

# ON THE GENEALOGY OF MORALITY



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# On the Genealogy of Morality

By Friedrich Nietzsche  
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# ON THE GENEALOGY OF MORALITY

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## PREFACE

### 1

We, the ones who seek knowledge—we don't really know *ourselves*. There's a reason for that. We've never actually searched for ourselves—so how could we ever hope to find out who we are?

As the saying goes: "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" Our treasure—the thing we truly care about—is where our knowledge lives. And we're always drawn toward that, like bees returning to their hive. We were born to roam, to seek, to gather honey for the mind. Deep down, we only care about one thing: bringing something back to the hive.

As for the rest of life—what people call "experience"—how many of us really take it seriously? Or have the time for it? Honestly, when it comes to those parts of life, we're usually not all that present. Our hearts—and definitely our ears—are'n't tuned in.

We're more like someone lost in thought or absorbed in something divine, who suddenly hears the loud chime of a clock striking noon. He wakes up and asks, "Wait—what just happened?" That's how we are. We sometimes rub our ears after the fact and ask, in total confusion and embarrassment, "What did we just live through?" or even, "Who *are* we, really?" And when we try to count out those twelve loud chimes of life—our experiences, our being—we inevitably get the number wrong.

We are destined to be strangers to ourselves. We misunderstand who we are. And when it comes to ourselves, we're always going to get it wrong. For this will always be true: "*Each of us is furthest from himself.*" We are not knowers—at least, not of ourselves.

### 2

My ideas about the roots of our moral beliefs—the core topic of this book—were first roughly outlined in my earlier book *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. I started writing it in Sorrento during a winter when I was able to look back across the dangerous intellectual terrain my mind had wandered through up to that point. That was in the winter of 1876–77. But the ideas themselves go back even further.

Essentially, they're the same ideas I'm returning to now in these essays. I hope that with time they've grown—become sharper, deeper, stronger, more complete. And the fact that I still stand by them now, and that over the years they've become more connected, more interwoven, tells me something important: these ideas weren't just random thoughts or isolated insights. They came from a common source—a deep command of knowledge—something that came from within and has grown louder and clearer with time. That's what you should expect from a true philosopher.

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We don't get to be scattered or inconsistent. We can't make mistakes randomly, nor should we discover truths randomly. No—our thoughts, our values, our affirmations, our denials, our doubts and uncertainties—they should grow together like fruit on a tree. They should all bear witness to a single will, a single state of health, a single inner world, a single sun.

And whether or not you *like* these fruits of ours? That's beside the point. Does a tree care if you like its fruit? Do *we*, the philosophers, care?

### 3

Out of a moral sensitivity that I admit a bit reluctantly—and that, I should add, has been a deep part of who I am from an early age—I've always been drawn to the question: *Where did our ideas of "Good" and "Evil" actually come from?* My curiosity and skepticism pushed me toward this question early in life, and with such intensity—despite everything around me: my time, my culture, even my family background—that I could almost call it my personal *a priori* truth.

Even when I was just thirteen, the question of the origin of evil haunted me. At an age when kids are usually splitting their time between games and God, I wrote my very first little philosophical essay trying to tackle that question. And how did I solve it, in my childlike way? Well, I did what many do: I blamed God. I made Him the creator of evil.

Was I already being led by a kind of built-in instinct? A new kind of *a priori*, a new “categorical imperative” that spoke with a voice very different from Kant's, and far more unsettling—one I've paid close attention to ever since. Fortunately, I soon learned how to separate religious assumptions from moral ones, and I stopped searching for some supernatural origin of evil.

Some historical and philological study—along with a natural gift for psychological insight—quickly transformed my original question into a much sharper one: *Under what conditions did humans come up with the value judgments "Good" and "Evil"? And what are those values actually worth? Have they helped or hurt humanity's growth? Do they signal weakness and decay in human life? Or do they express strength, vitality, and confidence in life and its future?*

I explored many answers to these questions. I noticed differences based on historical periods, cultures, and social classes. I became obsessed with the problem, and that obsession gave birth to new questions, new investigations, new insights. Eventually, I found my own intellectual territory, my own fertile ground—a secret garden of thought, rich and blooming, hidden from the rest of the world.

And let me tell you—how happy we “seekers of knowledge” are when we learn to keep silent long enough to let something meaningful grow.

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### 4

The first real push I felt to publish some of my ideas on the origins of morality came after reading a small, well-crafted, and surprisingly precocious book. In it, I encountered a twisted, misguided kind of moral philosophy—classic English style, no less—and I was immediately drawn to it. Not because I agreed with it, but because it was so radically opposed to my own views. That opposition had a kind of magnetic pull. The book was *The Origin of the Moral Emotions* by Dr. Paul Réé, published in 1877.

I can say without exaggeration that I've rarely come across a book where I disagreed so thoroughly with every single conclusion and underlying assumption. But my rejection of it wasn't hostile or intolerant—it wasn't that kind of emotional reaction. Instead, it was a strong, reasoned negation. In the years following, while working on other writings, I often referred to Réé's arguments—sometimes at the right moment, sometimes not. But I never aimed to “refute” him, because I've never had much interest in that sort of thing. Refutations are not my goal. Rather, I did what comes naturally to someone with a constructive mind: I replaced an unlikely theory with one that seemed more likely. And yes, that might mean exchanging one philosophical error for another—but hopefully one that brings us closer to the truth.

Back then, I first made public some of the ideas that now take center stage in these essays. But I did so awkwardly, without the clarity or precision I have now. I hadn't yet developed a language suited to the subject, and I often fell back into old ways of thinking or found myself uncertain. I knew it—I wasn't blind to my own clumsiness.

Still, those early attempts matter. For example, in *Human, All Too Human*, I began tracing the early history of the concepts of “Good” and “Evil” through the lens of social class—how these values emerged from the differences between aristocrats and slaves. I also explored the development and worth of ascetic morality, and how much older and more deeply rooted the morality of custom is—so different from the altruistic morality that Réé and his fellow English moralists treat as the very essence of ethics. To them, selflessness is the thing-in-itself, the core of morality. But I saw something very different.

I also examined how justice arose—not as a moral ideal, but as a balance between people of roughly equal power, a practical equilibrium that made agreements and laws possible. Likewise, I questioned the common idea that punishment originally served to deter wrongdoing. No, that goal was added later, under specific circumstances. Punishment had other, older roots.

### 5

At that time, what truly mattered to me wasn't the specific theories—my own or others’—about the origin of morality. That question, for me, was just a stepping stone, a means to something much more important. What I was really after was the *value* of morality. To confront that

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question seriously, I had to step back from everything and enter a kind of intellectual solitude—one where I found myself almost entirely alone, except for the presence of my great teacher, Schopenhauer. That book I was working on then, with all its fire and inner conflict (yes, it was also a polemic), kept turning to him for guidance, as though he were still alive.

What I was questioning was, strangely enough, the value of the so-called “unselfish” instincts—pity, self-denial, self-sacrifice. Schopenhauer had praised these instincts so often and so enthusiastically, raising them up until they seemed like divine, absolute moral truths—things good in and of themselves. It was on the basis of these ideals that he ultimately said “no” to life, both for himself and in general.

But in my own soul, a deep suspicion began to grow—doubt that kept pushing further and further down to the roots of these instincts. I came to see them not as noble, but as dangerous—possibly *the* most dangerous thing for humanity. These instincts seemed to me like a grand temptation, a seduction—toward what? Toward *nothingness*. In them I sensed a quiet collapse, a growing weariness, a turning away from life itself. They felt like the first signs of decline—the slow, sorrowful sickness that makes people look backward instead of forward, that turns their will against life.

I began to see this morality of pity spreading like a disease—even philosophers were being infected by it—and I realized it was the darkest symptom of modern European culture. It was leading us somewhere: toward a new Buddhism? A European Buddhism? Toward *nihilism*?

And this obsession with pity, this glorification of it by modern philosophers—it's a completely new thing. Before this, philosophers agreed almost unanimously that pity was worthless. Just look at Plato, Spinoza, La Rochefoucauld, and Kant—four thinkers as different from each other as can be, but united in their contempt for pity.

### 6

This question of the value of pity and “pity-morality” may seem, at first glance, like a small, isolated issue—just a curious footnote. But anyone who stops to really investigate it, who dares to ask the hard questions, will end up where I did: staring out at a vast, unsettling landscape of possibilities. A kind of intellectual vertigo sets in. Doubts and suspicions multiply. Even the belief in morality itself—*in any morality*—starts to shake and stumble. And then a new, urgent question arises.

Let's say it clearly: **we need a critique of moral values**. For the first time, we must seriously ask whether these values are truly valuable. And to do that, we need to understand the conditions and circumstances under which these values arose, how they evolved, and how they may have become distorted over time.

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Morality may be a *result*—a symptom, a disguise, a disease, a misunderstanding. But it may also be a *cause*—a remedy, a stimulant, a restriction, or even a narcotic. We have to look at all of that. And what's wild is that up to now, no one has seriously attempted this kind of investigation—and most people still don't want to. They just assume the value of moral values is beyond question.

Everyone simply accepts that the “good man” is more valuable than the “evil man,” especially when it comes to humanity’s progress, usefulness, and future. But what if the opposite is true? What if the “good man” is actually a sign of decline? What if he represents a threat, a danger, a slow poison—something that drains humanity’s strength and future potential?

What if morality itself is the thing holding us back? What if *morality* is the greatest danger of all?

### 7

Once this new perspective had opened up for me, I realized I needed to seek out fellow thinkers—serious, brave, and hardworking colleagues who could help explore this vast and mostly uncharted territory: the actual history of morality. Not abstract theories or imagined ideals, but the morality that *really existed*, that people *actually lived*. Asking new, urgent questions while seeing with new eyes—that, in itself, is already a kind of discovery.

I thought, for example, of Dr. Rée—not because I fully agreed with him, but because I believed the nature of the questions he was asking would eventually push him toward better, more accurate methods. Was I wrong about that? Either way, I hoped to help sharpen his focus, to turn his bright and impartial gaze toward real history—toward the moral record that lies buried in time, not lost in the clouds of English philosophy and its heaven-blue abstractions.

There are better colors than blue for painting a genealogy of morals. Take grey, for instance—by which I mean real facts, tangible evidence, things that truly happened. That entire long, cryptic scroll of the past—the history of human values—is like a coded language we’re only just beginning to read. Dr. Rée didn’t know how to read that script. What he *had* read was Darwin. And so, in his philosophy, the Darwinian beast ends up shaking hands with the modern soft-hearted weakling—a mild, civilized creature who’s too refined to bite. It’s almost amusing. This creature wears the face of weary politeness, touched by pessimism and fatigue, as if to say: “Is all this moral questioning really worth the trouble?”

But I think it *is* worth it. I believe there’s nothing more rewarding than taking these problems seriously. And one reward—though it comes only after long, difficult effort—is that we may finally learn to approach them *playfully*. Yes, that gaiety—what I like to call *joyful wisdom*—is something earned. It comes only after deep, prolonged, and honest thinking, the kind of intellectual labor only a few are willing or able to do.

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And maybe, one day, when we're finally ready to say from the heart, "Let's go forward—even our old morality can become a source of comedy," then we'll have found a new stage, a new plot, a new scene in the great Dionysian drama of the soul's fate. And you can be sure that the eternal playwright—the great comic dramatist behind our existence—will know exactly what to do with it.

### 8

If this writing seems obscure or jarring to someone, I'm not so quick to blame myself. I assume the reader has spent some real effort on my earlier works. Understanding them isn't easy. Take my *Zarathustra*, for instance. I don't consider anyone qualified to say they've understood that book unless every single sentence has at some point wounded them deeply—and at another time enchanted them completely. Only then can they truly share in the serene, radiant atmosphere from which that book was born—in its light, its distance, its clarity, its certainty.

In other cases, people stumble because of the aphoristic style I use. But that's only because they treat aphorisms too casually. A well-crafted aphorism isn't "gotten" as soon as it's read—no, that's when the real work begins. That's when it demands to be unpacked and interpreted. And of course, that kind of unpacking requires a real skill—a whole art of interpretation.

You'll find an example of what I mean in the third essay of this book. It begins with a single aphorism; the entire essay is a commentary on it.

There is one quality, though, that modern people seem to have completely forgotten—yet it's absolutely essential for true reading. That quality is *rumination*—slow, deep digestion of thought. And for that, you need to be more like a cow than a modern human being.

Sils-Maria, Upper Engadine,

July 1887

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## FIRST ESSAY

### "GOOD AND EVIL," "GOOD AND BAD"

#### 1

These English psychologists—who, up to now, are the only philosophers who've really tried to trace the history of morality—are interesting characters themselves. In fact, to be honest, they're even more intriguing as people than their books are. They're like living riddles, which makes them fascinating.

But what are they really trying to do? Time and again, whether they realize it or not, they keep focusing on the most shameful, hidden parts of our inner lives. They try to explain morality by looking in the places where humanity's self-respect would least want to find its roots—things like sheer laziness, forgetfulness, random habits, automatic responses, or blind mechanical associations. They search for the driving force behind our moral sense in the most passive, dumb, and unthinking parts of human nature.

So why do they always go down that road? What's really motivating them? Is it some dark instinct to bring people down—a crude, mean-spirited impulse they don't even understand themselves? Or maybe it's the bitterness of disappointed idealists, who've become cynical and poisoned by their own disillusionment. Maybe they carry around a hidden resentment toward Christianity (and Plato), something they've never even consciously admitted to. Or could it just be that they enjoy the weird, painful, paradoxical, and irrational aspects of life? Maybe it's a mix of all these things—a bit of bitterness, a bit of gloom, a touch of anti-Christianity, and a taste for spicy controversy.

Some people say these psychologists are just cold, boring creatures—like frogs, crawling around people's minds the way frogs crawl through swamps.

But I disagree. I don't buy that image. And if we're allowed to imagine what we *hope* is true when we can't be certain, then here's my wish: that these psychologists are actually brave, noble, and big-hearted. That they've trained themselves to control both their emotions and their pain. That they've chosen to pursue truth—any truth, even if it's unpleasant, ugly, un-Christian, or morally uncomfortable—over what's comforting or desirable. Because those kinds of truths *do* exist.

#### 2

So let's give credit to the noble minds who try to rise above these so-called moral historians. But it's unfortunate that those same noble minds don't actually have a good sense of history. It's like all the helpful spirits of history have abandoned them. Their way of thinking is stuck in the past—old-school philosophy, completely unhistorical. There's no question about it.

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You can see how clueless their attempt to trace the origins of morality really is the moment they try to explain where our idea of “good” came from. According to them, the story goes like this: originally, people called certain actions “good” because they were helpful to others—because they were useful. Over time, people forgot why they praised those actions, and since they kept praising them out of habit, those actions came to *feel* good—as if they had some built-in goodness of their own.

But this explanation is obviously flawed. It’s textbook English psychology: everything boils down to **usefulness**, **forgetfulness**, **habit**, and eventually **error**. And somehow this whole messy mix became the foundation for the value system that we’ve been proud of—like it’s a badge of honor for humanity. That pride needs to be challenged. That whole system of values needs to be stripped of its value. Has that happened yet?

The first problem with this whole theory is that it looks for the origin of the concept “good” in the wrong place. The idea of “good” didn’t come from the people who received goodness—it came from the people who *did* the good, the ones in power. It came from the aristocrats, the strong, the noble, the proud. They felt they were “good,” and their actions were good—meaning excellent, high-ranking, first-class. In contrast, the common, low, vulgar people were considered “bad.” Out of this sense of superiority—what I call the *pathos of distance*—the nobles claimed the right to define values for themselves, and to name things according to those values. Utility had nothing to do with it.

Trying to understand this by looking through the lens of usefulness or practical benefit is completely off-base. We’re talking about a powerful, passionate explosion of value-creation—a hierarchy of worth created by a proud, dominant class. And that’s worlds apart from the lukewarm mindset of ordinary wisdom and practical calculation. This wasn’t an occasional burst of arrogance either—it was constant, ingrained, a deep instinct of a ruling elite that found itself face-to-face with an inferior group, a subservient class. *That* is where the distinction between “good” and “bad” comes from.

(And by the way, the right to name things belongs to the masters. You can even think of language itself as a tool of their power. They said, “this is this, and that is that”—and in doing so, they claimed ownership over the world.)

So the word “good” was never about altruism, despite what these moral philosophers want to believe. That association only emerged later, when the old aristocratic values began to decay. It was then that people began obsessing over the contrast between selfishness and selflessness. That obsession, I would argue, is the voice of the *herd instinct*—the masses trying to express themselves through this rigid opposition.

Even then, it took a long time before this herd morality really took over, to the point where people started judging everything based on whether it was “selfish” or “selfless.” That’s where

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we are now in Europe. Today, people are completely possessed by the idea that being “moral,” “altruistic,” and “selfless” are all basically the same thing. It’s a kind of mass delusion—a moral fever that clouds the mind.

### 3

Secondly, even setting aside the fact that the theory about how the idea of “good” came to be can’t be backed up historically, it also has a major flaw when it comes to basic psychology. The theory goes: people started praising altruistic behavior because it was useful, and then they eventually *forgot* why they were praising it. But how could they possibly forget something like that? Did altruistic behavior suddenly stop being useful at some point? Of course not. Quite the opposite—it’s something people have experienced as useful every single day, throughout history. So instead of fading from memory, this usefulness should have been more and more clearly reinforced in people’s minds over time.

If anything, the opposite theory actually makes more sense—though that doesn’t mean it’s correct. Take Herbert Spencer, for example. He argues that “good” basically means “useful” or “serving a purpose.” According to him, when people say something is “good” or “bad,” they’re just summing up and giving moral weight to their very clear, ongoing experiences with what is helpful versus harmful.

Under that view, “good” is simply what has proven useful in the past and therefore gets seen as highly valuable—valuable in and of itself. Now, like I said, I still think this theory is wrong, too—but at least it makes logical sense. Psychologically, it holds up a lot better than the other explanation.

### 4

The clue that first set me on the right path was a simple but powerful question: what do the original words for “good” in various languages actually mean? What’s their true etymology?

When I looked into it, I found something striking: in every case, these words traced back to the same basic idea—namely, that “good” originally meant *aristocratic* or *noble* in a social sense. The concept of “good” grew out of how the aristocracy saw themselves: people with high souls, privileged souls, the kind of people who stood above the rest. So when someone was called “good,” it meant they belonged to that noble class—not just in wealth or power, but in character.

At the same time, there was a parallel development on the other side of this social divide. Words like “common,” “low,” “vulgar,” and “plebeian” eventually morphed into words for “bad.” The clearest example of this is in German: the word *schlecht* (which now means “bad”) is historically the same as *schlicht* (which still means “simple” or “plain”). Originally, *schlecht* had no negative connotation—it just referred to the lower-class man as opposed to the nobleman. It wasn’t until

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much later—around the time of the Thirty Years' War—that the word shifted to mean something morally negative.

From the standpoint of moral genealogy, this is a key discovery. So why did it take so long to be noticed? The answer lies in the influence of modern democratic prejudice—this idea that all origins must be equal, which has infected the way people investigate history. Even the natural sciences and physiology, which are supposed to be the most objective fields, haven't been spared.

The damage this democratic mindset has done—especially to ethics and history—is huge. Just look at the infamous example of Henry Thomas Buckle. In him, the plebeian spirit of modernity, especially the kind rooted in England, erupted again with full force. His work gushed forth like some greasy, smoldering volcano, spewing out a kind of bloated, self-important eloquence that seems to be the standard language of all such eruptions.

### 5

Now, when it comes to our subject—which is a deeply personal and sensitive matter, meant only for a few ears—it's especially interesting to look closely at the original words for “good” in different languages. What we find in them are subtle clues that reveal how aristocrats once saw themselves as superior beings—truly a higher type.

Often, they described themselves simply in terms of their power: they called themselves “the powerful,” “the rulers,” “the commanders.” Sometimes they named themselves after what set them apart most visibly—like “the rich” or “the possessors.” That's the root meaning of the word *arya*, and we find the same meaning in both Iranian and Slavic language families.

But in some cases, they defined themselves by a trait they believed to be uniquely theirs—and that's what interests us now. For example, the noble Greeks called themselves “the truthful.” This can be seen clearly in the poet Theognis of Megara, who served as the voice of the aristocracy. The Greek word ἐσθλός was created to express this identity—it originally meant someone who *is*, someone real, someone who possesses true being. Later, it took on a more personal meaning: the “truthful one.” Eventually, it became a rallying cry for the noble class, and fully transitioned into meaning “noble.” It clearly contrasted the nobility with the “lying” and “common” man, the low type Theognis criticized and condemned. After the nobility eventually declined, the word ἐσθλός remained and evolved into something more refined and psychological—it came to mean a kind of inner nobility.

Meanwhile, Greek words like *kakós* and *δειλός*—used to describe the common people, those who stood opposite the *ἀγαθός* (the noble)—often emphasize cowardice. This gives us a clue for tracing the origin of the ambiguous word *ἀγαθός* itself.

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In Latin, we see a parallel development in the word *malus* ("bad"), which I believe can be connected to *melas* (Greek for "dark" or "black"). The word *malus* seems to have been used to describe the darker-skinned people—the black-haired natives of Italy who lived there before the Aryans arrived. The Aryans, who were lighter-skinned and blond-haired, were the ruling class who established dominance. Supporting this idea, in Gaelic, we have the word *Fin*—as in the name *Fin-Gal*—which originally meant "blond" but later took on the meaning of "good," "noble," and "pure." It started as a description of appearance and evolved into a moral term, marking the contrast between the fair-haired nobles and the dark-haired natives.

As a side note: the Celts were a blond race through and through. It's a mistake, like the one still made by Virchow, to associate darker hair in parts of Germany with Celtic blood. That darker coloring actually comes from pre-Aryan populations that once lived there. This holds true for most of Europe. In fact, the older subject race has gradually reclaimed dominance—physically, in terms of skin color and skull shape, and maybe even in intellect and social instinct.

So who's to say that modern democracy, or even anarchism, or the push toward communalism (that primitive form of society so many European socialists now embrace), isn't actually a massive step backward? What if these movements are signs of regression, a return of the older, conquered classes to power? And what if the ruling Aryan race is now declining—not just culturally, but biologically?

As for the Latin word *bonus* ("good"), I believe it originally meant "warrior." My guess is that *bonus* comes from an earlier form, *duonus*—just like *bellum* (war) comes from *duellum*, which includes the *duo* root. If so, then *bonus* referred to the man of conflict, the man of duality, of struggle—the warrior. That tells us a lot about what being "good" meant in ancient Rome.

And finally—could our German word *gut* (good) have originally meant "godlike," someone of divine or noble race? Could it be related to the name of the *Goths*, which was once the term for the noble class?

The full case for that theory doesn't belong here—but the possibility is intriguing.

### 6

One rule always holds true—without exception—though in some cases it might *seem* like there could be exceptions: whenever the ruling class is also the priestly class, the idea of political superiority eventually transforms into the idea of *spiritual* or *psychological* superiority. These priestly elites give themselves titles that emphasize their religious role, and it's in this context that we first see "clean" and "unclean" used as social distinctions. That distinction—between pure and impure—leads to a new version of "good" and "bad," one that's no longer just about social status.

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But we shouldn't over-romanticize these terms—don't take “clean” and “unclean” too seriously or symbolically. The early meanings of these words, and of ancient values in general, were shockingly literal, physical, and narrow-minded. They had nothing to do with metaphor or deeper symbolism. A “clean” person was simply someone who bathed regularly, avoided certain foods that might cause skin diseases, didn’t sleep with prostitutes or lower-class women, and had a disgust for blood. That’s all it originally meant—nothing more noble or profound.

Still, the priestly aristocracies took these distinctions and turned them into something far more intense—and far more dangerous. They sharpened the divide between “good” and “bad” in a way that dug deep chasms into the social world, creating gulfs so wide that even the boldest free thinkers would hesitate to cross them.

There’s something unhealthy at the root of these priestly societies. Their way of life—disconnected from action, steeped in self-analysis and emotional extremes—breeds a kind of spiritual sickness. It leads to nervous disorders, to psychological breakdowns. All priests throughout history carry a trace of this illness.

And what did the priests do to cure themselves? They invented remedies that, from a philosophical point of view, were far worse than the disease they were supposed to heal. In fact, humanity is *still* suffering from the side effects of these so-called cures.

Look at the kinds of things they prescribed: vegetarianism, fasting, celibacy, retreat into isolation—all of it meant to fight off the “corruption” of the senses. It’s like an ancient version of the Weir-Mitchell treatment (which included isolation), but without the nourishment and rest that actually helped people recover. Then consider the metaphysics of the priests, with its obsession with repressing the body, its weakening of the will, its endless hair-splitting and mind games. Think of the self-hypnosis practiced by Brahmins and fakirs, the fixation on mystical trance states—and the final goal of it all: *nothingness*.

Yes, “union with God,” the mystical merging with the divine, is really just another way of demanding *nothingness*. It’s the same goal as Nirvana in Buddhism. Make no mistake—the ultimate craving here is for *oblivion*.

In these priestly societies, *everything*—not just their remedies—is more extreme and dangerous. Pride becomes arrogance. Revenge becomes venom. Love becomes possessiveness. Ambition becomes tyranny. Even their “virtue” becomes pathological. And yet, it’s precisely on this kind of dangerous ground—the soil of priestly cultures—that human beings first became truly interesting.

Because it’s here that the soul of man grew deep.

It’s here that the soul became capable of evil.

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And those are the two things that have most clearly distinguished humanity from all other animals: **depth** and **evil**.

7

By now, the reader has probably guessed how easily the *priestly* way of valuing things can split off from the *knightly-aristocratic* way—and eventually become its complete opposite. The rivalry between priests and warriors only makes this division sharper, especially when these two powerful castes compete for dominance, driven by jealousy and mutual disdain.

The knightly-aristocratic value system is grounded in a celebration of physical strength, exuberant health, and vitality that goes far beyond what's needed just to survive. It's rooted in warfare, adventure, hunting, dancing, tournaments—everything that expresses strength, freedom, and the joy of being alive.

The priestly-aristocratic system, as we've seen, is based on very different assumptions. For this class, war is already a problem. And yet—and this is no coincidence—priests have always been the world's most dangerous enemies. Why? Because they are the weakest. Their inability to act directly turns their hatred into something vast and sinister—clever, poisonous, and endlessly patient.

Throughout history, the greatest haters have been priests—and the most intelligent ones, too. Their brand of hatred makes all other forms of cunning seem simple in comparison. If human history has any depth at all, it owes that depth to the twisted intelligence of the weak. The strongest example? The Jews.

