Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

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HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN

A BOOK FOR FREE SPIRITS

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PREFACE.

1

It is often enough, and always with great surprise, intimated to me that there is something both ordinary and unusual in all my writings, from the "Birth of Tragedy" to the recently published "Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future": they all contain, I have been told, snares and nets for short sighted birds, and something that is almost a constant, subtle, incitement to an overturning of habitual opinions and of approved customs. What!? Everything is merely--human--all too human? With this exclamation my writings are gone through, not without a certain dread and mistrust of ethic itself and not without a disposition to ask the exponent of evil things if those things be not simply misrepresented. My writings have been termed a school of distrust, still more of disdain: also, and more happily, of courage, audacity even. And in fact, I myself do not believe that anybody ever looked into the world with a distrust as deep as mine, seeming, as I do, not simply the timely advocate of the devil, but, to employ theological terms, an enemy and challenger of God; and whosoever has experienced any of the consequences of such deep distrust, anything of the chills and the agonies of isolation to which such an unqualified difference of standpoint condemns him endowed with it, will also understand how often I must have sought relief and

self-forgetfulness from any source--through any object of veneration or enmity, of scientific seriousness or wanton lightness; also why I, when I could not find what I was in need of, had to fashion it for myself, counterfeiting it or imagining it (and what poet or writer has ever done anything else, and what other purpose can all the art in the world possibly have?) That which I always stood most in need of in order to effect my cure and self-recovery was faith, faith enough not to be thus isolated, not to look at life from so singular a point of view--a magic apprehension (in eye and mind) of relationship and equality, a calm confidence in friendship, a blindness, free from suspicion and questioning, to two sidedness; a pleasure in externals, superficialities, the near, the accessible, in all things possessed of color, skin and seeming. Perhaps I could be fairly reproached with much "art" in this regard, many fine counterfeitings; for example, that, wisely or wilfully, I had shut my eyes to Schopenhauer's blind will towards ethic, at a time when I was already clear sighted enough on the subject of ethic; likewise that I had deceived myself concerning Richard Wagner's incurable romanticism, as if it were a beginning and not an end; likewise concerning the Greeks, likewise concerning the Germans and their future--and there may be, perhaps, a long list of such likewises. Granted, however, that all this were true, and with justice urged against me, what does it signify, what can it signify in regard to how much of the self-sustaining capacity, how much of reason and higher protection are embraced in such self-deception?--and how much more falsity is still necessary to me that I may therewith always reassure myself regarding the luxury of my truth. Enough, I still live; and life is not considered now apart from ethic; it _will_ [have] deception; it thrives (lebt) on deception ...

but am I not beginning to do all over again what I have always done, I, the old immoralist, and bird snarer--talk unmorally, ultramorally, "beyond good and evil"?

2

Thus, then, have I evolved for myself the "free spirits" to whom this discouraging-encouraging work, under the general title "Human, All Too Human," is dedicated. Such "free spirits" do not really exist and never did exist. But I stood in need of them, as I have pointed out, in order that some good might be mixed with my evils (illness, loneliness, strangeness, _acedia_, incapacity): to serve as gay spirits and comrades, with whom one may talk and laugh when one is disposed to talk and laugh, and whom one may send to the devil when they grow wearisome. They are some compensation for the lack of friends. That such free spirits can possibly exist, that our Europe will yet number among her sons of to-morrow or of the day after to-morrow, such a brilliant and enthusiastic company, alive and palpable and not merely, as in my case, fantasms and imaginary shades, I, myself, can by no means doubt. I see them already coming, slowly, slowly. May it not be that I am doing a little something to expedite their coming when I describe in advance the influences under which I see them evolving and the ways along which they travel?

3

It may be conjectured that a soul in which the type of "free spirit" can attain maturity and completeness had its decisive and deciding event in the form of a great emancipation or unbinding, and that prior to that event it seemed only the more firmly and forever chained to its

place and pillar. What binds strongest? What cords seem almost unbreakable? In the case of mortals of a choice and lofty nature they will be those of duty: that reverence, which in youth is most typical, that timidity and tenderness in the presence of the traditionally honored and the worthy, that gratitude to the soil from which we sprung, for the hand that guided us, for the relic before which we were taught to pray--their sublimest moments will themselves bind these souls most strongly. The great liberation comes suddenly to such prisoners, like an earthquake: the young soul is all at once shaken, torn apart, cast forth--it comprehends not itself what is taking place. An involuntary onward impulse rules them with the mastery of command; a will, a wish are developed to go forward, anywhere, at any price; a strong, dangerous curiosity regarding an undiscovered world flames and flashes in all their being. "Better to die than live _here_"--so sounds the tempting voice: and this "here," this "at home" constitutes all they have hitherto loved. A sudden dread and distrust of that which they loved, a flash of contempt for that which is called their "duty," a mutinous, wilful, volcanic-like longing for a far away journey, strange scenes and people, annihilation, petrifaction, a hatred surmounting love, perhaps a sacrilegious impulse and look backwards, to where they so long prayed and loved, perhaps a flush of shame for what they did and at the same time an exultation at having done it, an inner, intoxicating, delightful tremor in which is betrayed the sense of victory--a victory? over what? over whom? a riddle-like victory, fruitful in questioning and well worth questioning, but the _first_ victory, for all--such things of pain and ill belong to the history of the great liberation. And it is at the same time a malady that can destroy a man, this first outbreak of strength and will for

