

Hollow Fullness

The Refuge with No Outside

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Contents

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MIND

THE NEED FOR CERTAINTY

THE COMMUNITY

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MIND

1

Man defends not what is true, but what accords with his own truth. Whoever writes this sentence is, at the moment of writing it, defending his own truth. The sentence thus confirms itself and at the same time renders itself suspect; to prove its correctness it rests on its own incorrectness, and because it rests on incorrectness it turns out correct. The readability of this book springs from this contradiction alone — that the author is wrong when he is right, and right when he is wrong. Whoever reads the book by accepting this contradiction is proved right; whoever reads it by rejecting the contradiction keeps the book's claim alive.

Truth and defense cannot dwell in the same mind at the same time; for truth is seeing, and defense is not-seeing. Yet a man sees only what he defends — what he does not defend he cannot see, for attention gathers only where there is interest, and interest is the taking of a side. To see, then, one must be partisan; and the moment one takes a side, not-seeing begins. The impartial man is blind; the partisan sees wrongly. Truth lies between the blindness of impartiality and the error of partisanship, at a midpoint that is never reached. This midpoint may not

exist; but to say that it does not exist is itself to take a side.

The body does not seek truth; it protects itself. This is not the body's failure but its achievement — for it was not those who sought truth, but those who protected themselves, who survived. Evolution, then, by punishing the organisms that sought truth, created the very capacity to grasp truth. We were made to live without being able to know what is true; yet we live just long enough to ask after it. The mechanism to which we owe our life is the very mechanism that hides the answer to the question we ask. The mind that seeks truth rebels against the conditions that brought it into being; to the degree that it sustains its existence, it betrays its own source.

The mind is not a court but a refuge. Yet the mind that admits to being a refuge has already torn down the refuge's first wall; for a good refuge conceals even that it is a refuge. To write this book, then, is to weaken the author's refuge — yet to survive, the author needs that refuge. Whoever describes his refuge shatters it; and whoever shatters his refuge dies once there is nothing left to tell. This book is an honesty half-spoken, so as not to die. Full honesty silences the author; half-honesty lets him speak. The author who speaks is a liar; the author who stays silent has written nothing. The man between the two is half liar, half silent — the author of a book is exactly this man.

To assent to an idea is often the sign not of knowing it but of recognizing it. Yet we must not forget that we do know what we recognize; for knowledge begins with recognition, and cannot begin otherwise. When we call a foreign idea foreign, we are right — to reach it, we first had to see it as foreign. A wrong reflex, then, can be a right step; and a right reflex, a wrong step. Our first reaction is wrong not because it is always wrong but because it is always reflex — to think is to halt a reflex, and the reflex is the unhaltable ground of thought. That what must be halted in order to think is unhaltable is an astonishing testimony that thought has been born.

The peculiar predicament of the intelligent man is this: he justifies well. A fool's belief is guarded by a crude defense and falls apart at an objection or two. An intelligent man's belief is guarded within an architecture of arches and columns; when objections come, the structure makes room for them, absorbs them, makes them its own stone. The intelligent man, then, errs more soundly when he errs; the fool errs weakly when he errs. The fool's error is fragile; the intelligent man's error is load-bearing. That is why the fool's error is soon corrected, while the intelligent man's error lasts a lifetime. Reason is as much an instrument that leads to truth as a shield that guards error. More reason means not fewer errors but sturdier ones. This is not to say we should choose unreason — for the unreasoning man's truth is as weak as his error. Reason strengthens both the true

and the false; to possess it is no advantage, but the possibility of seeing strongly at the price of erring strongly. Reason is a gamble without a prize.

You cannot explain to a man who believes a falsehood the falseness of his belief by means of logic; for he did not enter there by logic. But how does one enter by illogic a place one did not enter by logic? Illogic is the way in, but to one already inside, this way does not appear as the way in. Whoever enters forgets the outside; and whoever forgets the outside takes the inside for the only reality. The way out of a belief, then, is not to enter another belief — for the exit, too, becomes an entrance — yet neither is it possible to enter no belief at all; for to enter no belief is to enter the belief that one enters no belief. There is no exit from belief, only the changing of beliefs. Unbelief is the most hidden belief.

