

## dissent

Zarathustra is a man on a constant voyage. He begins by climbing up a mountain to experience enlightenment for himself, but later lowers himself to return home to his fellow men. As he goes up and down, Zarathustra's understandings of the world and of himself change. Zarathustra is on a journey.

There are two parts to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The first recounts the story of Zarathustra while the second part is a record of Zarathustra's speeches he delivers to man. The first, seemingly transparent piece of the text tells the account of Zarathustra's various adventures. The second portion of the text, the speeches he makes, are pieces of philosophical doctrine that either reveal or hide Zarathustra's ideas. The story and the speeches often intersect. For example, while the story tells of Zarathustra's descent and his coming down from the top of the mountain, his speeches equate man with a going under and connect physical descent with sinking into evil. Or, as Zarathustra speaks of isolation and likens love to loneliness, he offers his ideas in support of concealment and secrecy. The story of Zarathustra's descent is coupled with speeches concealing or revealing his ideas on depth, masks, and physical and mental height. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the full account of Zarathustra, a man who identifies with other men, and often longs to be by their side.

Zarathustra's journey requires inquiry, for his motivations are never clear and simple. Just as Zarathustra's actions are contradictory (he both ascends and descends),

his speeches present opposites, too. It is important to realize that it is not always what these words say that is relevant, but what they do. Why does Zarathustra decide to ascend and climb the mountain? Why, after he raised himself to a level of such mental and physical clarity, does Zarathustra desire to descend and come home to man? Why does Zarathustra, a man who advocates for concealment and the use of masks in Nietzsche's text, reveal so much to unfamiliar men? Zarathustra indisputably discourages enlightenment at times in the book. Why, then, does he so adamantly endorse rising to certain mental and physical heights? Zarathustra struggles with man, but inside, he has a deep affection for people who are similar to himself. First I will examine ascent and descent in relation to Zarathustra's story. I will then scrutinize revelation and concealment and "up" and "down" in relation to Zarathustra's philosophical doctrine. Finally, I will specifically investigate Zarathustra's thoughts about man's attempts at seeking enlightenment and man's dissent against gravity and the earth. I seek to show how Zarathustra's love for man manifests itself in his dissent, in his challenge to reevaluate and fight against the natural limitations of gravity, and in his journey to empower, not to enlighten, man. Zarathustra's care for man can be seen in his ascents and descents of mountains and ideas, his divulgences and suppressions of speeches and truths, and his urges and dissuasions for and against the achievement of physical height.

The story of Zarathustra begins in the mountains. Up high, Zarathustra was alone. He reveled in clarity. "Here he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude, and for ten years did not tire of it" (Nietzsche 9). He was in contact with himself. At the beginning of his story, Zarathustra does little to explicate why he decided to venture upwards. Only

about half way through the text does he finally express his motivations for rising upwards towards the sky. He says he strives to reach ultimate heights and thinks of himself as a climber. "I am a wanderer and a mountain climber...Indeed, to look down upon myself and even upon my stars, that alone I should call my *peak*; that has remained for me as my *ultimate peak*" (Nietzsche 152-153). He says he is the lover of knowledge who looks up past himself (Nietzsche 153). Zarathustra makes it clear that he is on a journey. Zarathustra wants to reach the highest height, where it is "clear and starry bright" (Nietzsche 153). He is struggling with his identity as a man. So, Zarathustra ascends the mountain, moving away from man and ultimately away from himself. Zarathustra moved away from other men. He rebelled against the masses. By ascending, he explicates his dissent.

