

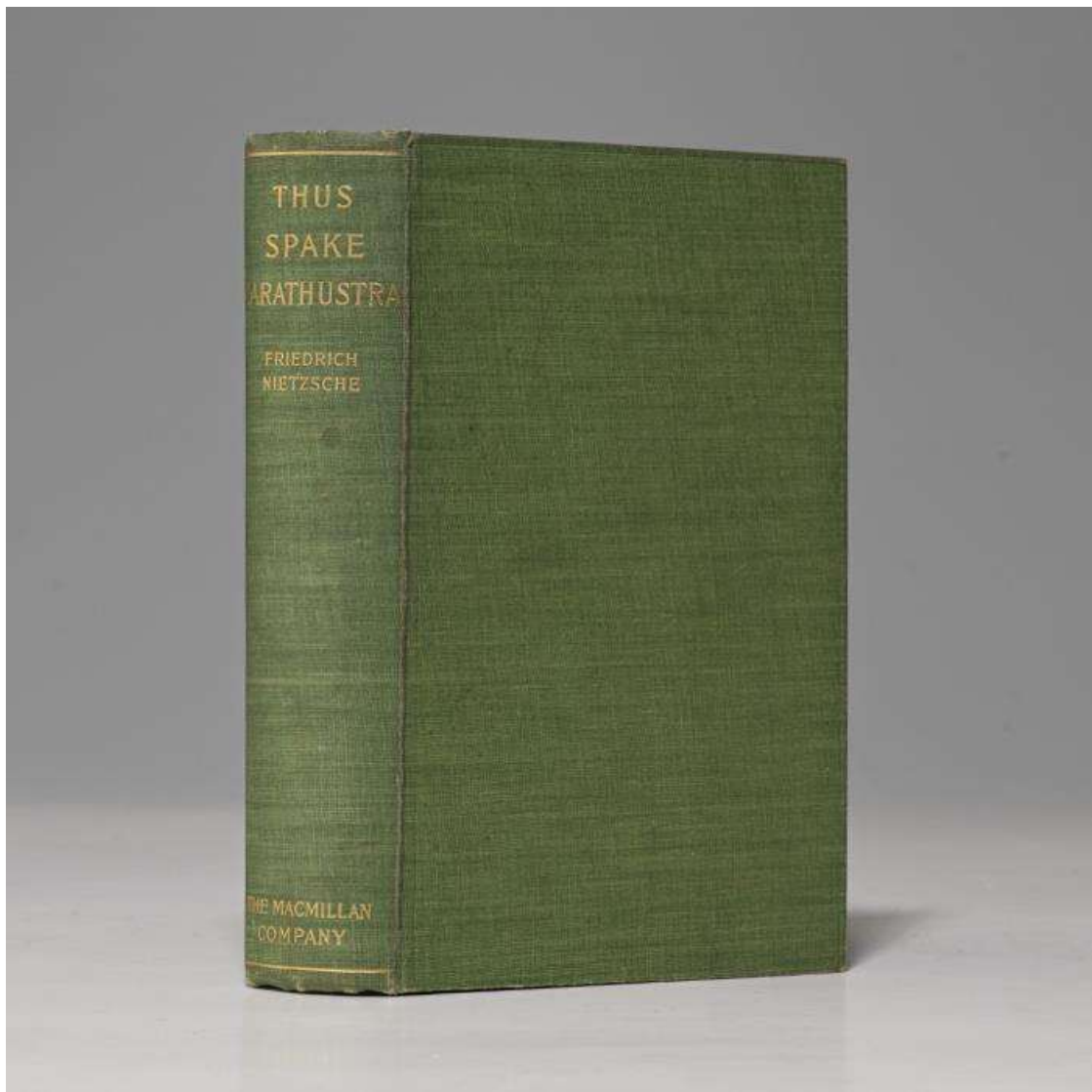
# "Thus Spake Zarathustra" (1896), by Friedrich Nietzsche: A Canonical Book

Curated by Stephen A Batman

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## Summary of this Particular Rare First Edition

Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, 1896



# THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA

A BOOK FOR ALL AND NONE

BY

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

TRANSLATED BY

ALEXANDER TILLE

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.