When a belief becomes a person's identity, to question it is to question not a proposition but a self. And the person is already the sum of his beliefs; to question them is to question himself, and to question himself is to annihilate at once the one who questions and the one who is questioned. Thought resists this annihilation, for thought itself requires the existence of the one who thinks. The moment it reaches its limit, thought halts — in order to protect itself. The deepest thought, then, is the briefest thought; for thought that prolongs itself grows faint in order to keep the thinker in being. The most courageous questioning lasts a second; after a second the refuge is built again. The

refuge is never torn down; it merely becomes visible at intervals of a second.

Why does the intelligent man believe the absurd? Because the intelligent man can bear meaninglessness less well. The fool's mind may not notice the void; the intelligent man's mind notices it, and the moment it notices, it is compelled to fill it. Yet the compulsion to fill means that the void really exists — the intelligent man, by bringing the void into being, wars with what he has brought into being. Because the fool has no void, he has no war either. The intelligent man creates his own enemy and is then defeated by it. Because the fool never fights, he is never defeated. To be intelligent is the secret of defeat.

An absurd belief is a better filler than a true nothingness — for the absurd belief has a form, and form is the enemy of emptiness. Yet the phrase “a true nothingness” is in itself paradoxical; for the truth of nothingness makes nothingness into something, and so it is nothingness no longer. The moment nothingness is noticed, it ceases to be nothingness. That is why it is impossible to face nothingness — what is faced is no longer nothingness, but something else. Nothingness is truly nothingness only when it is not seen. A seen nothingness is a form, and form is among the fillers. To face nothingness, then, is the most sophisticated way of filling. Those who believe they have chosen meaninglessness are those who have chosen meaning most deeply of all.

Man believes absurd things because his search for truth is strong. The search for truth and the search for meaning are not the same thing; but the mind cannot tell them apart. Truth silences — the moment it is found, the search ends. Meaning satisfies — the moment it is found, the search is forgotten. When a man thinks he has reached truth, he has in fact reached meaning; but because meaning imitates truth, the two are confused. So the one who hungers for truth is sated on meaning; and the one sated on meaning forgets that he was ever seeking truth. Satiety erases the memory of hunger; that is why the sated man cannot say that he is still hungry. The one strongest in the search for truth is the one most easily deceived by meaning.

This book is itself a refuge; its author cannot describe his own refuge from the outside, but at most from within. A description from within is no escape; but it is a description that says there is an outside. To say there is an outside is not to see the outside — to see the outside one must be outside, and whoever is outside does not write this book, for he no longer has a concern. Whoever has no concern does not write; whoever writes is still in the grip of his concern. So when this book ends, its author will still be in his refuge, and its reader still in his own. No bridge will have been built between the two refuges; but a small window will have been opened in each. What is seen through the window is not the other refuge — it is the wall of one's own. The only thing this book can do is

cast a small shadow upon the reader's own wall. When the shadow is seen, the wall is seen; when the wall is seen, the refuge is seen; and when the refuge is seen, a man takes on — if only for a second — the responsibility of having chosen to be in the refuge. More than this cannot be promised, for more than this is not possible.

2

Man first believes, and then produces a justification for his belief. Yet to admit that he first believed, he must first have thought; and one who has thought no longer believed first. Whoever understands this sentence has, at the moment he thinks he understands it, proved the sentence false — for to understand is for the justification to operate before the belief. The only way to prove the sentence true is not to understand it; yet one who does not understand it cannot prove it. The proof of the sentence is that there is no one to prove it.

The brain is not an instrument for finding truth but an instrument for producing meaning. Yet this sentence too has issued from a brain; so this sentence too is not truth but meaning. If the sentence is truth, then the brain can find truth, and therefore the sentence is false. If the sentence is meaning, then it does not state the truth, and therefore it cannot be confirmed. When it is true it is refuted; when it is refuted it is confirmed. An instrument for producing meaning is the definition produced by an instrument that produces its own definition — the definition, that is, refutes its own subject by proving it.

Justification is born as the child of belief, yet once born it says to its mother, “It was I who made you.” That the mother accepts this is the surest proof that she is truly a mother; for only a real mother can stand

firm enough to let her child live out such a delusion. False mothers cannot bear the child's delusion and correct it at once — the weakness of their reality shows itself in their inability to carry the child's delusion. Belief is the real mother; it raises no objection when the child says, "I made you." Its silence is the mother's confirmation — were it not the mother, it would object. In the human mind, the cogency of a justification is the clearest sign of how deep the belief has gone.