After ten initial years of solitary life in the mountains, Zarathustra begins to long for companions. He talks to the sun, saying that the purpose of it is to give light to people. The sun would be meaningless if it had not people to give its light to. "You great star, what would your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?" (Nietzsche 9). One could say that Zarathustra likens himself with the sun, and that he believes that there is no purpose for himself, or any other man or creature, to be alone, for it is the interactions with others that make one great. Later in the story, Zarathustra is able to better illustrate his loneliness. At one point in the text, he compares his ascent to a tree that grows past all other trees. "This tree stands lonely here in the mountains; it grew high above man and beast. And if it wanted to speak, it would have nobody who could understand it, so high it has grown" (Nietzsche 43). Zarathustra says that when he was in the mountains, not only was there nobody to talk to, but his words were not

understandable. Even though he was a man, he had forgotten the language of men. Without common language, one is alone. Zarathustra gained knowledge in the mountains and he accomplished his goal, but that was not enough for Zarathustra. He became frustrated with his wealth of understanding. "Behold, I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to receive it" (Nietzsche 10). Zarathustra declared that he would descend to be among other men. He ascended to achieve enlightenment and to gain true understanding of himself, but after so many years of being alone, he must again express his love of man and sink down to encourage them to also seek knowledge. He is useless unless he is among men, not only with himself.

Zarathustra dreams to be among man, but most of all, he wants to help man. "I would give away and distribute, until the wise among men find joy once again in their folly, and the poor in their riches" (Nietzsche 10). Zarathustra wants to spread his knowledge and encourage man to seek enlightenment. After being isolated and possessing true freedom of thought for ten years, Zarathustra realized his own potential; he recognized the possibilities and prospects of man. Still talking to and comparing himself with the sun, Zarathustra declares his descent. "For that I must descend to the depths, as you do in the evening when you go behind the sea and still bring light to the underworld, you overrich star" (Nietzsche 10). Zarathustra is not descending for himself, but for man. He wants man to become enlightened. Zarathustra's reason to descend is for the same reason he ascended - he loves man.

While Zarathustra was alone in the mountains, he forgot who he was and where he came from. He forsook his identity as a man. "...Zarathustra wants to become man

again” (Nietzsche 10). Early on in his journey down the mountain, he encounters an old man who attempts to discourage Zarathustra from descending, for, the old man says, “Zarathustra is an awakened one...” (Nietzsche 11). The old man only appears to value individual pursuit of enlightenment and does not fathom why Zarathustra would want to return to man. Zarathustra replies plainly and simply, truly showing how much he cares for man. “I love man...I bring men a gift” (Nietzsche 11). Again, he says that he is not only returning to man because he is lonely, but instead, he wants to help enlighten the people. Just as his initial ascent originally showed his dissent, his descent also shows his rebelliousness.

Many times throughout the story, Zarathustra ascends the mountain, only to return back to man days, months, or years later. Zarathustra keeps descending because he still loves man. There is still much he wants man to know. “But his soul grew full of impatience and desire for those whom he loved, because he still had much to give them” (Nietzsche 83). Just as in the beginning of his story, Zarathustra’s knowledge grew so much that he needed others to spread his knowledge to. He had trouble sitting still. He needed to interact with other men. “Zarathustra may speak again and give and do what is dearest and closest to those dear to him. My impatient love overflows in rivers, downward, toward sunrise and sunset” (Nietzsche 84). He must let his knowledge flow to his friends and enemies. Zarathustra continues on to show his urgent need and want to descend:

Too long have I longed and looked into the distance. Too long have I belonged to loneliness; thus I have forgotten how to be silent. Mouth have I become through and through...I want to plunge my speech down into the valleys. Let the river of

my love plunge where there is no way!...Indeed, a lake is within me, solitary and self-sufficient; but the river of my love carries it along, down to the sea.

(Nietzsche 84).

Zarathustra wants man to seek enlightenment. He will encourage man with his speeches. In this passage, Zarathustra begins to draw a connection between descent and silence and concealment. When in the mountains, Zarathustra's mind and speech flow free. Upon high, Zarathustra's ideas are liberated, for he must not concern and preoccupy himself with other men. Yet, when he is among man, he is "silent." When in the depths of the earth, one could say that Zarathustra censors himself. However, this very same passage which appears to treat man as silent and hidden, Zarathustra still believes that his speeches and philosophies should flow down to the people.

