

## ÜBERMENSCH'S PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT AS SEEN THROUGH SUPERMAN'S CHARACTER IN ZACK SNYDER'S "MAN OF STEEL"

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### ABSTRACT

*What people think about Superman is that he was not real. There was no one as strong as Superman in the world. However, some people believe that what matters about Superman is he cares about everyone in the universe without exception, without judgment. The article aims to elevate Superman's values to human existence. The research focuses on the character of Clark Kent in Zack Snyder's two movies entitled Man of Steel. Clark initially used his powers covertly to help people and prevent or thwart disasters. He is valuable to human's existence in the universe. The theory that is used to support to the analysis is Nietzsche's super human version, the Übermensch in English means Beyond-Man, Superman, Overman or Superhuman. It is the concept of Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche's thought on human philosophy directs us to fully love the life and position humans as superhuman. The research design that is taken is qualitative research. There is one literary approach that meets the analysis, that is, archetypal approach. The finding of the research is that Clark Kent as the representation of Übermensch is a human that sees himself as a source of value. Human who has reached Übermensch is a person who always says "yes" to everything and is ready to face challenges, who has an attitude of always affirming his life.*

**Keywords:** *Superman, Philosophical Concept, Nietzsche's Übermensch*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the movie "Man of Steel", Superman was born on the planet Krypton as Kal-El, and as a baby was launched by a rocket to Earth by his father, Jor-El, just before the planet was destroyed in a natural cataclysm. How Kal-El was born is different from any kryptonite babies. He was born naturally as a baby that was born by a mother. Planet Krypton's technology is far beyond the Earth's. The growth of the kryptonite babies is controlled by a codex which gives power to the babies when they are maturely born. Before Kal-El was sent to the Earth, Jor-El destroyed the codex and put its power totally to Kal-El in order that Kal-El will help save the universe when he is grown up. The rocket then landed on Earth, in a field which the Kent couple, Jonathan and Marta Kent lived. They later adopted and named the baby Clark Kent. As a child who was growing up, he discovered that he possessed powers that were far beyond ordinary humans have and used those powers to help others. To hide the secret of his identity while not dealing with criminals as Superman, he lives as Clark Kent, an ordinary human being with a subtle character.

Most people know that Superman has some of the most extraordinary powers, but besides his heat vision, super strength, arctic breath, super-speed, x-ray vision, super-hearing, and flight, Superman, a.k.a Man of Steel has some other insane capabilities as well. The most recent addition to his already huge array of powers is the explosive Super Flare. In contrast, with a name like Superman and a nickname like the Man of Steel, one would expect Clark Kent to be practically invulnerable. For the most part, however there are a few things that can bring him to his knees. At most will tell you, the green space rock, Kryptonite, will weaken Superman and leave him vulnerable to attack. Furthermore, one of Superman's weaknesses

that often results in harm is magic. Despite his impressive physical prowess, Superman is not a mystical being. He is a biological life form with enhanced attributes, but he has no foothold in the realm of magic. Therefore, he can be harmed by things like Aquaman's trident or Wonder Woman's sword.

Furthermore, the character of Superman in comics and movie is inspired by the theory of Übermensch written by Nietzsche. The word, Übermensch, is derived from Germanic vocabulary that means 'super human' in English. Superman, German Übermensch, in philosophy, the superior man justifies the existence of the human race. This superior man would not be a product of long evolution; rather, he would emerge when any man with superior potential completely master himself to create his own value which is completely rooted in life on this earth. The Übermensch is proposed by Nietzsche as a way to find a new moral path that celebrates life as opposed to rejecting it. The Übermensch embraces life's hardships and pleasures alike and accepts hard truths without complaint. Therefore, the Übermensch never denies or is afraid of his life's tremendous urges. Nietzsche also believes that by dealing with conflict, humans would be challenged, and all the abilities they could come out of themselves optionally.

In the movies, "Man of Steel", Clark Kent is the major point that can help people in the Earth because of the danger that has threatened the Earth. Clark Kent who is described in the movie is that he is bullet proof, able to take anti tank rounds to the face and not flinch, and he has the ability to shrug off things that should have killed him long ago. He has tremendous power that he only uses to help people. His value to the survival of the people is comparable to the philosophical concept of Nietzsche's Übermensch.