1896

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## **"PERHAPS THE MOST WONDERFUL 'MINE OF IDEAS' IN EXISTENCE": FIRST EDITION IN ENGLISH OF NIETZSCHE'S THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA**

First American edition and presumed first edition in English of Nietzsche's magnum opus—"the first comprehensive statement of his mature philosophy"—a splendid copy in original gilt-lettered cloth.

Nietzsche's powerful, philosophical prose-poem ranks as "perhaps the most wonderful 'mine of ideas' in existence" (Seymour-Smith, 100 Most Influential Books 79). In its pages Nietzsche announces the "death of God" and heralds the advent of the *übermensch*, the "superman"—"not the 'blond beast' of later fascism; it is a human being who has mastered passion, risen above the senseless flux and given creative style to his or her character" (Blackburn, 262).

Zarathustra is "an elaborate riddle seamlessly blending elements of Nietzsche's philosophy, his psyche and his personal life into a seductive invitation to dance" (Schaberg, 87). Although it would become his most famous work, Nietzsche's philosophical prose-poem was largely unnoticed when it first appeared. Having published Parts 1-3 in 1883-84 at his own expense, the greatly discouraged author privately published only a few copies of Part 4 in 1891. The complete work, "the first comprehensive statement of his mature philosophy" (Edwards V:509), was first published in 1892.

Number eight in an eleven-volume series of separately issued English translations of Nietzsche's texts, prepared under the supervision of the Nietzsche-Archiv in Naumburg, Germany; it is the presumed first English-language edition. Translation by Alexander Tille. With eight pages advertisements at rear. See PMM 370. Owner signature, with separate erased signature below on same blank leaf.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. New York: Macmillan, 1896. Octavo, original green cloth. Housed in a custom clamshell box.

The interior is very fresh with trace evidence of ink ownership signature removal to front free endpaper and half title, exceptionally bright gilt-cloth. A very handsome about-fine copy.

## **Introduction**

Friedrich Nietzsche's "*Thus Spake Zarathustra*" stands as one of the most profound philosophical works of the 19th century, published in four volumes between 1883 and 1885, with the complete edition appearing in 1896. Through the character of Zarathustra, a sage who descends from isolation to enlighten humanity, Nietzsche crafted a philosophical narrative that challenged conventional morality, religion, and societal norms of his time. The book emerged during a period of significant intellectual and social transformation in Europe, as industrialization, scientific advancement, and secularization were reshaping traditional worldviews.

Nietzsche wrote this work during a time of personal isolation and intellectual ferment. Having resigned from his academic position at the University of Basel due to health concerns, he spent much of his time in solitude, developing his most radical philosophical ideas. The cultural

climate of late 19th century Europe was characterized by growing disillusionment with traditional Christian values and increasing skepticism toward metaphysical certainties, creating fertile ground for Nietzsche's revolutionary philosophy.

The political landscape of Nietzsche's Germany was dominated by Bismarck's newly unified German Empire, with its emphasis on nationalism and militarism. Economically, Europe was experiencing the full effects of industrialization, with its attendant social dislocations and class tensions. Against this backdrop, Nietzsche crafted a work that would challenge readers to transcend conventional morality and create their own values in a world increasingly devoid of traditional certainties.

## **The Author**

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was born in Prussia to a family with strong Lutheran traditions. His father, a Lutheran pastor, died when Nietzsche was only five years old, an event that profoundly shaped his later philosophical outlook. Nietzsche showed early academic promise, studying classical philology at the Universities of Bonn and Leipzig before being appointed professor at the University of Basel at the remarkably young age of 24.

Despite his promising academic career, Nietzsche suffered from poor health throughout his life, which eventually forced him to resign from his professorship in 1879. Following this, he lived a nomadic existence, moving between various European locations in search of a climate that would alleviate his physical ailments. During this period of wandering and isolation, he produced his most significant philosophical works, including "Thus Spake Zarathustra."

