

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE  
ON LIFE

Excerpts From *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

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*Life not an argument.* - We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we are able to live - by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith no one could endure living! But that does not prove them. Life is not an argument; the conditions of life might include error.

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*In media vita.* - No, life has not disappointed me. Rather, I find it truer, more desirable and mysterious every year - ever since the day the great liberator overcame me: the thought that life could be an experiment for the knowledge-seeker - not a duty, not a disaster, not a deception! And knowledge itself: let it be something else to others, like a bed to rest on or the way to one, or a diversion or a form of idleness; to me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings also have their dance- and playgrounds. 'Life as a means to knowledge' – with this principle in one's heart one can not only live bravely but also live gaily and laugh gaily! And who would know how to laugh and live well who did not first have a good understanding of war and victory?

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*The dying Socrates.* - I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in everything he did, said - and did not say. This mocking, love-sick monster and pied piper of Athens, who made the most audacious youths of Athens tremble and sob, was not only the wisest chatterer of all time; he was equally great in silence. I wish he had remained silent also in the last moments of his life - perhaps he would then belong to a still higher order of minds. Whether it was death or the poison or piety or malice - something loosened his tongue and he said: 'O Crito, owe Asclepius a rooster.' This ridiculous and terrible 'last word' means for those who have ears: 'O Crito, life is a disease.' Is it possible that a man like him, who had lived cheerfully and like a soldier in plain view of everyone, was a pessimist? He had merely kept a cheerful demeanour while all his life hiding his ultimate judgement, his inmost feeling! Socrates, Socrates suffered from life! And then he still avenged himself - with this veiled, gruesome, pious, and blasphemous saying. Did a Socrates really need revenge? Was there one ounce too little magnanimity in his overabundant virtue? - O friends! We must overcome even the Greeks!

## *Excerpts from Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

### **On the Preachers of Death**

There are preachers of death, and the earth is full of people to whom departure from life must be preached. The earth is full of the superfluous, life is spoiled by the all too many. May they be lured from this life with the "eternal life!" "Yellow ones," so the preachers of death are called, or "black ones." But I want to show them to you in still different colors. There are the terrible ones, who carry the predator about in themselves and have no choice but lust or self-laceration. And even their lusting is self-laceration. They have not even become human beings, these terrible ones: may they preach departure from life and pass away themselves!

There are the consumptive of the soul: scarcely are they born when they begin to die and long for the teachings of weariness and resignation. They would like to be dead and we shall honor their will! Let us beware of waking these dead and disturbing these living coffins! They encounter a sick or a very old person or a corpse, and right away they say "life is refuted!" But only they are refuted and their eyes, which see only the one face of existence.

Cloaked in thick melancholy and greedy for the small accidents that bring death, thus they wait and clench their teeth. Or again: they reach for candy while mocking their childishness; they cling to their straw of life and mock the fact that they cling to a straw. Their wisdom says: "A fool who goes on living, but we are such fools! And precisely that is the most foolish thing about life!" "Life is only suffering," so speak others, and do not lie; then see to it that you cease. Then see to it that the life that is only suffering ceases! And let the doctrine of your virtue speak thus: "Thou shalt kill thyself! Thou shalt steal thyself away!" "Sex is sin," say the ones who preach death - "let us step aside and not beget children!"

"Giving birth is strenuous," - say the others - "why continue to give birth? One bears only the unhappy!" And they too are preachers of death. "Pity is needed," - so say the third kind. "Take what I have! Take what I am! All the less does life bind me!" If they were the pitying kind through and through, they would ruin the lives of their neighbors. Being evil - that would be their proper goodness. But they want to get free of life; what do they care that they bind others still tighter with their chains and gifts!

And you too, for whom life is hectic work and unrest: are you not very weary of life? Are you not very ripe for the sermon of death? All of you who are in love with hectic work and whatever is fast, new, strange - you find it hard to bear yourselves, your diligence is escape and the will to forget yourself. If you believed more in life, you would hurl yourself less into the moment. But you do not have enough content in yourselves for waiting - not even for laziness! Everywhere sounds the voice of those who preach death: and the earth is full of people to whom departure from life must be preached.

Or "the eternal life." It's all the same to me - if only they pass away quickly!

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

## **On War and Warriors**

We do not want to be spared by our best enemies, nor by those whom we love thoroughly. So let me tell you the truth now! My brothers in war! I love you thoroughly, I am and I was like you. And I am also your best enemy. So let me tell you the truth now! I know of the hate and envy of your heart. You are not great enough to not know hate and envy. So at least be great enough to not be ashamed of them!

And if you cannot be saints of knowledge, then at least be its warriors. They are the companions and forerunners of such saintliness. I see many soldiers: if only I saw many warriors! "Uni-form" one calls what they wear: if only what they conceal with it were not uni-form! You should be the kind of men whose eyes always seek an enemy -your enemy. And with some of you there is a hate at first sight. You should seek your enemy, wage your war and for your thoughts! And when your thought is defeated, then your honesty should cry out in triumph even for that!