The Jews—this priestly people—are unmatched in their strategic brilliance when it comes to *revenge through values*. When they were powerless in the face of their rulers and enemies, they found a method of retaliation that didn't require physical force: they reversed the entire value system of their oppressors. This was not just revenge—it was one of the most profound acts of moral transformation in human history.

Only a priestly people, steeped in resentment and trained in long-term vengeance, could have done it. They turned the aristocratic equation on its head. The old values—*good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = favored by the gods*—were flipped with terrifying precision. In their place came a new formula: *only the poor, the weak, the humble, the sufferers, the sick, and the repulsive are truly good; only they are pious and blessed; only they will be saved*. And as for the noble, the powerful, the wealthy? They were now labeled as *evil, godless, damned for eternity*.

We know exactly who inherited this massive reversal of values. And in the context of such a deep, world-changing declaration of war—because that's what this was—I'm reminded of

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something I once wrote elsewhere (*Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 195): that it was the Jews who launched the *slave revolt in morality*, a movement that has lasted two thousand years. And the reason we don't see it anymore is simple—it won.

### 8

What—you don't understand this? You can't see a force that's taken **two thousand years** to finally achieve its victory? That's not surprising. Long historical processes are hard to perceive, hard to grasp as a whole. But this is what has happened:

From the trunk of the tree that is Jewish hatred—that deep, powerful, creative hatred, the most profound the world has ever known, the kind that invents ideals and transforms values—there grew something equally unique: a new kind of love. A love more intense, more sublime than anything before it.

But don't be fooled. Don't imagine that this love rose up in some pure, angelic rejection of hatred. Don't see it as the opposite of that deep thirst for revenge. No—the *opposite* is true. This love grew *out of* that hate. It was the **crown** of that hate, its victory, its most dazzling and radiant triumph. It reached upward like a tree growing into the sunlight, expanding ever wider—but it never let go of its purpose. Even in the clear skies of “love,” it pursued its same old goal: revenge. It carried out its strategy, took its spoils, claimed its victory—with the same relentless energy as the roots that plunged ever deeper into darkness, into everything ugly and vengeful and festering below.

Now look at Jesus of Nazareth—the “bringer of love,” the embodiment of the Gospel, the savior of the poor, the sick, the sinful. Was he not the ultimate *temptation*—the most subtle, irresistible, and deadly seduction? He offered the world a detour, a backdoor path—right back into Jewish values and Jewish ideals.

And didn't Israel, in the end, achieve its ultimate revenge through this “Redeemer”—even though he seemed to stand against it, even though he seemed to destroy the old Israel? Could it be that this was all part of a **brilliant revenge strategy**—a cold, patient, hidden plan working deep underground?

Think about it: was it not the supreme cunning of this revenge that *Israel had to disown its own weapon*? That it had to **nail its own creation to the cross**, just so the rest of the world—Israel's enemies—would swallow the bait without hesitation, without ever suspecting a thing?

Can you imagine a more dangerous trap? A more powerful, seductive, intoxicating, and corrupting symbol than the **holy cross**? Can anyone conceive of a more twisted and potent idea than a **God on a cross**—the horrifying paradox of a divine being sacrificing himself, being tortured to death, for the salvation of humanity?

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And under that sign—**sub hoc signo**, under the symbol of the cross—Islam, with its revenge and its complete reversal of values, has triumphed again and again over all rival ideals. Especially over every form of **aristocratic** ideal.

9

“But why are you still talking about nobler ideals?” someone might object. “Let’s just accept the facts: **the people have won**—or the slaves, or the masses, or the herd, or whatever name you prefer. And if they triumphed through the Jews, then so be it! That would mean no nation has ever played a more important role in history. The ‘masters’ are gone, finished. The morality of the common man has prevailed.”

You could even describe this victory as a kind of *blood poisoning*—a mingling and mixing of races, a kind of spiritual contamination. I won’t deny it. But there’s no question that this infection has been effective. Humanity’s “redemption”—that is, redemption *from the ruling classes*—is moving full steam ahead. Everything is clearly becoming more **Judaized**, **Christianized**, **vulgarized** (what difference do the words make?). The moral transformation of humanity seems unstoppable now.

Sure, maybe this infection will slow down a bit. Maybe it will move more quietly, more subtly, with greater discretion. But there’s plenty of time. It no longer needs to rush.

In light of all this, does the Church still serve any real purpose? Does it still have the *right* to exist? Could humanity do without it? That’s the question.

Maybe the Church now actually *slows down* the moral transformation it once helped unleash, rather than speeding it up. But perhaps that’s its role now. Maybe that’s even useful.

Let’s be honest: the Church is a clumsy, tasteless institution. It offends anyone with a shred of refinement or truly modern sensibility. Shouldn’t it at least *try* to become more subtle? These days it drives more people away than it attracts.

I mean—honestly—which of us would even *want* to be a freethinker if there were no Church around to rebel against? It’s not the Church’s *doctrine* we hate—it’s the Church itself that repels us. **We like the poison. We just hate the bottle it comes in.**

That, at least, was the response of a freethinker to my discussion—a decent man, one who’s proven his integrity, and, of course, a proud democrat. He’d been listening closely all along and couldn’t bear my silence at the end.

As for me—when it comes to this topic, there’s much that I prefer to leave unsaid.

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10

The *slave revolt in morality* begins when **resentment** becomes creative—when it invents new values. This kind of resentment is felt by people who are unable to act—people denied an outlet for their power or anger—and so they take revenge in their minds instead. They invent a system of morality that allows them to feel superior, not by *doing* anything great, but by redefining greatness itself.

In contrast, aristocratic morality comes from a position of strength. It begins with a triumphant "yes" to itself—an affirmation of its own values and way of life. The slave morality, on the other hand, starts with a "no." It defines itself by *opposing* whatever is different, whatever is "not itself." That "no" is its one creative move.

This shift in moral perspective—this reversal in how values are created—is the hallmark of resentment. Unlike aristocratic morality, which comes from within, from strength and spontaneity, slave morality needs an external enemy. It reacts. It requires stimuli from the outside world to feel anything at all. It is, by nature, a *reaction*.

Meanwhile, aristocratic values arise from an inner richness. They are not defined by opposition. If the noble person even needs to name what is "bad" or "low," he does it only to contrast and highlight his own "yes"—his sense of self, of being good, beautiful, and happy. The "bad" is a shadow that comes after, not the source.

Now, aristocratic morality can sometimes get things wrong—it might misunderstand the lower classes or dismiss them too quickly. But even when it looks down on others, it doesn't do so with the kind of twisted, venomous hatred that defines the morality of resentment. Contempt, in the aristocrat, still contains a kind of indifference or even pity. It's too full of self-confidence and strength to distort its object into a caricature or monster.

Just look at the language of ancient Greek nobility when they talk about common people. Even the insults they use—words like *δειλός*, *πονηρός*, or *μοχθηρός*—eventually softened into meanings like "unfortunate," "pitiful," or "unhappy." These were originally terms for laborers and slaves—beasts of burden. But you can hear in them a lingering note of compassion. Even *bad* or *low* in Greek carries the tone of *unhappiness*, a trace of aristocratic dignity still embedded in the words. (Philologists will recognize this in words like *οἰζυρός*, *ἄνολβος*, *τλήμων*, *δυστυχῆς*, and *συμφορά*.)

The noble saw himself simply as *happy*—not because he had to look at others to feel that way, not because he needed to compare himself to enemies, and certainly not because he lied himself into it. His happiness came naturally, from *action*. To act was to live well. (That's what the Greek phrase *εὖ πράττειν*—“to do well”—means.)

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This stands in sharp contrast to the happiness of the weak, the resentful, and the oppressed. For them, happiness is passive—it's numbness, calmness, peace, quiet, a kind of moral *sedative*. It's about not feeling anymore. A kind of Sabbath rest for the soul.

The aristocratic person lives openly and confidently with himself. The word *γενναῖος* (noble-born) carries the sense of honesty, sincerity, even a kind of noble *naïveté*. But the resentful person is the opposite. He's not honest. His soul squints and hides. He thrives on secrecy, on dark corners and back doors. He's drawn to the hidden, the ambiguous. He excels at silence, at waiting, at pretending to be weak and small, at biding his time. These traits—this quiet cunning—make his type more *clever*, in the long run, than any aristocratic group.

For the resentful man, *prudence* becomes everything—it's his highest value, a survival strategy. But for the noble man, prudence is just a luxury, an ornament. He relies instead on deep, instinctive confidence—on his natural command of action. His spontaneity and emotional surges—bursts of anger, love, gratitude, reverence—are how noble souls recognize one another.

When an aristocrat feels resentment, it burns fast and is gone. It gets expressed, released, and doesn't fester. In many situations where a weaker person would obsess and cling to a grudge, the noble simply doesn't even notice. His enemies, his misfortunes, his wounds—they don't sink in. His nature heals and forgets. He has too much strength to hold a grudge.

Look at someone like Mirabeau: he forgot insults as soon as they were spoken. He couldn't *forgive* because he didn't *remember*—he was already past them. That's the kind of man who can actually love his enemies—if that's possible at all. The aristocrat *respects* his enemies. In fact, he needs a worthy enemy. He wants someone strong, honorable, impressive—an enemy who dignifies the struggle. He will tolerate no opponent who isn't worth respecting.

Now contrast that with how the resentful man creates his concept of “the enemy.” This is where his creativity shows up. He imagines the *evil* person, the *bad man*, the *oppressor*—and in contrast to that, he defines himself as “the good.” But that goodness is built on the image of the enemy. It's not a free affirmation of life—it's a response to hatred.

### 11

The method of the resentful man—the one who creates *slave morality*—is the opposite of the aristocrat's. The aristocrat defines the idea of *good* instinctively, from within himself. It's a spontaneous expression of his own being. Only afterward does he form the concept of *bad*, and even then, it's more of an afterthought—a faint contrast to highlight his positive self-image.

In slave morality, however, the process is reversed. *Evil* comes first. The resentful man fixates on what is outside himself, on what he hates, and calls it evil. Only then does he define himself—by opposition—as “good.” So while both aristocratic and slave moralities have opposites (good vs.

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bad, good vs. evil), these opposites are not equivalent. They are different *in kind*, because the original “good” is different in each.

And who, according to slave morality, is *evil*? Let’s not be shy: it’s exactly the person the aristocrat calls “good.” The noble, the powerful, the ruler. But in the eyes of the resentful, this noble figure is twisted into something ugly, demonic, hateful. He is seen through the venomous lens of bitterness and frustration.

We must admit that these nobles, when seen only from the outside—as enemies—can appear terrible. Among themselves, they are bound by customs, mutual respect, tradition, pride, and competition. They treat each other with care, restraint, and loyalty. But outside their own circle, in relation to strangers or enemies, they can act like wild animals suddenly let loose. They experience a kind of savage freedom when released from the pressures of social order, when they’re out in the wilderness.

There, they let go of their tension—often through acts that are brutal and violent: murder, pillaging, rape, and destruction. And they do it with the casual arrogance of someone playing a prank. They return from such orgies of violence feeling no guilt—maybe even expecting to be celebrated in song. This *beast of prey* lives at the core of every aristocratic culture. It’s the “blonde beast,” hungry for conquest and glory. It needs, from time to time, to break out—Roman nobles, Arab chieftains, German knights, Japanese samurai, Homeric heroes, Norse Vikings—they all express this same force.

These aristocratic peoples left behind the idea of “barbarian” wherever they went. And they were *aware* of it—they were even proud of it. You can see this pride in the high points of their civilization. Take Pericles, for example, in his famous funeral speech to the Athenians: he celebrates their daring, their reckless expansion across land and sea, their monuments of glory—built for good and for evil.

This aristocratic boldness, though chaotic and irrational, stands out: the wild unpredictability of their endeavors, the mad passion for victory, cruelty, destruction, and exaltation—these are crystallized in the image of the “barbarian,” the “Goth,” the “Vandal.” No wonder the rest of Europe has felt an enduring fear of German power. Even today, the deep suspicion surrounding Germans is the echo of centuries of horror in the face of the wrath of the blonde Teutonic beast.

I once pointed out how even Hesiod, the ancient Greek poet, was embarrassed by the violent greatness of the Homeric age. He wanted to fit all of history into a neat timeline—gold, silver, and bronze ages—but he couldn’t figure out what to do with the Homeric world. So he split it in two: on one hand, the heroic age, remembered by the aristocrats as glorious and divine; on the other, the bronze age, remembered by the oppressed as an era of blood, brutality, and soulless conquest.

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Now suppose the modern theory is right—that civilization means taming the wild animal in man, making him safe, domestic, manageable. Then it follows that all those instincts of *resentment* and *reaction*, the tools used to bring down the aristocratic classes and their values, must be seen as *instruments of civilization*. But—and this is crucial—that doesn't mean the people who used them *were* the bearers of civilization. Far from it.

In fact, I would argue the opposite: those who carried and nurtured these reactive instincts—descendants of slaves, serfs, conquered peoples (especially pre-Aryan populations)—represent **not** humanity's progress, but its *decline*. These “tools of civilization” may have been effective, but they're also shameful. They are evidence *against* civilization. They are the reason we should question whether our idea of civilization is truly noble.

Yes, it might be reasonable to fear the blonde beast that lurks inside aristocratic races. But isn't fear, mingled with admiration, better than being disgusted by the sight of what we have today? Because today, we are surrounded by the twisted, the shrunken, the vengeful—the mediocre mass of tame men.

And that's what we suffer from: **man himself**. Not because he's frightening, but because there's nothing left to fear. Instead, we are left with the worm-like version of man, multiplying endlessly, crawling across everything. The average, boring, emotionally dull human being now thinks of himself as the ultimate goal of history, as the meaning of life, as the *higher man*. And maybe, to some degree, he's right—at least in the sense that he has survived while others collapsed.

He still says “yes” to life, even if what he represents is a diminished, defanged form of it.

### 12

At this point, I can't help but let out a sigh—and a final hope.

What is it, exactly, that I find unbearable? What chokes me, makes me feel faint and sick?

**Bad air.** The stench of something sickly, something deformed, a twisted soul up close. That's what I can't endure—having to breathe in the moral rot, the spiritual decay of something *misbegotten*. That, above all else, poisons me.

Everything else? I can handle it. Need, poverty, sickness, solitude, exhaustion, even suffering—these things we can survive. We were born for struggle, for digging in, for fighting. We always come back into the light. We always return to that golden hour of triumph. And when we do, we stand once more as we were born: unbroken, resilient, sharpened and tensed like a bow—only more taut with every pull, more ready for the next great challenge.

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But still—I ask for this, if there are goddesses beyond good and evil who can grant such things—just *once*, give me a glimpse. Just one glimpse of something truly fulfilled, truly whole, strong, joyful, victorious. Let me see something that still makes us *fear*, something that stirs awe. Show me a human being who *justifies* humanity—someone whose very existence redeems us, who makes belief in mankind worth holding onto. Just once.

Because here's the truth: the greatest danger facing us today is the *shrinking*, the *flattening* of man in Europe. This is what exhausts us, what makes us spiritually tired. We see nothing around us that *wants* to be greater. Everything seems to be heading *backwards*, to something smaller, more careful, more comfortable, more *mediocre*. More tame. More Chinese. More Christian. Man is becoming “better”—yes—but in what sense?

And this is Europe's fate: that in losing our fear of man, we have also lost our *hope* in him. Even worse—we've lost the *will* to be man at all.

We look at man today, and we feel weary. We are *tired of man*.

And what is modern **Nihilism** if not that? That's what it is, plain and simple:  
We're tired of man.

### 13

But let's return to our central problem: the other origin of the concept of “good”—the version invented by the resentful man—still needs to be properly understood.

It's no shock that lambs resent birds of prey. But is that a reason to blame the birds of prey for doing what they do? That's just their nature. And when the lambs gather together and say, “These birds of prey are evil, and anyone who is as unlike them as possible—someone like us, a lamb—is good,” we can't really object to their logic. It's understandable. It's their way of creating a moral ideal.

Of course, the birds of prey might respond with a smirk: “We don't resent these good lambs. We even like them. Nothing tastes better than a tender little lamb.”

To demand that strength should not express itself as strength—that it should not seek to dominate, to overcome, to win—that's as absurd as asking weakness to act like strength. A quantity of force *is* just force: a tendency to act, to move, to assert. It is nothing else. There's no hidden “something” behind it. What we call “will” or “action” or “power” isn't an effect of some invisible doer—it *is* the doer. That's all there is.

But language tricks us. It makes us think there's a subject behind every verb. Like when people say, “The lightning flashes.” That's actually nonsense. There is no *thing* called lightning that

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*does* the flashing. The flash *is* the lightning. Similarly, we imagine “strength” as something separate from its expression, as though a strong person could freely choose *not* to act strongly.

This is a mistake baked into language—a mistake that science has not yet overcome. Even scientists say things like “Force moves,” as if force were some thing behind the motion. But it’s not. And this illusion of a hidden subject—this “doer behind the deed”—is the foundation of popular morality, of bad philosophy, and of the belief in the soul, in the self, in the “thing-in-itself.” It’s pure superstition. And it’s powerful.

Why? Because it serves the interests of the weak.

The suppressed, the downtrodden, the powerless—they need to believe that the strong *choose* to be strong, and that they themselves could be strong too, *if they only wanted to*. That way, they can blame the strong for being strong, and celebrate themselves as “good” for being the opposite.

That’s the trick. They say: “Let’s be the opposite of those evil oppressors. Let’s be good. Good is someone who doesn’t hurt others, doesn’t attack, doesn’t retaliate, doesn’t seek revenge, leaves judgment to God, hides away, avoids danger, expects little from life—someone like *us*, the patient, the humble, the meek, the just.”

But let’s be honest: this is just weakness dressed up as virtue. It’s nothing more than a strategy of self-protection—don’t act, don’t fight back, because you *can’t*. Even insects fake death when they’re scared. This kind of “virtue” is just a more refined form of playing dead.

Still, thanks to self-deception, this feeble instinct now parades around as if it were a conscious choice, a noble achievement, a moral high ground. As if weakness itself were a virtue, a decision, a *merit*. And to sustain this lie, the weak must believe in a subject, a soul, a free chooser—something that makes them feel as though their condition is something *they* decided, something *they* chose.

That’s why the belief in a freely choosing subject has been so useful—because it allowed the weak to interpret their weakness as a form of freedom. It let them believe that being what they are is not a limitation, but a *moral accomplishment*.

### 14

Let’s get back to it: the question of where *another kind* of “good” comes from—this version born from the mind of the resentful—still demands an answer.

So—who’s brave enough to really look into how *ideals* are made? Who has the courage to peer straight into the shadows? Come closer!

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Now imagine we're standing at the edge of a grim, smoky workshop. Wait a moment—don't rush in. Let your eyes adjust to the dim, flickering light. Yes, there—now you're beginning to see. Speak! Tell us what's going on down there. You, with the dangerous curiosity—go ahead, I'm listening.

"I don't *see* much—but I *hear*. There's quiet, spiteful whispering, hushed muttering in every dark corner. It sounds sweet on the surface—but it's fake. They're lying. You were right: weakness is being repackaged as virtue."

Go on!

"And impotence—the inability to strike back—is being rebranded as 'goodness.' Cowardice becomes 'meekness.' Submission to their enemies becomes 'obedience'—but only because they claim that *God* demands it. Their helplessness, their fearful crouching at the margins of life, is now called 'patience,' and even *virtue*. Since they can't take revenge, they tell themselves they *choose* not to. They call it *forgiveness*. ('They know not what they do—but *we* do.) They even talk about *loving their enemies*—and they sweat just saying it."

Go further!

"They're miserable, all of them—these whisperers, these deceivers in the dark. Still, they huddle together trying to warm themselves. And what do they say? That their misery is actually a *gift* from God! That it's a mark of His favor—like how one beats the dogs one loves best. Maybe it's a *test*, they say. A trial. A preparation for something better. A future reward in gold, no—in *happiness*! They call that reward 'Blessedness.'"

Further still!

"Now they're telling me that they're not only *better* than the powerful ones they must obey (whose boots they lick—not out of fear, of course, but because *God* demands obedience to authority), but that they'll also have a *better* time—if not now, then eventually. One day. In the next life. But enough! I can't take it anymore. **Bad air! Bad air!** These places where ideals are manufactured—they stink of the most blatant lies!"

Hold on! You're leaving out the best part—the *masterpiece* of these dark alchemists, these black magicians of morality. You haven't yet told me about their greatest trick: their talent for transforming anything dark into light, black into white, cruelty into innocence.

Haven't you noticed their *chef-d'œuvre*—their most cunning and audacious lie?

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Look! These creatures, seething with revenge and hate—what do they *say* their motives are? Listen closely. Would you guess, just from their *words*, that you're among people of bitterness and vengeance?

“Ah! Yes! Now I hear it clearly—and I’m holding my nose! They say, ‘We are the *good*, we are the *righteous*.’ What they really want—revenge—they call ‘justice.’ Their hatred? No, no—they say they hate *injustice*, *godlessness*. And their deepest longing? Not revenge (nothing so human and emotional!)—but the *triumph of God*, the *righteous God* over the *godless*. What little love they claim to have left is reserved not for their fellow haters, but for their ‘brothers in love’—all the other good and righteous souls on Earth.”

And what do they call the fantasy that consoles them—the grand promise that soothes all their pain and powerlessness?

“Do I hear this right? They call it the *Last Judgment*! The coming of their kingdom—the *Kingdom of God*! But until then, they live ‘in faith,’ ‘in love,’ ‘in hope.’”

**Enough! Enough!**

15

But let's go deeper: What exactly is this *faith*, this *love*, this *hope* they keep talking about?

These weaklings—what do they really believe in? What do they love? What are they hoping for?

Well, they too want to be strong *someday*, make no mistake. They’re dreaming of their own kingdom—“*the kingdom of God*” is what they call it. They’re so meek for now! But to reach that kingdom, one has to live a very long time—longer than life itself, in fact. Yes, *eternal life* is necessary so they can finally get compensated for this miserable earthly existence they’ve endured “in faith,” “in love,” and “in hope.”

But compensated how? And for what?

I think Dante made a clumsy error when he placed that famous inscription over the gates of Hell: “*I too was made by eternal love.*” Wouldn’t it have made far more sense to carve the following inscription over the gates of the Christian **Paradise**?

“*I too was made by eternal hate.*”

—That is, assuming it’s even appropriate to hang a truth above the entrance to a lie.

Because really—what is the *blessedness* of that paradise?

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We can probably guess... but let's hear it directly from someone who knows—Saint Thomas Aquinas himself, one of the Church's most revered thinkers. He tells us gently, like a lamb:

*"The blessed in the heavenly kingdom will see the torments of the damned, so that their happiness may be more delightful to them."*

And if you want something more intense, listen to the fiery words of Tertullian, one of the Church Fathers, who warned Christians to stay away from the savage joys of pagan bloodsports. Why? Because, he says, faith promises us *much better spectacles*—so much better!

Instead of athletes, we have martyrs. Instead of Roman games, we have Christ's crucifixion. But just wait, he says—wait for the grand finale, when Christ returns and everything is set right.

And then he launches into a fever dream:

"There are better shows yet to come! The Day of Judgment—unexpected, terrifying, when the whole rotten age of the world will be burned in a single fire! What a spectacle that will be! What shall I admire? What shall I laugh at? Where shall I rejoice? Where exult—watching so many kings, once thought to be taken up to heaven, now groaning in the depths of darkness along with Jupiter and all his witnesses! Watching governors and persecutors of Christ melt in fiercer flames than any they inflicted! Watching philosophers burning alongside their pupils, those proud men who taught there was no God, or that souls don't return after death!"

"And even the poets—not judged by Rhadamanthus or Minos—but dragged before the unexpected tribunal of Christ himself! How they'll scream! Tragedians more tragic than ever, actors writhing more wildly than on stage, charioteers blazing on fiery wheels, athletes skewered not in arenas, but in flames! But—no—I wouldn't even want them alive. No, I'd rather gaze endlessly at those who tortured our Lord. That man—yes, *that one*, that carpenter's son, that Sabbath-breaker, that Samaritan possessed by demons—that's the one they ransomed from Judas, beat with reeds and fists, spat on, gave vinegar to drink, and buried in secret so his body couldn't be found... *that's the one!*"

"Who could offer us such glorious sights? Not any governor, consul, or priest. But these spectacles—we already have them, in a way, through faith. Our spirit imagines them. Still—what will they be like in reality? *Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man...* But one thing is sure: the circus, with both stages—comic and tragic—has never had shows like *these!*"

*By faith:* so it is written.

## 16

Let's sum this up. The two opposing value systems—"good and bad" and "good and evil"—have been locked in a fierce battle for thousands of years. Even though the "good and evil" system has largely dominated for a long time, there are still places today where the outcome isn't settled. In fact, the battle has evolved: it's now being fought on a deeper, more intense, and more psychological level. These days, perhaps the clearest sign of a deeper, more complex soul is to feel this conflict within yourself—to be a battleground for these two opposing moralities.

The best symbol of this epic struggle—recorded in a text that has remained significant through the centuries—is "**Rome versus Judea, Judea versus Rome.**" There's been no greater conflict in human history than this: the clashing of two worldviews, two value systems in deadly opposition.

To Rome, the Jewish people represented the unnatural—a kind of mirror-opposite, almost monstrous. Romans saw the Jews as enemies of humanity itself—and from their perspective, that made sense, because they tied the future of mankind to the dominance of Roman, aristocratic values.

But what did the Jews feel about Rome? We can guess from many signs—but the *Book of Revelation* (the Johannine Apocalypse) is enough. It's one of the most vicious and vengeful texts ever written, filled with hatred. Yet, ironically, the Christian tradition attributed this hateful book to the *Disciple of Love*, John—the same person said to have written the most loving and poetic Gospel. This, oddly enough, reflects a deeper truth—despite all the literary forgery involved.

The Romans were strong, noble, aristocratic. No stronger or more aristocratic people have ever existed. Even their inscriptions still inspire awe—if you know how to read them. On the other hand, the Jews were the ultimate priestly people of **resentment**—with a rare genius for moralizing the masses. Compare them with others known for morality, like the Chinese or the Germans, and you'll see the difference between greatness and mediocrity.

So, who has won—Rome or Judea? There's no doubt. Just look at whom we bow down to today in Rome itself—not just there, but across half the world, wherever people have been "civilized" or are in the process of being tamed: **three Jews and one Jewess**—Jesus, Peter the fisherman, Paul the tentmaker, and Mary. Clearly, **Rome lost**.

There was a brief moment during the Renaissance when classical Roman ideals tried to rise again—Rome stirred like someone waking from a deep sleep beneath the new, Judaized Rome: the **Church**, essentially a global synagogue. But Judea quickly triumphed again, this time through the **Reformation**—a popular movement of revenge, mostly German and English, which ironically led to a revival of the Church and the ancient Roman order, now hollow and lifeless.