That is why, the sturdier a man's justifications, the more hidden his belief stands. Where a sturdy justification is visible, an invisible belief is at work. A weak justification is the sign not of a weak belief but of a belief less concealed; when someone advances a weak justification, his need to hide his belief is slight, for the belief has either not yet settled into his identity or has not been challenged at that moment. The man of the firmest pronouncements is the man least sure of himself — for one who is sure feels no compulsion to advance justifications at all. Justification is the veil of doubt; the thicker the veil, the more fragile what lies beneath. That is why long explanations are the sign of short faith, and short explanations of long faith.

The intelligent man knows this too — he knows that his justifications were produced after his belief. Yet what the knowing man does is not to stop producing justifications; it is to produce better ones. To notice one's self-deception serves not to abandon it but to

push it deeper. The man who notices believes anew, taking into account the very thing he has noticed; this new belief is sturdier than an unnoticed one, for it carries its own objection within it. Like a mind that has passed through an immunization — the objection can no longer harm it, for the objection has become part of it. The most enlightened man has erred most soundly. Enlightenment serves not to keep one from erring but to dress error in better clothes.

From this it follows: knowing is a stronger defense than not knowing. An objection raised against the belief of a man who does not know strains the belief; but the same objection raised against the belief of a man who knows widens it. For the knowing man takes the objection into his own system, places it there as a subordinate case, and thereby proves the system's greatness. When an objection is used to draw the system's boundary, it enlarges the system; the drawing of a boundary is itself an act of enlargement. With every objection raised against him, the intelligent man grows a little more intelligent, and with every gain in intelligence he errs a little more. Reason is the accessory muscle of error.

One who knows this takes refuge in a remedy: to believe in nothing at all. Yet since "to believe in nothing at all" is itself a belief, this remedy too is a more refined form of belief. Whoever prefers not to believe holds the belief of not-believing; he seeks the proofs of this belief he holds, finds them, arranges them in a row. These are proofs against believing, but

they are proofs for “not-believing”; they serve the opposing side. Not-believing is the most hidden form of belief, for since it does not call itself a belief, it conceals its own defense. Open believers are defended when their beliefs are attacked; hidden believers are not even attacked, for no one sees in them anything to attack. He whose shield is invisible is the most protected of all. The sturdiness of skepticism comes not from the skeptic’s doubt but from his not seeing his own doubt.

There remains, then, no way of living without self-deception. For to say that one lives without self-deception is itself a self-deception; and to accept one’s self-deception is itself a self-deception, for acceptance is the justified form of another belief. Self-deception is not a state one can step out of but a medium one lives within. The fish in the water does not see the water; the fish out of the water dies. The moment a man sees his self-deception he can think about it, yet because the deception he sees is seen from within a deception he does not see, even the seeing is deception. No seeing can manage to see seeing itself; for the seeing eye does not lie within what it sees. The sentence that says this is also within a seeing, and therefore within a deception — what proves what it says is the unprovability of what it says.

Yet no evil consequence follows from this state of affairs. On the contrary — the universality of self-deception strips it of being an individual flaw. The

universality of a flaw makes the flaw a natural phenomenon; natural phenomena are nothing to be ashamed of. A man is not ashamed of his own self-deception, for that is not the shameful thing; the shameful thing is to believe oneself free of it. To be deceived is normal; to believe oneself undeceived is a sickness. Health, then, lies not in being without error but in the ease of acknowledging one's error. Ease is the fruit not of being right but of accepting one's condition. The man who does not know what is true but accepts his condition is less deceived than the man who thinks he knows what is true but does not accept his condition — the acceptance of error diminishes error; the denial of error multiplies it.

That is why the book is written not to resolve error but to mark it. To resolve it would be to pass into another error; to mark it leaves the error in place, yet casts a small shadow upon the error itself. Seeing the shadow does not stop one's seeing, but it recalls what the seeing does not see. This reminder is no remedy; one who waits for a remedy is already in error, for the search for a remedy presumes that a remedy exists. Yet one who accepts that there is no remedy holds, in turn, a belief in that very absence; and this too is a remedy, in its own way. Just as there is no escape from remedy, there is no arrival at one — there is only a going back and forth between remedy and its absence, and the human mind cannot stop this going back and forth. If it stops, it dies; if it does not stop, it

is deceived. Life is the name of the self-deception that has chosen not to stop.