Nietzsche was deeply dedicated to his students during his teaching career, offering them personal attention and even hosting five-course dinners for them at the end of semesters. His commitment to becoming "a really practical teacher," as he expressed in a letter to his friend Erwin Rohde, demonstrates a side of Nietzsche often overshadowed by his radical philosophical ideas.

A poignant detail from his personal life reveals his enduring connection to his family: in 1885, after winning a court settlement against his publisher and paying off his debts, Nietzsche purchased and designed his father's tombstone, thirty-six years after his father's death. The tombstone bore an inscription from 1 Corinthians: "Love never faileth," suggesting a complex relationship with his religious upbringing.

Nietzsche's mental health collapsed in 1889, and he spent the last decade of his life in a state of mental incapacity, cared for first by his mother and then by his sister Elisabeth. He died in 1900, just as his philosophical ideas were beginning to gain wider recognition. The subsequent management of his literary estate by his sister, who selectively edited and published his works to align with her own nationalist and anti-Semitic views, would complicate Nietzsche's legacy for decades to come.

## Why this is a Canonical Book

"Thus Spake Zarathustra" merits inclusion in the canon of essential books for several compelling reasons. First, it represents a fundamental challenge to traditional Western moral and religious frameworks, advocating instead for individual self-determination and the creation of new values. This radical individualism resonates deeply with American ideals of personal liberty and self-reliance, even as it challenges certain communal aspects of American culture.

The concept of the *Übermensch* or "Overman" introduced in this work—an individual who transcends conventional morality to create new values—speaks to the American emphasis on self-improvement and reinvention. Zarathustra's descent from isolation to share his wisdom parallels the American narrative of exceptional individuals who rise above circumstances to lead and inspire others.

Nietzsche's critique of herd mentality and his call for individuals to separate from the mass and define their own values aligns with America's historical emphasis on individualism and skepticism toward authority. His philosophy challenges readers to question received wisdom and create their own meaning—a stance that resonates with America's revolutionary origins and continued emphasis on innovation.

At the same time, Nietzsche's rejection of conventional morality and religion has provoked significant controversy in American culture, where religious traditions remain influential. His proclamation that "God is dead" and his critique of Christian morality as a "slave morality" have made him a lightning rod for cultural debates about secularism, relativism, and traditional values.

The book's enduring influence on American thought can be seen across disciplines—from literature and art to psychology and political theory. Nietzsche's ideas have informed American existentialism, pragmatism, and postmodernism, making "Thus Spake Zarathustra" a foundational text for understanding key currents in American intellectual life. Its challenging, provocative nature continues to stimulate debate about fundamental questions of value, meaning, and human potential—questions that remain central to American cultural and political discourse.

## Five Timeless Quotes

1. "Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"

This challenge from Zarathustra encapsulates Nietzsche's concept of self-overcoming, a continuous process of personal growth and transformation. In our current era of rapid technological and social change, this quote reminds us that human potential remains unfulfilled unless we actively work to transcend our limitations. It speaks to the contemporary emphasis on personal development and the need to move beyond comfortable mediocrity to achieve genuine growth. For civic-minded Americans, it suggests that both individuals and societies must constantly evolve and improve rather than remaining static.

2. "I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"

This declaration introduces Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* or "Overman," the ideal of a person who creates their own values rather than accepting inherited ones. In today's world of increasing moral complexity and competing value systems, this quote challenges us to develop authentic personal ethics rather than simply conforming to external authorities. It resonates with America's emphasis on self-determination while pushing us to consider what truly constitutes human excellence in a post-traditional world.

3. "The higher man is distinguished from the lower by his fearlessness and his readiness to challenge misfortune."

This insight speaks directly to our contemporary struggles with adversity and uncertainty. In an age of increasing anxiety and risk-aversion, Nietzsche reminds us that true growth comes through confronting challenges rather than avoiding them. For Americans navigating economic uncertainty, political polarization, and rapid social change, this quote offers a perspective that values courage and resilience over comfort and security.

4. "I am a forest, and a night of dark trees: but he who is not afraid of my darkness, will find banks full of roses under my cypresses."