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Judea won again in the **French Revolution**, but this time more deeply. The last real political aristocracy in Europe—France's 17th- and 18th-century nobility—was crushed by the instincts of a resentful crowd. The people celebrated like never before. And yet, something extraordinary happened: the old, aristocratic ideal burst back onto the scene with unmatched brilliance—challenging the revolutionary cries for equality, humility, and regression. It proclaimed once again the right of the **few**, of the **noble**, to lead.

As if marking the path forward, **Napoleon** appeared—an absolute anomaly, a storm of energy and contradiction. He was both **monster and superman**, and in him, the aristocratic ideal came to life one last time.

17

So—was that the end of it?

Was the greatest of all moral oppositions—the clash between noble and slave morality—really settled and closed for good? Or was it merely postponed—delayed for a long time?

Might there not come a time, sooner or later, when the old fire erupts again—only more devastating, more carefully prepared than ever before?

And shouldn't we *want* that? With everything in us? Shouldn't we will it into being ourselves, *call* for it ourselves?

If, like my readers, you've started to reflect and think seriously about these questions, don't expect quick or easy answers. It's complicated.

And that's why I'll stop here. Let's assume that by now it's become clear enough what I mean—especially by that provocative phrase on the cover of my last book: **Beyond Good and Evil**. And let me be perfectly clear—that does *not* mean “Beyond Good and *Bad*.”

**A Note:**

I want to use this moment to publicly express a wish—something I've only mentioned privately in conversations with scholars until now.

It's this: I hope that some *faculty of philosophy* somewhere will organize a series of prize essays to encourage deeper research into the **history of morality**. Maybe this book can help spark such an initiative.

Here's a specific question I think should guide such a project—one that deserves the attention of not just philosophers, but philologists and historians too:

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**“What can philology—and especially etymology—tell us about the historical evolution of moral ideas?”**

And just as importantly, **doctors** and **physiologists** should be brought into the conversation too. These people must become interested in questions about the *value* of our inherited moral codes. In this, philosophers should act as mediators—once, of course, they've worked to transform the current chilly, distrustful relationship between philosophy and medicine into a partnership that is both respectful and fruitful.

Because the truth is this: every moral system, every "thou shalt" in history or anthropology, **first and foremost needs to be examined physiologically**—even more than psychologically. Medical science must weigh in. The question must be asked:

**“What is the actual *value* of a given moral code or system of values?”**

And not just asked once, but from *many* perspectives. For example, we need to ask: *valuable for what?*

What might be considered “good” for enhancing a population’s endurance or survival in a harsh climate might not be “good” at all if the goal is to *evolve a stronger, higher type* of human being.

We need to recognize that the “good of the majority” and the “good of the few” are very different measures—and yet English biologists, with their naïve optimism, continue to assume the former is automatically superior.

The sciences must now lay the groundwork for what will be the philosopher’s most vital task in the future:

**To confront the problem of value head-on.**

To define, rank, and create a new *hierarchy of values*.

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## SECOND ESSAY

### "GUILT," "BAD CONSCIENCE," AND THE LIKE

#### 1

Creating an animal that can **make promises**—isn't that precisely the paradoxical task nature has set for itself in shaping human beings?

Isn't that the *problem* of being human?

And the fact that this problem has already been largely solved is astounding—especially when you realize how powerful a force works *against* it: forgetfulness.

People often think of forgetfulness as just laziness or inattention—a kind of passive mental fading. But that's a shallow view. Forgetfulness is actually an active force, a kind of psychological gatekeeper. It blocks, filters, and maintains order in our minds. It functions like the digestive system of the soul: just as we don't remain constantly aware of the entire process of digestion, we also don't (and shouldn't) retain every single impression we've experienced. Forgetfulness keeps our consciousness *clear*, giving us space to take in the new, the important, the higher priorities.

You could say it closes the “doors and windows” of the mind for a while, quieting the noise of the body’s inner machinery so that more noble, conscious functions—like planning, ruling, and decision-making—can have room to operate. (Our inner life, after all, runs like an oligarchy, ruled by a few higher powers.) This kind of forgetfulness is what allows for joy, for presence, for peace, for hope, for pride. Without it, none of those things would be possible.

Someone who can't forget—who lacks this crucial mechanism—is like someone who can't digest. And that's not just a metaphor. Such a person can't *let go* of anything. Their soul becomes bloated and sick with what it can't expel.

But at the same time, this very forgetful animal—**man**—has created for himself a counter-power: **memory**. And memory here isn't just about remembering events. It's the internal *force* that resists forgetfulness—specifically for things like **promises**. It's not just that we *can't* forget a promise; it's that we actively *refuse* to. We hold on to it. We *want* to hold on to it. Memory, in this sense, is the **will holding itself together through time**—a continuity of intention that can stretch across months, years, even a lifetime.

This means that between the initial “I will” and the eventual “I have done,” there can be an entire world of unpredictable events—and yet that original thread of the will is not broken. It endures.

But think about what had to be in place for that to even be possible:

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- Man had to learn to distinguish between what is necessary and what is accidental.
- He had to learn to think in terms of cause and effect.
- He had to learn to anticipate the future and treat it as real.
- He had to become someone who could make long-term commitments—someone *reliable*.
- In short, he had to become a being who could **calculate**—to measure, to plan, to make himself *predictable*, even to *himself*.

Only then could he say, “*I promise*,” and actually **mean it**.

2

This is the long story of how **responsibility** came to exist.

The goal of breeding an animal that can make promises, as we've seen, depends on a more basic task: first, you must make man into something **predictable**. You have to shape him into a being that is **stable, uniform, reliable, like his peers**, someone who behaves according to set rules—someone you can count on.

That's what the **morality of custom** was for. That was its function throughout the longest stretch of human history. It was humanity's brutal and primitive self-discipline—an immense effort where man labored on himself. It was rigid, harsh, absurd, even idiotic at times. But it *worked*. Through rules, rituals, and social constraints, man became **calculable**.

Now, imagine we place ourselves at the *end* of that long and painful process—at the moment when the tree finally bears its highest fruit. What emerges?

We find something rare: the **sovereign individual**—a person who is **truly himself**, who has broken free from blind obedience to custom, someone *beyond morality*. (“Autonomous” and “moral,” Nietzsche says, are opposites.) This is the person with a long, deliberate, and consistent will—the kind of will strong enough to make and **keep promises**.

This individual possesses something new: a deep, vibrating **consciousness of power**. He knows what he has become. He is proud of it. He senses, in every fiber of his being, that he is the culmination of centuries of discipline—and that he now *owns* his freedom.

And what does such a person feel when he looks at those who lack that strength?

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He knows exactly how superior he is to anyone who can't promise, who can't stand as their own guarantor, who isn't trustworthy. He knows what it means to be *trusted*, to inspire **awe**, **respect**, and **reverence**. And he *deserves* all three.

This ability to bind himself with a promise, to make a commitment that will hold even in the face of disaster or fate—that is *power*. This mastery over *himself* also gives him power over the world, over others, over all weaker creatures with short attention spans and shallow wills.

The free man—the one who possesses an enduring, unbreakable will—uses that will as a yardstick to measure others. He **honors** those like him—strong, reliable, restrained. He trusts rarely, but when he does, it is a mark of distinction. His word means something. He gives it cautiously, sparingly—but when he gives it, he keeps it, no matter the cost.

And when he encounters the opposite—those careless fools who make promises without any sense of responsibility, or liars who break their word even as they speak it—he responds as he must: with **contempt**, with a **boot** to their face, or a **whip** across their back.

Because in this man—the one who is *truly free*—there lives a deep and instinctive pride in his rare capacity to make and keep promises. That inner strength, that ability to govern himself, to hold the line through time and fate, becomes second nature. It becomes his dominant instinct.

And what does he call this instinct, if he needs a name for it?

There's no doubt:

**He calls it his conscience.**

3

So—this “conscience”?

Let's be clear: what we're seeing in the sovereign individual is the **highest form** of conscience—so refined, so strange, so rare. It must have taken a very long time to reach this point. That proud ability to guarantee oneself, to say “yes” to oneself, to carry responsibility with strength—that is a **mature fruit**, and a very late one at that.

Before that fruit ever ripened, it hung bitter and sour on the tree for ages. In fact, for a very long time, such a fruit didn't even exist at all—no one had even dared to *promise* that it might exist. Even though the tree had already been growing toward that end, no one could yet imagine it.

But let's go back to the root of the issue. The question is:

**How do you create a memory in a creature like man?**

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How do you carve something so deep into this soft, forgetful, scatterbrained creature—this walking amnesia—that it actually *sticks*?

The answer? Let's just say it wasn't done gently.

There is probably nothing more horrifying in early human history than the way we first developed memory: through pain.

**Only what continues to hurt stays in memory.**

That was the basic principle of the oldest—and longest-lasting—psychology on Earth. And it worked.

To this day, whenever humans act *serious*—whenever there is solemnity, gravity, dark tones, or ritual—we can still feel the lingering presence of that ancient fear: the fear attached to **promises, obligations, contracts**. The *past*, with all its darkness and cruelty, still breathes through these things.

When early humans needed to create memory—to truly *make* something unforgettable—they didn't hesitate to use blood, torture, and sacrifice. They mutilated bodies. They mutilated *souls*. Think of the sacrifices of firstborn children. Think of castration. Think of the rituals of ancient religion. Because at their core, **all religions are systems of cruelty**—designed to carve ideas into the mind with pain.

Even the most extreme forms of **asceticism** come from this impulse: the desire to burn a particular idea into consciousness so deeply that it never fades. By starving, beating, or denying the body, all other competing thoughts are pushed aside—leaving only the "fixed idea," seared into every nerve.

The worse a person's memory, the harsher the punishment had to be. Ancient criminal codes were savage because early humans couldn't hold on to abstract rules. Pain was the only language strong enough to etch "Thou shalt not" into the heart.

Even we **Germans**, who don't exactly think of ourselves as cruel or especially chaotic, only need to glance at our medieval law codes to see how far we had to go to become what we are today—a *nation of thinkers*. Think about what it took to discipline our raw instincts and brutal tendencies.

Just consider the old German punishments:

- **Stoning**, even from the earliest myths (like the millstone falling on the guilty man)
- **The breaking wheel**—a gruesome German specialty

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- **Quartering**, by tearing or trampling with horses
- **Boiling criminals alive**, in oil or wine
- **Flaying**, slicing skin into strips
- **Cutting flesh from the chest**
- Or smearing someone with honey and leaving them out under the sun for the flies

This was how you taught someone to remember **five or six basic prohibitions**, so that they could live in a society and reap its benefits.

And in this way—through horror—human beings eventually gained something they could call **reason**.

Yes, *reason, seriousness, emotional self-control*, all those lofty human ideals—what dark foundations they rest on!

How much blood... how much cruelty... lies beneath every so-called “good thing.”

4

But how did that other dark thing arise—this whole *consciousness of sin*, this *bad conscience*?

Where did it come from?

And here's where we must once again turn to our modern-day genealogists of morality. And let me say, for a second time—no, maybe for the first time, clearly and directly: **they're useless**.

They have nothing but their shallow, modern experience, limited to five-feet-deep contemporary thinking. They know nothing of the distant past, and worse—they don't *want* to know. They completely lack the kind of historical instinct, that gift of “second sight,” which is exactly what's needed here. And yet, despite all this, they presume to write histories of morality.

Of course their results are bound to be wildly off the mark—way further from the truth than even they realize.

Let me ask: have these moral historians ever considered—even faintly—that the core moral concept of “**ought**” originally comes from the very practical and very physical concept of “**to owe**”?

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Have they considered that **punishment** developed not out of some theory about free will or moral responsibility, but entirely separately from it?

That the idea, “*He deserves to be punished because he could have acted differently,*” which today feels so natural, so obvious, so necessary—that idea is actually an extremely **late** and **refined** conclusion of the human mind?

And that it didn’t appear at the beginning of human justice at all?

Placing it at the start of things is not just historically false—it’s a complete **butchering of early human psychology**.

For most of human history, **punishment had nothing to do with guilt**. It wasn’t about blaming someone for having chosen wrongly. It was about simple cause and effect: *someone did harm, and you hit them back.*

It’s the same reason parents punish their children even today—not because of a legal theory, but out of **anger**. You hurt me, so I lash out. Simple.

But as humans developed, that instinctive response began to be moderated—channeled through another idea: that **pain can be a form of repayment**. That **injury can be balanced out**, evened up, by inflicting pain on the person who caused it. That *everything has a price*.

And where did this idea come from?

From the oldest and deepest human relationship: the relationship between **creditor and debtor**.

That’s where this whole idea of moral equivalence—“*an eye for an eye*”—comes from. It’s as old as any form of law or justice. And that, in turn, goes back even further—to the earliest forms of **trade, barter, and commerce**.

Before humans felt guilty, before they had “consciences” in the moral sense, they had **debts**.

And before they believed in “sin,” they believed in **paying what they owed**—even if the payment was made in blood.

5

When we look closely at how these early debt relationships were carried out, it’s no surprise (given what we’ve already seen) that they provoke suspicion and discomfort when we imagine the kind of society that created them.

Think about it: promises were made in these societies. But making a promise means you must remember it—and we know that, in early times, memory was created through **pain**.

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So, of course, these primitive societies were filled with **harshness, cruelty, and suffering.**

To make sure someone remembered their obligation—to make them feel, deep in their conscience, the **duty to repay**—people would pledge something tangible and serious as a guarantee. Something they still had control over: their **body**, their **freedom**, their **life**, their **wife**, even (in religious contexts) their **soul or peace in the afterlife.**

In ancient Egypt, for example, a debtor could be haunted by his creditor even **after death**, because disturbing the peace of the grave was considered a particularly severe punishment.

Most of all, the creditor had a sacred right to punish the debtor physically—to inflict **pain** in direct proportion to the size of the unpaid debt.

And this gave rise to detailed, gruesome **systems of legal valuations**: exact prices were put on individual body parts—how much a severed finger, an ear, or a limb was worth. The more precise and cruel, the better.

That's why I actually see it as a kind of **progress**—a sign of broader thinking—when Roman law (in the Twelve Tables) finally declared that it didn't matter how much or how little the creditor cut off: "*if he cuts off more or less, let it not be considered fraud.*" That's Roman boldness—less petty, less obsessed with exact equivalence.

Let's look at the underlying logic of this ancient system of “equal exchange.” It's strange, but revealing:

Instead of repaying a debt with **something material**—like land, money, or goods—the debtor gives the creditor something else: **the pleasure of punishment.**

That is, the **emotional satisfaction** of exercising power over someone weaker.

The creditor gets a kind of cathartic joy—**the joy of cruelty**, the thrill of *hurting someone just because you can.*

And the **lower** the social status of the creditor, the more sweet that feeling becomes. It's like getting a taste of being “one of the powerful.” The right to punish—especially to do so brutally—lets them feel what it's like to be a master.

Even if the actual administration of punishment has later been taken over by “officials” or “the state,” the psychological logic remains the same: **the punishment of the debtor gives the creditor the right to enjoy cruelty.**

In this early form of justice, *compensation* means **the right to inflict pain.**

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## 6

It's in this ancient world of **contracts and debt**—that gritty economy of promises and repayments—that we find the **birthplace of our entire moral vocabulary**: ideas like *guilt*, *conscience*, *duty*, the *sacredness of duty*.

And, just like everything great in the world, their origins are **soaked in blood**.

Really think about that: this moral world that we moderns hold so dear—it's never truly lost its taste for **blood and torture**. Not even in someone like **Kant**: even his cold, rational **categorical imperative** stinks faintly of cruelty.

It was here, too, that a dark and lasting association was born—an association between **guilt and suffering**.

But how did this happen?

Why should suffering—pain—*pay off* a debt? Why is it considered fair compensation?

Because, Nietzsche says, **causing pain feels good**. The creditor gets something in return for the loss he suffered: he gets to enjoy the intense satisfaction of making someone suffer. That “**sweet revenge**,” that surge of power. It’s a **pleasure**—even a **feast**.

And the poorer or lower-status the creditor is, the more delicious the opportunity becomes. It’s his chance to *play god*, to assert superiority over someone else, even if only for a moment.

This is **pure cruelty**, and it’s something that once lay at the **heart of justice**.

You can still see traces of it today. Even when the power to punish has passed to the state, what does the victim get out of it? A moment of catharsis. A symbolic share in the **right to hurt someone**. The desire to punish is, at its core, a claim on **the pleasure of cruelty**.

Now, Nietzsche admits this isn’t easy to face.

Modern people—“**tame house pets**” that we are—find it almost impossible to grasp just how much **joy and delight** ancient humans took in cruelty. It was so **natural**, so **innocent**, so **open**. The idea of **malice for its own sake**—what Spinoza called *sympathia malevolens*—was seen as a normal human instinct, something the **conscience approved of**.

If you’re really paying attention, you may have already noticed how deeply this desire for cruelty is embedded in human culture.

I’ve pointed this out before—carefully—in *Beyond Good and Evil* (§188), and earlier in *The Dawn of Day*. What I argued there is this: the **history of “higher civilization”** is, in large part,

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the history of the **refinement and spiritualization of cruelty**. We've **sublimated** it—we've dressed it up, disguised it, given it divine status—but we haven't lost it.

Think about this: until fairly recently, it was **unthinkable** to celebrate a royal wedding or a national holiday without **executions, torture**, or even **public burnings at the stake**. These weren't just add-ons—they were the **main event**.

The same goes for aristocratic households. It was *normal* to have a whipping boy or a jester or some other powerless soul to be the target of casual, cruel amusement. **Tormenting the weak** was an everyday source of fun.

Remember *Don Quixote*? Today, we read it with a sense of discomfort, even guilt—it feels sad, even cruel. But in Cervantes' day, people laughed themselves breathless. They saw it as the **funniest book ever written**. They had **no idea** how much suffering their humor rested on.

So here's the harsh truth:

**Watching someone suffer feels good. Inflicting suffering feels even better.**

It's ugly, but it's human—**all-too-human**. Even the apes, it's said, display flashes of “proto-humanity” in their invention of cruel little games.

Nietzsche's point?

**No feast without cruelty.**

That's what the oldest and longest history of humankind tells us. Even **punishment**—especially punishment—has always carried the mood of a **celebration**.

7

While entertaining these thoughts, let me say, in passing, that I have no intention of giving our modern pessimists more fuel for their gloomy mills. Quite the opposite.

I want to show that life was once **brighter and more joyful** back when humans **weren't ashamed** of their cruelty. It's only as man became ashamed of his instincts—ashamed of his animal nature—that the sky started to grow darker above him.

Pessimism, world-weariness, and existential disgust didn't appear in the most brutal, savage eras of history. No—those are the **products of later times**, of a society that has become **sick with morality**, a society where people turn against their instincts and feel ashamed of the most natural parts of themselves.

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As man tried to become an “angel” (to use the gentler word), he developed something like **spiritual indigestion**—a soul that recoils from even the joy and innocence of animals, a soul disgusted with itself, with life.

He even holds his nose before his own body, like Pope Innocent III, who once wrote a list of horrors that define the human condition: “filthy conception, foul birth, vile matter, stench, spit, urine, excrement...”

Now, whenever someone suffers, that suffering gets paraded around as **proof** against life itself—as if pain is a reason to condemn existence.

But people didn’t always see it that way.

There was once a time when humans couldn’t live without **inflicting suffering**, when it was a **thrill**, a form of **magic**, a **seduction to life**.

And just to comfort the modern weaklings—yes, maybe **pain hurt less back then**. Anyone who’s treated “uncivilized” peoples (like African tribesmen), even those suffering from internal injuries that would drive a European to despair, knows this: **they just don’t feel pain the same way**.

The more “civilized” you get, the **softer** and more sensitive you become—until one hysterical night of crying from a dainty cultured woman counts for more, in modern minds, than the accumulated pain of a thousand tortured animals in a lab.

But don’t think the craving for cruelty has vanished. Not at all. It’s just been **refined**, **spiritualized**, hidden behind psychological masks and dressed up in polite euphemisms.

We now indulge cruelty with a cleaner conscience.

Take “**tragic pity**”—a beautiful word, but it’s often just cruelty in disguise. Or “**longing for the cross**”—a spiritualized lust for pain.

What really offends us about suffering is not the pain itself—but its **meaninglessness**.

Ancient people didn’t think suffering was meaningless. Christianity, for instance, turned suffering into part of a **cosmic drama of salvation**. Even more primitive people saw suffering as **entertainment**—either as spectators or inflictors.

To make sure no suffering ever went unwatched, they invented **gods**—beings who could see in secret, who always caught every juicy moment. Suffering became justified if it gave the gods something to enjoy. It’s a dark logic:

“Every evil is justified if it amuses a god.”

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And this is not just primitive. Even today, in so-called modern Europe, we still carry around this ancient idea that **the gods enjoy watching cruelty**.

Ask **Luther** or **Calvin** what God thinks of eternal punishment. Ask yourself what kind of God would be so obsessed with damnation.

And don't forget the **Greeks**, whose gods laughed with glee as they watched the miseries of mortals. The **Trojan War?** It was a **festival for the gods**—a divine drama, thrilling and bloody. Homer knew it. The gods were there for the show.

Even Greek philosophers later pictured God watching the “moral heroism” of virtuous men with awe and delight—watching their inner torment, their sense of duty. Think of **Heracles of Duty**, standing on stage, suffering nobly. To them, **virtue without an audience was unthinkable**.

Isn't it obvious that the invention of “**free will**”—this wild, dangerous new idea that humans are totally responsible for their actions—was created specifically to keep the gods entertained? To make virtue more dramatic? To keep the spectacle going?

After all, a **deterministic world**, one where everything was predictable, would have bored the gods to death.

The ancients wanted **plot twists**. They wanted **moral suspense**. And free will made sure that **no play would ever run out of surprises**.

Ancient humanity was obsessed with **theatre**. It couldn't imagine happiness without **festivals**, without **spectacles**, without someone watching. Even **punishment** was a **performance**—a grand, sacred ritual of pain and meaning.

8

Let's go back to the feeling of “ought”—of having a personal obligation. Where did that come from? It has its roots in one of the oldest relationships people have ever had: the relationship between a buyer and a seller, a creditor and a debtor. That's where people first stood face-to-face and tested their strength, their worth, and their word against each other.

You won't find a human society so primitive that some version of this exchange doesn't exist. Early humans were so fixated on value, trade, and equivalency that you could say it basically defined how they thought. This was humanity's first form of intelligence—and maybe the beginning of our pride as a species. It was the first thing that made us feel above the animals.

Maybe even the word *Mensch* (man) carries a trace of that pride—it might have originally meant “the one who measures,” the creature that weighs, calculates, and assigns value.

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Trade, bartering, and all the psychological instincts that come with them are older than any government or legal system. In fact, our ideas of justice—things like duty, debt, obligation, and fairness—were first developed through personal exchanges, long before people ever came together to form societies. Eventually, those instincts scaled up and shaped how early communities interacted: group versus group, each comparing power and value.

And this old way of thinking—slow, relentless, hard to unlearn—led to a massive leap in human morality: the idea that *everything* has a price. Everything can be repaid.

This became the earliest rule of justice—simple, childlike, and brutal: fairness means settling the score. At first, “justice” just meant that two people or groups of equal strength agreed to make peace. And if one was weaker? Justice meant forcing them to agree.

### 9

If we measure things by the standards of the ancient world—and I mean a kind of deep antiquity that could show up again at any time—then the relationship between a community and its members is like that between a creditor and a debtor.

When someone lives in a community, they benefit from it—and not just in small ways. The community offers protection, stability, peace, trust. It shields people from threats and violence—the kinds of things someone outside the community (what the Germans used to call the *élend*, the outcast or exile) constantly faces. This security isn’t free, though. It comes at a price: the individual owes the community a kind of debt—he has obligations, a social contract.

And what happens when someone breaks that contract? The community—the wronged creditor—will demand repayment however it can. It’s not just about the direct harm caused by the crime. No, the criminal is guilty of something much deeper: he’s broken his word, broken his bond with everyone else. He’s betrayed the trust that gave him all those benefits of living in society. He’s not just a rule-breaker; he’s an ingrate and an attacker.

So what does the community do? First, it takes away everything he once enjoyed: protection, status, peace. But it doesn’t stop there. The punishment is also a reminder—an example to everyone else—of just how valuable those lost benefits really were. The criminal is kicked out of the circle. The community casts him back into the wild, into the status of an outlaw—and once he’s there, anything goes. He’s fair game.

Punishment, at this stage of human history, is basically just a ritual reenactment of how we’ve always treated outsiders, enemies, and the defeated: total cruelty, no rights, no mercy. It’s like a community going into battle against one of its own. And that’s why, historically, punishment has taken its shape from war—especially war seen as a sacred rite, complete with sacrifice and celebration. In other words, punishment is born from the brutal logic of *woe to the vanquished*.

10

As a community becomes more powerful, it starts to take individual wrongdoing less seriously. Why? Because by then, no single person poses a real threat to the whole. The wrongdoer is no longer seen as a dangerous enemy to be cast out. Instead, the community begins to restrain its own anger—especially the anger of those directly harmed—and even goes so far as to *protect* the offender.

This shift is reflected in the evolution of punishment. Over time, we see more and more signs of compromise: efforts to limit the reach of the anger, to stop the offense from causing wider chaos, and to settle things through compensation. There's a growing desire to treat wrongdoing as something that can be made right, as something that can be *repaid*—and, importantly, to separate the wrongdoer from the wrong. The more powerful and self-assured a community becomes, the more it softens its punishments. But the opposite is also true: when a society feels weak or threatened, the punishments grow harsher again.

It's always been this way: the richer and stronger the creditor, the more humane he can afford to be. Eventually, the true measure of someone's power becomes how much harm they can take without being truly harmed.

You can even imagine a society so confident in its strength that it treats its criminals like nothing more than annoying freeloaders. “What do I care about a few parasites?” it might say. “Let them live, let them thrive. I’m strong enough to handle it.”

So justice, which started with the hard-and-fast rule “everything must be paid for,” ends with the luxury of letting people off the hook. Like every noble thing on earth, it ends by undoing itself.

And what do we call this undoing? We give it a beautiful name: **grace**. But make no mistake—it is the privilege of the powerful, the final law of the strongest, their *super-law*.

11

Let me say a few critical words about the recent attempts to trace the origin of justice back to something entirely different—namely, to resentment. I'll whisper something to any psychologists interested in studying revenge closely: you'll find it thriving today in places like anarchist and anti-Semitic circles. It's still a hidden flower—like a violet, though with a very different scent.