The research focuses on the main character of the movie, that is, Clark Kent a.k.a Superman/Man of Steel. Superman created in the movie is inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's Übermensch. The research discusses the influence of Nietzsche's philosophical concept of Übermensch toward the main character of the movie entitled "Man of Steel".

The theory that meets the topic is the theory of Übermensch. The Übermensch is a German word that refers to "Beyond-Man", "Superman", "Overman", "Uberman", or "Superman". It is a philosophical concept of Friedrich Nietzsche whose book entitled *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* stated that Zarathustra posits the Übermensch as a goal for humanity to set itself. According to Nietzsche (2005),

Nietzsche wants man to grow, reach out, pull out, go upward – it is not out of morality or immorality, but because he is alive, and because life is the will to power. Humans must be honest with themselves, and always be innovative.

The Übermensch is motivated by a love of this world and of life. His will is life-affirming and creative. He is not guided by a rule book but instead seeks truth in himself and nature. The Übermensch has ambition and does not become tired or bitter in the face of hardship. He strives to become his highest possible self. Exactly what this means is left open by Nietzsche as the Übermensch finds his own direction. In other words, the Übermensch is a way of life as opposed to a system of values.

Moreover, in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche has something in his mind about how a man should be more than just human-all-too-human. An overman as described by Zarathustra, the main character in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is the one who is willing to risk all for the sake of enhancement of humanity. An overman is someone who can establish his own values as the world in which others live their lives, often unaware that they are not pre-given (Nietzsche, 2005). It means an overman can affect and influence the lives of others. In other words, an overman has his own values, independent of others, which affects and dominates others' lives that may not have predetermined values but only herd instinct. An overman is then someone who has a life which is not merely to live each day with no

meanings when nothing in the past and future is more important than the present, or more precisely, the pleasure and happiness in the present, but with the purpose for humanity.

Nietzsche evoked an idea of will-to-power, life is the will-to-power that underlies how human thinks, behaves and acts in all circumstances. He views that a human being is always in a constant struggle to quench his own desire. A living thing always seeks to discharge its strength, not only to survive but to power and this sometimes results in violent behavior which is, allegedly by Nietzsche, intrinsic to the nature of men. However, the way to will can be different, constructive or destructive. In conclusion, an overman uses the will-to-power to influence and dominate the thoughts of others creatively from generation to generation. In this way, his existence and power live on even after he dies.

## 2. METHOD

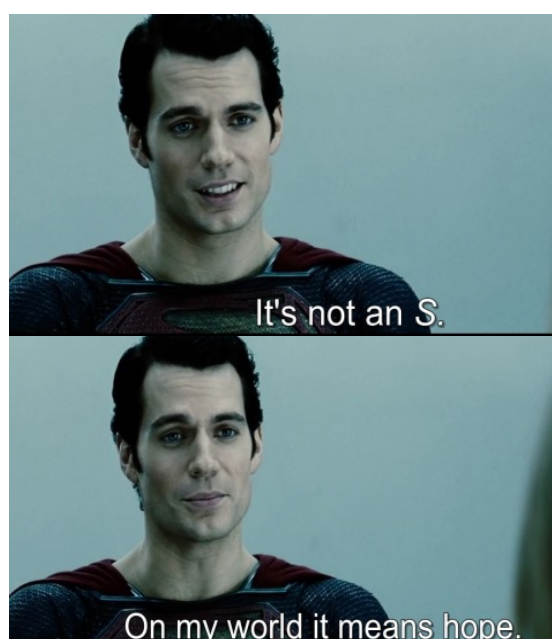
The qualitative research is decided to be used as the research design. Norman (2013) said that qualitative research is a research study that investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials. Besides, Fraenkel (2012) stated that analysis and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest. Therefore, this research uses qualitative method because it focuses on the analysis or interpretation of the scenes, subtitles and images that can support the analysis. This research is a content analysis which is researching communication patterns that focus on words, subjects, and concepts in texts or images. Astalin states that qualitative research is an umbrella term for a broad range of different approaches and methods, which vary considerably in terms of focus, assumptions about the nature of knowledge, and the role of the researcher (2013).