This poetic metaphor captures Nietzsche's belief that confronting life's difficulties and complexities—including the darker aspects of human experience—is necessary for discovering its deepest rewards. In our current culture, which often emphasizes positivity and avoidance of discomfort, this quote reminds us that meaningful growth requires engaging with life's full spectrum of experiences. It challenges the simplistic narratives of both extreme optimism and pessimism that characterize much contemporary discourse.

5. "The last man blinks and says: 'The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small.'"

Nietzsche's prescient critique of what he called "the last man"—comfortable, risk-averse individuals concerned only with security and entertainment—seems remarkably relevant to contemporary consumer culture. This quote challenges our society's emphasis on comfort, convenience, and distraction at the expense of meaning, creativity, and excellence. It warns against a future where human potential is sacrificed for safety and entertainment, a concern that resonates powerfully in our digital age of constant distraction and diminishing attention spans.

# Five Major Ideas

## 1. The Übermensch (Overman)

Central to "Thus Spake Zarathustra" is the concept of the Übermensch or Overman, Nietzsche's vision of human potential fully realized. The Übermensch represents an individual who has overcome conventional morality and religion to create their own values. Unlike the "last man" who seeks only comfort and security, the Übermensch embraces life's challenges and transforms them into opportunities for growth. This figure "depicts a change from conventional morality and religion, not even bounded by conventional ideas of good and evil."<sup>1</sup> The Übermensch is not a biological evolution but a spiritual and psychological one—someone who has mastered self-overcoming and lives authentically according to self-created values. This concept has profound implications for how we understand human potential and moral development, suggesting that true fulfillment comes not from conformity to external standards but from the courageous creation of one's own meaning.

## 2. The Death of God and the Revaluation of Values

Nietzsche's famous proclamation that "God is dead" finds its fullest expression in "Thus Spake Zarathustra." This statement is not merely about religious belief but about the collapse of traditional metaphysical foundations for morality and meaning. With this collapse, Nietzsche argues, comes both great danger and great opportunity. The danger lies in nihilism—the sense that nothing matters; the opportunity lies in the freedom to create new values. Zarathustra calls for a "revaluation of all values," challenging readers to question inherited moral assumptions and develop values that affirm life rather than denying it. This radical reassessment of values remains relevant in our pluralistic society, where competing moral frameworks coexist without clear hierarchical ordering.

## 3. Eternal Recurrence

One of Nietzsche's most challenging ideas is the thought experiment of eternal recurrence: What if you had to live your life exactly as it is, with all its pain and joy, over and over again for eternity? Nietzsche presents this not as a metaphysical reality but as a test of one's affirmation of life. Those who can embrace this thought have truly overcome resentment and regret, achieving a complete affirmation of existence. This concept challenges the common human tendency to live with regret or to postpone fulfillment to some future state. Instead, it calls for a radical acceptance and celebration of life as it is lived in the present moment—an idea that resonates with contemporary interest in mindfulness and authentic living.

## 4. The Three Metamorphoses

Early in "Thus Spake Zarathustra," Nietzsche describes three spiritual transformations: from camel to lion to child. The camel represents the spirit that bears the weight of tradition and duty;

the lion represents the spirit that rebels against these constraints and says "no" to imposed values; the child represents the spirit that creates new values with innocence and joyful affirmation. This model of spiritual development offers a profound framework for understanding personal growth and cultural evolution. It suggests that true creativity requires both the discipline to master existing traditions and the courage to break free from them—a perspective that has significant implications for education, personal development, and cultural innovation.

## **5. Will to Power**

Throughout "Thus Spake Zarathustra," Nietzsche develops his concept of "will to power," which he sees as the fundamental driving force in human psychology and culture. Unlike simplistic interpretations that reduce this to mere domination over others, Nietzsche's concept encompasses self-mastery, creativity, and the overcoming of internal and external obstacles. Will to power manifests as the drive to expand one's capabilities and express one's unique potential. This concept offers a complex alternative to both traditional religious frameworks and utilitarian approaches to human motivation. It suggests that human flourishing comes not primarily from pleasure or comfort but from the continuous expansion of capacity and the exercise of creative power.

