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ZaratHOUSEtra



As The Philosopher Nietzsche Once Said

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Introduction

Many things have been written about the character of Dr. House, and numerous analogies have been made in particular between him and Sherlock Holmes. David Shore himself did not hide the fact that he modelled his character on that of Conan Doyle, by 'transposing' him into the world of medicine.

But as more episodes pass, more analogies with another character become obvious: the character of the Superman as he is described by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. The thesis that "man exists to be overcome" finds itself, in effect, at the heart of this series, revealing a solitary being questing for truth in each of the patients that he treats. He doesn't act to heal the sick, but to resolve the mysteries posed by rare diseases or carefully hidden by lies, silence, or the hypocrisy of the afflicted people or their entourage.

The Superman's characteristics described in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* are all found--with perhaps one exception--in the character of Dr. House. There is certainly his solitary and isolated nature, his refusal to mix with others and avoiding 'the masses' in order to do his work better. But there is also his philosophy about the disappearance of God and the "new tables" that must be written in order to find

oneself.¹ The ethical questions that are regularly broached in the different seasons of the series examine Dr. House's free will, and never fail to show Dr. House's determination to place himself beyond good and evil in order to attain a truth that otherwise escapes him.

The first four articles aim to show that House is a sort of Zarathustra, a creator who has managed to surpass himself in order to find himself. They evoke the nature of the knowledge that the diagnostician passes on to his team, the locations where the Solitary evolves, as well as his *modus operandi* and the consequences of "the death of God". The fifth article presents evidence for a flaw in the character.

¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Third Part: Old and New Tables." *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Random House: New York, 1917. Trans. Thomas Common. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Oct 7 2009. All further references to *Thus Spake Zarathustra* reference this edition.

The "Wild Wisdom" of Dr. House

I am weary of my wisdom, like the bee that hath gathered too much honey.
Thus Spake Zarathustra: First Part, Prologue

Like the sail trembling with the violence of the spirit, doth my wisdom cross the sea--my wild wisdom!
Thus Spake Zarathustra: Second Part, "The Famous Wise Ones"

The prologue of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, begins with these words:

When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lake of his home, and went into the mountains. There he enjoyed his spirit and solitude, and for ten years did not weary of it. But at last his heart changed,--and rising one morning with the rosy dawn, he went before the sun, and spake thus unto it:

Thou great star! What would be thy happiness if thou hadst not those for whom thou shinest!

For ten years hast thou climbed hither unto my cave: thou wouldst have wearied of thy light and of the journey, had it not been for me, mine eagle, and my serpent.

But we awaited thee every morning, took from thee thine overflow and blessed thee for it.

Lo! I am weary of my wisdom, like the bee that hath gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to take it.²

And therefore Zarathustra decided to descend from his mountain to dispense his wisdom to the people.

House did not spend ten years in absolute isolation, as Zarathustra did, before deciding to rejoin society and pass on his wisdom. He has always lived among people, and he even works at the heart of a hive: a hospital where thousands of individuals work and are treated for their illnesses. He has not "descend[ed] into the deep"³; he is permanently in those depths. This image of the deep, which Nietzsche employs to designate the world of men, is hardly insignificant. It highlights the intellectual superiority of the Superman. He possesses the Light; he is the sun that illuminates the Earth. He possesses the Wisdom of a man who, in his solitude, discovered how to rise above worldly distractions

² *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue, 1.

³ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue, 1.

in order to study and learn. But which wisdom, which type of knowledge, are we speaking of exactly?

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House's office is filled with books, and we know that House is fluent in several languages, including Mandarin and Hindi--and perhaps even canine, if we believe Dr. Cameron.⁴ Languages pose no barrier to his understanding. As well, we often see him in front of his computer late at night, clearly concerned, probably connected to medical sites, entrusted with finding the key to the mystery he must solve. (When he doesn't appear concerned, he's looking at a pornographic site or pretending to do so.) He has therefore acquired and continues to acquire knowledge as a result of his studies, all while deprecating the act of reading. He happily uses his copy of the enormous *Anatomy of the Human Body* by Henry Gray in the place of a pillow. He has little respect for book learning even though it serves him well.

House even finds it necessary to insult books for his audience's sake. "Read less. More TV," he says to Dr. Cameron.⁵ He holds out a medical dictionary to a medical student searching desperately for a diagnosis, with the hint that the condition she is looking for starts with C. The student's first mistake is opening the book. House immediately rebukes her, saying that answers will never be found in dictionaries, but through uncovering the facts and nothing but the facts, that is, by observing the patient's symptoms. Besides which, the disease that she was looking for starts with a K. Oops!⁶

Worse, we often see House watching an insipid medical soap opera or playing handheld video games. And beware the person who interrupts him or tries to stop him! House is hardly the archetype of the Sage meditating on the world from a remote mountaintop. His soap operas and video games haven't increased his knowledge, but they do serve as pressure valves for his constantly cogitating brain. Thus,

⁴ "Sleeping Dogs Lie." *House, Season 2*. Written by Sara Hess, directed by Greg Yaitanes. FOX. Original airdate Apr 4 2006.

HOUSE:

You talked to the dog?

CAMERON:

We're not as up on foreign languages as you are.

⁵ "Control." *House, Season 1*. Written by Laurence Kaplow, directed by Randall Zisk. FOX. Original airdate Mar 15 2005.

⁶ "Histories." *House, Season 1*. Written by Joel Thompson, directed by Daniel Attias. FOX. Original airdate Feb 8 2005.

they can be considered indispensable elements of House's practice. Undoubtedly that is the reason House is incensed when, for example, Dr. Cuddy, the Dean of Medicine, confiscates his television or his remote on the pretext that he is wasting time. Practicing music--House plays both the piano and the guitar--is another element of House's strategy of escapism. However, he needs no punching bags when his team, Wilson, or most of all, Cuddy, will do nicely.

House's wisdom is "wild" in the sense that it breaks free of the habitual obsessions of intellectual activity. When we imagine a great medical doctor, we don't ordinarily picture someone sitting on a coma patient's bed watching daytime television and snacking on chips! Yet would House be as successful once he returns to his office if he hadn't made that detour to the coma patient's room?



2.01 "Acceptance"

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In addition to House's theoretical philosophies, balanced by his vapid pastimes, practice certainly comes into play. Yet here too, Dr. House's practice hardly resembles that of an ordinary physician.

David Shore, the character's creator, never hid the fact that he wanted House to be the Sherlock Holmes of medicine. Even though House never makes a direct reference to his prototype (he prefers to see himself as the Mick Jagger of medicine), his street number is 221B, he proceeds in the same manner as Holmes, and he considers his calling to be solving mysteries, not treating patients. Therefore, he pursues his investigation like a detective, for example, by sending his team to the scene,

not of the crime, but of the disease. He has them search through his patients' homes, breaking and entering if necessary, in search of "the usual suspects." Occasionally, he goes further, rifling through his patients' grey matter as easily as their homes. Living by the principle that everyone lies, House is willing to put the patient through severe psychological or physical treatments to get to the truth.

In "Role Model"⁷, House's patient is a black senator who has decided to run for president. He shows all the symptoms of AIDS without having AIDS. House reaches the conclusion that the symptoms are a side effect of an anti-epilepsy medication that the senator took as a child. But in order to confirm his hypothesis, House needs the senator to confess. The senator carefully concealed what he considered to be a long-ago weakness, believing that if it was revealed, his political image would be tarnished. House takes the senator off the assisted ventilation he needs to breathe, torturing him morally and physically until the senator admits that as a child, he received anti-epileptic medication, as House suspected, and even remembers an approximation of its name. The scene is shot in such a fashion (with the music enhancing the effect) that the viewer can't help but hope that the senator's suffering will be cut short when the truth is unveiled. Once House replaces the mask, allowing the patient to breathe normally, the relief is complete: for House who now knows that he was right and who is certain of arriving at the answer that he was searching for all along, for the patient who recovers his breath...and for the viewer who, at the same moment, recovers theirs in sympathy.



1.17 "Role Model"

⁷ "Role Model." *House, Season 1*. Written by Matt Witten, directed by Peter O'Fallon. FOX. Original airdate Apr 12 2005.

Scenes of quasi-torture such as this are found in abundance throughout the series. House believes that the end of uncovering the truth and finding the possibility of a cure justifies any means, including, but not limited to, physical torture.

House has a dead cat disinterred in order to perform a necropsy on it⁸, which allows him to diagnose a patient with naphthalene poisoning. He even forces the candidates for his new team of fellows to exhume a man's body because his current patient presented with the same symptoms that the man displayed before he died.⁹ House wants to confirm his hypothesis of Creutzfeld-Jakob disease through biopsying the man's brain, but perhaps he also wants to see how far his candidates are willing to go in order to secure a job with him. When Dr. Taub declares that he won't exhume a corpse without a court order, House responds: "Don't think of it as digging up a body. Think of it as keeping another one from being buried."¹⁰ When it comes to saving a patient's life, House will go to any length, including desecrating a grave.



4.04 "Guardian Angels"

House teaches his 'disciples' to use any means necessary to obtain the truth. He ignores words such as 'professional ethics.' He places his actions beyond good or evil. For example, while he's in

⁸ "Detox." *House, Season 1*. Written by Lawrence Kaplow & Thomas L. Moran, directed by Nelson McCormick. FOX. Original airdate Feb 15 2005.

⁹ "Guardian Angels." *House, Season 4*. Written by David Aselton, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate Oct 23 2007.

¹⁰ "Guardian Angels." *House, Season 4*. Written by David Aselton, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate Oct 23 2007.

transit, House helps his team solve a mystery over the phone, but when Dr. Foreman explains that they haven't yet been allowed to use the MRI, a diagnostic imaging tool in demand by all the doctors in the hospital, House is irritated: "I teach you to lie, and cheat, and steal, and as soon as my back is turned you wait in line?"¹¹

House isn't content to simply go his own way. He wants his fellows to be just as effective as he is, and thus capable of anything, including the worst, to achieve their ends. "I would fain bestow and distribute," Zarathustra says,¹² and similarly, House feels the need to relay his knowledge, but above all, his methods, to others. At all times, his disciples must show themselves to be equal to the task. They must learn to lie, cheat, and steal whenever House deems it necessary. "Destroyers, will they be called, and despisers of good and evil."¹³ Acquisition of knowledge, of true knowledge, happens through the destruction of ordinary moral values.

House's wisdom is wild because it doesn't respond to the ordinary criteria of Good and Evil. House creates his own values. By that essential characteristic, he can be recognized as the Superman, defined by Nietzsche as follows: "He, however, hath discovered himself who saith: This is *my* good and evil: therewith hath he silenced the mole and the dwarf, who say: "Good for all, evil for all."¹⁴

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In the end, theory must be validated by experience. Unlike Zarathustra, House did not spend ten years "enjoy[ing] his spirit and solitude."¹⁵ Meditation and solitude are certainly essential to him, but experience is fundamental; it is what he can share most easily with his 'disciples.'

