**Thus Spoke Zarathustra** – Friedrich Nietzsche

This book, probably Nietzsche’s most famous, is written in typical Nietzschean fashion as highly ambiguous, melodramatic, exuberant, and poetic. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* makes for somewhat tiring reading but is valuable for the “sapphires in the mud”; the gems of philosophical wisdom that can be extracted with a little perseverance.

*First Part*

Zarathustra descends from the mountain, where he has been living in solitude (with an eagle and serpent) for ten years, to give his wisdom to humankind. On the way, he meets a saint who advises against going into town, warning that the people will only be suspicious of him. He tells Zarathustra that, “Now I love God; man I love not” (p.123), and about how he spends his time praising God by making songs, laughing, crying, and humming. Zarathustra responds by saying that he has nothing to give this old saint. As he leaves, he asks himself, “Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that *God is dead!*” (p.124)

In town Zarathustra talks about the coming of the *ubermensch* and compares him to man as man is compared to ape. He also compares the *ubermensch* to lightning, bringing to mind images of raw, unadulterated energy but also something unpredictable, frenzied, and dangerous. He states that the *ubermensch* will be the meaning of the earth and cautions the people to remain faithful to the earth; that is, not to pursue otherworldly hopes, i.e. heaven. He talks about the way religions had taught people to value the soul over the body and seek to “escape it and the earth.” (p.125) But this was all before God died.

He holds that the greatest experience one can have is contempt. Contempt for all the things we stand for, value, and believe in, and which he implores us to transcend; happiness, reason, virtue, pity and justice. Specifically:

* Happiness ought not to be our goal. Our goal is greatness.
* Reason ought to “crave knowledge as the lion his food” (p.126) instead of being this dry, lifeless, over-analysing enterprise.
* Virtue merely tires us; “How weary I am of my good and my evil” (p.126), restraining the pure energy of emotions; e.g. rage.
* Justice – “the just are flames and fuel”. Perhaps justice self-immolates because it restricts and constrains the natural exuberance of life.
* Pity is what killed Christ.

Zarathustra says that, “Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss… what can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* and a *going under*.” (pp.126-7) Zarathustra continues; “I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over.” (p.127)

Zarathustra sees modern humans as an introduction or prelude (overture) to some greater version of humanity, the *ubermensch*. It is difficult to know exactly what ‘going under’ here refers to though. My best guess is that he means something like dying out, or stepping aside, to make way for the *ubermensch*.

At the end of this passage, Zarathustra reveals himself as the herald of the *ubermensch*.

Zarathustra sees that the people don’t understand him. Their education has made them deaf and blind. He continues to speak, warning that people have become lazy and bereft of spirit and vitality. It is not too late, people can still produce the *ubermensch* but time is running out.

Next, he talks about the “last man”; “the time of the most despicable man… he that is no longer able to despise himself.” (p.129) By the “last man” Zarathustra means the point where society and the herd’s ‘values’ will have reduced people to something completely lacking the Dionysian instinct and unable to aim ‘beyond themselves’ for something greater. These ‘last men’ know nothing of suffering, hardships, or sickness. They are happy, but this happiness is, for Zarathustra, a contemptible, safe, warm, insipid contentment that has lost the passion and vitality he values so much. “A little poison now and then: that makes for agreeable dreams. And much poison in the end, for an agreeable death.” (pp.129-30)

Zarathustra continues, talking about this ‘last man’ as a time of no shepherd and one herd. No one wants to rule and no one wants to follow, for both require too much exertion and ambition that no one has anymore. “Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same” (p.130). Anybody different voluntarily isolates himself.

After this speech, the tightrope walker comes out and begins his performance. Just as he was halfway across though, a jester steps onto the rope behind him and boldly marches forward challenging his rival to move faster. He quickly catches him and leaps over him. The tightrope walker falls to his death.

This whole scene is a metaphor for Zarathustra’s speech. The rope bridge and the tightrope walker represent humanity. At first I thought the jester represented the *ubermensch* but now I think he is a better metaphor for Zarathustra himself, a herald of the *ubermensch* considering this passage, “over those who hesitate and lag behind I shall leap.” (p.136)

Before the tightrope walker dies, Zarathustra tells him there is no devil and no hell to which the tightrope walker remarks that he loses nothing when he loses his life and has been little more than a beast taught what to do and how to do it. Zarathustra disagrees and praises him for making danger his vocation; a clear reference to the merits of living dangerously.

The crowd disperse and in the evening Zarathustra carries the corpse into the forest to bury him. When he gets tired, he deposits the corpse in a hollow tree for the night and goes to sleep. When he wakes up he realises that he was wrong to go forth and try to speak to the “herd”. He doesn’t want this type of person, comparing them to the dead corpse he had carried all night; rather, “companions I need, living ones – not dead companions and corpses whom I carry with myself…” (p.135). From here on in, he resolves to “speak not to the people but to companions.” (p.135) Zarathustra describes ‘companions’ as “fellow creators… those who write new values on new tablets” (p.136); i.e. people more like him and less like the herd.

As he looks skyward, he sees an eagle with a serpent draped around its neck. Zarathustra says these are his animals, and we are told the eagle represents pride while the snake represents wisdom. He then goes into a town called The Motley Cow and gives a series of speeches.

*Zarathustra’s Speeches*

On the Three Metamorphoses

The spirit undergoes three metamorphoses in its journey; a camel, a lion and finally a child. The spirit must undergo many hardships in life. To see itself through these hardships, it must become like the camel; i.e. able to bear a heavy load. Next, the spirit desires to conquer its freedom and become its own master. To do this it needs to fight the “great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god” (p.138). This dragon is named “Thou shalt” and represents all the values that have already been decided upon by those who came before the spirit and which it is called on to follow. To conquer the dragon, the spirit must become a lion and it resists the dragon by affirming “I will”. Zarathustra calls this saying the “sacred “No” even to duty” (p.139). Although the lion cannot actually create new values, what it can do is create the “freedom for oneself for new creation” (p.139). For the final step, creation itself, the spirit becomes the innocent, forgetful child, capable of making a new beginning, who can create new values for itself. This is the sacred “Yes.”

On the Teachers of Virtue

Zarathustra mocks the teachers of virtue by having a “sage” proclaim that the ultimate goal in life is good sleep. No goal could be more ridiculous for Zarathustra than to lie on one’s back, completely inactive. The virtuous ‘sage’ recommends living quietly, avoiding anything that might upset or disturb a contented day (“inflame the spleen”) because such turmoil and disturbance would result in a poor night’s sleep. As Zarathustra says; “His [the sage] wisdom is: to wake in order to sleep well.” (p.142)

On the Afterworldly

Zarathustra talks about the fact that it was suffering and incapacity which created all afterworlds and the gods that inhabit them. He recognises god and the afterlife as man-made creations, modelled on a poor specimen of man. The invention of the afterworldly is a way to escape one’s own misery without having to do any work. Indeed, “It was the sick and decaying who despised body and earth and invented the heavenly realm and the redemptive drops of blood… They wanted to escape their own misery, and the stars were too far for them… Thus they invented their sneaky ruses and bloody potions.” (p.144) God is the easy way out. Zarathustra urges us to abandon these beliefs which denigrate this world and this body and create meaning here in this world.

On the Despisers of the Body

Zarathustra denounces the “despisers of the body”. For him, spirit (reason) and sense (feeling) are nothing more than instruments of the body. Behind these thoughts and feelings stand the true ruler; the self; which dwells in, and is, the body. He also calls body the “great reason” and spirit the “little reason”. In yet another metaphor, Zarathustra says the spirit *says* “I”, but the body *does* “I”, leaving us in no doubt as to which is preferable. He values action over thinking; the body (self) is where the buck stops. The ego only feels pleasure and pain at the behest of the body.

Zarathustra also derides the “despisers of the body” as serving their bodies, even as they say they reject them. Because their bodies are life-denying, their principles and beliefs are also life-denying; “your self itself wants to die and turns away from life.” (p.147)

On Enjoying and Suffering the Passions

Virtue is individual; not something we can universalise and force all to obey. We ought to say, “This is *my* good; this I love… I do not want it as divine law; I do not want it as human statute and need” (p.148).