And since like always produces like, it's no surprise that these groups are also the ones trying to sanctify revenge by calling it “justice.” They want to redefine justice as just another form of payback, a way to express the feeling of being wronged. In doing so, they're not just defending revenge—they're defending all reactive emotions: hatred, envy, mistrust, jealousy, suspicion, bitterness.

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I actually don't mind that part so much. From a biological perspective, these emotions have probably been undervalued, and it's worth reconsidering their usefulness. But what I want to highlight is this: it's precisely the spirit of revenge itself that's disguising itself now as this new kind of "scientific fairness"—but only when it benefits reactive emotions. As soon as more *active* emotions enter the picture—things like ambition, drive, personal strength—this "fairness" disappears, replaced by hostility and bias. Just look at Eugen Dühring, for example, who fits this bill exactly.

He claims that justice comes from reactive emotions like revenge. But in the name of truth, we have to turn that idea upside down: *revenge* is the very last place where justice develops.

True justice is rare. It appears only when someone is capable of staying fair even toward someone who's harmed them. That doesn't mean being indifferent or emotionally numb—it means actively and deliberately *choosing* fairness, keeping a calm and objective view even when personally offended or insulted. That kind of justice is a work of art—it's excellence—it's something we shouldn't expect too often.

In reality, even the most just people tend to lose their cool when they're wounded. A little malice, a little slander, and the blood rushes to their head. Justice evaporates.

Now consider the active person—the doer, the aggressor, the initiator. They're much closer to true justice than the person who merely reacts. The active person doesn't need to twist reality to justify themselves. They don't need to invent lies about their enemies. They can afford to see things clearly, because they're strong enough to act.

That's why active people have always had the more powerful, freer, and more honest perspective—and why they carry less guilt. In contrast, it's the reactive man—the one who stewts in resentment—who likely invented the concept of a "bad conscience."

If you look at history, ask yourself: where has the law truly lived? Has it grown from the world of the passive, the reactive, the spiteful? Definitely not. It comes from the strong, active types—from those who wanted to contain the chaos of revenge, to put boundaries around it, to replace vengeance with order and structure.

Everywhere that justice is practiced, we can see the powerful stepping in to calm the angry and protect even the wrongdoers from the revenge of the mob. They divert that vengeful energy toward more structured forms of judgment and punishment—settlements, penalties, and rules. The most decisive act of all? The creation of law itself. That is the moment when the strong say, "Here is what's right, and here is what's wrong," and by doing so, they draw everyone's attention away from the injury and toward the bigger picture of peace and power.

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From that point on, the entire community begins to learn how to look at actions not just emotionally, but more impersonally—even the victims themselves. And *this* is where right and wrong begin—not, as Dühring claims, with some act of violation.

Let's be clear: talking about “inherent” right or wrong is nonsense. In and of itself, harming, oppressing, exploiting, even destroying—these aren't “wrong.” Life itself *is* built on them. Life thrives by pressing forward, by overpowering, by reshaping the world through struggle and dominance. Without those elements, life doesn't even exist.

To be brutally honest: from a biological perspective, the rule of law is not the natural state of things—it's an exception. It's a temporary truce in the endless battle for power. Laws are tools used to build larger structures of strength. But if law were ever to become universal, if we actually treated all wills and all people as equal (as in Dühring's utopia), we would destroy humanity's future. It would be a war against life itself. It would be the death of growth, of vitality, of struggle—it would be a silent slide into *nothingness*.

## 12

Let's say a bit more about the origin and purpose of punishment—two topics that should be treated separately, though they're usually lumped together. And how have our moral genealogists handled this? With their usual naïve approach.

They find some *purpose* of punishment—like revenge, or deterrence—and then, assuming that's why punishment was invented in the first place, they declare the case closed. That's how they pretend to explain its origin. But using the end or goal of a thing to explain its beginning is the *last* thing you should do when trying to understand its history.

Here's a much more accurate (if more difficult) principle that needs to be taken seriously in any historical investigation:

### **The origin of something and its current use or purpose are often worlds apart.**

Once something comes into existence, it can be repurposed, used differently, and absorbed into new systems with new goals. In fact, this is the story of all development in life—it's about domination and adaptation. Whenever a stronger force takes hold of something, it gives it a *new* function or meaning, and often erases or distorts whatever its original purpose might have been.

This is just as true for things like legal institutions, social customs, political systems, works of art, or religious rituals as it is for biological organs. Even if you fully understand what something is used for now, that tells you nothing about where it came from or why it first appeared.

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People used to think that understanding an object's use meant understanding its origin. For example: "The eye exists to see," or "The hand exists to grasp." In the same way, they thought punishment was created for the purpose of punishing.

But all ends, all "uses," are just signs that a Will to Power has taken control of something and redefined it. The entire history of anything—a custom, an idea, an organ—is actually a *chain* of interpretations and re-interpretations. These new meanings don't need to be connected to each other. In fact, they often contradict each other and emerge randomly.

The evolution of a thing is never a straightforward journey toward some goal. It's a long story of takeovers and struggles, of different forces fighting to define what that thing means. It's also the story of resistance—of things trying to maintain their older identity. It's full of tension, accidents, and compromises.

Even within a single organism, the functions of different parts can shift dramatically. Sometimes an organ shrinks or fades away completely, and yet the whole organism becomes *stronger* as a result. In other words: **loss, decline, and death can be part of real progress**—because progress is always about becoming more powerful, and that usually comes at someone else's expense.

So how do you measure the *scale* of progress? By the amount of sacrifice it demands. If the masses must suffer or be sacrificed for the rise of a stronger kind of human being—then that's progress.

I'm stressing all this because this way of thinking is deeply unpopular today. Modern tastes would rather explain everything as random or mechanical than accept the idea that power drives history. Our democratic mindset resists anything that dominates or rules—and this anti-authority instinct now parades around as intellectual objectivity.

You can see this attitude everywhere now—even in the most "objective" sciences. In my view, it has already taken over biology and physiology. The result? We've lost sight of one of the most important ideas: **the will to power**.

Instead, we focus only on "adaptation"—which is really a second-rate kind of activity. It's about *reacting*, not acting. Spencer, for example, defined life as an increasing ability to adapt to external conditions. But that misses the entire point of life.

Life is about *creating*, not just adapting. It's about asserting, conquering, shaping, and interpreting. Adaptation is just a side effect of those stronger, more creative forces at work.

To reduce life to adaptation alone is to deny its very essence—and that's not just administrative nihilism (as Huxley once accused Spencer of). It's something much deeper: **it's a rejection of life's driving force**.

## 13

Let's return to our topic—punishment. We need to draw a double distinction here: on one hand, there's the fixed part of punishment—the custom itself, the ritual, the structured series of actions, the “drama” of it all. On the other hand, there's the fluid part—the meaning, the purpose, the interpretation attached to that process.

Following the historical method I laid out earlier, we can assume that the *practice* of punishment—the procedure—existed long before it had the *meaning* we now attach to it. The meaning came later. It was layered onto something that already existed. In other words, the ritual or process we now use for punishment originally served some other purpose. Only later was it interpreted and repurposed to serve the idea of punishment. This flips the common assumption on its head: just as people once believed the hand was made to grasp, many assume punishment rituals were invented to punish. That's not the case.

Now, let's talk more about that *fluid* part—the meaning. Today, in modern European society, punishment doesn't carry just *one* meaning. It carries a *whole mix* of meanings, all tangled together. The long history of punishment—how it's been used for all sorts of different goals—has created a synthesis of meanings that's hard to break apart. And more importantly, it's *impossible* to define it precisely. You *can't* define something that has a history. Only something completely fixed and unchanging can be neatly defined.

In earlier stages of culture, however, this mix of meanings was more flexible, more open to change. In each particular case, different meanings would come forward or fade into the background. For example, sometimes the *deterrent* effect of punishment was emphasized so strongly that it seemed to be the only reason for punishing—pushing all other purposes aside.

To show just how variable and unpredictable the *meaning* of punishment has been—and how the *same act* can be used to serve completely different purposes—here's a list of just some of the meanings punishment has had over time:

- **Punishment as a way to make the criminal harmless**—to keep them from doing more damage.
- **Punishment as compensation**—to make up for harm done to the victim (sometimes even just emotionally).
- **Punishment as a way to quarantine the disturbance**—to stop the problem from spreading.
- **Punishment as intimidation**—to make people afraid of those in power.

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- **Punishment as repayment**—to make the wrongdoer pay back the privileges they previously enjoyed (like by forcing them into slave labor).
- **Punishment as purification**—removing a harmful element from society or even an entire family line, like in ancient Chinese law, to preserve a certain racial or social type.
- **Punishment as celebration**—as a public display of dominance and revenge against someone finally overpowered.
- **Punishment as a reminder**—either to reform the criminal (the so-called "correction") or to leave a lasting impression on those who witness it.
- **Punishment as a fee**—paid to the ruling power that protects the wrongdoer from personal vengeance.
- **Punishment as a compromise**—a socially sanctioned form of revenge where vengeance is still desired and allowed by dominant groups.
- **Punishment as war**—treating the criminal as a threat to peace, order, and society's basic contract—as an enemy of the state, a traitor, a breaker of trust.

## 14

This list of the uses of punishment is definitely not complete—but it already shows us something important: punishment has been used for all kinds of purposes. Which is exactly why we're justified in rejecting one particular supposed purpose—a purpose that, at least in popular opinion, is still considered its most essential one. I'm talking about the idea that punishment exists to make the guilty person *feel* guilty, to awaken a sense of conscience or remorse. That's still the strongest reason people cling to punishment today, even though belief in it is crumbling for many other reasons.

But even from a modern psychological perspective, this idea—that punishment stirs up guilt—is false. And if it's untrue now, how much more absurd is it to project that idea onto the distant past?

The reality is this: true remorse is rare—extremely rare—in criminals or in those who are punished. Prisons and reform institutions are not breeding grounds for guilt or repentance. In fact, every careful observer, even those who *wish* punishment led to remorse, will admit that it usually doesn't.

Punishment tends instead to harden people, to dull their sensitivity. It pushes people inward, makes them feel isolated, reinforces their resistance. And when punishment *does* break a

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person's spirit—reduces them to a pathetic wreck—that outcome is even worse than the more common one, which is a cold, bitter stubbornness.

If we look back at the earliest stages of human history, it becomes clear that punishment actually *slowed down* the development of guilt or conscience—especially in the ones being punished. Why? Because when the criminal sees the legal and police system in action, they don't walk away thinking what they did was *wrong in itself*. They see the same kinds of acts—deception, violence, manipulation, surveillance—being committed by those in power, but labeled as *justice*, or even praised. Spying, bribing, ambushing, arresting, torturing, even killing—it's all done coolly, without emotion, with full approval of the system.

The criminal sees that those same acts are only judged by who commits them and why—not by the nature of the acts themselves.

That's not the kind of environment where a deep moral self-awareness grows. And for a very long time in human history, even the judges and punishers didn't think in terms of "guilt" or "conscience." They weren't thinking, "this person is evil" or "deserves to feel bad." They just saw someone who had caused harm—someone who had to be dealt with, like a sudden accident or a dangerous animal. The criminal was treated like a force of nature—something unpredictable and destructive. And for the one being punished, the punishment didn't feel like *guilt* or *remorse*—it felt like a bolt of lightning, or an avalanche, something terrifying and inevitable, but not *personal*.

### 15

This insight—that punishment doesn't awaken guilt—quietly made its way into the mind of Spinoza (to the dismay of many of his interpreters, like Kuno Fischer, who go to great lengths to misunderstand him here). One afternoon, while he was probably reflecting on some distant memory, Spinoza posed a question to himself: *What actually remained in him of that famous "sting of conscience" (morsus conscientiae)?*

Keep in mind, this is the same Spinoza who had thrown the concepts of "good and evil" into the realm of human imagination and who passionately defended the dignity of his "free" God against the blasphemous idea that God acted according to the idea of the "good" (which, he argued, would be tantamount to putting God under the rule of fate—something utterly absurd in his eyes).

In Spinoza's worldview, the world had returned to a state of innocence, like it was before the invention of the "bad conscience." So what was left of that inner sting? Eventually, Spinoza answered his own question: the *sting of conscience* is nothing more than "the opposite of joy," a kind of sadness, accompanied by the memory of something in the past that didn't turn out the way we expected (see *Ethics* III, Proposition 18, Scholium i and ii).

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For thousands of years, people who did wrong and were punished didn't feel guilt in the moral sense—they felt like Spinoza: "*This didn't go the way I planned.*" Not "*I shouldn't have done this.*"

They accepted their punishment like they would accept an illness, or bad weather, or death itself—with a kind of stubborn, resigned fatalism. This attitude still gives Russians, for example, an advantage over Westerners today when it comes to dealing with life's harsh realities.

If people back then judged their own actions at all, it wasn't with a moral lens—it was through the lens of *prudence*. The main effect of punishment was, without question, an increase in caution. It sharpened memory. It taught people to be more careful, more secretive, more suspicious. It taught them their limits. It taught them self-control—but only as a survival tactic.

In short: the most obvious effects of punishment in both humans and animals are fear, cleverness, and control over one's impulses.

Yes, punishment *tames* people—but it doesn't make them better.

In fact, you could even say the opposite is true.

As the old proverb puts it: "Injury makes a man cunning"—and to the extent that it does, it also makes him *worse*. (Though luckily, sometimes injury just makes him dumb instead.)

## 16

At this point, I want to cautiously share my own theory about the origin of the "bad conscience." It's not easy to grasp, and it really needs to be turned over, reflected on, and digested slowly.

I believe that the bad conscience is a kind of deep, serious sickness that humanity inevitably caught when it underwent its most radical transformation—when humans left behind the wild, instinct-driven life and were forced to live in organized societies, under rules and peace.

It's like what happened to sea creatures when they had to become land animals or die. Similarly, those half-wild, aggressive humans—who had evolved to live in constant conflict, prowling, hunting, and fighting—suddenly found their instincts useless. These primal energies no longer had anywhere to go.

From that moment on, they had to stand on their own, walk upright, carry themselves—where once they had been carried along effortlessly by their natural instincts. The change was crushing. They suddenly had to think, to reason, to calculate—using their weakest tool: their conscious mind.

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And those instincts didn't just disappear. They still demanded to be expressed, but there was no obvious outlet for them. So what happened?

They turned inward.

That's what I mean by the *internalization* of man. The instincts that once lashed out toward enemies now turned against the self. This is the beginning of what we would later call the soul.

Where before man had only a thin emotional skin, barely stretched over his surface, now his inner world deepened and expanded—because he was blocked from expressing himself outwardly.

The strict moral rules, the punishments, the crushing weight of social expectations—these were like walls built to contain the wildness of the old human animal. And so the wildness went underground, inside. All that aggression, cruelty, delight in pain and change and destruction—now turned inward.

*That's* how the bad conscience was born.

The man with no more enemies to fight, no more wild challenges to overcome, began to torture himself instead. He turned his instincts against himself. He beat himself up inside his mental cage, clawed at himself, created his own personal hell—out of sheer frustration, nostalgia, and homesickness for his lost freedom.

That's when humanity first caught this terrible disease: suffering because of being human. This was the fallout from violently ripping man out of his animal past and forcing him into a new environment of civilization, order, and peace—a hostile world for his old instincts.

It was a war against his own nature, against everything that had once made him powerful and proud.

But ironically, out of this self-torture emerged something completely new in the world—something so strange and rich and full of potential that it transformed everything.

From this inward war, a drama began—a deep, complicated, astonishing human drama that no casual observer could fully appreciate. Only the gods—or maybe even just *one* god, or the cosmic force of fate itself—could truly grasp the stakes and meaning of what had begun.

From this point forward, man became a spectacle worth watching. He was no longer just an animal. He became something uncertain and open-ended—a bridge, a transition, a promise. Something incomplete. Something that might yet evolve into something higher.

This idea about the origin of the bad conscience depends on a key point: the change that gave rise to it didn't happen gradually, and it wasn't something people chose. It wasn't an organic adaptation to new conditions. It was a violent rupture—a sudden break, an unavoidable shift, a fate no one could escape or even protest.

And here's the second key point: transforming a wild, unstructured, instinct-driven mass of people into something organized—into a functioning society—wasn't accomplished through reason or dialogue, but by brute force. The first "state" came into existence as something terrifying: a merciless, grinding machine that kept operating until the raw, half-animal human material had been shaped, kneaded, made pliable, and molded into form.

When I use the word "State," I'm talking about something very specific: a pack of *blonde beasts of prey*—a warrior elite, a conquering race—descending upon a much larger population that was still formless and nomadic. This is the real origin of the state.

So let's toss out that fantasy that the state began with some kind of social contract. No one who can actually rule—no natural-born leader—makes a contract. People like that don't negotiate. They arrive like storms or lightning bolts: sudden, overwhelming, unstoppable, alien. You don't hate them because they're too beyond you to hate. They *are* fate.

Their impact isn't rational; it's instinctive. They shape society the way artists shape clay—without thinking, without knowing exactly why, but with utter certainty. Wherever they go, a living structure takes shape: a clear division of roles, a sense of purpose and order in which everything has meaning and place. Nothing exists in this structure unless it's tied to the whole.

These born rulers and organizers don't feel guilt, or moral responsibility, or empathy. Instead, they embody the ruthless ego of the artist, the kind that shines like polished metal and justifies itself entirely through its creation—just like a mother justifies herself through her child.

No, the bad conscience didn't come from *them*. That much is clear. But still—without them, it never would have developed.

Why?

Because these rulers took a massive amount of human freedom and either crushed it, drove it underground, or locked it up. Their hammer-blows shaped society, but they also buried the primal, free instincts of early humans.

And *that*—this freedom forced inward, trapped, repressed, unable to act—is exactly where the bad conscience began. It was freedom turned against itself. It was the wildness of man made invisible, then forced to express itself only through inner suffering.

18

Don't underestimate this phenomenon just because it seems ugly or painful at first glance.

At its core, it's the same powerful force—the same creative energy—that you find in great artists and rulers, the kind of force that builds entire civilizations. The difference is that, in this case, that force isn't building outward, shaping the world or other people. Instead, it turns inward—it's working inside a single person, in a confined and twisted way, carving up their own soul. Goethe called this inner conflict the “labyrinth of the breast.”

It's the same will to power. But now it doesn't act on others—it acts on the self, on the person's own raw, animal nature. Instead of conquering the external world, this force becomes a kind of inner tyrant.

This is self-inflicted tyranny. It's the cruelty of an artist shaping himself, forcing a form onto a chaotic and suffering self. It means burning in a will, a judgment, a contradiction, a rejection. It's a dark, twisted form of love—a divided soul tormenting itself with deliberate suffering, simply for the satisfaction of mastery. This *active* bad conscience, this inner self-torturer, is also—perhaps surprisingly—the source of ideals and imagination.

Yes, this same inner force that wounds itself has also given birth to new forms of beauty and affirmation. Maybe it even *invented* beauty. After all, how could beauty have ever been recognized as such, unless someone had first experienced and defined its opposite—ugliness? Unless someone first said, “I am ugly”?

That little insight makes it easier to understand how values like “selflessness,” “self-denial,” and “self-sacrifice” became tied to ideas of idealism and beauty. It also helps us recognize what really lies at the heart of the pleasure we take in those supposedly noble behaviors: it's a refined form of cruelty.

So—at least for now—here's the takeaway: values like altruism grew out of the bad conscience. Without this instinct to turn cruelty inward, to abuse ourselves, there would be no foundation for valuing selflessness in the first place.

19

There's no doubt that the bad conscience is a kind of sickness—but it's like a sickness in the way that pregnancy is a sickness. If we want to understand how this sickness reached its most intense and awe-inspiring form, we need to understand what first brought it into the world.

But to do that, we have to take a step back and return to a point we touched on earlier: the legal relationship between a debtor and creditor. That concept took on a new—and to us moderns,

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pretty strange—form in early human history. In primitive tribal societies, the relationship wasn't just between individuals—it became a relationship between the living and their ancestors.

Every generation believed it owed a debt to its forefathers, especially to the original founders of the tribe or family. And this wasn't just a vague sense of respect or sentiment. No, they believed that the only reason they were still alive, the only reason the tribe continued to exist, was because of the sacrifices and efforts of these ancestors. So they felt they owed them something—a literal debt.

And the longer the ancestors continued to exist in the afterlife as powerful spirits helping the tribe, the more the debt grew. Why would the ancestors keep giving blessings for free? Primitive people didn't believe in getting something for nothing. So the living had to repay them—through sacrifices (including food), festivals, rituals, building temples, showing reverence, and most importantly, obeying customs. Every custom was considered a command passed down by the ancestors.

But the living always worried they hadn't done enough. That suspicion lingered—and it grew. Sometimes it demanded extreme repayment, something huge and terrifying—like the sacrifice of a firstborn child, or other acts of bloody restitution. The more powerful and successful a tribe became, the more they feared and revered their ancestors, the more they felt they owed. That's how the logic worked.

The reverse was true as well: when a tribe began to decline, when bad things happened and the people felt weaker or more chaotic, the fear of their ancestors faded. Their reverence dimmed. The ancestors lost their aura of wisdom and power.

Now imagine how far this logic could go: the more powerful a tribe becomes, the more powerful its ancestors seem. Eventually, the founders of the tribe grow in people's imaginations until they become something godlike, even gods themselves. Could this be the origin of gods? Maybe gods began as terrifying ancestors. Some might say they also arose from reverence or piety—but that's hard to argue when we're talking about the oldest and most primitive periods of human history.

And this was especially true for the aristocratic tribes—the ones who projected their own noble, powerful qualities back onto their ancestors and turned them into idealized heroic gods.

We'll return later to this theme of how the gods were “ennobled” and promoted. For now, let's keep tracing how this whole idea of “debt” continued to evolve in the human conscience.

## 20

History shows that even after the collapse of tribal and clan-based societies, the feeling of being in debt to the gods didn't go away. Just as humanity inherited the ideas of “good” and “bad” from

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the old noble class—along with its instinct for maintaining social hierarchies—it also inherited the weight of unpaid debts to ancestral and tribal gods, along with the urge to repay them.

This shift happened largely through the masses of slaves and lower-class people who, either by force or imitation, adopted the religion of their masters. Through that channel, the idea of being indebted to a deity spread far and wide.

For centuries, this feeling of spiritual debt kept growing—and it grew in direct proportion to how much the concept of God himself grew. The more exalted, powerful, and abstract the gods became, the greater the sense of guilt and obligation people felt toward them.

(You can see this process reflected in the chaotic genealogy of the gods—their battles, victories, and reconciliations mirror the history of war, conquest, and social blending among different peoples. As diverse groups merged into larger civilizations, their gods merged too. Every step toward a universal empire came with a step toward a universal god. And whenever a despotic ruler overthrew an independent nobility, monotheism wasn't far behind.)

So when the Christian God appeared—the most powerful, all-knowing, and morally demanding god in history—he also brought with him the heaviest burden of guilt that humanity had ever experienced.

Now, if we assume that we're beginning to move in the opposite direction—away from this God—then it seems likely that our collective sense of spiritual debt is also shrinking. In fact, we may already be far along that path.

And if that's the case, then atheism—the full rejection of God—might one day free humanity entirely from this feeling of being burdened by guilt over its origins or its “first cause.”

In that sense, atheism could lead us into a kind of second innocence.

### 21

That wraps up my rough sketch of how the ideas of “ought” (or “owe”) and “duty” evolved in relation to religion. So far, I've deliberately avoided discussing how these ideas were moralized—how they were internalized into our conscience, and how the idea of God became tangled up with the bad conscience. In the last paragraph, I even suggested that this moralization didn't happen—that once belief in our “creditor” (i.e., God) collapsed, the ideas of guilt and duty would collapse too.

But that's not how things actually went.

In reality, the moralization of these ideas—pushing them deep into the psyche, into the bad conscience—marked a turning point. It was the first serious attempt to stop or reverse the

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development I just described. It was the moment when the *hope* for some kind of redemption locked itself inside a prison of pessimism. The eye turned inward and saw—what?—an impossible situation. And from that moment on, the ideas of “guilt” and “duty” turned backwards.

But backwards toward *what*—or rather, toward *whom*?

There's no doubt: first, they turned against the *debtor*—against the person who owes. The bad conscience dug into him, spread throughout him like a parasite, feeding on him. And when the debt could no longer be paid, people began to believe it *could never* be paid. This is where the idea of eternal punishment came from—the notion that the penalty for sin is infinite and can never be satisfied.

And eventually, the blame turned against the *creditor*—against whoever was believed to be the source of human existence in the first place. That might be:

- The *first cause* of humanity—our origin, our “father,” now associated with a curse (think: *Adam, original sin*, the idea of inherited guilt).
- Or *Nature*, the womb from which humanity emerged, now seen as the root of all evil (this is the *demonization of nature*).
- Or simply *existence itself*, now viewed as some unbearable burden (cue nihilism, the longing for nonexistence, Buddhism, etc.).

And then—comes the most disturbing and paradoxical solution of all, the one that offered suffering humanity temporary relief. It was a stroke of genius. Christianity.

What did it propose?

That *God himself* would pay humanity’s debt. That *God* would suffer on behalf of mankind. That *God*, in an act of divine love, would sacrifice himself *to himself*, for our sake.

Yes—you heard that right.

The creditor became the scapegoat for the debtor.

And why?

Out of love. Can you believe it?

By now, the reader probably has a sense of what really happened, both on the stage and behind the scenes of this drama.

It was the will to self-torture—the cruelty of man turned inward. Once man was confined and domesticated in society (in “the State”), and no longer free to unleash his violent instincts outward, he turned those instincts against himself. That’s how the *bad conscience* was invented: an outlet for the natural human drive to hurt, now turned inward instead of outward.

Religion gave this tortured man the perfect tool to intensify his own suffering. The idea that he *owes something to God* became the ultimate instrument of psychological torment. He imagined in God everything that most violently opposed his own animal instincts—his sexuality, his aggressiveness, his love of freedom and spontaneity.

He interpreted those instincts as sin—as rebellion against God, the Father, the Creator. He trapped himself between two extremes: God and the Devil. Every natural impulse that he wanted to suppress, he externalized as part of God's righteous judgment. He didn't just feel guilt—he *glorified* his guilt. He gave it divine significance. He imagined God as his executioner, his eternal judge, his punisher, his torturer—forever.

This is a kind of psychological cruelty and madness that has no equal.

Man *wanted* to feel guilty beyond redemption. He *wanted* his punishment to be endless. He even tried to poison the very fabric of reality with the concepts of sin and retribution, so that there would be *no way out*—no escape from this self-made labyrinth of suffering. He created an ideal—the “holy God”—for the sole purpose of proving how unworthy he himself was.