Thus, House can refer to a bygone case to find the solution for a new case that is strangely

¹¹ "Failure To Communicate." *House, Season 2*. Written by Doris Egan, directed by Jace Alexander. FOX. Original airdate Jan 10 2006.

¹² *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue, 1.

¹³ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue, 9.

¹⁴ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: The Spirit of Gravity, 2.

¹⁵ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue, 1.

similar. In "All In" (2.17)¹⁶, House bases his diagnosis of a young child on the case of a patient who died twelve years ago. Persuaded that his patient is suffering from Erdheim-Chester syndrome, House takes the risk, at the end of the episode, to bet on his experience. He orders his team to use the tiny sample of the tumour that they excised with a biopsy to confirm his diagnosis, even though the patient tested negative for Erdheim-Chester in an earlier attempt. House's team is appalled: they only have one sample left and several theories, which, by the process of elimination, must be more plausible than the one House proposes. Wasting the sample means risking the patient's life. But they don't have a choice; House is sure of himself, convinced by his experience and certain that, twelve years ago, he made the right diagnosis too late. He wasn't able to save Esther, but he can save Ian.



2.17 "All In"

House's decision resembles a hand of poker, but this hand is played by a master, echoing his friend Wilson's triumph only a short time before. Significantly, just before House makes his apparently risky decision, Wilson tells him how he won the poker tournament organized by the hospital as a benefit function for a charitable organization.

With only one opponent left, Wilson was dealt two aces. By not betting heavily, he made the other player believe that he had better cards than Wilson. Little by little, Wilson closed the trap and finished the hand by going all in. He pocketed all his opponent's money, and in the same blow, won the tournament. This story triggers--as, in the series, anecdotes thematically related to the medical cases

¹⁶ "All In." *House, Season 2*. Written by David Foster, directed by Fred Gerber. FOX. Original airdate Apr 11 2006.

often do--an epiphany for House. Even though the first clinical tests had given false negatives for Erdheim-Chester's, he orders the last test that finally permits him to confirm his initial hypothesis. The disease was there from the beginning, just like Wilson's aces.

Poker is not simply a game of chance. Once enough cards are dealt, the players can adopt a strategy that allows them to trap their opponents. Wilson and House won their respective hands because they had enough information and they never doubted themselves. The entire episode revolves around the metaphor of the poker hand, including the title ("All In"), which, incidentally, is more apt than the French title ("Twelve Years Later"). Understanding the metaphor means understanding the theme of the episode, which gives a masterly demonstration that House's intuitions aren't based on chance, but on experience, the information at his disposal, and above all *self-confidence*, a characteristic that is essential to both House and Zarathustra.

House's wisdom is wild because it isn't regimented by reason. If he had been reasonable, he would have used the final sample to check a theory that hadn't yet been tested. *Insane* is the adjective that is most often used to characterize Gregory House. But, following Shakespeare, we know that it is the Fool who has the true wisdom. Nietzsche knows it too: "Go away! or ye will learn that a sage is also a fool."¹⁷

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If Zarathustra's decline can be traced to the moment when he decides to "again [...] be a man"¹⁸, so House's decline begins once he chooses his team. Like Zarathustra, House recognizes that he can distribute his honey only to individuals capable of comprehension. If Drs. Cameron, Foreman, and Chase occasionally had trouble following House's logic, and if the team disbanded at the end of season three, without a doubt it is because the honey that House had gathered and that he wished to share with

¹⁷ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Drunken Song, 10.

¹⁸ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue, 1.

them was no banal acacia honey with no particular flavour. It was a honey made from chestnut trees, acerbic, very bitter, somber and thick, and perhaps a touch too strong for beings who, though they wish to follow the Superman, prove to be too weak to survive to the end. Not everyone is prepared to exhume the dead to save the life of a patient. Not everyone is prepared, either, to undergo the verbal attacks and constant mockery of an individual, who, at the very least, is far from ordinary.

"Yea, ye also, my friends, will be alarmed by my wild wisdom; and perhaps ye will flee therefrom, along with mine enemies."¹⁹



3.17 "Fetal Position"

¹⁹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: The Child with the Mirror.

Solitary Spaces: House's Office, Greg's Apartment

Thou lonesome one, thou goest the way to thyself!
Thus Spake Zarathustra, First Part: The Way Of The Creating One.

Like I always say, there's no "I" in "team". There is a "me", though, if you jumble it up.
House, "DNR", Season 1, Episode 9

Whether we consider the character of House as a doctor or as an individual, what most often strikes the spectator is his resolutely solitary nature. Before addressing how such a character functions, an analysis of the spaces in which he evolved can clarify the manner in which he has "become what he is,"²⁰ at once in his work and in his home.

²⁰ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Honey Sacrifice. In context: "[...] who not in vain counselled himself once upon a time: 'Become what thou art!'"

House works in the heart of a hive, which doesn't stop him from being alone at its center, isolated in *his* office, which he shares with no one. As Zarathustra, from time to time, takes refuge on his mountain, to meditate and "[enjoy] his spirit and solitude,"²¹ so House often retreats to his office, a private space where he thinks, not with an eagle and a serpent as his only companions, but with a rubber ball that he bounces interminably in order to concentrate better, and with the whiteboard on which he systematically writes all the symptoms of the disease he is treating. When House gathers his team together, they most often meet in the adjacent outer office, which doesn't earn its name by chance. House's space is set apart and personal. His name and title feature prominently on the glass door, and even the least amount of cleaning requires his approval. When the Dean of Medicine, Dr. Cuddy, has House's blood-soaked carpet replaced after a family member of one of his patients shoots him, House demands that she return his old carpet immediately, on the pretext that it is his office, his carpet, and his blood. "That carpet is part of me," he says.²² House's office is an extension of himself, a privileged space dedicated to solitude and reflection. "My office! Where I work, where I think, where I save lives!"²³ House could not be more clear: in insisting on the 'I', repeated three times after the initial 'my', he gives proof that he considers his office as the essence of himself and of his function as a doctor. Not just any doctor: a doctor who saves lives, who solves difficult cases, mysteries that no one else is capable of solving, not one of those doctors that House constantly denigrates, all of them barely capable of diagnosing the common cold.

²¹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue, 1.

²² "Lines in the Sand." *House, Season 3*. Written by David Hoselton, directed by Newton Thomas Sigel. FOX. Original airdate Sep 26 2006.

²³ "Lines in the Sand." *House, Season 3*. Written by David Hoselton, directed by Newton Thomas Sigel. FOX. Original airdate Sep 26 2006.



3.04 "Lines in the Sand"

Therefore, what happens when House has the impression that he is being evicted from his own office? Once the old carpet has been pulled up and replaced by a new one, House decrees that he has no space of his own. He sees himself as obligated to squat in others' places, until such time that he is given back *his* office and *his* carpet. This triggers a process of appropriating every new space he visits.

House starts by installing himself in the entrance hall of the hospital. In seconds he has transformed it into his private space. He talks about his patient's case with his team and makes a point of speaking loudly. Even though what he says only concerns the doctors on his team, it is easily overheard by everyone in the hall. Cuddy finds the situation unacceptable, and she intervenes, asking House if his plan consists of disrupting the entire hospital in order to get his carpet back. House retorts that it's a devious plan but that he saw it in a James Bond movie, which is his manner of telling Cuddy that yes, that is precisely the idea. And it is one he continues to put it into practice throughout the episode.

In this manner, House invades his friend Wilson's office. The process of usurpation is put back into action. House finds a horribly tacky knickknack on his friend's desk and demands what it is. Wilson explains that it was a present that a young patient gave him as a joke; they laughed because they both knew it was hideous. After learning that the patient has since died, House knocks the knickknack into the garbage without a word. This gesture isn't simply characteristic of a man who despises pity

and dismisses it entirely by trashing the gift. He also shows, in this case, his intention to empty Wilson's office all the items that don't reflect his own personality. An ugly piece of kitsch with a sentimental story attached has no place in a space that House has decided to invest with his essence. The gift symbolizes Wilson's primary weakness, according to House: his concern for others. Understandably, the figure of the Nietzschean Solitary would not know how to tolerate the signs of that weakness around him. The scene may appear shocking to the audience who, for the most part, share Wilson's natural tendency towards sentimentalism. But it reveals the implacable logic in House's plan: that knickknack had nowhere to go but the trash.



3.04 "*Lines in the Sand*"

Later, during a second scene in Wilson's office, it is the Zen garden that gets the same treatment as the young patient's knickknack. This sand garden was also a present from a former patient and House knows it, since Wilson told him during his first 'visit'. After pushing the Zen garden, along with everything else on that corner of Wilson's desk, into the garbage, House sits on his friend's desk and symbolically invites Cameron to sit next to him. This time, the appropriation is total: House has replaced Wilson's knickknacks with the work of art represented by Cameron! In the pilot episode, House explained to Cameron why he recruited Foreman (because he had a juvenile record) and Chase (his father made a phone call) and he added that he'd chosen Cameron for her beauty: "I hired you because you look good; it's like having a nice piece of art in the lobby."²⁴ The appropriation of space

²⁴ "Pilot." *House, Season 1*. Written by David Shore, directed by Bryan Singer. FOX. Original airdate Nov 16 2004.

was done in two steps: first, the elimination of any trace of the office's original owner and second, the introduction of new rules. The audience is only shocked that House didn't start throwing darts at the posters on Wilson's walls.



3.04 "Lines in the Sand"

Because House's power play pits him against Cuddy, he invades her office next. This time, he sits in Cuddy's desk chair and examines the papers he finds on her desk. Foreman, with whom House is discussing their patient's problem, is nervous. Twice, Foreman demands if they can leave, but it is clear that House wants a confrontation with Cuddy. He is waiting for her in the position of power in her own office. The confrontation is not long in coming. Cuddy enters her office, or what she believes to be her office, and orders House to drop her files and get out immediately. The countdown she starts doesn't faze House in the slightest; he continues to talk with Foreman about their patient, *as if Cuddy isn't there*. This time, it's not a matter of throwing out physical items, but the psychological elimination of Cuddy as a person. With Cuddy, House adopts a much more radical method than with Wilson: he goes so far as to ignore her very existence as his superior in order to better take her place. When the telephone rings, House answers it. Cuddy grabs the receiver from him, determined to take back the upper hand in their power struggle, but House tells her, "Take a message." Completely disconcerted, Cuddy is forced to take the message because the phone call was, indeed, for House. His appropriation of Cuddy's office was a premeditated act: his team members knew they could reach him in that room!

