers," since man must be overcome.

Zarathustra sees man's hatred of himself as honorable—it's a kind of love for the Superman and a prelude to overcoming oneself.

THE VOLUNTARY BEGGAR

As Zarathustra continues on his way, he feels warmer and more cheerful. Among a group of cows, he discovers a beggar, "a peaceable man and mountain sermonizer." The man explains that he's seeking happiness and sought it among these cows, learning from their "rumination"; they lack the disgust that characterizes modern man. When the beggar realizes he is in the presence of Zarathustra, he kisses him in delight. The beggar explains that humanity has not accepted him, hence going to the cows. They agree that it is hard to give to humanity in this day of mob rule. Zarathustra fondly invites the beggar to his cave.

The beggar symbolizes the Buddha (often regarded as a non-theistic religion). Nietzsche had great respect for Buddhism, seeing it as a religion that appealed to higher people, unlike Christianity. Like Zarathustra, the beggar doesn't find a sympathetic hearing among the masses—he finds a more sympathetic audience among cows, showing just how deaf and resistant humanity is to new ideas.


THE SHADOW

Zarathustra hears a voice calling him, but he is becoming grumpy about the loss of solitude on his mountain. He tries to evade the shadow that is following him but at last gives up. Angrily, he questions the unsettling shadow, who explains that he is a homeless, aimless wanderer. He has followed Zarathustra longest, but he still has not found what he seeks.

The shadow haunts Zarathustra. He is a freethinker who has wandered so long that he has lost sight of an ultimate goal—he has, in fact, lost faith in the idea of a goal altogether.

Zarathustra feels sympathy for his shadow, a "free spirit" to whom even a prison would be bliss. He warns the shadow not to be tempted by something narrow and firm; by losing his goal, the shadow has lost his way. Zarathustra tells the shadow to find a resting place in his cave.

Zarathustra suggests that the boldest freethinkers risk losing their way altogether. In weariness and disillusionment, such spirits are tempted to take refuge in traditional values and beliefs.

AT NOONTIDE

Zarathustra encounters no one else and enjoys his solitude. Just before **noon**, however, he takes a nap in the shade of a gnarled tree, content. His soul is weary of journeying, and he rests in the perfect stillness of the world, seemingly for an eternity. After a few moments, however, he stirs himself from his intoxicated state, not having slept for long.

Noontide symbolizes humanity's midway point as it evolves into something greater than its current iteration. Having gathered various higher men, Zarathustra rejoices and rests in the knowledge that humanity is closer to the Superman.

THE GREETING

In the late afternoon, Zarathustra returns to his cave. Just before he enters it, however, he hears the cry of distress once more—it's coming from his own cave, and it's multiple voices crying together. He enters the cave and finds all his guests: the kings, sorcerer, beggar, shadow, the ugliest man, and all the rest. In their midst are his animals. Zarathustra considers them all and concludes that he's been hearing their cry all along, and he now knows where to seek the Higher Man—right here in his cave.

The Higher Men are gathered in Zarathustra's cave. Zarathustra realizes that they are the men he's been searching for all this time—figures who, in various ways and to different degrees, resist humanity and exercise their will to power—and that they are suffering.

To comfort his guests, Zarathustra offers them the security of his cave and his hand and heart. His guests reply that their distress has ended, their hearts and minds delighted. There is nothing better on Earth than a glorious strong will like Zarathustra's. Their arrival at his cave signals that, soon, "better men" will be on their way to him, seeking hope.

Zarathustra and his will to power are sufficient solace for the men, whose presence prophesies the coming of yet higher humanity. However, their contentment with Zarathustra suggests that they aren't yet fully exercising their own will to power.

Zarathustra replies that, although these might be Higher Men, they are not high and strong enough for him. They are not yet ready for his teaching; the evil dwarf still crouches inside them, and the mob as well. In the end, they're just bridges, omens and forebears of the heir to come. Zarathustra longs for the coming of these children.

Zarathustra perceives that the higher men are still hampered by guilt and mob thinking. However, they are still necessary forerunners to the Superman.

THE LAST SUPPER

At this point, the prophet steps forward and interrupts Zarathustra, reminding him that Zarathustra has promised them all a meal. The guests agree to lend a hand in preparing spiced lamb and other delicacies. Those who belong to Zarathustra, after all, must be feast merrily. They enjoy a long meal which the history books call "The Last Supper," and their supper conversation is of the Higher Man.