Poor, insane, tormented creature! What monstrous fantasies and insane thoughts rise up in this animal called man—especially when he is denied the chance to act freely. Denied action, he breaks down, he turns vicious, self-hating, hysterical.

It's fascinating—but also deeply sickening.

This is a disease, beyond question—the worst disease to ever ravage humanity. And if, by some chance, someone still hears—through all the screams of agony in this spiritual madhouse—the faint echo of a cry of love, of redemption through love, they would only recoil in horror. Because that too, in this context, is part of the madness.

There is something terrifying in man.

The world has been a madhouse for far too long.

Let this be enough, once and for all, about the origin of the “holy God.”

Just because humans imagined gods doesn’t mean they had to end up with the kind of degrading picture we’ve been talking about. There are other, nobler ways to use the idea of gods than what we’ve seen in the self-crucifixion and self-loathing of man, which Europe has perfected over the last two thousand years.

Thankfully, we can still see a healthier vision just by glancing at the ancient Greek gods—those divine reflections of proud, powerful human beings. The Greeks saw their gods as idealized versions of themselves, and they didn’t use them as tools for guilt or inner torment. Instead, the gods were shields against *bad conscience*—so that the Greeks could enjoy their own vitality, strength, and freedom of soul.

This is the exact opposite of what Christianity has done with its god.

And those radiant, lionhearted Greeks took this outlook very far. Even when they went too far in their freedom or irreverence, their chief god, Zeus, would merely offer a gentle reminder. In one Homeric passage, he comments on mortals like this—referring to the story of Aegisthus, who brought tragedy on himself:

“It’s amazing how they complain, these mortals, against the gods.  
They blame us for their troubles, but they bring about their own destruction  
by acting foolishly—against all warnings, against their fate.”

Notice how Zeus isn’t furious with them. He’s not judging them harshly. He sees them with a kind of amused pity: “How foolish they are!” That’s the Greek way of looking at human wrongdoing.

Not sin. **Folly**. Got that?

Even in their darkest moments, the Greeks of their strongest and noblest period explained human failure not as moral corruption, but as a kind of error—a lapse of judgment, a moment of madness. And when one of their peers committed a shocking or impious act, they would ask, “How is this possible? How could such a thing happen to someone like us—men of noble blood, good character, refined upbringing?”

And eventually, they’d land on this answer: “A god must have led him astray.” That explanation—"he was struck by a god"—became the classic Greek solution. It’s telling. The gods didn’t exist to punish man. They were there to help explain—even justify—his failings. The gods didn’t carry out vengeance.

**They carried the blame.**

24

I'll finish with three questions—yes, three, as you'll see.

**First:** "Is this an ideal that's being raised up here—or torn down?"

Well, let me ask you something: Have you really considered the cost of every ideal ever created in the world? Just think—how much truth had to be distorted or ignored? How many lies had to be made sacred? How many consciences had to be shaken, bent, or broken? How many pounds of "God" had to be sacrificed, each and every time? For one new altar to be built, another has to be smashed to rubble. That's the law. Show me one exception.

**We moderns**—we're the heirs of a long, slow tradition of tearing our instincts apart, dissecting our conscience, and punishing ourselves. That's been our deepest and most sustained form of discipline—maybe even our greatest creative act, or at least the most refined example of our twisted taste.

For so long, man has looked at his natural instincts with suspicion and loathing, until they fused with his guilty conscience.

And so I ask:

**What if we flipped it around?**

What if we turned that same suspicion and self-loathing on our *unnatural* instincts instead—on those so-called “higher” ideals that go against life, against the body, against instinct and nature? What if we treated the transcendental, the mystical, the “spiritual” as the real sickness? What if all the world-rejecting, body-denying, guilt-soaked ideals of the past were what actually deserved our contempt?

But who today has the strength for that?

Who could dare such a reversal?

We'd be swarmed at once—not just by the “good” people of the world, but by the lazy, the cautious, the vain, the hysterical, and the exhausted. Nothing shocks and offends them more than someone who dares to impose a severe standard on themselves, who doesn't just “go along with the flow” and “let themselves go,” like everyone else.

To make such a revolution possible, we'd need a different kind of soul—one shaped by real battles and real victories, someone who craves challenge, danger, and even pain. We'd need someone who thrives in high altitudes, both literal and metaphorical—who can breathe the sharp,

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cold air of mountains and isolation. Someone with a kind of sublime mischief, a bold and clear-eyed audacity born of great health.

Yes, that's the terrible truth: **we would need a new kind of great health.**

**Is that even possible today?**

Maybe not now. But someday—in an age stronger than this one, stronger than our sickly, introspective age—he must come.

He will come.

The redeemer—not of sin, but of life itself. A creator full of deep love *and* deeper scorn, who plunges into reality—not to escape it, but to transform it. A man misunderstood by the masses, who think he's escaping the world, when really he's digging into it, burrowing deep, so that when he emerges again, he can save it. Save it from the curse of the old ideals.

This man of the future will free us—from the old God, from the sickness of guilt, from the pull toward nothingness. He will ring in the great noon, the judgment, the turning point. He will restore freedom to the will, meaning to the earth, and hope to mankind.

**This Anti-Christ, this Anti-Nihilist,  
this conqueror of God and of Nothingness—  
he must one day come.**

25

**“But what am I even doing? Enough! Enough already!”**

At this point, there's only one proper thing for me to do: **shut up.**

Because otherwise I'd be stepping into territory that belongs to someone else—someone younger, someone stronger, someone more forward-facing than I am—someone who stands firmly in the future.

That realm is reserved for **Zarathustra—**

**Zarathustra, the godless one.**

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## THIRD ESSAY

### WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ASCETIC IDEALS?

"Wisdom wants us to be bold, playful, and strong—she's like a woman, and she only falls for warriors." – Thus Spake Zarathustra

## 1

#### What does the ascetic ideal really mean?

For **artists**, it either means nothing at all, or way too much—sometimes it inspires them, sometimes it overwhelms them.

For **philosophers and scholars**, it's basically an instinct for the lifestyle that best supports deep thinking—quiet, discipline, simplicity.

For **women**, at best, it's an added layer of seductiveness—a touch of fragility or saintliness that makes a beautiful body seem even more divine.

For **those who are physically weak or constantly complaining** (which, Nietzsche says, is most people), it's a way to act like they're *above* the world—like suffering makes them holy. It becomes a kind of spiritual self-indulgence, a defense mechanism to cope with boredom and chronic pain.

For **priests**, it's not just belief—it's their main tool of influence. It's how they maintain power and claim moral authority over others.

For **saints**, the ascetic ideal is an excuse to disappear from the world altogether. It gives them a way to hibernate from life, a final desire for glory that amounts to finding peace in complete nothingness—what they call “God.” It’s their version of madness.

And yet, the very fact that this ideal has meant so much to so many people reveals something essential about human nature:

We’re terrified of emptiness. We *need* a purpose. And if we can’t find a real one, we’ll choose *nothingness* over having no purpose at all.

**Still not clear? You didn't get it? Not at all?**

Alright then—**let's start from the top.**

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2

**What do ascetic ideals actually mean?** Take a specific example—something I've been asked about a lot: *Why did an artist like Richard Wagner start glorifying chastity in his old age?*

Sure, he always hinted at it in some way, but toward the end of his life, it became overtly **ascetic**—a full-on shift in values. That's a big turnaround. So what's going on when an artist suddenly reverses course like that and embraces the opposite of everything he used to represent?

Let's pause and think back to the best, boldest, most joyful period in Wagner's life: the time he was deeply inspired by the idea of "**Luther's Wedding.**" Who knows what twist of fate led us to get *The Meistersingers* instead of this wedding music—but chances are, a lot of *The Meistersingers* still echoes that earlier vision.

That original project would have been a celebration of both **chastity and sensuality**—and that actually would've made perfect sense, even for Wagner. Because these two things—chastity and sensuality—are not necessarily opposites. Every healthy marriage, every real and heartfelt love goes beyond that simple binary. Wagner, I think, missed a great opportunity to remind Germans of this truth—with a daring, lively comedy about Luther's marriage.

Why would that have mattered? Because Germany has always had too many **haters of sensuality**. And one of Martin Luther's greatest legacies was that he wasn't ashamed of his sensuality—he called it "*evangelical freedom.*"

And even when chastity *does* clash with sensuality in a person, that conflict doesn't have to be tragic—at least not for people who are mentally and physically healthy. For someone who's balanced between their earthy instincts and their higher ideals, that tension can be exciting—it can even make life more beautiful. Great minds like **Goethe** or **Hafiz** saw it as one of life's unique charms.

But here's the problem: when people who are spiritually or physically broken—people Nietzsche calls "*ruined swine*"—start worshipping chastity, what are they really doing? They're just idolizing the thing that stands in opposition to their own brokenness. They're not celebrating virtue; they're just fixated on what they're *not*.

And so they grunt and pine after this painful, unnecessary contrast, and **that** is what Wagner, in his later years, tried to turn into music and stagecraft.

But really—**why?**

Why bother? What do those swine matter to him? What do they matter to us?

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### 3

We really can't avoid asking: what was Wagner thinking when he made *Parsifal*—this clumsy, awkward country boy—into his central character? Especially when, by the end, he turns him into a kind of fake Catholic hero through a bunch of emotionally manipulative tricks. Are we really supposed to take *Parsifal* seriously?

Honestly, I'd like to think the opposite—that Wagner *wasn't* being serious. Maybe he meant *Parsifal* as a kind of final joke, like the comic relief that traditionally ends a tragic trilogy in ancient Greek theater—a wild, over-the-top parody of all the heavy, somber drama that came before. Maybe *Parsifal* was Wagner's way of saying goodbye to tragedy, to his own work, and even to himself—with a wink.

That would have been a fitting finale for a truly great tragedian: to rise above his own art and laugh at it, to show he was free and strong enough to joke about the very ideals he had once held sacred. Could *Parsifal* be Wagner's secret self-mockery, his artistic victory lap, a symbol of the freedom and creative power he had finally achieved?

We can hope so. Because if *Parsifal* is meant seriously, what are we left with? A work born from a deep hatred of intellect, knowledge, and the body itself? A bitter curse on both mind and flesh? A total rejection of everything Wagner had spent his career celebrating—art that glorified both soul and body?

Not just in his art, but in his life too. Don't forget how passionately Wagner embraced the ideas of **Feuerbach**, the philosopher who preached "healthy sensuality." In the 1830s and 1840s, Wagner and many other young Germans (they called themselves the "Young Germans") took this to heart—it was like a gospel of liberation.

So what happened? Did Wagner have a change of heart? Because *Parsifal* feels like a retraction of everything he once stood for. And not just on stage. In his later writings—those gloomy, confused, and often awkward essays—you can find hints everywhere of a hidden desire to preach a return to religion, to old Christian ideals, to medieval values. It's like he was quietly telling his followers:

"Everything I taught you was meaningless. Turn back. Look for salvation in the old faith."

He even calls on the "blood of the Redeemer" at one point.

### 4

Let me speak frankly about something that's uncomfortable—but important. It's a case that says a lot. When we deal with an artist like Wagner, it's usually best to separate the man from his

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work completely. Why? Because the artist is just the starting point for the art—the soil it grows in, sometimes even the muck and manure it needs to flourish. And that's exactly why we often need to forget the artist entirely in order to fully appreciate the art.

Understanding where a work came from—psychologically, emotionally, biographically—that's a job for psychologists, for those who dissect things. But it's not a concern for people who simply want to enjoy the work, for aesthetes or fellow artists. Think of it like this: Wagner, when he created *Parsifal*, had to dive deep into the twisted world of medieval morality, into dark spiritual tensions and extreme emotional states. That kind of descent isn't unlike pregnancy—it's full of horror and wonder—and just like with a pregnancy, it's better forgotten if we want to enjoy the end result: the “child,” the work of art.

We also need to be careful not to make a mistake the artist himself can easily make—thinking he *is* the thing he's depicting. He isn't. If Homer had been Achilles, or Goethe had been Faust, they wouldn't have been able to *create* them. A true artist is always separate from the real world, from actual life. He lives in imagination and illusion.

But sometimes that gets exhausting. Sometimes, the artist wants to be real—just once. And when he tries, he fails. That's the tragic temptation—the wish to cross the line from illusion into life. And that's exactly what happened to Wagner at the end of his life. He wanted to live out what he had only imagined. And it cost him—he lost his clearest vision, and even some of his closest friends.

And don't we all wish—for Wagner's sake—that he had ended things differently? Not with *Parsifal*, but with something bold, triumphant, unmistakably his, something confident and alive, not weighed down by Schopenhauer's pessimism and nihilism. Wouldn't that have been a more fitting farewell? A true Wagnerian finale?

### 5

So, what do ascetic ideals really mean? When it comes to artists, we're starting to get the picture: either nothing at all... or so much that it becomes meaningless. But what's the *point* of these ideals in their case? For a long time, artists haven't taken an independent enough stance—either in the world or against it—for their beliefs or shifts in beliefs to matter much. More often than not, they've played the role of moral, religious, or philosophical sidekicks—sometimes even bootlickers for wealthy patrons or sycophants to powerful people or rising movements.

At the very least, artists always need a crutch—some kind of authority or support. They don't stand on their own. That kind of isolation goes against their nature. Take Richard Wagner as an example: when the moment felt right, he latched onto the philosopher Schopenhauer for credibility, like a shield in front of him. Could you even imagine Wagner embracing an ascetic ideal without Schopenhauer's backing? Especially since Schopenhauer's ideas were sweeping

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through Europe in the 1870s? (It's worth asking whether an artist *can* ever truly function without some kind of established doctrine nourishing him.)

But that leads us to a more serious question: What does it mean when a true philosopher embraces the ascetic ideal? Someone like Schopenhauer—fiercely independent, with the courage to be himself, a man who doesn't need to hide behind others or wait for approval from above?

Let's take a look at Schopenhauer's views on art—they clearly had a strong pull on certain people. That's likely why Wagner, under the influence of the poet Herwegh, fully converted to Schopenhauer's philosophy. So fully, in fact, that his aesthetic theories underwent a complete about-face—from the ones he championed in *Opera and Drama* to those found in his writings after 1870.

And most notably, Wagner reversed his whole position on the role and value of music. He used to treat music as secondary, as a means to an end—essentially the “woman” in the marriage, dependent on the “man,” the drama. But after adopting Schopenhauer's philosophy, he realized he could elevate music by leaning into this new theory—for the greater glory of music.

Schopenhauer saw music not as a reflection of the visible world like other arts, but as something more direct and primal—the very voice of the “will,” straight from the depths of reality. This massive upgrade in the status of music also meant a dramatic rise in the stature of musicians: no longer mere entertainers, but oracles, priests, even prophets. Suddenly, musicians were no longer just playing instruments—they were channeling metaphysics.

So it's no surprise that, eventually, one of them ended up preaching ascetic ideals.

## 6

Schopenhauer borrowed a lot from Kant's approach to aesthetics—but he didn't see things quite the same way as Kant. Kant thought he was honoring art by focusing on the qualities of beauty that he believed made it similar to knowledge: namely, its impersonality and universality. Whether or not that was a mistake is another debate. But what I want to point out is that Kant, like most philosophers, looked at art and beauty purely from the perspective of the *viewer*, not the *creator*. In doing so, he snuck the viewer into the very definition of what beauty is.

But do philosophers really understand what it's like to *be* a viewer of beauty? Do they grasp it as a rich, personal experience—full of intense feelings, desires, surprises, and joy? I'm afraid not. Most of them totally miss this. And that's why their definitions are often shallow or flat-out wrong—like Kant's famous definition of beauty: “That is beautiful which pleases without interest.”

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Without interest? Now compare that to Stendhal, a real “spectator” and artist, who defined beauty as “a promise of happiness.” See the difference? Stendhal’s definition throws out Kant’s central idea of disinterest—*le désintéressement*. So who’s right, Kant or Stendhal?

Kant’s defenders often argue that beauty must be disinterested because we can admire naked statues without feeling anything... personal. But let’s be honest: artists have had some pretty different experiences. Just ask Pygmalion! He wasn’t exactly indifferent. That kind of innocence—the idea that beauty leaves us unaffected—is almost sweet, like Kant’s oddly naïve ideas about the sense of touch.

Now, back to Schopenhauer. He was closer to art than Kant, but even he stayed stuck in Kant’s shadow when it came to this definition. Why? It’s fascinating. Schopenhauer took the phrase “without interest” and interpreted it in his own very personal way—based on something he probably experienced often. He believed aesthetic contemplation actually *cancels out* sexual desire. He compares it to taking a cold shower (or camphor, to use his metaphor). He constantly praised this ability of art to silence the “will”—to give us a break from life’s endless cravings. For him, that was art’s greatest value: its power to quiet desire.

One might even wonder if Schopenhauer’s entire philosophy of “Will and Idea”—his claim that the only way to be free of desire is through pure contemplation—was just a big theory based on this one very specific experience of suppressing sexual urges.

(Remember: Schopenhauer came up with his whole philosophy when he was just 26. So it says as much about *him* and *his age* as it does about the world.)

Just listen to this emotional passage from *The World as Will and Idea*: “This is the painless state that Epicurus called the highest good, the state of the gods. In that moment, we are freed from the harsh burden of the will—we celebrate a Sabbath from its labor. The wheel of Ixion stands still.” What a powerful image! What pain, what relief! But also—what a contrast! That single “moment” of peace versus the rest of life: endless labor, pressure, punishment. Even if Schopenhauer was totally right *for himself*, does this help us understand *beauty*? Not really. He’s only describing one possible *effect* of beauty—the calming of desire.

But is that the usual experience? Stendhal—equally sensual, but happier—saw something else: the *stirring* of desire, the excitement of the will. For him, beauty meant joy, even arousal. So it’s fair to ask: was Schopenhauer wrong to call himself a Kantian? Maybe he misunderstood Kant completely. Because in truth, beauty *did* interest him—deeply, even desperately. For him, beauty was a temporary escape from suffering, from torment. It was intensely personal.

And this brings us back to our original question: What does it mean when a philosopher embraces the ascetic ideal?

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At least now we've got a hint: he's trying to *escape* something—some form of suffering.

7

Let's not get too gloomy when we talk about "torture"—there's actually something to laugh at here. For example, Schopenhauer had a personal vendetta against sexuality (and against its "instrument," as he saw it—woman, whom he called "the devil's tool"). But he needed enemies to keep himself energized and amused. He *enjoyed* dark, bitter language. He liked to rant just for the fun of it. Without these enemies—Hegel, women, sensuality, and the whole "will to live"—he probably would've withered away. He wasn't really a pessimist, no matter how much he claimed to be one. These enemies kept him going; they lured him back into life again and again. His anger at them was like a pressure valve, just like with the old Cynics: a way to keep himself sane, a form of therapy, his little remedy against boredom and despair, even his source of joy.

So that's the personal side of Schopenhauer. But there's also something *typical* about his attitude—and now we return to the real question.

It's a known fact, as old as philosophy itself (from India to England, the whole world over), that most philosophers show a deep hostility toward sensuality. Schopenhauer was just the loudest and most poetic example of it. Likewise, there's also a real tendency among philosophers to be drawn to the ascetic ideal—let's not kid ourselves. These are consistent patterns. And if a philosopher doesn't display either trait, you can be pretty sure he's not the real deal.

But what does this mean? Because the facts alone don't explain themselves—they just sit there, blank and dumb, like a "thing-in-itself."

Well, here's how I interpret it: Every living thing—including the philosophical beast—instinctively seeks the environment that best allows it to grow, to thrive, and to express its full power. And just as instinctively, it avoids anything that would interfere with that.

(And I'm not talking about happiness here—I mean power, action, bold striving. Sometimes that includes embracing hardship or even unhappiness if it serves the goal.)

So take the philosopher: he instinctively avoids anything that could distract him from his intellectual peak—like, for example, marriage. Marriage gets in the way of his personal "optimum." Just look at the great philosophers: Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer—none of them were married. And honestly, you *can't even imagine* them married. It just doesn't fit. A married philosopher is a joke. That's my rule.

Yes, Socrates was an exception—but he probably married ironically, just to prove the rule!

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Every philosopher might relate to what Buddha said when he learned of his son's birth: "*Rāhula is born to me—a shackle is forged for me.*" ("Rāhula" literally means "little demon.")

At some point, every truly free spirit—if he wasn't always one—has a moment of realization like Buddha did: "*Life in the household is cramped and unclean. True freedom lies outside.*" And so he leaves.

Philosophers hear stories of people who broke free from society and chose solitude or deserts or monasteries—and even if those people weren't the brightest minds (more like stubborn donkeys), the philosopher still celebrates them. Why? Because their actions point toward independence.

So what does the ascetic ideal mean to a philosopher?

Here's my answer (and you've probably guessed it by now): When a philosopher sees the ascetic ideal, he smiles—not because he's denying life, but because he sees in it the perfect conditions for fearless and elevated thinking. He affirms life—his life, *his* way of being—and perhaps even to the point of saying something blasphemous, like:

*"Let the world perish—so long as there is philosophy! So long as there are philosophers! So long as I become one!"*

### 8

So let's be clear: philosophers aren't exactly neutral or objective when it comes to judging the value of ascetic ideals. Why? Because when they think about these ideals, they're not thinking about saints or religious figures. They're thinking about *themselves*—about what they need most.

They crave freedom: freedom from pressure, from noise, from responsibility, from distractions. They want clarity of mind, the lightness and agility of thought, that feeling of soaring mentally. They long for rare, fresh, dry mountain air—the kind that sharpens the senses and makes even animals more alert and thoughtful. They want peace, silence, no howling from enemies, no nagging regrets, no internal drama—just quiet organs humming along in the background like mills, a heart that looks beyond the present. For them, the ascetic ideal is a kind of joyful detachment—a spiritual flight above life, not a rejection of life, but a glide over it.

Think of the famous ascetic values: poverty, humility, chastity. Now, look at the lives of all great, creative minds. You'll see these same values—not as moral virtues (great thinkers have nothing to do with virtue in the conventional sense), but as *conditions* that help them live at their best and create their finest work.

Maybe their reason had to fight against some wild pride or intense sensuality. Maybe they had to resist their own urges for comfort, luxury, or excessive generosity. But they did it—not because it

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was "virtuous," but because their strongest instinct, their intellect, demanded it. When one instinct dominates, it keeps all the others in check. If it didn't, it wouldn't be dominant.

Now, let's talk about their "desert"—the place they go to be alone and think. It's nothing like the dramatic desert fantasies people imagine. In fact, those people *are* the desert the philosopher is escaping from.

Real intellectual solitude might look like this: anonymity, quiet, being deliberately overlooked; a little room, a routine task, something modest that doesn't draw attention. Maybe some harmless animals or birds nearby—something peaceful to watch. Maybe a mountain nearby, but not a dead one—a living one with eyes (that is, with lakes). Maybe even a busy hotel, where nobody knows them and they can talk freely with strangers. *That* is their desert. Believe me—it's lonely enough.

Of course, when Heraclitus secluded himself in the temple of Artemis, his retreat was more impressive. Why don't we have places like that anymore? (Well—maybe we do. I think of my beautiful study overlooking the Piazza San Marco in Venice, in the spring, between 10 and noon...)

What Heraclitus avoided is exactly what we philosophers still avoid today: the political noise, the news, the small talk, the marketplace chatter about "current events." What we need most is a break from the constant distractions of the *present moment*.

We admire what's quiet, noble, and distant—especially things that don't force us to tense up or fight back. We like to engage with things we can ponder without raising our voice. Just listen to how a spirit speaks—it has a tone. You can tell who someone is by the tone of their mind.

That one over there? He's just a loudmouth—a hollow echo chamber. Whatever you pour in comes back dull and noisy. Another one talks in a hoarse, rushed way—you can tell he's full of stress, always pushing to get something out *now or never*. You can even feel his breath on you, even though he's speaking through a book!

But the true philosopher—the one confident in himself—speaks softly. He waits. He values privacy. He prefers shadows to the spotlight. He avoids fame, politics, and romance—not because they don't chase him, but because *he* avoids them. He avoids anything flashy. He avoids *his own era*—he lives in shadow, like a philosopher should. And the deeper the sun sinks, the bigger that shadow becomes.

What about his humility? That's really just comfort in being hidden. He dreads attention like a tree dreads lightning. His inner "motherly instinct," his love for the ideas growing inside him, leads him to protect them—just like women have, for that reason, often stayed in dependent roles: to protect life. Philosophers demand very little. Their motto is something like, "*If I possess something, it possesses me.*"

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And let me say again: none of this is about moral virtue or trying to live simply. They aren't making some ethical stand—they're just obeying their strongest instinct, which hoards everything—time, energy, passion—for one thing: *their work*.

They don't want to be distracted by hate. They don't want to be distracted by love. They forget people easily. They don't like to act like martyrs or pretend they "suffer for truth." That's for showy intellectuals with too much time. Philosophers are *working* for truth—they don't have time for theatrics.

They avoid big, flashy words, including the word "truth" itself—it sounds too grandiose. And as for chastity: their energy is focused elsewhere. Their real creativity doesn't involve children. If they do leave behind a legacy, it's in the mind, not the flesh.

The Indian philosophers said it best: "*What does he care for children, whose soul is the world?*"

So no, their chastity isn't about hating the body. It's like an athlete or a jockey abstaining from sex during training—it's just practical. When a great mind is "pregnant" with a new idea, it hoards all its energy. The big instinct eats up the little ones.

Let's return to Schopenhauer now. For him, beauty seemed to unlock his deepest powers of contemplation—it gave his intellect an explosion of clarity. But that doesn't mean sexuality disappeared; it might've simply been *transformed* into something higher, more abstract. That's what happens in aesthetic states—they aren't anti-sensual; they're sensuality in disguise.

(I'll come back to this in more detail later when we get into the physiology of aesthetics—something no one has really explored yet.)

### 9

A certain kind of asceticism—a kind of grim but enthusiastic self-denial—is, as we've seen, one of the most favorable conditions for deep intellectual life. So it's no surprise that philosophers, in particular, have always had a soft spot for the ascetic ideal.

But a serious look at history shows that the relationship between philosophy and the ascetic ideal is even deeper than that. You could say that philosophy only learned to walk at all because of the ascetic ideal—it took its first baby steps holding that ideal's hand. And what awkward, clumsy, cranky steps those were! Philosophy, like all good things, had a long awkward childhood. It didn't have the confidence to be itself for a long time. It kept looking around for help and cringed under scrutiny.

Just think about the defining traits of the philosopher: doubt, skepticism, patience, analysis, curiosity, boldness, the drive to compare and question everything, the desire to be neutral and objective, to approach things "without anger or bias." For a long time, those qualities were

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actually seen as immoral, even sinful! (And let's not forget how even Luther once called reason "Miss Clever," the sly temptress.)