And as House himself remarks, the one thing that might get him out of Cuddy's office would be his patient's worsening health. The one *thing*, because no *person* could have budged him.



3.04 "Lines in the Sand"

In a less spectacular manner, House appropriates each of the following rooms in turn: the room of the child he is treating, by playing with his patient's blocks and his video game; the chapel, where he plays the role of an evangelical preacher at the pulpit; and a conference room where he uses the same type of whiteboard that he has in his own office. The principle is the same in each case. The occupied space becomes the exclusive property of the Solitary who cannot tolerate the idea that the values of others might apply to him, on the pretext that he no longer has his own space. Therefore, his home extends to all the places that he decides to inhabit. As Sertorius says in the eponymous play by Pierre Corneille: "Rome is no longer in Rome; she is everywhere that I am."²⁵ The Solitary necessarily becomes the master of the places he occupies. He does as he wishes with the objects and the beings that he finds there. House takes over the spaces the rooms' usual occupants leave vacant, whether by inclination or by force. In this episode, he demonstrates to Cuddy that he can make the entire hospital into his office if he must, by "Housifying" all the spaces that he wants: he remains a doctor in his doctor friend's office but changes the decor, he becomes an administrator in Cuddy's office, a child in his patient's room, and a preacher in the chapel. Cuddy is forced to concede that she has lost the battle. She folds under his demands and has House's old carpet retrieved so that House will finally reinstate

²⁵ Corneille, Pierre. *Sertorius*. 1662. The cited line was translated by Heather Osborne.

himself in his real office and stop expanding his sphere of influence. In the end, the Solitary might well have been capable of transforming Princeton-Plainsboro Hospital into House M.D. Hospital!

This theme of usurpation, particularly evident in this episode, reoccurs throughout the series. When House finds himself tracked down by a documentary television crew who want to film his tiniest actions and gestures, he gathers his team in the most improbable locations in the hospital: the MRI room where no metal object, and thus no camera, is permitted to enter; an operating theatre where an operation is in progress; Cuddy's office, where she complains about his movements and finds herself once again expelled from her own workplace; and the entrance hall. In another episode, "Games,"²⁶ House arranges to meet his fellows in the hospital laundry to avoid Foreman, though in vain. Quite a long list could be drawn up of unusual locations where differentials have taken place.

The conclusion that arises is that, even if House attests that his office is a part of him, it is actually the entire hospital that is part of him. He can declare that the laundry or an operating theatre has become his office the moment he can't use his real office to his satisfaction. The true space of the Solitary, while he is thinking, is his own mental arena. The physical reality is abolished.

Since Nietzsche--much like House--adores metaphors, why not consider that the mountain where Zarathustra took refuge in order to meditate and "feed on [...] knowledge"²⁷, is, in the end, this mental space? What characterizes this mountain in Nietzsche's text? It is contrasted with "marshes," those places teeming with insignificant beings: "One should not stir up the marsh. One should live on mountains. With blessed nostrils do I again breathe mountain-freedom. Freed at last is my nose from the smell of all human hubbub!"²⁸ The mountain is the place, wherever it might be, where one can think quietly because one has complete freedom. House is, in fact, capable of thinking in an operating theatre if he must. The operating surgeons don't bother him; the cameras hounding him do. There is confirmation of this idea in the second season. Foreman is near death and House wants to do an

²⁶ "Games." *House, Season 4*. Written by Eli Attie, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate Nov 27 2007.

²⁷ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: The Three Metamorphoses

²⁸ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: The Return Home.

autopsy on the cadaver of the police officer who transmitted the fatal disease to him. Since Cuddy refused to transport a body that might be contagious, House lays siege to the morgue for hours, hoping that the guard might fall asleep, so that House can get to the corpse. Because he is there, Wilson reproaches him for not being in his office and for wasting his time while Foreman hangs between life and death. House responds: "Only thing I can do is think. I can pretty much do that anywhere." And he adds: "As long as no one is bugging me."²⁹ Wilson takes the hint and leaves without a word. House can even think in a hallway outside the morgue. The physical space that surrounds him has no bearing on his ability to think. The only influences that disturb him are those who might interrupt his train of thought. The small difference from Nietzsche's Zarathustra that might be argued is that, sometimes, House feels the need to think in the company of his 'disciples', whom he has chosen and who are not there only to listen to him: they must also push his thought processes forward.

The location where Dr. House works is thus essentially a mental space. But what can be said about the home space that is Gregory House's apartment?

* * *



5.10 "Let Them Eat Cake"

Though there are several odd objects on House's desk, such as an eagle with spread wings³⁰--

²⁹ "Euphoria, Part 2." *House, Season 2*. Written by Matthew W. Lewis, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate May 2, 2006.

³⁰ "Let Them Eat Cake." *House, Season 5*. Written by Russel Friend and Garrett Lerner, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate Dec 2 2008.

likely a present from the ephemeral Dr. Samira Terzi who had it on her desk and who piqued House's interest from the moment they met³¹--there is not a single photograph. It would be easy to assume that House hopes not to mix his public and his private life. But the explanation is even more simple than that: as he likes to say of himself, House "cleverly has no personal life."³² His apartment is somber and very classical. There are no more photographs there than there are in his office. The baby grand piano and the two magnificent guitars hanging on the wall betray House's passion for music, but it is a passion that he shares with no one. He always plays alone, never in a group. His apartment represents a place of refuge. He locks himself in when his leg hurts badly. He also locks himself in when Cuddy offers him a plane ticket so that he can take a vacation: he sprawls on his couch, takes Vicodin, and watches television. It's easy to imagine that he spends all his vacations there, since he threw the airline ticket in the garbage as he entered the apartment.



2.19 "House vs. God"

Who has the right to enter this private space? Not many: Wilson, who has a key, the neighbours whose names House doesn't even know for poker nights, and the call girls on nights when House is depressed. Wilson, obviously, is thus the only one with true permission to occupy this space. But what

³¹ "Whatever It Takes." *House, Season 4*. Written by Thomas L. Moran, directed by Juan J. Campanella. FOX. Original airdate Nov 6 2007.

³² "Cursed." *House, Season 1*. Written by Matt Witten & Peter Blake, directed by Daniel Sackheim. FOX. Original airdate Mar 1 2005.

happens when, by chance, House doesn't invite him but is *obliged* to put him up because Wilson has left his wife and has come asking for House's hospitality?³³

In truth, House pursues a path not unlike the one he takes when he is "evicted" from his office. He immediately tries to impose his own rules and doesn't accept any norms from the "outside world," which is barely tolerated. The Solitary can't stand the noise of the shower or the sound of the hair-dryer in the morning when he is trying to sleep. He won't allow the television to be turned to any program but the one he picks, and he imposes that choice without warning:

Wilson: I was watching something!

House: No, you're about to watch something. I'm watching something. See the difference?

And he chooses a sports program--even though he could have chosen, from the list of his recorded programs, *Blackadder*, a British television series from the eighties which starred a certain Hugh Laurie...

In the end, after thinking about evicting Wilson after he has lived with him for only a day, House would do anything to keep Wilson as long as possible, since he realizes that Wilson is a wonderful cook and that House can amuse himself at Wilson's expense. Thus the process of appropriation starts all over again... When Wilson labels a Tupperware container with a post-it that reads "Property of James Wilson, Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted!" containing a meal Wilson has prepared for himself, House doesn't hesitate to wolf down the contents. And when Wilson's rental agent calls him at House's number to offer him an apartment, House erases the message because he has decided to appropriate Wilson himself! A cook in his home who also serves as the butt of his practical jokes: who could ask for more? House dips Wilson's hand in a bowl of warm water while he is sleeping: Wilson has become his toy. Once again, the audience might feel uneasy watching House's juvenile behaviour; he is like an disobedient rascal who believes he can get away with anything

³³ "Clueless." *House, Season 2*. Written by Thomas L. Moran, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate Mar 28 2006.

because no one can control him. House doesn't hesitate to leap across boundaries, both at work and at home: it is the principle trait of the Solitary who recognizes no law but his own. But the viewer does not feel embarrassed for long, since Wilson starts to fight back. If Cuddy is incapable of putting House in his place, Wilson manages it. In the following episode, he starts by sawing halfway through House's cane during the night. The next day, the cane breaks and House finds himself on the ground. Wilson gives a "hypothetical" explanation for his fall and the viewer is treated to a rare phenomenon: a true, genuine smile from House. He is quite simply happy to see his friend reacting, refusing to let House get the better of him, and, in short, becoming like him.



2.17 "Safe"

That night, in front of the television, Wilson holds the remote control firmly and says in a calm voice to House that, if he were him, he wouldn't sit where House is on the couch. House says nothing, takes Wilson's pillow and places it underneath him, and conscientiously watches the program that Wilson has chosen. Certainly, Wilson has been absorbed by House. He has become like him, has adopted his methods, has accepted the game of pranks, but in exchange, he has earned the right to exist on his own terms as well: he can watch *Blackadder* if he wants!

At another moment, Wilson's dog plays the part of the intruder. Wilson is in the middle of a divorce. His ex-wife lives in a tiny apartment, and he himself is living in a hotel, so he asks House to keep his dog. The dog's name is interesting and prophetic: Wilson's ex-wife Bonnie named him Hector,

or more precisely Hector Does Go Rug, because it is an anagram for Doctor Gregory House, the one who doesn't know how to contain himself.

What does House make of this intruder? At first, much like he did with his master, House tries to get rid of him. He leaves his bottle of Vicodin open on the floor. The dog gulps half the pills, but he doesn't die, he just gets high! There's a reason he shares Gregory House's name... But at the same time, he's not Wilson's dog for nothing, and House takes a second fall because of a faulty cane, this time chewed in half by the dog! So House tries once again to rid himself of Hector by deliberately leaving his apartment door open. When he arrives home, he shouts, in a tone that pretends to be despairing but that poorly hides his hope:

Oh, goodness! I've left my door open! My poor dog must've run away and been hit by a car or...truck. Or train. Or an anvil.³⁴

But Hector is still there; only House's stereo system has disappeared! The next incident is one that House didn't plot himself. Perhaps without intending to, House slams the door behind him on the dog's paw, and Hector whimpers. House smiles; he's gotten his revenge, and from then on, the dog limps, just like House. When Wilson comes to take him back, Hector is gnawing on his stethoscope, which House has given him as a chew toy. House tosses him a pill that Hector catches mid-air. House seems almost disappointed to see the dog leave. Hector is disappointed, too: he turns back to House one last time and then limps away. House then tosses a pill and catches it in his mouth, treating himself just like the "good boy"!

In other words, the dog undergoes the same treatment as his master. He has been transformed into a canine House...he has his name, though an anagram; he gets high on Vicodin; and he limps.

