

rality is an unhealthy development that must be overcome.⁷⁵ The fate of the human species depends upon it. We must go beyond good and evil.

26. *The Overman*

Nietzsche once said that he philosophized with a hammer.⁷⁶ By that he did not mean anything crude like a sledgehammer that smashes things. He had in mind a delicate hammer like the one a piano tuner uses to strike keys on a finely-built musical instrument—to see which notes ring clear and which are discordant or muddy. In writing his philosophy, Nietzsche intended for his words to be like that delicate hammer on your soul. When you read them, how does your soul respond? Does it vibrate clearly—or does it wobble uncertainly? When you hear that God is dead—do those words cause you to shrink inside and fill with a squishy panic—or do they strike a clear, pure, liberating note that heralds the beginning of the tremendous symphony that you can become?

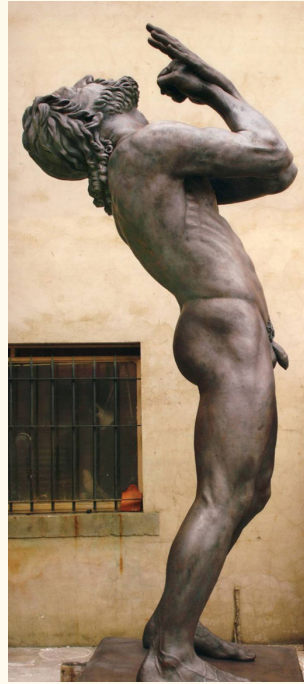
God is dead, so we must become gods and create our own values. Yet most people are afraid of legislating for themselves. They know there is inequality and risk out there in the big, bad world. So they want to let some higher power shoulder the responsibility. But, Nietzsche says, for some precious few among us, the realization that God is dead galvanizes every fiber of their being. They respond by feeling, both passionately and solemnly: *I will become the author. I will create. I will embrace the responsibility—joyously. I will move beyond good and evil and create a new, magnificent set of values.*

Such an individual will raise mankind to a higher level of existence. He will be on the path to the *Übermensch*—the superman or overman.

⁷⁵ Noting here that toward the end of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche argues that the new masters will thus combine the physical vitality of the aristocratic masters with the spiritual ruthlessness of the slave-priests of Christianity: the new masters will be “Caesars with the soul of Christ” (*WP* 983).

⁷⁶ Preface to *Ecce Homo*.

The entire history of mankind, Nietzsche believes, will have prepared the *Übermensch* for his great creative adventure. In himself he will embody the best of the past. The physical vitality and exuberance of the past master types will flow through his veins. But Nietzsche also credits the Judeo-Christian tradition for its internalized, spiritual development—by turning all of its energy inward and stressing ruthless self-discipline and self-denial, that tradition has been a vehicle for the development of a stronger, more capable type of spirit. The new masters will thus combine the physical vitality of the aristocratic masters with the spiritual ruthlessness of the slave-priests of Christianity. As Nietzsche put it in a memorable phrase, the new masters will be “Caesars with the soul of Christ.”⁷⁷



Thus Spake Zarathustra,
Peter Schipperheyn,
Bronze

We cannot say ahead of time what new values the masters will create. Not being *Übermenschen* ourselves, we do not have the power to decide for them or even predict. But Nietzsche does indicate strongly what broad direction the new masters will take.

(1) The overman will find his deepest instinct and let it be a tyrant. The creative source of the future lies in *instinct*, *passion*, and *will*. To put the point negatively, the overman will not rely much on reason. Reason of course is the favorite method of modern, scientific man, but Nietzsche holds that reason is an artificial tool of weaklings—those who need to feel safe and secure build fantasy orderly structures for themselves. Instead, instincts are the deepest parts of your nature—and to the ex-

⁷⁷ *WP* 983.

tent that you feel a powerful instinct welling up within you, you should nurture it and let it dominate—for from that spring flows true creativity and true exaltation.

“One thing is needful—To ‘give style’ to one’s character—a great and rare art! In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!”⁷⁸

And again: The “‘great man’ is great owing to the free play and scope of his desires and to the yet greater power that knows how to press these magnificent monsters into service.”⁷⁹

(2) Another hint Nietzsche gives us is that the overman will face conflict and exploitation easily, as a fact of life, and he will enter the fray eagerly. In the face of conflict many people become squeamish and given to wishing that life could be kinder and gentler. For such people, Nietzsche has nothing but contempt: “people now rave everywhere, even under the guise of science, about coming conditions of society in which ‘the exploiting character’ is to be absent:—that sounds to my ear as if they promised to invent a mode of life which should refrain from all organic functions.”⁸⁰

Conflict and exploitation are built into life, and the overman himself will not only accept that as natural but will himself be a master of conflict and exploitation.

As Nietzsche puts it, “We think that . . . everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents, serves the enhancement of the species ‘man’ as much as its opposite does.”⁸¹

And further: “a higher and more fundamental value

⁷⁸ GS 290.

⁷⁹ WP 933.

⁸⁰ BGE 259.

⁸¹ BGE 44.

for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness, and lust.”⁸²

(3) Another suggestion Nietzsche gives us is this: The overman will naturally accept the fact of great inequalities among men and the fact of his own superiority. The overman will have no qualms about his superior abilities—and his superior *worth* to all others.

About the superior men, Nietzsche forthrightly proclaims: “Their right to exist, the privilege of the full-toned bell over the false and cracked, is a thousand times greater: they alone are our warranty for the future, they alone are liable for the future of man.”⁸³

So those who are strong should revel in their superiority and ruthlessly impose their wills upon everyone else, just as the masters did in past aristocratic societies. “Every enhancement of the type ‘man’ has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other.”⁸⁴

(4) And, as the last quotation suggests, Nietzsche indicates approvingly that the overman will have no problem with using and exploiting others ruthlessly to achieve his ends. “Mankind in the mass sacrificed to the prosperity of a single stronger species of man—that would be an advance.”⁸⁵

Nietzsche gives a name to his anticipated overman: He calls him *Zarathustra*, and he names his greatest literary and philosophical work in his honor.

Zarathustra will be the creative tyrant. Having mas-

⁸² BGE 2.

⁸³ GM 3:14.

⁸⁴ BGE 257.

⁸⁵ GM 2:12.

tered himself and others, he will exuberantly and energetically command and realize a magnificent new reality. Zarathustra will lead mankind beyond themselves and into an open-ended future.

Nietzsche longs for Zarathustra's coming. "But some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt ... This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; ... this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness—he must come one day.—"⁸⁶

And on that prophetic note, Friedrich Nietzsche stops—and leaves the future in our hands.

⁸⁶ *GM* 2:24.