



## Nietzsche's "Ecce Homo"



# Nietzsche's “Ecce Homo”



Edited by  
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**DE GRUYTER**

ISBN 978-3-11-024654-4

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-024655-1

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-039166-4

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2020942455**

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2021 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

# Acknowledgements

The editors gratefully acknowledge the award of a conference grant from the Modern Humanities Research Association which enabled us to bring together many of the volume's contributors. We wish to express our profound gratitude to the contributors and the publisher for their patience and forbearance during the lengthy gestation period of this volume:

*Nachträgliche Schwangerschaft.* – Die, welche zu ihren Werken und Thaten gekommen sind, sie wissen nicht wie, gehen gewöhnlich hinterher um so mehr mit ihnen schwanger: wie um nachträglich zu beweisen, dass es ihre Kinder und nicht die des Zufalls sind.

HAH II AOM 63: KSA 2/405

Nicholas Martin  
Duncan Large

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246551-001>



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# Abbreviations

- AC *Der Antichrist*, 1888; translated as *The Antichrist* or *The Antichristian*.
- AOM *Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche*, 1879 (part of Volume II of HAH); translated as *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*.
- BAW *Frühe Schriften*, ed. Hans Joachim Mette, Karl Schlechta and Carl Koch, 2nd edn, 5 vols (Munich: Beck, 1994).
- BGE *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 1886; translated as *Beyond Good and Evil*.
- BT *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 1872; translated as *The Birth of Tragedy*.
- CW *Der Fall Wagner*, 1888; translated as *The Case of Wagner* or *The Wagner Case*.
- D *Morgenröthe*, 1881; translated as *Daybreak* or *Dawn*.
- DW *Die dionysische Weltanschauung*, 1870; translated as *The Dionysian Worldview*.
- EH *Ecce homo*, 1888; references to this work include the chapter number in Roman numerals, followed by the section number, e.g. EH III BT 3.
- GM *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887; translated as *On the Genealogy of Morals* or *On the Genealogy of Morality*.
- GS *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*; translated as *The Gay Science*, *The Joyful Wisdom*, or *The Joyous Science*: Books I–IV, 1882; 2nd edition incorporating Book V and new Preface, 1887.
- GTVS ‘*Versuch einer Selbstkritik*’; translated as ‘*Attempt at a Self-Criticism*’; preface to 1886 edition of BT.
- HAH *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*; translated as *Human, All Too Human*: 2 volumes, 1878–1880; second edition with new Preface, 1886.
- KGB *Friedrich Nietzsche. Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli,azzino Montinari *et al.* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1975–).
- KGW *Nietzsche. Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli,azzino Montinari *et al.* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1967–).
- KSA *Friedrich Nietzsche. Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, 2nd edn, 15 vols (Munich: dtv; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1988).
- KSB *Friedrich Nietzsche. Sämtliche Briefe. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, 8 vols (Munich: dtv; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1986).
- NF *Nachgelassene Fragmente* (Notes and Fragments); the date, fragment number and KSA reference are given, e.g. NF 1871, 9[104]: KSA 7/312.
- NW *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, 1888.
- TI *Götzen-Dämmerung*, 1888; translated as *Twilight of the Idols*; references to this work include the chapter number in Roman numerals, followed by the section number, e.g. TI IX 51.
- TL ‘*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne*’, 1873; translated as ‘*On Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense*’.
- UM *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*; translated as *Untimely Meditations*, *Unmodern Observations*, or *Unfashionable Observations*; I – *David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer*, 1873; II – *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, 1874; III – *Schopenhauer as Educator*, 1874; IV – *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, 1876.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246551-002>

## XII — Abbreviations

- WP *Der Wille zur Macht*, 1901/1906; translated as *The Will to Power*.
- WPh 'Wir Philologen', 1875; translated as 'We Philologists' or 'We Classicists'.
- WS *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*, 1880 (part of Volume II of HAH); translated as *The Wanderer and his Shadow*.
- Z *Also sprach Zarathustra*; translated as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; Parts I–II, 1883; Part III, 1884; Part IV, 1885; references to this work include the part, chapter and, where applicable, section numbers, e.g. Z III ii 2.

## Duncan Large and Nicholas Martin

# Editors' Introduction

It is surely surprising and somewhat scandalous that, over a century after the first publication of Nietzsche's late autobiographical text *Ecce Homo* (1888), the present collection of critical essays should be the first devoted to it in any language. There are, of course, plenty of reasons to account for *Ecce Homo's* distinctly chequered history, starting with the apparent ambivalence which Nietzsche expresses in the text itself over whether he even wants it to be read (EH III 1; KSA 6/299). He gave the text a blasphemous title in order to test the Prussian censorship laws,<sup>1</sup> and was indeed the first to use the title "Ecce Homo" for a self-referential work. The book itself makes uncomfortable reading, thanks in no small part to its hyperbolic rhetoric, its coruscating critiques and tone of self-congratulatory immodesty. It baits its readers with its exaggerations and distortions, its credulity-straining claims and frustrating omissions, leaving them unsure whether even to take it seriously, for all its protestations of the supposed weightiness of its task. The fact that Nietzsche indisputably went mad only a few weeks after finishing *Ecce Homo* led the text's first readers to assume that its excesses could be attributed to encroaching mental instability. When Nietzsche's sister and philosophical executor Elisabeth encountered it in manuscript, she was only the first in a long line of readers to be embarrassed by it (not least because of its explicit criticism of her and her mother), so she initially suppressed it and did not have it published till 1908, when it finally appeared in a prohibitively expensive edition eight years after Nietzsche's death, as the last of his 1888 texts to appear (Nietzsche 1908).

Even after *Ecce Homo* had made it into print it took decades for the text to escape marginalization and achieve anything like canonical status.<sup>2</sup> After all, it was only "Nietzsche's autobiography" – as the spurious subtitle to Anthony M. Ludovici's first English translation has it (Nietzsche 1911) – and the importance of its philosophical contribution was not immediately apparent. Indeed, it took another six decades after its first publication before *Ecce Homo's* place alongside the other writings of 1888 was finally cemented in volume VI/3 of the definitive Colli-Montinari edition, which came out in German in 1969 (Nietzsche 1969a). Over those decades, critical commentary on the text was certainly sparse, and

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<sup>1</sup> See letter to Heinrich Köselitz (Peter Gast), 30 October 1888 (KSB 8/462; Nietzsche 1969b, p. 319).

<sup>2</sup> For further detail, see Large 1995.

Oscar Levy's early pronouncement (in his English translation of Nietzsche's *Complete Works*) that *Ecce Homo* "may be strongly recommended as containing the quintessence of Nietzsche"<sup>3</sup> was largely ignored. No monographs on the text were published in any language between Josef Spindler's *Nietzsches Persönlichkeit und Lehre im Lichte seines "Ecce Homo"* of 1913 and Sarah Kofman's monumental two-part French-language commentary *Explosion* in the early 1990s (Spindler 1913; Kofman 1992; Kofman 1993). Over the last three decades the text has finally started to receive its due, with the publication of a number of significant book- and article-length studies and introductions, culminating in Andreas Urs Sommer's exhaustive German-language commentary on the text, published in 2013.<sup>4</sup> In the case of English, there has also been a small flurry of new translations since the turn of the millennium – by Thomas Wayne, Judith Norman, Duncan Large and Carol Diethe – to complement the earlier versions by the two postwar doyens of Nietzsche translation in English, Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale.<sup>5</sup>

These more recent developments represent a belated recognition of the value and importance of Nietzsche's most ill-treated text, a collective willingness to look beyond the early arguments over blasphemy and madness to appreciate instead the text's many merits. It has always been acknowledged that *Ecce Homo* is one of Nietzsche's most readable books, indeed one of the most beautifully written books in the German language, and that the reviews of almost all his earlier works which Nietzsche includes in the section "Why I Write Such Good Books" give invaluable insights into their composition and concerns, but more recent scholarship has at last also been appreciating that *Ecce Homo* represents a powerful statement of philosophical method, and that it conveys Nietzsche's final positions on many urgent philosophical questions.

Such is the context in which our collection now appears: it contributes to the growing number of studies that take *Ecce Homo* seriously and engage with it as a full constituent of the Nietzschean canon. *Nietzsche's "Ecce Homo"* is intended to present a conspectus of contemporary views on the text, and its twenty-one essays – by both younger and more established scholars from the UK, USA and continental Europe – illuminate Nietzsche's text from a wide variety of perspectives. By way of a prelude, **Daniel Conway** addresses Nietzsche's multiple

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<sup>3</sup> Part of Levy's advice to readers reproduced at the end of each volume of the edition. See Levy 1909–1913.

<sup>4</sup> See Conway 1993; Schank 1993; Steinbuch 1994; Schmidt and Spreckelsen 1999; Müller and Sommer 2005; Kammerer 2008; Sommer 2013; More 2014; Meier 2019.

<sup>5</sup> See, respectively, Nietzsche 2004; Nietzsche 2005a; Nietzsche 2007 and Nietzsche 2021; Nietzsche 1967 and Nietzsche 1979.

modes of self-presentation in *Ecce Homo*, arguing that the purpose of the book is to introduce readers to the author of the imminently forthcoming *magnum opus*, *Revaluation of All Values*. For Conway, the new incarnation in which Nietzsche appears before his readers is irreducibly dual: “the contrast with which he concludes *Ecce Homo – Dionysus vs. The Crucified One* – is meant to identify an opposition *internal* to him” (p. 23). The text instantiates this duality of negation and affirmation by taking on the character of an elegiac prayer of gratitude in the Christian tradition and at the same time marking Nietzsche’s Dionysian rebirth as immoralist.

The main body of essays in this book is divided into five sections, the first of which further considers questions of autobiography and subjectivity, the way Nietzsche writes a self in his text. **Anthony K. Jensen** considers the subject of autobiography and argues for an “expressivist” theory of the “self” as it is illustrated by the autobiographical act of *Ecce Homo*. By contrast with classic philosophical assumptions concerning the transparency of introspection and memory as an objective surveillance camera, the self-knowledge that is on display in Nietzsche’s text is dynamic, Jensen argues, the product of a mobile perspective on a ceaselessly evolving historical object. The autobiographical subject is not a discrete, static object to be accurately described by a discrete subject, nor is it purely a narrative construct, but rather it is to be expressed through an act of interpretation premised on the impossibility of a realist self-description. **Kathleen Merrow** is interested in the effects of Nietzsche’s use of intertextuality and intratextuality in *Ecce Homo*. Nietzsche sets the parodic Biblical reference in the main title against the subtitle’s reference to Pindar’s *Second Pythian Ode*, but “Become who you are!” is also a quotation from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–1885); hence “the intratexts make the names ‘Nietzsche’ and ‘Zarathustra’ interchangeable” (p. 67). Merrow argues that intertexts and intratexts work to undermine any possibility that the name “Nietzsche” returns to a stable subject identity outside the text, for every time we try to jump out of the circle to the empirical Nietzsche, we are sent not outside but back to a text. Hence the web of allusions that is present here frames Nietzsche’s undertaking as both a saying of who he is and the perversion or betrayal of that account. **Aaron Parrett** gives a comparative treatment which measures *Ecce Homo* against another classic of the autobiographical genre, Augustine’s *Confessions* (397–400 AD). Despite the obvious distance between the two texts, Parrett explores three points of connection in what he terms their “magnetically repellent relationship” (p. 75), arguing that the two works bookend the history of Christianity, framing it as a world-historical phenomenon; that both works can be read as testimony, bearing witness to philosophical self-discoveries and presenting methods of self-conscious critique; and that both works exhibit similar stylistic characteristics.



**André van der Braak** returns us to the Pindaric injunction “Become who you are!”, but contrasts Nietzsche’s account of self-becoming in *Ecce Homo* with his earlier work: whereas in his earlier work Nietzsche often uses active, agonal metaphors to describe the process of becoming who one is, in *Ecce Homo* he stresses the absence of any struggle, and describes “becoming what one is” as instead a physiological and subconscious process. Van der Braak foregrounds Nietzsche’s notions of forgetting and misunderstanding the self, rather than cultivating or overcoming it, and reconstructs a non-intentional perspective on “becoming what one is” that supplements Nietzsche’s more active metaphors in his earlier work. **Rebecca Bamford** is interested in *Ecce Homo* as philosophical autobiography, focusing on the interplay between Nietzsche’s life, character and thought in the text. Bamford argues that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche engages critically with philosophical methodology as part of his wider interest in the transvaluation of all values. Setting the text in the context of Nietzsche’s engagement with philosophical methodology in texts of the earlier 1880s, she concludes that *Ecce Homo* offers a performative critique of any philosophical methodology that prizes pure rationality at the expense of embodied subjectivity, since for Nietzsche the possibility of self-mastery is established through the connection between genius and physiology.

The second subdivision in our collection includes four essays that focus on specific concepts in Nietzsche’s text. **Paul Bishop** discusses Nietzsche’s concept of character in *Ecce Homo* against the backdrop of the concept of character in Kant, Goethe and especially Schopenhauer. Whereas in his early writings Nietzsche rejects the Kantian-Schopenhauerian terminology of character, in *Ecce Homo* his thinking of affirmation and *amor fati* is much more aligned with theirs. Bishop argues that the doctrine of eternal recurrence lies at the heart of Nietzsche’s interest in character as a coming-to-terms with the dialectic of freedom and necessity, and concludes that the German tradition of philosophical discussion around character, to which Nietzsche contributes, forms the backdrop to the “science” of *Charakterologie* as it came to be formulated in the early twentieth century in opposition to psychoanalysis. **Katrina Mitcheson** is intrigued by the conflicted status of truth in *Ecce Homo* and argues that Nietzsche’s critique of “Truth” as the “real world” can be reconciled with his more positive valuation of truthfulness. This new practice of truth is served by the fictionalizations that *Ecce Homo* contains, such that the text operates as a paradoxical, perspectival “honest lie”, contrasted with the “lie of the ideal”. *Ecce Homo* shows us how to practise truth by undermining the idea of objective truth, and giving us an example of how we can select our own truths. **Julia S. Happ** traces Nietzsche’s ambivalent concept of decadence from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) to *Ecce Homo*, setting it in the context of the broader cultural history of the term. Happ

shows how Nietzsche defines decadence with the aid of three “universal models”: as sickness, ending and fragmentation in opposition to health, beginning and wholeness. The late characterization of the decadence of Wagner in *The Case of Wagner* (1888) demonstrates that decadence is not just a concept for Nietzsche but also a style. Nietzsche holds such aesthetic and literary decadence in high esteem and considers it a cultural necessity, adopting it himself in *Ecce Homo*, where he emerges briefly as a “clandestine” decadent poet even while critiquing a wide array of decadent types. **Carol Diethe** continues the analysis of Nietzsche’s style in the text, focusing closely on his use of rhetorical devices which make his late style so difficult to translate. Nietzsche’s text bristles with figures of speech such as litotes or extended metaphor, and even his punctuation serves rhetorical ends. So often, Diethe argues, Nietzsche compresses a layered meaning into words or phrases, knowing their etymology and drawing out affinities that the reader can only tease out laboriously. Additional difficulties for the modern translator are presented by Nietzsche’s psychological and physiological diagnoses, his misogynistic vocabulary, and his appropriation of specific terms.

