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Nietzsche: Raider of the Lost Arc

Conor Tucker '10

CORE 152

I went down, some time ago, to the Piraeus with Glaucon, son of Ariston. I wanted to enter the temple there to pray – yet outside, yelling before the goddess, I found a friend, Nietzsche. It is not often that we saw Nietzsche as anything other than a creature of destructive wit, but neither Glaucon nor I interceded. At first, our cautious ears were drawn toward his bombast – at first, we dismissed his “subterranean animosity and rancor” as more blast and less bomb. But, we listened – and, we waited. Swiftly, a pebble registered its descent as the sanctuary quivered. It seemed that below this resplendent, glorious, and passionate temple lay a murky world of decaying and festering pilasters at the mercy of his voice – a musky workplace where his echoed words struck silence into whisperers. There appeared a crack in the plaster. We slowly began to realize that his words were shaking the very foundations of this sacred palace in ways which war never could. Quickly now – his voice reached a fervent tremor – the temple began to fall. As our vision crowded with smoke, we cringed at the devastation and stood in awe of this powerful Simon. As the thunder quieted, a dark and ominous cloud of floating debris threw shadow onto the rubble. Grime and rotting wood covered the ground. A foul stench – bad air! – lingered over what remained. ‘Look!’ said Glaucon – and my eye was drawn toward a surprising glint hidden beneath the rubble. Oh noble fortune, something had survived! It was a simple mirror, mounted on what looked like the tip of a temple. On it was engraved a riddle: The “Anti-Christ and anti-nihilist... – he must one day come”. A quick survey told me that Nietzsche was nowhere to be found and could not provide an answer, so I began to formulate my own.¹

¹ The first line and a half were taken nearly entirely from Plato’s *Republic* (Penguin Books: New York, 1998). The first Nietzsche quote comes from Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc: Indianapolis, 1998), 9. For his description of the actual “dark workplaces”, see section 14 in *First Treatise in Nietzsche*, 26-8. For his quote about the “anti-Christ” see Nietzsche, 66.

It would seem odd that we should find anything of constructive value within the works of Nietzsche. Indeed, he seems more content with destruction than creation.² Yet, at the end of the day – beyond the rubble and the ruffled feathers – there lies a simple truth (if we can call it such!) within Nietzsche: he does not want a vacuum in the place of morality. He simply feels he cannot build any substitute. One day, however, some “younger one free to choose” will arrive and rise above the valuations of good and evil, shirk off the cloak of morality and become ennobled in the face of this slave morality – a morality which has created an endemic sickness in man.³ This individual, this *ubermensch*, will create a new moral code – one based on the will to power, not the will to *nothingness*. Here we are given a rare glimpse of hope in Nietzsche. It is this oddly prophetic pronouncement (“*he must one day come!*”) that this paper seeks to explain.⁴ This paper addresses the human quality of such an individual and the philosophic principles this individual would oppose and uphold.

Nietzsche never specifically defines the *ubermensch* in *On the Genealogy of Morality* yet, by the end of the book, he has fleshed out its basic shape and form. The image we end up with, in general terms, is a physically strong and powerfully willed human beyond and above contemporary moral entrapments. Nietzsche describes the need for a “*different kind of spirit*”: a breed “strengthened by wars and victories, for whom conquering, adventure, danger, pain

² Could this simply be a Freudian slip, an over-amplification of his own tendency toward destruction and sadomasochism? Nietzsche himself seems to be obsessed with the idea of pain; perhaps pain’s central role in *Genealogy* is simply its byproduct.

³ “younger ones” Nietzsche, 66.

⁴ Ibid.

have even become a need”, spirits who possess an “acclimatization to sharp high air, to wintry journeys, to ice and mountain ranges... a kind of sublime malice, an ultimate most self-assured mischievousness of knowledge”.⁵ This description presents a rugged and intimidating person in complete command of both his body and mind – one who knows his limits yet pushes his luck. It is not surprising, then, that we find Nietzsche praising “Napoleon, this synthesis of an *inhuman* and a *superhuman*”, as the nearest human to the “*noble ideal in itself*” – for such a human was he.⁶ Yet it is from these scraps of evidence that we are charged to construct our *superman*, and it is highly possible – given Nietzsche’s affinity for metaphors – that the physical description simply lends an image to the far more important human element of the *ubermensch*: his mind.