Have we realized that when a philosopher becomes self-aware, he might see himself as an embodiment of *forbidden desire*? That he might feel he has to guard himself *from himself*? Again, it's the same story with all things we now consider good—they started out as bad, as dangerous. Even by ancient Greek standards, much of modern life—our power, our confidence—would have been seen as *hubris* (reckless pride) and godlessness.

Take our attitude toward nature: look at how we dominate and violate it with machines and technology. That's hubris. Our attitude toward God: we treat the idea of a divine, purposeful "designer" as outdated superstition. That's hubris too.

It's like we're fighting against the whole "divine spider web" of the universe, just like Charles the Bold once said in his war with Louis XI, "*I fight the universal spider.*"

Even our attitude toward ourselves is full of hubris. We experiment on ourselves in ways we'd never tolerate with animals. We poke and prod at our own souls, dissect ourselves with curiosity. Who cares about "saving the soul" anymore? We get sick, we study the sickness, and we call it progress. Being sick teaches us more than being well. Disease is interesting.

Yes, we do violence to ourselves. We philosophers are like nutcrackers for the soul. We live to crack the shell and dig into what's inside. And because of that—because we ask these hard questions of ourselves—we might even be becoming more *worthy* to be asked questions ourselves. Maybe even more worthy of life.

All good things were once considered bad. Every "original virtue" used to be an "original sin."

Take marriage: once upon a time, it was seen as an offense against the rights of the community. A man had to pay a fine for selfishly claiming one woman for himself. (That's where the idea of *jus primae noctis*—the right of the lord to sleep with a bride on her wedding night—came from. It still exists in Cambodia today, where it's the priest's privilege.)

Kindness, gentleness, sympathy—traits we now hold dear—were once considered signs of weakness and were deeply shameful. Back then, cruelty was a virtue. Submission to the law? That used to be an insult to pride. Noble people resisted laws for as long as they could. When laws were finally accepted, it wasn't out of love for justice—it was through shame and coercion. Law was an offense. It was forced upon people like an invader.

Every small step forward in civilization came at the cost of pain and suffering. But today we've forgotten that. It seems strange to us that progress once required martyrs—people who suffered physically and mentally for every tiny improvement in life.

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As I've written before in *The Dawn of Day*, "Nothing has been paid for more dearly than the small amount of reason and freedom we now enjoy." And that's why we modern people can hardly relate to those long, early periods of "moral custom"—those times when cruelty was a virtue, when deceit, revenge, and blind obedience were signs of strength.

Back then, everything we now call "good" was treated with suspicion or shame. Happiness was dangerous. Knowledge was dangerous. Peace was dangerous. Compassion was seen as weakness. To be pitied was disgraceful. Work was disgraceful. Madness was holy. And change? Change was the ultimate sin—it meant corruption, decay, the downfall of everything stable.

### 10

In *The Dawn of Day*, aphorism 12, there's a description of how deeply unpopular the first contemplative men—the earliest philosophers—were. People didn't just distrust them; they feared and despised them too. The life of contemplation didn't arrive in the world with charm or grace—it looked strange, ambiguous, even dangerous. The earliest philosophers often seemed like they had dark motives or unstable minds. And for a long time, the calm, quiet, inward nature of contemplative men made others deeply suspicious of them. To survive, they had to provoke fear—to seem powerful, not weak.

The old Brahmins were masters of this. The first philosophers knew how to craft a presence, how to project authority, even mystique—something that would make people afraid of them. But this wasn't just about how others saw them. They themselves needed to be afraid of themselves—to develop a sense of awe and reverence for who they were becoming. Why? Because even *they* were full of doubts about their way of life. Their own instincts, shaped by older values and traditions, were against the path they were on.

So, they had to fight with themselves. And they used brutal methods. They practiced extreme discipline, self-punishment, and mental torment to beat down their inner resistance. These solitary and ambitious seekers had to tear down the gods and traditions inside their own souls in order to believe in the new path they were forging.

Think of the old Indian tale of King Vishvamitra, who subjected himself to a thousand years of self-inflicted suffering until he became so powerful and self-assured that he set out to build a new heaven. That story is a symbol of philosophy—of every thinker who ever dared to build a "new heaven." The power to do that always comes from one's own hell.

So, let's sum it up. For philosophy to exist at all, it had to disguise itself. Philosophers had to take on the appearance of priests, prophets, or religious ascetics—because those were the only accepted forms of contemplative life. The ascetic ideal was a disguise, a way to survive. To even be *allowed* to philosophize, they had to look like they embodied that ideal. And to do that convincingly, they had to *believe* in it.

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That's why for so long philosophers were so otherworldly—so full of distrust toward the body, the senses, and everyday life. Their hatred of the physical world, their life-denial, their abstractions—all of that came not from philosophy itself, but from the survival strategy philosophy had to adopt for centuries. It was philosophy in costume, sneaking around in ascetic robes and self-denial.

So now we have to ask: has that changed?

Has that dangerous, brilliant thing—what we call the “spirit”—finally emerged from its cocoon into the light of a freer world? Has it shed its old disguise?

Do we live in an age with enough pride, enough daring, enough courage, enough mental strength, enough responsibility, enough free will... for real philosophy to finally be possible in the world?

### 11

Now that we've taken a close look at the ascetic priest, let's finally return to our central question: **what is the meaning of the ascetic ideal?** Now the question becomes truly serious—*vital* serious. Because now we're dealing with the people who represent *seriousness* itself.

In fact, a deeper question might already be forming in our minds: **what is the meaning of all this seriousness to begin with?** That's a question more suited for biologists or psychologists, perhaps—but for now, we'll set it aside.

The point is: for the ascetic priest, the ascetic ideal is everything. It's his faith, his will, his power, his personal stake in the world. His entire claim to existence stands or falls with this ideal. So if we are critics or opponents of the ascetic ideal, then we're dealing with someone who will fight us *as if his life depends on it*—because it does.

That said, we shouldn't expect the ascetic priest to be the best person to defend or explain this ideal—not because he's unintelligent, but because he's too involved. A person can rarely judge fairly something they themselves *are*. A woman defending "woman," for example, often fails to be persuasive for the same reason.

So if anything, it will probably be *us* who have to help the priest argue his case properly—more than we have to fear being defeated by him.

The core of the dispute is this: **What is the value of life, according to the ascetic priest?** He sets this life—our world, nature, the cycle of birth and death—against another kind of existence entirely, something "beyond" this world. Life, for him, only has meaning *if* it is a bridge to that other world. Otherwise, it is something to be denied.

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The ascetic sees life as a trap, a maze to be reversed and escaped. He treats life like an error, something to be undone—not just in theory, but in *practice*. He demands that others follow him in this view. He preaches it, enforces it, spreads it wherever he can.

But what does it mean that this extreme, world-denying judgment has existed so often, in so many places, at so many times?

From a cosmic point of view—if we were reading the story of Earth from a distant star—we might get the impression that Earth is a planet full of sickly, bitter creatures, full of self-loathing and disgust toward life itself, who find their only joy in hurting themselves.

Think about how often the ascetic priest shows up across history. He appears in every culture, every age, every class. He seems to grow everywhere, like some hardy weed. And no, it's not because he was bred to be this way or passed down through family lines—if anything, his values run *against* normal human instincts.

So what does that tell us?

It tells us that life itself must have some deep need for this strange figure. **Life must want the ascetic priest, even though he seems to hate life.**

Because the ascetic ideal is fundamentally self-contradictory. It represents a kind of bottomless resentment—not just against some part of life, but against *life itself*. It wants to dominate the very conditions that make life possible. It uses *power* to choke off the *source* of power.

This ideal looks at beauty, health, joy—and *hates* them. It turns green with jealousy. Instead, it finds comfort and even pleasure in illness, pain, ugliness, failure, self-punishment. It seeks out suffering as its path to truth, power, and even salvation.

It's a paradox: a kind of split in the soul that *wants* to be split, that *delights* in its own pain. It feels stronger and more righteous the weaker it becomes, the more it suffers.

The ascetic ideal declares its victory through agony—“**triumph in the heart of suffering.**” That’s the symbol it has always carried. That’s its secret power: a strange glow of salvation shining through torture.

Crux, nux, lux—**the cross, the pain, the light**—all combined into one.

12

Let’s say this type of person—someone driven by an intense, deep-rooted will to contradict and reject life—starts philosophizing. What will they target? They’ll go after what people have

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always been most certain is true, most obviously real. Their whole mission is to tear down exactly what the life-instinct affirms as true.

Like the ascetics of the Vedanta school, for example—they'll say matter is an illusion. They'll call pain an illusion. They'll dismiss the multiplicity of the world, even the basic division between subject and object, as *nothing but errors!* They won't stop there. They'll even deny the existence of their own *self*—refusing to believe in their own ego, their own reality.

And what a twisted sense of triumph they feel in doing so.

This isn't just about overcoming the senses—it's about turning against *reason itself*. It's an act of philosophical violence. A triumph of self-hatred, where reason is used to attack reason, and declares: "There is truth and life out there, but *you*, reason, are excluded from it."

Even in Kant's idea of the "intelligible character" of things—that is, of a world beyond what we can perceive—there's still a faint echo of this ascetic mindset. In Kant's version, "intelligible" means something reason can *never* understand. The intellect, Kant says, is faced with something that, by its very nature, it can't comprehend. That's classic asceticism—turning reason against itself.

And yet, we, as philosophers and seekers of knowledge, should be careful not to be completely ungrateful toward this habit of turning thought inside out. These strange and often painful reversals have trained the mind. They've prepared us, in a way, for true objectivity—not the cold, "interest-free" objectivity Kant talked about (which doesn't even make sense), but the kind of objectivity that comes from being able to see something from *many angles*, from switching between perspectives, from embracing emotional and conceptual contrasts.

This kind of mental training—this juggling of perspectives—is what sharpens our understanding. The more emotional and diverse our views on something, the more perspectives we bring to it, the *richer* and more complete our knowledge becomes.

But let's also be very cautious, my fellow philosophers. We need to stop falling for those seductive old myths about things like "pure reason," "absolute knowledge," or a "timeless, detached knower." These ideas are nonsense. They imagine an eye that sees but has no viewpoint, no perspective—an eye that isn't shaped by any desires, emotions, or direction. But without those interpretive forces, we can't really see *anything*. Vision becomes empty. Knowledge becomes meaningless.

There is *only* seeing from a perspective. There is *only* knowing from a perspective. And the more perspectives we can adopt—the more emotional and cognitive angles we can take—the deeper and truer our understanding becomes.

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Trying to remove all will, all emotion, all bias? That wouldn't give us objectivity—it would be like *intellectual castration*.

### 13

But let's circle back. When we see this apparent contradiction in ascetics—"life turning against life"—it's clear (from a physiological, not psychological point of view) that it's not actually a real contradiction. That would make no sense. It *seems* like a contradiction, but really, it's just a temporary interpretation, a placeholder, a misunderstanding, a way of describing something we didn't yet understand—an old label slapped onto a gap in human knowledge.

Let's get to the point: the ascetic ideal doesn't come from some mysterious, higher rejection of life. It's actually a strategy—coming from life's own instincts for survival and self-preservation—used in moments of decline and weakness, a way for a worn-down life to keep itself going. It emerges in situations where people are physiologically depleted, where vitality is low. The healthiest instincts of life fight back in these moments by inventing new tools—and the ascetic ideal is one of those tools. It's not an attack on life—it's life's *defense* mechanism.

That's the exact opposite of what its followers believe. They think they're rejecting life. But actually, life is struggling within them—and through them—to survive and even thrive. The ascetic ideal is a *life-hack* in the face of death.

History confirms this: look at how powerful and widespread the ascetic ideal has been, especially in cultures where humans had been fully "civilized" and tamed. That's not a coincidence. It tells us something critical about human beings: that we've been sick for a long time—especially the "civilized" ones. This whole history of the ascetic ideal reflects humanity's physiological struggle with death—more specifically, with the feeling of being worn down, of being fed up with life, of wanting to quit.

The ascetic priest represents the full expression of the wish to escape this life and reach a different kind of existence—something purer, higher, separate. But here's the twist: that wish is exactly what keeps him *locked into* this life. It keeps him grounded here, makes him useful to life. He becomes a kind of tool for keeping all the broken, weak, suffering, exhausted people still *bound to life*. And he does this by taking the lead, by being the shepherd to the herd of the lost and miserable. So the ascetic priest—this so-called enemy of life—is actually a major conservative force that helps preserve and affirm life in a strange, backward way.

But what's the root of this sickness? Because make no mistake: man *is* the sick animal. He's more uncertain, more unstable, more inconsistent than any other creature. That much is undeniable.

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Why? Because he dares more than any other creature. He's more adventurous, more experimental. He's the great risk-taker who challenges beasts, nature, even the gods. He pushes himself endlessly, never satisfied, always future-oriented. He's never able to rest, always moving forward, always evolving.

Of course such a brave and ambitious creature is also the one most at risk of collapsing, the one most likely to fall into long, deep illnesses.

Man gets sick of himself—so sick, in fact, that entire cultures and centuries are infected by his exhaustion (like during the Black Death in 1348, with the Dance of Death). But even this exhaustion and self-disgust gets twisted into something productive. His "no" to life somehow generates a thousand new "yeses." Even when he wounds himself, the wound becomes the very thing that *forces* him to keep living.

### 14

Since sickness in humanity has become so common, we should hold in even higher esteem the rare individuals who are truly strong—both mentally and physically. These are life's fortunate exceptions. And we must be even more careful to keep these healthy individuals away from the most toxic environment possible: the sickroom atmosphere that pervades society.

Is that happening?

Not really. Because here's a hard truth: the sick are far more dangerous to the healthy than the strong are to the strong. It's not the powerful who hurt each other—it's the weak who undermine the strong. Do we realize this?

What's most dangerous to humanity isn't fear of man. In fact, fear of man forces the strong to become stronger and more formidable. That's healthy. No—the real danger is *disgust* with mankind. And worse still is *pity* for mankind. If those two—disgust and pity—ever join forces, then we're in deep trouble. That's when humanity reaches its worst form: Nihilism—the will to nothingness. And let's be honest—the road is already well-paved.

Anyone who uses not just their nose but also their eyes and ears will notice it: wherever you go, it's like walking through a mental asylum. The atmosphere is heavy with illness—I mean the so-called "cultured" parts of the world, the various Europes of our time.

It's the *sick*, not the evil or wild, who are the greatest threat to life. The weak, the broken, the misfits—they're the ones who corrode trust in life, in humanity, in ourselves. Their mere presence—those sad, self-loathing expressions—drains others. What does that gaze say? It groans: "*I wish I were something else—but there's no hope. I am what I am. And I hate it.*"

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And it's on that soil—self-hatred—that the most poisonous weeds grow. Quietly. In secret. In the shadows. There, the worms of revenge and resentment multiply. The air is thick with toxic whispers. And there, in the dark, a quiet conspiracy forms: the sick conspiring against the healthy, the defeated against the victorious.

And how they lie to disguise their hate! They use big, noble-sounding words. They act with righteousness. They talk like saints and moral authorities. But underneath it all, what they really want is power—power over the healthy. And they're *very* good at pretending. They imitate virtue with stunning accuracy, putting on the golden mask of goodness. And now they act like they alone are righteous, that *they* are the truly moral ones, the only people with “good will.”

They walk around like living accusations, like moral reminders meant to shame the healthy and joyful. Their message? That strength, pride, vitality, and happiness are somehow shameful. And deep down, they long to punish the healthy—to make them *pay* for being whole.

Among them are the most spiteful people, always posing as judges. Always accusing. Always spitting the word “justice” like poison. They resent anyone who doesn’t look as miserable as they do. They hate joy. They hate success. And they want to pull everyone down to their level.

Then there’s the most disgusting type—the vain ones who dress up their broken desires in fancy words and poetry and call it “purity of heart.” They are masturbators of their own souls, dressing up weakness as spirituality.

This is the “will to power” of the sick—it might be twisted, but it’s still a will to rule. The sick woman, especially, is often unmatched in her sly ways of controlling and manipulating. As the Bogos tribe says, “Woman is a hyena.”

Look deep into any family, any institution, any community—and you’ll find this silent war: the sick versus the healthy. Usually it’s subtle, with passive-aggressive stabs, poisoned smiles, fake patience, and self-righteous pantomime. But sometimes it gets loud—raging in the name of morality. You’ll even hear it in universities and books, in the high-minded talk of “morality” and “justice.” (Think, for example, of someone like Eugen Dühring in Germany: a walking embodiment of bitterness disguised as righteousness.)

These people—these “moral” ones—are full of resentment. Their only real ambition is to make the strong feel guilty for their strength, and to push their own misery into the consciousness of the happy.

And their ultimate dream of revenge? That the healthy, the joyful, the powerful start to feel *ashamed* of their own well-being. That they look at each other and whisper: “*Is it right to be happy... when others suffer?*”

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But that—that—would be the greatest mistake imaginable. It would be the beginning of the end. If the healthy start to feel guilty for their health, if the strong question their strength, then the entire future of humanity is in jeopardy.

We must resist this sickness of spirit—this creeping pity and shame. Our top priority must be: **to stop the sick from making the healthy sick.**

And to do that, we have to draw lines. The healthy must separate themselves from the sick. Not out of cruelty, but out of necessity. The strong aren't meant to be nurses or comforters or saviors. Their job is not to descend but to rise—and to lead. They can't afford to get tangled up in the problems of the weak.

So: good air! Clean, strong, clear air! Let's get away from the hospitals of the spirit, from the sickly fumes of modern culture. Let's keep good company—our own company. Or solitude, if we must. But never again let ourselves be poisoned by the rot of resentment and self-pity.

Because if we're to survive—and thrive—we have to guard against the two most dangerous plagues of all:

**the great disgust with man... and the great pity for man.**

### 15

If you've truly grasped—deeply—the reasons why it's not the job of the healthy to heal the sick, then you should also understand something else: **there must be doctors and nurses who are themselves sick.**

And that is exactly what the **ascetic priest** is.

He's the natural and destined **savior, shepherd, and leader of the sick**. That's how we must understand his heavy historical role. He rules over those who suffer—that's his domain. That's where his instincts lead, where he finds his own kind of power, his unique talent, and even his own version of happiness.

To do this, he *must* be sick himself. He has to be one of them, related to them, so he can truly understand them, so he can connect with them. But at the same time, he must be strong—stronger even than the healthy in some ways. He must have total control over himself, a deep will to power, so that the weak will both trust him and fear him. He becomes their anchor, their wall, their authority, their tyrant, even their god.

He protects them. But who does he protect them *from*?

From the healthy. And from their own **envy of the healthy**.

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He becomes, by nature, the enemy of every form of wild, unrestrained strength and joy. He's the first version of a more "refined" creature—he doesn't hate as much as he *scorns*. He's clever, not brutal. His war isn't fought with strength, but with strategy—with the power of spirit, manipulation, and cunning.

Sometimes, when needed, he even takes on the qualities of the predator: a terrifying combination of polar bear, cold panther, and sly fox. He'll appear as a prophet, an oracle, a messenger of mystical powers—using his craft to sow guilt and inner conflict among the strong and powerful. That's how he ensures his herd always stays sick—and that he always remains their master.

Yes, he brings healing. But first he *makes the wound*.

He's a master of poisoning—he soothes the pain, even as he makes sure it never really heals. Everything healthy around him tends to get sick. Everything sick becomes tame and dependent. But he's skilled at keeping his herd together. He stops them from turning on each other, from collapsing into chaos. Because inside this herd, resentment is always building—like dynamite under pressure.

**And the priest's greatest talent is this:** redirecting that resentment, turning it *inward* instead of letting it explode outward.

Every sufferer instinctively looks for someone to blame—someone to hold responsible for their pain. That's because anger is a kind of relief—it deadens pain for a while. It numbs the suffering. It's like a narcotic.

So the sick need a target. *Someone* must be guilty. Some living thing—real or imagined—they can throw their emotions at.

**That**, I believe, is the real root of revenge and resentment: the emotional need to dull pain by feeling something stronger in its place. Not the simple knee-jerk reaction to danger (like a frog twitching when poked), but the psychological effort to drown out suffering by lashing out.

That's why sick people are so creative when it comes to finding reasons to be offended. They enjoy their suspicions and grudges. They dig through the past to find betrayal and injustice, anything that lets them feel angry and justified. They even turn their own loved ones—family, friends—into villains. Because if they're suffering, *someone must be to blame*.

But then comes the priest, and he says: "Yes, someone is to blame—but that someone is *you*. It's all *your* fault."

It's a bold lie—but it works.

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Because in saying that, the priest *redirects* the resentment. Instead of exploding outward, it collapses inward. The sufferer doesn't take revenge on the world—he takes revenge on himself. And in doing so, he becomes tame. The herd stays together. The order remains intact.

That's the ascetic priest's genius.

### 16

Now you can begin to see what, in my view, **the instinct for healing in life** was trying to achieve through the figure of the **ascetic priest**—and why he had to rely on such strange and contradictory ideas as “**guilt**,” “**sin**,” “**sinfulness**,” “**corruption**,” and “**damnation**.” What was the goal?

To make sick people less dangerous, at least to some extent.

To make the **incurably sick destroy themselves**, to turn **the less severe cases inward**, so they'd attack themselves instead of others. It was about redirecting their resentment inward—“Man only needs one enemy: himself.” The priest also **channeled their worst instincts** into things like self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-mastery.

Of course, we shouldn't be under any illusion that this “treatment” was real healing in any **medical** or **physiological** sense. It wasn't about curing sickness—it was an emotional coping mechanism, not a genuine cure. In fact, there's no indication that **life's instinct** was aiming at healing here at all.

What actually resulted?

- On one side, a kind of **organised collection of the sick**, forming something like a community—the most common name for this is the **Church**.
- On the other side, a kind of **protective wall for the healthy**, especially the more powerful and capable individuals. **A separation between the sick and the well.**

For a long time, that was it. And even that was a lot—no, it was **a huge achievement**.

As you can tell, I'm operating in this essay from a central hypothesis—one I don't feel I need to prove to the kind of readers I care about: that is, that “**sinfulness**” **isn't a real fact**. It's just **an interpretation of a fact**, a moral-religious lens through which people interpret **a physical or psychological discomfort**.

So just because someone *feels* guilty or sinful doesn't mean they actually are. Feeling healthy doesn't prove you are healthy—and feeling guilty doesn't prove guilt.

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Think about the infamous witch trials: even the most intelligent and humane judges were absolutely convinced those women were guilty. And the “witches” themselves believed it, too. But they weren’t. There was **no actual guilt**—just an illusion created by a false framework of interpretation.

Let me go further: I don’t even believe in something like “**soul-pain**” as a real thing. I think it’s just an **explanation** we use—a convenient way to label an experience that people haven’t yet been able to fully describe. In reality, that pain is likely not spiritual at all—it’s probably just a **physical issue**, like a **stomach problem**.

(And when I say that, I don’t mean you should take it in some crude, overly simple way—just bear with me.)

A strong and well-balanced person can **digest** their experiences—good or bad—just like they digest food, even the tough stuff. But when someone **can’t process something**, when it sits heavy in their mind, that’s a kind of **mental indigestion**—which might actually just be the **result of physical indigestion**.

You can believe that without being a materialist. Trust me.

17

**So is the ascetic priest really a healer?** We can already see why it’s hard to call him a true physician—even though he loves to think of himself as a “savior” and wants others to worship him as one. Why? Because he doesn’t treat the *cause* of suffering—just the *symptoms*. He fights against how bad people feel, but not against what’s making them sick in the first place. **And that’s our deepest objection to his way of “healing.”**

But let’s try to look at it from his point of view for a moment—a view that priests and religious leaders have basically owned for centuries. If you do that, you’ll be amazed at how clever he’s been in trying to reduce human suffering. His whole **genius** lies in how he’s approached that role: **how skillfully he’s interpreted the job of “consoler”**, and how boldly he’s picked the tools for that role.

**Christianity especially** should be seen as a huge warehouse of **clever emotional painkillers**. It’s filled with comforting illusions and soothing ideas—almost like a spiritual pharmacy. And in some cases, it’s even experimented with dangerous emotional “drugs,” trying to treat feelings of despair, fatigue, and depression—**particularly in people who were physically or psychologically worn out**.

Let’s be clear: **most religions were created to help people cope with a deep, widespread feeling of exhaustion**. This weariness could’ve come from all kinds of causes. And because people back then didn’t know anything about physiology, they had to explain these feelings of

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fatigue in moral or psychological terms—and try to treat them the same way. (In fact, **that's my basic definition of what a “religion” is**: a way of morally explaining and emotionally treating chronic human exhaustion.)

Where did all this widespread fatigue come from?

- From **mixing races and classes** too quickly—especially in Europe, where that led to what we call “world-weariness” or *Weltschmerz*.
- From **migration** to climates humans weren’t suited for (like the Indian peoples in India).
- From **old age**—like the collapse of optimism in post-1850 Paris.
- From **poor diet** or things like **alcoholism** (which damaged Europe after the Middle Ages), or **syphilis** (which ravaged Germany after the Thirty Years’ War and made the people more submissive and passive).

In all of these cases, a kind of massive spiritual war was launched **against depression**—and the tools of that war were, unsurprisingly, **religious and emotional**.

So how did they fight back?

By trying to **dampen consciousness** to its lowest possible level. That meant: no desires, no wants, no emotional highs or lows—nothing that gets the “blood pumping.” Avoid sex. Avoid money. Don’t think too much. Be passive. Don’t get involved. Don’t work. Don’t feel. Withdraw. Fast. Meditate. Hypnotize yourself.

Pascal put it this way: “*Il faut s’abîter*”—“You must make yourself stupid.”

The goal? **To reach a kind of spiritual hibernation**—a minimum level of awareness, just enough to keep breathing, without really *being* alive.

Put in religious language, this was called “**holiness**” or “**redemption**.” In biological terms, it was **hypnotism**—a slow fade into nothingness, a kind of mental numbness where suffering no longer registers.

And it worked! These “saints” and religious warriors really did find some relief through this extreme training. It was like an escape hatch from unbearable suffering. That’s why this kind of “spiritual numbing” shows up across cultures—it’s one of the oldest and most universal human survival strategies.

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Now, is it insane? Not necessarily. Some modern critics laugh at monks and vegetarians, dismissing them as crazy. But Nietzsche says **don't be so quick to judge**. Sure, this method might lead to **hallucinations, visions, or mystical ecstasies**—like we see in the lives of saints. But the people who went through this weren't insane. In fact, many of them felt deeply **grateful** for this escape from suffering. They saw their peaceful, “empty” state as the ultimate truth—as if they had reached **the core of reality itself**.

