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**On Nietzsche's Human All Too Human: Issues and Prospects**

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**Abstract.** Every human being desires to be appreciated, fulfilled, loved, free. He delights in anything that pleases his body, but the body sets the limitations and thus making man in a state of disproportion. Caught in the never-ending push and pull between itself and non-self, human beings are always in conflict with themselves. The limitations and disproportion of the man lead to the many chances of fallibility. What we know and what we claim as 'wisdom' is actually just a coherent collection of perception, a product of a sensible world. These perceptions are biased or prone to bias, making the 'truth' a relative notion. This cements Paul Ricoeur's constant conviction that to be human is to be embodied, free, rational, creative, moral and finite. The 'finiteness' of man condemns him to be imperfect. The limitations cause him to have flaws, to be fallible, and these flaws are stereotypical of human beings. To live a meaningful life, to trudge in the right direction in life, Friedrich Nietzsche postulated that "human beings are all-too-human." The succeeding parts outlined the key points highlighted in Nietzsche's celebrated book, "Human, All Too Human."

**Keywords:** philosophy, humanness, fallibility, finiteness

### Issues and Prospects

*"Human, All Too Human" is a book written by Friedrich Nietzsche in 1887. It was born out of a personal crisis and the pressing need to transcend Christian morality. It contains Nietzsche's observations of human nature captured within the nine categories – philosophy, religion, art, morality, society, men and women, and in 638 forceful aphorisms. The book is simply a straightforward analysis of the human condition presented through a collection of seemingly random thoughts built around varied themes covering the realm of philosophy.*

### Of Firsts and Last Things

A man loves to ask the origins and beginnings of things believing that there exists an explanation for every phenomenon. Nietzsche believed that philosophers have common failing – the congenital defect of arriving at an analysis with the lack of historical sense. This is clearly explained in the first part of the book, which says:

"Everything the philosopher asserts is basically no more than a statement about man within a very limited time span.... They will not understand that man has evolved, that the faculty of knowledge has also evolved, while some of them even permit themselves to spin the whole world from out of this faculty of knowledge.... The philosopher sees 'instincts' in present-day man and assumes that they belong to the unchangeable facts of human nature, that they can, to that extent, provide the key to the understanding of the world in general. This entire teleology is predicated on the ability to speak about a man of the last four thousand years as if he were eternal, the natural direction of all things in the world from the beginning. But everything has evolved; there are no eternal facts, nor are there any absolute truths. Thus historical philosophizing is necessary henceforth, and the virtue of modesty as well." (Nietzsche, trans. by Hotingham, 1878, pp. 12-13).

This notion brings us to a realization that great thinkers and philosophers who speculated on a number of ideas on human nature based only on what they can see, just the tip of the iceberg. It all started with the time when philosophy became a preoccupation of man, around four thousand years ago, with the presence of some kind of evidence. What transpired prior to those years and what the behaviors and thoughts were is beyond man's power to know. Nietzsche criticized against jumping to conclusions based on the limited phenomena. With this, one must accept that there are no absolute truths. Truths change along with the transition of man's whims and tastes.

This world of infinite is beyond man's power to fathom because of the limitations set forth to be a human being, paradoxically free but not free. Similarly, this issue on intimate disproportion of man with himself is placed centrally in Ricoeur's *Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of Philosophical Anthropology* (Ricoeur, 1960, p. 390). The idea posited is that there exists a pre-philosophical comprehension – an argument of the origin of belief, a pre-reflective level of one's experience – the absolute possibility existing in the metaphysical world.

### **On the History of Moral Sensations**

Nietzsche defies the Christian idea of good and evil. Human emotions and conditions caused the inventions and fluctuations of socially approved morals and rules. Owing to the permanent state of transition and the limitations of knowing a thing in itself, it becomes very difficult for man to know the absolute truth, that which is good. It follows that it is not for man to attain perfect knowledge. What lies before man is mere appearances and representations of things, making the existence of things the only source of one's judgment and the source of moral values. It is only then, through wisdom, the applied intelligence, that one can tell what to do and how to live. It is in the avoidance of the superficiality of assuming that the essence of a thing is one and the same as its particular appearance at any time.

Human frailties and destruction, as a result of the limitations of things perceived in the sentient world, can be mitigated, if not ceased, when reason overrules. The role of reason is to find the mean of every situation for a man to be truly happy. The person with practical wisdom uses the mean whenever he is confronted with choices to make.

However, "meanness" is relative to a person. One cannot quantify the value of 'mean.' To resolve this, the principle of equity should be exercised as Karl Marx succinctly puts it, "From each according to his ability; To each according to his need." (Kant, 1875 in Wikipedia). Nietzsche describes the different mental states and emotions revolving around the human predisposition to inventing deities. He is known for having pierced the myth of Christianity with his famous words, 'God is dead,' challenging public Catholic opinion and questioning religious beliefs. Like Sartre, Nietzsche is an atheist. Without God, man had to be responsible for his actions, to find a new mode of being, a new way of living. This is closely akin to Jean-Paul Sartre's claim that man is left alone, without excuse, condemned to be free (Sartre, 1946, p. 5). In other words, there is no determinism.