The three essays in our third subdivision all relate *Ecce Homo* in various ways to Nietzsche’s earlier writings. **Frank Chouraqui** traces the changes in Nietzsche’s notion of self-becoming by comparing *Ecce Homo* with *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874). Chouraqui argues for a shift in emphasis between the two texts, with self-creation supplanting self-knowledge as Nietzsche’s preferred method for achieving self-becoming: “One no longer needs to know *who* one is in order to *become* it” (p. 213). Likewise, Nietzsche’s understanding of education shifts from the negative goal of self-liberation to the affirmative self-expression of *amor fati*, and the object of such cultivation shifts from the individual to the cultural. **Paul S. Loeb** reads *Ecce Homo* with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, arguing that *Ecce Homo* is a much more modest and self-critical text than is generally supposed. Loeb highlights the many non-ironic references to the figure of Zarathustra in the text, arguing – against the interpretative consensus – that the chief point of Nietzsche’s autobiography is to draw up a catalogue of his own all-too-human deficiencies in order to show how he nevertheless triumphed by pointing the way to a future superhuman teacher who would be able to overcome these deficiencies. **Thomas Brobjer** also pays attention to the importance of Zarathustra in Nietzsche’s late text, but reads that figure together with the figure of Dionysos. Brobjer shows how the two figures are referred to more or less equally often over the whole of Nietzsche’s career and in *Ecce Homo* in particular, where they are brought together and reconciled. The text looks back to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and forward to the *Revaluation of All Values*: Zarathustra the teacher of the eternal recurrence is a figure of identification for Nietzsche,

while Dionysos is the god who represents the affirmative revaluation of values and draws him ever onward into the future.

Our fourth subdivision is devoted to considerations of revolution and revaluation. **Martine Prange** reads *Ecce Homo* as primarily a preface to the forthcoming book *Revaluation of All Values*, and argues that to view it as Nietzsche's intellectual autobiography is to underestimate the philosophical work that the text is doing in order to prepare for the forthcoming revaluation. *Ecce Homo* is thus a transitional work, and comparable to *The Gay Science* (1882) with its "free spirit philosophy": *Ecce Homo* launches Nietzsche's new "philosophy of the future" and ushers in the "revaluation of all values" with its ethics of self-transfiguration and meta-philosophy of morals. **C. Heike Schotten** reads *Ecce Homo* as Nietzsche's quintessentially revolutionary text. She argues that Nietzsche's revolutionary rhetoric of explosive destruction marks the text out as a manifesto in the service of a properly political project: we need to read it as an update of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848). The crucial difference between *Ecce Homo* and other manifestoes, however, is Nietzsche's obsession with the proper performative articulation of *himself*, rather than his readers: *Ecce Homo* is the vehicle by which Nietzsche makes himself and/as the revolution. Finally in this section, **Yannick Souladié** places the emphasis on *Ecce Homo*'s relation to the work which it presages, the *Revaluation of All Values*, but not in the sense of a philosophy to come, rather in the sense of the subtitle to the work which he had just completed, *The Antichrist* (1888). In this sense, *Ecce Homo* (and its resounding conclusion in particular) lays the foundation for a philosophy of pure affirmation, a Dionysian philosophy opposed to the Christian values of "the crucified one". *Ecce Homo* thus announces a new morality, a new educational politics that will promote the advent of higher human types.

Our fifth and final subdivision contains four essays which examine psychological extremes of ecstatic inspiration, madness and hyperbolic excess. **Maria João Mayer Branco** focuses on the account which Nietzsche gives in the *Ecce Homo* chapter on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* of his experience of the inspiration for the earlier book. Branco's exegesis compares Nietzsche's description of inspiration with the account of the inspiration of the poet and the rhapsode given by Socrates in Plato's *Ion*, especially the idea that poetic inspiration corresponds to a divine gift, a force transmitted by enthusiasm that cannot be controlled by the poet through voluntary choice. For Branco, Nietzsche's description of his own inspiration as a Dionysian, dithyrambic artist is analogous: it is linked to his conception of destiny and plays a key role in Nietzsche's understanding of what philosophy is. **John F. Whitmire, Jr.**, takes another model, arguing that the text's "madness" can be accounted for by setting it in the context of Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic narrative. *Ecce Homo* shares a number of features in com-

mon with this literary tradition: a first-person narrative describing a revelatory disclosure (and its subsequent interpretation), a cosmic dualism of forces (Dionysus and “the Crucified”) coupled with a radical eschatological worldview, and a paraenesis or exhortation to change our behaviour in light of the new perspective. Such an ironic deployment of a Christian style derives from Nietzsche’s lifelong *agon* with Christianity and highlights the importance to him of overcoming the Christian worldview. **Martin Liebscher** focuses squarely on the question of Nietzsche’s madness by highlighting the work of the Nietzsche editor and interpreter Erich F. Podach, who published *Ecce Homo* in 1961 as one of the works from the period of Nietzsche’s mental collapse (*Werke des Zusammenbruchs*; Podach 1961). Such a psychopathologizing approach was fiercely resisted, notably by the editors of the historical-critical German edition of Nietzsche’s writings, Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, but Liebscher argues against going too far in cleansing Nietzsche’s philosophy of its psychological aspects. **Duncan Large** also takes the “madness” of Nietzsche’s text as his point of departure and demonstrates through close textual analysis that *Ecce Homo* sets a new benchmark for rhetorical excess in Nietzsche’s work, that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche’s use of hyperbole *itself* becomes hyperbolic. Large contends that *Ecce Homo* is indeed an unbalanced, exorbitant text, but argues that despite its rhetorical excesses it shows Nietzsche to be still very much in control, that even here Nietzsche is still rigorously pursuing the same philosophical themes that characterize his mature work as a whole. In our final contribution, **Werner Stegmaier** gives a masterclass in the exegesis of Nietzsche’s philosophical writing. Also taking issue with the accusation of madness levelled against Nietzsche in this text, Stegmaier tackles the aphorism which he terms the most challenging and most frightening in Nietzsche’s work, the first section of “Why I am a Destiny”. In Stegmaier’s patient reading, this aphorism has a surprisingly precise and comprehensible meaning: interpreting the aphorism sentence by sentence, he argues that it gives access to the whole of Nietzsche’s later philosophy.

Taken together, these essays demonstrate that *Ecce Homo* is one of Nietzsche’s most compelling and rewarding texts. The true scandal of *Ecce Homo* is that it should have been neglected for so long, and we hope that this collection will give fresh impetus to the text’s ongoing rehabilitation in the second century of its reception.



Daniel Conway

# Nietzsche's Perfect Day

## Elegy and Rebirth in *Ecce Homo*

**Abstract:** Nietzsche's deployment of multiple modes of self-presentation in *Ecce Homo* is meant to provide his readers with an appropriate introduction to the new incarnation in which he appears before them. The "man" he urges his readers to "behold" in the pages of this bristling little book exemplifies the Dionysian spirituality that is recommended to all those who wish to become what they are. Of particular interest to Nietzsche on this occasion is the complementarity that obtains, ideally, between negation (or elegy) and affirmation (or rebirth).

Moral: What prudent man would write a single honest word about himself today?  
– he would have to be a member of the Order of Holy Foolhardiness to do so.  
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*

You pay dearly for being immortal: it means you die numerous times over the  
course of your life. –  
Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

The nectar is in the journey...  
John J. McDermott

## 1

Nietzsche begins *Ecce Homo* by explaining that it now behoves him to introduce himself to those who, by rights, should already know who he is and what he is about. Although he does not identify the grave "demand" (*Forderung*) with which he will very soon will confront humankind as a whole, or the "task" (*Aufgabe*) whose eminence outstrips the diminished faculties of his contemporary readers, we may conclude with some confidence that he has in mind "the revaluation of all values" (*Umwertung aller Werthe*), which his recently completed book by the same name apparently was meant to inaugurate.

The book in question, which is known to us as *The Antichrist(ian)*, lies completed before him. (It is in fact one of the "gifts" (*Geschenke*) for which he ex-

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This essay is dedicated to the memory of my late friend and colleague, John J. McDermott (1932–2018).

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246551-004>

presses his gratitude in the interleaf epigraph of *Ecce Homo*.<sup>1</sup>) But he dare not authorize its publication until he has prepared his potential readers, and the German authorities, with a sympathetic, reassuring portrait of its author. While the goal of *Ecce Homo* is, as he says, to introduce himself to potential readers of *The Antichrist(ian)*, he attests more candidly in his correspondence from the period to the aim that motivates his efforts to introduce himself. In a letter to Heinrich Köselitz (aka Peter Gast) on 30 October 1888, Nietzsche confides:

To be sure, I talk about myself with all possible psychological ‘cunning’ and cheerfulness [*Heiterkeit*] – I do not want to present myself to people as a prophet, savage beast, or moral horror. In this sense, too, the book could be salutary: it will perhaps prevent people from confusing me with my opposite [*Gegensatz*]. (KSB 8/462; Nietzsche 1969b, p. 318–320)

In particular, as he explains in the Foreword to *Ecce Homo*, he wishes to launch a pre-emptive strike against those who would be inclined to dismiss the author of *The Antichrist(ian)* as a “bogeyman” or “moral monster” (EH Foreword 2).<sup>2</sup> Although he does not identify the potential critics whom he has in mind, his letter to Köselitz provides the following explanation of the “audacity” on display in *Ecce Homo*:

Not only did I want to present myself *before* the entirely uncanny solitary act of *revaluation*, – I would also like to *test* what risks I can take with the German ideas of freedom of speech. My suspicion is that the first book of the revaluation will be confiscated on the spot – legally and in all justice. (KSB 8/462; Nietzsche 1969b, p. 318–320)

The appearance of *Ecce Homo*, he thus hopes, will “make the question [of revaluation] so intensely serious, and such an object of curiosity” that the cognizant authorities will be discouraged from censoring or confiscating *The Antichrist(ian)* (KSB 8/462; Nietzsche 1969b, p. 318–320). Alas, Nietzsche’s clever plan was foiled by his breakdown and collapse in January of 1889. *The Antichrist(ian)* appeared for the first time in 1895, while *Ecce Homo* was finally published in 1908.<sup>3</sup>

Returning to the Foreword to *Ecce Homo*, we find Nietzsche enrolling his readers in the confidence game that is meant to serve the undisclosed end of steering *The Antichrist(ian)* safely into print. “*Between ourselves*”, he intimates,

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1 For an account of Nietzsche’s realization that *The Antichrist(ian)* would comprise the whole of the *Revaluation of All Values*, see Montinari 2003b, p. 117–118.

2 In his letter to Brandes of 20 November 1888, Nietzsche describes *Ecce Homo* as the “prelude” (*Vorspiel*) to *The Antichrist(ian)* (KSB 8/482; Nietzsche 1969b, p. 326–327).

3 This paragraph and the two that precede it make use of material that originally appeared in Conway 2018, p. 1–3.

urging his readers to guard the secret he is about to disclose to them, “something I can be proud of” is that “I am by nature the opposite of the type of person who has been admired as virtuous till now” (EH Foreword 2). (This type of person, he later reveals, is the target of one of the two “denials” (*Verneinungen*) that are allowed him *qua* “immoralist”, which is the *nom de guerre* that is meant to convey his opposition to this type [EH IV 4].) Here he not only flatters his readers, placing them among the discerning few who are not likely to mistake him for someone else, but also signals to them that *pride* is alive and well within the lineage he represents. For the right kind of reader, this combination of intimacy, flattery, and contrarian pride would be difficult to resist. If we may assume that his readers are predisposed toward the estimation of themselves that his flattery conveys, then he stands a decent chance of building the receptive readership that he believes is needed. The game, as it were, is on. His trap is set. As bait, of course, he offers *himself*, presented here in the novel incarnation that will warrant the seriousness of the “demand” he soon will assert.<sup>4</sup>

In describing the opening gambit of *Ecce Homo* as comprising a confidence game, I do not mean to suggest that Nietzsche is irreducibly strategic – and therefore insincere – in his efforts to introduce himself to his likely readers. While strategic considerations are never far from his mind, he tends not to resort in *Ecce Homo* to outright deceit or naked manipulation. He is far more likely to present his life in the kind of highly idealized terms that suggest a good-natured, self-conscious exercise in complimentary self-description. To the extent that his readers are invited (or expected) to be in on the joke, moreover, Nietzsche’s buoyant *Heiterkeit* contributes to the ethos of intimacy that he cultivates in *Ecce Homo*.<sup>5</sup> Although he clearly wishes to build a sympathetic readership for *The Antichrist(ian)*, he also wishes to introduce himself in a way that will neutralize or deflect the misidentifications that he understands to be coming his way. In short, I would describe *Ecce Homo* as both strategic and sincere, both cheerful and serious, in its presentation of Nietzsche. Or, to borrow the terms he uses elsewhere, *Ecce Homo* is that rarest of autobiographies, for it is both “prudent” and “honest” in its presentation of its author (GM III 19).

Having declared and identified what he is *not*, Nietzsche turns to explain what he *is* (and has become) – namely, “a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus” (EH Foreword 2). This disclosure may help to explain why he would “prefer to be a satyr rather than a saint” (EH Foreword 2), even if, as he later admits, he ac-

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<sup>4</sup> The seductive intricacies of Nietzsche’s writing style are productively examined by Faulkner. See Faulkner 2010, especially p. 11–34 and, with respect to *Ecce Homo*, p. 52–69.

<sup>5</sup> I am in general agreement here with the evaluation provided by Ridley (Ridley 2005a, p. xvi–xxi).



tually prefers water to wine. Here it becomes clear, in fact, that Nietzsche wishes to introduce himself to his readers on the strength of the contrast (*Gegensatz*) that *Ecce Homo* is supposed to illuminate, namely, the contrast between what he is not and what he is. While the pairings he initially presents – e.g., satyr vs. saint – suggest a fairly stark contrast, the anxieties expressed throughout *Ecce Homo* arise from his justifiable concern that he ultimately may fail to illustrate adequately the contrast in question. At its limits, in fact, this contrast involves pairings – e.g., Dionysus vs. The Crucified One, immoralist vs. moralist – whose terms are virtually indistinguishable, especially inasmuch as they have become reciprocally interdependent.<sup>6</sup> In the end, that is, the contrast in question is sufficiently novel, even to Nietzsche, that he quite legitimately wonders if he can do it justice in *Ecce Homo*. If he cannot, then his readers are not likely to behold the man presented for their consideration. Through no fault of their own, they will mistake him for another, just as he has prophesied. One day, he fears, they may go so far as to pronounce him *holy* (EH IV 1).