In this section, Zarathustra is talking to someone who has already overcome themselves. This can make understanding him difficult if you aren’t aware of it. He says, “Once you suffered passions and called them evil. But now you have only your virtues left: they grew out of your passions. You commended your highest goal to the heart of these passions: then they become your virtues and passions you enjoyed.” (p.148) The ‘once’ is actually modern people, and the ‘now’ is the individual who has overcome him or herself (“My brother”). The idea here is that we consider our passions evil and try to suppress them (suffering through them). To become great, we will have to rename those passions (evils) as our greatest virtues; “all your passions became virtues and all your devils, angels.” (p.148)

Henceforth, the only thing we will call ‘evil’ is that conflict among the different virtues whereby each wants to secure the spirit for itself. In this, Zarathustra recommends having only one virtue (perhaps the same as the Kierkegaardian idea of finding a goal you would die for), and comments that it will be easier to pass over the bridge (to the *ubermensch*) if you do.

On the Pale Criminal

Zarathustra rejected the label ‘evil’ as a restriction, a limitation imposed on us to control and check our natural passions; ““Enemy” you shall say, but not “villain”; “sick” you shall say, but not “scoundrel”; “fool” you shall say, but not “sinner.” (p.150)

The pale criminal is a man on trial for murder and robbery. He is pale from guilt because he cannot bear what he has done. A judge asks why he murdered when all he wanted to do was rob? Zarathustra disagrees with this analysis though. Actually, he wanted to murder – this was his passion – but his *reason* couldn’t accept this and so made him rob as well to exact revenge (a petty, unworthy goal). Denying his passions is the reason the pale man is suffering from guilt. For Zarathustra, the problem is not that the pale man murdered. The problem is he tried to rationalise it and justify it through robbery, rather than embrace his nature.

On Reading and Writing

Zarathustra wasn’t much for academia. He talks about writing in blood and aphorisms; i.e. not constructing long, reasoned, dry discourses, but writing as one lives; i.e. with passion, vigour, and vitality. He uses the metaphor of aphorisms being mountain peaks written for people with long legs who leap from peak to peak, freely, gaily, high above the serious, tragic profundity of those who love reading. This latter he calls the “spirit of gravity” (p.153).

On the Tree on the Mountainside

The taller a tree grows to the heights, the deeper its roots must reach into the earth. So it is with people; “The more he aspires to the height and light, the more strongly do his roots strive earthward, downward, into the dark, the deep – into evil.” (p.154) Zarathustra seems to be saying that to be noble (as he defines it; powerful, carefree, etc.), one must also unleash the passions within, i.e. what has been called ‘evil’ by the leaders of the herd mentality.

The noble are independent and strong. They stand in everybody’s way, especially those who are good, because the “good want the old, and that the old be preserved” but the noble individual “wants to create something new and a new virtue.” (p.156)

This speech seems to also contain a warning. Those who aspire to be noble but lose their “highest hope” for some reason, may find their spirit broken and turn into “voluptuaries”, living only for the satisfaction of base pleasures.

On the Preachers of Death

The “preachers of death” are those without the stomach for life, those who bemoan the trials life brings and are weary of existence, those who teach the renunciation of life. For some of these people, life is only suffering (probably a direct reference to Schopenhauer), for others lust is sin so they beget no children (Christian priests), yet others welcome life taking from them what they have so that life will “bind me that much less!” (p.158) (possibly Stoics), for others, “life is furious work and unrest” (p.158) (presumably all those struggling to live lives prescribed by society and its norms); all of these people are preachers of death.

Finally, Zarathustra takes one last shot at religion by equating those who preach “eternal life” (heaven) with those who preach death; for the two are the same to him.

On War and Warriors

Zarathustra likes warriors and strength, although he detests soldiers. The difference is that warriors fight for strength and nobility whereas soldiers fight for the herd. He makes a play on the word “uniform”, which they both wear and are. The warriors here don’t seem to be at the level of *ubermensch*, whom Zarathustra refers to with the odd phrase “saints of knowledge” saying, “if you cannot be saints of knowledge, at least be its warriors.” (p.159)

The status of warriors as below *ubermensch* seems confirmed at the end of this section where Zarathustra says, “To a good warrior “thou shalt” sounds more agreeable than “I will.”” and encourages the warrior to “live your life of obedience and war.” (pp.159-60)

As always, it is difficult to know how literal Nietzsche is being especially in the face of these three quotations:

* “Your enemy you shall seek, your war you shall wage…”
* “You should love peace as a means to new wars – and the short peace more than the long.”
* “You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I say unto you: it is the good war that hallows any cause. War and courage have accomplished more great things than love of the neighbor.”

I am sure that Nietzsche isn’t *against* war but I don’t think this section is solely about actual battle. The reason I think this is in the omitted section of the first quote which reads in full, “Your enemy you shall seek, your war you shall wage – for your thoughts. And if your thought be vanquished, then… you should still find cause for triumph in that.” (p.159)

Of course, Nietzsche isn’t advocating a stirring after-dinner debate among gents here but I don’t think he is endorsing full-out invasion either. ‘War’ seems to operate too easily here as a metaphor for ‘resistance of societal values’. He recommends the warrior “have eyes that always seek an enemy” (p.159) but rather than wandering the streets with your shotgun, this probably means being active and exuberantly engaged in life, always challenging those who endorse life-denying values in opposition to your own. Indeed, this is exactly how Nietzsche lived his life.

On the New Idol

Zarathustra hates the state because it tells us it *is* the people. It embodies everything he is rallying against – the imposition of values on people “in the tongues of good and evil” (p.161). It attempts to set itself up as the greatest, as “the ordering finger of God” (p.161). Zarathustra values freedom, the freedom to create, and individuality. The state (the new idol) is the polar opposite of this – “Only where the state ends, there begins the human being who is not superfluous” (p.163).

On the Flies of the Market Place

The marketplace is a metaphor for any place where there are many people (flies), places where “the noise of the great actors and the buzzing of the poisonous flies begins” (p.163). Zarathustra values the power of solitude and silence where individuals can gather themselves and create, as opposed to the hubbub of society with people all vying for fame and attention but having nothing of value to say. “Far from the market place and from fame happens all that is great: far from the market place and from fame the inventors of new values have always dwelt.” (p.164)

He draws a distinction between the actors and the creators. It is the latter who create their own values, while the former merely rush to take the credit, for this today, that tomorrow, and something else the day after.

The herd in the market place will hate the individual in his or her solitude and despise him or her for being different but this is because they are “small creatures. Before you they feel small” (p.166) and their hatred is rooted in envy.

On Chastity

Zarathustra is against chastity inasmuch as it is a mantle one tries to don to be ‘good’ and ‘virtuous’. He speaks contemptuously of those who abstain but only by denying their natural urges, those for whom, although chaste, “sensuality, leers enviously out of everything they do.” (p.167) If one is chaste by nature, that is fine, but if one isn’t chaste by nature, that is also fine. In this, he praises animals for their innocence; “I counsel the innocence of the senses.” (p.166)

On the Friend

There is a lot in this passage about friendship. In general, Zarathustra seems to value friendship but a kind of ‘manly’ one. A friend should maintain his or her independence and honesty. We ought not groom ourselves too beautifully for our friends but rather not be afraid to be who we are before them.

Slaves and tyrants cannot be friends because friendship is a relationship between equals. Because he sees women as typically being one or the other (often in the same person at different times), Zarathustra dismisses women as being “not yet capable of friendship” (p.169). Instead, women are capable of love, but this isn’t true friendship because they then become incapable of being independently objective as regards the beloved; “Woman’s love involves injustice and blindness against everything that she does not love.” (p.169) Having said all this against women, Zarathustra also questions how many men are capable of friendship.

On the Thousand and One Goals

The central premise here is that good and evil (morality) are relative to different peoples; “Much that was good to one people was scorn and infamy to another” (p.170). In addition, what a people call “good” is nothing more than whatever seems difficult and indispensable to them. There is nothing wrong with this for Zarathustra, indeed, this is the way it should be. He calls the “tablet of the good” that all tribes create, the “tablet of their overcomings… the voice of their will to power.” (p.170)

He affirms that it was people who gave themselves their opinions about good and evil; not any sacred or holy source; “men gave themselves all their good and evil… Only man placed values in things to preserve himself – he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning.” (p.171)

An important consequence of creation is that, aside from the very first creators, all creation must be preceded by an annihilation; “Whoever must be a creator always annihilates.” (p.171)

Zarathustra says there have been a thousand goals (moralities) because there have been a thousand peoples but still no single overarching goal, a morality that encompasses all moralities. Without such a goal, humanity has no goal and “if humanity still lacks a goal – is humanity itself not still lacking too?” (p.172) Either the overarching goal is the will to power or what we lack is the *ubermensch*.