The German word Abendmahl *is the traditional term for Holy Communion, or Christ's Last Supper with his disciples. Nietzsche obviously alludes to that Last Supper and even suggests that this Supper is the real one—that is, one that's more significant for humanity—so it ought to be remembered.*

OF THE HIGHER MAN

(1) Zarathustra recalls his initial folly of trying to speak to humanity in the market-place. Nobody among the mob believes in Higher Men; they believe that everyone is equal before God. But God has died. (2) God was the Higher Men's greatest danger. Only after his death can **noontide** come, and the Men be masters. Now they desire the Superman. (3) While most ask how humanity can be preserved, Zarathustra asks how man can be *overcome*. He doesn't care about suffering men near at hand; he cares about the Superman. He hates modern man's slavish attempts at self-preservation. He only loves those who desire to overcome "petty virtues" and "miserable ease," despairing of, rather than submitting to, today's values.

The supper conversation summarizes Zarathustra's teachings. Zarathustra once tried to appeal to the mob, but their outdated beliefs kept most from receiving him. Those who threw off belief in God are able to rightly desire the Superman.Most people are motivated by self-preservation and are therefore unable to understand the need to overcome themselves and look toward the future, to the Superman. They prefer comfort in the present moment, which traditional morality enables.

(4) Zarathustra calls upon the Higher Men to be courageous, even when faced with the abyss. (5) Evil is man's greatest strength and necessary for the Superman. Sin is Zarathustra's consolation. But these things aren't meant for everyone's ears. (6) Life must become harder and harder for Higher Men, so that they can grow high enough to be struck and shattered by lightening. (7) Zarathustra doesn't want to become light for the higher men, but to blind them with his lightning.

Zarathustra teaches that courage is the highest virtue. Courage, like other strong attributes, looks like "evil" to the masses, but such things are necessary expressions of the will to power. That will must be tested for endurance, until higher men don't just follow Zarathustra but surpass him.Nietzsche saw his teachings as appropriate for higher men only, not for the masses.

(8) The Higher Men must be honest and not exert their will beyond their powers, unlike the mob, who are false. (9) The Higher Men must be mistrustful and keep their reasoning secret from the mob. The learned, too, hate the Higher Men. (10) The Higher Men must carry themselves high on their own legs, not on the backs of others. (11) Higher Men, creators, must be "pregnant" with their own children only. They should not do things for the sake of their neighbors—doing so is for petty people who hold false values. (12) Giving birth is a painful, messy effort.

Higher Men must be honest about their limitations and indeed about everything. Because Higher Men are susceptible to misunderstanding, they should also conceal their ideals from those who will be threatened by them. They must think for themselves, and they must not pity their weaker contemporaries, but look resolutely into the future, to their offspring.

(13) The Higher Men must follow in their forefathers' footsteps and not attempt the improbable. (14) They must not be timid or ashamed. They should attempt great things, even if they fail, and even if that means man is a failure. (15) Higher Men are all failures—why does this matter? Humanity's future is struggling deep within them, so it's no wonder. They must learn to laugh at this. (16) The greatest sin on Earth is rejection of laughter—one who doesn't laugh doesn't love enough. Such people are sickly and belong to the mob; they don't know how to dance.

Higher Men, though they must be independent, must also be realistic about the burdens passed down to them and the effort involved in casting these aside. Higher Men must also strive to fulfill their full potential, something too rare. This effort will inevitably involve failure, but this isn't to be viewed as a reason for shame or despair. For Nietzsche, life is basically cheerful—there's even joy to be found in serious matters. Laughter is part of embracing life, something the masses can't do.

(17) The one approaching their goal dances, even though they pass through dangers and afflictions. (18) Zarathustra "the laughing prophet" has found no one else strong enough for his crown today. (19) It is better "to dance clumsily than to walk lamely." The Higher Men must learn how to do this and reject the solemnity of the mob. (20) They must learn to dance organically, in a way that transcends themselves. Much is still possible. Zarathustra throws his "laugher's crown" to the Higher Men.

Again, the struggles and failures inherent to striving for the Superman aren't heavy, solemn things. Such failures must be accompanied by joy instead of false guilt and grief, which belong to conventional morality. Higher Men should be daring and reach toward the future.