The data of the research are taken from words (subtitles) and images in the movie directed by Zack Snyder's "Man of Steel". "Man of Steel" was released in 2013. It is a reboot of the "Superman" film series that portrays the character's origin story. In the movie, Clark Kent learns that he is a super powered alien from the planet Krypton. He assumes the role of mankind's protector as Superman, making the choice to face General Zod and prevent him from destroying humanity.

There is one literary approach that meets the analysis, that is, archetypal approach. It concerns with demonstrating how the individual imagination shares a common humanity by identifying common symbols or images. Mythological critics identify "archetypes"(symbol, character, situation, or images) evoking a universal response. Wheelwright explains in *Metaphor and Reality* (in Guerin, 2005)

those which carry the same or very similar meanings for a large portion, if not all, of mankind. It is a discoverable fact that certain symbols, such as the sky father and earth mother, light, blood, up-down, the axis of a wheel, and others, recur again and again in cultures so remote from one another in space and time that there is no likelihood of any historical influence and casual connection among them. (111)



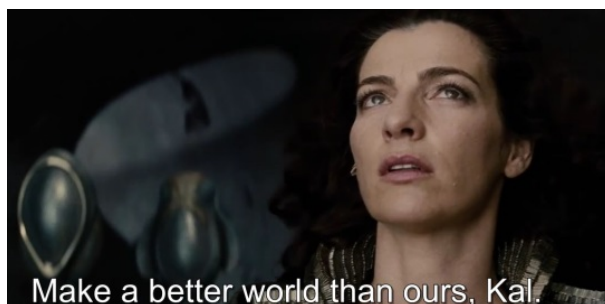


Referring to the symbol 'S' Superman has on his suit is such a hero archetype. The hero is involved in a quest (in which he overcomes obstacles). Kal El a.k.a Superman/Man of Steel sent to the Earth helps the people who live in the Earth from the disaster, and as what Kal El has said that 'S' in his suit does not stand for 'Superman' but it means 'Hope' in Kryptonite language. Lynn (1998) stated that archetypal images and story patterns encourage readers (and viewers of films and advertisements) to participate ritualistically in basic beliefs, fears, and anxieties of their age. These archetypal features not only constitute the intelligibility of the text but also tap into a level of desires and anxieties of humankind.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Superman is a fictional character that is widely considered to be a symbol of justice. Superman was Kal-El on the far planet of Krypton. After his birth, he was sent to the Earth on a rocket before Krypton's destruction. Kal-El began his life on Earth as Clark Kent, after his discovery and adoption by Kansas farmer and his wife. He was raised with strong moral values and maintained a decent life. He grew up in a normal family and tried to live life just like a normal child. However, as he matured, he realized that he was different. He displayed superhuman abilities, which he used to help solve problems within his community. He is often referred as 'The Man of Tomorrow' that many people turn to for help, and as 'Man of Steel' because he is a bulletproof, super hearing, having freezing breath and many other super characteristics that make him super of the super.

Since Kal-El was born, he was planned to save others out there beyond the galaxy. He was extraordinary because he was the first child who was born just like a normal one was in Krypton. He was sent to Earth because of a reason, that is, to save human race from human's arrogance and supremacy.

