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### Thus Spake Zarathustra

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Thus Spake Zarathustra

A Book Report

for

Honors 490

Special Studies

for

Dr. R. A. Coppenger

Mark Coppenger

Fall 1969

Thus Spake Zarathustra is one of the most powerful and emotional books I have ever read in the field of philosophy, comparable to Unamuno's Tragic Sense of Life in intensity. I got the impression that Nietzsche was somewhat emotionally disturbed when he wrote it. Some of the impact of the book lies in the fact that he says so many incredible and questionable things with a great deal of conviction. I cannot separate the ideas of this book from those expressed in the Genealogy of Morals, which I read along with it.

I began reading it in German and read about twenty pages with a great deal of difficulty. It was a good exercise though, and I got the German version for many of the words used throughout the book. The most notable of these is the word "Übermensch", or literally "Over-Human", which is translated "Superman." My difficulty in translating became understandable to me when I started reading it in English, because Nietzsche's vocabulary is really amazing. He uses as many "twenty-five cent" words as he can, and for the two-semester German student, it is an exercise in dictionary proficiency.

The story line is basically one of the wanderings of the teacher or prophet, Zarathustra, who comes down from his mountain, cave, and animals to, as he puts it, "... teach the Superman." This does not mean to teach a certain kind of person something, but rather to reach a doctrine of a new kind of man to the world. This Superman is to man as man is to the ape. He is". . . beyond good and evil", the

title of another of Nietzsche's books. His ethics are those of "becoming" and creativity. Pity has no place in the heart of this Superman, whether for himself or for others. Contrary to the teachings of the churches, self-love is one of the highest goods. The life of the Superman is characterized by a will to power, one of the author's main themes throughout all his writing.

Probably the most famous declaration in this book is that God is dead. This does not say that there never was a God, but rather that this God died because of a fatal flaw. Zarathustra says that this flaw was a great pity for mankind, which grew and grew, making God feeble and finally killing Him. Now that He is dead, Zarathustra preaches an end to pity and other weak sentiments. This disdain for pity is accompanied by a great love of strength and freedom, which he sees epitomized in the eagle. His dearest companions are, in fact, an eagle and a snake, which is coiled around the bird's neck. Because animals, most particularly birds, are unsullied as man is, they are his truest friends.

Zarathustra is a collection of paradoxes, and is, therefore, very hard to understand in some ways. In commenting on the book, Nietzsche cites the source of the paradoxes in quoting this--"Into every abyss do I bear the benediction of my yea to Life." In going into the depths, he speaks with an affirmative statement. He is exalted in the depths. He places value on great pain as well as on great joy. His theme is honesty and living life to

the hilt, whether in pain or pleasure.

The book consists of a series of confrontations between Zarathustra and world. He first goes to the marketplace but is shunned. He finally realizes that his hope lies in bringing up disciples rather than speaking to the masses. As the book nears an end, Zarathustra is almost overcome by a pity for some of his disciples, but he shakes this off and makes a fresh start. Nietzsche really slams Christ and the Bible by having Zarathustra saying familiar things from the Bible with just a few words changed. Christianity is the antithesis of Zarathustra's preaching. He leaves us with the essential command, "Harden yourselves!," and the deep conviction that ". . . all creators are hard."