One step further. Whoever utters the sentence “Man first believes, then produces a justification” has at least not lied in that one sentence; and this sentence releases him from being a complete liar. A complete liar does not say that he lies. So the wholly deceived does not notice his own self-deception; one who notices his deception is, at least at that point, outside the deception. Yet if a single point were enough to step outside deception, everyone would unravel the whole of deception from that point. Since one cannot unravel it, the way out does not begin with a single point; the way out is not possible, and what is possible is only the shore of the outside that lies within. To be on the shore is not to be outside; nor is it to be wholly inside. The shore is where this book lives.

It says: I stand on a shore, neither inside nor outside, neither deceived nor awakened, neither right nor wrong. Yet to say “neither right nor wrong” is to take a position, to take a position is to take a side, and to take a side is to lay claim to being right. So impartiality is the most hidden partisanship — the partisanship of everyone’s being right. This book has settled on this side; because, by finding everyone right, it wishes to wrong no one, it ends by finding everyone wrong. And to find everyone wrong is again a side — the side on which no one is right. There is no third position, for every position is the taking of a position, and the taking of a position makes the taking

of no position impossible. The only thing a man can do is to keep shifting his position; the moment he fixes it he becomes the deceived, and so long as he shifts it he keeps his deception hidden. Shifting too is a form of self-deception, but because it is in motion it goes unnoticed. To keep from noticing one's deception, one must move — the movement of thought is the way of surviving in spite of deception.

Justification carries belief, but to carry is not to create; belief is the mother of justification, but the mother may be unaware of the child; the child forgets the mother, but forgetting is a stronger bond than remembering; the intelligent man systematizes this forgetting, but a systematized forgetting is no longer forgetting; the intelligent man knows this too, but what he knows is another manifestation of what he does not know. The knowing man knows that he does not know; the unknowing man thinks that he knows; both have erred, but because their errors run in opposite directions, enmity arises between them. And yet the enmity of one erring man toward another is the strongest proof that both are in error. While two erring men quarrel, truth does not stand in a third position; the third party who claims to be that third position is one who has simply not yet found anyone to quarrel with over his own error. His turn, too, will come. Truth stands in no position, for everything that stands in a position is error. The positionlessness of truth is another name for the inexpressibility of truth. Everything that is put into words is error, and what is

not put into words has not been said. This book is the spoken form of the unspoken truth — erring in that it is spoken, confirmed in its nearness to the unspoken.

3

The moment a belief becomes a person's identity, to question it becomes impossible; yet the impossibility belongs not to the belief but to the questioner — where the questioner can question, no belief remains in any case. What is impossible is to possess a questionable identity; for an identity is, by definition, that which is not questioned. A questioned identity has ceased to be an identity; an unquestioned identity has become an identity precisely because it cannot be questioned. An identity, then, is an identity because it cannot be questioned, and is not questioned because it is an identity. Its definition gives birth to itself, and because it gives birth to itself it does not count as a definition. All identities are without definition; the moment they are defined, they fall apart.

When one says to a person "you are a Muslim," "you are a socialist," "you are a father," what is said is not a piece of knowledge but a brand — knowledge can be questioned, but a brand cannot. To question the brand is to erase it; whoever erases the brand is no longer that person but has become another, and so the one who questions the brand is not the person beneath the brand. Because whoever questions the brand has remained outside the brand he questions, his questioning has no value; no authority remains that could acknowledge what he questions. The one

who questions the brand becomes only the witness of his questioning; he cannot be the one to whom the questioning is addressed. That is why, while an identity is being questioned, the questioner changes and the questioned does not. At the end of the questioning two persons emerge — one the questioner, one the questioned — and these two persons, who are in truth a single person, never meet again in the same body.

This is the place that makes an exit from within impossible. For whoever wishes to step outside his identity has, the moment he forms the intention to leave, already stepped outside; yet the one who has stepped outside cannot carry out the plans he devised for stepping outside, because the one who has stepped outside is no longer the person who laid those plans. The one who resolved to leave was inside; the one who has left is outside. There is no bridge between the two persons, for if there were a bridge the identity would have shattered from the start. People leave their identities not by degrees but by leaps; in the leap the intervening distance is not seen, for the seeing eye has changed along with the leap. There is an exit, but no memory of the exit; the one who has left says that he has not left, for the place he left is no longer visible to him. That is why most people who have changed their belief in the course of their lives interpret their old belief as “never a real belief at all” — the interpretation makes it appear that he has not lost it, whereas in fact he has lost it utterly.