The persistence of this concern helps to explain why Nietzsche offers the seemingly deflationary observation that to “express this contrast [*Gegensatz*] in a cheerful and benevolent way” may very well be “the only point of this work” (EH Foreword 2). Especially in light of who he is and has become, this outcome would be noteworthy in its own right. In any event, here we see Nietzsche treading what for him has become familiar ground ever since the publication of his *Zarathustra*: He endeavors to refine his readers’ aesthetic sensibilities *while* he discloses the truths to which, supposedly, their refined sensibilities will grant them access. As several commentators have variously noted, the complexity of his task in *Ecce Homo* obliges him to be doubly invested in the education of his target audience.<sup>7</sup>

In order to deepen the contrast that he aims to illustrate, Nietzsche proceeds to insist that he has no interest in improving humanity or erecting new ideals, which he sneeringly insists on calling *idols* (EH Foreword 2). He is much better suited to the task of “*toppling*” hollow idols, which suggests that he wishes to express the contrast in question, at least in part, by exposing these idols as representative of an alternative, idealized *faux* reality (EH Foreword 2). This particular revelation adumbrates his later claim that it is his “*lot*” to be remembered in conjunction with “something monstrous, of a crisis as yet unprecedented on earth”, in which he is destined to play a uniquely explosive role (EH IV 1).

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<sup>6</sup> On the similarities between “Dionysus” and “The Crucified One”, especially in their shared status as “suffering gods”, see Reginster 2006, p. 228–242.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Derrida 1985b, p. 8–11, p. 32–37; Girard 1978, p. 62; Nehamas 1985, p. 230–234; Sloterdijk 1989, p. 31–32; Staten 1990, p. 36–39, p. 147–149; and Faulkner 2010, p. 61–69.

This does not mean, however, that he is uninterested in, or disengaged from, the question of the future of humankind. Far from it: in accordance with his new-born incarnation as a disciple of Dionysus, he presents his Nay-saying and Nay-doing activities as the “preconditions” of his unprecedented capacity for Yea-saying (EH IV 4). As difficult as it may be for us to accept, his no-holds-barred assault on Christian morality is his way of saying *Yes* to life itself.

We will return to consider Nietzsche's introduction of himself in further detail. For now, let us note what an odd calling card he has chosen to leave. We need not fear that he is yet another in a long line of intolerant, fear-mongering Christian moralizers, each of whom has claimed to know with utter certainty how to improve humankind. We need not fear this about him, he calmly explains, because he is a self-avowed disciple of a pagan, pre-Christian god whose followers are known for their love of the grape, their preoccupation with bawdy, scatological banter and bestial expressions of sexuality, their celebration of madness, ecstasy, and other self-deranging forces, and their willing participation in frenzied acts of ritual mutilation, wherein, eventually, the god himself is dismembered by his female attendants. The authorities certainly have nothing to fear from *this* author. Far from a demagogue or mere rabble rouser, he promises in his next book to present humankind with the greatest “demand” ever made of it, a demand that shall inaugurate the era of *great politics* (EH IV 1).

## 2

Let us examine this calling card in further detail. In presenting himself as a disciple of the *philosopher* Dionysus, Nietzsche reprises a theme he introduced as he was nearing the conclusion of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Having identified himself there as “the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus”, he offered to provide his readers with “a few tastes” of the philosophy of Dionysus (BGE 295). His stated reason for doing so is worth noting: In the previous Section, he had jokingly proposed to acknowledge an “order of rank among philosophers depending on the rank of their laughter” (BGE 294). Reserving the lowest place in this order for Hobbes, he surmised that the philosophers among the gods “know how to laugh the while in a superhuman and new way – *and at the expense of all serious things*” (BGE 294, emphasis added).

In the specific case of the god and philosopher Dionysus, he further intimates, nothing taken seriously by human beings – including, presumably, the continued existence of humankind itself – should be deemed safe from the destructive force of his laughter (BGE 295). As befits his (merely) conditional love of

“what is human”, Dionysus aspires to make human beings “stronger, more evil, and more profound; also more beautiful” than they are and have been (BGE 295). Presumably, Dionysus is to be counted among the philosophers on the strength of his overarching concern with what humankind may yet become, especially if human beings were to be properly educated, challenged, organized, and distributed throughout the relevant social strata and political denominations.<sup>8</sup>

Nietzsche may have neglected to specify the god’s likely strategy in pursuing this alleged upgrade of the human condition, but he leaves his readers a potentially ominous clue: In addition to lacking “shame”, Dionysus lacks a certain “humane” quality that he would do well, perhaps, to learn from *us* (BGE 295). Apparently, that is, we humans treat each other with considerably more solicitude and concern than Dionysus is likely to display as he endeavors to “advance” our shares in the aforementioned desirable attributes. (In weighing this clue, we should bear in mind that Nietzsche is widely known for his brutally unsentimental account of how human beings actually have treated one another throughout the ages.) Unconvinced thus far of our warrant to exist as such, Dionysus may be less hesitant than other, more familiar gods to hold us to standards that we are not likely to reach. And lest we underestimate the destructive power of his laughter, as estimated by Nietzsche, let us recall these words of Zarathustra: “Not by wrath does one kill, but by laughter” (Za I vii).

As a self-avowed disciple of Dionysus, moreover, Nietzsche is apparently prepared to assist the god in these efforts, even if doing so requires him, too, to become less “humane” in the process. Indeed, the general impression one gains from this discussion is that the laughter of the philosopher Dionysus (and, presumably, of his disciples) observes no conventional bounds. Anything that human beings take seriously, including the fate of humankind itself, is a potential target of this laughter. At the very least, Dionysus and Nietzsche would seem to be willing to place the (dubious) future of humankind at risk in their quest to cultivate a “stronger, more evil, and more profound” animal. As a philosopher, that is, Nietzsche aims to deliver humankind to its single most promising incarnation; as a *Dionysian* philosopher, he is apparently willing to hazard the future of humankind in order to do so.

Readers of *Ecce Homo* will note the conspicuous lack of assurances issued by Nietzsche with respect to the outcome of the chaos he seeks to incite (cf. EH IV 1–2, 8), as if chaos itself were his goal, as if risking the future of humankind were more important to him than actually securing this future. Nietzsche

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<sup>8</sup> It is also in *Beyond Good and Evil* that Nietzsche delivers his oft-cited description of “*genuine philosophers*” as “*commanders and legislators*”, for “they say ‘*thus it shall be!*’” (BGE 211).

seems to delight, moreover, in the prospect of the upheavals – e.g., “wars the like of which have never yet been seen on earth” – that he associates with the advent of “*great politics*” (EH IV 1). It is with some trepidation, then, that we take note of his wish to be known henceforth as “the first immoralist” and, so, as “the annihilator [*Vernichter*] *par excellence*” (EH IV 2).<sup>9</sup> To be sure, a great deal more needs to be said about his practice of annihilation. For now, let us note that Nietzsche’s emergence as an “immoralist” is presented, and justified, as integral to his dowry as a disciple of Dionysus.<sup>10</sup>

If Nietzsche is the *last* disciple of Dionysus, moreover, then the Dionysian lineage that he represents will end with him. No one will follow in his footsteps along this particular path of initiation. The same is true, we might note, of the other, contrasting lineage that Nietzsche represents, comprising the priesthood of Christian truth-tellers, whom he identifies as historically poised to host the final stage in the self-overcoming of Christian morality.<sup>11</sup> Here we apparently are meant to understand that the historically- and culturally-specific impulses corresponding to “Dionysus” and “The Crucified One”, respectively, have become inextricably intermingled over the past two thousand years, such that they no longer exist or operate independently of one another. In that event, Nietzsche would represent (and embody) the culmination of *both* impulses, much as the title of *Ecce Homo* suggests that he is both Pilate and Christ in one, much as the genre of autobiography casts him in the dual role of author and subject.

Rather than oppose Nietzsche to some unnamed external other, the contrast with which he concludes *Ecce Homo – Dionysus vs. The Crucified One* – is meant to identify an opposition *internal* to him, an opposition that spells the end of late modernity and the moral period of human history.<sup>12</sup> While it is likely, as several scholars have noted, that Nietzsche came to see Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, as the most formidable opponent of the Dionysian philosophy he espouses,<sup>13</sup>

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**9** In recounting the production history of *Ecce Homo*, Montinari provides a very useful account of the “intensification of his [Nietzsche’s] self-image as a man of destiny” (Montinari 2003b, p. 111).

**10** For a critical appraisal of Nietzsche’s claim to have achieved the desired Dionysian status, see Benson 2008, p. 202–216.

**11** See Ridley 1998, p. 120–126; and Conway 2008, p. 142–152.

**12** My interpretation here is indebted to the analysis conducted by Salaquarda, who draws a very different conclusion about the contrast in question (Salaquarda 1998, especially p. 275–282).

**13** See, for example: Salaquarda 1998, p. 275–282; Conway 1997a, p. 194–206; and Reginster 2006, p. 228–229, p. 242–251.

*Ecce Homo* presents this opposition as playing out within the contours of Nietzsche's own destiny-driven life. What we learn in *Ecce Homo*, in short, is that Nietzsche boasts an irreducibly dual lineage: In addition to being a disciple of Dionysus, he is heir to a religious-moral-metaphysical tradition in which The Crucified One plays a central role. In particular, he owes his newly avowed status as *truth-teller* to the formative influence on him of Christian morality in its most recently determined historical shape. *Ecce Homo* is thus meant to signify, and describe, a world-historical moment wherein the impulses associated with "Dionysus" and "The Crucified One", respectively, have merged and fused.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the only disposable excess force available for the purposes of destruction and disintegration is generated through the currently authoritative ascetic practices of Christian morality – most notably, as we have seen, the ascetic practice of "experimental" truth-telling (GM III 24). Presumably, this is why the last disciple of Dionysus also must convene the final gathering of the Christian priesthood.

It thus follows that the "Dionysus" whom we encounter in the context of a mortal confrontation with "The Crucified One" is but a specific manifestation – a mask, as it were – of the inexhaustible Dionysian life principle. Here it may be helpful to recall the distinction, recommended by Kerényi, between *zoë* and *bios*:

The significance of *zoë* is life in general, without further characterization. When the word *bios* is uttered, something else resounds: the contours, as it were, the characteristic traits of a specified life, the outlines that distinguish one living thing from another. (Kerényi 1976, p. xxxii)

As this distinction suggests, the "Dionysus" whom Nietzsche opposes to "The Crucified One" is representative of life as *bios*, especially inasmuch as "Dionysus" acquires ever greater characterization by virtue of his role in the endgame sequence of late modern European culture. It is as a representative of *bios*, moreover, that "Dionysus" may be said and understood to die, or die out, as a result of the conflict with "The Crucified One". (Here we are reminded, in fact, that Dionysus, known to antiquity as the "god who comes", is also the god who departs, and not quietly.) Indeed, Nietzsche's claim to be the *last* disciple of Dionysus fits with similar pronouncements he makes about the unique, concluding role that he is destined to play in "that great spectacle in one hundred acts that is reserved for the next two centuries in Europe".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I am indebted here to the analysis provided by Staten, who draws a different conclusion (Staten 1990, p. 145–150).

<sup>15</sup> "*jenes grosse Schauspiel in hundert Akten, das den nächsten zwei Jahrhunderten Europa's aufgespart bleibt*" (GM III 27).

At this distinction is also meant to suggest, the death or dismemberment of “Dionysus” (as a representative of life as *bios*) is fully consistent with the ongoing existence of the indestructible Dionysian impulse that is representative of life as *zoë*. In other words, the “Dionysus” who is destined to perish in the epochal confrontation with “The Crucified One” is but a transient representation of the indestructible “Dionysus” to whom Nietzsche pledges his undying allegiance. To reinforce this point, here we might recall the theatrical imagery that Nietzsche employs elsewhere to good effect: the imminent collapse of Christian morality simply marks the end of one act in the long-running “Dionysian drama of ‘The Destiny of the Soul’”, as scripted and produced by “the grand old eternal comic poet of our existence” for his enduring amusement (GM Preface 7). Another act, in which Dionysus (as *zoë*) dons another mask (as *bios*), is certain to follow.

This is not to say, of course, that the successor epoch to late modernity will bear no debt (or resemblance) to the Dionysian philosophy that Nietzsche has championed throughout his career. If Nietzsche has his way, in fact, the successor epoch will bear the imprint of the (promised) triumph of “Dionysus” over “The Crucified One”, which is the end that he envisions for this epoch. In other words, if Nietzsche has his way, the successor epoch will support the sustaining activities of human (or over- or trans-human) beings who are noticeably stronger, more evil, more profound, and more beautiful than his underwhelming contemporaries.

### 3

Equally momentous, but overshadowed by Nietzsche’s pledge of Dionysian discipleship, is his announcement in this Foreword that he has re-invented himself yet again. It is with good reason that he implores his readers not to mistake him for someone else; even his most devoted readers are bound to be confused at this point. It is not simply the “bogeyman” or “moral monster” whom we must put out of mind while reading *Ecce Homo*. We also must beware of mistaking the author of *Ecce Homo* for the author, say, of *Beyond Good and Evil*, or *On the Genealogy of Morality*. By virtue of conducting a playful review of his extant writings, in fact, he draws our attention to the distance (or perspective) that it presupposes. Looking back (and down) on his “good books”, Nietzsche presents himself as having outgrown and surpassed the predecessor incarnations (whether sickly or convalescent) that he associates with the books under review.

Noteworthy in its own right, the launch of Nietzsche 2.0 is also meant to persuade us that a “revaluation of all values” is at hand. This is so, as Nietzsche tells

us later in *Ecce Homo*, because *he* has already accomplished something similar, albeit on a smaller scale, in his own life (EH IV 1).<sup>16</sup> Having succeeded in conducting – and subsequently incorporating – “the highest act of self-reflection on the part of humanity” (EH IV 1), he is now prepared to demand of his contemporaries a related, albeit more general, regimen of self-reckoning, which, he believes, will culminate in the “day of decision” that he associates with the revaluation of all values. (He will press this demand, as we have seen, in *The Antichrist(ian)*, which is the book for which *Ecce Homo* is meant to cultivate a sympathetic readership.) He thus presents himself in *Ecce Homo* as the link that formerly had been missing from his sketch of the endgame sequence of late modernity, the link between the advent of European nihilism and the final collapse of Christian morality. As such, Nietzsche now serves as a signpost to the future, pointing us in the direction of a post-moral epoch in the development of human history.<sup>17</sup>

As far-fetched as it may sound, Nietzsche turns out to be the answer to many of the nagging questions that he had posed as recently as the previous year. There is no longer any need, for example, to determine the value of those values that assert themselves under the banner of *morality* (GM Preface 6). Nor is there any need to wonder if morality itself might turn out to be the “danger of dangers” (GM Preface 6). Nor need we continue, “experimentally” or otherwise, to question the “value of truth” itself, despite having determined this to be our defining “task” (GM III 24). All of these questions, seemingly so ponderous and unapproachable just one year ago, have been settled by Nietzsche, who presents himself in *Ecce Homo* as the sole living champion of *truth*.<sup>18</sup>

Having appeared before us under various self-awarded titles, designations, and *noms de plume* – e.g. *philologist*, *philosopher*, *psychologist*, *Wagnerian*, *free spirit*, *wanderer*, *untimely man*, *Prince Free-As-A-Bird*, and so on – he now appears before us not only reborn, but also, as we have seen, immortal. It is this new incarnation, moreover, that prompts him to indulge in the hyperbole and grandiosity for which *Ecce Homo* is well known. In *him*, or so we are meant to believe, we may glimpse the configuration of powers that will spell the end, without remainder, of Christian morality. In short, this is no ordinary birthday boy. Conventional descriptions simply will not suffice to convey the magnitude of his achievement. In this regard, we would do well not to allow

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<sup>16</sup> See Shapiro 1989, p. 148; and Acampora 2013, p. 186–197.