From the beginning, Zarathustra makes it clear that he brings men a gift. He is descending to teach his people. As Zarathustra descends the mountain and as he leaves the land of free thought, he offers men speeches. He becomes a preacher. Even though he leaves the land of enlightenment, and enters "hell," or some sort of prison, he reveals as much as he conceals. Zarathustra is concerned with concealment and revelation. Zarathustra represses some ideas and truths and divulges others both in his story and in the speeches he offers along his journey. He encourages dissent among men by revealing only what he needs.

In Zarathustra's explanations of his own teachings, he recounts his own experiences of enlightenment. He says that he had to seek enlightenment himself and had to create his own path. "I preferred to question and try out the ways themselves...For *the way* - that does not exist" (Nietzsche 195). There was not a single

person who revealed the truth to Zarathustra. He found his enlightenment himself. He does not plan to carry the weight of man, he only intends to educate: "...thus / teach" (Nietzsche 192).

As he descends, Zarathustra never reveals the entire truth. On his journey down, a man asks what he is hiding. "And what do you conceal so carefully under your coat?" (Nietzsche 65). Zarathustra says he has the truth hidden inside his cloak. "...it is a treasure I have been given: it is a little truth that I carry" (Nietzsche 65). By hiding his "little truth," he has revealed only enough to ensure that man will ask questions for himself. Later in the text, Zarathustra again advocates for masks and veils. While discussing education and teaching, the very activity he has descended to do, he is amazed by the realistic masks of the "men of today." He remarks at how well they conceal themselves. "Verily, you could wear no better masks, you men of today, than your own faces! Who could possibly find you out?" (Nietzsche 119). In a single moment, Zarathustra relates revelation and concealment to his speeches. Again, it is evident that Zarathustra's repressions and divulgements come out of an act of love for man. By concealing the truth, he is protecting man. One must not give truth, but empower people to find truth on their own. By only offering certain teachings, Zarathustra empowers man to pursue enlightenment.

Zarathustra does not descend to save man by himself, as he claims in the beginning of the text, he only brings men a gift. Hiding the whole truth makes man an active participant in the creation of this truth and lets him discover his own path to enlightenment. Zarathustra wants man to ask questions and seek the truth for himself. He does not intend to carry man up the mountain. Zarathustra advocates for the

concealment of truth, but at the same time, he is teaching man to find that truth. He again speaks of the men who conceal themselves so well: "...and these characters in turn painted over with new characters: thus have you concealed yourselves perfectly from all interpreters of characters" (Nietzsche 119). Zarathustra is keeping the truth safe from those who attempt to illuminate it for the masses. He only wants to reveal enough of the truth to inspire man to create his own awareness. man must make the journey himself, just as Zarathustra did himself. Enlightenment can not be taught, it must be sought out. Zarathustra's revelations, or the words he speaks to man, and his dissuasions, or the truths he withholds from men, both come out of an act of love for man. Both his confessions and his suppressions encourage man to seek enlightenment.

Zarathustra's journey to and from man and the speeches he offers are, of course, related to his discussions of gravity. Zarathustra's rebelliousness and ultimately, his love of man, has so far been seen through the ascents and descents in his story and his revelations and concealments. Zarathustra's dissent ties itself together in his direct discussion of the spirit of gravity. His teaching about the spirit which binds man to the earth comes in two opposing forms, like every other example presented in this essay (he both ascends and descends and represses and divulges). Again, one must bear in mind that it is not what Zarathustra's words say that is important, but what they do. On the one hand, Zarathustra encourages physical height by dancing through out the text. However, Zarathustra also warns against physical and mental height in his speeches to a troubled youth. Zarathustra is preoccupied with man's attempts at enlightenment. In his talk of the spirit of gravity, Zarathustra both urges and dissuades physical ascent.

Throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra refers to the spirit of gravity. To Zarathustra, it is often a force that binds man to the earth. It is a prison that represents evil. However, it is also a force that teaches man how to dissent. In the section entitled “The Spirit of Gravity,” Zarathustra says that gravity represents both the good and the bad. “Thus the spirit of gravity orders it. He, however, has discovered himself who says, ‘This is *my* good and evil’...” (Nietzsche 194). Just as Zarathustra’s words are often contradictory and often represent more than one point of view, the spirit gravity is also multidimensional. “And above all I learned to stand and walk and run and jump and climb and dance” (Nietzsche 195). Zarathustra continues to talk about flying and other ways man can act out against gravity. Zarathustra both encourages and discourages acting out against the force of gravity.

At one point along his journey, Zarathustra encounters several girls dancing in an empty meadow. He approaches them and urges them to continue. “Do not cease dancing, you lovely girls! No killjoy has come to you with evil eyes...God’s advocate am I before the devil: but the devil is the spirit of gravity” (Nietzsche 107). Zarathustra plainly says that gravity is evil. Here, dancing is one way man can dissent. Dancing is one path to enlightenment. Dancing is a symbol for mental height, clarity, and awareness. Zarathustra continues on to say that he will offer his own song that will ridicule gravity. “...and I myself will sing a song for his dance: a dancing and mocking song on the spirit of gravity, my supreme and most powerful devil, of whom they say that he is ‘the master of the world.’” (Nietzsche 108). Zarathustra does not hesitate to urge the girls to act against gravity and seek enlightenment. Here, he does not suppress his encouragement. One thing is clear: Zarathustra supports dissent and loves man.

Zarathustra's support is absent in other parts of the text. At one point in the text, when he encounters a troubled youth who is struggling with his own ascent, Zarathustra does not encourage enlightenment and does not urge the youth to ascend. The youth is crying out about the evil depths of the earth. Zarathustra says that the higher one climbs, the more he becomes bound to the earth. "The more he aspires to the high and the light, the more strongly do his roots strive earthward, downward, into the dark, the deep - into evil" (Nietzsche 42). The youth adamantly and emotionally agrees with Zarathustra. "Yes, into evil!...You have spoken the truth..." (Nietzsche 42). Even though he is not explicitly encouraging physical or mental enlightenment, Zarathustra is still helping the youth. He cares for him. This particular path is not the one for the youth, for Zarathustra discourages his enlightenment. The youth continues to speak of how he longed to go below into the depths when he tried to ascend. Zarathustra teaches him. He speaks of the search one must endure and of the struggle that lies ahead. "You are not yet free, you still *search* for freedom. You are worn from your search and overawake" (Nietzsche 43). Zarathustra shields the truth from this particular youth, for the youth must find it for himself. Zarathustra compares the youth to a prisoner trying to escape from prison, or an incarcerated one planning his dissent. "To me you are still a prisoner who is plotting his freedom..." (Nietzsche 43). Zarathustra's teaching to the youth is still out of love, for Zarathustra is trying to help the youth seek enlightenment.

Zarathustra loves man. He shows his care by encouraging man to dissent. Zarathustra teaches man through his own story and uses his experiences to urge man to enlighten himself. Zarathustra ascends and descends, reveals and hides himself, and urges and dissuades girls and youth, all out of his love for man. When looking at this

text, it is easy to become mystified, for it is apparent that it is a truly contradictory work of art; after making one claim, Zarathustra, or Nietzsche, quickly moves to make another statement that invalidates his previous ideas. Though Zarathustra's words are certainly important, they are not the focal point of this text, for they appear to be concealed by thick veils. Rather, one should instead focus on what his words do, or how much weight they carry, so to speak. I myself have attempted to express my disorientation, while at the same time using precise words - I have chosen and analyzed ideas that can be viewed from at least two points of view. Zarathustra dissents against gravity, just as Nietzsche dissents against clarity.

## works cited

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Thus Spoke Zarathustra A Book for None and All. New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 1978.