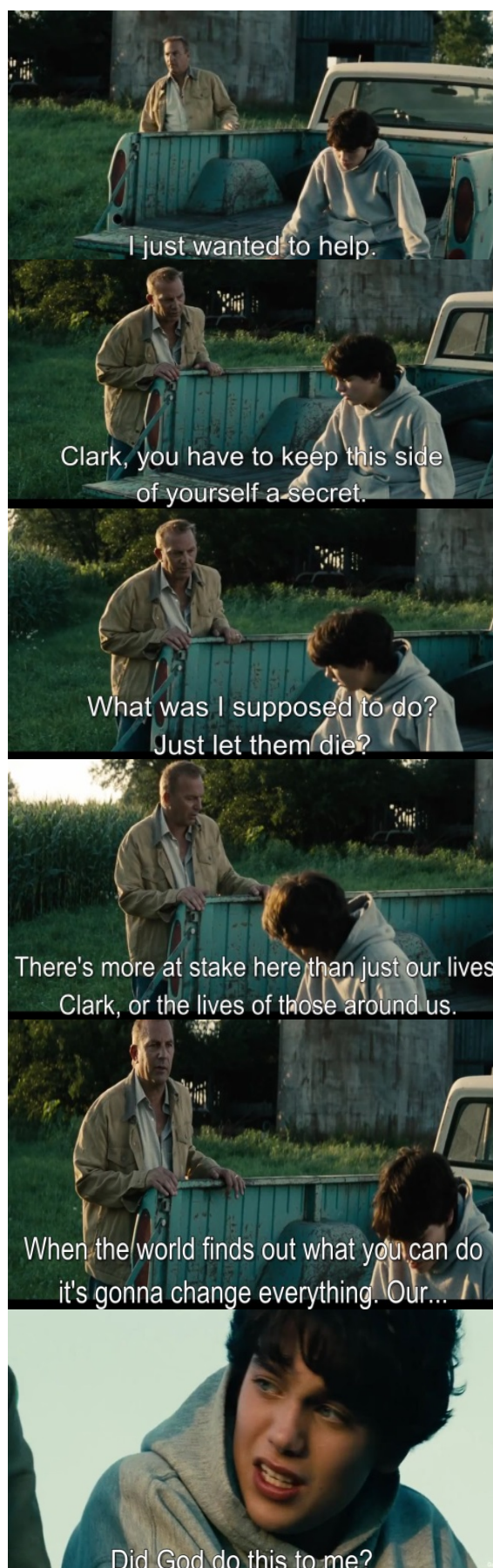


Make a better world than ours, Kal.

On Earth, Kal-El a.k.a Clark Kent was raised as a normal boy. He discovered his powers as a teenager and became dedicated to truth and justice. Jonathan Kent, Kal's foster father, has taught him how to manage his power, to mingle with others in the community, and also to keep the secret of his power to the society. Clark Kent has realized that he is able to help others. Even more, he can beat the ones who have always bullied him. However, his father does not allow Clark to show off his power even it is for helping others.



- He saw what Clark did.  
JONATHAN: I know he did.



Knowing his friends are in danger, a teenage Clark immediately saves the bus full of his friends from drowning. He does not care what people see and talk about him. One thing in his mind is that he has to save people's lives. What the teenage Clark thinks is the opposite of Jonathan Kent does. Because of his will-to-power and capability to help others, Clark's impulsive efforts to help evokes within him. It is because he realizes that his will-to power is able to save others. He wants to be honest to himself that he has the power to help. Jonathan Kent, however, forbids Clark to do what he has been supposed to do because it is merely to protect himself from the people's reaction to his power. Then, he blames that what has happened to him is because of God. Otherwise, his foster father presumed that Clark must keep it secret in order that the world does not reject him for his unbeatable power. Jonathan Kent also taught Clark to take everything for granted. It is not only to make him keep his secret but also accept what God's destiny. It happened in the movie "Man of Steel" when Clark wanted to save Jonathan Kent from hurricane that had made him die. From that moment on, he never trusts himself that what he will do to others can guarantee himself from other people's bad perspective. He keeps all in secret, but he still believes that he has been sent to Earth because of a reason, that is, saving people and the world.



Clark Kent a.k.a Superman has deep sense of morality. When discussing Superman and morality, we must first start with the other type of "super man," the *Übermensch*. Translated from German to be "super man," "beyond man," or "over man," the term is known from its embodiment of Friedrich Nietzsche's influential philosophy.

In many of his works, Nietzsche contrasts philosophical and theological views that promote a focus on an afterlife over this life. He believed that those who create moral systems focusing on the next world were dissatisfied with their own lack of power in this life.

By creating another world with an eternal heaven and hell, they were able to control the rules of the system. Codifying their beliefs as morality, they could impose their will upon others through intimidation and fear. In Nietzsche's view, these false systems must be exposed and destroyed to allow for the ultimate form of man (*Übermensch*) to reign. The *Übermensch* represents a new type of humanity free of binding moral systems, and the new man abides by a set of values that exist only within the material world.

