BOOK SUMMARY

Human, All Too Human

by Friedrich Nietzsche

A turn toward the free spirit, historical explanation, and psychological observation.

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Key ideas

1. **Historical philosophy.** Values, beliefs and even our faculty of knowledge have developed through human history, so no ideal has a miraculous origin.
2. **Psychological scrutiny.** Noble actions, saintly asceticism and the need for redemption can be traced to familiar motives like vanity, power and self-love.
3. **The fable of free will.** Responsibility is an inherited error, since good actions are sublimated selfish ones and differ from evil ones only in degree.
4. **Genius demystified.** Great works come from patient craft and selective judgment rather than sudden inspiration, and the cult of genius flatters our vanity.
5. **The free spirit.** Independence begins with questioning inherited convictions, which are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies.

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Preface (1886)

Human, All Too Human first appeared in 1878, subtitled A Book for Free Spirits and dedicated to the memory of Voltaire. The preface printed here was added eight years later, in spring 1886 at Nice, when Nietzsche looked back on the book from the far side of his later work. People tell him, he begins, that all his writings from The Birth of Tragedy onward share something: snares and nets for unwary birds, and a constant urge to invert customary valuations. They have been called a school of suspicion and of contempt, and, more kindly, a school of courage. He admits that perhaps no one has ever looked at the world with such deep suspicion, and that the loneliness it brings drove him to seek shelter in reverence, hostility, science, levity or even stupidity.

Then comes a striking confession. The “free spirits” to whom the book is dedicated never existed. He invented them, he says, as companions to keep him cheerful amid sickness, loneliness, foreignness and inactivity, ghosts to laugh and gossip with in place of the friends he lacked. Yet he does not doubt that such spirits will one day exist in Europe, and he sees himself describing in advance the paths by which they will come. “Already I see them coming, slowly, slowly,” he writes. The phrase “free spirit,” he adds, is a cool expression that does good in every condition, and the book is meant as a companion for those on the way to becoming one.

The heart of the preface is a portrait of how a free spirit is made. Those most strongly bound, by duty, reverence and gratitude to home and teachers, experience the “great emancipation” suddenly, like an earthquake. A dangerous curiosity flares up, together with contempt for what was loved, and the soul tears itself away into lonely experiment, sickness and wandering. After long years of convalescence, it slowly returns to life. Nietzsche pictures convalescents as lizards with their faces half turned back toward the sun, grateful for small things, astonished at how near and familiar things have changed.

Only then does the riddle of emancipation answer itself. The free spirit hears that he was meant to become master of his own virtues, which had been his masters; to learn the perspective in every valuation and the necessary injustice in every for and against, which is inseparable from life. His problem, Nietzsche says, is the order of rank. The preface ends by noting that this German book has found readers abroad but been read worst in Germany, because it demands leisure and refinement Germans lack. Readers should remember that the 1886 preface reads the book through Nietzsche’s later concerns, which are not always visible in the 1878 aphorisms themselves.

CHAPTER 1

First Division: First and Last Things (§§1–34)

The book opens with a programmatic aphorism, “Chemistry of Ideas and Sensations” (§1). For two thousand years, Nietzsche says, philosophy has asked how anything can arise from its opposite: reason from unreason, the living from the dead, truth from error, selflessness from selfishness. Metaphysics answered by giving the higher things a miraculous origin in the “thing in itself.” Historical philosophy, now inseparable from natural science, finds instead that there are no opposites except in the usual exaggeration of the popular or metaphysical point of view, and that what we prize most is sublimated from lowly materials. Strictly speaking, there is neither a wholly unselfish action nor a wholly disinterested point of view. What we need, he says, is a chemistry of moral, religious and aesthetic ideas and feelings.