On Love of the Neighbour

The notion of love of the neighbour is inextricably bound up with, what Zarathustra saw as Christian values; pity, compassion, leaning on each other rather than standing strong on one’s own two feet. For this reason, he sees it as a compensatory doctrine, compensating for the love of the self that people lack and have been taught is evil. For Zarathustra, people turn to their neighbours in weakness because they do not love themselves. They try to substitute self-love with love from others; “You cannot endure yourselves and do not love yourselves enough: now you want to seduce your neighbour to love, and then gild yourselves with his error.” (p.173)

It is better to be a friend than a neighbour; “the creating friend” (p.174) is noble and strong in his or her independence, and because of this “always has a completed world to give away” (p.174) rather than weakly leaning on you even as you lean on them.

For this reason, “love of the neighbour I do not recommend to you: I recommend to you love of the farthest.” (p.174)

On the Way of the Creator

The path of the creator is a lonely one and requires strength. Not only will you need strength to affirm your own values but also to break free from the herd. And of course, escaping *from* is not as important as escaping *to*; “Free *from* what? As if that mattered to Zarathustra!... free *for* what?” (p.175)

Others will despise you for passing “over and beyond them” (p.176), for rejecting their values in order that you may make your own. “And beware of the good and just! They like to crucify those who invent their own virtue for themselves – they hate the lonely one.” (p.176)

Zarathustra also talks again about destroying, but this time you must destroy yourself in order to create a new individual; one free from the herd. “You must wish to consume yourself in your own flame: how could you wish to become new unless you had first become ashes!” (p.176)

On Little Old and Young Women

This is a blazingly sexist passage purporting to describe women. Essentially, Zarathustra sees women as subservient and inferior to men.

We are told that women want children and that this is the ultimate end for them. Hence for women, men are means to this end. As for men, however, men want danger and play, hence they want women to be “the most dangerous plaything. Man should be educated for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly.” (p.178)

Women ought to obey men; indeed, Zarathustra claims that for women happiness is obeying the man; “The happiness of man is: I will. The happiness of woman is: he wills. ‘Behold, just now the world became perfect!’ – thus thinks every woman when she obeys out of entire love.” (p.179)

On the Adder’s Bite

Zarathustra tells a parable of a poisonous adder that bit him while he was sleeping. Upon being bitten, he woke, grabbed the snake and told it to take back its poison, which it did by licking around the wound. This is Zarathustra’s way of refuting Jesus’ teaching of repaying evil with good. He goes on to recommend getting a little angry at times, joining in a little with the swearing if someone swears at you, doing a few small wrongs if you are done a great wrong, exacting a little revenge rather than none, and punishing transgressors; after all punishment is “also a right and an honor for the transgressor” (p.180).

On Child and Marriage

Regarding children and marriage, Zarathustra advises that a man must be *entitled* to wish for a child. He must be “the victorious one, the self-conqueror, the commander of your senses, the master of your virtues” (p.181) When you have a baby, you should be creating a creator, “one that is more than those who created it” (p.182), in a marriage founded on reverence for each other.

He goes on to pour scorn on the marriages of the “all-too-many, the superfluous” (p.182) which, betraying his contempt for the herd, he compares to two beasts finding each other.

On Free Death

Death, for Zarathustra, is something momentous, but not an occasion for sadness and pity. It should be a “spur and promise to the survivors” (p.183), a consummation of a life lived well. He calls this a victorious death.

The “free death” is the death which comes when we will it. We should “die at the right time” (p.183), and when is this time? At the right time for “his goal and heir.” (p.184) With a grand goal and an heir to continue the pursuit of it, the right time to die will be the time when you have taught and shown your pupil all you can and they have become better able than you to pursue it. Presumably, at this point, you ought to step aside and die a noble death.

Zarathustra particularly detests the “all-too-many” who drag out their “all-too-long” lives past the point where they lose all nobility and vitality; “Would that a storm came to shake all this worm-eaten rot from the tree!” (p.185) When you die, “your spirit and virtue should still glow like a sunset around the earth: else your dying has turned out badly.” (p.185) Dying, wheezing and bed-ridden after a protracted illness has left you virtually incapacitated is not a good death for Zarathustra.

He also talks a little about how Jesus died too early; when “he knew only tears and the melancholy of the Hebrew” (p.185). Zarathustra speculates that if Jesus had lived longer, he might have recanted his teaching and “learned to live and to love the earth – and laughter too.” (p.185)

On the Gift-Giving Virtue

The highest virtue is like gold. Gold is uncommon and useless but it always gives of itself. In the same way “a gift-giving virtue is the highest virtue.” (p.186) With this ultimate goal in mind, giving of itself, the lover of knowledge accumulates his wealth. Zarathustra calls this a holy selfishness. The other kind of selfishness is a sick one which always wants to steal.

Zarathustra advises his disciples to always ensure their gift-giving virtue and love of knowledge serve the meaning of the earth (i.e. not afterworldly hopes). They must make sure it stays with the earth, with life, “that it may give the earth a meaning, a human meaning.” (p.188) leads back to the body, to life, to give the earth a meaning, a human meaning.

Despite his criticisms of reason, education, and philosophers, knowledge is very important for Nietzsche. He merely detested the attitude towards knowledge his contemporaries had; “With knowledge, the body purifies itself; making experiments with knowledge, it elevates itself; in the lover of knowledge all instincts become holy; in the elevated, the soul becomes gay.” (p.189)

He also promises that the *ubermensch* will come from a “chosen people” who will in turn come from the lonely individuals of today. Finally, Zarathustra tells his disciples to leave him and be suspicious of his teachings. If they are to make good overtures for the *ubermensch*, they must be creators, not merely accepting dogma, no matter the source; “One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil… Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves.” (p.190)

*Second Part*

The Child with the Mirror

Zarathustra returns to his mountain where he stays for years once more with his eagle and serpent until he dreams a child stands before him with a mirror. He looks into it and sees a “devil’s grimace and scornful laughter” (p.195). This is a sign that his teaching has been distorted by his enemies, so he resolves to journey to where his friends are and give more of his wisdom.

Upon the Blessed Isles

This section is atheistic. Zarathustra repeats several times that God is merely a conjecture but he maintains that our conjectures should not be beyond our creative capacities. They should also be restricted to what is thinkable. We can neither create nor think a god.

He also tells us that people cannot recreate themselves into *ubermensch* but they could make themselves the fathers and forefathers of the *ubermensch*.

He criticises the notion of God because it praises eternity and permanence when precisely the opposite; time, becoming, and impermanence are meaningful; “It is of time and becoming that the best parables should speak: let them be a praise and a justification of all impermanence.” (pp.198-9)

Creation is “the great redemption from suffering” (p.199) but there cannot be any creation without suffering and change. The feeling part of us suffers but the will, as creator, acts as liberator. Knowledge and the act of acquiring it are also creative and revel in the same process; “In knowledge too I feel only my will’s joy in begetting and becoming” (p.199).

On the Pitying

Zarathustra attacks pity here. He doesn’t like pity because, for him, pride is important. When someone takes pity on you and helps you, the implication is that you lack the power/strength to handle the situation; “when I helped him, I transgressed grievously against his pride.” (p.201) In addition, pity, or feeling sorry, is a weak, negative, inward reaction to suffering in others that shrivels the one doing the pitying. When one pities, one doesn’t nobly stand strong and shout into the wind; rather, one cries and bemoans the suffering of the other. The devil told Zarathustra, “God is dead; God died of his pity for man.” (p.202) Beggars are particularly distasteful because they are asking for pity. Rather, he counsels, “if you have a suffering friend, be a resting place for his suffering, but a hard bed as it were, a field cot: thus will you profit him best.” (p.202)

He also comments that petty thoughts are worse than evil deeds. There is a certain honesty in an evil deed, it is open and does not dissemble, but a petty thought buries away and eats someone from the inside.

On Priests

Zarathustra says he has compassion for priests. They have been deceived by the “Redeemer” (Jesus) who “put them in fetters: in fetters of false values and delusive words” (p.203). He is disgusted by the way their souls are not allowed to soar but rather they (as sinners) must crawl up the stairs on their knees before their ‘Redeemer’; an obvious allusion to the core of Christianity which teaches we are all sinners before God.

Interestingly enough Zarathustra also comments on the priests’ lack of knowledge stating that it is full of gaps and into these gaps they have slotted their God (God of the gaps); “they themselves have never walked on the carpets of knowledge. Of gaps was the spirit of these redeemers made up; but into every gap they put their delusion, their stopgap, which they called God.” (p.204)

In an important passage, Zarathustra says that there has never been an *ubermensch* yet; “Naked I saw both the greatest and the smallest man: they are still all-too-similar to each other. Verily, even the greatest I found all-too-human.” (p.205)

On the Virtuous

This section is an analysis of virtue and what it has come to mean. Among other things, Zarathustra criticises those who want (or expect) reward for their virtue (particularly an eternal one), those who call it virtue when their vices grow lazy (in a way, becoming virtuous by default), those who think virtue is merely pulling back from the world (avoiding those who would attack them and avoiding those whom they would attack), and those who cannot see the best in man but see only the worst and call it virtue.

