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## THUS ATE ZARATHUSTRA

Woody Allen

There's nothing like the discovery of an unknown work by a great thinker to set the intellectual community atwitter and cause academics to dart about like those things one sees when looking at a drop of water under a microscope. On a recent trip to Heidelberg to procure some rare nineteenth-century dueling scars, I happened upon just such a treasure. Who would have thought that "Friedrich Nietzsche's Diet Book" existed? While its authenticity might appear to be a soupçon dicey to the niggling, most who have studied the work agree that no other Western thinker has come so close to reconciling Plato with Pritikin. Selections follow.

Fat itself is a substance or essence of a substance or

mode of that essence. The big problem sets in when it accumulates on your hips. Among the pre-Socratics, it was Zeno who held that weight was an illusion and that no matter how much a man ate he would always be only half as fat as the man who never does push-ups. The quest for an ideal body obsessed the Athenians, and in a lost play by Aeschylus Clytemnestra breaks her vow never to snack between meals and tears out her eyes when she realizes she no longer fits into her bathing suit.

It took the mind of Aristotle to put the weight problem in scientific terms, and in an early fragment of the *Ethics* he states that the circumference of any man is equal to his girth multiplied by pi. This sufficed until the Middle Ages, when Aquinas translated a number of menus into Latin and the first really good oyster bars opened. Dining out was still frowned upon by the Church, and valet parking was a venal sin.

As we know, for centuries Rome regarded the Open Hot Turkey Sandwich as the height of licentiousness; many sandwiches were forced to stay closed and only reopened after the Reformation. Fourteenth-century religious paintings first depicted scenes of damnation in which the overweight wandered Hell, condemned to salads and yogurt. The Spaniards were particularly cruel, and during the Inquisition a man could be put to death for stuffing an avocado with crabmeat.

No philosopher came close to solving the problem of guilt and weight until Descartes divided mind and body in two, so that the body could gorge itself while the mind thought, Who cares, it's not me. The great question of philosophy remains: If life is meaningless, what can be done about alphabet soup? It was Leibniz who first said that fat consisted of monads. Leibniz dieted and exercised but never did get rid of his monads—at least, not the ones that adhered to his thighs. Spinoza, on the oth-

er hand, dined sparingly because he believed that God existed in everything and it's intimidating to wolf down a knish if you think you're ladling mustard onto the First Cause of All Things.

Is there a relationship between a healthy regimen and creative genius? We need only look at the composer Richard Wagner and see what he puts away. French fries, grilled cheese, nachos—Christ, there's no limit to the man's appetite, and yet his music is sublime. Cosima, his wife, goes pretty good, too, but at least she runs every day. In a scene cut from the "Ring" cycle, Siegfried decides to dine out with the Rhine maidens and in heroic fashion consumes an ox, two dozen fowl, several wheels of cheese, and fifteen kegs of beer. Then the check comes and he's short. The point here is that in life one is entitled to a side dish of either coleslaw or potato salad, and the choice must be made in terror, with the knowledge that not only is our time on earth limited but most kitchens close at ten.

The existential catastrophe for Schopenhauer was not so much eating as munching. Schopenhauer railed against the aimless nibbling of peanuts and potato chips while one engaged in other activities. Once munching has begun, Schopenhauer held, the human will cannot resist further munching, and the result is a universe with crumbs over everything. No less misguided was Kant, who proposed that we order lunch in such a manner that if everybody ordered the same thing the world would function in a moral way. The problem Kant didn't foresee is that if everyone orders the same dish there will be squabbling in the kitchen over who gets the last branzino. "Order like you are ordering for every human being on earth," Kant advises, but what if the man next to you doesn't eat guacamole? In the end, of course, there are no moral foods—unless we count soft-boiled eggs.

To sum up: apart from my own Beyond Good and Evil Flap-jacks and Will to Power Salad Dressing, of the truly great recipes that have changed Western ideas Hegel's Chicken Pot Pie was the first to employ leftovers with meaningful political implications. Spinoza's Stir-Fried Shrimp and Vegetables can be enjoyed by atheists and agnostics alike, while a little-known recipe of Hobbes's for Barbecued Baby-Back Ribs remains an intellectual conundrum. The great thing about the Nietzsche Diet is that once the pounds are shed they stay off—which is not the case with Kant's "Tractatus on Starches."