You should love peace as the means to new wars. And the short peace more than the long one. I do not recommend work to you, but struggle instead. I do not recommend peace to you, but victory instead. Your work shall be a struggle, your peace shall be a victory! One can be silent and sit still only when one has a bow and arrow; otherwise there is blabbering and quarreling. Your peace shall be a victory! You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I tell you: it is the good war that hallows any cause. War and courage have done more great things than love of one's neighbor. Not your pity but your bravery has rescued the casualties so far. What is good? you ask. Being brave is good. Let little girls say: "Being good is what is pretty and stirring at the same time." You are called heartless, but your heart is genuine and I love the shame of your heartiness. You are ashamed of your flood, and others are ashamed of their ebb.

You are ugly? Well so be it, my brothers! Then don the sublime, the mantle of the ugly! And when your soul grows big it becomes mischievous, and there is sarcasm in your sublimity. I know you. In sarcasm the mischievous one and the weakling meet. But they misunderstand one another. I know you. You may have only those enemies whom you can hate, but not enemies to despise. You must be proud of your enemy: then the successes of your enemy are your successes too. Rebellion - that is the nobility of slaves. Let your nobility be obedience! Your commanding itself shall be obeying! To a good warrior "thou shalt" sounds nicer than "I will." And everything you hold dear you should first have commanded to you.

Let your love for life be love for your highest hope, and let your highest hope be the highest thought of life! But you shall have your highest thought commanded by me - and it says: human being is something that shall be overcome. So live your life of obedience and war! What matters living long Which warrior wants to be spared! I spare you not, I love you thoroughly, my brothers in war!

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

### The Dance Song

One evening Zarathustra walked through the woods with his disciples, and as he searched for a well, behold, he then came upon a green meadow that was silently bordered by trees and shrubs; upon it girls danced with each other. As soon as the girls recognized Zarathustra, they stopped dancing; but Zarathustra approached them with a friendly gesture and spoke these words:

"Do not stop dancing, you lovely girls! No spoil sport has come to you with his evil eye, no enemy of girls. God's advocate before the devil am I; but the devil is the spirit of gravity. How could I be hostile toward godlike dancing, you light ones? Or toward girls' feet with pretty ankles? I may well be a wood and a night of dark trees, yet whoever does not shrink from my darkness will also find rose slopes under my cypresses. And he will also find the little god, surely, who is the favorite of girls; he lies next to the well, still, with closed eyes. Indeed, he fell asleep in broad daylight, the loafer! Did he chase too much after butterflies? Do not be angry with me, you beautiful dancing girls, if I chastise the little god a bit! He will probably yell and weep - but he is comical even when weeping! And with tears in his eyes he shall ask you for a dance, and I myself will sing a song to his dance: A dance and a mocking song to the spirit of gravity, my supreme highest and most powerful devil, of whom it is said that he is 'the ruler of the world.' "

And this is the song that Zarathustra sang as Cupid and the girls danced together.

*Into your eye I gazed recently, oh life! And then into the unfathomable I seemed to sink. But you pulled me out with your golden fishing rod; you laughed mockingly when I called you unfathomable. "Thus sounds the speech of all fish," you said. "What they do not fathom, is unfathomable. But I am merely fickle and wild and in all things a woman, and no virtuous one: Whether to you men I am called 'profundity' or 'fidelity,' 'eternity' or 'secrecy.' But you men always bestow on us your own virtues - oh, you virtuous men!" Thus she laughed, the incredible one, but I never believe her and her laughing when she speaks ill of herself. And when I spoke in confidence with my wild wisdom, she said to me angrily: "You will, you covet, you love, and only therefore do you praise life!" Then I almost answered maliciously and told the angry woman the truth; and one can not answer more maliciously than when one "tells the truth" to one's wisdom. Thus matters stand between the three of us. At bottom I love only life - and verily, most when I hate it! But that I am fond of wisdom and often too fond; that is because she reminds me so much of life! She has her eyes, her laugh and even her little golden fishing rod - is it my fault that the two look so much alike? And when life once asked me: "Who is this wisdom anyway?" - I hastened to reply: "Oh yes! Wisdom! One thirsts for her and does not become sated, one peeks through veils, one snatches through nets. Is she beautiful? What do I know! But even the oldest carps are baited by her. She is fickle and stubborn; often I saw her bite her lip and*

*comb her hair against the grain. Perhaps she is evil and false, and in all things a female; but when she speaks ill of herself, precisely then she seduces the most." When I had said this to life she laughed sarcastically and closed her eyes: "Whom are you talking about?" she said. "Surely about me? And even if you are right - does one say that to my face? But now speak too of your own wisdom!" Oh, and now you opened your eyes again, oh beloved life! And again I seemed to sink into the unfathomable.*

Thus sang Zarathustra.

