**SESSION 3: THE CHILDISH SUPERMAN**



***Key Sticky Question:***

*Should we challenge the moral ‘scales’ of the past?*

**TASK 1: Read the passage i**n the section of Nietzsche’s work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* entitled, "Of the Three Metamorphoses”. Consider what the camel, lion, dragon, and child represent. Use the table on the following page to jot down your ideas. You could divide the society into 4 groups, with each group considering what their element symbolizes.

|  |
| --- |
| Of the three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child. There is much that is difficult for the spirit, the strong, reverent spirit that would bear much: but the difficult and the most difficult are what its strength demands.  What is difficult? asks the spirit that would bear much, and kneels down like a camel wanting to be well loaded. What is most difficult, O heroes, asks the spirit that would bear much, that I may take it upon myself and exult in my strength? Is it not humbling oneself to wound one's haughtiness? Letting one's folly shine to mock one's wisdom?... Or is it this: stepping into filthy waters when they are the waters of truth, and not repulsing cold frogs and hot toads? Or is it this: loving those that despise us and offering a hand to the ghost that would frighten us?  All these most difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into its desert.     In the loneliest desert, however, the second metamorphosis occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon. Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god? "Thou shalt" is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will." "Thou shalt" lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scales; and on every scale shines a golden "thou shalt."    Values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales; and thus speaks the mightiest of all dragons: "All value has long been created, and I am all created value. Verily, there shall be no more 'I will.'" Thus speaks the dragon. My brothers, why is there a need in the spirit for the lion? Why is not the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, enough? To create new values -- that even the lion cannot do; but the creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred "No" even to duty -- for that, my brothers, the lion is needed. To assume the right to new values -- that is the most terrifying assumption for a reverent spirit that would bear much. Verily, to him it is preying, and a matter for a beast of prey. He once loved "thou shalt" as most sacred: now he must find illusion and caprice even in the most sacred, that freedom from his love may become his prey: the lion is needed for such prey. But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers the world. *[from Nietzsche's Thus spoke Zarathustra, part I, Walter Kaufmann transl]* |

**Decoding Nietzsche’s Metamorphosis**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Element** | **Represents** | **Details** |
| Camel |  |  |
| Lion |  |  |
| Dragon  |  |  |
| The Child  |  |  |

**Philosophical Fruit: The Metamorphoses Explained:**

Prior to the ‘death of God’ announced by Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and in the famous ‘Madman’passage in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche argues that human consciousness is restricted by the ‘thou shalts’ – the controlling moral absolutes which the church has long imposed upon individuals.

These absolutes are represented by the dragon in the passage above with the description of ‘values, thousands of years old’ shining on his ‘scales’. He suggests that these rules curb the creativity of humans and attitudes that deviate from the norm. The task, for Zarathustra, then, is to discover new realities, and to create new meaning out of the chaotic aftermath of God's death. The ‘metamorphoses’ are Zarathustra's answer to the apprehension created by the death of God. Nietzsche begins: "I name you three metamorphoses of the spirit: how the spirit shall become a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child" (Nietzsche 54). These metaphors describe various stages in the transformation of human consciousness. Just as we pass through physical stages on our way to adulthood, Nietzsche proposes that we pass through various stages of consciousness.

First, the human spirit becomes a camel, which is a beast of burden. When commanded, it kneels down to accept heavy loads, symbolizing the burden of religious belief upon individuals, who seem readily prepared to accept the weight it burdens them with, seemingly indicating the human tendency to confront that which is difficult for us with a profound sense of duty. Nietzsche suggests the camel should wade into the ‘filthy water’ coming across repulsive toads and frogs in their path because they are the ‘waters of truth’, indicating that the quest for truth is full of uncertainties and unpleasant challenges. This search for truth requires solitude (as indicated by Zarathustra’s own trip into the mountains’), and it is within the desert of solitude that the camel questions its heavy burdens, before transforming into a lion, for "it wants to capture freedom and be lord in its own desert".

