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# ZaratHOUSEtra



## As The Philosopher Nietzsche Once Said

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## 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.<sup>1</sup>

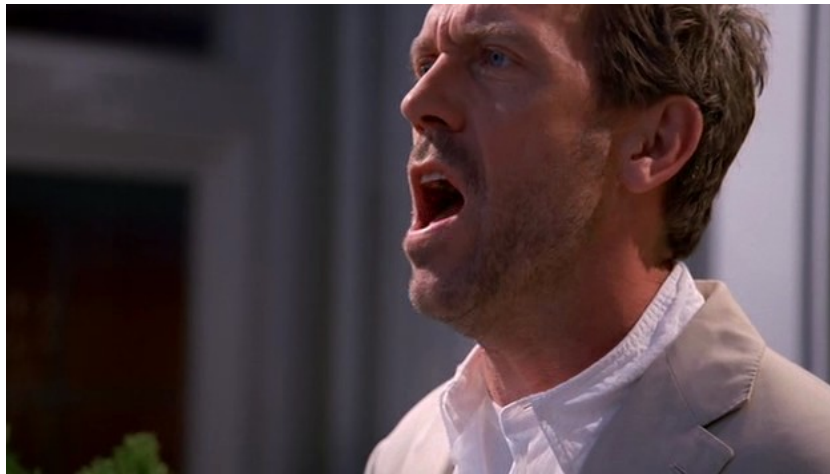
House doesn't care about the simple-minded. They at least have the excuse of not being capable of rational thought. But House despairs of the intellectuals, or at the very least all those who have had the chance to study and thus to have learned to think for themselves: all those who have the capacity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

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<sup>1</sup> "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.<sup>2</sup>



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"<sup>3</sup> are called "moles" and "tarantulas"<sup>4</sup>. 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:

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

<sup>3</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: The Bedwarfing Virtue.

<sup>4</sup> *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!"<sup>5</sup>

If Zarathustra later admits that "a little reason, to be sure, a germ of wisdom"<sup>6</sup> 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"<sup>7</sup> begins. The time of the "riddle-reader"<sup>8</sup> 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 accurate idea of the effects.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: Before Sunrise.

<sup>6</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part: Before Sunrise.

<sup>7</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part: Chastity.

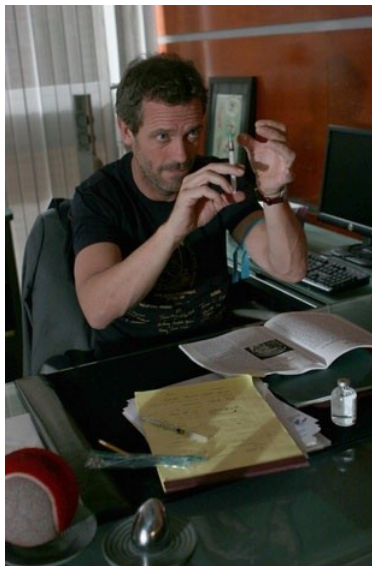
<sup>8</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: Redemption.

<sup>9</sup> Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *A Study In Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1887. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 7 2009.

And he adds:

To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same readiness.<sup>10</sup>

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:

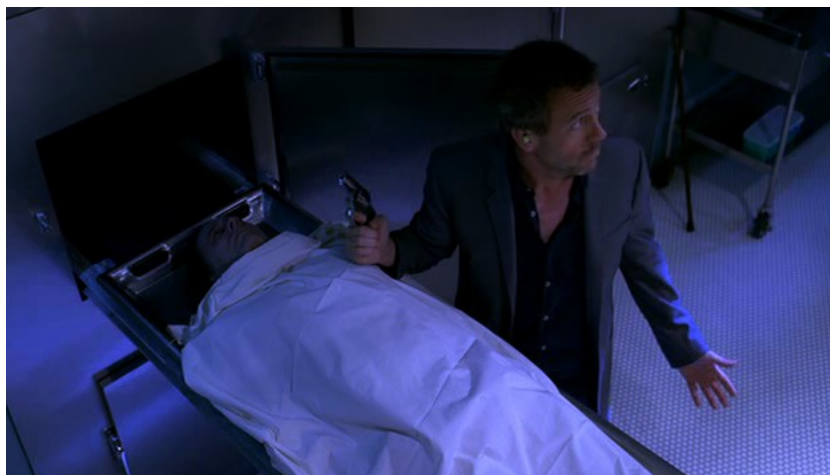
Yes, but it may be pushed to excess. When it comes to beating the subjects in the dissecting-rooms with a stick, it is certainly taking rather a bizarre shape.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *A Study In Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1887. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 7 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *A Study In Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1887. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 7 2009.

This warning resonates in "Euphoria, Part 1,"<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup>



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."<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup>

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 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*

<sup>12</sup> "Euphoria, Part 1." *House, Season 2*. Written by Matthew V. Lewis, directed by Deran Serafian. FOX. Original airdate May 2 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *A Study In Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1887. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. Nov 7 2009.

<sup>14</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: Famous Wise Ones.

<sup>15</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Second Part: Famous Wise Ones.

*cetera* of petty virtues" are only good enough for those who are not trying to "surpass man."<sup>16</sup>

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'.<sup>17</sup>

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.

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<sup>16</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Fourth Part: The Higher Man.

<sup>17</sup> "97 Seconds." *House*, Season 4. Written by Russel Friend & Garrett Lerner, directed by David Platt. FOX. Original airdate Oct 9 2007.



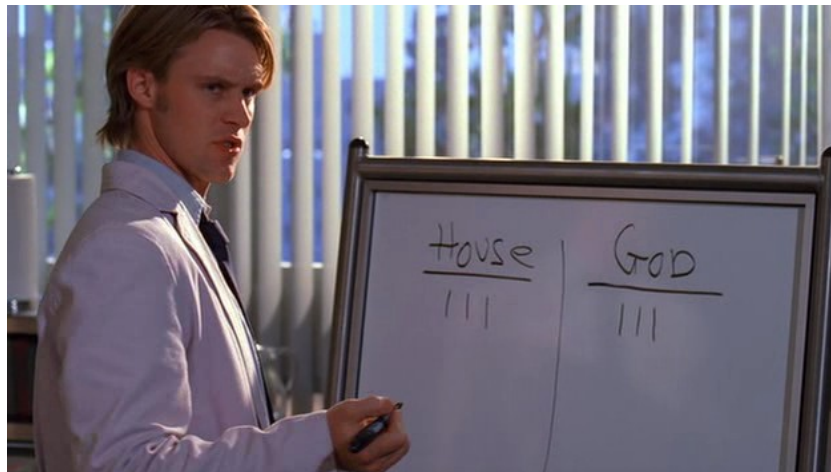
#### 4.03 "97 Seconds"

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"

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