The answer to the question why the questioning of an identity is taken as an attack made not on a proposition but on a self is this: because the proposition is already the self. Identity exists in a person not as a proposition but as the person himself. The person who says "I am a Muslim" is not advancing a proposition; he is uttering himself. Were it a proposition, one would fight it with a counter-proposition; since it is a self, one fights against a counter-self. There is no counter-self in the world — there is only the absence of the self, and absence offers no target to fight against. That is why a person whose identity is questioned behaves as though he were fighting not the questioner but nothingness — the violence of his fight comes from the fear of the target's absence. A target that exists is attacked forcefully but with measure; a target that does not exist is attacked without limit and without reckoning, for since there is no target, the brakes have been released.

That is why the man whose religion is questioned fears not religion, and not himself, but the absence of himself; the man whose political identity is questioned fears not his political opponent but the absence of himself; the man whose family is questioned fears not the invalidity of the family but, again, the absence of himself. What is feared is the same in all three cases, for in all three the same refuge is at work. The refuge is painted in different colors — in one a religious coat, in another a political

one, in another a familial one. Yet beneath them lies the same brick: the fear of ceasing to be an "I." This brick is universal, for though a man may lose everything, he can endure up to a point; but the point at which he would lose himself he cannot even think — for that which could think has already vanished before that point.

To take the questioning of one's identity personally, then, is no mistake; it is the only possible response. To take it as a proposition is the mistake, for what is questioned is not a proposition. Yet because this is true, the defense is not thereby justified — it is only made understandable. The understandable is not the same as the justified; to understand why an act is done does not justify the act, it only places it beyond condemnation. To be beyond condemnation is not the same as to be innocent; the person beyond condemnation is merely not judged, yet he has done it all the same. To mount a defense within the refuge is an offense that cannot be judged. The question whether, being an offense, it ought not to be judged is the question not of one who lives within the refuge but of one who lives outside it — and no one lives outside the refuge, so the question is ownerless, and so the verdict is empty.

Here what Nietzsche said is confirmed: a man always tells himself the lies that seem to him most important. Yet Nietzsche himself possessed an identity — the identity of being a philosopher, the identity of the overman, the identity of one who

stands against the Church. Were someone to appear who questioned these identities, Nietzsche would defend none of them as a proposition, but personally. Nietzsche, who said that he lied, was telling his strongest lie: the lie of having seen the lie. Even seeing is a lie, for the one who sees is looking out from within the lie. Nietzsche said this too, in fact — when he said “I am dynamite,” he was saying that he himself was an identity, the identity of dynamite. Even the sharpest shatterer is an identity; whoever bears the identity of shattering has become unshatterable. Whoever wishes to shatter him will be bound to his own identity of shattering. Shattering, too, is a refuge.

Here one must draw breath. For from here one can go in two directions: either to reject all identities or to embrace all identities. Both rejecting and embracing produce an identity — the identity of rejection, the identity of acceptance. Both lead into another room, not outside. Whoever seeks an exit from within, after wandering through every room of the house, realizes that he cannot step out of the house; for the house is himself, to step outside is to cease being himself, and one who ceases being himself can no longer return and tell anyone of the exit. The one who sees the outside of the house is the only witness concerning the house; he cannot give his testimony without returning to the house, and when he returns to the house his testimony disperses in the corridors of the house. A dispersed testimony is no testimony; yet an

undispersed testimony means one that has not entered the house, and a testimony that has not entered the house is again no testimony, for testimony requires having entered. Testimony is impossible from both directions. The mystics say this and are called mystics; because they are called mystics, what they say becomes part of their identity; and a word that has become part of an identity ceases to be testimony. The mystic's testimony is invalid because he is a mystic; yet without being a mystic it is not possible to give that testimony either. Truth becomes a lie the moment it is spoken; because it becomes a lie it ought not to have been spoken, yet an unspoken truth, again, does not exist. The mode of truth's existence is to appear as a lie.

From this it follows: if you wish to question an identity, then before questioning, renounce the questioning identity. Yet one who renounces cannot question, for no position remains from which to question. And not to renounce means to preserve the questioning identity; and the preserved identity, though it may seem to fight against identities, in fact, by preserving itself, reproduces the general principle of identities. Whoever fights against identities bears the sturdiest identity of all — the identity of fighting against identities. The man of the Enlightenment, the modernist, the postmodernist, the atheist, the skeptic — all are types who imagine themselves outside identities, but who are the most highly developed specimens of identity. When the roof of the refuge is