The mental state of the *ubermensch* is stressed more, and is accorded vastly greater importance, than his physical attributes by Nietzsche. From his outset, this *superhuman* will scrutinize himself through a mirror and “affirm *his* existence and *only his* existence”.⁷ Only through the knowledge of himself can this sovereign individual affect change beyond his *corpus moralis*. In order to attain an image candidly resembling himself in his mirror, the *ubermensch* will need to be entirely truthful with himself – another aspect of his mental personality. Yet beyond fully understanding himself, the *ubermensch* will strive to separate himself from those around him that know no truth within their beings. Would this noble knower want to be among the sick, the dying, those festering with lies, coughing up contagious untruths? No! This *superman* will try to free himself from the “bad air” of the “sick” and fly to “solitude if it

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁷ Ibid., 75.

must be!”⁸ He has seen himself – he knows his own beauty! – and would be disgusted to remain in the squalor in which he finds himself. Indeed, it will be this very acknowledgment of superiority which will give him a “*will to power*” rather than a “*will to nothingness*” – the *ubermensch* will have the ability to will greatness out of himself, abandoning the notion that he must humble himself to achieve greatness.⁹ In this discussion, I have addressed ideas of physicality and mental attitude but have remained silent (except for my use of the pronoun “he”) on the issue of the *ubermensch*’s sex. It seems we should turn our heads in such a direction.

The question of women entering the ranks of the *ubermensch* is something which Nietzsche never directly addresses. Multiple passages showcase his misogynistic impulses. His direct and prophetic reference to the “conqueror of God and of nothingness”, for instance, specifically references a male: “*he* [the conqueror of God and of nothingness] *must one day*

⁸ Ibid., 89. It is interesting here that we see a revival and dissociation of Plato’s physician metaphor in Nietzsche’s works. To begin, he represents the priests as doctors who “first [need] to wound in order to be a physician” (Ibid., 90) – perhaps a stab at the idea that a Platonic physician would be useful. Then, he denies that his *superhumans* should play the part of “nurses or physicians” for these wounded humans because “they could in no way more gravely mistake... their task – the higher *must* not degrade itself to a tool of the lower” (Ibid., 89). This is interesting, philosophically, because it highlights 1) the mistaken idealism and incompetence of priests and 2) negates a role for the higher class that most of western philosophy since Plato has insisted upon: the betterment of the lesser class. With a simple diatribe, Nietzsche demolishes both the idea that his *ubermensch* will be creatures of community and the very temple of thought which told them to be so.

⁹ “will to power”, Ibid., 98; “will to nothingness”, Ibid., 118. Italics, original; bold emphasis added.

come!”¹⁰ The lack of a non-gender-specific pronoun such as “it” or a neutral descriptor such as “this person” becomes all the more conspicuous when we take into account his belief that the “equal rights of women” are a symptom “of declining life”.¹¹ However, we must be careful not to over-amplify the importance of these passages – they are but two in an entire work. Multiple times Nietzsche presses a call for a “*sovereign individual*” when he could just as simply stated “*sovereign man*.”¹² Indeed, the two passages in question are readily trumped by an application of a more central concept to this work than misogyny: “there is no ‘being’ behind the doing”: “the doing is everything.”¹³ If a woman were to reject the ascetic moral code, think for herself, and form a will to power instead of a will to nothingness, the point would become moot, if she does then she is. The same argument holds true for races seen as inferior. This is an odd section where Nietzsche’s elitism opens the door to a form of harsh egalitarianism where the best – regardless of sex or race – are the best. Period.

Now that we are in possession of a physical description for our *ubermensch* – what would he (I will use the masculine singular in this essay for simplicity’s sake) stand for or against? It would appear from Nietzsche’s preoccupation with destruction that a figure steeped in war medals, filled with physical prowess, and intellectually daunting would share the joy of tearing down temples of preconceived thought. However, to make such an assumption would lead to a misunderstanding of the *ubermensch*’s place in society. The *ubermensch*, while playing the part of a destructive force, is far more important in a constructive role. Nietzsche himself admits “so that a sanctuary can be

¹⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹¹ Ibid., 112.

¹² Ibid., 36. Italics, original. Bold emphasis added.

¹³ Ibid., 25.

erected, *a sanctuary must be shattered*".¹⁴ Here Nietzsche seems to imply that the destruction would occur before the advent of such a strong-willed individual and thus the "younger one" will be free to construct a new sanctuary.¹⁵ What, it would be instructive to ask, will this *superman* erect over the rotting ruins of this ancient sanctuary? The answer is not so clear – uncharacteristically, Nietzsche remains silent. He is nowhere to be found: "But what am I saying? Enough! Enough! At this point there is only one thing fitting for me, to be silent: otherwise I would be laying a hand on that which only a younger one is free to choose".¹⁶ Thus Nietzsche disappears at a time which seems to be most opportune for him to shape exactly what those future ones will uphold. That, however, is the essence of the theory. The importance of Section 25 of the 2nd *Treatise* is precisely Nietzsche's silence: he realizes that should he lay a hand to such formation, he becomes a hypocrite. Instead, Nietzsche leaves his *übermensch* with nothing but a mirror and ruins – free to create what he needs and powerful enough to oppose what he sees as wrong. Here we find the answer to a paradox that seems to pervade Nietzsche's writing: thinking for yourself means going beyond even Nietzsche's philosophy and building your own temple. Because we cannot define such a creature by what he will stand for, we must define him by what he opposes.