Philosophers have one inherited fault (§2): they take the human being of their own day as an eternal truth and forget that humanity, including its faculty of knowledge, has developed. A lack of historical sense is the hereditary defect of all philosophers. So Nietzsche praises small, unpretentious truths found by strict method over dazzling errors from metaphysical and artistic ages (§3), and he traces metaphysics itself to a misunderstanding of dreams (§5): primitive people believed dreams showed them a second real world, and from this came the split between soul and body, the belief in spirits and perhaps in gods.

He does not deny that a metaphysical world is possible (§9). We see everything through the human head and cannot cut it off. But what has made metaphysics precious, terrible and delightful is passion, error and self-deception, the worst methods of knowledge, and once these are exposed, the bare possibility is useless. When the origins of religion, art and morality can be explained without metaphysics, interest in the thing in itself fades (§10). Language, too, is a kind of presumed science (§11): humans believed their words expressed knowledge of things, and that pride helped raise them above the animals.

Nietzsche then considers what is lost. Without metaphysical faith, people stop planting trees that shade later generations (§22). Ours is an age of comparison, in which all moralities and cultures can be experienced side by side (§23), and humanity can now consciously shape a new culture and even administer the earth as a whole (§24, §25). He warns against leaping straight from religion to science (§20, §27) and insists that we must understand the historical justification of what we have outgrown. Religion and art are blossoms of the world, he writes (§29), but no nearer its root than the stalk.

The division closes on a hard thought. The illogical is necessary for human beings (§31), every judgment of the value of life is unjust (§32), and belief in life's value rests on errors (§33). Must truth then become hostile to life (§34)? Nietzsche answers that it depends on temperament. A mild, cheerful soul might live with this knowledge simply, without praise or blame, watching much it once feared as if it were a play, renouncing almost everything others prize for the sake of a free, fearless soaring over men, customs, laws and traditional valuations.

CHAPTER 2

Second Division: The History of the Moral Sentiments (§§35–107)

Nietzsche begins by defending psychological observation, the old art of the French moralists, which, he says, lightens life and gives presence of mind (§35). He admits a counterargument: perhaps a blind faith in human goodness is better for general welfare (§36). Nevertheless (§37), humanity can no longer be spared the cruel sight of the psychological dissecting table with its knives and forceps. The history of moral sentiments must be investigated, because the errors of great philosophers usually start from a false explanation of human actions and feelings. Nietzsche quotes La Rochefoucauld's claim that what the world calls virtue is usually a phantom formed by our passions, and he regrets that such masters of psychological maxims are now so little read.

His central claim is that responsibility is a fable (§39). Actions were first called good or bad by their useful or harmful consequences for the community. Then people forgot this origin and placed goodness in the act itself, then in the motive, then in the whole person, and finally in an imagined free will. But no one is responsible for his nature or his acts. Looking at a waterfall (§106), we imagine freedom in the twisting of the water, yet every movement could be calculated; so it is with human actions. The bitterest drop for the one who understands, Nietzsche says (§107), is the complete irresponsibility of human beings. We may admire strength and beauty, as we admire plants or art, but praise and blame make no sense.

He sketches a twofold early history of good and evil (§45). Among ruling tribes, "good" meant those able to repay good with good and harm with harm, and "bad" meant the powerless; good and bad meant noble and base, master and slave, and even an enemy could be good. Among the oppressed, by contrast, every other person seemed hostile and cunning, so "evil" became the word for everyone. Justice itself originates, as Thucydides saw in the dialogue of Athenians and Melians, among parties of roughly equal power for whom fighting would be pointless (§92). It is at root exchange and requital.

Much of the division dissects motives. Most apparently unselfish deeds, Nietzsche argues, are not miracles of selflessness: the author who wants to be surpassed, the soldier who dies for victory and the mother who gives up sleep and health each love something of themselves, a thought, a desire, a creation, more than the rest of themselves, and sacrifice the rest to it (§57). In morality, he concludes, a person treats himself not as an individual but as a "dividuum."

Morality is first obedience to custom, and the “good” are those who obey it easily (§96). Evil actions spring from the drive to self-preservation and the wish for pleasure, not from a desire to cause pain as such (§99). We do not call a thunderstorm immoral for soaking us, so why call a person immoral (§102)?

