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### The Quest for the Overman

Friedrich Nietzsche's book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a very interesting novel revolving around the life of Zarathustra, a sort of self-proclaimed philosopher. Zarathustra makes sure to address every possible topic, from academics to women to redemption. As one reads the novel, certain parallels between Nietzsche's life and Zarathustra's life come to light. For example, Nietzsche led a very withdrawn life for about ten years; Zarathustra left society to live alone in the mountains for ten years. Nietzsche was a philosopher who shared his ideas with society; Zarathustra shared his ideas with society. It is evident that Nietzsche used Zarathustra as a means to express his beliefs to the world through the lens of a fictional character. The reasoning behind using Zarathustra as that lens is interesting. Zarathustra is similar to Zoroaster, a Persian prophet who focused on the necessity of truthfulness and wisdom through the religion of Zoroastrianism. Nietzsche wanted to create Zarathustra as a wiser Zoroaster. Two prominent excerpts presented by Zarathustra throughout the story are "Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves (69)" and "You must yet become a child and without shame (119)." The excerpts build off of each other; you cannot fulfill the second one without the first one.

The first excerpt, "Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves (69)" explains how Zarathustra wants his followers to stop following him and to forge their own paths. He

believes that human beings, in order to become the overman, must create their own path in life and come to their own conclusions, ideally without any influence from society. Zarathustra, for example, travels into the mountains alone several times throughout his life in order to create his own path and gather his own thoughts. He wanted people to do this for themselves as well in order to go through his three stages of life. The three stages he believed each person went through were the camel, the lion, and the child.

The first stage of life, the camel, is the period of life where people are servants. They carry around life's burdens without complaint. The second stage is the lion stage. This is the time where people reject old values. One fights one's inner demons but does not create new values. It can often be seen as a very angry time of life. The third and final stage of life, the child, is where everything seems new and open; there are no boundaries. Here life becomes fun because one does not know the outcome of the game of life. He wanted people to avoid getting stuck in the camel stage and becoming part of the rabble, also known as followers. He wanted people to each become leaders, like children, who design their own route without a care about the consequences.

This excerpt is the basis for the rest of his philosophy. It is necessary to completely isolate oneself from organized and outside thought so that one may draw one's own conclusions about life's true values and meaning. Only then, once one has rejected society and truly achieved the child state, can one become an overman. The irony here is that Zarathustra has not even reached the overman. He is still on his own journey and is merely passing down his beliefs and observations to others as he learns them.

This leads to a different sort of irony, however. Zarathustra claims that he dislikes organized thought yet he strives to get people to understand his point of view and thoughts. This is a contradictory concept. The only justification he provides is through this excerpt where he claims he wants his followers to forget him to forge their own paths. This concept is contradictory to Christianity, which is an organized religion. Zarathustra takes issue with Christianity on several occasions throughout the story. Rather than focus on how to achieve a happy afterlife, Zarathustra asserts that it is the here and now that is important. He does not believe that there is a soul; he believes that people are just bodies existing on earth. In a chapter titled “Backworldsmen” of Part I, Zarathustra tries to explain the origination of the belief in God. “Ah, ye bretheren, that God whom I created was human work and human madness, like all the Gods! (34).” Here he provides a naturalistic explanation of religious belief and insists that people created gods to explain their own existence and why people suffer in life, as well as worldly events. He insists that God is dead after he encounters the Saint as he is coming down from the mountains. A revolutionary statement for Nietzsche’s time, many readers did not understand what he meant. It is important to distinguish that Nietzsche was not against Christianity. He feared the atheism that may have come with the scientific revolution. He wanted people to challenge Christianity, question it, and create a stronger philosophical process. He took issue with certain aspects of Christianity, such as the promotion of equality and defending society’s weak people.

This concept of rejecting equality is explored in the chapter in Part II called “The Tarantulas.” The “poison” in this chapter is equality. No overman can exist if everyone is equal. Zarathustra describes equality as a poison that seeps into everything. People

thrive off of cruelty, however, because it allows them to assert power and control over others. He insists that people must go beyond human nature in order to resist that, otherwise people are just like the tarantulas.