In the end, almost everyone believes they possess some virtue and some knowledge of good and evil despite the fact that most don’t. Zarathustra particularly dislikes the words; revenge, punishment, reward and retribution because, for him, they share no part in virtue. He also explicitly denies that “what makes an act good is that it is unselfish” (p.208); rather, we should always strive to always ensure that our selves are in all of our deeds. That would guarantee their goodness.

On the Rabble

A criticism of the “rabble” (elsewhere called the ‘herd’) as the lustful, lowly people who poison everything with their attempts to stifle the strong, the noble, the brave. Some individuals turn away from life when they were really only turning away from the rabble (perhaps a reference to Schopenhauer) and others appear as “annihilators” when they were only attempting to thwart the rabble.

Zarathustra also says “I turned my back on those who rule when I saw what they now call ruling: higgling and haggling for power – with the rabble.” (p.209) This is a clear reference to democracy and how rulers have lost their ability and deservingness to rule, in that they can no longer simply take it. Now the strong and prideful have to rule *with* the weak, lowly rabble; a shameful situation indeed.

On the Tarantulas

The “tarantulas” are those who preach equality. They preach the will to equality as a virtue but they are full of envy and jealousy always seeking revenge; revenge against those whose equals they are not, for secretly they are envious of those better than them; ““We shall wreak vengeance and abuse on all whose equals we are not” – thus do the tarantula-hearts vow. And ‘will to equality’ shall henceforth be the name for virtue” (p.212). For Zarathustra, the truth is rather that, ““Men are not equal.” Nor shall they become equal!” (p.213) His greatest hope is that “*man be delivered from revenge*” (p.211) because revenge is a petty, bitter, poisonous emotion. He warns us to mistrust those who seek to punish and talk much of their justice. “They are people of a low sort and stock” (p.212).

Zarathustra goes on to talk about the warring and inequality of the *ubermensch*, but again, he qualifies it saying; “In their hostilities they shall become inventors of images and ghosts, and with their images and ghosts they shall yet fight the highest fight against one another. Good and evil, and rich and poor, and high and low, and all the names of values – arms shall they be…” (p213). Once more, these seem to be ‘wars’ of ideas and concepts, not so much physical battles.

He concludes this section affirming the glory in never-ending conflict and creation saying, “let us be enemies too, my friends! Let us strive against one another like gods.” (p214).

On the Famous Wise Men

This is all about the “wise men” who have elected to serve the people instead of the truth. They have promoted themselves and often claimed “the voice of God came to me.” (p.215) Having thus ingratiated themselves with the people, rulers who wanted the peoples’ support then had to put these wise men into positions of power; “many who were powerful and wanted to get along smoothly with the people harnessed in front of their horses a little ass, a famous wise man.” (p.215)

These well-fed wise men dwell in cities with all the comforts that entails while real truth seekers prefer isolation and can be found in the desert. “Hungry, violent, lonely, godless” (p.215); this is the lion-will of the truthful.

The Night Song

An ode to night told from the perspective of the light. The light is envious because it is only able to give, never receive. Perpetually giving, the act of giving has now lost all significance; “I do not know the happiness of those who receive… my virtue tired of itself in its overflow.” (p.218) Even those who receive no longer appreciate the gift; “They receive from me, but do I touch their souls?” (p.218)

The Dancing Song

Zarathustra converses with life and wisdom. He says to life that he loves her but finds her unfathomable. She says she is not unfathomable, “merely changeable and wild” (p.220).

When he discusses this with wisdom (also a woman), she says the only reason he praises life is that he wills, wants, and loves. (Perhaps meaning he doesn’t really love life, he only loves what life gives him)

So it stands thus. He loves only life but is “well disposed” towards wisdom as well because she reminds him so much of life. She is changeable and stubborn and although “one thirsts after her… [one] is never satisfied” (p.221).

When he tells life about wisdom she merely laughs and asks if he isn’t actually talking about her.

The Tomb Song

This seems to be Zarathustra remembering his past hopes and dreams. At that time, Zarathustra was full of youthful exuberance and grand hopes for the future but they have died (the tombs of his youth). Yet, there is something still within him that carries on, something ‘invulnerable’, his *will*, the “shatterer of all tombs.” (p.225)

On Self-Overcoming

The wisest (philosophers) call their drive a “will to truth”. Zarathustra questions this though. He says they have a “will to the thinkability of all beings… You want to *make* all being thinkable, for you doubt with well-founded suspicion that it is already thinkable.” (p.225) This will, this drive, is not a will to truth; rather, it is a will to power. The wisest want to “create the world before which you can kneel” (p.225). What’s more, the wisest then promote their valuations, their good and evil, and make the people hold to them. This is again, the will to power in action.

Zarathustra goes on to make an observation on all living things with three points. First, whatever lives, obeys. Second, he who cannot obey himself is commanded. Third, commanding is harder than obeying because to command is to carry all the burden and responsibility, even when it commands itself for it “must become the judge, the avenger, and the victim of its own law.” (p.226)

How does this happen? What is the mechanism behind the process? The will to power; “Where I found the living, there I found will to power” (p.226). It is apparent even in the weaker who serves the stronger because the weaker also desires to be master over what is weaker than itself; even in those who make sacrifices and pretend they don’t desire power, the will to power is always there.

All life (not just that of conscious creatures) sacrifices itself for power. Zarathustra expresses this succinctly by saying that life is that which must always overcome itself. We call this the “will to procreate or a drive to an end, to something higher, farther…” (p.227) but it is all the will to power.

In a rejection of Schopenhauer, Zarathustra argues against the will to existence, saying such a thing does not exist. “For, what does not exist cannot will; but what is in existence, how could that still want existence? Only where there is life is there also will: not will to life but – thus I teach you – will to power.” (p.227)

All evaluations of good and evil are transitory – there can be no absolute, eternal values because they must continually overcome themselves again and again, as we decide anew and continually create. And once again, Zarathustra reminds us that “whoever must be a creator in good and evil, verily, he must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the highest goodness: but this is creative” (p.228).

On Those Who are Sublime

Those who are sublime (possibly priests) are too solemn and serious; “he has not learned laughter or beauty. Gloomy this hunter returned from the woods of knowledge.” (p.229) Once more, Zarathustra preaches the physical, the mortal over the afterworldly and imaginary; “his happiness should smell of the earth, and not contempt for the earth.” (p.229)

He remarks that the sublime “has not overcome his deed.” (p.229) Remember that all life is characterised by the will to power, even in the self. To live in harmony with this will, we must therefore continually strive forwards and upwards, creating and recreating ourselves in each moment. The sublime person hasn’t overcome themselves because they have stagnated.

On the Land of Education

This is a criticism of modern education as motley, merely regurgitating what people had thought in the past and painting over this with more of the same. This seems to be an attack against lack of originality and authenticity in thinking. Removing all of the borrowed ideas would reveal nothing of substance underneath, no original thoughts. He calls men of today “paintings of all that men have ever believed” (p.232).

On Immaculate Perception

Zarathustra attacks detachment here. He slams the “immaculate perceivers” as those who look at life without desire, with a dead will (another Schopenhauer reference); “to look at life without desire and not, like a dog, with my tongue hanging out. To be happy in looking, with a will that has died and without the grasping and greed of selfishness…” (p.234)

He also calls them “lechers” and “sentimental hypocrites” because they also “love the earth and the earthly… but there is shame in your love and bad conscience… Your spirit has been persuaded to despise the earthly; but your entrails have not been persuaded, and they are what is strongest in you.” (p.234) Unable to completely get rid of their desires they continue to “leer” around them, all the while denying and renouncing the objects of their desires. To justify this they call their leering “contemplation” and thus attempt to sanctify it.

Then they go one step further. Because they renounce their own desires, they must make desire bad; “You lack innocence in your desire and therefore you slander all desire.” (pp.234-5)

The metaphor for the immaculate perceivers is the moon, which slips stealthily over the rooftops, silently and piously peering from a distance. This is dishonesty for Zarathustra. He prefers the overt, innocent acceptance and embracing of desire; i.e. the sun, which doesn’t slink about but grandly announces itself and its love for the earth below.

