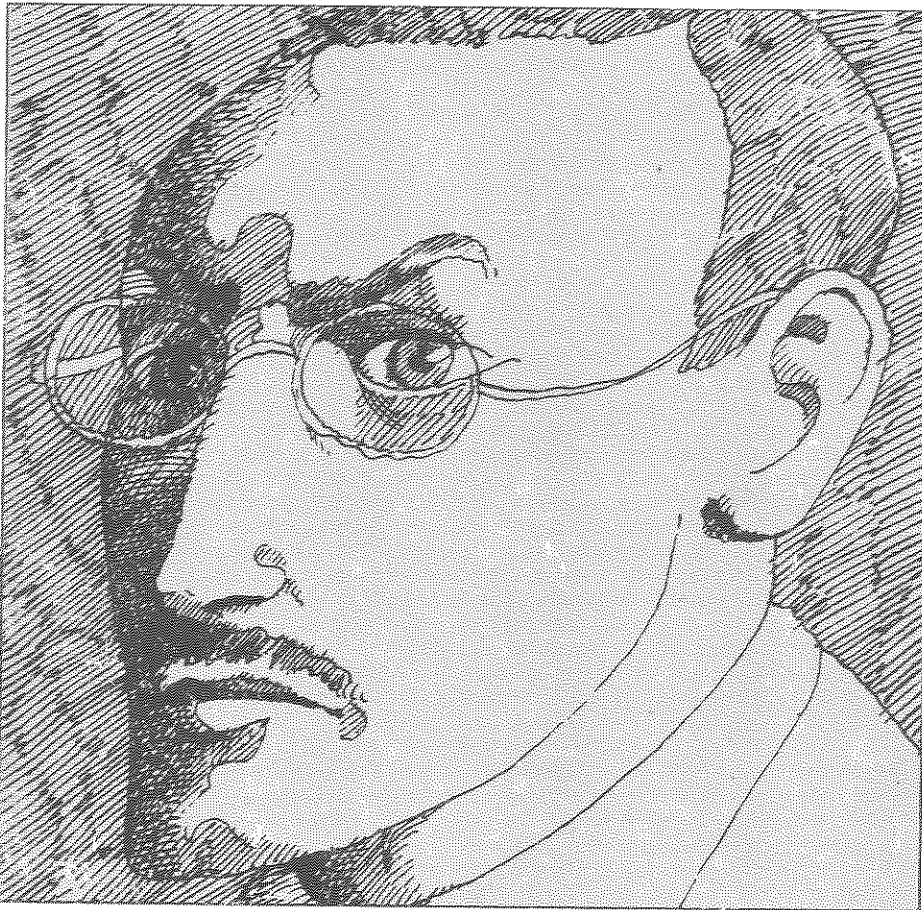


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**If the War Goes On...**

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there is no other way. And each one of us must take the first step by himself, in his own heart.

Since you are devoted to Nietzsche, reread the last pages of the "untimely meditation" on the advantages and disadvantages of studying history. Read word for word the passage about the younger generation fated to demolish a crumbling pseudo-culture and to begin anew! How hard, how bitter is the lot of such a generation, and how great, how holy! You are such a younger generation—you young people of today in this defeated Germany! Upon your shoulders lies this burden, upon your hearts this task.

But don't confine yourself to Nietzsche, or to any other prophet or guide. Our mission is not to instruct you, to make things easier for you, to show you the way. Our mission is solely to remind you that there is a God and only one God; he dwells in your hearts, and it is there that you must seek him out and speak with him.

# Thou Shalt Not Kill

1919

THE TAMING OF MAN, his development from gorilla to civilized being, is a long, slow process. The advances thus far embodied in law and custom are fragile; time and again what seemed to be definitive achievements are negated by an atavistic gnashing of teeth. If we see our provisional goal in the fulfillment of the spiritual imperatives put forth by the spiritual leaders of mankind from Zoroaster and Lao-tzu down, we are compelled to say that present-day mankind is still far closer to the gorilla than to man. We are not yet human, we are on the way to humanity.

A few thousand years ago the religious law of a superior people handed down the fundamental maxim: "Thou shalt not kill." In the spring of 1919 Baron Wrangel, addressing a small international gathering of idealists in Bern, put forward the demand that in future no man must be compelled to kill another man—"not even in the service of his country." And this was felt to be a significant step forward. That is how far we have come. Some thousands of years after Moses formulated the commandment on Mount Sinai, it is restated very cautiously and with restrictions by a small group of well-intended men. Not a single civilized people has embodied it without restriction in its legal code. Everywhere men

are still timidly discussing this simplest and soundest of all imperatives. Every student of Lao-tzu, every disciple of Jesus, every follower of Francis of Assisi was centuries in advance of the law and reason of the present-day civilized world.