But when the dance had ended and the girls departed, he became sad. "The sun set long ago," he remarked at last. "The meadow is moist, coolness emanates from the woods. Something unknown is around me and it gazes pensively. What – you are still alive, Zarathustra? Why? Wherefore? Whereby? Whither? Where? How? Is it not folly to continue living? - Alas, my friends, it is the evening whose questions emerge from me. Forgive me my sadness! Evening came: forgive me that evening came!"

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

### **On Self-Overcoming**

"Will to truth" you call that which drives you and makes you lustful, you wisest ones? Will to thinkability of all being, that's what I call your will! You first want to make all being thinkable, because you doubt, with proper suspicion, whether it is even thinkable. But for you it shall behave and bend! Thus your will wants it. It shall become smooth and subservient to the spirit, as its mirror and reflection. That is your entire will, you wisest ones, as a will to power; and even when you speak of good and evil and of valuations. You still want to create the world before which you could kneel: this is your ultimate hope and intoxication.

The unwise, to be sure, the people - they are like a river on which a skiff floats; valuations are seated in the skiff, solemn and cloaked. Your will and your values you set upon the river of becoming; what the people believe to be good and evil reveals to me an ancient will to power. It was you, you wisest ones, who placed such guests into the skiff and gave them pomp and proud names - you and your dominating will! Now the river carries your skiff along: it has to carry it. It matters little whether the breaking wave foams and angrily opposes the keel! The river is not your danger and the end of your good and evil, you wisest ones; but this will itself, the will to power - the unexhausted begetting will of life. But in order that you understand my words on good and evil, I also want to tell you my words on life and on the nature of all that lives. I pursued the living, I walked the greatest and the smallest paths in order to know its nature. With a hundredfold mirror I captured even its glance, when its mouth was closed, so that its eyes could speak to me. And its eyes spoke to me. However, wherever I found the living, there too I heard the speech on obedience. All living is an obeying. And this is the second thing that I heard: the one who cannot obey himself is commanded. Such is the nature of the living. This however is the third thing that I heard: that commanding is harder than obeying. And not only that the commander bears the burden of all obeyers, and that this burden easily crushes him: - In all commanding it seemed to me there is an experiment and a risk; and always when it commands, the living risks itself in doing so. Indeed, even when it commands itself, even then it must pay for its commanding. It must become the judge and avenger and victim of its own law.

How does this happen? I asked myself. What persuades the living to obey and command, and to still practice obedience while commanding? Hear my words, you wisest ones! Check seriously to see whether I crept into the very heart of life and into the roots of its heart! Wherever I found the living, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of the serving I found the will to be master. The weaker is persuaded by its own will to serve the stronger, because it wants to be master over what is still weaker: this is the only pleasure it is incapable of renouncing. And as the smaller gives way to the greater, in order for it to have its pleasure and power over the smallest, so too the greatest gives way, and for the sake of power it risks - life itself/

That is the giving-way of the greatest, that it is a risk and a danger

and a tossing of dice unto death. And where there are sacrificing and favors and love-looks, there too is the will to be master. Along secret passages the weaker sneaks into the fortress and straight to the heart of the more powerful - and there it steals power.

And this secret life itself spoke to me: "Behold," it said, "I am that which must always overcome itself."

To be sure, you call it will to beget or drive to a purpose, to something higher, more distant, more manifold: but all this is one, and one secret. I would rather perish than renounce this one thing; and truly, wherever there is decline and the falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself - for power! That I must be struggle and becoming and purpose and the contradiction of purposes - alas, whoever guesses my will guesses also on what crooked paths it must walk! Whatever I may create and however I may love it - soon I must oppose it and my love, thus my will wants it. And even you, seeker of knowledge, are only a path and footstep of my will; indeed, my will to power follows also on the heels of your will to truth!

Indeed, the one who shot at truth with the words 'will to existence' did not hit it: this will - does not exist! For, what is not can not will; but what is in existence, how could this still will to exist! Only where life is, is there also will; but not will to life, instead - thus I teach you - will to power! Much is esteemed more highly by life than life itself; yet out of esteeming itself speaks - the will to power!" - Thus life once taught me, and from this I shall yet solve the riddle of your heart, you wisest ones. Truly, I say to you: good and evil that would be everlasting - there is no such thing! They must overcome themselves out of themselves again and again. You do violence with your values and words of good and evil, you valuers; and this is your hidden love and the gleaming, trembling and flowing-over of your souls. But a stronger force grows out of your values and a new overcoming; upon it egg and eggshell break. And whoever must be a creator in good and evil - truly, he must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the highest goodness, but this is the creative one. - Let us speak of this, you wisest ones, even if it is bad to do so. Keeping silent is worse; all truths that are kept silent become poisonous. And may everything break that can possibly be broken by our truths! Many a house has yet to be built!

Thus spoke Zarathustra.