<sup>17</sup> Strong persuasively interprets *Ecce Homo* as staging Nietzsche’s production of himself as an “*übermenschlich*” hero (Strong 1985, p. 331–332).

<sup>18</sup> See Platt 1998, p. 231–232.



Nietzsche's unseemly self-aggrandizement in *Ecce Homo* to distract us from looking closely at what he claims to have accomplished and become.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, *Ecce Homo* can announce Nietzsche's rebirth only if it also acknowledges the death of Nietzsche in his previous incarnation.<sup>20</sup> Which is precisely what the book does. Before launching into his explanation of why he is so "wise", Nietzsche pauses to commemorate the death and burial of his forty-fourth year, even as he acknowledges (and celebrates) the gift of a forty-fifth year:

On this perfect day, when everything is ripening and not only the grapes are turning brown, a shaft of sunlight has just fallen on my life: I looked backwards, I looked ahead, I never saw so much and such good things all at once. Not for nothing have I buried my forty-fourth year today; I was *entitled* to bury it – all the life that was in it is saved, is immortal. The *Revaluation of All Values*, the *Dionysus Dithyrambs*, and, by way of recuperation, the *Twilight of the Idols* – all of them gifts of this year, even of its last quarter! *How should I not be grateful to my whole life?* And so I tell myself my life.

To be sure, scholars and commentators have taken note of this interleaf epigraph, citing it as evidence of Nietzsche's triumph over resentment, his attainment of a standpoint of unconditional affirmation, and so on.<sup>21</sup> For the most part, however, these appreciations have neglected to account for the placement

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**19** Doueïhi suggests that we understand "the new style of writing" on display in *Ecce Homo* as "stand[ing] in opposition to the Christian God and his manner of revealing Himself" (Doueïhi 1988, p. 216).

**20** See Doueïhi 1988, p. 209–212.

**21** See, for example, Derrida 1985b, p. 11–15; Silverman 1985, p. 147–149; Strong 1985, p. 316–317; Shapiro 1989, p. 162–164; Steinbuch 1994, p. 12–15; Altieri and Platt draw welcome attention to the echoes in *Ecce Homo* of Augustine's *Confessions* (Altieri 1985, p. 399–400; Platt 1998, p. 219–220). Kaufmann would seem to have the interleaf epigraph in mind when he avers, in his translation of *Ecce Homo*, that "*There is no 'if only' in this autobiography, and there are no excuses. A man who was in physical agony much of his adult life...does not once complain. He is thankful for his illness and tells us how it made his life better...In Ecce Homo Nietzsche embodies...this triumph over resentment. Instead of bearing a grudge toward the world that treated him so cruelly, instead of succumbing to the rancor of sickness, he relates the story of his life and work in a spirit of gratitude...*" (Nietzsche 1989c, p. 207). The interleaf epigraph would seem to play a similar role in supporting Nehamas's influential interpretation: "One way, then, to become ...what one is, is, after having written all these other books, to write *Ecce Homo* and even to give it the subtitle "How One Becomes What One Is". It is to write this self-referential book in which Nietzsche can be said with equal justice to invent or to discover himself, and in which the character who speaks to us is the author who has created him and who is in turn a character created by or implicit in all the books that were written by the author who is writing this one" (Nehamas 1985, 196). See also Jensen 2013, p. 188–196; and Acampora 2013, p. 153–159.



of the interleaf epigraph within the pages of *Ecce Homo*.<sup>22</sup> Why does it appear precisely *here*, untitled and unsigned, joined yet set apart, preliminary to the first of Nietzsche's outrageously self-congratulatory chapters? We already have his calling card, and we have been duly apprised of the contrast he intends for *Ecce Homo* to limn. What, then, is the purpose of this interleaf epigraph?

The placement of this epigraph suggests that it is meant to offer an elegiac prayer of gratitude.<sup>23</sup> Having announced that he is now a disciple of Dionysus, Nietzsche provides his readers with an outward sign, or token, of his discipleship. In doing so, he bears public witness to the rebirth that his Foreword announces. (This gesture may be especially appealing to those readers who have grown weary of his habit of issuing empty claims, hollow pronouncements, and assorted promissory notes.) As such, this prayer confirms the wondrous transformation that the Foreword to *Ecce Homo* is meant to announce. The aim or point of this prayer, or so we may speculate, is to attune Nietzsche *and his readers* to the Dionysian sensibility that is appropriate to his writing, and their consideration, of this curious autobiography.

As he reveals in the oft-neglected coda to the interleaf epigraph – “And so I tell myself my life” – he has not previously recited this prayer publicly.<sup>24</sup> Having heretofore related his life to himself only in the privacy of his own conscience, or so we are meant to understand, he now shares with his readers the prayer that both affirms and deepens his allegiance to Dionysus. His initial gesture of intimacy – *Between ourselves* – has thus yielded an unprecedented glimpse into the disposition and practice of his Dionysian discipleship. The audience to which he presumptuously addressed himself in the Foreword to *Ecce Homo* now stands on the threshold of spiritual fellowship.

Nietzsche's elegiac prayer of gratitude thus imbues the autobiography that follows it with an appropriate degree of reverence and solemnity. Having *told* us who he is, he now *shows* us that his discipleship affords him an unparalleled capacity for simultaneous mourning and gratitude. His recitation of this formerly private prayer thus reinforces the validity of the standpoint from which he proceeds to affirm all that has befallen him. As such, this prayer transforms his previously private account of his life into a potentially useful model or template for those members of his audience who similarly aspire to become what they are. In

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<sup>22</sup> Notable exceptions include Derrida 1985b, p. 11–15; Silverman 1985, p. 147–149; and Jensen 2013, p. 199–201.

<sup>23</sup> I am indebted to Benson for drawing my attention to “Nietzsche's long history of prayer” (Benson 2008, p. 214), as well as to the prayerful dimension of *Ecce Homo* itself (Benson 2008, p. 189–214).

<sup>24</sup> See Shapiro 1989, p. 142–143.

particular, those who would learn from the example of Nietzsche's own life would do well, presumably, to imbibe the Dionysian spirituality that this prayer conveys. Apparently, that is, this interleaf epigraph is meant to prepare the audience of *Ecce Homo* to undergo a spiritual awakening or transformation, on the strength of which it may yet become the enlightened readership Nietzsche seeks.

Our attention to this prayer also prepares us to understand (and receive) the autobiography that follows it as similarly informed by a dual attunement to mourning and gratitude. Each triumph he recounts is shadowed by loss, each loss gilded by the prospect of imminent self-overcoming. This is not to suggest, of course, that good humor and good cheer are inimical to the spirit of *Ecce Homo*. As we have seen, Nietzsche's irrepressible (and hard-won) *Heiterkeit* (cheerfulness) suffuses this odd little book, attesting thereby to the advertised restoration of his strength and health. As he makes clear throughout his post-Zarathustran writings, moreover, he regards *Heiterkeit* not as the opposite of *Ernst* (seriousness), but as its product and outgrowth. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, for example, he accounts for his own *Heiterkeit* as a "reward" for taking very seriously the questions concerning morality that had occupied him in recent years (GM Preface 7). In fact, what critics often identify and dismiss as his penchant for hyperbole in *Ecce Homo* may be more accurately (and charitably) identified as his buoyant good cheer.<sup>25</sup>

## 4

Here we might note that Nietzsche was no stranger to elegiac rhythms and rituals. Having buried and mourned his father and younger brother, and having done so at an impressionably young age, he acquired early on a persistent need for, and attunement to, elegiac modes of expression.<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly, death and dying became prominent themes in his writings. Zarathustra spoke eloquently of a death *freely* chosen, which he recommended as the timely consummation of one's life and the achievement of one's goal (Z I xxi).<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche himself was similarly concerned to illuminate the conditions of a "natural" death, a death chosen and affirmed as integral to the movement of life itself (TI IX 36; AC 34). In support of his most audacious elegiac teaching –

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<sup>25</sup> Here I follow Jensen 2013, p. 192–201.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example: Hayman 1982, p. 15–20; Safranski 2002, p. 25–33; Benson 2008, p. 15–22; and Young 2010, p. 6–11.

<sup>27</sup> I am indebted here to Loeb 2010, p. 133–147.

viz. *the death of God* – he experimented on multiple occasions with various dramatic settings, fictive personae, modes of expression, and rhetorical forms, hoping thereby to determine the most effective way to disseminate this untimely teaching.<sup>28</sup> Especially in his post-Zarathustran writings, moreover, he evinced a growing preoccupation with his presumed role in orchestrating diverse endings of varying magnitudes, each of which obliged him, or so he believed, to measure and strike the appropriately elegiac tone.

In the aforementioned prayer, he solemnly marks the passing of a year (and of a corresponding incarnation) that he claims to be *entitled* to bury. Having preserved and immortalized all that was vital in his forty-fourth year, he now bids it *adieu*. The suggestion here is that he has mastered an as-yet-unnamed technique or regimen of preparing for death.<sup>29</sup> Disinclined to cling to a glorious present that is no more, he greets his new present unburdened by his past. Equally disinclined to discard prematurely this present and race on to the next one, he lingers for a long, reflective moment before commencing his autobiography. The emphasis here, I take it, is placed on his *will* to relinquish his forty-fourth year, i. e., his *voluntary* role in its passing and burial.<sup>30</sup> The bygone year memorialized in this prayer was not ripped unexpectedly from his clutches; nor did it perish before he had managed to harvest its ripest fruits. His forty-fourth year expired precisely as he and Zarathustra had prescribed such partings to others: *at just the right time*, neither too early nor too late, perfectly synchronized with the natural rhythms suggested by the autumnal imagery that informs this prayer.<sup>31</sup>

As a disciple of Dionysus, therefore, Nietzsche has learned to situate himself within – and, so, affirm – the natural cycle of generation and corruption. He has managed to do so, moreover, even with respect to his own life, which had been a persistent challenge both for him and Zarathustra. Here he presents himself as a timely harvester not only of the fruits external to him, but also of the triumphs and outgrowths of his own being. At the risk of waxing excessively morbid, we might say that he dies by his own hand, granting himself the gift of death,<sup>32</sup> and thereby securing for himself the “natural” death that eluded so many of his contemporaries. In doing so, I suspect, he would regard himself as forward-

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**28** See, for example: Pippin 2010, p. 47–59; and Loeb 2010, p. 226–234.

**29** I am indebted here to Platt 1998, p. 241–242.

**30** Here I follow Steinbuch 1994, p. 12–14.

**31** See, for example, Za I xxi. Shapiro notes, suggestively, that this is also the perfect moment for Nietzsche to tell his story about himself (Shapiro 1989, p. 148). Shapiro goes on to explore to productive effect the “halcyonic” imagery of this “perfect day” (Shapiro 1989, p. 164–167).

**32** The reference, of course, is to Derrida’s influential work of the same name.

ing a welcome alternative to Christian teaching and practice.<sup>33</sup> Christians are especially inept, he observed, whenever they attempt, usually at the urging of the priest, to mark the most important of our natural and conventional transitions (e. g., birth, maturity, adulthood, marriage, sickness, death, and burial).

In light of Nietzsche's supposed triumph in *Ecce Homo*, we might speculate with some confidence that his elegiac prayer of gratitude is meant to form the basis of a secular, this-worldly liturgy, wherein his readers and disciples would consecrate rituals meant to hallow their expressions of mourning and gratitude.<sup>34</sup> The aim of this liturgy, and here I continue to speculate, would be to encourage us (or "us") to treat each person, each year, each blessing, each "gift," perhaps each moment, as a non-repeating singularity. So, for example, if Nietzsche is granted a forty-fifth year, it must be received as a gift and treated as an occasion for celebration and gratitude. I think it is easy to see that the interleaf epigraph accomplishes this objective.

It is also important to acknowledge, however, that the granting of a forty-fifth year in no way compensates Nietzsche for the loss, the passing, of his forty-fourth year. Nor would the dawning of a forty-fifth year substitute for the departed forty-fourth year. Whatever his Dionysian spirituality eventually turns out to be and involve, it affords him no calculus of compensation, no exchange rate for determining equitable substitutions. Mourning and gratitude must be treated (and expressed) as fellow travelers along life's winding path. So although Nietzsche has gathered and immortalized all that was vital in his forty-fourth year, its passing should and must be mourned. Put somewhat differently, his newly acquired share in immortality is such that it requires, rather than obviates, his mourning. To be immortal, as he notes, is to remain forever open and vulnerable to the death of one's transient incarnations and the dissolution of their defining investments.

Nietzsche's dual attunement on this "perfect day" is familiar, I believe, to any parent who similarly celebrates his or her child's birthday and simultaneously (though perhaps privately) mourns the passing of a year never to be repeated or regained. In fact, and often also in experience, these occasions for celebration and mourning are inextricably bound together, thereby yielding an experience that is often and accurately described as *bittersweet*. At age seven, to be sure, my daughter will continue to grow, mature, and develop new interests and skills. But none of her future accomplishments can or should be construed as substi-

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<sup>33</sup> Or, as Mulhall suggests, this supposed alternative may in fact reveal to Christians something integral, but long forgotten or misplaced, to their own faith (Mulhall 2005, p. 29–31).

<sup>34</sup> A signal insight of Nietzsche's "Madman" is that we may be obliged, in the aftermath of the "death of God", to invent new "festivals of atonement" and "sacred games" (GS 125).

tuting, or compensating, for the passing and loss of my precious six-year old. Her sixth year is gone forever, permanently consigned to the increasingly unreliable vault of my memory. If I understand Nietzsche correctly here, the passing of my daughter's sixth year is a genuine loss, a real (and not merely figurative) death, to be mourned as soulfully as her seventh year is welcomed and celebrated.