³⁴ "Family." *House, Season 3*. Written by Liz Friedman, directed by David Straiton. FOX. Original airdate May 1 2007.



3.21 "Family"

Up until now (the end of season five), there haven't been any other intruders into House's apartment, which shows itself to be the catalyst of a most disturbing metamorphosis. House's apartment is, like his office, an extension of himself. Whoever remains there overlong is Houseified, and every space taken by House as an office is equally transformed. Therefore, we must rethink what House says to Bonnie, who named Hector:

"Hector does go rug" is a lame anagram. You want a better one for "Gregory House"?
"Huge ego, sorry."³⁵

House is well and truly what Nietzsche called "the loneliest one":³⁶ wherever he finds himself, there is no room for anyone else. His excessive ego that he boasts of, and that permits him to exclude or absorb the people around him--this ego must be alone. Solitude, according to Nietzsche, is a virtue, a quasi-necessity for he who wants to surpass himself. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche develops the idea that "all society makes one somehow, somewhere, or sometime--'commonplace'."³⁷ House cannot run that risk. The individual would then endanger the extraordinary doctor. His solitude is thus obligatory, both in his private life (which he claims not to have) and in his profession.

Interestingly, the series which was originally titled *House, MD* has become, simply, *House*. It

³⁵ "House Training." *House, Season 3*. Written by Doris Egan, directed by Paul McCrane. FOX. Original airdate Apr 24 2007.

³⁶ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: The Vision and the Enigma, 1.

³⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Beyond Good and Evil." *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*. London: T.N. Foulis, 1909. Trans. Helen Zimmern. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 6 2009.

isn't the doctor as such who interests the public: it is the individual himself and his manner of living who makes him a fascinating character because he "liveth in order to know."³⁸



2.15 "Clueless"

³⁸ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue.

The Functioning of the Solitary

*There are many divers ways and modes of surpassing: see thou thereto!
Thus Spake Zarathustra, Third Part: Old and New Tables*

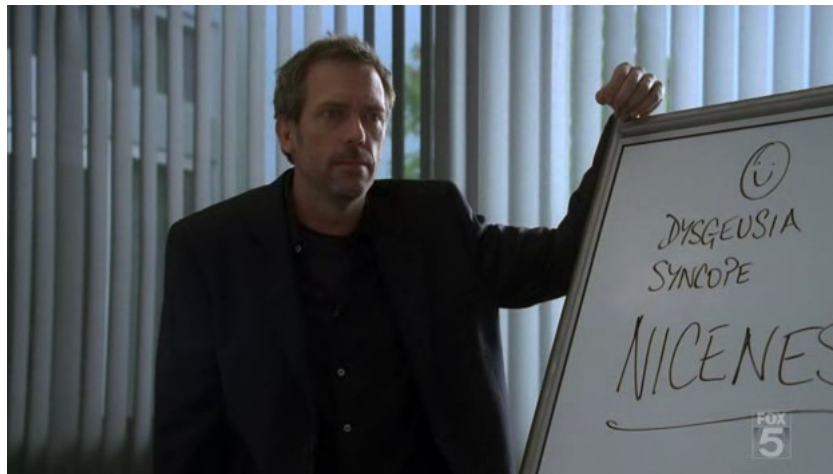
Given that there are no ready-made recipes for man to surpass himself, each individual must use his own ways to attain that level. For House, it is essentially in the practice of his art that we can detect his methods: on one hand, through his relationships with everyone who surrounds him in the hospital, and on the other, his ways of working and thinking.

* * *

There is a common denominator to nearly all of House's actions and initiatives: his apparent cold-heartedness. Most of the time, all anyone can see of House is his uncaring attitude, which is so basic to House that he refuses to deviate from it: certainly, he refuses to surrender to emotion, because it would compromise his ability to think and render him less efficient. House applies this principle in

his private life as much as in his profession, and it is the fundamental element of the way he functions.

In the season four episode "No More Mr. Nice Guy", House is intrigued by a patient because he is too nice for House's tastes. On the whiteboard in his office, House writes the word "NICENESS" in large block capitals on the list of symptoms, which certainly provokes his team. Kutner says, "If we believe in the existence of extreme jerkiness, which I suspect that we do--" (he glances pointedly at House, which House apes back at him) "--then we also have to accept the existence of the opposite extreme."³⁹ In so saying, Kutner implies that House's antipathy is a disease: very well, we'll stipulate that the nice guy is sick, but only to the same degree that you are yourself.



4.13 "No More Mr. Nice Guy"

House is characterized as "a jerk" many times throughout the series. And equally often, House is the one who points out that fact. For him, it's a justification, or his own personal brand name. He doesn't want to hear anyone talk about niceness, as he explains to Wilson in the first episode of the second season:

Wilson: You know why people are nice to other people?

House: Oh, I know this one. Because people are good, decent and caring. Either that, or people are cowards. If I'm mean to you, you'll be mean to me. Mutually Assured Destruction.⁴⁰

³⁹ "No More Mr. Nice Guy." *House, Season 4*. Written by David Hoselton & David Shore, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Apr 28 2008.

⁴⁰ "Acceptance." *House, Season 2*. Written by Russel Friend & Garrett Lerner, directed by Daniel Attias. FOX. Original airdate Sep 13 2005.

House does not seek tranquility. He refuses to hide behind friendly smiles so that in exchange, he will be seen as a "good doctor". For him, as for Zarathustra, goodness is a synonym for weakness. Strikingly, Nietzsche uses effectively the same vocabulary to speak of niceness. His reasoning is identical to House's:

Round, fair, and considerate are they to one another, as grains of sand are round, fair, and considerate to grains of sand. [...] In their hearts they want simply one thing most of all: that no one hurt them. Thus do they anticipate every one's wishes and do well unto every one.

That, however, is cowardice, though it be called "virtue."⁴¹

Therefore, certainly, in refusing to be a grain of sand, House stands out. His open intransigence brings out not only his patients' unhappiness, but their families' as well. The Superman refuses to compromise the values he has created. Playing the role of the good, compassionate, and understanding doctor has no place in House's morality. The search for the truth is all that matters. And if that means he will be called a jerk, then so be it.

The absence of empathy between House and his patients is particularly flagrant in the first season. In the beginning, House refuses to even see them. He stays in his office or, at best, on the other side of the glass wall of their rooms. When he deigns to enter, he treats them like idiots, or forces them to sign consent forms, or inflicts radical, agonizing treatments on them. In general, all his patients know about House is his name and what the nurses tell them about him: he's a jerk. The nurses could hardly believe anything else: House treats nurses like he treats his patients, with no tact whatsoever. It is not shocking, therefore, that before Cuddy hired House, she preemptively set aside a sum of fifty thousand dollars to serve as House's budget for attorneys' fees and damages when his patients or their families sued him.

Thus, in the episode "Paternity,"⁴² the parents of a teenage boy find House in the hospital garden, enjoying a coffee with Wilson. They recognize him because they asked him for a consult

⁴¹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: The Bedwarfing Virtue.

⁴² "Paternity." *House, Season 1*. Written by Lawrence Kaplow, directed by Peter O'Fallon. FOX. Original airdate Nov 23 2004.

directly, not because he ever made the effort to meet them. When House sees them approach, he says to Wilson:

Another reason I don't like meeting patients. If they don't know what you look like, they can't yell at you.

This reiterates the opening idea: House knows that he doesn't play the game the way the boy's parents expect, and therefore, necessarily, they will get angry with him.



1.02 "Paternity"

House would place himself beyond reproach if he acted like most doctors by going regularly to his patient's bedside to prove that he is working on his case. But appearances don't interest him: keeping up appearances is a waste of precious time in the race House runs each time he takes on a patient, against the clock and against death. And he is right: the young man's parents accuse him of mocking their son's case and of not caring enough to stay by his side. They go so far as to tell him: "You haven't checked in on him once." At this point, House lists all their son's symptoms and the results of every test his fellows have performed, which impresses even Wilson. The parents stare at him open-mouthed as House concludes: "Go hold his hand." To each his role: the parents' domain is emotion, as House's is logic, deduction, and reflection. He doesn't need to hold the patient's hand; he certainly must not involve himself personally if he wants to get results.

For the reasons enumerated above, then, House shows no kindness toward his patients or their

families. He doesn't communicate with them either, or at least speaks to them as little as possible. The prime reason given for this lack of communication is House's motto: Everybody lies. If he doesn't obtain the right information, or if part or all of the truth is hidden from him, the diagnostic process is muddied and confused. It would be interesting to count the number of times when House is confronted with lies. Is there even one episode when no one lies? Because it isn't simply the patient or their families who lie; Cuddy lies to House, House lies to everybody, and House's fellows lie too. Everybody lies! The only difference is that House's lies, those that he tells in pursuit of his diagnosis, always have the objective of uncovering the truth, while the patients' and their loved ones' lies only lead to disaster. The idea that everyone lies is reflected in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in terms that House would be the first to affirm:

Is this to-day not that of the populace? The populace however knoweth not what is great and what is small, what is straight and what is honest: it is innocently crooked, it ever lieth.⁴³

This passage shows the difference between House's lies and those of his patients: he doesn't tell innocent untruths. House lies knowingly, while most of the time, his patients don't even realize that they are lying. They couldn't know because theirs are lies of omission or of ignorance. Thus, the hostage taker in "Last Resort"⁴⁴ ends up telling House for the first time that, not counting House, he's already seen sixteen doctors--in Florida. House retorts that he already asked if the man has been to a tropical country where he might have contracted his disease. "Florida counts?" the man asks incredulously, bewildered by House's irritation (House treats him like an idiot, as is his habit in this type of situation). His lie, "innocently crooked," nearly cost him his life. And that is the case with many of the series' patients; the number of idiots is too long to list.

⁴³ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Higher Man.

⁴⁴ "Last Resort." *House*, Season 5. Written by Matthew V. Lewis & Eli Attie, directed by Katie Jacobs. FOX. Original airdate Nov 25 2008.



5.07 "Last Resort"

Just as Zarathustra tries not to approach "the populace,"⁴⁵ House keeps his distance from his patients. Similarly, he stays aloof from the people he is thrown into contact with on a daily basis. This is not to avoid their lies or their ignorance, but well and truly to treat them as they deserve.

* * *

The treatment House's colleagues undergo is doubtless worse than that suffered by his patients, because disdain is added to distance.



4.06 "Whatever It Takes"

There is, for example, the doctor at the CIA to whom House says, during their introduction, that

⁴⁵ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Higher Man. In context: "Before the populace, however, we will not be equal. Ye higher men, away from the market-place!"

he uses his book to stabilize one leg of his piano. As for the other CIA doctor, House hires her...and fires her two days later when he realizes that he had only been impressed by her beauty.