On Scholars

This is a brutal attack on academic scholars for seeking knowledge at their desks and in their books rather than living; they are “trained to pursue knowledge as if it were nutcracking. I love freedom and air over the fresh earth” (p.237). They pursue knowledge without any will or passion gaping at the thoughts of others like spectators. They are mechanical drones always lying in wait, ready to attack those who do not conform (like Nietzsche).

This is a personal, a quite bitter, passage, where Nietzsche admits that he “lived with them” but that because he “lived above them” they “developed a grudge against me.” (p.238) He claims that “so far I have been heard least well by the most scholarly.” (p.238)

On Poets

Zarathustra attacks poets for being superficial and for how “they all muddy their waters to make them appear deep.” (p.240) On top of this, they are vain (they “always fancy that nature herself is in love with them, and that she is creeping to their ears to tell them secrets and amorous flatteries; and of this they brag and boast before all mortals.” (pp.239-40)) and they crave spectators.

On Great Events

The central metaphor here is an island with a “fire-spewing mountain” (p.241) on it which smokes continuously. It is a metaphor for so-called “great events” which are accompanied by “much bellowing and smoke.” (p.243) Great events are “not our loudest but our stillest hours. Not around the inventors of new noise, but around the inventors of new values does the world revolve; it revolves *inaudibly*.” (p.243) Those who attempt to overthrow statues with much hullabaloo only make the overthrown more popular and godlike through its suffering.

Zarathustra sees the state in the same light; “it likes to talk with smoke and bellowing – to make himself believe… that he is talking out of the belly of reality.” (p.244)

The Soothsayer

A soothsayer talks about a great weariness and sadness that has descended on mankind; “All is empty, all is the same, all has been!” (p.245) This is a reference to Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence which will be explicated later. At any rate, Zarathustra is taken by this and lapses into melancholy. After three days of not eating or sleeping, he finally slept and dreamed. He dreamed that he had turned his back on life and was “a night watchman and a guardian of tombs upon the lonely mountain castle of death.” (p.246) Eventually, a roaring wind burst into the castle and tore a black coffin open. From out of the coffin “spewed out a thousandfold laughter. And from a thousand grimaces of children, angels, owls, fools, and butterflies as big as children, it laughed and mocked and roared at me." (p.247) One of Zarathustra’s disciples interprets the dream saying that Zarathustra is the wind blowing through all death chambers and frightening and laughing at the “guardians of tombs and at whoever else is rattling with gloomy keys.” (p.248)

This seems to be a parable praising joy, laughter, and levity over seriousness, solemnity, and gloominess.

On Redemption

Zarathustra comes across a group of disabled people and beggars, all afflicted with some incurable ailment. They ask to be healed but Zarathustra refuses saying that healing them wouldn’t be helpful. He notes a bigger problem is those he calls “inverse cripples”; i.e. those who lack everything except for one thing which they have too much of. Examples include people who are “nothing but a big eye or a big mouth or a big belly or anything at all that is big” (p250). People say these ‘inverse cripples’ are great men, even geniuses, but Zarathustra disagrees. (This may be a reference to people who live their lives ‘narrowly’, focusing on one thing to the exclusion of everything else)

He moves on to talk about redemption as being an attempt to change the past, to “recreate all ‘it was’ into a ‘thus I willed it’” (p.251) Willing liberates but even the will can be chained by ‘it was’; “Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past.” (p.251) Thus we see the people with disabilities were metaphors for people suffering before their own pasts.

From here begins a diagnosis of the modern sickness, as Zarathustra saw it, the descent into the denial of all life, existence, and vitality. The will cannot will backwards; it is impotent against the past, and so, “on all who can suffer he wreaks revenge for his inability to go backwards. This, indeed this alone, is what *revenge* is: the will’s ill will against time and its ‘it was.’” (p.252) That it may carry out this revenge with a clear conscience, the will instead calls it *punishment*.

Because of the suffering that the will is put through in the face of its unalterable past, willing itself and all life came to be seen as a punishment. But since this tragic ‘existential condition’ called ‘it was’ could not be fixed (healed), the punishment must therefore be eternal; “this is what is eternal in the punishment called existence, that existence must eternally become deed and guilt again.” (p.252) The only way the people thought they could overcome this and at last attain redemption was therefore if “willing should become not willing.” (pp.252-3) And we finally arrive at the denial of life.

This is all an error. The only way to claim redemption is by fiat, for the creative will to assert that of all its ‘it was’ ‘But thus I willed it’. Only by owning our past deeds can we redeem ourselves. No one (including ourselves) can ‘heal’ us of them.

On Human Prudence

Zarathustra recounts four instances of his prudence when it comes to humans. First, he says it is better to be deceived occasionally than to be on guard and cautious all the time. He says, “if I were on guard against men, how could men then be an anchor for my ball? I should be swept up and away too easily.” (p.254) I take this to mean, since Zarathustra wants to help humanity and share his wisdom with them, he cannot at the same time be at a distance from them.

Second, he spares the vain more than the proud. The vain are insecure and need praise. Without this they would be broken. However, when the proud are hurt or criticised, because of their inner mettle, they will likely grow into something stronger and better.

Third, Zarathustra doesn’t allow the sight of evil to be diminished for him by modern people’s timidity. What is typically considered evil is necessary and important because it is only by facing great evil that people can become great; “in order that the overman should not lack his dragon, [there must arise] the overdragon that is worthy of him…” (p.256).

Zarathustra’s final instance of prudence regarding humans is that he prefers to look upon modern men and women in disguise “well decked-out, and vain, and dignified, as “the good and the just” (p.256) because they have no substance underneath and it disturbs him to see them naked.

The Stillest Hour

Zarathustra has a conversation with a voice in his mind in which he confesses that he has become unsure of himself. He tells it he lacks “the lion’s voice for commanding” (p.258). The voice tells him he is still a proud youth but he must become a child. Zarathustra says he doesn’t want to. Finally, he leaves his friends to return to his mountain again.

*Third Part*

The Wanderer

Zarathustra climbs over hills to get to the coast where he will take a ship back to his mountain. While he walks, he tries to steel himself with maxims for the arduous inner climb he is heading towards.

On the Vision and the Riddle

Zarathustra boards a ship but he remains silent for two days. Eventually his tongue loosened and he tells the sailors about a vision he had, a vision of the loneliest.

He talks about how he was climbing upwards, “defying the spirit that drew [me] downward toward the abyss, the spirit of gravity… although he sat on me, half dwarf, half mole” (p.268). Here Zarathustra personifies the force which drags us down (fear, pity, equality, etc.) as a creature sitting on him, whispering “leaden thoughts” (p.268) to him. The best way to overcome this spirit of gravity is courage, “courage which *attacks*” (p.269) so Zarathustra confronts the dwarf.

The dwarf jumps off Zarathustra near a gateway. The gateway is the moment and it symbolises Nietzsche’s idea of eternal recurrence; “From this gateway, Moment, a long, eternal lane leads *backward*: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever *can* walk have walked on this lane before? Must not whatever *can* happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before?” (p.270) If this is true, then this very moment with he and the dwarf standing before the gateway must have already happened. And since an eternity stretches after the doorway (the Moment) as well, everything that *can* happen must also happen in the future, again including this very meeting.

The past stretches out eternally behind us and eternally in front of us, meeting at the present. All things recur eternally. We have already existed an eternal number of times in exactly this same state and will also so exist in the future.

There are also a couple of lesser points to note here. One, the iron rule of causality is suggested; “are not all things knotted together so firmly that this moment draws after it *all* that is to come? Therefore – itself too?” (p.270). Two, whatever can happen must happen; “For whatever *can* walk – in this long lane out *there* too, it *must* walk once more” (p.270).

Suddenly, the dwarf and the gateway disappear and Zarathustra finds himself on a cliff. A shepherd is writhing and gagging with a heavy black snake hanging out of his mouth. Zarathustra tried to pull it out but couldn’t. He tells the man to bite its head off. Following his advice, the shepherd bites the head off the snake and spits it out. He then stands up, radiant, changed into something more than human, and laughs. This is a metaphor which Nietzsche will use later at the end of this third part.

On Involuntary Bliss

Zarathustra went looking for companions but he now realises he has to create them himself. This, then, is why he is leaving them, to perfect himself for his children’s sake. He draws a nice metaphor here of his children as young trees “standing close together and shaken by the same winds…” (p.273) but he wants to “dig them up and place each by itself, so it may learn solitude and defiance and caution.” (p.273) This is a nice image summing up how Zarathustra values hardness and strength which is only possible through exposure to hardships.