Something resembling this dual attunement is presented, and roundly parodied, in Part IV of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. In Zarathustra's absence, the "higher men" among his companions resolve to consecrate the wisdom they have received from him. Toward this end, they inaugurate a festival in which they celebrate the wisdom of an omni-affirmative ass, who repeatedly brays "Yea-Yuh" [*I-A*], as if to affirm all of life (Za IV xvii 2).<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche plays this scene for laughs, but he also manages to communicate the tender earnestness of Zarathustra's companions as they struggle to build from the ground up a liturgy celebrating their everyday, this-worldly existence. Although embarrassed and disappointed by their predictable relapse into the familiar routines of Christian practice, Zarathustra warmly acknowledges their baby steps toward Dionysian spirituality. Saluting their efforts, he bids the "higher men" to remember *him* whenever they celebrate their festival of this-worldly affirmation (Za IV xviii 3).<sup>36</sup>

It was in a similarly Dionysian spirit, finally, that Nietzsche was moved to promote the otherwise forgettable *Hymn to Life* and to take pains to correct a "printer's error" in its score (EH III Z 1). As he explains in *Ecce Homo*, he regards this *Hymn* as the worthy product of his collaboration with Lou Salomé, whose words he set to music and arranged "for mixed choir and orchestra" (EH III Z 1). With its oboe properly scored to produce a C# as its final note, this *Hymn* might be meant to accompany the Dionysian liturgy that Nietzsche creates in *Ecce Homo*.<sup>37</sup> In any event, his reference to this *Hymn*, which in turn recalls the unhappy conditions of his estrangement from Lou (and Paul Rée), confirms the extent of the pain and heartbreak he had managed to affirm. It is perhaps fitting, then, that he considered this *Hymn* an enduring tribute, especially if it were performed, as he wished, in remembrance of him.<sup>38</sup>

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35 I am indebted here to Higgins 1998, especially p. 174–183.

36 See Higgins 1998, p. 183–187.

37 Benson makes a strong case for including within this liturgy a renewed emphasis on singing and dancing, which he gathers under the heading of Nietzsche's "musical askesis" (Benson 2008, p. 178–187).

38 In his letter of 16 July 1888 to Carl Spitteler, Nietzsche uses the same words – "*zu meinem Gedächtnis*" (cf. Luke 22:19) – that Zarathustra uses to conclude his response to the "higher men" following the inaugural installment of their "Ass Festival" (KSB 8/353; cf. Za IV xviii 3).

## 5 Conclusion

Much like Zarathustra, Nietzsche imagines himself as both discouraging would-be followers *and* as exerting a positive, recognizable influence on the founding disposition of a successor epoch and lineage. He thus presents himself in *Ecce Homo* as the *last* disciple of the philosopher Dionysus, while nevertheless hoping that his name eventually will be attached to a world-historical moment that fostered a transformative, extra-moral articulation of human (or trans- or over-human) history (EH IV 1). Altering the designation attributed to Jesus in *Revelations*, Nietzsche thus presents himself as the Omega and the Alpha, the Last and the First, the End and the Beginning (Rev. 22:13).

But can he have it both ways? The anxieties expressed in *Ecce Homo* confirm that he feels far more assured in his former role. Toppling idols, exposing calumnies, and generally blowing things up – these avocations strike him as consistent with his aspirations and more or less within the sphere of his control. In short, *this* part of saying Yes to life is relatively easy for him. His latter role, however, is another matter altogether, in large part because his success in performing it depends so heavily on how he is received by his readers, whom he neither trusts nor admires. Ultimately, it will be up to them to understand (and express) how his various acts of denial, denunciation, and destruction served to catalyze the new beginning with which he hopes to be associated. If they do not discern the Dionysian imprint of his admittedly priestly attack on Christian morality, they will not be likely to link him to any new values and ideals that might flower in the aftermath of this attack. While he certainly fears that the promised successor epoch may never materialize as such, his greater concern is that his own contributions to its founding will not be adequately recognized by those who enjoy its benefits and advantages. In disavowing all followers and disciples, that is, he may succeed, inadvertently, in erasing his name from the future he hopes to produce.

In the end, or so it would seem, Nietzsche bids his readers to do something that he himself could not manage to do with any consistency – namely, to behold him in the fullness of his new incarnation. What Nietzsche would like for them to see is a historically unique amalgamation of those forces that formerly were arrayed under the oppositional headings, respectively, of “Dionysus” and “The Crucified One”. As the final representative of both lineages, in and through whom the moral period of human history will reach a self-consuming close, he makes possible a future untainted by guilt, sin, and self-loathing. If he is to be seen as such, however, his readers will need to regard him with a surety and precision that he lacks. Can he help them to sharpen their vision and refine

their focus? This would seem to be the central and enduring challenge that occupies (and perhaps eludes) him in *Ecce Homo*.

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## | ***Ecce Homo*: Autobiography and Subjectivity**





Anthony K. Jensen

## Self-Knowledge in Narrative Autobiography

**Abstract:** This essay argues for an “expressivist” theory of the “self” as it is illustrated by the autobiographical act of *Ecce Homo*. Since the object of autobiography is thoroughly historical – in constant flux and radically particular – linguistic designations will fail to adequately describe the “self”. Since the subject who writes an autobiography is herself a historically dynamic confluence of drives, any judgment of her “self” will be a function of her perspective at that moment. These two conditions confute the traditional standard of “true” autobiography, i. e. the adequate description of a static object by a static subject. The author argues not only that Nietzsche realizes this conundrum, but that his idiosyncratic *Ecce Homo* works to overcome it by *expressing* his “self” by means of his act of interpretation rather than naively attempting to *describe* himself accurately.

Nietzsche had a more penetrating knowledge of himself  
than any other man who ever lived or was likely to live.  
Sigmund Freud<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche seems to have enjoyed writing his autobiography. One gets the sense that his life rather surprises him from time to time, as if the same twelve bells that echo in the ears of the genealogist also make him ask of himself, “Through what have we actually just lived?”, and further, ‘who actually *are* we?’” (GM Preface 1: KSA 5/247)<sup>2</sup> There is, despite Freud’s approbation, an abiding fascination in the writing of one’s life that concerns the possibility of describing the object under investigation. As Nietzsche writes in an 1858 sketch of himself titled “*Aus meinem Leben*”:

True, I am not yet grown up, hardly have the years of childhood and boyhood behind me, and yet so much has already slipped from my memory [*Gedächtniß*] and the little that I know about them I have probably retained only by means of tradition. The sequence of years rushes past my gaze like a confusing dream. Therefore it is impossible for me to establish the facts of the first ten years of my life. (BAW 1/1)

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<sup>1</sup> Reported second-hand by Ernest Jones from the 28 October 1908 meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. Cited in Jones 1955 II, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> All translations of *Ecce Homo* are from Nietzsche 2005a. Other translations are ultimately my own, although I have consulted several published translations.

Even at so short a span of years, Nietzsche recognizes the unreliability of memory to produce a faithful, accurate or objective picture of his own past. We rely as much on tradition – what other people tell us about ourselves – as on our memory to know our own when’s, where’s, and how’s. But how do those other people remember our lives better than we do, if after all they too rely upon memory and tradition to recall how we were over time?

Today we are seemingly in a better position to remember ourselves, armed as we are with old photos, films, preserved emails and reunited Facebook friends. All of these media increase the quantity of data by which we can confirm our personal identity over time, but in actuality fail strictly of themselves to answer to our sense of our past personality. An autobiography is not the reproduction of these artifacts any more than the history of Rome is a collection of its coins. In both cases, we are presented with symbols whose meaningfulness depends upon the perspective of the interpreter. Nietzsche sensed the same disconnect between facts and sufficient descriptions, of not only identifying a self but also providing a *meaningful* story of oneself. Now at the ripe old age of nineteen, he asks,

[h]ow do we outline a picture of the life and character of a person whom we have come to know? In general, just as we outline a region we once saw. [...] However, what just stands out at first sight, the mass of mountains, the form of the rocky terrain, does not provide of itself the physiognomic character of a region. Something similar happens when we want to survey a human life and appreciate it properly. Fortuitous events, gifts of fortune, the changeful appearances of destiny, which arise from interconnected circumstances, should not guide us at this point, since they likewise stand out at first sight like the mountain tops. Precisely those little experiences and internal processes, which we think have been overlooked, in their totality depict the individual character most clearly, they grow organically out of human nature, while those that are inorganic only seem to be connected to them. (BAW 2/269)<sup>3</sup>

Here in 1863, Nietzsche stood deeply in the debt of the Romantics. One might imagine Nietzsche fancying himself a follower of Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1833), wherein the portrait of the author is revealed only by an artistic morphology of these everyday “little experiences” in such a way that communicates an indelible impression of his “inner nature” –the enduring spirit behind innumerable events and changes. One might envision that, seven years later, Nietzsche imagined himself like the personality of Homer, “an aesthetic judgment”, whose innermost “I” could never be demonstrated by a fact-seeking scientific philology, but, too, required the artistic construction of a *Gesamtbild* out of the existing evidence. “People now study biographical details, environment, ac-

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3 Nietzsche, “Kann der Neidische je wahrhaft glücklich sein?” (1863).

quaintances, contemporary events, and believe that by mixing all these ingredients together they will be able to manufacture the wished-for individuality. But they forget that the *punctum saliens*, the indefinable individual characteristics, can never be obtained from a compound of this nature” (KGW II 1/262). The compound of facts and characteristics is itself mute, and requires the historian to draw out the true individuality of the person in question.

But by October 1888, just when he “buried his forty-fourth year”, Nietzsche’s meta-history had undergone profound changes. In *Ecce Homo*, a genealogical historian emerges who understood that to speak of innermost natures and enduring personalities was to speak as a romantic metaphysician and to ignore both the fundamental character of life as the expression of conflicting wills to power and the nature of the philosopher’s activity as abbreviating in meaningful signs the never-ending flow of becoming. And to reject metaphysical accounts of timeless and eternal things was to recognize the intrinsically historical character of all phenomena – including one’s own self. “Philosophy, the way I alone regard it, as the most general form of history, is an attempt to somehow Heraclitean becoming” (NF June-July 1885, [36]27: KSA 11/562). But herein lies the problem for Nietzsche. Whereas an epistemologically naïve autobiographer might consider his account a perfectly objective description of a discrete object by a discrete subject, Nietzsche’s thoroughly historical philosophy of history cannot. Nietzsche required a new mode of autobiography that satisfied the demands of his challenges to traditional metaphysics and epistemology, one that reflected, too, his radical conception of the self as an agon of process-drives.

In what follows, I articulate Nietzsche’s critique of traditional autobiography on two scores: the intractability of introspection, and the unreliability of memory. I argue that while Nietzsche rejects the representational realist presuppositions of traditional autobiography, this should not lead us to think that *Ecce Homo* is nothing more than fictive narrative. In fact, I contend, the text is a sort of expression of what Nietzsche thinks “selves” actually are.

## 1 Description of the Described

Nietzsche makes a singularly curious claim about the possibility of describing the object under investigation. “Becoming what one is presupposes that one doesn’t have even the slightest sense [*dass man nicht im Entferntesten ahnt*] what one is” (EH II 9: KSA 6/293). Why should this be? Since Socrates, knowing thyself has been a pre-eminent philosophical project. Since Descartes, it had been presumed that the content of my mind was not only clear and distinct but perhaps the only thing that could be known with absolute certainty. Kant,

too, took inner sense to be privileged since here at least there is no difference between how things are and how they appear to consciousness. And though he agrees with Hume that introspection never provides an “experience” of the self as such, reason compels us to posit at least a transcendental unity of apperception whose logical operations at least are a matter of iron-clad a priori certainty.

Philosophers of history have been no less beholden to the transparency of introspection. The epistemic privilege of self-observation has been the very fulcrum whereby late nineteenth- and mid-twentieth-century philosophers distinguished science and history in terms of the methodological distinction between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*. For neo-Kantians like Windelband, Rickert, and Dilthey, and later for the British meta-historians Collingwood and Oakeshott, the appeal of historical *Verstehen* rested on the premise that we have a privileged access into precisely one kind of object in the universe: namely, minds that operate within historical processes and socio-historical contexts. By analogy with our own experiences, apprehended immediately through introspection, we come to a more vivid and complete “sympathetic” understanding of the unity of life and culture, of how agents bring about actions. The objects of the natural sciences, on the other hand, must remain forever external to the scientists who explain them.<sup>4</sup> Though evident in historiographical *Verstehen* generally, they thought, autobiography would be the most exemplary case of the reliability of self-knowledge since here not even analogy to other minds was required.<sup>5</sup> The epistemic privilege of introspection, the very cornerstone of self-history, does seem to be a commonsense way of looking at things. That I know myself better than you do because I’ve been everywhere I’ve ever been; that there has been precisely one constant witness, I myself, to everything that I’ve lived through; that I *can* know myself best because I, and only I, have access to the inside of my mind, the very place where all those feelings, intentions, hopes, regrets, plans, pleasures, pains – that entire world “inside the skin” – that constitute the history of me; that the external observable evidence of behaviors may not be a reliable indicator of the psychological states that give rise to them; all of

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4 See Dilthey 2006 I, p. 36 ff.

5 Stuart Hampshire was probably the last prominent philosopher of mind who maintained that the transparency of self-knowledge was not only possible but also an essential part of human action. A neo-Spinozist of sorts, Hampshire held that actions performed from instinct or drives were equivalent to actions from ignorance; only the fully self-analyzed agent would achieve a sufficient level of detachment from these unconscious forces in order to be able to distinguish the ‘real’ from the ‘false’ self and, indeed, to be able to properly distinguish the developmentally meaningful from irrelevant in one’s autobiography. See Hampshire 1959 and 1972.

this goes to show that I know what is “really” me, know that the genuine kernel of selfhood that persists irrespective of however I am received by the outside world.<sup>6</sup> As Crispin Wright has it: “Selves have the best evidence about themselves” (Wright 1998, p. 14).

Nietzsche’s own thinking about introspection takes its initial bearings from Schopenhauer. Like a good Kantian, Schopenhauer regarded time and space as transcendental conditions of experience rather than subsistent external entities.<sup>7</sup> All phenomena, insofar as they are experienced, bear those subjective temporal and spatial features – except one: the source of the intuitions of space, time, and causality will not itself be cognized in the same manner as those external objects whose cognition results from that source’s activity. It would not be correct to say that we “know” this source, since knowledge, qua knowledge, always requires the mediation of the transcendental conditions of experience. But for Schopenhauer we need not posit a merely transcendental unity of self, since outside the principle of sufficient reason we can attain an immediate and non-experiential apprehension of the affective side of our inner nature. While our bodies are conceptualized and understood in a phenomenal way, no different from every other body in the universe, we have a privileged and immediate “secret path” into the “noumenal” side of the “I”. What we apprehend is not the Christian soul or the Cartesian *res cogitans*, but a willing, desiring, striving, avoiding, detesting, fearing – in short, a continuous fluctuation of feelings of pleasure and pain. Of this we are both immediately sure and absolutely aware: that the essence of our selves, that which underlies that menagerie of affects, is the Will.

Schopenhauer’s view has won few adherents among psychologists or philosophers of mind, not so much due to his conception of affects as to their transparency. While the young Freud, for example, roughly followed Schopenhauer’s contention that behind the rational mind stood a core of irrational drives and instincts, those affects were only properly decoded by a trained psychoanalyst, hardly given to immediate apprehension. But as he further explored the mechanism of repression, Freud came to consider the unity of the unconscious untenable and posited his famous tripartite mind.<sup>8</sup> Since Wittgenstein, the epistemic priority of introspection has faced serious scrutiny in terms of the application

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**6** An example of Nietzsche’s own mocking expression of this confidence in introspection comes at D 116 (KSA 3/108–109).

