

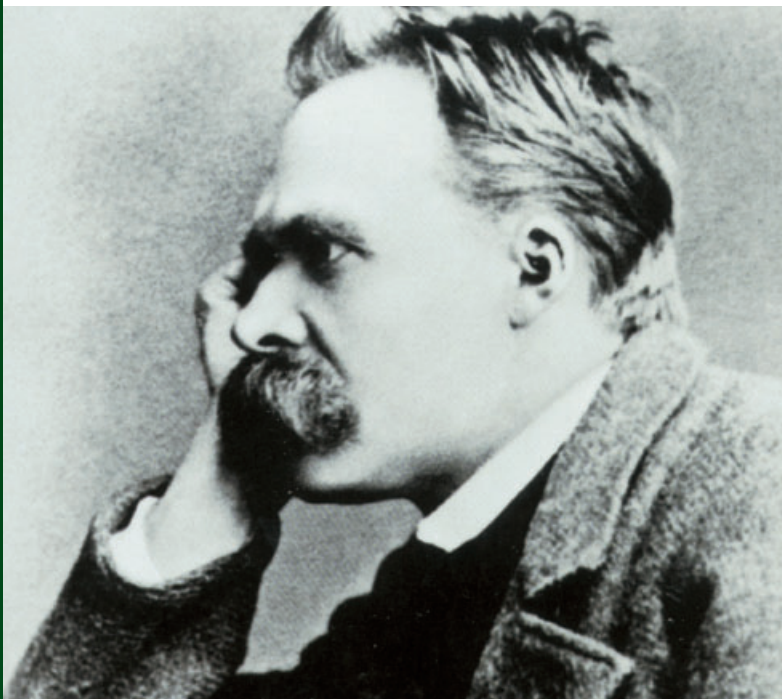
NAXOS
AudioBooks

**NON-
FICTION**

PHILOSOPHY

Friedrich Nietzsche
Thus spoke Zarathustra

Read by **Alex Jennings** with **Jon Cartwright**



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Friedrich Nietzsche

Thus spoke Zarathustra

Friedrich Nietzsche was born in 1844, at Röcken near Leipzig in Saxony, to Carl Ludwig Nietzsche (a Lutheran minister) and his wife Franziska; he had a younger sister, Elisabeth, and a younger brother Joseph (who died at the age of just one). Educated at the famous Schulpforta near Naumburg, he went on to study Classics at the universities of Bonn and then Leipzig, with such distinction that in 1869 – at the age of just 24 – Nietzsche was offered a chair in Classical Philology at the University of Basel in Switzerland. He held this post until his retirement in 1879.

Philologie as understood in Germany at this period covered a broad spectrum of disciplines which may seem to us separate; Nietzsche taught courses in Greek and Latin language, literature and philosophy (as well as more technical disciplines like metre and epigraphy). His major publications of these years, however, ranged more widely still. His first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872; in German, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*) offered a controversial (then – and now) and very influential account of the ‘Apolline’ and

‘Dionysiac’ elements in Greek culture; even here, Nietzsche looks well beyond the borders of the ancient world, with the final third of the book devoted to a consideration of Wagnerian opera (Nietzsche was from 1868 until 1876 a close friend of the composer). With *Untimely Meditations* (1873-6; *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*) he returned to Wagner, in one of four long essays on aspects of German culture (the others on David Strauss, historiography and Schopenhauer). But this form was not congenial to Nietzsche, and in his next book *Human, all too human* (1878; *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*) – made up of 638 discrete sections, often with their own titles, discussing a huge variety of subjects – he found a format (drawing on traditions of the French Enlightenment) more suitable for the directions that his thought was now taking. His next works *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (1879; *Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche*) and *The Wanderer and his Shadow* (1880; *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*) continue in this mode: cultural and philosophical commentary on a variety

of subjects, couched in aphorisms or short essays.

In 1879, Nietzsche resigned from his Basel chair, partly on the grounds of his poor health: a factor which would have a decisive influence on the next ten years of his life, which were spent mainly in the Alps and northern Italy. He retained contact with a few loyal friends, and in 1882 enjoyed the most significant erotic relationship of his life (with Lou Salomé) – but their affair did not last, and much of this period was spent in solitude. Remarkably, these were the years of Nietzsche's greatest achievement as a writer and thinker.

Daybreak (Morgenröte), published in 1881, was in form similar to the works of 1878-80; but it represented something of a new departure in terms of content. Looking back on it in his retrospective self-portrait *Ecce Homo* (written in 1888), Nietzsche said 'with this book my campaign against morality begins'; and while *Daybreak* contains reflections on many other subjects, it is perhaps those on moral judgement as a basis for human action which are most significant. Nietzsche 'denies morality': that is, he denies that moral judgements are based on universal truths (*Daybreak* §103). This denial follows in part upon a loss of

belief in the Christian God (for if God exists, He can establish moral truths) – a subject central to Nietzsche's next book *The Gay Science* (1882; *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*); in §125 of which the madman in the marketplace makes his famous announcement: 'God is dead... And we have killed him'.