Although idealized in a material sense, the concept of the *Übermensch* influenced two other concepts: Eugenic Perfection and Objectivist Individuality. The former promotes a

eugenic purification of humanity, which places those who are deemed perfect as “master” over those of a lesser stock, ultimately seeking to eliminate weakness through preventing the reproduction of those deemed unworthy. The latter promotes the absolute production of a unique individual over social considerations, setting those with talent above all others.

Both traits are attributed to the Kryptonian people. In the confrontation between Jor-El and Zod, it is revealed that Krypton has a rigorous genetic selection program in place that controls reproduction. Zod is a staunch defender of biological superiority, placing himself as both the perfect individual who should rule over all others.



When the world was threatened by the catastrophe that was done by General Zod and his people, it triggered Clark Kent to uncover his identity. General Zod is also another Kryptonian who is eager to destroy Earth and make it into another Krypton. The only one who is able to beat him is Kal-El, under the Earth name, Clark Kent. First of all, Clark felt hesitated that he is able to help the world because he was afraid that the world would reject his existence of being an alien. People condemned him as an enemy and could also threaten the life of the people. Clark Kent is willing to do what a responsible man is supposed to do, just what Nietzsche has suggested in his book entitled *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* said that “the one who is willing to risk all for the sake of enhancement of humanity”. Superman is the modern archetype of a dragon slayer. Superman refers to Clark Kent, while General Zod refers to dragon. Dragon slayer is the hero who faces death in order to save a threatened community. Superman is a super hero with extraordinary powers that make him the quintessential of a hero. He uses his power only for goodness by preventing evil from rampage in his city and to stop villains from doing bad deeds. Superman lives under a strict moral code that people dream of living.

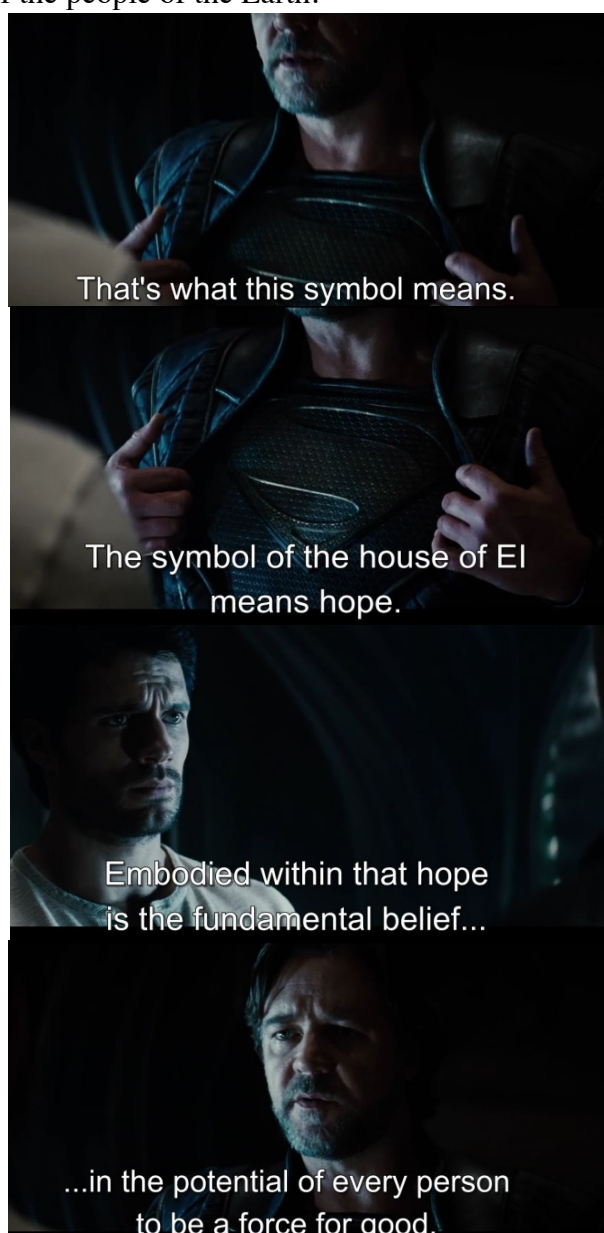




Because of Krypton's natural destruction, General Zod wants to rebuild Krypton in Earth by the helping of Codex. It is an ancient Kryptonian artifact that decodes the genetic makeup of the artificially incubated babies on the planet. It means that a child's genetic attributes before his or her birth, and Zod was born to be a soldier, as dictated by the Codex. He needs to codex in order to shape the genetic future of a reborn Krypton population. Furthermore, the power of codex has been put to Kal-El's body, and he has been destined to save the world by his power. Therefore, Kal-El is willing to do anything to save the world and to prevent Zod doing his dreadful plan.