**7** The following account is a summary of Schopenhauer’s “On the Primacy of the Will in Self-Consciousness”, WWR II, Chapter 19; in Schopenhauer 1911 II, p. 224–276.

**8** Two fine studies of this issue are Tyson 2002, p. 19–53, and Cavell 2006, p. 18–26.

of descriptive language to intrinsically private events.<sup>9</sup> For him, it would be logically impossible to describe oneself and one's experience without an inter-subjectively determined rule for applying predicates to mental states. We can thus only ever know whether what I'm feeling is anger or joy in comparison with others who we think are experiencing approximately the same-designated feeling.<sup>10</sup> Introspection turns out to be an indirect inference of my own outward behavior in comparison with socially accepted loose descriptions. Franz Brentano noted that it was practically impossible to describe mental states since the act of attending to them effectively alters their character.<sup>11</sup> Logically and practically, then, you cannot catch your shadow insofar as you are the one who casts it; though this has admittedly never stopped autobiographers from trying.<sup>12</sup>

In his mature departure from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche's critique of descriptive introspection partly anticipates these others. The failure of those propositions we use to describe our inner selves counts as a specific instance of the general failure of cognitive and linguistic expressions to describe reality in a correspondential realist sense.<sup>13</sup> Concepts, for Nietzsche, are general and static, while the world only presents what is particular and fluid. Accordingly, descriptions of the self will be general and static – what "I did" and what "I was" – though what we apprehend is ever particular and fluid. Thus: "*Nothing of what we are* is that which we appear to be in accordance with the states for

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**9** The so-called private language argument is found roughly between sections 243 and 300 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. The specific passage I have in mind is Wittgenstein 1953, section 258.

**10** Of course, Wittgenstein's disavowal of self-knowledge on the grounds that the intrapersonal communicability of 'public language' predicates fails to meaningfully impact the first-person inner experience of those predicates in the first place. That is, irrespective of whether I know that what I'm feeling is called 'remorse' in a particular society's language, through introspection I still have the same feeling in the pit of my stomach. Ernst Tugendhat and Charles Taylor have updated Wittgenstein's view with their commitment to intrapersonal and discursive determinations of meaning. See Tugendhat 1986; Taylor 1989.

**11** See Brentano 1973, I, 2.2.

**12** See also the well-known analyses of Ayer 1963, p. 52–81; Nagel 1986, 32–37; and Rosenthal 1991, p. 475f.

**13** See HAH I 491: "*Self-observation*. – Man is very well defended against himself, against being reconnoitered and besieged by himself, he is usually able to perceive of himself only his outer walls. The actual fortress is inaccessible, even invisible to him, unless his friends and enemies play the traitor and conduct him in by a secret path" (KSA 2/318–319). See also FW 335: "So, how many people know how to observe? And of these few, how many to observe themselves? 'Everyone is farthest from himself' – every person who is expert at scrutinizing the inner life of others knows this to his own chagrin; and the saying 'Know thyself' addressed to human beings by a god, is near to malicious" (KSA 3/560).

which alone we have consciousness and words [...]; those cruder outbursts of which alone we are aware make us *misunderstand* ourselves” (D 115: KSA 3/107–108). Since there is no cognition or linguistic expression that is adequate to the self as it genuinely is, neither momentary introspection nor any comprehensive autobiographical account can count as a genuine case of self-knowledge.<sup>14</sup> No traditional autobiography, then, can be considered a “true” account of the self.

But Nietzsche’s critique of self-knowledge takes a unique track. Although he shares with Schopenhauer the claim that introspection reveals non-cognitive affects rather than Cartesian ideas or Humean perceptions, and though he roughly anticipates the more recent claims about the conceptual inadequacies of self-knowledge, his original – and I think more damaging – critique of introspection has to do with the intrinsically *historical* character of the self.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche thinks that the self is no timeless eternal substratum; but continuous with the rest of nature the “self” is part of that endless stream of becoming.<sup>16</sup> “There is no ‘being’ behind the doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is simply poetically ascribed to the doing – the doing is everything” (GM I 13: KSA 5/279). His well-known simile, that to separate expressed affects from the self is like separating lightning from the flash, shows that Nietzsche denies the assumption, nearly ubiquitous even today, that a persistent self must underlie agency. If there is no persistent self that could stand as an object of knowledge, then the question of adequacy between account and object is moot. But notice that the simile also carries a historiographical implication. Like the flash of lightning, the expressions of affects are ephemeral; they come into being and pass away, emerge and descend as an event within an historical process. Just as we see only the afterimage of the actual flash due to the physiognomy of our eyes and brain, so too what we introspect of our affects is only an historical afterimage interpreted necessarily through the physiognomy of our drives in such a way that would never provide the character of an enduring self that lies behind it. The self’s becoming-itself within the flow of its history

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<sup>14</sup> For a more developed argument concerning Nietzsche’s notion of self-knowledge, see Jensen 2015a and 2015b.

<sup>15</sup> For a similar interpretation, see Saar 2007, p. 97–129.

<sup>16</sup> “The ‘mind’, something that thinks: where possible even ‘absolute, unadulterated, pure mind’ [*‘Geist absolut, rein, pur’*] – this conception is a second unwarranted consequence of false self-observation, one which believes in ‘thinking’ [*Denken*]: here an act is first imagined which doesn’t manifest as such, namely, ‘the thinking’ [*das Denken*] and second a subject-substratum is imagined in which the act of this thinking and nothing else has its origin: that is, the action as much as the agent are invented.” NF November 1887-March 1888, 11[113]: KSA 13/54.



precludes the possibility that static designations and discreet concepts could adequately describe the self as an object.

## 2 Remembering the Remembered

Nietzsche's view of memory should be a particular application of the problem we outlined above concerning the opacity and pervasive becoming of subjective states within acts of introspection. But the shortcomings of introspection will be exacerbated by the distance that passes between an introspective state and the memory of that state. If immediate consciousness of pain is a problematic indicator of the mental state, then how much less reliable as an indicator of reality is my recollection that "losing my father at a young age felt like 'x'" or "Christmas morning meant 'y' when I was five"? That is a well-worn problem, which any number of theorists try to ameliorate by appeal to other forms of evidence – the sorts of traditions Nietzsche's childhood autobiographies themselves showed could not be demonstrative of a reality outside that remembered tradition.

Memory also presents a new problem for Nietzsche's attempts at self-description. Some drive-based mental states like the feelings of pride, regret, guilt, vanity, and nostalgia are intrinsically backward-looking. They bring to mind certain facets of our pasts in accordance with what they require to fulfill their individuated power aims. A drive to pride will call forth particularly self-actuating episodes, while a drive toward regret will make our consciousness attend to a tragic event for whose outcome we were particularly blameworthy. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he writes, "'I did that', says my memory. 'I couldn't have done that' – says my pride, and stands its ground. Finally, memory gives in" (BGE 68: KSA 5/86). Accordingly, Nietzsche denies two nearly ubiquitous assumptions. First, memory is a not a single unified faculty of representation, but, consistent with subjectivity generally, is itself a fluctuating dynamic of drives.<sup>17</sup> Any autobiographers who retain that hope "deceive themselves about their own state: they had to fictitiously attribute to themselves impersonality and duration without change; they had to misconstrue the nature of the knower,

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Schacter has to some extent confirmed Nietzsche's once unique position on the complexity of mnemonic drive-states from the perspective of neuroscience. Consistent with Nietzsche's view, Schacter shows that different sorts of memories correspond to different areas of neural stimulation, suggesting a more multifaceted and constructive role than the usual 'recorder' view of memory. See Schacter 1997, p. 148–160.

deny the force of drives [*Gewalt der Triebe*] in knowledge, and generally conceive reason as a completely free, self-originated activity [...]” (GS 110: KSA 3/470).<sup>18</sup>

Second, memory is not a pure or “objective” recorder of the past, but an interpreter distorted by that same dynamic. Memory, that singular mark of personal identity for Locke, that infallible producer of the sense of *durée* for Bergson, is, for Nietzsche too, what constitutes our peculiar species being – an animal whose existence is “an imperfectible imperfect tense [*nie zu vollendendes Imperfectum*]” (UM II 1: KSA 1/249). But memory is not and never was some sort of objective surveillance camera. It perpetually adds a layer of meaning to what is remembered; it colors the original event, observation, or emotion. Memory is itself a sort of autobiographer that reinterprets and readjusts established meanings rather than re-presents them.<sup>19</sup> Like all historians, memory is also imbued with the range of subjective drives and affects that constitutes subjectivity. Otherwise stated, memory is “perspectival”, not the recorder of what was but the producer of subjective interpretations that of themselves indicate what a personal is led by their drives to consider meaningful of their past.

Forgetting, too, is similarly multifaceted and is equally perspectival. If memory ties us to our past, then forgetting hides away those aspects of our past that are either too burdensome to bear in the case of repression or else too meaningless to be retained in the case of what we think “slips our minds”.<sup>20</sup>

Forgetfulness is not just a *vis inertiae*, as superficial people believe, but is rather an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense, to which we owe the fact that what we simply live through, experience, take in. No more enters our consciousness during digestion (one could call it ‘spiritual ingestion’ [*Einverseelung*]) than does the thousand-fold process which takes place with our physical consumption of food, our so-called ‘bodily ingestion’ [*Einverleibung*]. To shut the doors and windows of consciousness for a while; not to be bothered by the noise and battle with which our underworld of serviceable organs work with and against each other; a little peace, a little *tabula rasa* of consciousness to make room for something new, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for ruling, predicting, predetermining (since our organism is oligarchically ordered) – that, as was said, is the benefit of active forgetfulness, like a doorkeeper or guardian of the spiritual order [*seelischen Ordnung*], rest and etiquette: from which we can immediately see how

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**18** The direct references here are the Presocratic philosophers who began to believe in enduring substrata. But the claim is equally applicable to historians, whom Nietzsche regards as blindly perpetuating this same belief.

**19** Nietzsche’s conception of memory as an active power of psychological construction has recently been echoed by Joseph LeDoux, whose subtitle evokes his debt to *Ecce Homo*. See LeDoux 2002, p. 216.

**20** For a similar discussion, see Richardson 2008, p. 96–103.

there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, and no *present* [Gegenwart] without forgetfulness. (GM II 1: KSA 5/291–292)

This passage should not lead us to think that forgetfulness, any more than memory, is a single, discrete, unified faculty.<sup>21</sup> Mental faculties in general are no happy set of colleagues working at the same goal organically, but a conflict and struggle between their constituent agonistic drives, each of which emerge “seeking mastery” until they are displaced by a stronger rival. Our respective ability or inability to recollect an event is contingent upon the respective dominance or submission of the drives. The relative strength of “pride”, to use Nietzsche’s earlier illustration, dictates to what degree I, within my own perspective, remember or forget whether “I did that”.

Drives are individuated by the ends at which they aim. Since the common character of the drives is an impulse to overcome its rival, one might well describe them as wills-to-power.<sup>22</sup> Because all cognitive activities are constituted by drives, all cognition will be “colored” by whichever drives achieve a dominant power expression. “Presuming that our world of desires and passions is the only thing “given” to us as real, that we cannot go up or down to any “reality” other than the reality of our drives – since thinking is only a relation of these drives to one another – [...]” (BGE 36: KSA 5/54).<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, both the writing of an autobiography is the expression of a particular dynamic conglomeration of dominant wills-to-power, and also the object of an historiographical study is understood as meaningful insofar and only insofar as it finds expression within the wills-to-power-constituted perspectives of the audience. As he writes about history generally in *Daybreak*, “[a]n historian has to do, not with what actually happened, but only with events supposed to have happened: for only the latter have produced an effect” (D 307: KSA 3/224). The genealogically-reflective autobiographer accordingly recognizes that his judgment is no clear mirror of the self, but an act of interpretive representation formed within his own perspective and intended to find an audience whose perspectives lead them to “suppose” what has already happened. His description will not count as “true” in the sense that it corresponds to the world as it really is, but will be meaningful within a given perspective insofar as it accords with that perspective’s multiplicity of drives and affects whose common character is their will-to-power.

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<sup>21</sup> See D 126: KSA 3/117.

<sup>22</sup> See, among others, Richardson 1996, p. 35–51.

<sup>23</sup> See also GS 374: KSA 3/626.

Nietzsche's views thus pose an identical problem to the two parties of an autobiography. First, the *object* of the study is itself nothing a-temporal, but, like all things and events, thoroughly historical, as vast and as complicated a process of interpretations and over-writings as that of the meaning of values, punishment, or ascetic ideals.<sup>24</sup> Traditional linguistic designations will fail to adequately describe insofar as the things described are historical or in flux and in particular while the words used to describe those things are static and general. Second, the *author* of the study is himself no a-temporal subject, no transparent alpha point free from the drives and impulses that constitute the interpretive act. “[F]or the past continues to flow [*strömt...fort*] within us in a hundred waves; we ourselves are, indeed, nothing but that which at every moment we sense of this continued flowing [*Fortströmen*]” (HAH II.1 223: KSA 2/477). All self-aware auto-genealogists<sup>25</sup> are therefore caught in a sort of double-blind of history: events and those who write about them are *both* in a perpetual state of becoming, which renders the description of a discrete object by a discrete subject inadequate.

Yet the impossibility of a realist self-description does not mean that Nietzsche cannot articulate himself at all. The author of *Ecce Homo* is not the author of *Les Mots* (1964), who, in trying to know himself can only throw up his hands in exasperation: “So try to figure it out. As for me, I can’t” (Sartre 1964, p. 254).<sup>26</sup> This very inability to describe or remember what a self is per se, of itself leads Nietzsche to his affirmative view about the activity of autobiography. For if judgment is constituted in such a way because it is a function of the subject, then this tells us something definitive about that subject: the “self” would just *be* the kind of thing that produces such interpretations: not a Cartesian “thinking thing” or even a Schopenhauerian “striving thing”, but a dynamic agonistic competition and confluence of drive-expressions whose common character is their will-to-power. Just as the philosopher’s will to knowledge is an expression of their will to power, so the autobiographer’s will to power is exercised in the *act* of interpreting itself in a particular way. As historians, our “selves” are a product of history, “the outcome of [...] earlier aberrations, passions, and errors” (UM II 3: KSA 1/270),<sup>27</sup> one that is in fact interpreted as a function of the historical acts of our own interpretive historiography. We are simultaneously products and producers of interpretations, the interpreted “self” and interpreters of ourselves. From

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<sup>24</sup> See GM II 12: KSA 5/313–316. See my discussion below.

<sup>25</sup> I borrow this term from Stegmaier 1992, p. 168.