To his vivid articulation of such momentous rejections of "traditional" values Nietzsche owes much of his reputation today; and this destructive work was continued in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (1883-4; *Also sprach Zarathustra*). But already in *The Gay Science* we find glimpses of a wider vision; and as Zarathustra himself tells us in his very first discourse ('The Three Metamorphoses'), destruction achieves only the freedom for new creation; a step further is required: the spirit must create *new values*. We are later told of 'the way of the creating one':

'Do you call yourself free? I want to hear your ruling idea, and not that you have escaped from a yoke...

Free from what? Zarathustra does not care about that! But your eye should clearly tell me: free *for* what?

Can you furnish yourself with your own good and evil and hang up your

own will above yourself as a law?’

‘Free for what?’: *Thus spoke Zarathustra* was Nietzsche’s first sustained attempt to provide an answer to this question.

It is by any standard an extraordinary work. In mode and form, *Thus spoke Zarathustra* represents a radical departure from Nietzsche’s previous works. The discursive mode of those essays and reflections, with their passionately engaged first-person authorial persona, is replaced in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* by the narrative mode: here the author Nietzsche *tells the story* of the Persian philosopher Zarathustra. And although there are many points of contact between the author and his character – in their lives, opinions and styles of expression – we should not forget that the ideas and thoughts found in the book are presented as those of the character Zarathustra: the title of the book (not to mention the final words of most of its subsections) is after all ‘Thus spoke *Zarathustra*’. Nietzsche himself remains a detached, impassive narrator. The deployment of the narrative framework gives the work greater literary appeal than any other Nietzschean text, and its

comparative accessibility has ensured that it remains his most well-known work. But this frame also renders *Thus spoke Zarathustra* more slippery than much modern philosophical writing; by yielding centre stage to Zarathustra and his occasional interlocutors, ‘Nietzsche’ becomes a more elusive and ambiguous figure than hitherto in his career, comparable in this respect to the Plato of the Socratic dialogues (whose relationship with the character Socrates is similarly elusive).

The work begins with a prologue in which we are introduced to Zarathustra:

‘When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lake of his home, and went into the mountains. There he enjoyed his spirit and solitude, and for ten years did not weary of it. But at last his heart changed...’

Zarathustra tells the sun that he is weary of his wisdom: ‘I would rather bestow and distribute’; and so he must ‘go down’ to men. The narrative of Zarathustra’s ‘down-going’ forms the remainder of the prologue, in which some key ideas make their first appearance. On his way down through the forest, Zarathustra encounters a hermit who

proclaims love of God and not of man; Zarathustra marvels to himself: 'Could it be possible! This old saint in the forest has not yet heard of it, that *God is dead!*'. With this glance back to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche establishes at the very beginning of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* the foundation on which Zarathustra will build his own teachings: the death of God leaves the field open for a new creator and new values.

Shortly after leaving the hermit, Zarathustra arrives at a town and addresses the people gathered in the marketplace. He is utterly uncompromising from the beginning:

'I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have you done to surpass man?'

All beings hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and you want to be the ebb of that great tide, and would rather go back to the beast than surpass man?

What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock, a thing of shame. And just the same shall man be to the Superman: a laughing-stock, a thing of shame.'

Zarathustra coins a new word to express his novel ideal: the *Übermensch*, 'Over-man'

or 'Super-man'; in German, the noun is related to the verb '*überwinden*', to surpass or overcome: 'I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed.' ('*Ich lehre euch den Übermenschen. Der Mensch ist Etwas, das überwunden werden soll*'). This is the first of very many instances of Nietzsche's delight in verbal ingenuity and wit, a crucial feature of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (albeit one which is difficult to apprehend fully in translation).

The idea of the *Übermensch* will be crucial to *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, as the focus of Zarathustra's vision of the future of mankind: he claims later in the prologue that 'The Superman is the meaning of the earth'. Yet Zarathustra does not trouble himself to provide his first audience with any clear indication of exactly who or what this exotic-sounding entity might be; he is rather content to leave them with such cryptic statements as 'Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman – a rope over an abyss', or 'I am a herald of the lightning, and a heavy drop out of the cloud: the lightning, however, is the Superman'. We learn a little more later in the work: that an *Übermensch* has never existed ('The Priests'); that he will be created from such as follow Zarathustra ('The

Bestowing Virtue'); that an *Übermensch* is not compatible with existing values ('Despisers of the Body', 'The New Idol'). Yet it must be conceded that for so central a feature of Zarathustra's thought, the *Übermensch* remains a concept decidedly lacking in clarity; and Zarathustra's first listeners make their feelings clear enough:

'And here ended the first discourse of Zarathustra, which is also called 'The Prologue': for at this point the shouting and mirth of the multitude interrupted him. "Give us this last man [i.e. the man rejected by Zarathustra], O Zarathustra," they called out, "make us into these last men! Then will we make you a present of the Superman!" And all the people exulted and smacked their lips. Zarathustra, however, turned sad, and said to his heart: "They understand me not: I am not the mouth for these ears."' "

Nietzsche's extensive use of 'internal audiences' (i.e. the presence of audiences for Zarathustra in the narrative itself) throughout *Thus spoke Zarathustra* offers both a guide and a counterpoint to our responses to his text, constantly posing the

question: with whom do we sympathise? The answer will vary from reader to reader, listener to listener. But in the prologue, the prophet of the *Übermensch* is rejected; and shortly afterwards, Zarathustra leaves the town.