Before Sunrise

Here Zarathustra praises accident, innocence, chance, and prankishness (as opposed to Purpose and rationality). He recommends a little reason and a little wisdom as well but these things, in trying to order and control reality, miss the vital, vigorous, carefree essence of life.

On Virtue That Makes Small

Once back on land, Zarathustra didn’t go straight back to his mountain. Rather, he decided to take several detours to see what had happened to people while he had been away.

It turns out that the people and their virtues have become small and they are only getting smaller and smaller. The reason for this is due to their doctrine of happiness and modesty in virtue which values contentment above all. Zarathustra criticises even those who command because they “hypocritically feign the virtues of those who serve. “I serve, you serve, we serve”… and woe, if the first lord is *merely* the first servant!” (p.281) He continues to lambast the kindness, justice, and pity (all weaknesses) that fill the people; all in the name of embracing a happiness as small as them, which they call *resignation*; “these simpletons want a single thing most of all: that nobody should hurt them. Thus they try to please and gratify everybody… Virtue to them is that which makes modest and tame” (p.282). This is what the people call *moderation*, and Zarathustra calls *mediocrity*.

He goes on to criticise the small people for their comfortable, comforting lives because only hardship and suffering can make something great; “that a tree may become *great*, it must strike hard roots around hard rocks” (p.283).

Zarathustra allows that we can do whatever we will, “but first be such as are *able to will*.” (p.284) Love your neighbour as yourself, as long as you first know how to love yourself.

Here, Zarathustra starts talking about the “*great noon*” which is coming. This is a build up to some climactic event for Zarathustra.

Upon the Mount of Olives

This seems to be an ode to winter, a guest whom Zarathustra welcomes. He prefers this “hard guest” to the “pampered… potbellied fire idol.” (p.285)

On Passing By

Just as Zarathustra was about to go into a city, a fool jumped in front of him barring his way. The people called this fool, “Zarathustra’s ape”, because he had taken to speaking in the manner of Zarathustra. He proceeds to advise Zarathustra not to enter the city because there is nothing of value within. The people are weak, ‘virtuous’, and small.

Zarathustra is offended by his ‘ape’ and chastises him and his “grunting”. The fool despises the city but from a place equally despicable. When Zarathustra despises, he does so out of love, not from petty vengeful feelings. He finally says he is nauseated by both the fool and the city and gives the fool one piece of advice as he leaves, “where one can no longer love, there one should *pass by*” (p.290).

On Apostates

The young people who had listened to Zarathustra all those years ago had gone back to believing in God again. Zarathustra calls them *apostates* and chastises them for their foolishness.

He listens to the conversation of a couple of watchmen in which they doubt God’s existence, and finds it hilarious because the time is long past for doubting this. The gods came to an end a long time ago.

In a curious passage, Zarathustra claims that the gods didn’t end in a ‘twilight’; rather, they laughed themselves to death when one of them said the most godless thing possible. What did he say? “There is one god. Thou shalt have no other god before me!” (p.294) To say “there is only one God”, is the most godless thing possible because there are many different kinds of nobility (godliness) and many different noble people are required so that there can even be a nobility (gods).

And so Zarathustra left the town called The Motley Cow, only two days away from his mountain and cave.

The Return Home

In this chapter, Zarathustra finally arrives home and rejoices in the clean, quiet air, remarking how starkly opposed it is to the noisy, musty air of the cities people live in.

On the Three Evils

Zarathustra has a dream in which he weighs the world on scales and surprisingly finds it humanly good. (I assume the ‘humanly’ here means good from the perspective of the humans living in it) On waking, he resolves to balance out the world in his dream. To this end, he identifies the three most evil things in the world and weighs them ‘humanly’ as well. They are; sex, the lust to rule, and selfishness.

Regarding sex and the lust to rule, Zarathustra goes through discussing how they appear from different perspectives. Sex is a “thorn and stake” for the “despisers of the body” but “innocent and free” for “free hearts” (p.300). The lust to rule can be a scourge but it can also ascend to the heights.

As for selfishness, Zarathustra calls this “blessed”, “wholesome”, and the attitude of “a powerful soul”, a “self-enjoying soul.” (p.302). Selfishness creates good and bad for itself and “banishes from its presence whatever is contemptible… [and] cowardly” (p.302). And those “world-weary cowards”? (p.303) What was selfishness for them? A vice. Instead, they valued self*less*ness.

Again, Zarathustra foretells the coming of the “great noon.”

On the Spirit of Gravity

The spirit of gravity makes life and earth seem grave. To overcome this, we must become light and love ourselves, although this is not the “love of the wilting and the wasting… One must learn to love oneself… with a wholesome and healthy love” (pp.304-5). In other words, not a love based on pity or remorse over my lot in life. This is not easy Zarathustra says because “whatever is his own is well concealed from the owner; and of all treasures, it is our own that we dig up last” (p.305). He also criticises the “love of the neighbour” again as a love that cannot bear to be with oneself and so seeks others to love.

Grave words and grave values surround us from birth; this ‘gift’ is called “good” and “evil.” Like a camel (reference back to the beginning of the book), the spirit loads itself with these alien, grave words and values and makes of life a desert. The spirit of gravity creates constraint, statute, necessity, consequence, purpose, will, and good and evil.

At this point, Zarathustra coins a new word, “omni-satisfied” to describe those who consider everything good and this world the best (possibly a reference to Leibniz). The omni-satisfied are not choosy, they do not pick what is right for them from the banquet of life; rather they accept everything, like a swine.

Zarathustra values those who choose the values that they will honour themselves, the one who refutes a universal “good for all, evil for all” (p.306) and rather says, “This is *my* good and evil” (p306). In line with this, there is not just one way to one’s truth; “*the* way – that does not exist”; rather we should say, “This is *my* way; where is yours?” (p307). He also says that he doesn’t like to merely inquire about the ways but to question and try them out himself. Another reference to the idea that deeds are more important than words and thoughts.

On Old and New Tablets

This chapter is largely a summary of ideas already expressed in the book. The following are notes on sections that offer new insights or emphasise old insights in an interesting way.

Section 5 – Zarathustra says here that noble souls don’t want something for nothing – and this applies to life itself; “One shall not wish to enjoy where one does not give joy” (p.311). The mob, on the other hand, wants to live for nothing. This reveals more about what nobility means for Zarathustra. It isn’t just a mean, brutal, anything goes for the stronger over the weaker. Noble souls give but not out of any misguided notions of equality or fairness; they give because they have something to give and they love life. It is a magnanimous form of giving; an innocent, honest giving.

Section 8 – The imagery offered here is of a river with bridges and railings spanning it. Some, looking at the river, say, “Everything is in flux” but others, looking at the bridges, say, “Everything is fixed and firm.” Then winter arrives and everything freezes. Surely, the world is firm now. But a thawing wind then sweeps in and even the ice that had frozen on the bridges breaks them and they fall into the water. Who could now deny that all is flux?

This is a metaphor for our values of good and evil. The bridges represent those values which we imagine are fixed and permanent. The truth is the opposite. We ought to each create our own values.

Section 10 – The injunctions ‘Thou shalt not rob’ and ‘Thou shalt not kill’ were once thought to be holy and we were forced to acquiesce to them. However, Zarathustra points out that life itself is full of robbing and killing. This is what life *is* for him. When we resist or ignore this, we, in effect, resist and ignore life itself.

Section 11 – This section is about the past. Zarathustra regrets two things about it. First, the way people continually interpret and reinterpret it so that it turns out to be nothing more than a bridge to themselves or their ideas. (Possibly a reference to Hegel although the New Testament does the exact same thing with events in the Old Testament) Secondly, he regrets that the “rabble” simply ignore the past and think back no further than their grandfathers. In both cases “all that is past is abandoned” (p.314).

Section 12 – For Zarathustra, a person’s nobility arises from the future, not the past. True nobility cannot be bought, inherited, bestowed (divinely or otherwise), or won through currying anyone’s favour. One is noble based on where they are going, not where they have been.

Section 14-18 – In these sections Zarathustra rallies against those who hate the “earth”; i.e. the physical / corporeal, and are “world-weary”. “There is much filth in the world… But that does not make the world itself a filthy monster.” (p.317) The pious even renounce reason because of its connection to the earthly; “And your own reason – you yourself should stifle and strange it; for it is a reason of this world” (p.317) Believing that there is nothing of worth in the world leads to the life-denying doctrines, “thou shalt not desire!” (p.317) and “You shall not will!” (p.318). Even those who are world-weary, are weary while still living in the world, the ultimate hypocrisy. Not to mention that Zarathustra believes that, even as they denounce the world, they themselves lust after it “in love even with your own earth-weariness.” (p.319)

Section 20 – This section emphasises a kind of Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’ element to Nietzsche’s thought, in which life naturally and correctly disposes of the weakest. The slowest pack member ought to be left behind otherwise it will bring the best members of the pack into danger as well; “what is falling, we should still push… And he whom you cannot teach to fly, teach to fall faster!” (p.321).