In those times in Germany with the Nazis, evil was associated with being God's work to allow man to use his reason to know that there is God, a merciful being who would rescue them when caught in a quagmire. As a new mindset of no afterlife and no evil without reason came about, the people had to find their own meaning in life away from the ones advanced by the religious leaders. Nietzsche's beliefs shaken the majority and created turmoil in the beginning.

### **From the Soul of Artists and Writers**

Nietzsche criticizes the belief that art and literature are divinely inspired. He maintains that it is through man's conscious effort to improve his craft that will make him a great artist and not on any other source of inspiration, not even on working an artistic genius. It was the

result of his changed outlook after his relationship with a dear friend and a believer of genius, Wagner, failed.

The greatness of an artist is the consequence of his hard work and not as a result of divine inspiration. Similarly, Sartre reasoned, in defense of Existentialism that man conceives himself after existing and that he is deemed as nothing, but what which he makes of himself (Sartre, 1946, p. 3). It is not the making of a Great Genius as to what happens to man. Given the free will, man is left abandoned. He has to take charge of himself. A great and renowned poet becomes one because he had been trained and had experienced writing. He did not wake up one day with the skill of writing. The same reasons go for dancers, for artists, for sculptors, etc.

Nietzsche contends that one can also 'become' something, that is, build a talent through the power of sheer will, determination, and investment. Becoming great is simply unlocking all dormant possible life paths and igniting them with all the zeal and gusto. This, I say, is life empowering. Vattimo in Harris (2016) held that to be human in this world, one must set about assuming one's own responsibilities in full supporting Heidegger's notion of Dasein as a "thrown project" (Vattimo in Harris, 2016, p. 13). In a nutshell, Nietzsche, like Sartre, and Heidegger, believed that there is no predetermined person, no pre-approved values that define a human being.

### **Tokens of Higher and Lower Culture**

Arguments on social hierarchy had been dealt with in his part of the book. He writes about the "free and the fettered spirits". While the free spirits are ones who go against the herd and "onwards along the path of wisdom" in order to better a society, the fettered spirits are those who protect the existing culture from collapsing into chaos. Without free spirits, society is doomed by cultural lethargy Cohen (2010) likened them to a 'paragon of science,' the agent of a higher culture. To be free-spirited is to be self-confident in acting for the welfare of the general public. It become necessary to propel society to a higher state. Similarly, Franco (2007) cited how Nietzsche explored the possibility of grounding culture on scientific knowledge rather than attributing the fragmentation of modern culture to the uncontrolled growth of science.

What has become to the fettered spirits? For every progress and advancement comes the fact that nature has deviated. To be considered "free" presupposes that there are those "not free." For every brand of "free spirits" comes the implication of the "fettered ones." This means that the existence of the latter is so important for the realization of the former. We can only fully understand what 'high culture' is if we know we are introduced to the idea of the 'low culture.' Hence, 'black' becomes essential to know the 'white,' evil to know good, unhappiness to know happiness. It appears that the weaker ones (the description is based on the nature of man to know the difference between weak and strong) help the stronger ones advance a reconstruction of existing ways while they also try to retain the status quo. To an optimist, the situation can be interpreted favorably-the gain that goes with the loss, a perceived "winning in losing." For instance, for choosing not to take part in any war, one may develop sound judgment after some time of reflection, of being quiet. One finds a well-developed foot that writes in the loss of both hands, a blind man who is gifted with a third ear, who can hear better than those with eyesight. In other words, there is a perceived weakening for progress to take place.

### **Man in Society**

Man in the conduct of himself can engage in contemplation continuously. How is this so? There is a fundamental reciprocity of voluntary decisions, choice, and action with the involuntary bodily functions that are a vehicle for the will. Ricoeur argues that the voluntary and the involuntary dimensions of human existence are complementary. Whatever man does, he is subjected to societal norms. Who sets the norms, the so-called standards of excellence? It

is by man's convention that certain tools measure the degree of achievement or failure a person has in a given activity. This had been tackled in Ricoeur's paper, *The Human Being as the Subject Matter of Philosophy*, stressing "the standards of excellence define the good immanent to practice in such a way that the practice called medical characterizes the physician immediately as a "good" physician." He added by saying that the task of moral philosophy is to elaborate an explicit typology of the values implied by these standards of excellence (Ricoeur, 2010, p. 213).