There is also Dr. Sebastian Charles, who considers himself the saviour of humanity, and who refuses to treat his tuberculosis with drugs that are, in his opinion, too expensive. He calls a press conference to denounce the disparity of health care between developed nations and underdeveloped nations. House treats him like a "pompous white man": he sees him only as a patronizing white lesson-giver, pontificating and arrogant. House doesn't want Charles participating in the differentials, because he wants to treat him like an idiot. He also treats him like a "stubborn jerk", a "human telethon", and a "media whore"⁴⁶. According to House, he uses only two letters of the alphabet (T and B) because he sees tuberculosis everywhere.



2.04 "TB or Not TB"

Then there is Dr. Phillip Weber, who turned House in for cheating off his test in university. In Cuddy's name, House invites Weber to Princeton with the goal of showing how ineffective his new vaccine against migraines is. Not only does House mock him in public, but he causes Weber to lose his research funding.

⁴⁶ "TB or Not TB." *House, Season 2*. Written by David Foster, directed by Peter O'Fallon. FOX. Original airdate Nov 1 2005.



2.12 "Distractions"

Also, there are all the candidates for a job on his team whom House treats like cattle. He designates them by number because who they are doesn't interest him. All that matters is how capable they are. Stripping away someone's very name means invalidating his existence as an individual.

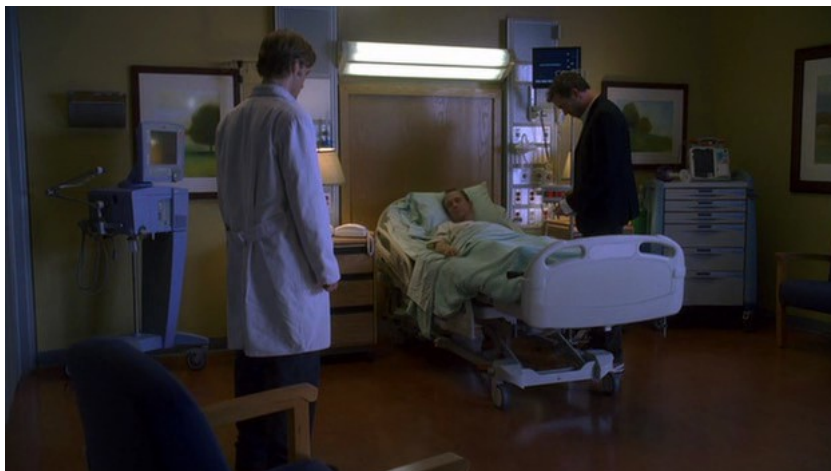


4.02 "The Right Stuff"

House can go incredibly far in showing his disdain for the people who are ostensibly, if not his equals, then at least learned individuals who have spent years in study and research. Only Dr. Ezra Powell⁴⁷ seems to find respect in House's eyes, and Powell confirms that House is right to make his heart beat faster than is safe in order to see if his respiratory problem originates there, thus cautioning against more orthodox methods. House respects him, but only to a point. At the end of the day, he treats him like the others--if slightly less insulting and disdainful--and when he acts to try and save

⁴⁷ "Informed Consent." *House, Season 3*. Written by David Foster, directed by Laura Innes. FOX. Original airdate Sep 19 2006.

Powell's life, House tortures him and lies to him. House goes so far as to make Powell believe that House will help him die, and instead puts him in a coma in order to continue running tests on him against his will. As Foreman says: "So much for the admiration."



3.03 "Informed Consent"

But apart from that instance, House's disdain for his colleagues and his sense of superiority are blatant. Nietzsche does not speak specifically about doctors, but the second part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* mentions "scholars" in general. One entire chapter is dedicated to them, and the sentiment of disdain is evident throughout:

For this is the truth: I have departed from the house of the scholars, and the door have I also slammed behind me.

Too long did my soul sit hungry at their table: not like them have I got the knack of investigating, as the knack of nut-cracking. [...]

I am too hot and scorched with mine own thought: often is it ready to take away my breath. Then have I to go into the open air, and away from all dusty rooms.

But they sit cool in the cool shade: they want in everything to be merely spectators, and they avoid sitting where the sun burneth on the steps.⁴⁸

Most of the doctors who cross House's path are these "lesser ones": they belong to the category of scholars who are content with appearances, as with Dr. Kurtz, who didn't realize that the man who'd just been in a bike accident suffered from locked in syndrome and who was preparing to harvest his heart for a transplant!⁴⁹ Unlike House, the lesser ones are incapable of taking risks, of standing up in

⁴⁸ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: Scholars.

⁴⁹ "Locked In." *House, Season 5*. Written by David Foster, Russel Friend & Garrett Lerner, directed by Daniel Attias. FOX. Original airdate Mar 30 2009.

the face of morals and laws. Because they mindlessly respect the rules and the simple teachings of other scholars, they fail to be creative and audacious; they remain in their "dusty rooms" where it is cool. They will never know what it is to be burnt by the sun. The triumph House feels when, at last, he discovers which disease his patients are suffering from, the disarray he falls into when he cannot save them because he failed to solve the mystery they represented, all this is and always will be forever unknown to the lesser ones. What does House say to Foreman about Dr. Hamilton, the doctor of John Henry Giles, the paralysed trumpeter?

House: He said it wasn't your fault.

Foreman: So?

House: So it was. You were wrong, but it was still great. You should feel great that it was great. You should feel like crap that it was wrong. That's the difference between him and me. He thinks you do your job and what will be will be. I think that what I do and what you do matters. He sleeps better at night. He shouldn't.

Dr. Hamilton sleeps well at night. He sits in the cool shade. He is content to do his work by following the principles he has been taught, and if that doesn't work, there's nothing more he can do. Whereas House is someone who takes responsibility, someone who suffers when he doesn't manage to arrive at the truth, and someone who sleeps badly because, contrary to what one might think, his only obsession is saving his patients. He does not treat colds, he saves lives, as he is all too pleased to repeat. He doesn't play with "false dice"⁵⁰ as Dr. Weber does. And House pushes away the cameras in order to do his work better rather than holding press conferences to pontificate on television like Dr. Charles.

* * *

This passage contains another explanation for the way in which House treats the people around him, starting with the doctors on his team. If he ill-treats them, if he tells them coldly that they have

⁵⁰ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: Scholars.

failed--how many times have we heard the expression "You screwed up!"?--it is because he wants them to become like him. Like Zarathustra, House sees himself as a teacher. He treats "his" doctors like some teachers treat their students, without consideration, with the sole objective of improving them. He is cold and direct with them, but his goal is the same as Zarathustra's, to incite them to climb higher and go farther:

For this am I from the heart and from the beginning--drawing, hither-drawing, upward-drawing, upbringing; a drawer, a trainer, a training-master, who not in vain counselled himself once on a time: "Become what thou art!"⁵¹

House demands that his team be perennially available, day and night if necessary, that they take his insults and his rebukes, and that they accept being contradicted at every turn. He insults them to jolt them out of a rut, to make them react, and thus advance the differential. There is a good example of his *modus operandi* in the third episode of season one. House has just reproached Foreman for not being interested in the patient in fairly violent terms. This dialogue with Wilson follows⁵²:

Wilson: I get that you're not a big believer in the "catching flies with honey" approach, but do you honestly think you'll collect a jarful by cleverly taunting them?

House: Flies, no. Doctors, sure. If I'd said to Foreman, "Nice try, it was a great guess, but not this time," what do you think he'd be doing right now?

Wilson: I think he'd be going home not feeling like a piece of crap.

House: Exactly.

Wilson: You want him to feel like a piece of crap?

House: No, I don't want him going home.

The honey metaphor is decidedly recurrent in *House* as in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. House's 'honey' is made of admonitions and insults, of coldness and distance, but he is certain of catching doctors with it, and more importantly, doctors who resemble him. He succeeds perfectly with Foreman, who quits his job with House precisely because he realizes he is becoming a mini-House. Foreman is the paragon of the perfect Zarathustrian disciple, who follows all of his master's principles, including this one:

⁵¹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Honey Sacrifice.

⁵² "Occam's Razor." *House, Season 1*. Written by David Shore, directed by Bryan Singer. FOX. Original airdate Nov 30 2004.

Verily, I advise you: depart from me, and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he hath deceived you. [...] One requiteth a teacher badly if one remain merely a scholar. [...] Now do I bid you lose me and find yourselves.⁵³

He succeeds partially with Cameron, who tells him later that she appreciated "playing private investigator."⁵⁴ And he fails with Chase, whom he fires, but then, Chase is the only one House didn't choose in the first place.

That being said, contrary to Zarathustra, House is not only waiting for his fellows to surpass themselves in order to become themselves (or, in effect, to become his doubles), but also for them to help him in his quest for the truth. Their role is essential to the Sherlock Holmes side of his character, not for the Zarathustra side. They are the ones he sends to rifle through his patients' homes in search of environmental toxins, mould, or hidden medications. Most of all, they were the ones who contradicted him, resisted him, and caused him to see other possible solutions to the puzzles. Their role was therefore more important than the much more passive disciples of Zarathustra.

* * *

On House's chessboard, there are many pawns; certainly a king; a more or less invisible queen who can take the form of his ex-girlfriend, or Cameron, or Cuddy; and the fool, Wilson. He is the only one to whom House grants freedom of movement, even if it is often House who decides the direction of those movements. House accords Wilson a role to which no one else can aspire: that of counsellor and confidant. When House has a problem, whether personal or professional, he turns to Wilson. Wilson permits House, in fact, to move outside of himself, to examine his own thought processes from a distance, which is how a discussion with Wilson most often triggers House's epiphany. In that case,

⁵³ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: The Bestowing Virtue.

⁵⁴ "Living The Dream." *House, Season 4*. Written by Sara Hess & Liz Friedman, directed by David Straiton. FOX. Original airdate May 5 2008.

generally, House's face goes blank, he leaves his friend's office without explanation and without saying goodbye, and goes to fix his patient's problem.

House is a doctor particularly interested by individuals with autism, the insane, or those who suffer from psychic isolation, simply because they resemble him: life outside his 'mountain' doesn't interest him. He only rarely leaves, in Wilson's company, for bowling, bars, or monster truck rallies. And when he is forced to replace Wilson with someone else, he becomes terribly bored. Once, he must make do with Chase for a bowling partner, and another time, Cameron as his companion for monster trucks, because he has no other friends. But he does have, by all means, more access to Wilson in the course of his practice than in his private life, which he claims doesn't exist.

What, then, does Zarathustra say on the subject of friends? There, too, the resemblance is uncanny:

"One, is always too many about me"--thinketh the anchorite. "Always once one--that maketh two in the long run!"

I and Me are always too earnestly in conversation: how could it be endured, if there were not a friend?