The conclusion is not cynicism but a kind of innocence. Between good and evil actions there is a difference of degree, not of kind. Everything grows from the same root, the individual’s longing for self-satisfaction, guided by better or worse judgment. Nietzsche hopes that understanding this will eventually replace moral habits with habits of knowledge, and that a wiser, innocent humanity may grow out of a moral one. Later works such as On the Genealogy of Morality would revise some of these claims, but the method, explaining values by their history, starts here.

CHAPTER 3

Third Division: The Religious Life (§§108–144)

Against misfortune, Nietzsche says (§108), we can either remove its cause or change how we feel about it. Religion and art take the second path, altering our judgment of events or giving us pleasure in pain. He wishes we could exchange the priests' comforting assertions for equally healing truths, but there are none (§109). That is the tragedy: those with strict methods of truth in heart and brain can no longer believe the dogmas, yet humanity has become so delicate and suffering that it needs the highest consolations, and might bleed to death from discovered error. He quotes Byron, "Sorrow is knowledge," and prefers Horace's stately levity to any romantic return to Christianity. He criticizes the romantic reaction against rationalism, which treated religions as allegorical containers of the deepest truth (§110). No religion, he insists, has ever contained a truth, directly or indirectly.

Religious cult, he argues, arose in ages that knew nothing of natural law (§111). If rain or harvest might or might not come, people tried to bind nature by ritual, as one binds a person by gifts, flattery and agreements. Christianity he calls a piece of antiquity (§113): hearing Sunday bells, one marvels that all this is done for a Jew crucified two thousand years ago who said he was the son of God. The Greeks, by contrast, saw their gods as ideal versions of themselves, not as masters (§114), which he calls the un-Greek element in Christianity.

The center of the division is a psychological account of the Christian need for redemption (§§132–135). The believer compares himself with a God of pure selflessness and finds himself sinful. But a being capable of purely unselfish actions is more fabulous than the phoenix, Nietzsche says, and the dark image the Christian sees is the fault of the mirror, made by his own faulty imagination. When the self-contempt fades with time and he loves himself again, he mistakes this for undeserved grace from above; what he calls mercy is really self-forgiveness (§134). A certain false psychology is the precondition for becoming a Christian and needing redemption. When the error is recognized, one ceases to be a Christian.

The last section treats asceticism and holiness (§§136–144). Nietzsche explains them by ordinary motives: a craving for power that, lacking other objects, turns to tyrannizing over parts of oneself; a need for emotion and contest, satisfied by a war against an "inward enemy"; a longing for complete rest from tormenting sensations; and a rare kind of delight that he covets in visions. Nietzsche quotes Novalis on the close kinship of lust, religion and cruelty (§142). Even visions and ecstasies of saints, and perhaps Socrates' inner voice, may be forms of illness

interpreted through religious error (§126). The saint's power over whole nations came from being misunderstood, both by others and by himself.

Nietzsche does not pretend that nothing is lost. The Catholic Church and the ancient cults, he writes (§130), mastered every means of putting people into unusual moods: deep tones, the appeals of a priestly throng, architecture that seems to house a god in its dark spaces. No one would wish to bring these back once their assumptions are gone. But their results remain: the inner world of noble, emotional, hopeful and contrite dispositions was cultivated on a large scale by religion and is now part of human nature. Great artists, meanwhile, were often irreligious at heart (§125); Homer handled the gods as freely as a sculptor handles clay, as did Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Shakespeare and Goethe. By comparison, the promise of modern science is modest (§128): as little pain and as long a life as possible.

CHAPTER 4

Fourth Division: Concerning the Soul of Artists and Authors (§§145–223)

This division takes apart the cult of genius that Nietzsche had embraced in his Wagnerian years. We love to think perfect things never grew (§145), as if a temple like Paestum had been built by a god in one morning. The artist encourages this belief in inspiration (§155), but in reality his imagination produces good, mediocre and bad ideas, and his practiced judgment selects among them. Nietzsche points to Beethoven's notebooks, which show melodies assembled gradually from many sketches. Great men, he argues, became "geniuses" through the earnestness of handicraft (§163), learning to make each part perfect before attempting a whole.