Already in these opening scenes we have run up against what is perhaps the chief difficulty for the first-time audience of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*; a difficulty which obtains throughout the book. For Nietzsche has the reputation of a great philosopher; and in the modern Anglophone world at any rate, philosophy is a discipline of which we have certain expectations: we look for the clear definition of terms, for the reasoned development of an argument, and more often than not for a transparent, comprehensible style. That this regularly leads to the dry and academic is a price which we are prepared to pay. Now listen to Zarathustra; in the discourse 'On poets', he is asked a question by one of his listeners ('why did you say that the poets lie too much?'):

"Why?" said Zarathustra. "You ask why? I do not belong to those who may be asked after their Why.

Is my experience but of yesterday? It is long ago that I experienced the

reasons for my opinions.

Should I not have to be a cask of memory, if I also wanted to have my reasons with me?

It is already too much for me even to retain my opinions; and many a bird flies away.'

It is in fact not uncommon for the positions adopted in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* simply to be asserted, with little or no attempt to present coherent arguments in their favour or to counter possible objections. We might complain that this is not philosophy; and perhaps it is not – at least, not as we know it. But Nietzsche could – and did – present philosophy in more conventional ways, as we see in works both earlier and later. The mode adopted in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* is clearly a deliberate choice; and we shall appreciate and enjoy the work much more if we listen to it on its own terms, rather than bringing to it a predetermined set of assumptions.

Nietzsche himself acknowledged the difficulties of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*:

'Some day institutions will be needed in which men live and teach as I conceive of living and teaching; it

might even happen that a few chairs will then be set aside for the interpretation of Zarathustra.'

So we should not perhaps be too disconcerted if we reach the end of the book still without a clear idea of exactly what an *Übermensch* might be. The difficulty of this concept – and of certain other ideas in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, above all the notoriously impenetrable 'eternal return' (given its clearest (!) exposition in 'The Convalescent' in Part Three; see also 'The vision and the Enigma') – is in fact largely due to Zarathustra's (and Nietzsche's) refusal to explain in detail what he means. To a great extent, this is 'take it or leave it' philosophy; its mode of presentation does not so much invite reasoned consideration as pull us along on a journey: a journey which, if we allow it to, will take us to some extraordinary places.

Rejected by the townspeople, Zarathustra comes to a decision:

'A light has dawned upon me. Not to the people is Zarathustra to speak, but to companions! Zarathustra shall not be the herd's herdsman and hound!...

Companions, the creator seeks, not corpses – and not herds or believers either. Fellow-creators the creator seeks – those who grave new values on new tablets.’

In Parts One and Two of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra finds the companions he desires: in Part One, a select group of followers in the town called ‘The Pied Cow’; and in Part Two, a similar (identical?) group on ‘the Happy Isles’. To them he presents his thoughts on a wide range of topics. (A guide to the individual *Reden*, or ‘discourses’, appears at the end of this general introduction.) Zarathustra’s major concern is with ethics, and specifically with how to respond to a world in which ‘God is dead’. There are two aspects to his approach (as explained in ‘The Three Metamorphoses’, ‘Self-Surpassing’ and in Part Three in ‘Old and New Tablets’): the rejection of old values, and the creation of new ones.

The old values against which Zarathustra concentrates his fire are primarily those associated with the Christian religion. Since Christian metaphysics are to be rejected – and Zarathustra makes a case against the afterlife (in ‘The Afterworldly’), the

distinction between soul and body (‘The Despisers of the Body’), and an intransitory God (‘In the Happy Isles’) – Christian ethics are no longer valid. We find explicit criticism of Christ’s attitude to the earthly (‘Voluntary Death’), and of Christian priests (‘The Priests’); but more often the rejection of Christian positions is implicit: thus ‘Neighbour-Love’, for example, attacks love of one’s neighbour; ‘The Pitiful’, pity as a virtue; ‘The Virtuous’, the notion of reward for virtue; and ‘The Tarantulas’ attacks punishment dressed up as ‘justice’. Now it should be noted that Zarathustra harbours no small respect both for Christ himself (seen as ‘noble’ but immature in ‘Voluntary Death’) and for certain Christians (even among the priests, he claims, ‘there are heroes’); but in the end Christianity must be rejected:

‘He whom they call Saviour put them in fetters:

In fetters of false values and fatuous words! Oh, that some one would save them from their Saviour!

On an isle they once thought they had landed, when the sea tossed them about; but behold, it was a slumbering monster!

False values and fatuous words: these are the worst monsters for mortals – long slumbers and waits the fate that is in them.

But at last it comes and awakes and devours and engulfs whatever has built tabernacles upon it.

Oh, just look at those tabernacles which those priests have built themselves! Churches, they call their sweet-smelling caves!