The friend of the anchorite is always the third one: the third one is the cork which preventeth the conversation of the two sinking into the depth.⁵⁵



1.06 "The Socratic Method"

The metaphor of the cork fits Wilson admirably. He is always there to hold House's head above water when he drowns himself, whether in his private life or in his work, and when he is cornered and

⁵⁵ Thus Spake Zarathustra, First Part: The Friend.

doesn't know what to think. Certainly, the doctors on House's team are there precisely to disentangle situations, but they don't always manage it. Above all, they don't have personal relationships with House and don't connect with him the same way that Wilson does. As mentioned earlier, it is while House and Wilson are discussing something other than the patient that Wilson, without meaning to, gives House the solution that he was waiting for. When House realizes that talking to himself, in playing with his ball in front of his whiteboard, has its limits, that is when he has the third, the friend, intervene--the one who stops him from brooding by himself and speaks to him of different things, for example, about a poker tournament and who, in this fashion, without intending it, gives House the key to the puzzle.

Let the future and the furthest be the motive of thy to-day; in thy friend shalt thou love the Superman as thy motive. [...] My brethren, I advise you not to neighbour-love--I advise you to furthest love!⁵⁶

House puts this precept into practice, staying distant from everyone except Wilson. Why? Because he shares his taste for monster trucks or for bowling? It seems doubtful. The true motivation is much more likely to be the motivation of the Superman: because Wilson can help him in his undertakings.

* * *

For someone like House, people who are obstructions are never pawns on a chessboard. Only powerful characters pose a danger to House, as they might prevent him from doing what he wants (opening a patient's skull or exhuming a corpse, for example). In the first five seasons, three authority figures can be distinguished: Dr. Cuddy, Michael Tritter, and Edward Vogler.

House, evidently, has no respect for his professional superiors or more generally, for representatives of any given authority. House leaves an anal thermometer in Tritter, even before he

⁵⁶ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Neighbour-Love.

finds out that Tritter is a police officer, because he cannot tolerate being treated the way he treats the rest of the world, with disrespect. Tritter kicks his cane, deliberately tripping him, and as a result, he finds himself abandoned in an unpleasant situation while House leaves the hospital without giving him a second thought.



3.05 "Fools For Love"

When House learns that Tritter is a police officer and could cause him serious trouble because of his addiction to Vicodin, House only redoubles his provocations. He continues to insult Tritter to his face and pushes his pill-taking in Tritter's face. He first spends few hours in jail, and later, he doesn't escape being tried for possession. The only reason House gets off the hook is because Cuddy perjures herself so that he will be exonerated. House might have dragged Cuddy, Wilson, and his team down with him, but none of that mattered to him as long as he got the better of Tritter. Thanks to Cuddy, he was able to move on with his life.

Edward Vogler suffers similarly. He is given the full, insulting treatment. Finally, in a memorable speech, House exposes how Vogler makes his money by changing a meaningless part of the formula for a medication in order to receive a new patent and put a "new" and much more expensive product on the market.



1.17 "Role Model"

Tough luck that Vogler leaves with the hundred million dollars he brought with him to direct the hospital; his pretentiousness earned him House's treatment with the anal thermometer...metaphorically speaking. He doesn't merit any better. The bully whom House called "Mr. Moneybags" and "Bow down before me"⁵⁷ could only be the object of disdain for the Superman:

And on the rulers turned I my back, when I saw what they now call ruling: to traffic and bargain for power--with the rabble!⁵⁸

The rabble, in Vogler's case, are the pharmaceutical companies, all ready to sacrifice the interest of the patient in the name of big profits.

It seems likely that House would love to insert a thermometer in Cuddy's behind; however, House does treat her with a hint more tact. He satisfies himself with manipulating her episode after episode, or trying to manipulate her. Cuddy is no slouch in that department herself, and she attempts the same thing. The two of them battle to see who can manipulate whom the best. Even though Cuddy often reminds House that he is her employee and that he must do as she says, the facts prove that, employee or not, House defines the playing field. He uses all possible forms of manipulation: he bets reducing his clinic hours against reducing his Vicodin intake; he has his team do his clinic hours instead; he lets Cuddy believe that she has made a decision, while behind the scenes, he arranges for it

⁵⁷ "Kids." *House, Season 1*. Written by Thomas L. Moran & Lawrence Kaplow, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate May 3 2005.

⁵⁸ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: The Rabble.

to be the only possible course she could have taken. The best example is doubtless the manner in which he is obliged to accept that there will be four doctors on his new team instead of the original three.⁵⁹ The dialogue at the end of the episode summarizes all of House and Cuddy's relationship:

Cuddy: What the hell did you do?

House: [shrugs innocently] You told me to hire Kutner and Taub.

Cuddy: Because I knew you wouldn't.

House: Oops.

Cuddy: I can't let you hire two men.

House: Now that is sexist.

Cuddy: You've already got Foreman.

House: Is he a dude?

Cuddy: [conceding] Hire a woman too.

House: Hire two women.

Cuddy: You can have the one that gives a crap about people.

House: [seriously] They both do.

House: Right. Hire "Thirteen".

At that moment, House nods, as if he is obeying orders. Cuddy turns her back on him as she starts to leave. A sneaky smile plays across House's face. Cuddy stops short when she realizes what has just happened, without even seeing House's smirk.

Cuddy: This was your plan all along.

[She turns back to him. House keeps smiling.]

Cuddy: Well, at least, the games are over.

House: How long have you known me?



4.09 "Games"

House's games are never finished. The one that involved recruiting the best possible doctors for

⁵⁹ "Games." *House, Season 4*. Written by Ellie Atie, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate Nov 27 2007.

his team is over, yes, but not those that he will play permanently with Cuddy to make her understand that he recognizes no authority but his own. The Superman cannot recognize any authority, no matter what its nature:

O my soul, I have taken from thee all obeying and knee-bending and homage-paying; I have myself given thee the names, "Change of need" and "Fate."⁶⁰

* * *

Cuddy should resign herself to the obvious: she is not the alpha dog⁶¹ in her own hospital. She tries to use Foreman, then Cameron, to control House, but he remains uncontrollable. Vogler used Chase to spy on House, but in vain. House brings chaos. Everything he breaks down the established order: his fundamental freedom, his refusal to compromise, and above all his rejection of traditional moral values, everything that makes him the very image of Nietzsche's Superman makes him disruptive. Yet despite the obstacles that are put in his path, his eternal creativity is the principal medium whereby House "surpasses man."

Behold the good and just! Whom do they hate most? Him who breaketh up their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker:--he, however, is the creator.⁶²

To Tritter, House is nothing but a criminal, a drug addict and perhaps even a dealer, a danger to society. Cuddy and Vogler accuse him of wanting to destroy the hospital's reputation and its smooth operation. Those accusations are the cost when we don't comply with rules; when efficiency is our only objective; and when our only desire is to go farther than the "lesser minds", those who blindly obey the old tables, deem possible. "Get creative!" House often says to the doctors on his team. Creativity is, indeed, another trait of the Superman. House wants disciples in his image. Occasionally

⁶⁰ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: The Great Longing.

⁶¹ "Mirror, Mirror." *House, Season 4*. Written by David Foster, directed by David Platt. FOX. Original airdate Oct 30 2007.

⁶² *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue.

his team, much like him, finds extreme or unlikely solutions to the problems their patients pose. Opening skulls to insert electrodes, using maggots to clean wounds, or using a long-outdated imaging mechanism to discover a patient's symptoms, are hardly the solutions of the faint-hearted.

With the creators, the reapers, and the rejoicers will I associate: the rainbow
will I show them, and all the stairs to the Superman.
To the lone-dwellers will I sing my song, and to the twain-dwellers; and unto
him who hath still ears for the unheard, will I make the heart heavy with my happiness.
I make for my goal, I follow my course; over the loitering and tardy will I leap.
Thus let my on-going be their down-going!⁶³

House is a creator because he constantly "thinks outside the box." If we believe Foreman, "He has no idea where the box is!"⁶⁴ He has crazy ideas, or at least, they appear crazy to those around him, but his ideas prove themselves right, precisely because they are not conventional.

In the end, in the domain of creativity, curiously enough, House attaches just as much importance to metaphors. Similarly, Nietzsche's book teems with them. The recourse to this figurative style is recommended by Zarathustra himself:

Give heed, my brethren, to every hour when your spirit would speak in similes:
there is the origin of your virtue.
Elevated is then your body, and raised up; with its delight, enraptureth it the
spirit; so that it becometh creator, and valuer, and lover, and everything's benefactor.⁶⁵

The mark of the Superman shows in House, right down to the manner in which he expresses himself. Certainly, his metaphors are often maladroit and he is the first to recognize it, but they often permit his team to better understand what he means to say, or to find new paths by following them or by adjusting them slightly. Linguistic creativity is combined with scientific creativity.

* * *

⁶³ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue.

⁶⁴ "Occam's Razor." *House, Season 1*. Written by David Shore, directed by Bryan Singer. FOX. Original airdate Nov 30 2004.

⁶⁵ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: The Bestowing Virtue.

Friedrich Nietzsche remains vague when he tries to evoke the way in which man can surpass himself in order to become a Superman. He always uses the same phrases: "to go beyond", "to surpass oneself", "follow one's own path", and he writes:

There are many divers ways and modes of surpassing: see *thou* thereto!⁶⁶

In House's mode of functioning, and in the relationships he establishes with the people around him, House's chosen methods become clear: coldness toward everyone; distance with patients and their families; disdain for hesitant doctors; requiring constant efficiency from his team accompanied by an unbending, uncompromising attitude; the recourse to a friend in difficult cases; the complete rejection of all authority; and even the use of metaphors in his search for creativity. All these elements contribute to making him one who traverses the bridge that leads to the Superman.

⁶⁶ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: Old and New Tables.

The Death of God and the Advent of the Superman

God hath died: now do we desire--the Superman to live.
Thus Spake Zarathustra: Part Four: The Higher Man

House, like Zarathustra, has no doubt: God is dead. For House, this signifies that no disease is caused by divine will and that no solution will come from prayers or miracles. This idea is developed throughout the series, but it is particularly evident in the nineteenth episode of season two, "House vs. God."