Why do we worship genius? Partly from vanity (§162): if Raphael or Shakespeare is a miracle, then our inability to match them does not wound us. The cult has dangers for the genius too (§164), who may come to believe he sees through a peephole in the curtain of appearances and need not submit to the hard discipline of science. The artist, Nietzsche says (§146), has a weaker morality than the thinker where truth is concerned; he clings to the fantastic, the mythical and the symbolic because they serve his art.

Nietzsche is not unsympathetic to the artist's lot. The artistic genius wants to give pleasure, but if his mind is very high he finds no one to share it (§157): he pipes, but none will dance. In compensation he takes more pleasure in creating than others take in anything, and his sufferings, though real, are loudly expressed because his ambition and envy are great; learned geniuses like Kepler and Spinoza bore greater privations more quietly. The relation of experience to art is often indirect (§211): as with Achilles and Homer, one person has the experiences and another describes them, and artists are seldom people of great passion themselves.

Art's functions are real but limited. It can raise the dead (§147), weaving a rope across the ages so that faded feelings return for a moment. Poets lighten life (§148) by turning our eyes to the past, which makes them bridges to dying religions and cultures, and therefore always latecomers; their consolations can delay real improvements. Even music, Nietzsche argues against his earlier views, is not in itself the direct language of feeling (§215). Its ancient union with poetry filled rhythm and tone with symbolism, so that we now hear meaning where once there was form.

Several aphorisms concern writing: thinkers as stylists, the incomplete as a stimulus to the reader, and the sin against the reader's intellect. But the division's deepest note is elegiac. Artists of every age glorified religious and philosophical errors (§220); Dante's Divine Comedy, Raphael's paintings, Michelangelo's frescoes and Gothic cathedrals presuppose a cosmic meaning now lost, and such art cannot flourish again. Yet something remains (§222): art taught us to look at life with interest and pleasure, and this need will survive art itself. Humanity will soon regard art, Nietzsche writes in "The After-glow of Art" (§223), as the old remember the joys of youth, like the people of a Greek city in southern Italy who once a year still celebrated their Greek festivals amid tears.

CHAPTER 5

Fifth Division: The Signs of Higher and Lower Culture (§§224–292)

Here the free spirit takes center stage. A community held together by common faith and strong custom is stable, Nietzsche says (§224), but it grows stupid; progress comes from deviating, weaker, more uncertain individuals who are injured and thereby "inoculated" with something new. The free spirit is a relative term (§225): one who thinks otherwise than is expected of him given his origin, position and the views of his time. The fettered spirit holds his positions from habit, not reasons (§226). He is a Christian or an Englishman as one born in wine country becomes a wine drinker. Strength of character (§228) often means acting from few motives, energetically, with a good conscience, and knowing little of alternatives.

The free spirit, by contrast, is weak in action (§230) because he sees too many motives and viewpoints. Where does strength come from? Nature produces genius, Nietzsche suggests (§231), as a prisoner finds his way out of a dungeon, through patient use of every small advantage. He compares stages of culture to climatic zones (§236): the past was tropical, full of violent contrasts and sudden storms, while we are entering a temperate zone, quieter but clearer. In a provocative judgment (§237), he calls the Italian Renaissance the golden age of the last thousand years, with its liberation of thought and ardor for truth, and blames Luther's Reformation for throwing humanity back and delaying the full awakening of the sciences by two or three centuries.

Culture, Nietzsche argues, was cast like a bell inside a coarse mold of falsehood, violence and unlimited egoism (§245); the question is whether it has now set firmly enough to remove the mold. He imagines a genius of culture as a centaur, half beast and half man, with angel's wings (§241). A higher culture needs a double brain (§251): one chamber to feel science and one for non-science, the one heated by illusions and passions, the other regulating them, or else humanity will relapse into barbarism and, like Penelope, unravel its web. The sign of great culture is the ability to be strict in knowledge while giving poetry, religion and metaphysics a hundred paces' start (§278), like a dancer balancing between forces.

