The Gay Science

by Friedrich Nietzsche

Selected Text

Book III

Excerpts from translation by Walter Kaufmann.
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108.

New struggles.— After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.— And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too!

110.

Origin of knowledge.— Over immense periods of time the intellect produced nothing but errors. A few of these proved to be useful and helped to preserve the species: those who hit upon or inherited these had better luck in their struggle for themselves and their progeny. Such erroneous articles of faith, which were continually inherited, until they became almost part of the basic endowment of the species, include the following: that there are enduring things; that there are equal things; that there are things, substances, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in itself. It was only very late that such propositions were denied and doubted—it was only very late that truth emerged, as the weakest form of knowledge. It seemed that one was unable to live with it, our organism was prepared for the opposite; all its higher functions, sense perception and every kind of sensation worked with those basic errors which had been incorporated since time immemorial. Indeed, even in the realm of knowledge these propositions became the norms according to which "true" and "untrue" were determined—down to the most remote regions of logic. Thus: the *strength* of knowledge does not depend on its degree of truth but on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life. Where life and knowledge seemed to be at odds there was never any real fight; but denial and doubt were simply considered madness. Those exceptional thinkers, like the Eleatics, who nevertheless posited and clung to the opposites of the natural errors, believed that it was possible to *live* in accordance with these opposites: they invented the sage as the man who was unchangeable and impersonal, the man of the universality of intuition who was One and All at the same time, with a special capacity for his inverted knowledge; they had the faith that their knowledge was also the principle of *life*. But in order to claim all of this, they had to *deceive* themselves about their own state: they had to attribute to themselves, fictitiously, impersonality and changeless duration; they had to misapprehend the nature of the knower; they had to deny the role of the impulses in knowledge; and quite generally they had to conceive of reason as a completely free and spontaneous activity; they shut their eyes to the fact that they, too, had arrived at their propositions through opposition to common sense, or owing to a desire for tranquility, for sole possession, or for dominion. The subtler development of honesty and skepticism eventually made these people, too, impossible; their ways of living and judging were seen to be also dependent upon the primeval impulses and basic errors of all sentient existence.— This subtler honesty and skepticism came into being wherever two contradictory sentences appeared to be *applicable* to life because both were compatible with the basic errors, and it was therefore possible to argue about the higher or lower degree of *utility* for life; also wherever new propositions, though not useful for life, were also evidently not harmful to life: in such cases there was room for the expression of an intellectual play impulse, and honesty and skepticism were innocent and happy like all play. Gradually, the human brain became full of such judgements and convictions, and a ferment, struggle, and lust for power [Machtgelüst] developed in this tangle. Not only utility and delight but every kind of impulse took sides in this fight about "truths"; the intellectual fight became an occupation, an attraction, a profession, a duty, something dignified—: and eventually knowledge and the striving for the true found their place as a need among other needs. Henceforth not only faith and conviction but also scrutiny, denial, mistrust, and contradiction became a *power*, all "evil" instincts were subordinated to knowledge, employed in her service, and acquired the splendor of what is permitted, honored, and useful—and eventually even the eye and innocence of the *good*. Thus knowledge became a piece of life itself, and hence a continually growing power: until eventually knowledge collided with these primeval basic errors, two lives, two powers, both in the same human being. The thinker: that is now that being in whom the impulse for truth and those life-preserving errors clash for the first fight, after the impulse for truth has *proved* to be also a life-preserving power. Compared to the significance of this fight, everything else is a matter of indifference: the ultimate question about the conditions of life has been posed here, and we confront the first attempt to answer this question by experiment. To what extent can truth endure incorporation?—that is the question, that is the experiment.

111.

Origin of the logical.— How did logic come into existence in man's head? Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense. Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished: for all that, their ways might have been truer! Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is "equal" as regards both nourishment and hostile animals, who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously, were favored with a lesser probability of survival than those who guessed immediately upon encountering similar instances that they must be equal. The dominant tendency, however, to treat as equal what is merely similar, an illogical tendency—for nothing is really equal—is what first created any basis for logic. In order that the concept of substance could originate—which is indispensable for logic although in the strictest sense nothing real corresponds to it—it was likewise necessary that for a long time one did not see nor perceive the changes in things; the beings that did not see so precisely had an advantage over those that saw everything "in flux." At bottom, every high degree of caution in making inferences and every skeptical tendency constitute a great danger for life. No living beings would have survived if the opposite tendency, to affirm rather than suspend judgment, to err and make up things rather than wait, to assent rather than negate, to pass judgment rather than be just—had not been bred to the point where it became extraordinarily strong.—The course of logical ideas and inferences in our brain today corresponds to a process and a struggle among impulses that are, taken singly, very illogical and unjust; we generally experience only the result of this struggle: this primeval mechanism now runs its course so quickly and is so well concealed.

112.