# **Three Major Controversies**

## **1. Misappropriation by Fascist Ideologies**

Perhaps the most damaging controversy surrounding "Thus Spake Zarathustra" and Nietzsche's philosophy more broadly was its misappropriation by fascist movements in the 20th century, particularly German National Socialism. Concepts like the *Übermensch* and will to power were distorted to support racist and authoritarian ideologies that Nietzsche himself would likely have abhorred. This misinterpretation was facilitated by selective editing of his works by his sister Elisabeth, who managed his literary estate after his mental collapse and aligned his ideas with her own nationalist and anti-Semitic views. The association with fascism led to a significant backlash against Nietzsche's ideas in post-war Western thought, particularly in political contexts. Only through the careful scholarship of philosophers like Walter Kaufmann in the mid-20th century was Nietzsche's work reclaimed from these distortions and recognized for its more nuanced and individualistic character.

## **2. Challenge to Traditional Morality and Religion**

Nietzsche's radical critique of Christian morality as a "slave morality" that devalues earthly life in favor of an imagined afterlife has provoked intense controversy, particularly in religious communities. His characterization of conventional morality as motivated by resentment rather than genuine virtue challenges fundamental assumptions about ethical behavior. Religious leaders and traditional moralists have often condemned Nietzsche's ideas as dangerous moral relativism that undermines social cohesion and ethical standards. Critics argue that without



transcendent moral foundations, Nietzsche's philosophy leads to nihilism or the arbitrary assertion of power. Defenders counter that Nietzsche sought not to destroy morality but to revitalize it through honest questioning and the creation of life-affirming values. This controversy reflects broader tensions in modern society between traditional moral frameworks and more individualistic approaches to ethics.

### **3. Elitism and Anti-Democratic Implications**

Nietzsche's emphasis on exceptional individuals and his critique of "herd morality" have led to accusations of elitism and anti-democratic sentiment. His apparent disdain for the masses and celebration of "higher men" seems at odds with democratic values of equality and collective decision-making. Political theorists have debated whether Nietzsche's philosophy is inherently aristocratic and incompatible with democratic governance, or whether it can be interpreted as a call for a more authentic form of democratic culture that values excellence without imposing uniformity. This controversy touches on fundamental tensions in democratic societies between meritocratic and egalitarian values, and between individual excellence and collective welfare. It raises important questions about how societies can foster exceptional achievement while maintaining commitment to basic equality and inclusion.

## **In Closing**

Civic-minded Americans should read "Thus Spake Zarathustra" because it challenges us to examine the foundations of our values and to take responsibility for creating meaning in a complex world. In an era of increasing polarization and moral uncertainty, Nietzsche's work offers not easy answers but a model of courageous questioning that can help us develop more authentic and thoughtful approaches to ethical and political challenges.

The book's emphasis on self-overcoming and personal responsibility resonates with America's tradition of self-reliance while pushing us to consider what true excellence looks like in contemporary society. Its critique of complacency and mediocrity challenges us to aspire to more than comfort and security, reminding us that democracy requires citizens capable of independent thought and creative action.

For Americans navigating a rapidly changing cultural landscape, Nietzsche's insights into how values evolve and transform can provide valuable perspective on current moral and political debates. His analysis of how resentment can distort moral judgment offers tools for recognizing and transcending the politics of grievance that increasingly dominates public discourse.

Moreover, "Thus Spake Zarathustra" reminds us that genuine freedom involves not just external liberty but the internal capacity to create meaning and purpose. In a consumer culture that often reduces freedom to mere choice among predetermined options, Nietzsche challenges us to exercise a deeper form of liberty—the freedom to question inherited assumptions and create new values.

Finally, despite its challenging and sometimes controversial nature, Nietzsche's masterwork ultimately affirms the value of this world and this life. In an age of environmental crisis and technological transformation, its call to love the earth and embrace our embodied existence offers a powerful counterpoint to both religious otherworldliness and technological escapism. By reading "Thus Spake Zarathustra," civic-minded Americans can develop a more nuanced understanding of our cultural inheritance and a more courageous approach to creating a meaningful future.

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