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Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For All And None (Modern Library)



Synopsis

Friedrich Nietzsche's most accessible and influential philosophical work, misquoted, misrepresented, brilliantly original and enormously influential, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is translated from the German by R.J. Hollingdale in Penguin Classics. Nietzsche was one of the most revolutionary and subversive thinkers in Western philosophy, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* remains his most famous and influential work. It describes how the ancient Persian prophet Zarathustra descends from his solitude in the mountains to tell the world that God is dead and that the Superman, the human embodiment of divinity, is his successor. Nietzsche's utterance 'God is dead', his insistence that the meaning of life is to be found in purely human terms, and his doctrine of the Superman and the will to power were all later seized upon and unrecognisably twisted by, among others, Nazi intellectuals. With blazing intensity and poetic brilliance, Nietzsche argues that the meaning of existence is not to be found in religious pieties or meek submission to authority, but in an all-powerful life force: passionate, chaotic and free. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) became the chair of classical philology at Basel University at the age of 24 until his bad health forced him to retire in 1879. He divorced himself from society until his final collapse in 1899 when he became insane. A powerfully original thinker, Nietzsche's influence on subsequent writers, such as George Bernard Shaw, D.H. Lawrence, Thomas Mann and Jean-Paul Sartre, was considerable. If you enjoyed *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* you might like Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, also available in Penguin Classics. 'Enigmatic, vatic, emphatic, passionate, often breathtakingly insightful, his works together make a unique statement in the literature of European ideas' A. C. Grayling

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Customer Reviews

I only want to say one thing here, and I say it primarily because I already love this work. This is the translation to buy. Everyone seems to adore Kaufmann, but the truth is he's much more obtuse and difficult to read (and I don't believe it's necessary, as some may say). Hollingdale gets it right. I'll defend myself with one example from a class I took, where Kaufmann's translation was the required text. I had read both translations (cover-to-cover), and sold my copy of Kaufmann's translation, keeping only my Hollingdale. So, needless to say, I wasn't about to buy Kaufmann again, and went to class with Hollingdale. Slowly, but surely, as the other students read bits of the translation I had, or heard when I spoke pieces aloud, they overwhelmingly agreed with me: Hollingdale is simply more clear, more beautiful, more powerful (less academic, shall we say, which is pure Nietzsche). Ok, over and out, enjoy.

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. For a man remembered for the statement 'God is dead', Nietzsche obviously drew

inspiration from the Bible, for Zarathustra is strongly reminiscent of Jesus, recruiting disciples and disappearing into the wilderness with a frequency that Bigfoot would be proud of. The problem with an allegorical tale is the reader's propensity for bringing western narrative expectations to it - 'Zarathustra' is a text-book, not a story, but sometimes you do find yourself waiting for the climax, the big show-down, the cinematic denouement. So long as you remember that it is philosophy, not a novel, and so long as you appreciate each segment as an expressive point and not part of a conventional plot, there should be no troubles. I'll leave you with a sample of Nietzsche's verbal wizardry: 'It is the stillest words which bring the storm. Thoughts that come on doves' feet guide the world.'

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 translators. 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".[10] The translations of Kaufmann and Hollingdale render the text in a far more familiar, less archaic, style of language, than that of Common. Clancy Martin's 2005 translation opens with criticism and praise for these three seminal translators, Common, Hollingdale, and Kaufmann. He notes that the German text available to Common was considerably flawed, and that the German text from which Hollingdale and Kaufmann worked was itself untrue to Nietzsche's own work in some ways. Martin

criticizes Kaufmann for changing punctuation, altering literal and philosophical meanings, and dampening some of Nietzsche's more controversial metaphors.[11] Kaufmann's version, which has become the most widely available, features a translator's note suggesting that Nietzsche's text would have benefited from an editor; Martin suggests that Kaufmann "took it upon himself to become his [Nietzsche's] editor".[11]Graham Parkes describes his own 2005 translation as trying "above all to convey the musicality of the text (which was not a priority for Walter Kaufmann or R.J. Hollingdale, authors of the best English translations so far)."[12]

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