The *übermensch* will oppose modes of thinking which develop submission to ascetic ideals and discourage independent thinking. He will oppose the idea of "herd-mentality" because it is a comfortable alternative to independent thinking and a form of

¹⁴ Ibid., 65.

¹⁵ Ibid., 66. For the construction of a new sanctuary, see Ibid., 65.

¹⁶ Ibid.

moral control, but above all because it encourages "ressentiment".¹⁷ Our *sovereign individual* will also oppose the ideal-finding aspect of science and understand that truth is multi-faceted: for there is "only perspectival seeing, only a perspectival 'knowing'... the more eyes[,]... the more complete will our 'concept' of this matter, our 'objectivity' be".¹⁸ This is perhaps the only constructive idea we have for the *übermensch*, and it is instructive to notice that the idea is introduced in context of his *opposition* to one set truth. The *übermensch*, perhaps most importantly, will oppose ascetic ideals giving him a will to power rather than a will to nothingness.¹⁹ In pursuit of this goal he, in his creative capacity, will resemble an artist who, through creation, makes an "attempt truly to be" through opposition.²⁰ These examples of opposition are our only gauges of this *übermensch*, because – in paradoxical form – what he stands for is his to create from that which is destroyed.

*In The Destructor's absence,
Glaucou and I slowly began sifting
through the rubble – choosing what
we needed to keep and what we felt
should be left on the ground. We
understood now. What surprising
freedom it was to boldly build our
own temple anew! – and, on its
pinnacle we placed the mirror
which started it all. What good air
surrounded us! What cold, harsh,
beautiful air!*

¹⁷ Ibid., 98. For further discussion of comforts and "hypnotic general suppression of sensitivity" (Ibid., 97) see Section 18 of 3rd *Treatise* in Ibid., 97-8.

For his resistance to "ressentiment", see Ibid., 89.

¹⁸ For Nietzsche's attacks on science see sections 24 and 25 of 3rd *Treatise* in Ibid., 108-113. He sees science as a means of "self-anesthetization" (Ibid., 108). Quote on multi-faceted facts, Ibid., 85.

¹⁹ "will to power", Ibid., 98; "will to nothingness", Ibid., 118.

²⁰ Ibid., 70.

Aratus

The Reverent, The Referent

Emily A. Wolford

SOAN 253

"All these constellations thou canst mark as the seasons pass, each returning at its appointed time: for all are unchangingly and firmly fixed in the heavens to be the ornaments of the passing night (451-454)."

In his 1996 book, *The Demon – Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, Carl Sagan, the great American astronomer and champion of popularizing the field of astronomy, wrote:

Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. When we recognize our place in an immensity of light-years and in the passage of ages, when we grasp the intricacy, beauty, and subtlety of life, then that soaring feeling, that sense of elation and humility combined, is surely spiritual [Sagan 1996:29].

Over two thousand years separate this fine twentieth century astronomer from Hellenistic Greece, a three hundred year time span that began in the third century BCE and reached its culmination with the rise of the Christian era. Despite this fact, Sagan's perspective concerning the affirmation of finding spirituality through the means of science, through "recognizing our place . . . in the passage of ages" (Sagan 1996: 29), is no more clearly relevant than in the *Phaenomena*, written by Aratus in Hellenistic Greece around 275 BCE. Aratus' *Phaenomena* consists of 1,154 lines of dactylic hexameter on the heavens and celestial

occurrences and effects. Over the course of the *Phaenomena*, Aratus outlines the location of the constellations in his presentation of the sky, the orientation of the Earth, the "belts" of the equator, Tropics, and ecliptic, and finally of earthy weather effects that foretell omens for his audience. However, Sagan's intentions are best appropriate for Aratus' discussion concerning celestial observances and the orientation of the Earth, for it is during these particular passages that Aratus successfully weaves the spiritual – that of mythology, religion, and Zeus – with the scientific – that of the ecliptic, an axial Earth, heliacal risings and settings, and the celestial sphere – in order to create a fascinating work of poetry that continues to preserve the heavens and celestial appearances as perceived by the ancient Greeks.

One of the clearest examples representing Sagan's concept of linking the spiritual with the scientific occurs during the first 20 lines of the *Phaenomena* wherein Aratus writes, "From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed; full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men; . . . always we all have need of Zeus. For himself it was who set the signs in heaven, and marked out the