### **Breakfast**

Orange juice  
 2 strips of bacon  
 Profiteroles  
 Baked clams  
 Toast, herbal tea

The juice of the orange is the very being of the orange made manifest, and by this I mean its true nature, and that which gives it its "orangeness" and keeps it from tasting like, say, a poached salmon or grits. To the devout, the notion of anything but cereal for breakfast produces anxiety and dread, but with the death of God anything is permitted, and profiteroles and clams may be eaten at will, and even buffalo wings.

### **Lunch**

1 bowl of spaghetti, with tomato and basil  
 White bread  
 Mashed potatoes  
 Sacher Torte

The powerful will always lunch on rich foods, well seasoned with heavy sauces, while the weak peck away at wheat germ and tofu, convinced that their suffering will earn them a reward in an afterlife where grilled lamb

chops are all the rage. But if the afterlife is, as I assert, an eternal recurrence of this life, then the meek must dine in perpetuity on low carbs and broiled chicken with the skin removed.

### **Dinner**

Steak or sausages

Hash-brown potatoes

Lobster thermidor

Ice cream with whipped cream or layer cake

This is a meal for the Superman. Let those who are riddled with angst over high triglycerides and trans fats eat to please their pastor or nutritionist, but the Superman knows that marbled meat and creamy cheeses with rich desserts and, oh, yes, lots of fried stuff is what Dionysus would eat—if it weren't for his reflux problem.

### **Aphorisms**

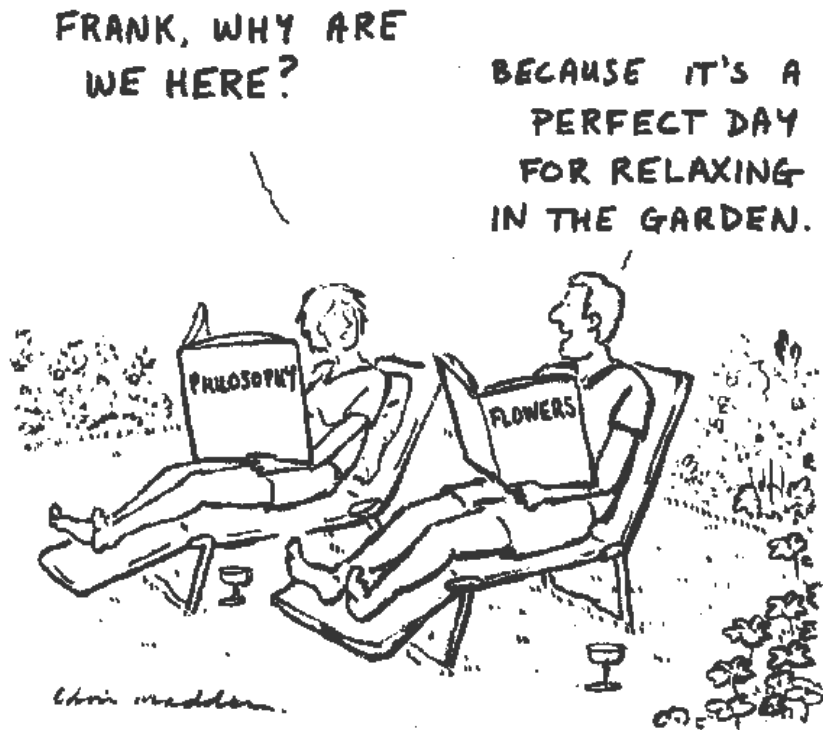
Epistemology renders dieting moot. If nothing exists except in my mind, not only can I order anything; the service will be impeccable.

Man is the only creature who ever stiffes a waiter.



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More below . . .




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Jean-Paul Sartre is sitting at a French cafe, revising his draft of *Being and Nothingness*. He says to the waitress, "I'd like a cup of coffee, please, with no cream." The waitress replies, "I'm sorry, monsieur, but we're out of cream. How about with no milk?"

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A boy is about to go on his first date, and is nervous about what to talk about. He asks his father for advice. The father replies: "My son, there are three subjects that always work. These are food, family, and philosophy."

