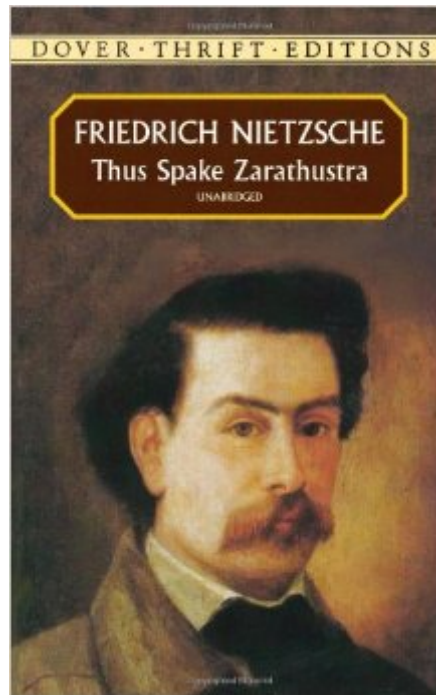


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Thus Spake Zarathustra (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

A tremendously influential philosophical work of the late nineteenth century, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is also a literary masterpiece by one of the most important thinkers of modern times. In it, the ancient Persian religious leader Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) serves as the voice for Friedrich Nietzsche's views, which include the introduction of the controversial doctrine of the *Übermensch*, or "superman." Although later perverted by Nazi propagandists, the *Übermensch* was conceived by Nietzsche to designate the ultimate goal of human existence as the achievement of greatness of will and being. He was convinced that the individual, instead of resigning himself to the weakness of being human and worshipping perfection only possible in the next world (at least in the Christian view), should try to perfect himself during his earthly existence, and transcend the limitations of conventional morality. By doing so, the *Übermensch* would emerge victorious, standing in stark contrast to "the last man" — an uncreative conformist and complacent hedonist who embodies Nietzsche's critique of modern civilization, morality, and the Christian religion. Written in a passionate, quasi-biblical style, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is daring in form and filled with provocative, thought-provoking concepts. Today, the work is regarded as a forerunner of modern existentialist thought, a book that has provoked and stimulated students of philosophy and literature for more than 100 years.

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Customer Reviews

There seem to be plenty of reviews debating the philosophical principles of Nietzsche and the

statements he makes, so, for the non-philosophy students present (i.e. ME) I'll rate it for the layman. 'TSZ' is very longwinded, and as the introduction states, filled with 'excess', but that does not make it a bad book. Every sentence is imbued with its own iconic poetry, and, philosophy aside, the metaphors and similes alone make this book worth reading. It is clear that Nietzsche, or perhaps his translator, had a mind better suited to creative expression than most philosophers, or indeed today's authors, and it is in this that lies the book's real strength. Through its use of imagery it not only makes an interesting, inspirational, conjectural read (apart from a few really boring parts that seemed written only to slow down the pace), it makes its message easy to understand and backs it up with surrealistic examples. Whereas sometimes in philosophy, the use of allegory can confuse the issue (More's 'Utopia' - mockery of idealism, framework for perfect society, or rambling tale?), in 'Zarathustra' the reader, no matter whether they are new to the field or not, cannot fail to discern the message that Man is not a goal but a bridge, a rope over an abyss. As philosophy, and as literature, it succeeds in conveying its point, setting up a platform for discussion or merely to digest individually. Admittedly, some refuse to read Nietzsche because of his view of women ('shallow waters'), and because of how his ideas for the Superman allegedly inspired Hitler's Aryan vision for the world, but such people deprive themselves of an interesting viewpoint that defines the meaning of life in human rather than spiritual terms. One potential problem for the newcomer to philosophy is the storyline.

This is the Thomas Common translation of the text. I was redirected here from the much more widely acclaimed Parkes translation. I don't know if this was a mistake or deliberate subterfuge. But FYI, here is what Wikipedia has to say about the various translations available (this entry accords with common scholarly opinion on the translations): English translations of Zarathustra differ according to the sentiments of each translator. The Thomas Common translation favors a classic English approach, in the style of Shakespeare or the King James Version of the Bible. Common's poetic interpretation of the text, which renders the title Thus Spake Zarathustra, received wide acclaim for its lambent portrayal. Common reasoned that because the original German was written in a pseudo-Luther-Biblical style, a pseudo-King-James-Biblical style would be fitting in the English translation. The Common translation, which improved on Alexander Tille's earlier attempt,^[10] remained widely accepted until the more critical translations, titled Thus Spoke Zarathustra, separately by R.J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann, which are considered to convey more accurately the German text than the Common version. Kaufmann's introduction to his own translation included a blistering critique of Common's version; he notes that in one instance,

Common has taken the German "most evil" and rendered it "baddest", a particularly unfortunate error not merely for his having coined the term "baddest", but also because Nietzsche dedicated a third of *The Genealogy of Morals* to the difference between "bad" and "evil".^[10] This and other errors led Kaufmann to wonder whether Common "had little German and less English".

To start off with, the Walter Kaufmann translation is by now well known to be probably the authoritative edition of *Zarathustra* (although the excerpts I've read from the Del Caro Cambridge Texts edition seems to be perhaps a more beautiful style). One of the reasons I originally picked up this edition was because the only translations available over the web were the droning and pedantic Thomas Common versions which are not only dull but muddled. Walter Kaufmann's translation gives a degree of clarity that far surpasses the Common translation, cannot speak to all the differences (however large or small) between it and the Del Caro version. The book isn't particularly long, but Nietzsche fills it with metaphors and parables in addition to simple narrative and merriment. This is one of the challenges of the book: you're forced to figure out what is meaningful from what isn't and on top of that what each metaphor means. Nietzsche has never been in the habit of going into intricate detail or clarifying what he's saying to the same degree as some other thinkers, and although the book is a stylistic masterpiece (with narrative deliberately done in a biblical style and herein lies one of the advantages over the Common translation, namely that Common translated everything to mimic the King James version with an overabundance of "thees" "thous" and "ests") the philosophy is at times difficult to comprehend. Again, it's not difficult in the sense that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is difficult, or at least not nearly to the same degree, it is difficult because it is at times cryptic. Additionally, I've seen a lot of reviews suggesting reading Nietzsche just for the pithy phrases or the beauty of the work.

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