<sup>26</sup> For Sartre, famously, one cannot know oneself through analysis, even though one is conscious of oneself at every moment. See, for example, Sartre 1969, p. 463.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion, see Müller-Lauter 1999a, p. 26 ff.

that interpretive *activity*, and not from either the “object” produced by the activity or by the “subject” considered as an entity separate from their activities, is a meaningful interpretation of one’s self-expression. Both as subject and object, what we really “are” are expressions of those multifaceted power wills, the written record of which is an autobiography. The question of the “truth” of an autobiography in terms of the adequation of account and object thus gives way to one about the degree to which the expression characterizes the life meaningfully.

To illustrate what I take Nietzsche’s point to be, consider the run-of-the-mill introduction to an autobiography that begins: “My childhood was happy”. As a realist description, the problems with such a proposition are immediately evident. What precisely does the writer mean by “childhood” or by “happy”? Certainly not all aspects of childhood can be considered happy; nor could any single adjective adequate to the massive sum of events and emotions that occur in the course of a single day, much less a decade. The description is general and static, the object described particular and fluid. In terms of memory, the problems are worse. The utterance reflects to what degree memory has highlighted, selected, ignored, and covered-over a huge swathe of emotions during that time. It is truer to say that the past itself hasn’t been re-presented so much as re-constructed using selective materials. It is that expression which gives meaning independent of any claim about its truth. Moreover, it is altogether naïve to assume this expression demonstrates something true of the present-day life-writer either. The present-day autobiographer may very well be suffering from depression, expressing his past as some irretrievable idyll. Of course, the very opposite may also be true: the life-writer may well be a wealthy, entirely satisfied businessman crediting a portion of his success to the efforts of his childhood family. So just as “My childhood was happy” cannot be considered an adequate description of the remembered-self, it cannot be a reliable indicator of the remembering-self either. What the phrase “My childhood was happy” indicates is not something about the object or the subject in-themselves at all. The phrase is an interpretive symbol linking past and present as a momentary expression, which, together with the dynamic, agonistic totality of other such expressions serves the writer and reader both as meaningful symbols of the life of one who would make such an expression.

The interpretive act, and indeed the autobiographical act of self-interpretation, is a particularly meaningful symbolic designation that expresses that conflict of drives within a perspective. As is the “self” of the autobiographer who does the interpreting. We represent ourselves to ourselves as if we were some free and rational alpha-point that willfully interprets as they wish. But a properly genealogical uncovering of the self reveals no such point, only a continuously shifting agonistic competition of drives both in the interpreter and in the inter-

preted. Insofar as we believe *we* are the ones who are judging here, *we* who look upon the river of history from within a raft we believed fixed and steady while the rest of the landscape rushes by, we delude ourselves. We consider ourselves just like the “objects” and “events” that we historians write about: as fixed and stable things. Neither is true of the reality outside our minds or, for that matter, inside the mind. Nietzsche sympathizes with the superficial reflex to imagine oneself as a fixed static object, since “man condemned to see becoming [*Werden*] everywhere would no longer believe in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this flow of becoming [*Strome des Werdens*]” (UM II 1: KSA 1/250).<sup>28</sup> But texts like *Ecce Homo*, and, if Nietzsche is right, *all* autobiographies, are not meaningful in relation to their correctly introspected or remembered objects, but in proportion to their act’s *expression* of a uniquely agonistic drive configuration. Nietzsche seems to say precisely this in *Human, All Too Human*: “Direct self-observation is not nearly sufficient for us to know ourselves: we require history [...]. It may even be said that here too, when we desire to descend into the river of what seems to be our own most intimate and personal being, there applies the dictum of Heraclitus: we cannot step into the same river twice” (HAH II.1 223: KSA 2/477).

### 3 Fictional Narrations

We have faced the conundrum of the autobiographer. We can only understand ourselves in the act of reflection upon the meaning of the events of our own life as mediated by a meaningful historical account of which we are authors.<sup>29</sup> But *Ecce Homo* invites us to consider a slightly different question as well. If autobiography is an act of reinterpreting the events of one’s life in order to make them meaningful, and if that act expresses one’s personal physio-psychical constitution in a way that actively symbolizes rather than accurately reflects, then what would be the difference between an autobiography and a fictional narrative? Obviously, there is a narrative quality about *Ecce Homo*, as much as any history involves a narrative linking-up between events in particularly meaningful

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<sup>28</sup> For a roughly similar reading of the historian’s subjectivity, see Nehamas 1994, p. 269–283; also see Born 2010, p. 41–47.

<sup>29</sup> This argument is similar to the recent contention of Harry Frankfurt that the unity of the self is only understood through historical self-reflection. See Frankfurt 1988, p. 83 ff.

ways.<sup>30</sup> Just as obviously, fictive stories express something of their authors, too. Beyond the notion of giving style to one's character by highlighting or downplaying certain elements for the sake of a coherent whole,<sup>31</sup> is Nietzsche's account of himself *nothing more* than narration, that is, a tale with no more claim on the truth of things independent of its author than Werther's diary?<sup>32</sup> Is it, to borrow the title of Goethe's autobiography, all *Dichtung* and no *Wahrheit*?

There has been some recent traction to the claim that the self is itself nothing more than a narrative product. Philosophers from Paul Ricœur to Charles Taylor have suggested that our selves are narrations and indeed have no subsistence outside the narrative.<sup>33</sup> Daniel Dennett, from a rather different perspective, also considers the notion of self to be like the notion of a "center of gravity": a well-known and well-used construct that nevertheless does not exist apart from the stories we tell about it.

A self is also an abstract object, a theorist's fiction. The theory is not particle physics, but what we might call a branch of people-physics; it is more soberly known as a phenomenology or hermeneutics, or soul-science (*Geisteswissenschaft*). The physicist does an *interpretation*, if you like, of the chair and its behavior, and comes up with the theoretical abstraction of a center of gravity, which is then very useful in characterizing the behavior of the chair in the future, under a wide variety of conditions. [...] It turns out to be theoretically perspicuous to organize the interpretation around a central abstraction: each person has a *self*. (Dennett 2007, p. 238)

Four well-rehearsed arguments support Dennett's point. First, the self as such cannot be distinguished from the account that is told about it; as soon as one is finished talking about it, there is no longer any persistent object in the way that the body and the brain persist independently of our accounts of them. Second, the alleged unity of the self is the result of a selecting and highlighting, an intrinsically constructive rather than archeological activity. Third, the self is no temporally discrete object, but continues in such a way that demands that new narratives be erected to encompass new circumstances. Finally, the form of introspection by which alone we reach our self seems intrinsically narrative;

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**30** In Lawrence Stone's well-known characterization, narrative history is organized chronologically, focused on a single coherent story, descriptive, and concerned with particular people rather than abstract concepts. This would mean Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* is a narrative, of course, but would fail to rule out almost any work of history or literature. See Stone 1979, p. 3–24.

**31** The position made well known by Nehamas 1985, p. 170–199.

**32** As Gary Shapiro writes, "Nehamas's claim should be revised by representing Nietzsche not only as a self-created character but as a text [...]" (Shapiro 1989, p. 161). I argue against Shapiro's interpretation in the following.

**33** The general positions of, for example, Carr 1984–1986; Ricœur 1988; Taylor 1989.

a self is a kind of story with a beginning, middle and end that are connected in a narrative order.<sup>34</sup> The narrative act of autobiography not only transforms or distorts the object under description; it actually constitutes the self.<sup>35</sup>

The notion of the self as a narrative product has been applied to Nietzsche's text as well, and further tied to his various motives for constructing himself in the idiosyncratic way he does. *Ecce Homo* is here considered a sort of confessional text, a self-revelatory and intentionally revisionist narrative written so that Nietzsche could consider his life worthwhile, could affirm what he had become.<sup>36</sup> Whatever traumatic or psychologically cumbersome events are glossed over – for example, his claims that “no clouds ever darkened the skies of his relationship with Wagner” (EH II 5: KSA 6/288), or that he is a “pureblood Polish nobleman” (EH I 3: KSA 6/268) – Nietzsche's externalizing them in his autobiography represents a therapeutic means of achieving a psychological harmony, viewing the past as positive contributor rather than inhibitor of his present self-making. Whatever aspects of himself fail to “fit the narrative” are left out of the account as a sort of memory-wipe. Like a psychoanalytic “talking-cure”, the therapy revolves around its author's ability to “come to grips” with his past. Accordingly, the goal of loving his fate – *amor fati* – appears to be a powerful motive for describing his life in the sometimes bizarre terms we read. Since the account is colored by a personal desire to reinterpret the facts in a certain way, his self-description can hardly be considered factual, if even informative. As even Hollingdale admits, “[i]f, under the guidance of the literature on the subject, you approach it as ‘Nietzsche's autobiography’ you will get very little out of it and probably won't even finish it, short though it is. As autobiography it is a plain failure” (Hollingdale 1979, p. 7).

One reason for resisting the “talking-cure” reading of *Ecce Homo* involves Nietzsche's position on the possibility of reversing causal ascriptions.<sup>37</sup> Causes, strictly speaking, don't exist since everything is persistently in motion without fixed points that could be efficacious. Mental causes are even more problematic.

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34 For these points, see Jopling 2000, p. 48 f.

35 Jopling writes, “self-narratives transform the self so that the self comes to fit them, thereby manufacturing some of the very facts about the self that they appear to uncover. Because the activity of narrating is an activity that itself generates the evidence that supports the narrative, narrative self-understanding becomes a self-confirming activity, and loses its claim to objectivity” (Jopling 2000, p. 55).

36 There have been several variations on this theme. For more prominent versions see Ridley 2005a, p. xx; Dietzsch 2000, p. 473–482; White 1991, p. 291–303; Pletsch 1987, p. 405–434; Magnus et al. 1993, p. 133–185.

37 I have argued elsewhere that *amor fati* was not a goal of writing but a necessary condition for writing a “healthy” history of himself. See Jensen 2011, p. 203–225.



“Will’: that is what our feeling imparts as a result of a process – thus it is already a *consequence* [Wirkung], and *not* the beginning and the cause” (NF Spring-Summer 1883, 7[25]: KSA 10/250). Talking about one’s mental contents does not necessarily alleviate unwanted behaviors since the act of talking about them may itself be evidence that the unwanted behavior has already abated to the point of being able to talk about it. The ability to admit that one has a problem with addiction, for example, is itself an indicator that the addiction has at least somewhat abated already, not necessarily a cause of its abatement. Accordingly, Nietzsche’s affirmation of his fate need not be the effect of having written his autobiography; his love of fate could be an indicator that he was disposed of a suitable psychological state to be able to compose such an autobiography in the first place. Such is the lesson of Nietzsche’s well-known revaluation of the diet of Cornaro (TI VI 1: KSA 6/88–89). Such, too, is the message of his famously optimistic interleaf epigraph to *Ecce Homo*.

On this consummate day [*An diesem vollkommenen Tage*], when everything is ripe and the grapes are not the only things that are turning brown, I have just seen my life bathed in sunshine: I looked backwards, I looked out, I have never seen so many things that were so good, all at the same time. It is not for nothing that I buried my forty-fourth year today, I had *the right* to bury it, –all its living qualities have been rescued, they are immortal. [...] *How could I not be grateful to my whole life?* And thus [so], I will tell myself the story of my life.” (KSA 6/263)<sup>38</sup>

Beyond this claim of therapy, there are three meta-historical reasons for resisting the more general claim that Nietzsche’s “self” is a fictive narration. The first is the ontological realist’s.<sup>39</sup> We might ask “Did Nietzsche have a birthmark on his left thigh?” There is an answer to this question irrespective of what *Ecce*

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**38** See also the accompanying letter to his publisher C. G. Naumann of 6 November 1888. Nietzsche was able to compose *Ecce Homo* so quickly because, “I was happily inspired these past few weeks by an unbelievable sense of well-being that has been unique in my life” (KSB 8/463–464).

**39** To avoid confusion, by ontological realist I mean anyone who believes the past actually did exist external to the representing agent. To be an ontological anti-realist about history would be tantamount to accepting Bertrand Russell’s hypothetical that the world actually began five minutes ago, stocked with agents who were provided a wealth of completely fictional notions they took to be memories. I see no evidence to suggest Nietzsche accepts ontological anti-realism, even if it were intelligible to do so in an autobiography. By representational anti-realist, however, I mean anyone who thinks that historical judgments necessarily fail to correspond to the reality of the past, but that the signs we use in our discursive practices are nevertheless meaningful. Understood thus, I hold Nietzsche to be an ontological realist but a representational anti-realist.

*Homo* says and irrespective of whether we today can discover it. Now “Did Zarathustra have a birthmark on his left thigh?” Here there is no answer since Nietzsche never says one way or the other. There is thus an asymmetrical indeterminacy in what can be discovered in the objects of fiction and history, and thus a meaningful difference in the truth value of their respective descriptions.<sup>40</sup> Insofar as certain details of *Ecce Homo* are confirmable or disconfirmable in principal, even if not in practice, independent of the text, it is something more than narrative.

Second, fictional characters are “finished” in a way that prohibits further interpretation. We can debate whether Hamlet is really paralyzed by over-thinking or else horrified by the tragedy of life, but we can gain no more data about the matter than what was written by Shakespeare. Biographical information of real “selves”, on the other hand, can be continually supplemented and corrected by those who possess different interpretations about the self in question. The case is even more pronounced in autobiography, for alongside these secondary sources our constantly reinterpreting introspection is an endless source of new “facts” about ourselves: for example, the introspective claim “my childhood was happy”. Those “facts” may change whenever we add a layer of interpretation onto our own events, and if Nietzsche is correct, then this is precisely what the historians and autobiographers do when writing about the past. The “self” of Nietzsche did not end when *Ecce Homo* was finished, as was the case for Hamlet. It ended whenever Nietzsche, the introspector, was no long capable of reflecting and reinterpreting.

This leads us to a third argument. Theorists of introspection tend to consider the self only as an object of knowledge, whether that object is constructed or revealed. What Nietzsche’s remarks about the nature of interpretation invite us to consider is the self who is writing the autobiography. Certainly, it would silly to think that Nietzsche the author had no more existence than that which was bound by his narrative, since Nietzsche himself was the very creator of it. Authors can write remarkably realistic stories of people who never existed; but to think that the creator is no more real than the creation, that Goethe is no more real than Werther, is nonsense. For these reasons, *Ecce Homo* is not purely narrative, but does express the real “self” of Nietzsche.

What these arguments demonstrate is that there is a “self” identifiable in the act of the autobiography in a way incommensurable with purely fictive narrative. They do not, however, demonstrate that the account can be either true or false in the sense of an adequate correspondence between the description and the object

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<sup>40</sup> To my knowledge, this argument is first presented in Lewis 1978, p. 37–46.

described, for the several reasons outlined above. The case is analogous to the earlier example of Rome. The identity of Rome is confirmed by the reality of its coins in a way that Narnia can never be. But the meaning of Rome, like the character of the person, is another matter, one that necessitates the interpreting activity of the genealogist of Rome and the genealogist of the self respectively. Therefore, although autobiography concerns the identity of an object in a way fiction does not, its *meaningfulness* lies in its intersubjectively determined meaningfulness to express the drive dynamic of its author at that moment of self-interpretation.

