

Preface

I

In this book you will find a “subterranean” at work, a tunneler, miner, underminer. Provided that you have eyes for such work of the depths, you will see him—how he makes his way forward slowly, deliberately, with calm relentlessness, scarcely betraying the hardship that accompanies every lengthy deprivation of light and air; even in his work in the dark, you could call him content. Doesn’t it seem that some faith¹ guides, that some comfort recompenses him? That he perhaps wants to have his own long darkness, his incomprehensibility, concealment, enigma, because he knows what he will also have: his own daybreak, his own salvation, his own *dawn*? . . . Certainly he will return: don’t ask him what he’s up to down there; once he has “become human” again, he will tell you himself, this apparent Trophonius² and subterranean. One thoroughly unlearns how to keep silent after having been, for as long as he, a mole and alone—

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Indeed, my patient friends, I will tell you what I was up to down there, tell you here in this belated Preface,³ which could easily have become an obituary, a funeral oration: for I have returned and—I have also escaped. You needn’t worry that I will summon you to the same perils! Or even merely to the same solitude! For whoever travels down such paths of his own

encounters no one: such is the nature of “own paths.” No one comes to help him along the way; he alone must contend with all the danger, chance, malice, and bad weather that befall him. He has his path *for himself*—and also of course his bitterness, his occasional vexation over this “for himself”: part of which includes, for instance, his knowledge that even his friends cannot discern where he is or where he’s going and that, from time to time, they ask themselves, “What? Is he even going at all? Does he still have—a path?”—Back then I undertook something that might well not be for everyone: I climbed into the deep; I tunneled into the foundation;⁴ I began to investigate and to dig away⁵ at an ancient *trust*⁶ upon which, for the past few millennia, we philosophers have tended to build as if it were the securest of foundations—time and time again, although every building heretofore has collapsed: I began to undermine our *trust in morality*. But you don’t understand me?

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Previously, thinking has been at its worst with regard to good and evil:⁷ that was always too dangerous a subject. Conscience, reputation, hell, and, if necessary, even the police allowed and continue to allow no candor. As with every authority, in the presence of morality one precisely *should* not think or, even less, speak one’s mind; here, one—*obeys!* As long as the world has existed, no authority has ever willingly permitted itself to become the object of critique; and even to think of criticizing morality, to consider morality as a problem, as problematic: what? was that not—*is* that not—immoral?—But morality has at her command not merely every type of terrifying bogey to keep critical hands and instruments of torture at a distance: her security rests even more surely in a certain power of enchantment in which she is well skilled—she knows how to “inspire.”⁸ She succeeds, often with a single glance, in laming the critical will, even in luring it over to her own side; there are indeed cases where she manages to turn the critical will against itself: so that, like the scorpion, it plunges its sting

into its own body. From time immemorial, morality has been well skilled in every devilry of the art of persuasion: there has never been, even these days, a single orator who does not solicit her assistance. (Just listen, for instance, to the way even our anarchists speak: how morally they evince in order to convince!⁹ They even go so far as to end up calling themselves “the good and the just.”) From the beginning of time, as long as people have evinced and been convinced, morality has proven herself to be the greatest mistress of seduction—and, as far as we philosophers are concerned, the true *Circe*¹⁰ of philosophers. Why is it that from Plato to this day all philosophical architects in Europe have built in vain? That everything they themselves honestly and earnestly held to be *aere perennius*¹¹ is threatening to collapse or already lies in ruin? Oh how false is the answer to this question that, even now, one keeps ready and waiting: “because they all had overlooked the prerequisite, an examination of the fundament, a critique of reason in its entirety”¹²—that disastrous answer of Kant’s, with which, without a doubt, he failed to entice us modern philosophers onto a more solid and less deceptive ground!¹³ (—and, come to think of it, wasn’t it somewhat strange to demand that an instrument should critique its own excellence and usefulness? That the intellect itself should “apprehend” its own worth, its own power, its own limits? Wasn’t it even just a bit contradictory? —) Actually, the right answer would have been that all philosophers, Kant included, have been building under the seduction of morality—that although their proposed aim seemed to be certainty and “truth,” actually they have sought “*majestic moral edifices*”: in order to use once again Kant’s innocent language, we recall that he designated it to be his own task and labor, which was “less resplendent, but certainly still meritorious” “to render the ground for these majestic moral edifices level and suitable for construction” (*Critique of Pure Reason* II, 257).¹⁴ Alas, we now have to admit that he did not succeed in his efforts, quite the opposite! With such a rapturous goal, Kant was indeed the true son of his century, which, more than any

