

ON TRUTH AND LIE IN AN EXTRA-MORAL SENSE

By Friedrich Nietzsche (1873)

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Part One: On Man

1.

In some remote corner of the universe that was poured out in countless flickering solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the most arrogant and the most untruthful minute in world history – yet it was only a minute. After nature had taken a few breaths, the star froze over and the clever animals had to die.

Someone could invent such a fable and still not have illustrated adequately how pitiful, how shadowy and fleeting, how purposeless and arbitrary the human intellect appears within nature. There were eternities when it didn't exist; and someday when it's no longer there, not much will have changed. For that intellect has no further mission which goes beyond human life. It is utterly human, and only its owner and producer takes it with such pathos as if the whole world hinged upon it. But if we could communicate with the fly, we would learn that it too swims through the air with this same pathos and feels within itself the flying center of this world.

2.

For what do you really know about yourself? If you could just for once see yourself completely, as if displayed in an illuminated showcase! Does not nature keep nearly everything secret from you, even about your body? Does not nature keep you unmindful of the windings of your intestines, the swift flow of your bloodstream, the intricate quivering of your tissues in order to lock you in a proud, delusionary consciousness?

Nature threw away the key; and woe to the fateful curiosity that for once succeeded in peering through a crack out of the room of consciousness, suddenly realizing that man is based on a lack of mercy, insatiable greed, murder, that man is based on the indifference that stems from his ignorance – while day-dreaming on a tiger's back.

Given this state of affairs, where in the world does the desire for truth originate?

3.

In the state of nature, since the individual wanted to preserve himself against other individuals, man used the intellect mostly for dissimulation and to protect himself. After some time man, out of both necessity and boredom, wanted to live socially, in the herd, and for that he needed a peace treaty. And this peace treaty, this contract apparently was the first step toward man's mysterious desire for truth. From that point on, what "truth" would be was fixed; a uniformly valid and binding terminology for things was invented. For the first time, the distinction between truth and lying arose.

Now man uses the current terminology, the words, to make the unreal appear real, to make the untruth appear truthful: for instance, he says, "I am rich," when in his current state "poor" would be the appropriate term. He himself misuses the established conventions of language through arbitrary substitutions or reversals of names. What about those conventions of language? Are they perhaps products of knowledge, of the sense for truth? Do terms coincide with things? Is language the adequate expression of all realities?

4.

(addresses the audience): What, is it? I mean you have all been here the last, you know, three-and-a-half-days talking about this stuff, any conclusions? Is language the adequate expression of all realities? What do you think? No idea, huh?

An incomprehensible voice from the audience

Excuse me?

Audience member: In one way...

"In one way." That's an answer... What is a hamburger? What is a hamburger?!

Another audience member: Food!

A hamburger is a sesame-seed bun sliced down the middle laterally, mayonnaise, ketchup, a 100 percent beef patty that has been grilled, tomato, onion, lettuce, bacon. That's a hamburger, cheddar cheese or jack cheese, that would be a cheeseburger. But that's a hamburger. What is a cappuccino?

Voice from audience: It's not a melange!

That's right. A cappuccino is a shot of espresso, or a double-shot of espresso, steamed milk and milk foam, that's a capuccino.

What is a word? Merely a nerve stimulus transformed into an image converted into sounds. But to conclude that a nerve stimulus is caused by something outside ourselves is already the result of a false and unjustified application of the law of causality. How can we possibly say: "A stone is hard," or "This wood is hard" for that matter, as if "hard" were known to us as something other than a subjective stimulation!

We speak of a "serpent"; the term applies to nothing but its winding, and so it would apply equally to a worm, an eel, the wagging tail of the dog. What arbitrary delimitations, what one-sided preferences for one trait or another of a thing! When we speak bricks, or walls, houses, when we speak of cars, tyres, bicycles, when we speak of streets and lights, street lamps, or cushions to sit on, or black cubes, when we speak of cables, lamps, sofas, when we speak of beds, when we speak of pillows, chairs, when we speak of blankets, plates, bowls, forks, spoons, glasses, cups, when we speak of eye glasses, when we speak of pins, sweaters, when we speak of pants, trousers, shoes, socks, underwear, hats, bags, wallets, credit cards, when we speak of tanks, satellites, missiles, guns, when we speak of fences, when we speak of explosions, when we speak of hospitals, when we speak of doctors and railroads and s-bahns and u-bahns, and airplanes and blimps, when we speak of helicopters, when we speak of stairs, staircases, railings, when we speak of flowers or trees, when we speak of all these things we believe we know something about the things themselves, although what we actually have access to are just *metaphors*, which do not correspond at all to the entities themselves.