They described this state as:

- A return to **being**
- A release from **all illusions**
- A place *beyond good and evil*
- A union with **the divine, the eternal, or Brahman**

Buddhism says: “*Good and evil are both chains. The perfect man rises above them.*”

Vedanta says: “*The wise man goes beyond good and evil. He neither gains nor loses from what is done or left undone.*”

This isn't moral progress—it's escape. And these religions don't lie about that. Unlike modern Christianity, which pretends to be about love and virtue, the older traditions are **brutally honest**: **Redemption isn't earned through good deeds**. It's simply a return to the divine, a merging with something beyond all effort or morality.

Nietzsche quotes his friend Paul Deussen's commentary on the Vedanta to show that:

- Redemption is not about becoming better.
- It's not about overcoming faults.
- It's about becoming *one with Brahman*, who is beyond change, beyond effort, and already pure.

So yes, Nietzsche says, **we should respect this concept of redemption**—but at the same time, let's not take it *too* seriously. Because when you boil it down, **what these exhausted people are really worshipping is deep sleep**. They've idealized *unconsciousness*—the absence of feeling, of thought, of pain—as the highest good.

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That's what they call "God."

That's what they call "salvation."

18

This kind of **hypnotic numbing**—deadening one's sensitivity to pain—requires unusual strength: courage, disregard for what people think, intellectual toughness. So, it's relatively rare. **But there's a more common and easier way** people deal with suffering: **mechanical activity—just keeping busy.**

It's clear that doing routine, repetitive work can **significantly ease suffering**. This fact is now often referred to with the uninspiring phrase "**the blessing of work.**" But the point is this: by keeping a person's attention fully occupied, constantly focused on doing something, they stop thinking about their pain. The human mind is small, after all—it can't hold too many things at once. So, if work fills the mind, suffering gets pushed out.

This "just keep working" strategy includes all sorts of things like strict schedules, mindless obedience, daily habits, and even a cultivated **impersonality**—that is, forgetting yourself entirely, ignoring your own inner life. **The ascetic priest has used all these techniques with precision**, like a master tactician, to fight against pain and suffering.

When it comes to **lower-class sufferers—slaves, prisoners, or women** (who were often a mix of both), the priest just **changes the names of things**, renames their reality. That's enough to make them believe that what they used to hate is now something good. **The priest didn't invent their misery**, but he did invent ways of making it feel bearable—**even meaningful.**

Another powerful remedy for depression is **small doses of joy**. The trick is to make that joy simple and easy to find, something that can be made into a rule or habit. The most common version of this is **the joy of making others happy**—doing good, giving gifts, helping people, praising them, comforting them, showing others they matter.

This is where the idea of "**love thy neighbor**" comes in—it's a kind of medicine. It encourages people to feel a **tiny sense of superiority** in helping others, which gives them a sense of worth. This, Nietzsche says, is a **small taste of the "Will to Power"**—that deep instinct to assert oneself and feel alive. The priest, therefore, prescribes just a small amount of it—enough to ease the pain, but not enough to make people strong or independent.

If the weak don't take this path, Nietzsche says, they still follow the same instinct—just **by hurting each other instead**. One way or another, they try to feel powerful.

If you study how **Christianity began in the Roman Empire**, you'll find it started among **the lowest social classes**, especially through **mutual aid groups**—people coming together to help

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each other in sickness, poverty, and death. These groups provided people with small moments of joy, based on shared care and support. **Perhaps this was a revolutionary idea at the time—a true discovery.**

By promoting **cooperation, community, family structure, and shared meals (Coenacula)**, the priest helped the sick and weak organize themselves. This allowed for a **subtle but real increase in their Will to Power**, expressed through group identity. It was a **way to cope**, and maybe even to thrive.

**When people form communities, it gives their lives new meaning**—something beyond their own personal pain or self-hatred. Nietzsche points to **Geulincx**, a philosopher known for his gloomy view of human weakness, as an example of someone trapped in self-loathing (“*despectus sui*”).

So, sick and weak people instinctively want to **form herds**, to escape from their suffering. The **ascetic priest recognizes this instinct** and encourages it. **Wherever there's a herd, you can be sure weakness created it, and a priest organized it.**

And, crucially: **the strong don't want herds**. They prefer isolation. When they join forces, it's only for battle or domination—not for comfort or togetherness. It goes against their nature. But the weak genuinely enjoy being part of a group—it fulfills them. Their instincts are satisfied by it.

And when **the strong are forced into group life**, they often experience inner tension—**they're suppressing their own urge for dominance**. Every oligarchy (rule by the few), Nietzsche says, hides within it the **desire for tyranny**—the desire of each strong individual to take total control. The whole system trembles under the strain of this inner conflict. **Plato knew this well**—he saw it clearly in his fellow Greeks, and also in himself.

19

We've already looked at the "**innocent" methods** used by the ascetic priest to combat suffering—methods like suppressing vitality, promoting mechanical work, encouraging small joys, and especially the "love thy neighbor" strategy: building herd communities so that people feel empowered through group belonging, and their self-loathing gets masked by collective pride.

Now it's time to turn to the **more interesting, more sinister methods**—the "**guilty" methods**.

What do these involve? In short: **creating emotional excess**—over-the-top feelings—as a way to numb people from the slow, grinding pain of existence. It's emotional anesthesia. **The more intense the feeling, the more effective the distraction**. So the priest becomes a genius at one specific task: “*How can I generate emotional overload?*”

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I know, that sounds harsh. Maybe it would sound nicer if I said, “The priest made use of the enthusiasm found in strong emotions.” But what’s the point of **catering to the soft sensitivities of modern readers?** Why should we, as psychologists, keep sugar-coating our words for a public that’s drowning in fake virtue and fragile feelings?

**Modern language is saturated with fake moralism**, and it's the **psychologist's job to push back** against this. Not because we enjoy being cruel, but because if we don't, we'll just get sicker ourselves. There's something *deeply disgusting* about this moralistic dishonesty that's now everywhere. The biggest problem isn't outright lies—it's the **self-righteous innocence** people wrap around their lies.

That's what makes modern psychology so hard to do—it constantly runs up against this sickly-sweet, clueless dishonesty. This is **our greatest danger**, and it might even push us toward what I call “the great nausea.” I can already imagine what the future will do with modernity—with our books, our culture, our language. They'll **use them as emetics—to induce vomiting**. Why? Because of all the **moral syrup, the fake virtue, the passive softness** that people now mistake for “idealism.”

Today's educated people—our so-called “good men”—don't even know how to lie properly anymore. They **don't lie outright** (true), but not because they're virtuous—it's because they're **too weak** for real lying. **Real lying**, the kind Plato respected, requires strength and clarity and honesty about oneself. But today's “good men” lie in a different way: through **self-deception**, through **sentimental delusions**, through **self-righteous naivety**.

They're **dishonest, but innocent about it**—they lie **not out of malice, but because they don't have the guts to look in the mirror**. These people are so morally brainwashed that they can never be redeemed. They couldn't handle a single uncomfortable truth about themselves. Ask yourself: Who among them could **stand the full truth about humanity?** Or better yet, **who could survive a brutally honest biography of themselves?**

A few examples. Lord Byron once wrote an intensely personal autobiography—but his friend, **Thomas Moore**, burned it. He was “**too good**” to let the truth exist. **Schopenhauer** may have written something deeply personal too, but his executor **Dr. Gwinner** supposedly did the same thing. **Beethoven's** American biographer, Thayer, quit halfway through. He reached a part of Beethoven's life that he couldn't stomach. He couldn't go on.

And so the moral of the story is: Who today would dare write the truth about themselves? You'd have to be half mad or possessed by divine foolishness to even try.

We've been promised an autobiography from **Richard Wagner**—but who doesn't already assume it'll be **carefully edited**, a theatrical performance, not the raw truth?

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Just look at what happened with **Janssen**, the Catholic priest who wrote a ridiculously safe, squeaky-clean account of the German Reformation. And even that sparked outrage! **Can you imagine what would happen if a real psychologist, someone with the fearlessness of Taine**, actually gave us the truth about **Luther**—not the sanitized version, but the full, raw psychological reality?

But no, that's not what Germans want. What they produce are historians like **Leopold Ranke**—the king of moral compromise, a master of telling the "strongest side's" story, a clever opportunist dressed up as an objective historian. Nietzsche practically spits out the words: a classic apologist for whoever holds power.

### 20

But now you'll start to see what I'm really getting at.

Let's put it simply: we psychologists today have **good reason to be suspicious—even of ourselves**. Maybe we're still “too good” for our work. Maybe, even with all our contempt for modern moral obsessions, we're still infected by them. Maybe we're still trapped in the very morality we want to criticize.

Think about that diplomat's warning to his colleagues: “*Let's never trust our first instincts, gentlemen—they're almost always good.*” We psychologists should give ourselves the same advice. Don't trust your gut—especially when it tells you you're being moral. And this brings us back to the problem we've been working on: the **ascetic ideal** as a tool to provoke **emotional excess**.

If you've read the previous essay, you'll remember what this means: The soul is forcibly yanked out of its ordinary, dull suffering—shocked, terrified, set on fire, thrown into rapture—so that in a single **emotional explosion**, it escapes the **gray fog of depression** and pain. It's like using lightning to burn away a fog.

So how do you get people to feel that kind of overwhelming emotion? Which techniques work best?

The answer is: **all of them**. Any deep emotion can do the job—**anger, fear, lust, revenge, hope, triumph, despair, cruelty**—if it's released suddenly and powerfully. The ascetic priest has no problem using this entire toolbox. He'll unleash any one of those passions, **just to jolt people out of their suffering**, to make them forget themselves—at least for a while.

But this cure has a price. Of course it does. It makes the sick even sicker. That's why it's a "**guilty**" remedy by modern standards. It's not meant to *heal* people—just to *distract* them from the pain.

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Still, in fairness, we should admit: the priest honestly believed in his treatment. He used these emotional detonations with full conviction. Sometimes he even **collapsed under the weight** of the pain he unleashed. He really thought these overwhelming emotional experiences were necessary. And sure, maybe those explosions made the sickness worse—maybe even caused mental breakdowns—but that didn't contradict the real point of it all.

Why? Because the point wasn't to make people healthy—it was to **numb their misery**.

Now here's the key: the priest discovered that **the most powerful way to unlock emotional extremes**—the master key, the most effective tool in his whole kit—was the feeling of **guilt**.

We talked about this in the earlier essay. Guilt didn't just appear—it started as animal psychology, as **internalized aggression**, turned inward. The priest took that raw feeling, and like a true artist, **refined it into “sin.”**

Sin was the greatest invention in the history of the sick soul. It's the **deadliest, most brilliant twist** ever created by religion. Here's how it worked:

Imagine a person who's suffering, who doesn't understand why, who feels like an animal locked in a cage. He wants a reason for his pain—**any reason**. He needs an explanation, something that will make it feel meaningful. So he goes to the one person who claims to know the hidden causes of things: the **priest**.

And what does the priest say?

“You're suffering because it's your fault. You sinned. Your pain is your punishment. You're guilty.”

And boom—there it is. The priest draws a line around the man like chalk around a chicken. And the man can't escape it. He becomes a prisoner of that thought: “*I'm a sinner. I'm to blame.*”

And for thousands of years since then, we haven't been able to look away from this **new kind of sick person: the sinner**. We see him everywhere. We see his eyes fixed obsessively on one thing—**his guilt**. That green-eyed, self-hating monster Luther called the “evil conscience”—that's him. Always chewing over the past. Always seeing his pain as proof of his wickedness. Always whipping himself on the wheel of endless self-punishment.

And yet—here's the sick brilliance of it—**it worked**.

That old depression, that boredom, that heavy, grey hopelessness? It was gone. Now life was interesting again. Now it had drama, purpose, *terror, ecstasy, madness!* Life became a **furnace**, burning, exhausting—but never dull. Never sleepy.

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The priest had won. Men no longer cursed pain—they **craved it**. For centuries people shouted:  
“*More pain! Give us more pain!*”

Torture became sacred. The dungeon became holy. The fire of hell became the light of heaven. Every form of suffering was reimagined as **spiritual ecstasy**, as a **step toward redemption**. And the priest—this grand puppeteer of human torment—used it all to promote his ideal: **the ascetic ideal**.

He had said from the beginning: “*My kingdom is not of this world.*” But after such a victory, could he still pretend that was true?

Nietzsche adds a little jab: Goethe once claimed there are only 36 possible tragic situations. That shows, Nietzsche says, that **Goethe wasn't an ascetic priest**—because *those guys know far more than 36 ways to make suffering into a show*.

**21**

When it comes to this kind of priestly "medicine"—the so-called *guilty* kind of treatment—we honestly don't even need to criticize it anymore. It speaks for itself.

Is there **anyone** who would seriously argue that the kind of emotional overload prescribed by ascetic priests—wrapped in the holiest of language and disguised as something sacred—has ever really *helped* the sick?

Come on.

Of course, we could say it "helped" in a certain way. Maybe it "reformed" people. But let's be clear about what "reformed" really means in this context: it means **tamed, weakened, discouraged, made fragile, made dainty, emasculated**. In short, "helped" here basically means **harmed**.

And when you're dealing with people who are already sick, depressed, or oppressed, even if you somehow make them "better," you're **also making them worse**. Just ask any psychiatrist what happens when you regularly subject people to guilt, penance, torment, emotional highs, and "salvation" experiences. What's the actual result?

Look at history. Every time the ascetic priest's methods are applied on a wide scale, they leave a trail of physical and mental collapse.

What kind of "results" do we see?

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- **Nervous breakdowns** layered on top of already existing sicknesses—in both individuals and entire societies.
- Massive outbreaks of **epileptic-like hysteria**, such as the St. Vitus and St. John dances in the Middle Ages.
- Entire cultures undergoing **personality shifts** toward gloom, melancholy, and inhibition—just look at Geneva or Basel after religious reform.
- **Witch trials**: widespread hysteria similar to sleepwalking or psychotic episodes. Eight major witch-mania outbreaks between 1564 and 1605 alone.
- Even worse: **mass death-worship**. Huge crowds crying “*Long live death!*” as if in some possessed trance. One minute they're raving in religious ecstasy, the next they're destroying everything in sight.

You can see this same pattern today wherever the doctrine of sin has a resurgence—it brings with it **religious neuroses**. They look like possession, and maybe that's not just a metaphor.

All of this—the ascetic ideal, the cult of guilt and moral perfection, the obsession with sin and emotional overload—is not just a theological idea. It's one of the **most damaging forces** in the history of mankind.

I can hardly think of anything else that's hurt **European health and vitality** more.

Maybe you could compare it to **the German influence**: that is, **alcohol**. The spread of German blood has been matched by the spread of German vices. Where they went, so did their beer—and the slow poisoning that came with it.

Third place on the list of Europe's great poisons? **Syphilis**—but that comes in with a wide gap behind the first two.

## 22

Wherever the ascetic priest has held power, he has corrupted the soul's health—and, as a result, he has also corrupted taste in art and literature. He's still corrupting it today.

“Consequently”? Yes, I expect you to grant me that “consequently.” I'm not going to waste time proving it.

I'll just point to one glaring example: the so-called holy book of Christian literature—their masterpiece, their “book-in-itself.”

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Imagine this: right in the midst of the glorious Greco-Roman world, a world overflowing with brilliant writing—books we would now trade half our libraries to recover—in that time of literary brilliance, the early Christian agitators (now called Church Fathers) had the nerve to say, “*We have our own classics. We don't need Greek literature.*”

And what did they point to instead? Their legends, their apostolic letters, and their little apologetic pamphlets. It's like today's Salvation Army comparing its tracts to Shakespeare.

You've probably already guessed: I can't stand the New Testament. Its popularity almost makes me ill. I know I'm alone in this opinion—two thousand years of praise stand against me—but so what?

Here I stand, I can do no other. I've got the courage of my bad taste.

Now the Old Testament—that's another story entirely! That's a book full of big personalities, of heroic landscapes, of hearts that are strong and unapologetically raw. There, you find a *people*.

In the New Testament? Just a petty gathering of squabbling sects. Emotional kitsch. All twists and flourishes of the soul. The atmosphere is that of a stale church basement—fussy, confined, with a few whiffs of pastoral charm borrowed more from Hellenism than from anything Jewish.

You find meekness next to swagger. Loud, emotional chatter—hysteria without heat. Pantomime without passion. Nobody here has any sense of dignity or restraint.

And what's with the fuss they make over their little sins? Who cares? Certainly not God. But these pious nobodies act like their everyday whining deserves eternal life.

Really? An *immortal Peter*? Who could bear that?

They parade their personal problems—grief, headaches, heartbreaks—as though the entire universe ought to stop and care. They constantly rope God into their mess, begging and whining as if their suffering were the world's biggest issue.

And don't get me started on their pathetic way of talking to God—this Jewish, and not only Jewish, slobbery familiarity. There are “pagan” cultures in East Asia whose restraint puts the early Christians to shame. They won't even say their God's name out loud. That's reverence. That's style.

Compare that to Martin Luther—the most eloquent and shameless peasant Germany ever produced. Think of his tone, especially when he speaks with God. It's vulgar. It's loud. It's *rude*.

Luther's real rebellion against the saints and the pope wasn't theological—it was the revolt of a crude man offended by the Church's spiritual etiquette. He hated the idea that only the quiet and

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initiated had access to the divine. The sacred wasn't open to peasants like him, and he couldn't stand it. So he kicked down the door and barged in to chat with God like he was drinking at the tavern.

Well—he got what he wanted.

The ascetic ideal, as you can see, was never a school of good taste. Certainly not of good manners. At best, it was a school for priestly manners—and those are often manners of passive-aggressive venom.

It has no sense of proportion, no moderation. It stands against moderation itself. The ascetic ideal is the embodiment of *too much*.

23

The ascetic ideal hasn't just corrupted health and taste—there are also a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth category of things it's ruined. But I'm not going to list them all out. When would I stop? That's not my aim anyway. I'm not here to catalog what this ideal *does*—I'm here to expose what it *means*, what it *stands on*, what hides beneath it and behind it. It's the temporary mask of something deeper, a vague symbol full of questions and misunderstandings.

That's why I dared to show you the horrific results it's had. I wanted to prepare you for the most disturbing question of all—the sheer *power* of the ascetic ideal. How is it so powerful? Why has it been allowed such control? Why hasn't it been met with stronger resistance?

Because the ascetic ideal expresses *one will*—and where is its equal? Where is the opposing will, the competing ideal?

This ideal has a purpose, a direction. It wants everything else in human life to seem small and meaningless by comparison. It interprets whole eras, cultures, and people through its lens—and it permits *no other* interpretations. It affirms, denies, praises, condemns—always according to its own code. Has there *ever* been a more well-developed system of interpretation? It subjects itself to no authority; it believes *everything else* must derive its worth from *it*. All meaning, all value, all purpose—must be defined by *its* standard, as part of its mission.

Where is the opposing ideal with *equal force*, equal conviction, equal reach?

People will tell me this counter-ideal exists. That it's already won many battles against asceticism. That we live in the era of modern science, which represents reality, truth, independence—science that has finally shed the need for God, for another world, for those old moral fictions.

I don't buy it.

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All the loud slogans of these science-boosters? They don't convince me at all. These people are bad musicians—no depth in their notes, no echo from the abyss. They don't speak from the depths of knowledge—because modern science *is* an abyss. When they speak of “science,” it's a shallow parody of the word. They've stripped it of weight and dignity.

The truth? Science *doesn't even believe in itself* anymore. Certainly not in any ideal that's higher than itself. And when science *does* carry any passion—love, zeal, suffering—it's not opposing the ascetic ideal. It's just the latest and most polished version of it.

Sounds strange, doesn't it?

There *are* diligent, decent people doing real work in science. Honest workers, happy with their narrow corners of research. And they shout loudly: “Why can't everyone be content like us? Look how useful science is!”

I'm not against them. I admire their work. I admire their drive. But that doesn't mean science as a whole has a unifying vision, a goal, a passion, a faith. It doesn't. Quite the opposite.

When science isn't just the modern form of the ascetic ideal—and that *is* rare—it often becomes a hiding place. A mask. A way to *avoid* confronting pain, emptiness, doubt. It's how people distract themselves from the lack of love, the absence of any guiding vision. It's the modern drug of choice.

And what doesn't science try to cover up today?

The frantic work ethic of our scholars, the obsessive data, the hyper-focus, the brilliance—it often means just one thing: *they're trying not to see something*. Science as a kind of self-induced numbness.

You notice it when you spend time around scholars: even a harmless word can sting them. A small comment can offend them deeply. Why? Because you've unintentionally hit a nerve. You've exposed something they've spent their lives avoiding. They're hurt. They're scared. And they don't even know it.

Because the thing they fear the most—is *becoming conscious*.

## 24

Now let's look at the other side: those rare individuals I mentioned earlier—the purest idealists among today's philosophers and scholars. Have we finally found in them the true opponents of the ascetic ideal, its anti-idealists?

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They certainly believe they are. These “unbelievers” (for they’re all that, at the very least) take great pride in their role as the enemies of the ascetic ideal. They argue with intensity and drama. But just because they *believe* something, does that make it true?

We “knowers” have grown suspicious of all believers, especially those who believe too passionately. In fact, our rule of thumb has become the opposite of theirs: the stronger someone believes something, the *less likely* it is to be true. The more passionately someone clings to an idea, the more likely it’s a *self-delusion*. Sure—faith can bring comfort. But that doesn’t mean it proves *anything*. If faith makes someone feel good, then we’re right to suspect the *object* of that faith. Why? Because it’s probably an illusion.

So what’s the real story with these modern-day idealists—these solitary thinkers, these deniers of God and tradition, these passionate defenders of intellectual “purity”? What are they, really?

At first glance, they seem to be the opposite of the ascetic ideal. Atheists. Anti-Christians. Immoralists. Nihilists. Skeptics. Intellectually obsessive types who would rather burn than believe without proof. These are the elite minds of our time—the last stronghold of intellectual conscience.

And yet...

If I may say what they themselves can’t see—because they’re too close to themselves—the ascetic ideal is *still* their ideal. They are its final and most spiritual embodiment. They may look like rebels, but they’re actually its most refined and seductive voice.

If I can be trusted as a reader of signs, then I say this: there are no truly “free spirits” today—because even they still *believe in truth*. That, right there, is the core of it.

When Christian crusaders once encountered the secretive, highly disciplined sect of the Assassins—free spirits *par excellence*—they learned of their ultimate motto, whispered only to the highest initiates: **“Nothing is true, everything is permitted.”** That was real freedom of thought. That was the breaking of the last chain—belief in *truth* itself.

Has any modern European, any so-called “freethinker,” even *approached* that thought? Has he wandered into that abyss, into that terrifying freedom? I doubt it—I know he hasn’t.

Because nothing is more foreign to these “monomaniacs”—these supposed free spirits—than *actual* freedom. In truth, they are fanatics of truth. They are still utterly enslaved by it.

And I know all this, perhaps too well—because I’ve lived and worked among them. I’ve seen firsthand their grim devotion to truth: their philosophical “purity,” their intellectual stoicism. They refuse to affirm or deny anything that isn’t “proven.” They try to stare blankly at facts, at

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the raw and brutal “what is,” like it’s a badge of honor. They act as though not interpreting reality is the most virtuous act of all.

But look closer—that *too* is just another form of asceticism. Their obsession with truth is still driven by the *faith* that truth has value, that truth is sacred. They may not wear robes or kneel in prayer, but they are still priests of the same faith—the same metaphysical belief in truth that Christianity and Plato preached before them.

And science? Don’t make me laugh. There is no science without *assumptions*. Science depends on a belief system too—it borrows its method and its meaning from a deeper philosophy. And when people say they want to “build philosophy on a scientific foundation,” what they’re really doing is flipping both science and philosophy upside down. It’s an insult to both.

Yes—science, at its root, is still built on a *metaphysical* belief. Even we modern “godless” thinkers are still lighting our torch from that same ancient fire: the fire of Christian faith, the faith that **God is truth**—that truth is *divine*.

But what if that belief is no longer believable? What if we finally see that nothing divine has ever been found—except perhaps **error, blindness, and lies**? What if **God Himself turns out to be our oldest, most enduring lie?**

Now we’ve arrived at the real turning point: **Science now requires a justification.** (And that doesn’t mean such a justification exists.)

Turn to the great philosophers, ancient and modern—you’ll find they *all* fail to question this one thing: the value of truth itself. Why? Because the ascetic ideal has ruled philosophy from the start. Truth was always assumed to be the highest good—the ultimate judge—the divine itself.

Truth was never allowed to be a *problem*.

Understand that word: “allowed.” It was *forbidden* to doubt truth, because the ascetic ideal needed truth to serve as its highest value.

But now that we’ve rejected the God of that ideal, a new problem arises—a massive, terrifying problem:

### **What is the value of truth?**

This is the question we must ask now.

So let’s name our task plainly: **We must begin a critique of the Will to Truth itself.** It is time to question whether truth is good. Whether it deserves our faith. Whether the pursuit of truth is noble—or dangerous.

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That is what I mean to do.

25

No! You can't fool me with science when I'm searching for the true antagonists of the **ascetic ideal**, when I ask, "Where is the opposing will? Where is the ideal that *resists* the ascetic one?" Science is nowhere near independent or courageous enough to play that role.

Science still **needs** values. It requires a system that gives it meaning—a purpose in the service of which it can believe in itself. Science doesn't create values. At best, it carries forward the momentum of the ascetic ideal's evolution. And when it does oppose that ideal, it's not really attacking the core of it—it's only brushing aside its outdated appearances, its dogmas, its old wrappings. All it does is make the inner life of the ascetic ideal freer and more fluid, while still reinforcing its underlying structure.

Both science and the ascetic ideal stand on the same foundation: an exaggerated reverence for **truth**. Or more precisely, the **belief** that truth is beyond critique, beyond valuation. That's why they're natural allies—and always will be. If you want to challenge the ascetic ideal, you must also be prepared to challenge **science itself**.

(Art, by the way—and I'll come back to this another time—is a far deeper and more fundamental opponent of the ascetic ideal. Art *sanctifies lies*. Art *embraces illusion*. It doesn't have to apologize for that; in fact, it glories in it. That's why Plato, Europe's most powerful philosophical defamer of life, stood so squarely against Homer, the artist who praised it. Plato versus Homer: that's the real battle of values. When art serves the ascetic ideal—as it often has—it is at its most *corrupt*.)

But coming back: viewed from a physiological perspective, science and the ascetic ideal share a root. They both require a certain *decline* in the vitality of life. A cooling of emotion. A slowing of tempo. The replacement of instinct with reasoning. A serious, withdrawn demeanor—seriousness always being a symptom of strained and weakened life. Look at the historical moments when science flourishes: they are often times of fatigue, decline, and cultural sunset—not strength, not confidence.