Section 21 – We must be proud of our enemies and save ourselves for the worthier foe. We can hate, but not despise, them. Three things to get from this. First, we ought to be picky in our battles, passing by those who aren’t worthy of engaging. Second, Zarathustra distinguishes between hating and despising. Hatred is, in a sense, ‘pure’ – we recognise the challenge and rise to meet it, while despising is a pathetic response that acknowledges the superiority of the opponent and yet still seeks to overthrow him or her but in order to do so must use sneaky, indirect tactics because a full-frontal assault would fail.

Also here, Zarathustra gives voice to his elitism; “the best should rule, the best also want to rule. And where the doctrine is different, there the best is *lacking*.” (p.322)

Section 23 – More regarding the difference between men and women. Men should be “fit for war” while women should be “fit to give birth”; however, both should be “fit to dance with head and limbs” (p.322), emphasising the joyful element that Nietzsche valued; “we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh.” (p.322)

Section 24 – Advice for marriage. Zarathustra seems to recommend that a couple live together before they get married to ensure their marriage will remain strong to avoid divorce; “Give us a probation and a little marriage, so that we may see whether we are fit for a big marriage.” (p.323)

Section 25 – Zarathustra clarifies his thoughts on the state. He claims it is a “trial” and not a “contract” (opposing people like Hobbes and Locke). It is a “trial” in the sense that people *try* to find a great individual who can assume command and whom they can obey.

Section 26 – The good and just represent the greatest danger to us because they think they already know what is good and just and they will attack and crucify those who attempt to write their own values on new tablets. Zarathustra specifically calls the good and the just ‘Pharisees’ here which must surely be a reference to the Romans and their crucifixion of Jesus. Interestingly, this means Nietzsche admired Jesus as a creator of new values, while perhaps at the same time disagreeing with the specific values he created.

Since the good and the just are unable to create, they are the beginning of the end.

Section 29 – This is a call that creators become hard. Using the metaphor of diamond and coal, Zarathustra says that the noble must be hard (strong, confident) in order to create their own values.

The Convalescent

Zarathustra, tormented by his realisation of the eternal recurrence, passes out and, on waking, merely lies there, neither eating nor drinking for seven days. After this time, the animals encourage him to get up and get on with his life. They affirm the doctrine of eternal recurrence but insist that it is a cause for joy, not despair; “all things themselves are dancing: they come and offer their hands and laugh and flee – and come back… Everything dies, everything blossoms again… Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the ring of being remains faithful to itself.” (p.339)

Zarathustra affirms something interesting here; “man needs what is most evil in him for what is best in him – that whatever is most evil is his best power and the hardest stone for the highest creator; and that man must become better and more evil.” (pp.330-1) This deserves some translating. First, when Nietzsche says we need more evil, he doesn’t mean we need more genocide, rape, and torture. Sometimes this drive will involve murder but, it will be ‘honest’ murder. Sex may be something taken by Nietzsche’s nobility but it will be taken the way the male lion takes the lioness; not a sneaky act born of weakness, just strength and pure willing working itself out.

Second, we have also called our passions and our… no, *the* natural will to power, striving, and greatness, evil. However, it is these raw passions that make us strong and to deny them is to deny life itself.

Third, it is only against our enemies (again, what we have called ‘evil’ and tried to dismiss) that we can demonstrate our strength. We need bigger and better enemies (evils) if we are to realise our greatest selves.

What had upset Zarathustra so much (“choked me and had crawled into my throat” (p.331) (remember the snake in the shepherd’s throat from the beginning of the third part)) wasn’t the fact that humans were evil, but the knowledge that this evil is so small and that this “small man recurs eternally!” (p.331) He is disgusted with humanity for being so pathetic, but also with existence itself for the eternal recurrence of this pathetic creature.

The animals realise that Zarathustra wants to die (to renounce existence) but they beg him not to die yet.

On the Great Longing

Zarathustra, after listening to the animals, retreats within and converses with his soul. He tells of all he has given to her and still wonders who should be thankful? His soul, because he gave so much to her, or him, because she received all he offered?

The Other Dancing Song

Zarathustra converses with life. He expresses his hesitation regarding embracing her, whom he feels is something of a prankster. Sometimes he seems to be hunting her, sometimes she is hunting him.

Life answers saying Zarathustra doesn’t love her as much as he claims to and that she knows he is planning on leaving her soon (dying).

At the end, Zarathustra whispers to her that he knows about the secret of eternal recurrence. Life is surprised that he knows this and they share a moment together. Zarathustra says that in that moment, “life was dearer to me than all my wisdom ever was.” (p.339)

This chapter ends with a poem that affirms the doctrine of eternal recurrence and which will get a fuller explanation at the end of the fourth part.

The Seven Seals

Zarathustra finally accepts the doctrine of the eternal recurrence and pronounces how much he loves eternity and is full of passion for life.

*Fourth Part*

The Honey Sacrifice

Years pass and Zarathustra remains on the mountain. He tells his animals that he is “waiting for the sign that the time has come for my descent” (p.351); i.e. for him to go back down to the people and teach.

We learn that the time of the *ubermensch*, “our great distant human kingdom” (p.352), is a long way away but Zarathustra isn’t concerned by that.

The Cry of Distress

The next day Zarathustra is sitting on the stone outside his cave when he sees the soothsayer we met back in the second part who taught of the great weariness; “All is the same, nothing is worth while, the world is without meaning, knowledge strangles.” (p.353) The soothsayer foretells that waves of distress are coming for Zarathustra and asks him if he hears it yet.

Just then, Zarathustra hears a cry of distress. He isn’t worried by this; what is human distress to him? The soothsayer tells Zarathustra the cry is for him and urges him to go to it. He says he has come to “seduce you to your final sin” (p.354); which is *pity*.

Zarathustra asks who is calling and the soothsayer replies, it is the *higher man*. Zarathustra leaves to find and help this higher man while the soothsayer remains in his cave.

Conversation with the Kings

Zarathustra runs across two men and an ass. The men turn out to be *kings* and they have left society because they have recognised how “false and foul” (p.357) the “mob” are, and how much human society nauseates them. Even kings have lost their nobility and have become mere representatives of the rabble.

They tell Zarathustra they were looking for him for they had heard of his speech praising war (“You shall love peace as a means to new wars, and the short peace more than the long!... It is the good war that hallows any cause.” (p.359)) and were impressed. Zarathustra could see they were deceiving themselves for they were peaceful kings, but invited them to his cave nevertheless, saying he would rejoin them later.

The Leech

Continuing his search for the higher man, Zarathustra inadvertently steps on a man lying on the path. He had his arm in the swamp, using it as bait, looking for leeches. He says he is an expert on the brain of the leech and calls Zarathustra the “great leech of the conscience” (p.362), presumably because he attaches himself to peoples’ consciences and forces them to face uncomfortable truths. The reason this man is such a specialist is because of what he represents; he tells Zarathustra that he is *the conscientious in spirit*. He believes it is better to “know nothing than half-know much… The conscience of my spirit demands of me that I know one thing and nothing else: I loathe all the half in spirit” (pp.362-3).

Zarathustra invites him back to his cave.

The Magician

Next, Zarathustra meets a man who begins convulsing and trembling and waving his arms around. He starts ranting about torture and pain until Zarathustra forces him to stop by beating him. The man admits to being a *magician* who was merely playing the role of *the ascetic of the spirit*; “the poet and magician who at last turns his spirit against himself” (p.368).

Zarathustra accuses him of not just playing the role of an ascetic. He *is* something of an ascetic of the spirit. The magician admits to dissembling, pretending to be great when it is a lie. Zarathustra acknowledges the magician’s honesty and invites him back to his cave.

Retired

The next person Zarathustra meets is a tall man in black who says he was looking for “the last pious man, a sage and hermit who, alone in his forest, had not yet heard what all the world knows today” (p.371); namely, that God is dead. The man in black is *the last pope* and, after God’s death, is now at a loss for what to do. The hermit he was looking for is also dead so he decided to look for “the most pious of all those who do not believe in God” (p.372); i.e. Zarathustra.