Silimilarly to the Übermensch, Superman also has ambition and never feels tired and bitter in facing the hardship. He even strunggles to keep him becoming the highest of all without sacrificing other people's needs. When Kal-El was sent to Earth, his Kryptonian parents hope the very best thing for the life of the people where their son would be. Jor-El believed that the people of Earth are different from Kryptonians because they were more civilized and they would not necessarily make the same mistakes all the time if Superman was able to guide and give them hope. The "S" on Superman suit used to mean Superman

himself, but actually it has another deep meaning and reason why Superman uses that symbol. It means hope in Kryptonian language. Kal-El has been destined to give and spread a good hope to the life of the people of the Earth.



Another similar point in Nietzsche's concept of Übermensch in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it elevates that an overman does whatever he wants is for the sake of humanity. Clark Kent in the movies also did the same thing as overman, the main character in Zarathustra, did. The character of Clark Kent/Kal-El in the movies might be inspired by Nietzsche's philosophy, he remains very elitist, rigid, and at times he can be violent. Therefore, some question how becoming one of Nietzsche's version of superhuman beings without having turn into evil creatures. Clark Kent realizes that life of people in Earth is "greedy". There is always an equal exchange within it. In other words, it takes struggle and pain to get what he wants. It happened when he did not even feel doubtful to surrender to the government and ensure them that he was the one who could help to save the world.



Superman succeeded to save other people's life but the consequence was that he took another's life. Clark was able to stop Zod's plan, but in an act of desperation, he was forced to kill Zod to save people's lives. In contrast, what he had done was against Superman's nature. He has dedicated himself to the life of the people in Earth, but then when another one was eager to destroy what he has stood for, Superman is against what he has been destined. In Nietzsche, an overman is then someone who can, with appreciation, face life that may seem so suffering and absurd, knowing that the basic conditions of life will not change even when he is in the ideal state of an overman. Similarly with Übermensch, the Übermensch himself can be interpreted as a figure who defies common conventions. He likes to fight against danger, accepts challenges, and he is not even embarrassed from confrontations and continues to strive to transcend all the boundaries of ordinary people. He has got the feeling of unity of creation and destruction, good and bad taste of life and is able to say that life is good even it may seem terrible and questionable. He views all the past actions, silly or wise, accidental or achieving, as necessity of becoming himself.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Nietzsche's thoughts on human philosophy want us to fully love and live the life and position humans as superhumans. Nietzsche sees humans as creatures that must continue to exist, namely humans who have high aspirations to become super. For many, Superman is one embodiment of heroism. He is a mythic archetype and a pop culture phenomenon whose insignia is known across the globe. As an archetype figure, pop culture creation like Superman need to be taken in context: he is meant to be both human and more than human. Superhero is meant to give us hope that we, as ordinary people, can aspire to accomplish extraordinary things.

Superman could rule the world with an iron fist if he wanted to. Nonetheless, the best Superman stories show that the character is a paragon of humility. He does not use his gifts to make others feel small and worthless; he uses them to show people how to make the best of themselves. Furthermore, to be an Übermensch means to be aware of the fact that life is suffering and has no inherent meaning yet keep living and finding our won meaning. Superman knows that he might have to hurt others in the name of good things. Sometimes he can be selfish in a strategic way. In certain situations, we have to let people fall so they can

learn the error of their way. Sometimes we have to help them fail so that they can become a best version of themselves. The superman is aware of this and accepts it, instead of resenting the world. The philosophy of the superman is a lot like that of the stoics but on steroids. It is an extreme, one which Nietzsche thought to be the only salvation for humankind.

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