Neither House nor Zarathustra blame God for anything: how can they demand anything of someone who doesn't exist? House resents that people are credulous and listen to voices other than that of reason. In his battle against God, and against a young faith healer's disease, House must struggle against humanity itself and its penchant for the supernatural. He says to Wilson, his usual confidant:

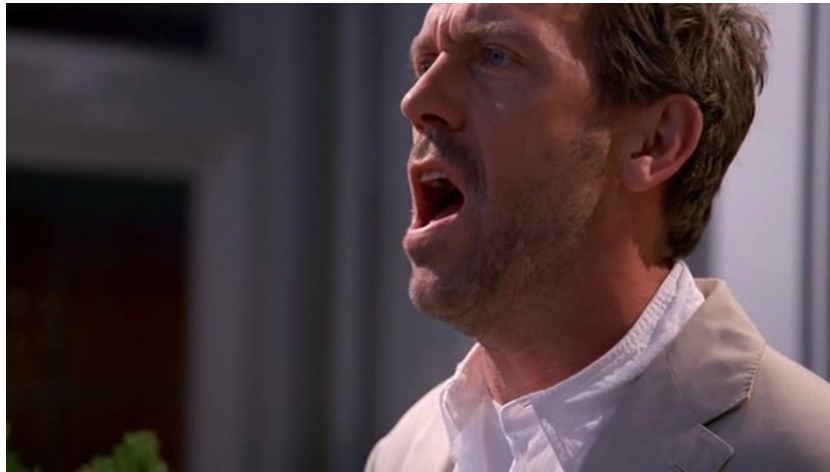
I fear for the human race. A teenager claims to be the voice of God and people with advanced degrees are listening.⁶⁷

House doesn't care about the simple-minded. They at least have the excuse of not being capable of rational thought. But House despairs of the intellectuals, or at the very least all those who have had the chance to study and thus to have learned to think for themselves: all those who have the capacity to

⁶⁷ "House vs. God." *House, Season 2*. Written by Doris Egan, directed by John Showalter. FOX. Original airdate Apr 25 2006.

exercise their free will and who refuse to do it, preferring the intellectual comfort of a thought process imprinted by religiosity. Notably, House's explanation of his attitude resembles Zarathustra's. For House, anyone who is prepared to listen to the first preacher to turn up are weaklings who only want reassurance. He uses a metaphor to illustrate his thought:

You know, I get it, people are just looking for a way to fill the holes. But they want the holes, they want to live in the holes. And they go nuts when somebody else pours dirt in their holes.⁶⁸



2.19 "House vs. God"

He then shouts out to nobody in particular: "Climb out of your holes, people!"

This type of metaphor is abundant in Nietzsche's text. Those who take refuge in ready-made explanations and the values inculcated by the "teachers of submission"⁶⁹ are called "moles" and "tarantulas"⁷⁰. House fills in their holes. He disrupts them by giving them other explanations and other ways of conceptualizing the world. And when he demands that they "climb out of their holes", he is demanding nothing less than that they should live in the light. This is the heart of Zarathustra's message: proclaiming the death of God means announcing the end of moles and tarantulas. Everyone who heretofore contented themselves with the divine explanations they were fed must sacrifice the peaceful world they lived in. They must envision the possibility of a chaotic world:

⁶⁸ "House vs. God." *House, Season 2*. Written by Doris Egan, directed by John Showalter. FOX. Original airdate Apr 25 2006.

⁶⁹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: The Bedwarfing Virtue.

⁷⁰ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: The Tarantulas.

This freedom and celestial serenity did I put like an azure bell above all things, when I taught that over them and through them, no "eternal Will"--willeth. This wantonness and folly did I put in place of that Will, when I taught that "In everything there is one thing impossible--rationality!"⁷¹

If Zarathustra later admits that "a little reason, to be sure, a germ of wisdom"⁷² can nevertheless be found in everything, he still insists that the world of men is essentially chaotic. Each person must admit that there are no easy answers and leave in quest, not of the truth, but of *his* truth. There, too, House's workings are essentially Nietzschean.

After accepting the precept "God is dead", the question becomes: what can we make of the chaos that surrounds us? How can we approach it? What tools can we use, not necessarily to create order, but to comprehend the *how* and *why* of the chaos? This is how the role that Nietzsche calls "the discerning one"⁷³ begins. The time of the "riddle-reader"⁷⁴ has arrived, ending the time of prayers and resignation.

Here, the Sherlock Holmes aspect of the character grafts itself over the Zarathustrian aspect. The nearly police-level investigations in his patients' homes, which are legally and morally reprehensible, have already been mentioned, but House also borrows other methods directly from Holmes to solve the mysteries presented by his cases.

In "A Study in Scarlet", the first novel in which Sherlock Holmes appeared, young Stamford speaks of the detective to Dr. Watson, who is looking for a relatively inexpensive apartment in London. Holmes is looking for someone to share the rent, so Stamford proposes to introduce the two men. However, he takes great care to describe Holmes' strange personality to Watson before introducing them, and he emphasizes the scientific traits that Holmes has to excess:

I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an

⁷¹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: Before Sunrise.

⁷² *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: Before Sunrise.

⁷³ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Chastity.

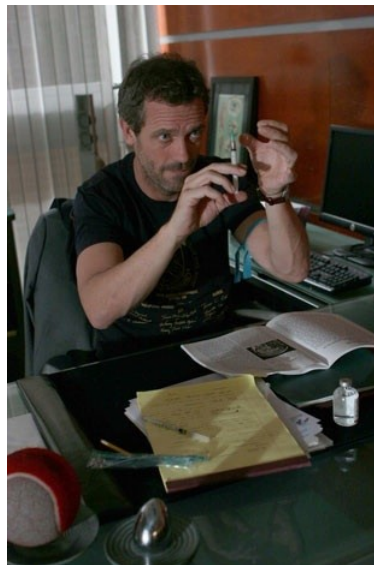
⁷⁴ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: Redemption.

accurate idea of the effects.⁷⁵

And he adds:

To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same readiness.⁷⁶

Taking risks for the sake of a scientific demonstration is, equally, one of House's specialities. In the twelfth episode of season two, "Distractions", House does exactly what Stamford believes Holmes capable of doing: he injects himself with a drug that is supposed to prevent migraine headaches, then gives himself a very dangerous dose of nitroglycerin that should induce a migraine! All this to prove that the doctor who invented the miracle medicine is nothing but a charlatan. And it works. House suffers from an atrocious migraine for the entire episode, and he cures himself through equally dubious means, that is, taking LSD as a painkiller and antidepressants to counteract the effect of the LSD! The second cocktail works as well as the first, but it's difficult to argue that House took it for scientific purposes. Though, he may well have wanted to try new methods of alleviating pain!



2.12 "Distractions"

Stamford warns Watson:

Yes, but it may be pushed to excess. When it comes to beating the subjects in the

⁷⁵ Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *A Study In Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1887. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 7 2009.

⁷⁶ Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *A Study In Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1887. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 7 2009.

dissecting-rooms with a stick, it is certainly taking rather a bizarre shape.⁷⁷

This warning resonates in "Euphoria, Part 1,"⁷⁸ when House shoots a corpse in the head in the hospital morgue, simply to see if the bullet will pose a problem during an MRI, which he proposes to do to a man with the same type of bullet in his head. Holmes, for his part, beats corpses to "verify how far bruises may be produced after death."⁷⁹



2.20 "Euphoria, Part 1"

Zarathustra himself would not reject these extreme methods. To the contrary, he too is prone to excess to achieve knowledge. After the metaphors of obscurity and light are used to illustrate the essential need for the disappearance of religious sentiment, the following metaphors of cold and heat illustrate the idea of necessary excess. For Zarathustra, men are too "lukewarm", and because of this, they cannot achieve "deep knowledge."⁸⁰

And never yet could ye cast your spirit into a pit of snow: ye are not hot enough for that!
Thus are ye unaware, also, of the delight of its coldness.⁸¹

Holmes and House know the coldness of ice: they go beyond habitual experiences. They are capable of putting their own lives in peril if they deem it necessary to demonstrate that their hypotheses

⁷⁷ Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *A Study In Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1887. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 7 2009.

⁷⁸ "Euphoria, Part 1." *House, Season 2*. Written by Matthew V. Lewis, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate May 2 2006.

⁷⁹ Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *A Study In Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1887. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 7 2009.

⁸⁰ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: Famous Wise Ones.

⁸¹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: Famous Wise Ones.

are correct. They ignore warmth. Compromises, easy solutions, and mediocrity have no part in their daily lives. "Submission and humility and policy and diligence and consideration and the long *et cetera* of petty virtues" are only good enough for those who are not trying to "surpass man."⁸²

A third extreme experience that House undergoes--one among many--is particularly interesting since it relies both on affirming the death of God and on how crucial it is for House to prove scientifically that he's right, whatever the cost.

One day, during the clinic hours House detests, no sooner does he walk into an exam room than the man waiting for him leaps for a wall socket and plunges a knife blade into it. He falls to the floor, electrocuted. After he is revived, he explains to House that he was in a car accident several days earlier. During the crash, he had a near-death experience: the 97 seconds during which he was declared dead were the most beautiful that he ever "lived." He electrocuted himself in order to recapture the experience.

This intrigues House enormously. He is certain that there is no life after death, but the scientist in him will not be satisfied by conviction without proof. A crazy idea leaps to his mind: why not prove that God is dead by verifying for himself that there is nothing on 'the other side', as he insists to another patient who says that he would prefer to "get out" in the same episode:

Get out and go where? You think you're gonna sprout wings and start flying around with the other angels? Don't be an idiot. There is no 'after', there's just 'this'.⁸³

But House needs proof. With the first patient's knife in his hand, House spends the episode considering, until finally he too inserts the blade into a wall socket.

⁸² *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Higher Man.

⁸³ "97 Seconds." *House, Season 4*. Written by Russel Friend & Garrett Lerner, directed by David Platt. FOX. Original airdate Oct 9 2007.



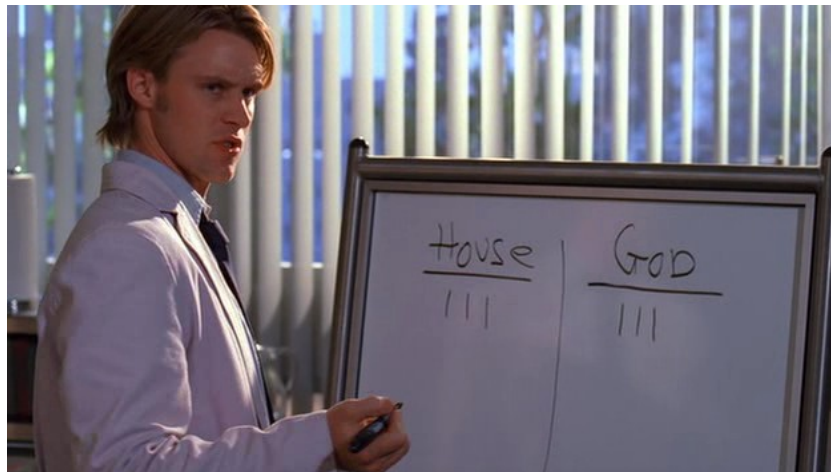
4.03 "97 Seconds"

Wilson is enraged that his friend risked death simply to prove that there was nothing after death. He reminds House that he has been declared clinically dead twice before, and finishes by asking, nevertheless, if House saw anything. House responds, "Nothing." Unusually, he doesn't gloat by expanding on his answer. The audience might have anticipated a sarcastic response in House's usual style: "Well, I didn't hear the flap of angels' wings or see an old guy with a white beard." Instead, simply, "Nothing." Doubt assails the viewer: what if House saw something and he is hiding it from Wilson so that he won't have to face the fact that he was wrong? However, House's final dialogue before the episode fade-out, spoken in front of the body of the patient who wanted to "get out", erases any doubt once and for all: "And I'm sorry to say... I told you so." House saw nothing, and even if he is sorry for the patient who believed in life after death, he is certainly celebrating the fact that he has so simply *proven* that God is dead.