The rise of scientists and scholars is never a good sign. It's a sign of exhaustion, just like democracy, pacifism, "equal rights for women," the religion of pity, and the rest of those symptoms of life in retreat.

No—modern science is not the enemy of the ascetic ideal. In fact, it has often been its **greatest ally**—especially because it doesn't even realize it. Science undermines certain superficial parts of the ascetic ideal, but only to make the ideal itself more subtle, more refined, more powerful in its control.

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Do you think, for example, that the fall of theological astronomy—our realization that the Earth is not the center of the cosmos—undermined the ascetic ideal? Far from it. All it did was make man feel *even more insignificant*. Less central. Less divine. He went from believing he was a child of God to seeing himself as a mere animal, a speck in an indifferent universe. Has that made man stronger? No—it has made him *hate himself more*.

Since Copernicus, man has been on a downhill slide—rolling faster and faster away from the center, toward nothingness. Or worse: toward a new kind of “thrill”—the thrill of his own **worthlessness**. And where does that road lead? Right back to the **ascetic ideal**, in a new disguise.

Science today tells man: “You are nothing special. You are an accident. Your dignity is an illusion.” Even Kant, who tried to protect human dignity, admitted that scientific astronomy “annihilates our sense of importance.”

Modern science strips away meaning. It tells man he is a deluded animal, a vanity-ridden mistake. And still—it feels *proud* of this! It brags about its honesty. But what if that pride is just the **last** leftover of man's need to believe he has value—even if it's only the value of **despising himself properly?**

Is this really opposition to the ascetic ideal? On the contrary—it's that ideal's new *camouflage*. It has just swapped out old religious dogmas for new scientific ones. Kant's critique of theology—of “God,” “soul,” “freedom,” and “immortality”—didn't damage the ideal; it *freed* it. Transcendentalists and mystics now chase their dreams in the name of “science,” unburdened by church authorities. The agnostics now worship their own uncertainty—as though not knowing were divine.

Suppose everything “known” to man horrifies him. Suppose he can't bear it. Then what a **godsend** to be able to blame the pain, not on his desires, but on knowledge itself! To say: “There is no knowledge—therefore, there is God!” What an elegant piece of logic. What a masterpiece of intellectual gymnastics. And what a victory for the ascetic ideal!

**26**

So what about modern history—does it show more confidence in life, more faith in our values?

Hardly.

At its best, modern history just wants to be a mirror—it avoids purpose, avoids saying what *should* happen. It refuses to judge, and thinks that's good taste. It doesn't affirm or deny anything—it just observes and describes. But all of this restraint, this “objectivity,” is actually deeply ascetic... and even more deeply nihilistic. Don't miss that.

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Look at your average modern historian—he has the cold, hardened stare of a lonely Arctic explorer. He stares outward, maybe to avoid looking inward—or backward. Everything is quiet, frozen. The only things left making noise are questions like “Where are we going?” “What’s the point?” “Is it all nothing?” No more life grows there. At most, you get the geopolitics of Putin’s Russia and the self-pity of a Tolstoy novel.

And then there’s another kind of historian—worse, if you ask me. The “aesthetic” ones. The delicate, self-styled “artists” who fawn over both life *and* the ascetic ideal. They like to call themselves contemplatives. They’ve carved out their own little niche of smug self-praise and “deep reflection.” These soft intellectuals are so cloying they actually make you long for the bleakness of the ascetics and their cold winter landscapes!

Ugh—these contemplatives! Give me, any day, the cold nihilists trudging through their grey fog over these perfumed, lace-cuffed fakes.

Hell, I’d rather listen to an outright hater of history like Eugen Dühring than to these over-refined posers. At least the raw anarchists among the intellectual working class have *something* real going on.

But the contemplatives? They’re far worse. I’ve never encountered anything more nauseating than one of those “objective” academic types—a preening little dandy of historical knowledge, part priest, part satyr (think of someone like Renan, all perfumed intellect). You can tell what they’re missing by the way their high-pitched applause rings hollow.

This kind of person disgusts me. They test my patience. Let the man with nothing to lose be patient—this kind of sight enrages me more than history itself does. These passive spectators poison the whole play. At least give me the right to kick! Like Nature gave the steer horns and the lion its jaws, it gave me feet—for *stomping*, not running away.

I want to crush every rotten academic “chair,” every cowardly watcher, every pretender who flirts with ascetic ideals, every moral fraud hiding impotence behind righteousness. Yes, I *respect* the ascetic ideal—when it’s real, when it believes in itself, when it doesn’t try to trick us.

But I can’t stand the fake mystics, those bugs trying to reek of the divine until even the divine smells like a bug. I can’t stand the hollow men pretending to be wise and “objective.” I can’t stand the self-promoters dressing up as heroes, using ideals as masks. I can’t stand the vain artists trying to pass as saints or priests—when really, they’re just tragic clowns.

And don’t even get me started on the latest peddlers of fake morality—the anti-Semites who parade around with big Christian-Aryan eyes, whipping up every blockheaded instinct in the crowd with cheap moral outrage and political stunts. The fact that this stuff works in Germany just shows how bankrupt the German mind has become—stuffed with newspapers, politics, beer,

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and Wagner... and no room left for real thought. Add in their obsessive nationalism—"Germany above all!"—and you've got the perfect recipe for mental paralysis.

Modern Europe is rich in one thing: ways to get high. It craves constant stimulation, like an addict. And so it mass-produces *fake ideals*—fiery, intoxicating, but totally empty. The whole place stinks of imitation: fake virtue, fake heroes, fake moral outrage, fake suffering-for-a-cause, fake idealists on every corner.

How many tons of this junk—cheap moral costumes, sugary pity liquor, righteous indignation crutches—would we have to *export* to clear the air?

There's a business idea for you: exporting fake idealism. Someone's going to make a killing. The world is ready for a total makeover, a new flood of ideals—mass-produced and globally distributed.

But who's got the courage to do it?

Bah—why talk about courage? All we need is one thing: **a hand. A free, truly free hand.**

27

Enough! Enough! Let's leave behind these strange twists and tangled personalities of the modern mind—half funny, half disgusting. Our question doesn't need them: the question of the **meaning** of the **ascetic ideal**. What does that have to do with the fads of yesterday or today?

I'll deal with those things more directly in another work (something I'm writing under the title: *The Will to Power: An Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*). The only reason I've even mentioned them here is to point out this: in the intellectual realm, the worst threat to the ascetic ideal has never come from its outright enemies—but from its **parodies**. The clowns of the ideal—the ones who wear its mask but degrade it—*they* are the ones who sow doubt and mistrust.

Everywhere else, where serious minds are at work—working deeply, truthfully, without faking—it's clear: today's thinkers are done with ideals. (The everyday word for this is "atheism.") And yet, there's one exception: **the will to truth.**

But let me tell you something—it's important.

That will to truth, this "last" ideal, is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal. On the contrary, it's **its most refined form**. It is the *essence* of the ideal, stripped down, pure, without ornament. So no, it's not the "leftover" of the ascetic ideal—it's its **core**.

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Radical, honest atheism—the kind of air we thinkers breathe today—is not the enemy of the ascetic ideal. It is in fact **its final stage**, its logical end. It's what happens after two thousand years of Christian commitment to truth finally turns against itself and **forbids the lie** of belief in God.

(And this isn't just a European thing. The exact same pattern happened in India, completely independently. Five centuries before Christ, in fact—most clearly in the Sankhya philosophy, and then spread widely by Buddha. The same ideal, reaching the same conclusion.)

So I ask you—*what actually defeated the Christian God?*

The answer is in *The Gay Science*, aphorism 357: **Christian morality itself**. More precisely, the Christian commitment to truth. That deep need to confess, to examine the conscience—that drive turned into science, into intellectual honesty at any cost. And that, in the end, demanded we throw out the lie of a moral universe.

We no longer interpret nature as proof of God's love, or history as guided by divine reason. We no longer pretend that every little detail of our lives was arranged for the salvation of our soul. That way of thinking is over. Our conscience now rebels against it. We feel in our bones that it's dishonest, shameful, sentimental, cowardly.

And this *honesty*, this ruthless clarity—that's what makes us true Europeans. That's the legacy of Europe's long, hard self-discipline.

Because the greatest things in history don't collapse from outside—they collapse from within. They destroy themselves. That's the law of life. The law of self-mastery.

Christianity destroyed itself *as a dogma* through its own morality. And now, in our time, it's going to destroy itself *as a morality*. We're standing right at that threshold.

After Christianity's passion for truth has chased every last consequence, it finally turns on itself. It asks: "**What does this will to truth really mean?**"

And that's where we find our real problem—*my* problem, *our* problem (you, my still-unknown friends).

What meaning does our whole existence have—if not this: that the will to truth has now finally become conscious of *itself*? That it's now asking itself, "Why?"

And because of that moment of self-awareness, morality—make no mistake—will fall apart. And that collapse? That will be the great drama of Europe's next two centuries.

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It will be terrifying. It will be mysterious. It may be hopeful. But it will be the greatest drama of all.

28

If we take away the ascetic ideal, then man—this creature called man—had no meaning. His life on Earth had no goal. The question “What’s the point of humanity at all?” had no answer. There was no will that justified man’s existence—or even the world’s existence. Behind every great individual life echoed an even louder message: “All is vanity!”

The ascetic ideal gave an answer to that silence. It revealed something was missing—there was a gaping void surrounding man. He didn’t know how to justify his own existence, or to affirm himself. He suffered not just physically, but spiritually: he suffered from not knowing *why*. He didn’t suffer just *because* he was in pain—he suffered because he had no reason for his pain. And that made it unbearable.

Because man—man is the bravest animal. He doesn’t run from pain. He seeks it out. He embraces suffering—if it has a purpose. Suffering itself isn’t the problem—it’s **meaningless** suffering that curses mankind.

And the ascetic ideal stepped in and said: *Here is a meaning!* Finally, there was an answer. Maybe it wasn’t a perfect one. Maybe it brought even more pain—a deeper, sharper kind. It placed suffering in the framework of guilt and sin. It made suffering feel deserved. It stung more.

But it gave suffering meaning. And for that reason, it saved humanity.

Man was no longer a tossed leaf in the wind, or a plaything of chaos. He could now *will* something. It didn’t even matter what the goal was—just the fact that he had a goal. His will was no longer wandering aimlessly.

But let’s not kid ourselves. Let’s see this clearly: every complete and committed version of the ascetic ideal has one thing in common—it **hates life**.

It hates the human, hates the animal, and hates the physical world even more. It is disgusted by the senses, reason, happiness, beauty. It longs to escape from everything that’s alive, changing, growing, dying, desiring, becoming.

This is a will that wants **nothingness**. It is fundamentally anti-life.

But—it **is** still a will. And that’s the most terrifying and revealing thing of all.

Because, as I said before, and I say again now:

**Man would rather will nothingness than not will at all.**

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**PEOPLE AND COUNTRIES**

[The following twenty-seven fragments were intended by Nietzsche to form a supplement to Chapter VIII. of Beyond Good and Evil, dealing with Peoples and Countries.]

1

"Europeans today think of themselves as the most advanced kind of people on the planet."

2

One trait of Europeans is that their actions often don't match their words. In contrast, people from the East tend to live more consistently with their beliefs in everyday life. The way Europeans built their colonies reflects this inconsistency—it reveals a nature that's closer to that of a predator.

This gap between belief and behavior comes from Christianity having turned its back on the social class it originally came from—the lower, oppressed class.

That's what sets us apart from the ancient Greeks: their moral codes came from the ruling classes. The values you find in Thucydides are the same ones that erupted in full force in Plato's philosophy.

The Renaissance brought some attempts at honesty, but they were mostly in service of the arts. Take Michelangelo's view of God, for example—he saw Him as a 'Tyrant of the World.' That was at least an honest depiction.

3

I rank Michelangelo above Raphael because, even though he lived surrounded by the Christian traditions and biases of his time, he still managed to glimpse a vision of culture that was greater than the Christo-Raphaelite one. Raphael, for his part, faithfully and humbly celebrated the values he inherited—he didn't seem to carry any deep restlessness or longing to explore beyond them. Michelangelo, in contrast, grappled with the question of how new values are born. He sensed what it meant to be a lawgiver of the future: a fully realized conqueror who had first conquered the hero within himself. This was someone who had risen to his highest self—who ruled even over his own pity—and who, like an Olympian god, could destroy anything that didn't reflect his own greatness.

To be clear, Michelangelo didn't always live at that extraordinary height. Much of the time, he seemed to submit to the softer, more sentimental Christian ideals—particularly the "eternal feminine." It even seems that, in the end, he gave in to them and let go of the higher vision that

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had inspired his most powerful moments. That vision demanded incredible strength—it wasn't something a man could carry into old age. In fact, to stay true to it, he would have had to destroy Christianity itself. But he wasn't enough of a philosopher or thinker to do that.

Of all those artists, maybe only Leonardo da Vinci had a truly post-Christian perspective. He had an inner sense of the East, the "land of dawn," both in himself and outside of himself. There was something beyond Europe in him—something quiet and distant, as if he had seen too much of the good and the bad to speak lightly again.

### 4

Look how much we've learned—and relearned—in just the last fifty years! The entire Romantic movement, with its idealized notion of "the people," has been thoroughly discredited. We now reject the idea that Homeric poetry was simply "folk poetry." We no longer see the forces of nature as having been deified in some naïve, primitive awe. We've stopped assuming that shared language implies shared race. We've abandoned the idea that religions hold some deep intellectual insights into the supernatural or that they are veiled forms of truth.

The question of *truthfulness* itself is something completely new. It surprises me how far we've come. From this new perspective, we can even judge people like Bismarck as being at fault—not because they were evil, but because they were careless with truth. Or Wagner, not for lack of talent, but for his lack of humility. Even Plato we would fault for his "noble lie" (his *pia fraus*), and Kant, for grounding his categorical imperative in a belief that likely didn't even come from that reasoning in the first place.

In the end, even *doubt* turns on itself—doubt doubting doubt. We're left staring down the ultimate question: How much is truthfulness really worth? And how far should it go?

### 5

What I genuinely enjoy about the German character is its Mephistophelian streak—a mischievous, cunning, and daring nature. But to be honest, we need a deeper, more formidable idea of Mephistopheles than the one Goethe gave us. Goethe had to tone down Mephistopheles just to make his "inner Faust" shine brighter. But the *real* German Mephistopheles is far more dangerous—bolder, more wicked, more intelligent—and for that reason, paradoxically, more sincere and honest. Just think of figures like Frederick the Great, or even more so, the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II.

The true German Mephistopheles doesn't stay confined within borders—he crosses the Alps and assumes everything he sees belongs to him. Then he regains his clarity and sense of self—like Winckelmann did, like Mozart did. He sees characters like Faust and Hamlet not as profound figures but as exaggerated, almost laughable parodies—and even views Luther that way.

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Goethe himself had flashes of this sharp German insight, moments when he likely laughed to himself about all of it. But then he would slip back into his more sentimental, brooding moods.

### 6

Maybe the Germans simply grew up in the wrong climate! There's something within them that could have been truly Hellenic—something graceful, noble, artistic—that awakens when they encounter the South: just look at Winckelmann, Goethe, Mozart. Still, we shouldn't forget that, as a people, we're relatively young. Luther is still our most recent major figure, and the Bible is still, in a way, our last great book. The Germans have never truly undergone a process of "moralisation"—not in the deeper, self-critical sense. Even their downfall, their cultural narrowness—their Philistinism—might just come down to something as basic as their diet.

### 7

The Germans are a dangerous people—they're masters at creating intoxicants. Think of Gothic architecture, rococo style (as Semper points out), their obsession with history and the exotic, or the dizzying systems of Hegel and the operatic world of Richard Wagner. Even Leibniz, especially in today's context, poses a kind of danger. The Germans have gone so far as to idealize the obedient soul—as the virtue of scholars, of soldiers, even of the so-called “simple-minded.”

They might just be the most mixed, multifaceted people on earth.

"The people of the Middle"—they're the ones who invented porcelain... and that peculiar, bureaucratic breed: the Chinese-like Privy Councillor.

### 8

The pettiness and servility of the German soul didn't come from the old system of small states—after all, people from even tinier regions in history were often proud and fiercely independent. And just having a big state doesn't magically produce freer, more dignified souls. A man whose very being obeys the command: "*You must kneel!*"—a man whose body instinctively bends and grovels before titles, medals, and condescending glances from above—well, that same man will only grovel deeper and more eagerly in a mighty empire than he ever did under some petty ruler. No surprise there.

You can still see traces of noble pride in the lower classes of Italy. That history of self-respect and masculine self-discipline hasn't completely vanished—those values were lived and seen for generations. A poor Venetian gondolier carries himself with more dignity than a Berlin Privy Councillor, and truth be told, he's a better man too. Just ask the women.

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9

Most artists—even many of the greatest, including historians—have historically belonged to the servant class. Whether they served the powerful, the Church, women, or “the people,” they rarely created from a place of independence. Take Rubens, for example: he painted the nobility of his time, but according to their idea of beauty and taste—not his own. In that sense, his work ultimately went against his personal aesthetic. Van Dyck was more noble in this regard: he infused his own ideals into his portraits. Rather than lowering himself to flatter his subjects, he elevated them—he portrayed them as reflections of what he valued most.

The artist’s deeply ingrained servility to public taste is harder to detect in music, but it runs just as deep. Consider Sebastian Bach’s infamous, overly humble dedication of his *Mass in B Minor*—a striking example of how even a musical genius bowed to authority. It would likely scandalize people if I said all I really think about this.

Still, some musicians, like Chopin, had a refined character—his distinction is similar to Van Dyck’s. Beethoven, by contrast, had the spirit of a proud farmer; Haydn, the dignity of a proud servant. Mendelssohn also had refinement, but in the most effortless, natural way—like Goethe.

10

At any given time, you could count on one hand the number of German scholars who actually had wit. Most of the rest just had intellect—and a few, luckily, had that famous "childlike spirit" that relies on intuition or "divination." That's something uniquely German: through this kind of instinctive guessing, German scholarship has come up with some truly incredible ideas—ideas so abstract and far-fetched that we can barely even grasp them, and perhaps they don't even *really* exist. Interestingly, the Jews in Germany are the exception—they don't "divine" in this way like the Germans do.

11

Just as the French reflect the politeness and sharp wit of their social culture, the Germans reflect the depth and serious-mindedness of their mystics and composers—along with a certain goofy childishness. The Italian, on the other hand, often displays a natural sense of refinement and artistic sensibility, and can carry himself with nobility and pride, but without the arrogance.

12

I hope that, in time, a greater number of the more capable and talented individuals will have enough self-discipline to rid themselves of the harmful allure of affectation and sentimental gloom, and turn against figures like Richard Wagner and Schopenhauer. These two Germans are leading us towards destruction, as they pander to our more dangerous traits. A more powerful

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future lies in the examples set by Goethe, Beethoven, and Bismarck, rather than in these deviations from the norm. We have yet to produce true philosophers.

## 13

The peasant represents the most common form of nobility, as he is most reliant on himself. Peasant blood remains the strongest in Germany—consider figures like Luther, Niebuhr, and Bismarck as examples.

Bismarck, despite his German identity, had Slavonic roots. If one observes the faces of Germans, they'll see that much of the robust, virile blood has migrated abroad. The people who remained behind—those with more submissive, slave-like traits—were later improved by external influences, particularly through the infusion of Slavonic blood.

The Brandenburg nobility, the Prussian nobility as a whole, and the peasants of certain North German regions currently embody the most resolute and manly spirits in Germany.

That the strongest and most capable should lead—this is the natural and rightful order of things.

## 14

The future of German culture depends on the sons of the Prussian officers. They represent the strength, discipline, and leadership that are essential for the continuation and growth of German civilization. These individuals are seen as the carriers of the traditions and values that will shape Germany's future.

## 15

Germany has always lacked wit, and average minds often rise to the highest honors simply because even they are rare. What is most valued in Germany are qualities like hard work, perseverance, and a cold, critical perspective. Because of these traits, German scholarship and the German military system have become dominant in Europe.

## 16

Parliaments can be very useful to a strong and adaptable statesman: they provide something reliable (although, of course, it must be able to withstand pressure!). However, on the whole, I wish that the obsession with counting votes and the superstitious belief in majorities were not so ingrained in Germany, as it is in Latin countries, and that we could finally come up with something new in politics. It is both foolish and risky to allow universal suffrage—still relatively new and easily reversible—to take deeper root. Its introduction was merely a short-term solution to avoid temporary problems.

Can anyone take an interest in this German Empire? Where is the new thinking? Is it just a new arrangement of power? Even worse, if it doesn't know what it wants. Peace and laissez-faire are not political ideals I respect. Ruling, and helping the highest thoughts succeed—those are the only things that can make me interested in Germany. England's small-mindedness is the greatest danger to the world today. I see more inclination towards greatness in the feelings of Russian Nihilists than in those of the English Utilitarians. We need an integration of the German and Slavic races, and we also need the cleverest financiers, the Jews, for us to become masters of the world.

- (a) A sense of reality.
- (b) Abandoning the English principle of the people's right to representation. We need the representation of great interests.
- (c) We need an unconditional alliance with Russia, along with a mutual plan of action that prevents any English influences from gaining control in Russia. No American future!
- (d) A national system of politics is unsustainable, and being hindered by Christian views is a great evil. In Europe, all sensible people are sceptics, whether they admit it or not.

I see beyond all these national wars, new "empires," and whatever else is in the foreground. What I'm truly concerned with—though I see it unfolding slowly and hesitantly—is the idea of a United Europe. This was the only real goal, the driving force in the minds of all the broad-minded and deep-thinking individuals of this century—the preparation for a new synthesis, and the tentative effort to anticipate the future of "the European." Only in their weaker moments, or as they grew older, did they revert back to the national narrowness of the "Fatherlanders"—then they were "patriots" once more. I'm thinking of figures like Napoleon, Heinrich Heine, Goethe, Beethoven, Stendhal, Schopenhauer. Perhaps Richard Wagner belongs to this group, though, as a prime example of German obscurity, it's difficult to say for sure.

To aid such minds, who see the need for a new unity, comes a major economic fact: the small States of Europe—I'm referring to all our current kingdoms and "empires"—will soon become economically unfeasible due to the intense, uncontrolled competition for local and international trade. Money is already forcing European nations to unite into a single power. However, for Europe to stand a chance in the global struggle for dominance (and we can easily predict against whom this battle will be fought), she will likely need to "come to an understanding" with England. The English colonies are essential for this struggle, just as much as modern Germany, which now plays the role of intermediary and broker, needs the colonial possessions of the

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Netherlands. No one believes that England alone can continue to play her old role for another fifty years. The inability to prevent new individuals from rising in government will destroy her, and the constant changes in political parties present a major barrier to completing long-term tasks. Today, a man must first be a soldier so that he does not lose his credibility as a merchant later. Enough. In this and other matters, the coming century will follow in Napoleon's footsteps—the first man of great initiative and progressive ideas in modern times. For the challenges of the next century, methods of popular representation and parliaments are the least suitable options imaginable.

### 19

The condition of Europe in the next century will once again foster the development of manly virtues, as men will constantly face danger. Universal military service already serves as the curious antidote to the effeminacy brought about by democratic ideas, and it has emerged from the struggle among nations. (Nation—men who speak the same language and read the same newspapers. These men now call themselves "nations," and they are all too eager to trace their ancestry to the same origin and through the same history; however, even with the help of the most deceitful accounts from the past, they have failed to achieve this.)

### 20

What quagmires and lies must exist if, in the modern European hodgepodge, questions of "race" can even be raised! (Assuming, of course, that the origin of such writers is not in places like Horneo or Borneo.)

### 21

**Maxim:** Do not associate with anyone who participates in the deceptive "race" fraud.

### 22

With the freedom of travel that now exists, groups of people of the same kindred can come together and form communal habits and customs, working toward the overcoming of "nations."

### 23

To make Europe the center of culture, we must not let national foolishness blind us to the fact that, at the higher levels, there is already a continuous mutual dependence. French and German philosophy. Richard Wagner and Paris (1830-50). Goethe and Greece. Everything is pushing toward a synthesis of the European past in the highest intellectual figures.

24

Mankind still has much ahead of it—how, in general, could the ideal be taken from the past? Perhaps only in relation to the present, which might be a lower realm.

25

This is our distrust, which recurs again and again; our care, which never lets us sleep; our question, which no one listens to or wishes to listen to; our Sphinx, near which there is more than one precipice: we believe that the men of present-day Europe are deceived in regard to the things we love most, and a pitiless demon (no, not pitiless, only indifferent and puerile) plays with our hearts and their enthusiasm, as it may have already played with everything that lived and loved. I believe that everything which we Europeans of today are in the habit of admiring as the values of all these respected things called "humanity," "mankind," "sympathy," "pity," may be of some value as the debilitation and moderating of certain powerful and dangerous primitive impulses. Nevertheless, in the long run, all these things are nothing else than the belittling of the entire type "man," his mediocrisation, if I may use such a desperate expression in such a desperate situation. I think that the commedia umana for an epicurean spectator-god must consist in this: that the Europeans, by virtue of their growing morality, believe in all their innocence and vanity that they are rising higher and higher, whereas the truth is that they are sinking lower and lower—i.e. through the cultivation of all the virtues that are useful to a herd, and through the repression of the other and contrary virtues that give rise to a new, higher, stronger, masterful race of men—the first-named virtues merely develop the herd-animal in man and stabilitate the animal "man," for until now man has been "the animal as yet unstabilitated."

26

**Genius and Epoch:** Heroism is not a form of selfishness, for one is shipwrecked by it. The direction of power is often conditioned by the state of the period in which the great man happens to be born; and this fact brings about the superstition that he is the expression of his time. But this same power could be applied in several different ways; and between him and his time there is always this difference: that public opinion always worships the herd instinct — i.e., the instinct of the weak — while he, the strong man, fights for strong ideals.

27

The fate now overhanging Europe is simply this: that it is exactly her strongest sons that come rarely and late to the spring-time of their existence; that, as a rule, when they are already in their early youth, they perish, saddened, disgusted, darkened in mind, just because they have already, with the entire passion of their strength, drained to the dregs the cup of disillusionment, which in our days means the cup of knowledge, and they would not have been the strongest had they not also been the most disillusioned. For that is the test of their power — they must first rise out of the illness of their epoch to reach their own health. A late spring-time is their mark of distinction;

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also, let us add, late merriment, late folly, the late exuberance of joy! For this is the danger of today: everything that we loved when we were young has betrayed us. Our last love — the love which makes us acknowledge her, our love for Truth — let us take care that she, too, does not betray us!