The second excerpt, “You must yet become a child and without shame (119)” comes at a crucial time in the story. It is at this point that Zarathustra begins to become unsure of himself; he begins to question his own methodology and philosophy. The audience sees that he is still trying to reach the child stage in life; he is stuck in the lion stage. He knows that he is still feeling slave morality and he still feels shame. This is also the point at which Zarathustra should be feeling the most alive. As he had previously asserted, “In my heart do I love only life – and verily, most when I hate her! (90).” He should love life while he most hates it. But, ironically, he does not seem to love life at this low point. He finds himself greatly conflicted; will he ever be able to reach the child stage? He has nobody to talk about this to because nobody has reached the same place in his or her journey. He feels very lonely and isolated, even though he arrived at this place on his own accord. Yet he finds himself still feeling shame, which means that he still cares about what others think of him. Shame is the sign that Zarathustra has not truly found his own path, as hard as he has tried.

At its basic definition, the fear of shame is a feeling that limits character or action. It causes one to feel bad about something one has thought or done or is about to do. In order to truly be free and become an overman, one must conquer the fear of shame and not let it enter into one’s thoughts. Shame is defined by society, however. Therefore, one must either remove oneself from society or find a way to transcend the boundaries

that society has established. This is a very daunting and difficult task. It is not easily accomplished; even Zarathustra has not accomplished it by the end of Part II.

His situation relates to the first excerpt in that as one truly rejects the moral teachings that they have internalized, they will feel shame. If they do not feel shame than they have not fully internalized the moral values. Even if they put all of society's moral values up for examination and find them to be valid, they would feel some amount of shame just questioning them. Part of his philosophy is that there is no one truth. If you accept the idea that a person must reject society's truth, then you have to accept the idea that people will arrive at different truths that will all be valid from their perspective.

A previous observation of Zarathustra's is that people have a small window of their lifetime where they successfully contribute to society. He says that many people die before they have a chance to teach their lessons or that they live too long after they teach their lessons that they stagnate and repeat themselves. He insists that once a person has reached his or her full potential and taught all that he or she has to offer, there is no real point in staying alive. It could be argued, then, that perhaps Zarathustra is reaching this point in his life. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land! I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land (Brainy Quote)." Perhaps this quote parallels how Zarathustra was feeling about himself at the end of Part II. He is reaching a point in his life where he is stagnant; he can see where he wants to be in life but he cannot quite get there. Perhaps this is why he once again retreats to the mountains; he is desperate to break through the shame and become an overman.

The first two parts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* explored in this essay are intriguing. He conveys to the people his philosophy on how to become an overman: to create one's own path in life, conquering the three metamorphoses of life, and breaking through shame, which holds one back from becoming an overman. While he wants his followers to understand his philosophy, he also wants them to forget about him and create their own thoughts and philosophies. This is why he retreats to the mountains the first time. His second retreat into the mountains, at the end Part II, signifies that he himself has not reached the point of becoming an overman, something that nearly drives him to madness. The audience is exposed to some hypocrisy here when Zarathustra does not love life while he hates it and is at the lowest point as he asserts he would. But perhaps that is only a human characteristic: one cannot possibly always follow one's own doctrines 100 percent of the time. Perhaps this hypocrisy is included so that Nietzsche can show that one can still become an overman without being a flawless human being. Humans are, after all, inherently flawed. Zarathustra had to have some faults otherwise he would not be human.

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a work that was designed to make people question their values and reevaluate their position in life and it did just that. Nietzsche created a revolutionary philosophy and presented it in a relatable way that would keep people interested. While some aspects of his philosophy make sense and are reasonable, others do not and are not. In today's society, Nietzsche's work still holds relevance. People should strive in some ways to become an overman, in order to avoid becoming the "last man," someone who is afraid of the extreme and danger and who is contented with being

mediocre. Perhaps Thus Spoke Zarathustra should be read more widely than it is; there are some compelling aspects to his philosophy.

Works Cited

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