Oh, that falsified light, that mustified air! Where the soul – may not fly aloft to its height!' ('The Priests')

Closely related to the old Christian values is what Zarathustra calls 'the Spirit of Gravity'. This great opponent is first met in the discourse 'Reading and Writing':

'I should only believe in a God that would know how to dance.

And when I saw my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, solemn: he was the spirit of gravity – through him all things fall.

Not by wrath, but by laughter, do we slay. Come, let us slay the spirit of gravity!'

His importance is explained in Part Three – riddlingly in 'The Vision and the Enigma', then more clearly in 'The Spirit of Gravity':

'Almost in the cradle are we apportioned with heavy words and values: "good" and "evil" – so calls itself this dowry...

Man is difficult to discover, and to himself most difficult of all; often lies the spirit concerning the soul. So causes the spirit of gravity.

He, however, has discovered himself who says: This is *my* good and evil: therewith has he silenced the mole and the dwarf, who say: "Good for all, evil for all".'

The Spirit of Gravity – in Zarathustra's vision, half-mole and half-dwarf – must be defeated because it is this which denies the relativity of moral values (as asserted by Zarathustra in 'The Thousand and One Goals') and insists on there being only one path to the truth (whereas Zarathustra in 'The Spirit of Gravity' sees many paths); such claims stand in opposition to the establishment of new values: thus, only by defeating the Spirit of Gravity can the creator carry through his work.

Creation itself calls for strength, and for

belief. Zarathustra's most withering scorn is reserved for those who have rejected Christianity, yet have failed to replace the old values with anything new; the following passage is from 'The Land of Culture' (and compare 'The Way of the Creating One'):

'For thus speak you: "We are complete realists, and without faith and superstition": thus do you plume yourselves – alas! even without plumes!...

Perambulating refutations are you, of belief itself, and a dislocation of all thought. *Unworthy of belief*: thus do I call you, you realists!

All periods prate against one another in your spirits; and the dreams and pratings of all periods were even more real than your awakeness!

Unfruitful are you: *therefore* do you lack belief. But he who had to create, had always his presaging dreams and astral premonitions – and believed in believing!'

Scarcely less contempt is directed at those 'conquerors of the old God' who have fallen short of the strength required to create worthy new values, and have turned

instead to that 'coldest of all cold monsters', the state: 'Weary you became of the conflict, and now your weariness serves the new idol!' ('The New Idol').

What is required in a creator of new values, Zarathustra tells his followers, is the 'will to power'. The will to power is seen in man's free bestowal of meaning upon the world, in his own creation of values, including the values of good and evil: the world only gains meaning through man's will to power. (The clearest exposition of this comes in 'Self-surpassing'.) Where values of good and evil are recognized on earth, this is the sign of a will to power which created them in the past; and 'Verily, men have given to themselves all their good and evil. Verily, they took it not, they found it not, it came not to them as a voice from heaven' ('The Thousand and One Goals').

Zarathustra's own exercise of the will to power produces, it must be admitted, at best mixed results. As we have seen, central planks in his new system of values – the *Übermensch*, the 'eternal return' – are so unclear in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* as to be almost meaningless; but we can admire some of the other ideas. For example, in Zarathustra's first speech in the marketplace in the prologue, he urges:

'I invoke you, my brethren, *remain true to the earth*, and believe not those who speak to you of super-earthly hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not.'

This 'truth to the earth' is not merely a rejection of Christian otherworldliness (on which see 'Voluntary Death'); it is also a positive celebration of the transitory nature of time, the human body and the earth, which is sounded throughout the book: 'A new pride taught me my ego, and that teach I to men: no longer to thrust one's head into the sand of celestial things, but to carry it freely, a terrestrial head, which gives meaning to the earth!' ('The Afterworldly'); 'the awakened one, the knowing one, says: "Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body"; "Ego," you say, and are proud of that word. But the greater thing – in which you are unwilling to believe – is your body with its big sagacity; it says not "ego", but does it' ('The Despisers of the Body'); 'Ah, there has always been so much flown-away virtue! Lead, like me, the flown-away virtue back to the earth – Yea, back to body and life: that it may give to the earth its meaning, a human meaning!' ('The

Bestowing Virtue'); 'Evil do I call it and misanthropic: all that teaching about the one, and the plenum, and the unmoved, and the sufficient, and the imperishable! All the imperishable – that's but a simile, and the poets lie too much. – But of time and of becoming shall the best similes speak: a praise shall they be, and a justification of all impermanence!' ('In the Happy Isles').

In Part Three of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra has left his followers and is making his way slowly back to his cave in the mountains. The journey home brings him into contact with new audiences, and the greater narrative variety of Part Three brings a greater variety in the content of Zarathustra's speeches. On the ship from the Happy Isles, Zarathustra tells his fellow-travellers of an extraordinary vision ('The Vision and the Enigma'). Reaching land, he proclaims his contempt for mankind ('The Bedwarfing Virtue'); but on encountering 'Zarathustra's ape', who expresses a similar contempt, he explains the importance of moving beyond (or 'passing by') such feelings:

'Why did you live so long by the swamp, that you yourself had to become a frog and a toad?...