THE SONG OF MELANCHOLY

(1) After the preceding discourse, Zarathustra escapes into solitude for a short time, embracing his animals. (2) The sorcerer wrestles with his sorrow and sings a song about his old thirst for truth, from which he is now banished.

In Zarathustra's absence, the sorcerer—again, a symbol for Wagner—sings a song to try to entice the other Higher Men. He tries to lure them back to traditional truths by appealing to their emotions.

OF SCIENCE

As the sorcerer sings, the rest of the Higher Men fall under his spell; the only one who resists is the conscientious man of the spirit, the scientist. He takes the sorcerer's harp away from him, denounces him, and asks the rest where their freedom has gone. The scientist seeks greater security, while the rest desire greater insecurity—he says that this is because scientists understand fear.

The sorcerer succeeds in tempting the rest of the Higher Men; only the scientist has the presence of mind and strength of will to see what to sorcerer is doing. This suggests that Nietzsche saw scientists as especially capable of seeing through the temptation of false values.

Just then, Zarathustra comes in and refutes the scientist. He says that courage, not fear, is what has helped humanity reach its current form. Such courage is today called "Zarathustra," the Men cry in unison. Then they laugh, expelling their sorrow.

Zarathustra elevates the scientist as the highest of modern men, even though he critiques his view of fear. Though fear might motivate the scientific search for truth, joy is actually humanity's more primal urge—and it coincides with the will to power.

AMONG THE DAUGHTERS OF THE DESERT

(1) Zarathustra is about to leave, but his shadow begs him to stay, lest they fall into sadness again. (2) The shadow sings a song reminiscing about the desert and the maidens who dwelt there; he summons Europeans to roar like **lions** before these daughters of the desert.

This rather bizarre section seems to be a response to the sorcerer's tempting song. The shadow is a wandering freethinker who enjoys lion-like freedom in his search for truth (earlier, Zarathustra used the desert lion as a symbol of the evolving human spirit). The shadow's racy and seductive song urges his contemporaries to throw off the burdens of convention in order to share his wanderings and his freedom on the way to the Superman.

THE AWAKENING

After the shadow's song, the cave is filled with revelry and laughter. Zarathustra withdraws from the cave, imagining that the men have sufficiently recovered from the spirit of melancholy. Even if they haven't yet learned his laughter, the Spirit of Gravity is fading.

The Higher Men are not yet as advanced as Zarathustra believes—as soon becomes apparent, they use their newfound freedom poorly.

Suddenly, however, the cave falls silent, and there's a smell of incense. Zarathustra looks inside and is astonished to see the Higher Men praying—they are kneeling before the kings' donkey. The ugliest man recites an absurd litany praising the donkey's burden-bearing, patience, and long ears. The donkey simply brays in response.

The moral of this humorous passage is that even Higher Men are susceptible to ridiculous beliefs. Belief in gods is so embedded in humanity that even superior people will find something to worship—and if they're not vigilant, they'll choose an absurd "god."

THE ASS FESTIVAL

(1) Zarathustra interrupts the litany and asks the Higher Men what they're doing. The old pope says that it's better to worship God in this form than in none; the scientist says that even a philosopher prefers to walk by crooked paths. The others offer various excuses for their behavior, and the ugliest man says that God is killed most effectively by laughter. (2) Zarathustra denounces the Higher Men's childishness; they should not seek to enter the kingdom of heaven, but the kingdom of Earth.

In the Middle Ages, there was a type of festival called the asinaria festa, *or feast of the ass, which celebrated Jesus's childhood journey to Egypt on a donkey. Of the various justifications given by the Higher Men, the ugliest man's excuse is nearest to Zarathustra's view of the death of God. Nevertheless, otherworldly beliefs have no place in Zarathustra's teachings.*

3. However, Zarathustra is pleased that the men have regained joy. He says that only "convalescents" (those who are healing) devise such nonsense, and so they should remember this festival and celebrate it in remembrance of him.

The ass festival has a purpose; Zarathustra concedes that higher men require new festivals. As long as the men embrace the foolishness of the celebration, there's no harm in observing it as a kind of tribute to their progression.

