

– Zarathustra’s Prologue –

1

When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he quit his home parts and the lake at his home and went up into the mountains. There he savoured the pleasures of his spirit and of his solitude, and for ten years they did not pall on him. At length, however, his heart underwent a change, and one morning he rose at dawn, stepped out before the sun, and addressed it in this way:

‘Great star, what happiness would you have without those to whom you bring light?’

‘For ten years you have been coming up here to my cave. You would have wearied of your travails and of your own light, were it not for me, my eagle, and my serpent.

‘But every morning we awaited you, took of your superabundance, and blessed you for it.

‘Now, look, I have wearied of my wisdom, like the bee that has gathered too much honey. I am in need of hands outstretched.

‘I should like to give and distribute, till that time come when the wise among humankind rejoice in their foolishness once again, and the poor rejoice in their riches.

‘That that may be, I must go down into the depths, as you do in the evenings when you go down beyond the sea and, super-rich star, bring light to the underworld too.

‘Like you, I must *go down*, to borrow the phrase of humankind, to whom I mean to descend.

‘Bless me, then, steady eye that can gaze without envy on even the greatest of happiness.

‘Bless the cup that is full to overflowing, that the water may flow golden from it and bear the reflection of your rapture everywhere.

‘For the cup, you see, would be empty once more, and Zarathustra would be human again.’

So began the going-down of Zarathustra.

2

Zarathustra went down from the mountains alone, and no one came his way. When he entered the forest, however, he happened upon an old man who had left his holy cabin to look for roots in the woods. And the old man said to Zarathustra:

‘This wayfarer is no stranger to me. He came by here years ago. His name was Zarathustra, but he has changed.

‘Back then, you were taking your ashes up into the mountains. Are you bringing your fire to the valleys now? Are you not afraid to be punished as a fire-raiser?’

‘I’d know Zarathustra anywhere – his limpid eye, his mouth free of revulsion, his walk like a dancer’s.

‘But Zarathustra has been transformed. Zarathustra was become a child. Now Zarathustra is a man awoken. What, then, do you want among those who are asleep?’

‘You dwelt in solitude as in an ocean, and the ocean bore you up. Perish the thought, but do you mean to step ashore? – do you mean to haul your own body about once again, yourself?’

Zarathustra answered: ‘I love humankind.’

‘And why did I go into the forest and desert?’ said the holy man. ‘Was it not because of the-all-too great love I bore humanity?’

‘Now I love God: I do not love humanity. For me, humankind is too imperfect. To love humanity would be the end of me.’

Zarathustra answered: ‘What was I thinking, to speak of love? I am bearing a gift to humanity.’

‘Give them nothing,’ said the holy man. ‘You would do better to take something from them, and help them carry it. That will be of the greatest benefit to them. May it also be good for you!’

‘And if you really want to give them something, let it be no more than alms, and let them beg for it.’

‘No,’ answered Zarathustra, ‘I am no alms-giver. I am not poor enough for that.’

The holy man laughed at Zarathustra, and said to him: ‘Then see they accept your treasures. They are wary of hermits and do not believe that we come bearing gifts.

‘Our footfall in the streets has too solitary a sound – and if at night in their beds they hear a man go by, long before the sun is up, you can be sure they think it’s a thief and wonder where he’s heading.

‘Don’t go among humanity. Stay in the forest. You would do better to go to the animals. Why not be like me, a bear among bears, a bird among birds?’

‘And what does a holy man do in the forest?’ asked Zarathustra.

The holy man answered: ‘I make songs and sing them, and while I’m making up the songs I laugh and cry and rumble on in my way. That is how I praise God.

‘Singing, laughing, crying and rumbling on is how I give praise to the God who is my God. But what gift is it you bring us?’

When Zarathustra heard these words, he saluted the holy man and said: ‘Whatever could I give you? Let me go quickly, lest I take something from you.’ And so they parted, the old man and the other, laughing as two boys laugh.

But once Zarathustra was alone, he spake to his heart in this way: ‘Can it be possible? Can this old holy man in his forest really not have heard that *God is dead*?’

3

When Zarathustra reached the nearest town, on the edge of the forest, he found a crowd of people gathered in the marketplace there to watch a tightrope-walker who was due to perform. And Zarathustra spake thus to the people:

‘My teaching to you is of the superhuman. The time has come to go beyond the human. What have you done to go beyond it?’

‘So far, every being has created something that went beyond itself. Do you mean to be the ebb of that great flood? Would you rather return to the condition of beasts than go beyond the human?’

‘What is an ape in the eyes of humanity? An occasion for laughter or smarting shame. And that is what the human will be for the superhuman: an occasion for laughter or smarting shame.

‘The journey from worm to human lies behind you, and still there is much of the worm in you. At one time you were apes, and even now the human is more of an ape than any ape.

‘The wisest among you is no more than a riving and twining of plant life and ghost. But am I urging you to become plants or ghosts?

‘No – my teaching to you is of the superhuman!

‘The superhuman is the meaning of the earth. May your will say: so be it – let the superhuman be the meaning of the earth!

‘I call upon you, my brothers, to *remain true to the earth* and not believe those who would have you hope for things that lie beyond it. They are concocters of poisons, whether they do it knowingly or not.

‘They hold life in contempt. They are a dying breed. They have been poisoned themselves, and the world is weary of them. Let them be gone.

‘At one time, to sin against God was the gravest of sins. But God died, and with him the sinners of old. Now to sin against the earth is the most terrible of sins – and to prize the entrails of the inapprehensible more than the meaning of the earth.

‘At one time, the soul regarded the body with contempt, and in those days that contempt counted higher than all else. The soul wanted the body skinny, grisly and famished, the better to give it the slip and escape the earth.

‘But, oh, it was the soul itself that was skinny, grisly and famished, and what the soul delighted in was cruelty.

‘What of you then, my brothers? Say to me: what does your body tell you of your soul? Is your soul not poverty and filth and miserable contentment?

‘Humanity is truly a river of filth. It takes an ocean to absorb a river of filth without itself being defiled.

‘So you see, my teaching to you is of the superhuman. That is the ocean. That is where your measureless contempt can go under.