I despise your contempt; and when

you warned me – why did you not warn yourself?...

This precept give I to you, in parting, you fool: Where one can no longer love, there should one – *pass by!* ('On Passing-by')

This advice is a development of that found in 'War and Warriors' in Part One: 'You shall only have enemies to be hated, but not enemies to be despised'.

When he reaches the mountains, Zarathustra rejoices in the solitude. 'The Return Home' marks the start of the final movement of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, which builds as a crescendo through the recapitulation of Zarathustra's key ideas (in 'The Spirit of Gravity', and the epic 'Old and New Tablets') to the climax of his recognition of the 'eternal return' in 'The Convalescent'. This difficult discourse is followed by Zarathustra's recollection of a mysterious encounter between Life and himself ('The Other Dance-Song'); Life accused Zarathustra of not loving her as much as he claimed, and of planning to leave her soon:

"'Yea," answered I, hesitatingly, "but you know it also" – And I said something into her ear, in among her

confused, yellow, foolish tresses.

"You *know* that, O Zarathustra? That no one knows – "

And we gazed at each other, and looked at the green meadow o'er which the cool evening was just passing, and we wept together. – Then, however, was Life dearer to me than all my Wisdom had ever been.'

We are not told what Zarathustra said to Life. Such deliberate obscurity at the very climax of the work is only further proof (if any were needed) that this is not conventional philosophy; Nietzsche here is more interested in generating mystery, emotion – sublimity, even. *Thus spoke Zarathustra* ends with the lyric ecstasy of 'The Seven Seals':

'If ever I have spread out a tranquil heaven above me, and have flown into my own heaven with my own pinions:

If I have swum playfully in profound luminous distances, and if my freedom's avian wisdom has come to me:

– Thus however speaks avian wisdom: "Lo, there is no above and

no below! Throw yourself about – outward, backward, you light one! Sing! speak no more!

Are not all words made for the heavy? Do not all words lie to the light ones? Sing! speak no more!” –

Oh, how could I not be ardent for Eternity, and for the marriage-ring of rings – the ring of the return?

Never yet have I found the woman by whom I should like to have children, unless it be this woman whom I love: for I love you, O Eternity!

For I love you, O Eternity!

Clearly we are dealing with much more than a work of philosophy here. The literary ambitions of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* are visible from the prologue right up to this triumphant conclusion. In an unprecedented mingling of different genres, we find elements of the picaresque novel; of drama (comedy and tragedy); of didactic, diatribe and sermon; of the philosophical dialogue; of lyric poetry; of satire and invective; of prophecy; of the fable and folk-tale; even elements of proto-surrealist hallucinatory narrative (see the extraordinary discourse ‘The Vision and the Enigma’). There is a

clear debt to the essay and the aphoristic forms of Nietzsche’s earlier career: in many respects Zarathustra’s *Reden* (‘discourses’) can be seen as spoken versions of these literary forms. Throughout the book, ideas are articulated in fantastic imagery and often with great wit; a delight in wordplay and paradox is evident. Looking back in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche described *Thus spoke Zarathustra* as a ‘dithyramb’: and Zarathustra acknowledges that his work has much in common with poetry (in ‘Poets’). Gilles Deleuze has spoken of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* as ‘a piece of theatre or an opera which directly expresses thought as experience and movement’; it is perhaps no accident that parts of the book have been interpreted as, or set to, music on a number of occasions (and how many works of philosophy can one say that of?).

The enormous variety of elements visible in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* nevertheless coheres into a remarkably unified whole. Here we see the crucial importance of Nietzsche’s decision to cast *Thus spoke Zarathustra* as a narrative centred on the figure of Zarathustra. For it is Zarathustra around whom the book revolves; and what could have been a loose *mélange* of writings on a miscellany of subjects

becomes a coherent, linear narrative within which the philosophy develops in an accessible and generally comprehensible way – and which constitutes in itself a magnificent and singular literary achievement.

The first three Parts of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* were published in 1883 and 1884. They were not well received, and sold poorly. Nevertheless, Nietzsche went on to write a Part Four, which was printed privately in 1885; it forms something of an afterthought, in a number of respects quite different from the first three parts – and is not included in this audiobook recording.

Nietzsche continued to write prolifically during the following years, producing a series of remarkable books including the philosophical masterpieces *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886; *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887; *Zur Genealogie der Moral*). Yet in his mind *Thus spoke Zarathustra* remained unequalled:

‘Among my writings my *Zarathustra* stands to my mind by itself. With that I have given mankind the greatest present that ever has been made to it so far.’

These words are taken from *Ecce Homo*, one of an astonishing five books Nietzsche wrote in 1888. Tragically, this was to be his last year of sanity. In January 1889, he collapsed in the street; madness claimed the final eleven years of his life. He died in August 1900.