self-destination, self-valuation, this will for free will: and how much illness is forced to the surface in the frantic strivings and singularities with which the freedman, the liberated seeks henceforth to attest his mastery over things! He roves fiercely around, with an unsatisfied longing and whatever objects he may encounter must suffer from the perilous expectancy of his pride; he tears to pieces whatever attracts him. With a sardonic laugh he overturns whatever he finds veiled or protected by any reverential awe: he would see what these things look like when they are overturned. It is wilfulness and delight in the wilfulness of it, if he now, perhaps, gives his approval to that which has heretofore been in ill repute--if, in curiosity and experiment, he penetrates stealthily to the most forbidden things. In the background during all his plunging and roaming--for he is as restless and aimless in his course as if lost in a wilderness--is the interrogation mark of a curiosity growing ever more dangerous. "Can we not upset every standard? and is good perhaps evil? and God only an invention and a subtlety of the devil? Is everything, in the last resort, false? And if we are dupes are we not on that very account dupers also? _must_ we not be dupers also?" Such reflections lead and mislead him, ever further on, ever further away. Solitude, that dread goddess and mater saeva cupidinum, encircles and besets him, ever more threatening, more violent, more heart breaking--but who to-day knows what solitude is?

4

From this morbid solitude, from the deserts of such trial years, the way is yet far to that great, overflowing certainty and healthiness which cannot dispense even with sickness as a means and a grappling hook of knowledge; to that matured freedom of the spirit which is, in an equal degree, self mastery and discipline of the heart, and gives

access to the path of much and various reflection--to that inner comprehensiveness and self satisfaction of over-richness which precludes all danger that the spirit has gone astray even in its own path and is sitting intoxicated in some corner or other; to that overplus of plastic, healing, imitative and restorative power which is the very sign of vigorous health, that overplus which confers upon the free spirit the perilous prerogative of spending a life in experiment and of running adventurous risks: the past-master-privilege of the free spirit. In the interval there may be long years of convalescence, years filled with many hued painfully-bewitching transformations, dominated and led to the goal by a tenacious will for health that is often emboldened to assume the guise and the disguise of health. There is a middle ground to this, which a man of such destiny can not subsequently recall without emotion; he basks in a special fine sun of his own, with a feeling of birdlike freedom, birdlike visual power, birdlike irrepressibleness, a something extraneous (Drittes) in which curiosity and delicate disdain have united. A "free spirit"--this refreshing term is grateful in any mood, it almost sets one aglow. One lives--no longer in the bonds of love and hate, without a yes or no, here or there indifferently, best pleased to evade, to avoid, to beat about, neither advancing nor retreating. One is habituated to the bad, like a person who all at once sees a fearful hurly-burly _beneath_ him--and one was the counterpart of him who bothers himself with things that do not concern him. As a matter of fact the free spirit is bothered with mere things--and how many things--which no longer _concern_ him.

5

A step further in recovery: and the free spirit draws near to life again,

slowly indeed, almost refractorily, almost distrustfully. There is again warmth and mellowness: feeling and fellow feeling acquire depth, lambent airs stir all about him. He almost feels: it seems as if now for the first time his eyes are open to things _near_. He is in amaze and sits hushed: for where had he been? These near and immediate things: how changed they seem to him! He looks gratefully back--grateful for his wandering, his self exile and severity, his lookings afar and his bird flights in the cold heights. How fortunate that he has not, like a sensitive, dull home body, remained always "in the house" and "at home!" He had been beside himself, beyond a doubt. Now for the first time he really sees himself--and what surprises in the process. What hitherto unfelt tremors! Yet what joy in the exhaustion, the old sickness, the relapses of the convalescent! How it delights him, suffering, to sit still, to exercise patience, to lie in the sun! Who so well as he appreciates the fact that there comes balmy weather even in winter, who delights more in the sunshine athwart the wall? They are the most appreciative creatures in the world, and also the most humble, these convalescents and lizards, crawling back towards life: there are some among them who can let no day slip past them without addressing some song of praise to its retreating light. And speaking seriously, it is a fundamental cure for all pessimism (the cankerous vice, as is well known, of all idealists and humbugs), to become ill in the manner of these free spirits, to remain ill quite a while and then bit by bit grow healthy--I mean healthier. It is wisdom, worldly wisdom, to administer even health to oneself for a long time in small doses.

6

About this time it becomes at last possible, amid the flash lights of a

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