After Zarathustra introduces himself, the last pope tells some ‘secrets’ about God that he gleaned while working so close to him. He says God was “addicted to secrecy… [and] even a son he got himself in a sneaky way. At the door of his faith stands adultery.” (p.373) He admits that anyone calling him the god of love did not have “a high enough opinion of love itself. Did this God not want to be a judge too? But the lover loves beyond reward and retribution.” (p.373) He also says that when God was young, he was “harsh and vengeful and he built himself a hell to amuse his favorites” (p.373) but then he became old, mellow, weary of willing, and finally died of pity.

Zarathustra chimes in complaining that God got angry when we didn’t understand him. But it was his fault for not speaking clearly; “And if it was the fault of our ears, why did he give us ears that heard him badly?” (p.374) In short, he created us the way we are and then blamed us for being the way we are; “He bungled too much, this potter who had never finished his apprenticeship. But then he wreaked revenge on his pots and creations for having bungled them himself” (p.374).

Zarathustra invites him back to his cave and continues his search.

The Ugliest Man

Next, he meets a man who is so ugly he can barely stand to look at him. The man asks Zarathustra to guess who he is. Zarathustra, after sinking to his knees in pity, stands back up and correctly identifies him as the murderer of God. The pity his ugliness aroused in God – who looked “with eyes that saw everything; he saw man’s depts. And ultimate grounds, all his concealed disgrace and ugliness” (p.378) – was the pity which killed him.

He says he left society because he couldn’t stand the persecution any longer. It wasn’t that the people mistreated him; what he couldn’t stand was the pity; “it is their pity that I flee” (p.377). He is glad that Zarathustra didn’t react to him by throwing him alms and pitying him. Rather, he says Zarathustra’s shame honoured him. Shame is the honest reaction to failure or misfortune, acknowledging the situation and progressing past it. Pity keeps us locked in the situation by wishing it were otherwise.

Naturally, Zarathustra then invites him back to his cave.

The Voluntary Beggar

The next man Zarathustra meets is a guy talking to a herd of cows. He says he is seeking happiness on earth and wants to learn it from the cows. The secret to happiness he thinks is “chewing the cud”. No matter what else you achieve, if you fail to learn how to do this, you will never overcome your melancholy.

This man was rich but gave up all his wealth to become poor. The richest aren’t happy but neither are the poor. Living like the cows; that is, to “abstain from all grave thoughts, which bloat the heart” (p.383) seems to be the secret.

Zarathustra invites him back to his cave.

The Shadow

Finally, Zarathustra meets his shadow who is, like him, “a wanderer… always on my way, but without any goal, also without any home” (p.385). Nothing concerns him anymore, he can’t even love himself.

Zarathustra invites this last character back to his cave.

At Noon

Wandering on, Zarathustra comes to a tree under which he decides to take a nap and where he has a realisation. He used to teach “how little is sufficient for happiness” but he now realises “it is *little* that makes the *best* happiness.” (p.389)

The Welcome

Having been unable to find the source of the cry of distress, Zarathustra arrives back at this cave only to hear the cry coming from there. Hearing it up close he realises that it is not actually a single voice but many voices mixed together. It only sounded like one voice when he heard it from far away. The higher man is the eight men plus the ass he met earlier.

One of the kings then says that many people had wondered where Zarathustra had gone and why he hadn’t returned to continue teaching. It is because the men gathered here were all despairing that they had sought him out.

Zarathustra responds by saying that he wasn’t waiting for them. They are higher men in that they recognise the poor state of humanity but they are still “not high and strong enough… There is hidden mob in you too. And even though you may be high and of a higher kind, much in you is crooked and misshapen. There is no smith in the world who could hammer you right and straight for me.” (pp.394-5) He reaffirms that they are mere bridges to the *ubermensch* and signs that these highest of men are coming (although they are still distant).

The Last Supper

They prepare a meal in which Zarathustra discourses on the *higher man*.

On the Higher Man

The first thing Zarathustra says was that it was a mistake to go and preach in the “market place” for the mob are unable to hear his words. However, now that God has died, there is a chance for the higher man to arise.

Many people still ask how humanity is to be preserved. This is the wrong question for Zarathustra. He wants to know, “How is man to be overcome?” (p.399) His only concern is for the *ubermensch*, “*not* man: not the neighbour, not the poorest, not the most ailing, not the best.” (p.399)

He goes on to reaffirm things he has said before; humans must be more evil and suffer more and harder trials. He also says people should not will beyond their capacity. This is being false and has the negative consequence that, because they are merely “counterfeiters and actors” (p.401), the great things they pretend to will be maligned and disbelieved.

It was interesting here to see that it was Nietzsche who (maybe) first said; “What the mob once learned to believe without reasons – who could overthrow that with reasons?” (p.402)

He warns that if we want to go high (be great, noble, etc.), we must use our own legs and not be carried up. Otherwise, when we stand on our own two feet, we won’t be able to handle conditions up there. This is one reason he rejects the doctrine “for the neighbour”; because no matter what you do, you cannot create for them; i.e. by helping them, you merely make them dependent on you (carry them up to the heights).

He also talks a lot about joy, laughter, and dancing (as opposed to the “gnashing of teeth” we were promised somewhere else). Especially, we must be able to laugh at ourselves.

The Song of Melancholy

After his long speech on the higher man, Zarathustra steps outside for some air. When he does, the magician gets up and sings a sad song about futility and how nothing is worthwhile. He draws everyone in the cave in with this song and succeeds in lowering the mood.

On Science

The conscientious in spirit leaps up and takes the harp off the magician to break the spell he has woven over the others. He then launches into his own speech about how he came to Zarathustra seeking security. He thinks “fear is the original and basic feeling of man” (p.414) and that all of human history can be explained as a response to this deep-seated fear. Indeed, it was precisely to allay our fear that we invented *science*.

Zarathustra comes in mid-way through this speech and disagrees completely. It is courage, not fear, that defines our prehistory. Fear is an anomaly in humans.

Among Daughters of the Wilderness

Zarathustra’s shadow then grabs the harp and sings his own song about… pretty much nothing that I can discern. Walter Kaufmann confirms that it “can and should be read as thoroughly delightful nonsense” (p.347).

The Awakening

Zarathustra slips out once more and reflects on how, despite the fact that he “was overcome by a slight aversion and by scorn for his company… he enjoyed their gaiety” (p.422) and was pleased to see the *spirit of gravity* retreating.

Suddenly however, the noise stops and Zarathustra smells burning incense coming from his cave. Heading in, he is shocked to see them kneeling before the ass, worshipping it. The ugliest man then recites a little prayer to the beast.

The Ass Festival

Zarathustra runs in and chastises them one by one, finally kicking them out. However, he recognises what is positive in the situation; namely, that they *created* this “ass festival” themselves and urges them to celebrate it, when they next do, “for their own sakes” (p.429).

The Drunken Song

They all step outside Zarathustra’s cave and the ugliest man rejoices saying that, for the first time in his life, he is completely satisfied, not just with this day, but for his whole life; “Living on earth is worth while: one day, one festival with Zarathustra, taught me to love the earth.” (p.429) Now, he has accepted the doctrine of eternal recurrence; “‘Was *that* life?’ I want to say to death. ‘Well then! Once more!” (p.430) Each of his guests thank Zarathustra expressing similar sentiments.

From sections 3 to 12, Zarathustra discourses about eternal recurrence, explaining the section at the end of the third part entitled “The Other Dancing Song”. Essentially, it is an ode to eternal recurrence, rejecting the response to suffering that says, “No” and seeks for a way out, and affirming the response that says, “Yes” and embraces joy, *thereby embracing all suffering as well* because you can’t have one without the other; “Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you said Yes too to *all* woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, “You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!” then you wanted *all* back. All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored – oh, then you *loved* the world.” (p.435)

The Sign

The next morning, while sitting on his stone, a whole flight of doves flap and flutter around him and in the midst of this a lion appears. He recognises these as the sign he was waiting for (both were foretold in the first section of “On Old and New Tablets” in the third part). His guests come out of his cave at this moment and the lion, previously tame before Zarathustra roars savagely at them.

Zarathustra sits back down, reflecting on things. Yesterday, he was in this exact same spot when the soothsayer prophesied the call of distress from the higher men, with which he wanted to tempt and seduce Zarathustra to his final sin. What was this sin?

Pity! But not pity for the “mob” of humanity; pity for the higher man. Finally, Zarathustra has faced and overcome his final obstacle. His “great noon” is arriving. Zarathustra leaves his cave “glowing and strong as a morning sun that comes out of dark mountains.”