The opening section of the Preface to *Ecce Homo* concludes with these words: ‘Above all, do not mistake me for someone else.’ In the light of this, the history of Nietzsche’s early reception reads with grim irony. Manipulation by his sister Elisabeth during his years of insanity was the first of the abuses perpetrated against Nietzsche and his memory; worse was to follow. Wilful misreading, selective editing and Nietzsche’s own fateful lack of clarity (above all with regard to the *Übermensch*) allowed this great thinker to be appropriated by ‘intellectuals’ of the National Socialist movement in early twentieth-century Germany; his reputation, particularly in Anglophone countries, has still not fully recovered. As Camus said, ‘we shall never finish making reparation for the injustice done to him’.

Appendix: Zarathustra

Zarathustra, also known as Zoroastres or Zoroaster, was regarded in antiquity as the founder of the ancient Persian religion. He was thought to have lived at some point before the sixth century BC, perhaps even as early as 1000 BC. His teachings were contained in the Avesta, the sacred book of the Persian religion; their central feature was the opposition between *aša* (truth, or rightness) and *druj* (lie, or deceit). He recognized Ahuramazda as the supreme deity. Legendary details of many kinds about Zarathustra's life were recorded.

So why did Nietzsche choose this (semi-?) historical figure as the protagonist for his work of philosophy? We are fortunate that he records his reasons in *Ecce Homo*; here is the passage in full:

'I have not been asked, as I should have been asked, what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth, the mouth of the first immoralist: for what constitutes the tremendous historical uniqueness of that Persian is just the opposite of this. Zarathustra was the first to consider the fight of good and evil the very wheel in the machinery of things: the transposition of morality into the metaphysical

realm, as a force, cause and end in itself, is *his* work. But this question itself is at bottom its own answer. Zarathustra created the most calamitous error, morality; consequently, he must also be the first to recognize it. Not only has he more experience in this matter, for a longer time, than any other thinker – after all, the whole of history is the refutation by experiment of the principle of the so-called "moral world order" – what is more important is that Zarathustra is more truthful than any other thinker. His doctrine, and his alone, posits truthfulness as the highest virtue; this means the opposite of the cowardice of the "idealist" who flees from reality; Zarathustra has more intestinal fortitude than all other thinkers taken together. To speak the truth and to *shoot well with arrows*, that is Persian virtue. – Am I understood? – The self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness; the self-overcoming of the moralist, into his opposite – into me – that is what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth.' (*Ecce Homo*, 'Why I am a Destiny' §3)

Further Reading

The translation used in this Naxos audiobook is that of Thomas Common; a text is available in the Wordsworth Classics series. Nietzsche's other books are all available in English translation; the best translators are Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. Particularly useful are two compilation volumes translated by Kaufmann: *The Portable Nietzsche* (containing *Thus spoke Zarathustra*), published by Penguin; and *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, published by Random House in the 'Modern Library' series.

Nietzsche's own *Ecce Homo* provides perhaps the best introduction to his career and his personality. Among modern critics, the short book *Nietzsche* by Michael Tanner in the Past Masters series (published by Oxford University Press) is a useful guide; it is reprinted (along with similar introductions to Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer) in the volume *German Philosophers* (again published by OUP). More ambitious is the seminal book by Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton). Both books give lists for further reading.

Among the many responses to Nietzsche in twentieth-century philosophy, the

following might be singled out for attention: Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*; Albert Camus, *The Rebel*; Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*.

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Thus spoke Zarathustra: A guide to the 'discourses'

Part One

Prologue

The work begins with a Prologue introducing us to Zarathustra. After the briefest indication of Zarathustra's background, we meet the thinker at a decisive point in his life. Having spent ten years in solitude among the mountains, he finally returns to human society to present

his radical new ideas: most notably, the prophecy of the *Übermensch*, the Superman.

The Three Metamorphoses

The first discourse (*Rede* in German) following the Prologue begins with Zarathustra speaking aloud: we are given no indication of his audience, or the location. He considers the difficulty of pursuing the truth, in a series of vivid images: the Spirit (in German *der Geist*) must become a burdened camel, then a destructive lion, and finally a creative child. Only when the prophet has finished speaking are we told of when and where this speech took place.

The Academic Chairs of Virtue

Zarathustra goes to hear a wise man speak about virtue: those virtues are praised which allow the agent to rest easy and sleep soundly. Zarathustra acknowledges the attractions of such an ethics, but remains unimpressed.

The Afterworldly

Zarathustra explains how in the past he was drawn to belief in a *Hinterwelt*, an Afterworld; but then he overcame himself: and now (as we have already heard in the

Prologue) he is here to teach men to do the same.

The Despisers of the Body

Zarathustra now criticises those who despise the human body, claiming rather that the body is the self (*das Selbst*), and that the soul (*die Seele*) is but part of the body.

Reading and Writing

In the course of Zarathustra's next discourse – a suitably aphoristic discussion of his use of aphorisms in teaching – he introduces for the first time the Spirit of Gravity (*der Geist der Schwere*), whom he longs to kill by laughter.

The Tree on the Hill

Whilst walking in the hills, Zarathustra comes upon a young man and engages in conversation. The young man tells Zarathustra candidly of his fears in his search for freedom; Zarathustra encourages him to persevere, warning him of the difficulties to be faced.