The negation of God's existence denies the possibility of renunciation ("God wanted it!") or quick explanations ("God punished him!"), and this permits the emergence of the Superman. The Superman's foremost characteristics are his search for deep knowledge due to reflection; the spirit of deduction; and the abiding will to decipher the riddles posed by an ultimately chaotic world. And though House himself is occasionally tempted to play God, or to take his vacant throne--after all, he saves lives, as he likes to remind everyone--he will never follow that idea to its extreme. Replacing

God with another God would make no sense. But to replace Him with someone who would be even greater--why not? The Superman is superior to God because he does not try to impose eternal values of Good and Evil on the world. The Superman creates his own values. He defies morality and he mocks what others do or think. He doesn't tell them how to act; he leaves them free to create their own values and their "new tables" for themselves, and to become Supermen, or, in the Nietzschean parlance, to become who they are.

If House insists, at the end of the episode "House vs. God", that Chase remove one of God's points on the combatants' scoreboard, it's because he claims to have won the battle. He cannot be satisfied by a tie; he must triumph over God, on paper as well as in the facts of the case.



2.19 "House vs. God"

The Flawed Character?

*So learn to laugh beyond yourselves.
Lift up your hearts, ye good dancers, high!
Higher! And do not forget the good laughter.*
Thus Spake Zarathustra, Fourth Part: The Higher Man.

The Superman must be joyous. Because he is beyond man, even his joy must be greater: "Learn to laugh beyond yourselves!"⁸⁴ In all of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, we find recurring references to laughter, to singing, and to dance. They are among the fundamental characteristics of the Superman. Conversely, House is anything but a character who is happy to be alive. The adjective that is most often used to describe him is "miserable." Suffering from chronic pain in his leg, he can never dance. Neither does he sing. He hums only when, by chance, he is content. He laughs rarely, and even more rarely "laughs beyond himself." Does the comparison between House and the Nietzschean Superman no longer apply on a point as fundamental as this? As House would say, "It doesn't fit."

To find the solution to this puzzle, we must act like House and start by facing the facts. Who is House? According to Wilson (and if there is anyone we can believe when he speaks of House, it is certainly Wilson), since House is more than capable of lying about himself, "what he does is who he is."⁸⁵ House defines himself by his work above all else. He isn't Mr. House, he is Dr. House. People

⁸⁴ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Higher Man.

⁸⁵ "The Greater Good." *House*, Season 5. Written by Sara Hess, directed by Lesli Linka Glatter. FOX. Original airdate Feb

consult him because they know he is probably the best diagnostician in the world. There are even Cubans who risk their lives to come and see him in New Jersey.⁸⁶ But House's character is also what the series' producers have decided to make of him: a medical genius, certainly, but also a misanthrope and a cripple, and those two traits are intrinsically linked.

It's impossible to picture House without his cane. Books could be written on its use alone. To an extent, it is House's emblem. He won't exchange it for a different, more efficient one. He makes Wilson buy him a new one after Wilson breaks the one he had. His cane, like his office, is part of him. House's other indispensable accessory, his Vicodin bottle, is also associated with his personality. His character starts to emerge: he defines himself by his medical acumen, but also by the physical handicap that makes him a bad-tempered addict.

The "addict" side of House could seem disturbing if he himself didn't demonstrate that his worth disappears without his pills. Without his regular dose of analgesics, his ability to think critically is reduced. That is the case in the ninth episode of season three. House eventually becomes violent, punching Chase in the face, and is no longer able to think clearly. As a result, Chase finds the origin of the young patient's disease when she might otherwise have had her leg and arm amputated if House's instructions had been followed to the letter.

But House also recognizes that no longer being miserable would also prevent him from thinking clearly. In an attempt to end his suffering, he replaces his Vicodin with methadone.⁸⁷ The effect is spectacular: his pain disappears, he's no longer bad-tempered, and he even *accepts a request* by the patient's parents to perform a pointless procedure with no benefit to the patient. However, because the patient was suffering from nothing worse than dehydration to start with, the child falls gravely ill as a result of the test. At first, House is so relieved not to be in pain that he would rather leave his job than

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⁸⁶ "Human Error." *House, Season 3*. Written by Lawrence Kaplow & Thomas L. Moran, directed by Katie Jacobs. FOX. Original airdate May 29 2007.

⁸⁷ "The Softer Side." *House, Season 5*. Written by Liz Friedman, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate Feb 23 2009.

stop taking methadone, when Cuddy confronts him with that choice. But House sees that when he's cheerful instead of miserable, he loses his touch, and so he renounces the treatment.



5.16 "The Softer Side"

Cuddy, who eventually accepted House's treatment decision, nearly begs him to continue it. She knows that House will suffer again, and she has trouble supporting his decision. She says: "You don't need your pain to be a good doctor." But House responds like the Superman: "I'm not interested in good." And, holding up his cane to show Cuddy, he declares: "This is the only me you get."

There, too, the point is made. Without suffering, House is no longer exceptional. He needs his pain to go beyond himself. Physical pain--and the misery it leads to--is not anecdotal to House. It is part of him, and it makes him the genius that he is. By giving up methadone, he renounces the softer side of life, but not mediocrity. Make no mistake, this is not an absolute sacrifice of self. God is dead, it must not be forgotten, and with him, all notion of sacrifice. If House had continued taking methadone, then he would be sacrificing himself, with Cuddy playing the role of Eve in the Garden of Eden. But no, the Superman must continue to "become who he is" and never succumb to the temptation of ease. In this precise moment, House takes another step along the bridge. Let us take up Nietzsche's text again.

The apparition of the Superman is never sudden. The Superman is not born somewhere; he is built piece by piece. He is not unique. Zarathustra represents something like the first Superman, but he

"teaches" others how to become the Superman as well; he tempts those who are ready to listen to learn how to be like him. Zarathustra himself, at the beginning of the text, has not fully achieved the status of the Superman. Several times, he must return to his mountain to meditate, then redescend to society to dispense the honey he has in abundance. During this time, the Superman slowly matures and his spirit undergoes metamorphosis:

Three metamorphoses of the spirit do I designate to you: how the spirit becometh a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child.⁸⁸

In the first instance, the spirit measures its power. It trumpets its challenge, puts itself to the test, and charges toward all possible difficulties: this is the camel stage. Then the spirit becomes a lion. From this moment on, it is capable of free will. It does not obey any rules imposed on it:

To create itself freedom, and give a holy Nay even unto duty: for that, my brethren, there is need of the lion.⁸⁹

And finally, the third metamorphosis of the spirit produces the child.

Why hath the preying lion still to become a child?
Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea.⁹⁰

Curiously enough, Nietzsche's text ends with the second metamorphosis of Zarathustra's spirit, once he has become the lion. So what can we read from the final page of Zarathustra?

My suffering and my fellow-suffering--what matter about them!
Do I then strive after happiness? I strive after my work!
Well! The lion hath come, my children are nigh, Zarathustra hath grown ripe, mine hour hath come:--
This is my morning, my day beginneth: arise now, arise, thou great noontide!⁹¹

Thus, House embodies the Superman after the second metamorphosis, not the first. Doubtless, the third is not far off, for there is something of the child in House: he sucks endlessly on lollipops; he sneaks all

⁸⁸ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: The Three Metamorphoses.

⁸⁹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: The Three Metamorphoses.

⁹⁰ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Sign.

⁹¹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Sign.

he can from Wilson's dinner plate, not to mention from the plates of the patients who pass him in the cafeteria; he plays practical jokes and makes faces at everyone. These are always brief moments, as if House's childlike side is at the threshold of existence and surfaces at the least provocation. And it is true that the image of the "self-rolling wheel" is the one that best summarizes House's character. He is not, therefore, the figure of an evolving Superman, but rather a Superman who has very nearly been realized. At this stage, the Superman's happiness has no importance; all that matters is the task set for him to accomplish. How many times have Cuddy or Wilson come to speak with House about his happiness, and how many times has he shrugged his shoulders or rolled his eyes? For him, as for Zarathustra after the second metamorphosis, the problem is immaterial. The time at his disposal should not be sacrificed to the pursuit of happiness but to the fulfilment of his calling, and if that must happen through suffering, then House will give the methadone a pass. Sainthood isn't for him. Happiness would destroy him, make him a "good" doctor, and nothing else. "This is the only me you get"? But it's certainly that "me" who interests Cuddy, and outside the characters of the series, who interests the audience: an extraordinary individual who manages to transform his weakness into a supplementary power. And if "to discern: that is *delight* to the lion-willed!"⁹², then that delight is accessible to him, thanks to the methods worthy both of a Sherlock Holmes and a Zarathustra. These are the very methods that Zarathustra's shadow summarizes when it addresses Zarathustra:

With thee have I pushed into all the forbidden, all the worst and the furthest: and if there be anything of virtue in me, it is that I have had no fear of any prohibition.⁹³

⁹² *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: Old and New Tables.

⁹³ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Shadow.

Conclusion

The sixth season of House premieres on September 21, 2009. The promotional campaign centers around a photograph of House--or simply his cane--with two serpents twined around it, and eagle's wings sprouting from his back.



"This is not a caduceus."

Obviously, the photo alludes to the caduceus. The tag-line reads "Incurably himself." What can be deduced from this? That House will be a doctor more than ever? The caduceus is unmistakably the

symbol of medicine, after all.

But might we not also see the image of the Superman himself, accompanied by his loyal animals, "the proudest animal under the sun, and the wisest animal under the sun"?⁹⁴ The eagle and the serpent are mentioned regularly in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. They are named the companions of the Superman. What the audience expects from this character is not simply that he is medicine incarnate, but that he is an individual outside the norm, obeying no law, submitting to no one, using all the possible tricks to solve the puzzles that he finds, and evolving in the highest peaks of intelligence and reason.

* * *

A patient: You don't have a family, do you?

House: Left them all back on Krypton.⁹⁵

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⁹⁴ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Prologue.

⁹⁵ "Painless." *House, Season 5*. Written by Thomas L. Moran & Eli Attie, directed by Andrew Bernstein. FOX. Original airdate Jan 19 2009.