other, may be called the century of rapturous enthusiasm;¹⁵ as, fortunately, he also remained with regard to his more valuable sides (for example, the healthy bit of sensualism¹⁶ that he took over into his theory of knowledge). He too had been bitten by that tarantula of morality Rousseau, he too held in the very depths of his soul the idea of moral fanaticism whose executor yet another disciple of Rousseau's, namely Robespierre, felt and confessed himself to be, when he longed "*de fonder sur la terre l'empire de la sagesse, de la justice et de la vertu*" (address from 7 June 1794).¹⁷ With such Frenchified fanaticism at heart, one could not, on the other hand, have acted more un-French, more profound, more thorough, more German—if the word "German" in this sense is still permissible these days—than Kant acted: in order to create room for *his* "moral realm,"¹⁸ he found himself obliged to posit a nondemonstrable world, a logical "Beyond"—expressly to this end did he need his *Critique of Pure Reason*!¹⁹ Or to put it another way: *he wouldn't have needed it*, if one thing had not been more important to him than everything else: to make the "moral realm" unassailable, better yet, inapprehensible by reason—he felt too powerfully the very assailability of the moral order by the forces of reason! In the face of nature and history, in the face of the fundamental *immorality* of nature and history, Kant was, like every good German from way back, a pessimist: he believed in morality, not because it is manifested in nature and history; rather, he believed in spite of the fact that nature and history constantly contradict it. In order to understand this "in spite of," one might perhaps recall a related passage in Luther, that other great pessimist who, with all of his natural audacity, once remonstrated to his friends: "if we could grasp through reason how God, who shows so much wrath and malice, could be merciful and just, then why would we need *faith*?" Nothing, of course, has ever made a deeper impression on the German soul, nothing has "tempted" it more than this most dangerous of all conclusions, which, to every true Mediterranean, is a sin against the spirit: *credo quia absurdum est*²⁰—with this

conclusion, German logic makes its first appearance in the history of Christian dogma; but even today still, a millennium later, we Germans of today, late Germans in every respect, catch the scent of—something like truth, like the *possibility* of truth behind the famous real-dialectical axiom with which Hegel in his day procured for the German spirit a victory over Europe—“Contradiction moves the world; all things contradict themselves”²¹—we are, through and through, even in our logic, pessimists.

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Logical value judgments, however, are not the deepest and most fundamental to which our valorous suspicion can descend: faith in reason, according to which the validity of these judgments stands or falls, is, as faith, a *moral* phenomenon . . . Perhaps German pessimism must still run its final course? Perhaps it must yet one more time, in a terrifying manner, juxtapose its *credo* and its *absurdum*? And if *this* book is pessimistic even over into morality, over into and beyond the trust in morality—wouldn't it be, for this very reason, a German book? For it does indeed present a contradiction and does, in no way, shy away from it: this book gives notice to trust in morality—but why, you may ask? *Out of morality!* Or how else should we name what occurs in the book—and in us? For in accordance with our taste, we would prefer more modest words. But there is no doubt that to us also there still speaks a “thou shalt”: we also still obey a strict law set over us—and this is the last morality to which we also still attend and by which we also still know how *to live*; in this, if in anything at all, are we also still *people of conscience*: namely, in that we do not want to go back once more into *what* we deem outlived and decayed, into anything at all “unworthy of belief,” call it God, virtue, truth, justice, or love thy neighbor; in that we allow ourselves no bridges of lies to old ideals; in that we are inimical to the core to everything that would like to appease and to interfere with us; inimical as well to every present type of faith and Christianness; inimical to

the half-and-half of all Romanticism and fatherland-fanaticism; inimical as well to artists' love of pleasure and their lack of conscience, which would like to convince us to worship where we no longer believe—for we are artists—inimical, in short, to the whole of European *feminism* (or idealism if that sounds better to you), which eternally “draws us upward”²² and, precisely for that reason, eternally “drags us down”—only as people of *this* conscience do we still feel ourselves related to the millennia-old German integrity and piety, albeit as its last and most questionable descendants, we immoralists, we godless ones of today, yes, even, from a certain understanding, as its heirs, as executors of its innermost will, a pessimistic will, which, as I said, is not afraid of negating its very self because it takes great *pleasure* in negating! Fulfilling itself in us is, in case you want a formula—the *self-sublation of morality*.²³ — —

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— But ultimately: why should we have to proclaim what we are, what we want and don't want, so loudly and with such fervor? Let us view it with a gaze more cold, more distant, shrewd, lofty; let us speak it as it may be spoken among ourselves, so furtively that the whole world pays no attention to it, that the whole world pays no attention to *us*! Above all, let us speak it *slowly* . . . This Preface comes late, but not too late; what difference, after all, do five or six years make? A book, a problem such as this, has no hurry; besides, both of us, I just as much as my book, are friends of the *lento*.²⁴ Having been a philologist is not for nothing; perhaps you remain one, a teacher, in other words, of slow reading—in the long run, you end up writing slowly as well. Nowadays it is not only a matter of habit for me, but also one of taste, a malicious taste perhaps?—To write nothing more that would not drive to despair every sort of person who is “in a hurry.” Philology is, namely, that venerable art that requires of its admirers one thing above all else: to go aside, to take time, to become still, become slow—as a goldsmith's art and connoisseurship of the *word*, which has

nothing but fine, cautious work to take care of and which achieves nothing if it does not achieve it *lento*. But for exactly this reason, philology is today more necessary than ever, by exactly this means, philology attracts and enchants us most powerfully in the midst of an age of “work,” that is to say, of precipitateness, of unseemly and sweating overhaste that wants at once to be over and done with everything, even with every old and new book:—philology itself is never so easily over and done with anything whatsoever; it teaches to read *well*, which means to read slowly, deeply, backward and forward with care and respect, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate fingers and eyes . . . My patient friends, this book desires for itself only consummate readers and philologists: *learn* to read me well!—

Ruta near Genoa,²⁵

in the Autumn of the year 1886