Some aphorisms in this division look further ahead and further back. The burden of culture, Nietzsche observes, has grown so heavy that the cultivated classes of Europe are thoroughly neurotic (§244). Humanity may be only a passing phase of an animal species (§247), able to sink back toward the ape as culture declines, though the very ability to face this prospect may

help avert it. The early Greek philosophers, he notes (§261), left the sunshine of myth for the brighter light of their own “truth,” and each became a warlike tyrant of the mind, never happier in the belief that he possessed the truth and never harder or more arrogant because of it.

Nietzsche also diagnoses the modern pace of life. Restlessness grows toward the West (§285); for lack of rest, he says, our civilization is turning into a new barbarism, and one of the necessary corrections will be to strengthen the contemplative element. Active people are lazy in the higher sense (§283): they act as officials or merchants, as a species, not as individuals. Free spirits should be content with a modest post and income (§291), arranging life so that even political upheaval would not overthrow it. The division ends with an exhortation (§292): go forward on the path of wisdom, use yourself as a source of experience, forgive your own individuality, and climb toward knowledge.

CHAPTER 6

Sixth Division: Man in Society (§§293–376)

This division collects short observations in the manner of La Rochefoucauld and the other French masters of the psychological maxim, whom Nietzsche praises at the start of the second division (§35). Many are one or two sentences long, and they turn the psychological method of the earlier divisions onto everyday social life: conversation, gifts, praise, flattery, embarrassment, letter writing, hosts and guests. Their tone is dry, often witty, and seldom indignant. The opening aphorism sets it: in dealing with people, a well-meant pretense is often needed, as if we did not see through their motives (§293).

Some aphorisms expose the self-interest in ordinary manners. We often contradict an opinion when it is only the tone in which it is expressed that we dislike (§303). The balance of a friendship is sometimes restored when we put a few grains of wrong on our own side of the scale (§305). The passion for equality can show itself in two ways (§300): by pulling others down to our level, or by lifting ourselves and others up. Sympathetic people, ever ready to help in misfortune, are seldom those who share in joy (§321), because in another's happiness they have nothing to do and feel superfluous.

Others are small comedies. Someone conceives a clever remark and steers the whole conversation toward the point where he can make it (§345). Whoever has become a master in one field usually remains a dunce in most others, though he believes the opposite, as Socrates found (§361). The humanity of celebrities consists in politely submitting to unfairness from those who are not celebrated (§328). We fear our neighbor's hostility because he might discover our secrets (§335). And people with a gift for friendship come in two kinds (§368): the "ladder," who finds a new friend for each stage of his development, and the "circle," who draws very different characters together around himself.

The division closes with a longer meditation, "Of Friends" (§376). Consider, Nietzsche writes, how different are the feelings and opinions even of close friends, and how fragile the ground of all alliances. Friendships survive because certain things are never said; if those pebbles start rolling, the friendship breaks. Seeing that others' opinions are as necessary as their actions, and learning to despise ourselves a little, we regain our balance with others and bear with each other as we bear with ourselves. He ends by playing on the old saying of a dying sage, "Friends, there are no friends!"

CHAPTER 7

Seventh Division: Wife and Child (§§377–437)

The seventh division gathers aphorisms on women, love, marriage and family. They mix sharp psychological observation with generalizations about women that most modern readers will find dated or offensive, and they are best read as part of Nietzsche's experiment in cool, unsentimental observation rather than as considered doctrine. He opens, surprisingly, with the claim that the perfect woman is a higher type of humanity than the perfect man, and also much rarer (§377). Everyone, he says, carries an image of woman inherited from his mother, which shapes whether he honors, despises or ignores women in general (§380).