THE INTOXICATED SONG

(1) Zarathustra and the Higher Men go outside to admire the silence and beauty of the night. At last, the ugliest man breaks the silence, acknowledging that he is content with his entire life for the first time, as Zarathustra has taught him how to love the earth; he is happy to live it again. The rest of the Higher Men realize that they, too, are recovered, and they embrace and adore Zarathustra. (2) Zarathustra grows silent and staggers as if drunk. Then, he hushes the rest, saying, "Come!" They all hear the sound of a bell: midnight is coming.

The ugliest man, who appears to be closest to Zarathustra in his progress, first expresses his will to power and embraces the idea of the Eternal Recurrence. This development overwhelms Zarathustra, presumably because he has worked toward it for so long. If noontide heralded the arrival of the Higher Men, midnight signals their progress toward perfection.

(3) Zarathustra tells the Higher Men that things are being spoken at midnight which cannot be said by day. (4) The sound of the tolling bell asks who will be "master of the world." (5) Zarathustra calls upon the Higher Men to revive the dead. (6) The tolling bell sounds forth the pain of their forefathers. The world has now grown ripe and smells of eternity.

At midnight, Zarathustra summons the Higher Men to their calling as masters of a new society. They must summon others to be like themselves. Eternity—not in the form of an afterlife, but as an expression of the Higher Men's collective will to power—is near.

(7) The world having just become perfect, Zarathustra feels both happiness and woe. (8) The wind, howling as if drunk, speaks both joy and agony. (9) Everything ripe wants to die; everything unripe wants to live. But everything that truly lives wants to grow joyful, and joy wants eternity and recurrence, for things to be the same forever.

Zarathustra's conflicted mood symbolizes the paradoxical struggle toward the Superman and Eternal Recurrence. Those who embrace life joyfully are most ready for death and eternity, while the "unripe," or immature, aren't yet ready.

(10) Zarathustra appeals to the Higher Men—if they say yes to all joy, then they also say yes to all woe, because all things are joined together eternally. (11) Joy wants everything for eternity, and it longs for the Higher Men—they must learn this. (12) Zarathustra summons the Higher Men to join him in a song, calling humanity to attend to the voice of midnight, the depth of the world's woe and joy, and joy's desire for deep eternity.

Zarathustra gives the Higher Men some closing instructions, summing up the joy and pain involved in embracing the will to power, accepting Eternal Recurrence, and calling others to do the same.

THE SIGN

The next morning, Zarathustra springs out of bed and emerges from his cave "like a morning **sun** emerging from behind dark mountains." The Higher Men are still asleep; but that is fine, because they aren't Zarathustra's rightful companions. They don't understand the signs of the morning.

Zarathustra separates himself from the Higher Men. Despite the previous night's instructions, he now realizes that they aren't yet ready for humanity's new dawn.

Suddenly, birds swarm around Zarathustra, and as he tries to ward them off, he grasps a **lion**'s mane and realizes that the sign has come. Indeed, the lion presses its head lovingly against Zarathustra like a loyal dog; doves play around it, and the lion laughs. Zarathustra weeps, knowing that his children are near.

The lion symbolizes Zarathustra's mastery of life. It is also the long-awaited sign that it's time for Zarathustra to descend once more to his children—that is, humanity at large. (Recall that the free lion preceded the innocent children in Zarathustra's earlier vision.)

The Higher Men wake up and venture outside to greet Zarathustra, but when the **lion** roars at them, they flee back into the cave. Zarathustra recalls everything that happened yesterday and realizes that the old prophet tried to seduce him to pity the Higher Men's distress—his "ultimate sin." He cries out "Pity for the Higher Man!" and his face is transformed.

When the Higher Men spring away in fear, Zarathustra no longer pities them; he has overcome the temptation he succumbed to yesterday, perfecting himself. He is ready to strive for the Superman alone, rather than being hobbled by short-sighted pity for others.

Zarathustra realizes that the time for pity has passed; he now aspires after his work. The **lion** has come, his children are near, he is ripe, and today the great **noontide** will rise up. Zarathustra leaves his cave, glowing and strong like the sun.

Paralleling the beginning of the novel, Zarathustra descends to humanity, among whom he will find the Superman. Having overcome his pity, it seems that Zarathustra is now ready to fully embrace his will to power and serve as an example for others—and having recognized the Higher Men's shortcomings, he'll now be able to discern the true higher men among the masses.

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