War and Warriors

Now apparently back in the town, Zarathustra exhorts his listeners to be warriors of knowledge – and to take as

enemies only those worthy to be hated.

The New Idol

Here Zarathustra attacks the State; even those who managed to conquer the old God now serve this monstrous 'New Idol'. Inveighing against the media and the rich, Zarathustra asserts that freedom and the earth still remain available for 'great souls'.

The Thousand and One Goals

Zarathustra observes the relativity of moral values, briefly considering some of the most influential definitions of what is good; he concludes that man himself creates meaning in life through evaluation, thus establishing a 'table of values' for his society.

Neighbour-Love

Zarathustra criticises the virtue of love of one's neighbour (*Nächstenliebe*), exhorting his listeners rather to love that which is most distant (*Fernsten-Liebe*, or 'Furthest-Love'), and indeed to learn to love themselves in solitude.

The Way of the Creating One

Drawing various threads of the work so far together, this discourse raises the crucial

distinction between 'negative' and 'positive' freedom: Zarathustra is not interested in what man is liberated from, but in what he is liberated *for*. He warns of the terrible difficulty and solitude which face anyone who follows the way of the creator.

Voluntary Death

Zarathustra encourages his audience to die at the right time, in triumph, and not to live on into rotten old age. He explicitly criticises Christ for an 'immature' hatred of the earth, suggesting provocatively that had Christ lived he may have learned to love life on earth.

The Bestowing Virtue

In this final section of Part One, Zarathustra leaves the town accompanied by disciples whom we are now told he has acquired. Before departing alone, he is presented with a golden staff; he urges them to stay loyal to the earth and to fight to create new values, promising that from such as they will one day be born the Superman. Leaving, he encourages them to criticise even his teachings, to find themselves, promising to return at the 'great noontide' of man's journey towards the Superman.

Part Two

The Child with the Mirror

Zarathustra returns to the mountains, spending years in solitude in his cave. Warned by a dream that his message has been distorted, he vows to return at last to his friends: in a speech full of extraordinary imagery he bears witness to his delight at this prospect.

In the Happy Isles

As the title of this discourse tells us, Zarathustra is now on the Happy Isles, reunited with his disciples. He reasserts his commitment to the Superman and to the transitory nature of time and the earth, again rejecting faith in an intransitory God as irrational, misanthropic and evil.

The Pitiful

Zarathustra criticises the virtues of compassion, pity and forgiveness.

The Priests

Some priests pass Zarathustra and his followers. Zarathustra regards them as enemies, but also pities and even admires some priests; he criticises Christian values, ritual and intellectual poverty. He points out that there has never yet existed a Superman.

The Virtuous

Zarathustra mocks the notion of reward for virtue, and advances into an attack on various conceptions of the good. He emphasizes his destruction of these value-systems, but concludes by promising man the consolation of his own message.

The Rabble

Zarathustra expresses his loathing for various sorts of rabble, and his delight that he has managed to reach a height beyond their reach.

The Tarantulas

Zarathustra attacks those 'tarantulas' who claim to preach justice and equality, yet practise an ethics merely of punishment and revenge. He presses on his listeners the need for violence and strenuous climbing before life can overcome itself.

Self-Surpassing

Zarathustra defines the activity of the wisest men as the 'will to power' (*der Wille zur Macht*): such men wish to create the world, to create meaning and value in the world. Before this, however, they must first engage in destruction and breaking of values.

The Land of Culture

Zarathustra reveals his contempt for present-day mankind, mocking their pride in their own lack of belief. Dreams and belief are essential for creators. For Zarathustra, only the future is of interest.

Poets

Zarathustra is questioned by one of his disciples about poets. While accepting that his work has much in common with poetry, Zarathustra expresses his disappointment at the mediocrity of other poets, past and present.

Great Events

On an island near the Happy Isles, some sailors witness Zarathustra flying through the air proclaiming 'It is time'. Zarathustra returns to his worried disciples, telling them of his journey over the sea and encounter with the 'Fire-Dog'. His disciples are more interested in his appearance to the sailors; the discourse ends with Zarathustra asking for what 'it is time'.

The Soothsayer

Zarathustra hears a soothsayer speak, and at his words becomes sad and weary, finally falling into a deep sleep. Upon awaking, he

tells of a terrifying nightmare he has had; one of his disciples attempts to interpret the dream. Zarathustra is partly reassured, but some mystery remains.

Redemption

Crossing a bridge, Zarathustra is accosted by some cripples and beggars; he expounds his notion of 'reversed cripples'. He then discusses with his disciples his own nature, and the nature of the will to power – in particular, its relationship to the past. Zarathustra's emotions run high; he continues to be questioned by a hunchback.

The Stillest Hour

The final discourse of Part Two begins with Zarathustra troubled and ready to leave his disciples. He explains how at the stillest hour, a voice reproached him with his failure to tell of all that he knows; Zarathustra acknowledges his shortcomings. The voice demanded that Zarathustra return to solitude. And so, in great distress, Zarathustra tells his friends that he must leave.