Marriage is a recurring subject. The best friend will probably get the best wife, because a good marriage rests on a talent for friendship (§378). Before marrying, one should ask whether one will enjoy talking with this person into old age, since everything else in marriage passes while conversation fills most of the time (§406). If married couples did not live together, happy marriages would be more frequent (§393). In a more serious vein, he imagines a future in which marriage might be understood at its highest as the spiritual friendship of two people for the purpose of raising a new generation (§424).

Some aphorisms concern parents and children. Fathers, he writes, have much to do to make amends for having sons (§382). The hardest battles of noble people are sometimes fought in childhood, against a deceitful father or, like Byron, a childish and passionate mother (§422). He warns against giving girls the same classical education that turns ardent boys into copies of their teachers (§409). His remarks on women's judgment and emancipation (§416), asking whether women can be just when they are so used to loving and hating, repeat prejudices common in his time.

The division ends on the free spirit. Will free thinkers marry? In general, Nietzsche says, like the prophetic birds of old, they must prefer to fly alone (§426). The final aphorism (§437) imagines fate putting a cup of hemlock to the free spirit's lips, and the women of his household weeping and disturbing the calm of his sunset, as at Socrates' death in prison, when he asked Crito to have someone take the women away. Just before, in "Ceterum Censeo" (§436), Nietzsche remarks that childless people writing a country's laws, like paupers abolishing inheritance, lack enough ballast in their ship to sail the ocean of the future. The division, in short, ends by returning from family life to the solitary thinker who is the book's real subject.

CHAPTER 8

Eighth Division: A Glance at the State (§§438–482)

Nietzsche's political aphorisms are skeptical of every party. All parties now, he says, must appeal to the masses and turn their principles into great fresco-style follies (§438). He holds that a higher culture requires two castes, one of compulsory labor and one of free labor capable of true leisure (§439), and he provocatively claims that slaves in many respects lived more securely than modern laborers, though people abhor slavery in the name of human dignity (§457). In "My Utopia" (§462) he imagines a society that assigns the heaviest work to those who suffer least from it.

He treats socialism with sharp suspicion. Socialism, he writes, is the fantastic younger brother of almost decrepit despotism (§473), which it hopes to inherit; it wants a state power greater than any despot's and would reduce the individual to an organ of the community. He calls its demand for equal rights covetousness rather than justice (§451) and argues that the struggle between workers and owners is a question of power, not of right (§446). The whole past is built on violence and error, and we, as its heirs, cannot cancel it (§452). He also attacks the revolutionary dream inherited from Rousseau (§463), that overturning all institutions will release an original human goodness; history shows instead that upheavals revive the wildest energies.

His most far-reaching aphorism concerns religion and government (§472). As long as governments see themselves as guardians of minors, they will preserve religion, because it consoles people where the state cannot. But when religion decays, the state loses its veil of Isis and no longer inspires reverence. Popular sovereignty dispels the last magic, and so, Nietzsche writes, modern democracy is the historical form of the decay of the state. He does not expect chaos; human prudence and self-interest will invent something more suitable, as the clan once gave way to the family.

Nietzsche also looks at the old forms of political feeling. People often relate to their princes as to their god (§461), and the modern cult of genius is an echo of that veneration; wherever some are raised to the superhuman, others are pushed down as coarser than they are. Bismarck, he notes (§450), describes constitutional government as a compromise between government and people, a historically grounded view, while a newer principle treats government as merely an organ of the people, with consequences few have considered. Even the Greek polis, he argues (§474), distrusted the growth of culture and wanted education to keep every generation at one stage; culture developed there indirectly, through the ambition the city stirred in individuals.

Nietzsche also looks beyond nations. Trade, travel, books and a nomadic modern life are dissolving European nationalities (§475) into a mixed European people. Nationalism, he argues, is artificial and serves dynasties and certain classes; we should call ourselves good Europeans. In the same aphorism he condemns the literary habit of making Jews the scapegoat for every public and private abuse. Elsewhere he regrets that national armies waste the most cultivated men (§442), yet also claims that war is indispensable for reviving exhausted nations (§477). Culture, he observes, owes most to politically weak periods (§465), and a nation that pursues high politics pays for it with its finest minds (§481).