The lion holds the bravery to remove himself from the camel’s acceptance of the veracity of the ‘eternal’ standards allows imagination to burst forth into an uncertain state devoid of absolutes. However the lion must destroy the dragon to create its own freedom. The dragon believes itself supreme because it believes it possesses a truth derived from a transcendental realm of absolute ideas that can be understood by humanity through the faculty of reason. It believes in a transcendental Being (God) who has created this realm and now watches over it. The dragon despises opposing opinions, and states that "There will be no 'I will,' to which the might of the lion responds: "I will!" The lion is the beginning of the will to power, or the will to create new realities.

However, the lion is not able to create original values, and thus it is at this point that

it is suggested that the third metamorphosis must occur, transforming the lion into a child who creates his own values like a ‘self-propelled wheel’ - ‘a first motion’ unaffiliated by the impositions of past absolutes. The child is completely innocent, lacking influence of any kind, and thus in a unique position to ‘conquer the world’. Nietzsche does not offer firm guidance of how we might full discover ourselves, but it is crucial that we task the risk and struggle with the uncertainty involved in a free and fluid existence. Nietzsche’s description of the ‘ubermench’ may give us some indication of the kind of being he aspires to direct us towards becoming.

**TASK 2: Nietzsche describes his version of the ‘superman’ (ubermensch) who for him is a figure who drives his own morality. What qualities would your moral ‘superman’ hold? (Discuss in groups, and add them to the chart below) *Be ready to feedback your ideas!***



**Nietzsche’s Ubermencsch:** For Nietzsche these were men that create their own morality based on human instincts, drive and will. He affirms his existence not by saying, with the Christian, "thou shalt not," but rather the new man shouts, "I will." The new man bases his actions and desires upon world rather than transcendental influences. Zarathustra further links the Übermensch to the body and to interpreting the soul as simply an aspect of the body. He dares to be himself and as himself, traditional, Christian ideals of good and evil have no meaning and he recognizes them as such. His "will to power" means, for Nietzsche, that he has gone "beyond good and evil." The enhancement of the will to power brings supreme enjoyment. The Superman casts off all established values and because he is now free of all restraints, rules and codes of behavior imposed by civilization, he creates his own values. He lives his own life as one who takes, wants, strives, creates, struggles, seeks and dominates. He knows life as it is given to him is without meaning -- but he lives it laughingly, instinctively, fully, dangerously.

**TASK 3: DEBATE:** ‘This house believes that we should we aspire to be Nietzsche’s Ubermensch and complete the stages of his metamorphoses?’ Choose a side, and write a 1 minute speech defending your point of view. (*Ensure that both sides are represented, and perhaps pick 2 groups on each side to deliver their speech followed by questions and a vote).*

|  |
| --- |
| **Key Fact:** The term Übermensch was used frequently by [Hitler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler) and the [Nazi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazism) regime to describe their idea of a biologically superior [Aryan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aryan) master race; |

**Additional Reading:** In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche famously proclaimed: "God is dead". For Nietzsche, rather than an ontological statement of the non-existence of God, this means that the philosophical abstraction known as ‘God’ to institutional religion, especially Christianity, has been removed from the belief systems of 19th century Western man. Even though Nietzsche was troubled by the recognition that God's death leaves a gaping hole in Western man's Being, Nietzsche saw the death of God as necessary to bring about the transformation described in the *Metamorphases*. See the famous ‘Madman’ passage in Nietzsche’s book *The Gay Science:*

|  |
| --- |
| **Additional Extract: THE MADMAN from *The Gay Science***‘Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" -- As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? -- Thus they yelled and laughed.The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him* -- you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us -- for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than most distant stars -- *and yet they have done it themselves*.It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"[Source: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882, 1887)**To consider:**1. What do you think the madman means when he claims that ‘God is dead’, and ‘we have killed him’?
2. What reaction do the ‘listeners’ give to the madmen? Why does the madmen think this is?
3. What does the madmen mean when he states that "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"
4. Why do you think Nietzsche presented these words through the voice of a madman?
 |