Part Three

The Wanderer

Part Three opens with Zarathustra making his way across the island by night, speaking to himself about the climb he must now face: the climb above himself. The prophet makes his way down to the sea, bitterly upset at leaving his friends.

The Vision and the Enigma

On board ship, Zarathustra is silent for two days; finally he speaks out, telling of his 'vision of the most solitary man'. In this vision, Zarathustra confronts the Spirit of Gravity at a gateway, back and forth from which stretch long, eternal paths. Zarathustra presents the first intimations of the idea of the 'eternal return'. A dog howls, and the scene of the vision changes: Zarathustra sees a man on the ground, and a shepherd choking upon a snake; Zarathustra urges him to bite, and the shepherd does so: spitting out the snake's head, he laughs an inhuman laughter. Zarathustra is puzzled by his vision, and invites his listeners to solve this riddle.

The Bedwarfing Virtue

Back on land, Zarathustra does not make straight for his mountain home, but carries

among men. He laments the 'smallness' and mediocrity of men, attributing this to their pursuit of limited virtue. He welcomes their appellation of him as 'Zarathustra the godless', and longs for his hour to come.

On Passing-by

In his travels Zarathustra reaches the gate of the great city, where he encounters 'Zarathustra's ape', who warns him to leave. The fool expresses his contempt for the city in a speech full of half-quotations of Zarathustra. Zarathustra interrupts to ask the fool why he remains here; as Zarathustra leaves, he advises that ['where one can no longer love, there should one – pass by!'].

The Return Home

Reaching the wilds, Zarathustra addresses solitude. He rejoices that here he will be (paradoxically) less lonely, that here he will be able to speak the truth – and regrets that he was obliged to conceal much among men.

The Spirit of Gravity

Alone, Zarathustra explains the importance of the defeat of the Spirit of Gravity: for it is this which establishes the way of good and

evil for all. Man must discover himself, must reach truth by his own path; there is no single universal path.

Old and New Tablets

In this the longest discourse, Zarathustra presents a vigorous recapitulation of his earlier teaching. Good and evil, the Superman, true nobility, inherited 'wisdom', the will to power, worthy enemies, the creator and his rejection by the Pharisees who are the good – all these build towards a climactic recognition of Zarathustra's own importance in directing man away from false values and towards the future. Zarathustra ends with a prayer for victory.

The Convalescent

Zarathustra springs from his bed and cries aloud that his deepest thought is coming forth; animals crowd around him. Zarathustra collapses, and only after seven days is able to speak: he tells the animals of his recognition of the eternal return. The animals hail Zarathustra as the teacher of the eternal return, and describe the return of Zarathustra himself in the future. Zarathustra makes no reply, lying still with eyes closed.

The Other Dance-Song

Zarathustra relates how he sang to Life; and Life responded, telling Zarathustra that he was unfaithfully planning to leave her. He said something – we are not told what – in her ear; she was surprised at his knowledge. They wept together.

The Seven Seals (or: the Yea and Amen Song)

In an ecstatic climax to the work, Zarathustra in a song of seven parts sings his love for eternity. The imagery ranges widely. Zarathustra rejoices in the absence of boundaries, in the open sea and sky: 'far away sparkle for me space and time'.

Notes and essays by James Burbidge



Alex Jennings trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre Company and has played numerous leading roles for Royal Shakespeare Company productions including *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure*, *Richard III*, *Peer Gynt*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. His film credits include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Derek Jarman's *War Requiem* and *The Wings of the Dove*. He has also read *The Sonnets* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Jon Cartwright was born and raised in South Africa but trained at LAMDA. In addition to recording books for a wide audience, including the Royal National Institute for the Blind, he has appeared frequently on stage, in film on television and radio, both in Britain and abroad.

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Friedrich Nietzsche

Thus spoke Zarathustra

Read by **Alex Jennings** with **Jon Cartwright**

Also sprach Zarathustra was conceived and written by Friedrich Nietzsche during the years 1881-1885; the first three Parts were published in 1883 and 1884. The book formed part of his 'campaign against morality', in which Nietzsche explored the ethical consequences of the 'death of God'. Heavily critical not only of Christian values but also of their modern replacements, *Thus spoke Zarathustra* argues for a new value-system based around the prophecy of the *Übermensch*, or Superman. For the first time, Nietzsche gives his philosophy a narrative frame: the founder of the ancient religion of Persia, Zarathustra, takes the central role. Rejected by society at large, Zarathustra gains a devoted band of followers to whom he delivers 'discourses' on a huge range of subjects. Haunted by visions and driven by his own 'will to power', Zarathustra eventually leaves these friends to return to his lonely mountain home, where he makes his most important discovery: that of the 'eternal return'.

A literary as well as a philosophical masterpiece, *Thus spoke Zarathustra* survived an initially poor reception, to be recognised as a seminal text in modern culture. Its appropriation by the National Socialist movement in Germany early in the twentieth century has tainted its reputation unjustly; but there are signs that the rehabilitation of Nietzsche, and of this, his most incendiary work, is almost complete.

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