CHAPTER 9

Ninth Division: Man Alone by Himself (§§483–638) and Epode

The longest division returns to the individual and his relation to truth. It opens with one of Nietzsche's most quoted lines: convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies (§483). Many aphorisms are short and pointed. One thing is needful (§486): either a naturally light temperament or one lightened by art and knowledge. However objective a person thinks himself, in the end he gains nothing from his knowledge but his own biography (§513). There is no pre-established harmony between the advancement of truth and the welfare of mankind (§517). Error has made animals into men; might truth turn men back into animals (§519)?

Others are observations of daily inner life. Life consists of rare moments of the highest importance and countless intervals in which their phantoms hover around us (§586); love, spring, a fine melody, mountains, moon and sea speak fully to the heart only once, if at all. Each person has a good day when he finds his higher self, and true humanity judges people by that day rather than their working days (§624). Instead of one fixed philosophical attitude for all situations, we might listen to the quiet voice of each situation and the opinions it brings (§618).

The division also traces how a mind matures in its relation to truth. Young people love what is interesting and exceptional, whether true or false (§609); riper minds love the interesting when it is true; mature minds love truth even when it looks plain and simple, having learned that truth often speaks its highest insights with an air of simplicity. Our culture, Nietzsche warns, is in danger of being destroyed by its own appliances (§520). And we are more sensitive to others' contempt than to our own (§549), which is one reason the solitary thinker must learn to bear both.

Near the end comes a sustained reflection on conviction and justice (§§629–637). A conviction, Nietzsche writes, is the belief that one possesses absolute truth on some matter (§630), which presumes that absolute truths exist, that perfect methods for reaching them have been found, and that the believer uses them. The person of convictions therefore belongs to an earlier, theological age of thought. Scientific method itself grew from the struggle of rival convictions (§634), and methods matter more than any particular result (§635), since without them superstition would return. Opinions arise from passions and harden into convictions through intellectual laziness (§637); the free spirit prevents this by constant change.

The book ends with “The Wanderer” (§638). Whoever has achieved some freedom of mind, Nietzsche writes, must for a long time see himself as a wanderer with no final goal, taking pleasure in change. He will have bad nights when the town gates are closed and the desert reaches to the walls, and days that are hardly better. But there will also be mornings in other lands when he sees the muses dancing in the mountain mist and receives gifts from free spirits at home in mountains, forests and solitude, all seeking a philosophy of the bright hours before noon. A short verse epode, “Among Friends,” closes the volume by inviting friends to laugh with this foolish book.

About Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche was born on 15 October 1844 in Röcken, a village near Leipzig in Prussian Saxony, the son of a Lutheran pastor who died when Friedrich was four. He studied theology and then classical philology at Bonn and Leipzig, and in 1869, at just 24 and before he had formally completed his doctorate, he was appointed professor of classical philology at the University of Basel. There he became a close friend of Richard Wagner, whose music and cultural ambitions shaped his first book, The Birth of Tragedy, in 1872.

Chronic illness forced Nietzsche to give up his professorship in 1879. For the next decade he lived on a small pension, moving between the Swiss Alps, the Italian Riviera and Turin, and wrote the books for which he is best known: Daybreak, The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Beyond Good and Evil, On the Genealogy of Morality and the works of 1888. In January 1889 he suffered a mental collapse in Turin from which he never recovered, and he died in Weimar on 25 August 1900.

After his collapse his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, took control of his papers and published selections from his notebooks, most famously The Will to Power, shaping his reputation in ways later scholars rejected. The critical edition by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari restored his texts. His ideas about the death of God, the will to power, eternal recurrence, the Übermensch and the genealogy of values went on to influence existentialism, psychoanalysis, modern literature and much of twentieth-century philosophy.

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