This would seem to argue against the value of such lofty demands and to demonstrate purely and simply that man is incapable of progress. A hundred other examples might be cited in support of the same contention. Actually, our dismal experience does not detract from the value of such humanitarian imperatives and insights. For thousands of years the maxim "Thou shalt not kill" has been honored and faithfully followed. After the Old Testament came a New Testament; Christ was possible, the partial emancipation of the Jews was possible, mankind produced Goethe, Mozart, and Dostoevsky. At all times there has been a minority of men of good will, who believed in the future and obeyed laws that are inscribed in no secular legal code. And during this horrible war, thousands of men acted in accordance with unwritten higher laws: soldiers treated enemies with mercy and respect, while others suffered imprisonment and torture because they staunchly rejected the duty of murdering and hating.

In order to esteem such men and deeds at their full worth, in order to overcome our doubt in the progress of man from animal to human being, we must live in faith. We must learn to value ideas as highly as bullets or gold pieces, to love possibilities and cultivate them in ourselves; we must gain intimations of the future and of the future in our own hearts.

The "practical" man, who is always right in committee meetings, is invariably wrong outside of his committees.

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Ideals and faith in the future are always right. They are the one source from which the world draws strength. And anyone who disposes of humanitarian ideas as idle talk and fuzzy thinking or of strivings for the future as literature is still a gorilla and has a long way to go before becoming a man.

A good example that even our "practical" men will appreciate: In his colonial reminiscences Carl Peters relates how he once ordered some African natives to plant coconut palms. The natives refused to do anything so fatiguing and pointless. Peters explained to them that in eight or ten years the trees planted today would be full-grown and reward their pains a hundredfold. Of that the natives were well aware, they were far from stupid. But it struck them as sheer madness that a man should work his fingers to the bone for a reward that would be forthcoming only in ten years. White men had such comical ideas! It is we men of the spirit, we poets, seers, fools, and dreamers, who plant trees for later. Many of our trees will not thrive, many of our seeds will be sterile, many of our dreams will turn out to be mistakes, delusions, and false hopes. Where is the harm in that?

But there is no point in trying to make practical men out of poets, calculators out of believers, organizers out of dreamers. During the war, artists, writers, and intellectuals were transformed into soldiers and farm workers. Now efforts are being made to "politicize" them and turn them into organs of material change. That is like trying to drive a nail with a barometer. Because today the times are hard, it is thought that all energies should be directed to our daily needs, every will harnessed to the practical work of the hour.

But though the need cries out to high heaven, fuss and

bustle are useless. The world will not progress any faster if you turn poets into street speakers and philosophers into cabinet ministers. It will progress whenever men do what they were made for, what their nature demands of them, what they consequently do willingly and well. And even if practical men regard such things as luxuries, concern for the future, faith in man as he will be some day, and groping play with remote possibilities will always be every bit as important as political organization, the building of houses, and the baking of bread.

And we believers in the future will never cease to concern ourselves with the old commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." Even if some day all the legal codes in the world forbid killing (inclusive of killing in war and killing by executioners), that imperative will never lose its cogency, It is the foundation of all progress, all human development. We kill so much! Not only in our stupid battles, the stupid street fighting of our revolution, our stupid executions—no, we kill at every step. We kill when circumstances force us to drive gifted young people into occupations for which they are not suited. We kill when we close our eyes to poverty, affliction, or infamy. We kill when, because it is easier, we countenance or even pretend to approve of atrophied social, political, educational, and religious institutions, instead of resolutely combating them. Just as a consistent socialist looks on property as theft, so those who hold consistently to our kind of faith regard all contempt for human life, all cruelty and indifference, as tantamount to killing. And not only things present can be killed, but the things of the future as well. A great deal of future in a young man can be killed by a little mordant skepticism. Everywhere life is waiting,

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everywhere the future holds promise, and we see so little, we trample so much. We kill at every step.

In respect to mankind we all of us have but one task. To help mankind as a whole make some small advance, to better a particular institution, to do away with one particular mode of killing—all these are commendable, but they are not my task and yours. Our task as men is this: in our own unique personal lives, to take a short step on the road from animal to man.