Cause and effect.— "Explanation" is what we call it: but it is "description" that distinguishes us from older stages of knowledge and science. Our descriptions are better—we do not explain any more than our predecessors. We have uncovered a manifold one-after-another where the naive man and inquirer of older cultures saw only two separate things, "cause" and "effect" as the saying goes; but we have merely perfected the image of becoming without reaching beyond the image or behind it. In every case the series of "causes" confronts us much more completely, and we infer: first, this and that has to precede in order that this or that may then follow—but this does not involve any *comprehension*. In every chemical process, for example, quality appears as a "miracle," as ever; also, every locomotion; nobody has "explained" a push. But how could we possibly explain anything! We operate only with things that do not exist: lines, planes, bodies, atoms, divisible time spans, divisible spaces—, how should explanations be at all possible when we first turn everything into an *image*, our image! It will do to consider science as an attempt to humanize things as faithfully as possible; as we describe things and their one-after-another, we learn how to describe ourselves more and more precisely. Cause and effect: such a duality probably never exists,—in truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces, just as we perceive motion only as isolated points and then infer it without ever actually seeing it. The suddenness with which many effects stand out misleads us; actually, it is sudden only for us. In this moment of suddenness there is an infinite number of processes that elude us. An intellect that could see cause and effect as a continuum and a flux and not, as we do, in terms of an arbitrary division and dismemberment—would repudiate the concept of cause and effect and deny all conditionality.

116.

Herd instinct.— Wherever we encounter a morality, we also encounter valuations and an order of rank of human impulses and actions. These valuations and orders of rank are always expressions of the needs of a community and herd: whatever benefits *it* most—and secondmost, and thirdmost—that is also considered the first standard for the value of all individuals. Morality trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function. The conditions for the preservation of different communities were very different; hence there were very different moralities. Considering essential changes in the forms of future herds and communities, states and societies, we can prophesy that there will yet be very divergent moralities. Morality is herd instinct in the individual.

117.

Herd remorse.— During the longest and most remote periods of the human past, the sting of conscience was not at all what it is now. Today one feels responsible only for one's will and actions, and one finds one's pride in oneself: all our teachers of law start from this sense of self and pleasure in the individual as if this had always been the fount of law. But during the longest period of the human past nothing was more terrible than to feel that one stood by oneself. To be alone, to experience things by oneself, neither to obey nor to rule, to be an individual—that was not a pleasure but a punishment; one was sentenced to "individuality." Freedom of thought was considered discomfort itself. While we experience law and submission as compulsion and loss, it was egoism that was formerly experienced as something painful and as real misery. To be a self and to esteem oneself according to one's own weight and measure—that offended taste in those days. An inclination to do this would have been considered madness: for being alone was associated with every misery and fear. In those days, "free will" was very closely associated with a bad conscience [Damals hatte der "freie Wille" das böse Gewissen in seiner nächsten Nachbarschaft]: and the more unfree one's actions were, and the more the herd instinct rather than any personal sense found expression in an action, the more moral one felt. Whatever harmed the herd, whether the individual had wanted it or not wanted it, prompted the sting of conscience in the individual—and in his neighbor, too, and even in the whole herd!— There is no point on which we have to learn to think and feel more differently.

124.

In the horizon of the infinite.— We have left the land and have embarked! We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone further and destroyed the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom*—and there is no longer any "land"!

125.

The madman.— Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"— As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?— Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried. "I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I! All of us are his murderers! But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? And backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition?—Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives,—who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed,—and whoever is born after us, for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto!"— Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners: they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern to the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering—it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—*and yet they have done it themselves*!"— It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his **requiem aeternam deo**. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?" —

143.

The greatest advantage of polytheism.— For an individual to posit his own ideal and to derive from it his *own* law, joys, and rights—that may well have been considered hitherto as the most outrageous human aberration and as idolatry itself; the few who dared as much always felt the need to apologize to themselves, usually by saying: "Not I! Not I! But *a god* through me!" The wonderful art and gift of creating gods—polytheism—was the medium through which this impulse could discharge, purifiy, perfect, and ennoble itself: for originally it was a very undistinguished impulse, related to stubbornness, disobedience and envy. *Hostility* against this impulse to have an ideal of one's own was formerly the central law of all morality. There was only one norm: "*man*"—and every people thought that it *possessed* this one ultimate norm. But above and outside, in some distant overworld, one was permitted to behold a *plurality of norms*: one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him! Here the luxury of individuals was first permitted, here one first honored the rights of individuals. The invention of gods, heroes, and overmen of all kinds, as well as near-men and undermen, of dwarfs, fairies, centaurs, satyrs, demons and devils was the inestimable preliminary exercise for the justification of the egoism and sovereignty of the individual: the freedom that one conceded to a god in his relation to other gods one eventually also granted to oneself in relation to laws, customs, and neighbors. Monotheism, on the other hand, this rigid consequence of the doctrine of one normal human type— the faith in one normal god beside whom there are only pseudo-gods [falsche Lügengötter]—was perhaps the greatest danger that has yet confronted humanity: it threatened us with the premature stagnation that, as far as we can see, most other species have long reached; for all of them believe in one normal type [Ein Normalthier] and ideal for their species, and they have translated the morality of mores definitively into their own flesh and blood. [See 43.] In polytheism the free-spiriting and many-spiriting of man obtained its first preliminary form: the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes and ever again new eyes that are even more are own: hence man alone among all the animals has no eternal horizons and perspectives.