The boy picks up his date and they go to a soda fountain. Ice cream sodas in front of them, they stare at each other for a long time, as the boy's nervousness builds. He remembers his father's advice, and chooses the first topic. He asks the girl: "Do you like potato pancakes?" She says "No," and the silence returns.

After a few more uncomfortable minutes, the boy thinks of his father's suggestion and turns to the second item on the list. He asks, "Do you have a brother?" Again, the girl says "No" and there is silence once again.

The boy then plays his last card. He thinks of his father's advice and asks the girl the following question:

"If you had a brother, would he like potato pancakes?"

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## The Jean-Paul Sartre Cookbook

We have been lucky to discover several previously lost diaries of French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre stuck in between the cushions of our office sofa. These diaries reveal a young Sartre obsessed not with the void, but with food. Apparently Sartre, before discovering philosophy, had hoped to write "a cookbook that will put to rest all notions of flavor forever." The diaries are excerpted here for your perusal.

### October 3

Spoke with Camus today about my cookbook. Though he has never actually eaten, he gave me much encouragement. I rushed home immediately to begin work. How excited I am! I have begun my formula for a Denver omelet.

### October 4

Still working on the omelet. There have been stumbling blocks. I keep creating omelets one after another, like soldiers marching into the sea, but each one seems empty, hollow, like stone. I want to create an omelet that expresses the meaninglessness of existence, and instead they taste like cheese. I look at them on the plate, but they do not look back. Tried eating them with the lights

off. It did not help. Malraux suggested paprika.

### **October 6**

I have realized that the traditional omelet form (eggs and cheese) is bourgeois. Today I tried making one out of cigarette, some coffee, and four tiny stones. I fed it to Malraux, who puked. I am encouraged, but my journey is still long.

### **October 10**

I find myself trying ever more radical interpretations of traditional dishes, in an effort to somehow express the void I feel so acutely. Today I tried this recipe:

### **Tuna Casserole**

Ingredients: 1 large casserole dish

Place the casserole dish in a cold oven. Place a chair facing the oven and sit in it forever. Think about how hungry you are. When night falls, do not turn on the light.

While a void is expressed in this recipe, I am struck by its inapplicability to the bourgeois lifestyle. How can the eater recognize that the food denied him is a tuna casserole and not some other dish? I am becoming more and more frustrated.

### **October 25**

I have been forced to abandon the project of producing an entire cookbook. Rather, I now seek a single recipe which will, by itself, embody the plight of man in a world ruled by an unfeeling God, as well as providing the eater with at least one ingredient from each of the four basic food groups. To this end, I purchased six hundred pounds of foodstuffs from the corner grocery and locked myself in the kitchen, refusing to admit anyone. After several weeks of work, I produced a recipe calling for two eggs, half a cup of flour, four tons of beef, and a leek. While this is a start, I am afraid I still have much work ahead.



**November 15**

Today I made a Black Forest cake out of five pounds of cherries and a live beaver, challenging the very definition of the word cake. I was very pleased. Malraux said he admired it greatly, but could not stay for dessert. Still, I feel that this may be my most profound achievement yet, and have resolved to enter it in the Betty Crocker Bake-Off.

**November 30**

Today was the day of the Bake-Off. Alas, things did not go as I had hoped. During the judging, the beaver became agitated and bit Betty Crocker on the wrist. The beaver's powerful jaws are capable of felling blue spruce in less than ten minutes and proved, needless to say, more than a match for the tender limbs of America's favorite homemaker. I only got third place. Moreover, I am now the subject of a rather nasty lawsuit.

**December 1**

I have been gaining twenty-five pounds a week for two months, and I am now experiencing light tides. It is stupid to be so fat. My pain and ultimate solitude are still as authentic as they were when I was thin, but seem to impress girls far less. From now on, I will live on cigarettes and black coffee.

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**And last, but not least . . .**

René Descartes walks into a restaurant and sits down for dinner. The waiter comes over and asks if he'd like an appetizer

"No thank you" says Descartes, "I'd just like to order dinner"

"Would you like to hear our daily specials?" asks the waiter

"No" says Descartes, getting impatient

"Would you like a drink before dinner?" the waiter asks

Descartes is insulted, since he's a tee-totaler "I think not!" he says indignantly, and **POOF** he disappears. 😊

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