A number of aphorisms on man in the social construct are interesting and worth the read. One acknowledges the uniqueness of every person in aphorism 509:

"Everyone is superior in one thing: In civilized circumstances, everyone feels superior to everyone else in at least one way; this is the basis of the general goodwill, inasmuch as everyone is someone who, under certain conditions, can be of help, and need therefore feel no shame in allowing himself to be helped." (Nietzsche, trans. by Hollindale, 1887, p. 181)

Nietzsche also highlighted the relativity of fame in the aphorism 375:

"Posthumous fame. It makes sense to hope for the recognition in a distant future only if one assumes that mankind will remain essentially unchanged and that all greatness must be perceived as great, not for one time only, but for all times. However, this is a mistake; in all its perceptions and judgments of what is beautiful and good, mankind changes greatly; it is fantasy to believe of ourselves that we have a mile's head start and that all mankind is following our path." (Nietzsche, trans. by Hollindale, 1887, p. 148)

The aforementioned aphorisms shed light on the futility of wanting to matter and the pointlessness of comparing oneself to others.

### **Woman and Child**

Nietzsche had a collection of aphorisms that relate to the subject of relationships, marriage, and progeny. Essential elements constitute the image of a woman and everything that are associated with her relationship, children, motherly goodness, consequences of marriage, desire to become loved, modesty, girlishness, inspiration, etc. The aphorisms are short yet very emphatic. One's feminist side is in revelry in most of the lines, particularly on modesty, on marriage with stability, on Proteus nature, respectability, and honesty and the female intellect. It feels good that even during the most chaotic part of history, Nietzsche had this high regard for women.

### **A Glance at the State**

In this part, Nietzsche describes his views on politics and power. In aphorism 438, culture and caste, he pointed out the necessity to see the clear picture of the division of the state – the two different castes: that of the workers and that of the idle. There are always the two sides to a coin – those who work without being compelled and those who do it if they want to. If the people of a state cease to acknowledge the essence of subordination, believing that it is no longer possible, a strong foundation is surely toppled down. He added that in free circumstances, people subordinate themselves only under conditions, as the result of a mutual compact, thus without prejudice to their own interests (Nietzsche, trans. by Hollindale, 1887, p. 162).

The question of the composition of a government can be best viewed as nothing but an organ of the people and not an offshoot of the preparation of someone "above" in relation to the ones below. Analyzing the reinforcing elements, a special relationship is created, which is closely akin to that of a teacher and his students, father and his family, master and his

apprentice. This will lead to the constant reshaping of roles and a series of compromising under the constitutional form of government.

It was also observed during his time that people place more value on the satisfaction of vanity than on any other form of well-being (security, accommodation, the pleasure of all kinds) and that it is impossible for them to attain an age of happiness. They want only to desire it but not to have it (Nietzsche, trans. by Hotingham, 1887, p. 167).

### **Man Alone with Himself**

Nietzsche had spent almost half of his life meditating and engaging in philosophical inquiry. This section provides the readers with his exposition of man's nature as an individual. The various aphorisms in this chapter encapsulate the wants and deep desires of man. Some of these are the following:

- 483- Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth.
- 484- Unpleasing suggestions are usually criticized at/ smirked at.
- 491- Man is very well defended against himself.
- 492- Man endures a profession he deemed as 'right'
- 501- Pleasure in a thing is misconstrued as pleasure in oneself by means of a thing.
- 508- We enjoy in the open countryside so much because it has no opinion concerning us.
- 552- He who deviates from the tradition is a victim of extraordinary; he who stays in the traditional becomes a slave. In either event, man perishes.
- 554- There is enjoyment in being "half-knowing."
- 611- Need compels us to perform the work.

Man, as a rational being, has been central to the study of philosophy. Ultimately, human desires family, career, and excellence have become the starting point in understanding the reason behind every man's action. The desires of man are all contributive to his wanting to be happy. However, only a 'just' man can be happy. It is but right to think those good men deserve to be happy. This will lead to another question of what qualifies as 'good.' True indeed, the struggle for a meaning behind our lives is no doubt entrenched in our being.

### **Conclusion**

The readings in philosophy, the works of Immanuel Kant, Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, and many others, could not have been more appreciated without the conscious effort of reading intensively and paying close attention to their viewpoints. It is like diving into a deep ocean to get the ginormous pearls of philosophical understanding of the nature of man.

Man, by nature, is good, but there are instances where man commits mistakes. It is by God's and society's standards that one can tell that he errs. Because we differ in the things we held as valuable, it becomes difficult to compare one from the other in terms of morality. It is only through one's reason that he can tell which is moral and which is not.

Like Confucius who was popular in his Analects, Nietzsche's philosophy, expressed in the form of aphorisms presented in themes, provides the readers with a vivid picture of a new way of looking at the various affairs of life. Being an advocate of nihilism, he offered a fresh perspective in understanding human imperfections. Like Jean-Paul Sartre, he espoused the idea that life is without objective meaning, no predetermined purpose, nor intrinsic value.

Having read the nine (9) issues and prospects, I have with me the strong conviction that I have delved into the pertinent questions with regard to human existence and that issues

stressed in "Human, All Too Human" have been appropriated in the light of my experiences as a human person. It is in this premise that I disclose my appreciation for reading, writing, and studying philosophy. Indeed, because human, is all-too-human, one must approach humanness not a gift but as a task, with the conscious effort to keep the task in the state of progress to attain the moral purpose of living.

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