Every word becomes a concept as soon as it is supposed to simultaneously fit countless, more or less similar phenomena, which, strictly speaking, are never identical, absolutely dissimilar. Just as no leaf is ever exactly the same as any other, certainly the concept "leaf" is formed by arbitrarily dropping those individual differences, by forgetting about the distinguishing factors,

and this gives rise to the idea that besides leaves there is in nature such a thing as "the leaf," i.e., an original form according to which all leaves are supposedly woven, sketched, traced, coloured, curled, so that not one single specimen turns out correctly and reliably as a true copy of the original form. Nature knows neither forms nor concepts, hence also no species, but only an X that is inaccessible and indefinable for us.

If we had, each of us, a varying sensory perception, if we could see now like a bird, now like a worm, now like a plant; or if one of us saw the same stimulus as red, another as blue, while a third heard it even as a sound, then no one would speak of such principles of nature. We would grasp it only as a highly subjective formation.

5.

What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors and anthropomorphisms, a sum of human relations, which after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to the people: Truths are illusions, however man has forgotten that they are illusions, merely worn-out metaphors which have become impotent, coins which have lost their face, and can be used only as metal.

Now, of course, man forgets that this is his situation; after centuries of habitualization, he unknowingly lies - and precisely through this unconsciousness, through this forgetting, he arrives at his sense of truth. In this respect man can probably be admired as a mighty architectural genius who succeeds in building an infinitely complicated conceptual cathedral on floating foundations. Of course, in order to anchor himself to such a foundation, the building must be as light as a spiderweb – strong enough to not be blown apart by the wind, yet delicate enough to be carried along by the wave. As an architectural genius, man excels the bee; for the bee builds out of wax that it collects from nature, while man builds out of a much more subtle material, concepts, which he must fabricate out of his own self. In *this* respect he is quite admirable.

However, if someone hides an object behind a bush, and then looks for this object there, and, surprise surprise, finds it there, there is nothing admirable about that mode of hide-and-seek: and yet that is the way it is with the seeking and finding of "truth" within the rational sphere. If I define the mammal and then declare, after examining a camel, "See, a mammal," some truth is brought to light, but it is of limited value. The investigator into such truths is basically seeking just the metamorphosis of the world in himself. Man's procedure is to hold up man as the measure of all things.

Part 2: After The Fall – The Artist (Tape Recording)

6.

Man seeks a new territory for his activities and a different riverbed and finds it in myth and generally in the arts. Here he consciously confuses the categories and cells of the concepts, continuously showing the desire to shape the existing world of the wide-awake person in such a creatively irregular and playfully disjointed way, in such an exciting and eternally new way, as it is in the world of dreams. Actually, the wide-awake person is certain that he is awake only because of the rigidly regular web of concepts, and so he sometimes comes to believe that he is dreaming when at times that web of concepts is torn apart by art.

As long as the intellect is free and released from its usual servile tasks, never is it more

exuberant, richer, prouder, more skillful and bold. While the needy man clings to that enormous structure of beams and boards, the concepts, for his survival, the liberated intellect uses this scaffolding as a plaything for his boldest artifices. And when he smashes the woodwork of concepts apart, scattering it, and then ironically puts it together again, joining the most remote parts and separating what is closest, he reveals that he is now guided not by concepts but by intuitions.

7.

The intuitive man, standing in the midst of his culture, reaps from his intuitions a continuously streaming clarification, cheerfulness, redemption. He desires to master life; as an "overjoyous" hero, considering only life, disguised as illusion and beauty, to be real. Where once the intuitive man, as in ancient Greece, bore his weapons more powerfully and victoriously than his adversary, the rational man, in favorable cases a culture can form and the domination of art over life be established.

Of course, the intuitive man suffers more violently when he does suffer; indeed, he also suffers more often, because he does not know how to learn from experience and he falls again and again into the same pit into which he fell before. He is then just as unreasonable in sorrow as in happiness; he cries out loudly and cannot be consoled.