149.

The failures of reformations.— Among the Greeks several attempts to found new Greek religions failed, which speaks for the higher civilization of the Greeks even in rather early times; it suggests that there must have been in Greece at an early time large numbers of diverse individuals whose diverse needs and miseries could not be taken care of with a single prescription of faith and hope. Pythagoras and Plato, perhaps also Empedocles, and much earlier yet the Orphic enthusiasts, aimed to found new religions; and the first two had souls and talents that fitted them so obviously for the role of religious founders that one can scarcely marvel enough that they should have failed: yet all they managed to found were sects. Whenever the reformation of a whole people fails and it is only sects that elevate their leader, we may conclude that the people has become relatively heterogeneous and has begun to move away from rude herd instincts and the morality of mores: they are hovering in an interesting position that is usually dismissed as a mere decay of morals and corruption, although in fact it proclaims that the egg is approaching maturity, and that the eggshell is about to be broken. That Luther's Reformation succeeded in the North suggests that the north of Europe was retarded compared to the south, and still knew only rather homogeneous and monotonous needs. Indeed, Europe would never have become Christian in the first place if the culture of the ancient world in the south had not gradually been barbarized through an excessive admixture of Teutonic barbarian blood, thus losing its cultural superiority. The more general and unconditional the influence of an individual or the idea of an individual can be, the more homogenous and the lower must the mass be that is influenced; while counter-movements give evidence of counter-needs that also want to be satisfied and recognized. Conversely, we may always infer that a civilization is really high when powerful and domineering natures have little influence and create only sects: this applies also to the various arts and the field of knowledge. Where someone rules, there are masses: where we find masses we also find a need to be enslaved. Where men are enslaved, there are few individuals, and these are opposed by herd instincts and conscience.

151.

Of the origin of religion.— The metaphysical need is not the origin of religions, as Schopenhauer supposed, but merely a *late offshoot*. Under the rule of religious ideas, one has become accustomed to the notion of "another world (behind, below, above)" and when religious ideas are destroyed one is troubled by an uncomfortable emptiness and deprivation,—and from this feeling grows once again "another world," but now merely a metaphysical one that is no longer religious. But what first led to a positing of "another world" in primeval times was *not* some impulse or need but an *error* in the interpretation of certain natural events, a failure of the intellect.

153.

Homo poeta.— "I myself, having made this tragedy of tragedies all by myself, insofar as it is finished; I, having first tied the knot of morality into existence before I drew it so tight that only a god could untie it ,—which is what Horace demands!—I myself have now slain all gods in the fourth act,—for the sake of morality! Now, what is to become of the fifth act! From where am I to take the tragic solution!— Should I begin to think about a comic solution?"

154.

Different types of dangerous lives.— You have no idea what you are living through; you rush through life as if you were drunk and now and then fall down some staircase. But thanks to your drunkenness you never break a limb: your muscles are too relaxed and your brain too benighted for you to find the stones of these stairs as hard as we do! For us life is more dangerous: we are made of glass—woe unto us if we merely *bump* ourselves! And all is lost if we *fall*!

163.

After a great victory.— What is best about a great victory is that it liberates the victor from the fear of defeat. "Why not be defeated some time, too?"—he says to himself: "Now I am rich enough for that."

173.

Being profound and seeming profound.— Those who know that they are profound strive for clarity; those who would like to seem profound to the crowd strive for obscurity. For the crowd believes that if it cannot see to the bottom of something it must be profound: it is so timid and dislikes going into the water.

174.

Apart.— Parliamentarianism, that is, public permission to choose between five basic political opinions, flatters and wins the favor of all those who would like to *seem* independent and individual, as if they fought for their opinions. Ultimately, however, it is indifferent whether the herd is commanded to have one opinion or permitted to have five.— Whoever deviates from the five public opinions and stands apart will always have the whole herd against him.

179.

Thoughts.— Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings—always darker, emptier, simpler.

200.

Laughter.— Laughter means: being schadenfroh but with a good conscience. [schadenfroh: the word is famous for being untranslatable; it signifies taking a malicious delight in the discomfort of another person.]

258.

The denial of chance.— No victor believes in chance.

264.

What we do.— What we do is never understood but always only praised or censured.

266.

Where cruelty is needed.— Those who have greatness are cruel to their virtues and to secondary considerations.

267.

With a great goal.— With a great goal one is superior even to justice, not only to one's deeds and one's judges.

268.

What makes one heroic?— Going out to meet at the same time one's highest suffering and one's highest hope.

269.

In what do you believe?— In this: that the weights of all things must be determined anew.

270.

What does your conscience say?— "You shall become the person you are."

271.

Where are your greatest dangers?— In pity.

272.

What do you love in others?— My hopes.

273.

Whom do you call bad?— Those who always want to put to shame.

274.

What do you consider most humane?— To spare someone shame.

275.

What is the seal of liberation?— No longer being ashamed in front of oneself.