## 4 The Expressive Self

By considering autobiography the act of expressing one's life, we can pull the together the various threads of this essay. Because the self is not a static object, Nietzsche cannot describe himself as a static object in the way of traditional autobiography. Because memory and forgetting are not mirrors of the past, Nietzsche can only interpret himself selectively and subjectively along the lines his memory-drives lead him to. But in denying both the self-as-fundamental subject and the self-as-fundamental object awaiting introspection and memory, Nietzsche opens up a space for a new conception of autobiography in *Ecce Homo*, and, accordingly, a meaningful expression of his own self. The character of reality is, after all, a constant process, a continual flux of forms and shapes, the meaning of which shifts and transmogrifies along with the conceptual symbols of those interpreters who try to encapsulate it.

That something there, having somehow come-into-being [*Zu-Stande-Gekommenes*], is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it; that everything that happens in the organic world consists of *overpowering* [*Überwältigen*], *dominating* [*Herrwerden*], and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of interpreting anew [*Neu-Interpretieren*], adjustment, in the process of which their former 'meaning' and 'purpose' [*Sinn* und '*Zweck*'] must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated. (GM II 12: KSA 5/313–314)

Selves, as a part of this reality, will be no different. Like lightning, the self manifests itself in its essential activity: constantly re-interpreting and adjusting meanings, in deciding, valuing, blaming, appraising, assessing, honoring, justifying, condemning, etc. – indeed in the autobiographical activity itself – the self of Nietzsche “becomes what it is”. The autobiography is the flashing, not some subsistent thing that lies behind it. We readers get a sense for what the character of Nietzsche is by means of our own retrospective reinterpretations of the after-

image of his intrinsically subjective historiographical activity. Just as we make sense of what lightning “is” by means of observing only the after-effect of its activity, so too do we get a sense for Nietzsche by observing the after-effect of his life-expressing interpretive activity in *Ecce Homo*.<sup>41</sup>

I have argued that Nietzsche’s unique mode of autobiography is no failure of the traditional genre, per Hollingdale. It is the novel expression that measures up to Nietzsche’s radicalized theories of ontology, epistemology, and the self. Traditionally conceived theories of introspective description and memory mislead insofar as they promise some adequate correspondence between interpreter and interpreted. Nietzsche’s mode, on the other hand, expresses his dynamic competition of drives at that moment. His various claims in *Ecce Homo*, all his little lies and exaggerations, may not be “true” in the correspondential sense, but taken together do express Nietzsche in a quite indelible way.

But what, precisely, is the meaning of Nietzsche. The question surely cannot be answered here. The dynamic expression, who Nietzsche really is, what his life really meant, is continually determined by the total intersubjective interplay of re-writings and re-interpretations, actions which continue well beyond *Ecce Homo*, well beyond his death, and continues into the future, in we who continually re-make the meaning of Nietzsche’s life according to our own interpretive expressions. As much as the genealogical meaning of good and evil, of ascetic ideals, or of punishment, the first few of the twelve bells of Nietzsche’s life began to sound with his own life-writing, continually reverberating in ever new idioms and timbres. Only the sum of those echoing dynamics ringing today is the adequate expression of the meaning of Nietzsche’s life. “*L’effet*”, Nietzsche claims, the sum of dynamic interpretive expressions, “*c’est moi*” (BGE 19: KSA 5/33).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See NF June–July 1885, 36[22]: KSA 11/560: “Life would be defined as an enduring form of processes of *force expressions*, in which the different contenders grow unequally”.

<sup>42</sup> I would like to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung for its generous support during the composition of this essay.



Kathleen Merrow

# “How One Becomes What One Is”

## Intertextuality and Autobiography in *Ecce Homo*

**Abstract:** In this essay the author argues for the importance of attending to intertextuality and intratextuality in *Ecce Homo*. The intertextual allusions inspected here work to undermine any possibility that the name “Nietzsche” returns to a stable subject identity outside this text. The intratextual allusions work to construct a “Nietzsche” as exemplary of the “man who has turned out well” such that the name comes to signify one who has accepted the idea of eternal return. Even as the text deconstructs itself as autobiography, it works to ensure that his texts continue to have their effect in his name, in the surplus value of this name.

## 1 Introduction

Duncan Large’s introduction to the 2007 Oxford translation of *Ecce Homo* points to the new standards for reading *Ecce Homo* that put the autobiographical in relation to the philosophical. There is now considerable agreement that *Ecce Homo* as a text subverts the genre of autobiography. Large writes that “we need to bring to bear a literary-critical awareness of the work as a crafted fiction, as a kind of *Bildungsroman*, indeed, with its leading protagonist, ‘Nietzsche’, as effectively a literary construct” (Large 2007, p. xxi). My own reading stands firmly with the lines of interpretation described by Large.<sup>1</sup> What I add to this line of criticism is an argument for the crucial role of intertextuality and intratextuality in *Ecce Homo*. The intertextual allusions I inspect work to undermine any possibility that the name “Nietzsche” returns to a stable subject identity outside this text. The intratextual allusions work to construct a “Nietzsche” as exemplary of the “man who has turned out well” such that the name comes to signify one who has accepted the idea of eternal return. Even as the text deconstructs itself as autobiography, it works to ensure that his texts continue to have their effect in his name, in the surplus value of this name.<sup>2</sup> It is this double movement that I want to unfold.

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<sup>1</sup> I have particularly benefitted from the studies of Derrida 1985b, Kofman 1992, Kofman 1993, Schank 1993, Kleinschmidt 2000, Thums 2004, Langer 2005, Stegmaier 2008b and Hödl 2009.

<sup>2</sup> I am borrowing the phrase “surplus value” from Jacques Derrida (1985b, p. 7).

I focus primarily upon the allusions that comprise the title, the “ecce homo” from John 19:5 and the “become who you are” from Pindar’s *Second Pythian Ode*, treating their interrelationship as a synecdoche for the text as a whole. My study of the title is itself situated in relationship to Nietzsche’s preface, using this to show how Nietzsche frames the autobiographical task and to place this within the nature of autobiography as a genre. The intratexts I focus upon are those in which lines from *Zarathustra* are repeated, albeit in altered contexts, in *Ecce Homo*. These textual components that I have chosen to work with are structurally necessary to *Ecce Homo* as a text. They then allow me to keep my inspection of the text strictly limited so that I can carry out the detailed work necessary to explicate fully the allusions while still making an argument valid for the text as a whole. There is much work to be done with the intertextuality in Nietzsche’s texts.

## 2 Framing the Autobiographical in *Ecce Homo*

The opening lines of *Ecce Homo* invite us to read this text as autobiography. Nietzsche tells us that in the light of the great task that is his, “the most difficult demand” with which he must “confront humanity”, he must “bear witness”, and must tell his readers *who* he is (EH Preface 1).<sup>3</sup> He then adds, “[r]eally, one should know it, for I have not left myself ‘without testimony’”. The “most difficult demand” will only be fully unfolded in the last sections of *Ecce Homo*, which reveal that the project of the “revaluation of all values” has become the referent for the name Nietzsche. Our first sense of the significance of this demand is shaped through the allusion “without testimony” (Acts 14:17) to the story of Jesus, here as told by Paul to nonbelievers against whom he cries “he has not left himself without testimony”. Nietzsche’s German is “*nicht ‘unbezeugt gelassen’*”, which is taken directly from Luther’s translation of Acts 14:17: “*und doch hat er sich selbst nicht unbezeugt gelassen*” (*Bibel* 2017). Nietzsche’s words put him in the place of Christ, the one who has not left himself without testimony, but also Paul whose words these are. This is further complicated by the presence of an author, presumed by Luther to be Luke, who is telling the story of Paul witnessing to the meaning of Christ. The allusion to Christ does not trouble (yet) the reading of this text as autobiography, for what better trope is there for the narration of a unique and significant life? It is the specific allusion that does trouble

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<sup>3</sup> Translations of quotations from Nietzsche’s works are by R.J. Hollingdale (AC, EH), Walter Kaufmann (BGE, GS, Z) and David J. Parent (TL).

the autobiographical reading, because it puts in question the status of the author function in *Ecce Homo* through the double refraction of the author present in the original text. When Nietzsche makes this allusion we are not sure whose voice should be privileged. Furthermore, it is Paul that Nietzsche blames for the perversion of Jesus’ life and its transformation into the dogma of Christianity; Paul without whom there would be no Christianity (D 68; AC 42). The allusion thus is intra- and intertextual at the same time. Should we read the allusion to say that without *Ecce Homo* there is no Nietzsche? Is Nietzsche then Paul as author to Nietzsche as Jesus as subject, transforming the life into a world-historical narrative – the greatest demand that makes him a destiny – with all the troubling Pauline connotations this has? In this context we should not miss the way Nietzsche’s prior texts are put in the place of the *New Testament* here, an implication that Nietzsche is happy to continue later in *Ecce Homo* when he refers to his “glad tidings” (EH III; TI 2). The web of allusions that is present here frames his undertaking as both a saying of who he is and the perversion or betrayal of that account. We need to take both movements into account.<sup>4</sup> Even before we are asked not to confound Nietzsche with what he is not, Nietzsche himself has supplied the potential for doing so and set his reader a puzzle or riddle to solve.

The next sentence indicates that the betrayal lies in the autobiographical mode itself, and that it is Nietzsche who must betray himself. Nietzsche writes:

But the disparity between the greatness of my task and the smallness of my contemporaries has found expression in the fact that I have been neither heard nor even so much as seen. I live on my own credit; it is perhaps merely a prejudice that I am alive at all. I need only to talk with any of the “cultured people” [*Gebildeten*] who come to the Ober-Engadin in the summer to convince myself that I am *not* alive ... Under these circumstances there exists a duty against which my habit, even more the pride of my instincts revolts, namely to say: *Listen to me! for I am thus and thus. Do not, above all, confound me with what I am not!* (EH Preface 1).

Nietzsche, despite the world-historical nature of the task he indicates, is not yet recognized. This continues to resonate with the allusion to Acts 14:17, which concerns the work of the disciples to bring the good news to those who do not yet understand. This passage shapes the autobiographical demand – and indeed the notion of “good news” itself – as one only for a particular audience, those “cultured people” who have not understood what the name Nietzsche represents.

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<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between *Ecce Homo* and *The Antichrist*, and of both to the project of *The Revaluation of All Values*, see Barros 2005, p. 164–169, Hödl 2009, p. 485–498 and Winteler 2009. The two texts were composed during the same period and need to be read together.



The quotation marks around this phrase indicate that they are anything but cultured, only those who imagine they pass for such. Here another frame is thus set into place, as it is only those who *have* read Nietzsche who can understand the meaning of the quotation marks and read them for the extensive critique of German *Bildung* and *Bildungsphilister* they signify. Nietzsche shapes his other texts as necessary to the *exegesis* of *Ecce Homo*. Those who have read Nietzsche should know what kinds of ideals are associated with this philistine perspective summarized in Nietzsche's phrase "the lie of the ideal". The second paragraph supplies the code necessary to read the first paragraph: Nietzsche must be understood as one who has diagnosed the lie of the ideal and the mendaciousness of the way moralistic monsters and the would-be improvers of mankind have invented the lie of a truer world beyond the actual world to devalue the world of appearances. Nietzsche tells us a bit further on in his preface that when dealing with such ideals he does not refute them, but puts on gloves in their presence. The instruction not to confuse him with what he is not manages at one and the same time to make the autobiographical move and to suggest that this move is suspect from the outset, suitable only for readers who have still not learned to recognize the lie of the ideal and the fictionality of the subject that supports it. One must speak to them in the language they understand. This text is a lesson for those who still believe in grammar.

The ideal reader of this text is constructed at the outset as one who understands (or now wants to understand) the philistine and as such false nature of the autobiographical, and, along with Nietzsche, puts on her gloves in order to interpret it. On the other hand, the rhetoric of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* plays with the reader's desire to project an author behind his text as the stable referent of an autobiography, using the biblical allusions as the means for doing so. As Zarathustra warns in the passage quoted at the end of the preface to *Ecce Homo*: "beware lest a statue slay you" (EH Preface 4).

How then to interpret it? Nietzsche's opening words focus our attention upon the exemplary life that autobiography is supposed to deliver. Nietzsche's attack on the "cultured people" would seem to indicate that one way to read this would be as a parody of proper autobiography (Kofman 1992, p. 50). The hyperbolic chapter titles and the extreme nature of Nietzsche's claims on behalf of himself would fit into a reading of *Ecce Homo* as parody, as would Nietzsche's many claims elsewhere that in his texts, *incipit parodia* (GS Preface 1).

There is, however, more going on than this. Particular historical conventions and assumptions govern autobiography as a genre in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One of the most important of these is the assumption of a 1:1 relationship between the author of the text and the life described therein. Philippe Lejeune, in *Le pacte autobiographique*, has described the way that

the signature of the author is supposed to guarantee the identity of the author, the narrator, and the first-person voice in the classic texts of autobiography in this period. This identity is underwritten by the publishing contract, itself underwritten by the state and civil law codes, which are in turn based upon the assumptions of the autonomous, rational, liberal self within a capitalist economy.<sup>5</sup> Georges Gusdorf argues that autobiography as a genre in its classic form is confined to the period from the second half of the eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth. While he is making an historical argument rather than a structural argument like Lejeune’s, he arrives at the same point: that “straight” autobiography is an historically bounded phenomenon that works ideologically to stabilize and to guarantee the autonomous self. This is said to hold even in instances where we know that the author – say, Nietzsche – has aesthetically shaped a symbolic account of his life rather than provided an empirically factually accurate account of the details of that life: the signature – the name on the cover – returns us to the empirical person outside the text.<sup>6</sup>

It is this very contract that is exposed as conventional in the first paragraph of *Ecce Homo*. “I live on my own credit”, Nietzsche writes, and in doing so he indicates the institutional system of credit that operates to give one a name in order to count for something, to be calculable. At the same time this exposes the autonomous subject that stabilizes the author/narrator/protagonist relationship as a socially constructed fiction. Everything then depends upon the name “Nietzsche”. Yet, I argue, this is the one thing that evades us in *Ecce Homo*.

### 3 The Structure of Allusions in Nietzsche’s Title

The title itself enacts this process. On the surface it seems to condense the autobiographical project. “Ecce Homo”, we read: “Behold the man” Nietzsche, putting in place here that name on the title page as referent of this phrase. This is followed after the colon by “How One Becomes What One Is”, which appears to be the gloss on the autobiographical itself: the account of the life will inform us how Nietzsche has attained the perspective from which he writes and which makes his life noteworthy and exemplary. Yet, the very words that point to the uniqueness of Nietzsche as subject turn out to be well-known allusions to other texts, other names, and other stories.

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<sup>5</sup> See Lejeune 1975, p. 14–15; Gusdorf 1980.

<sup>6</sup> The theory of autobiography as the shaped representation of the unique individual life is that of Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Pascal 1960, p. 1–20).

First, the words “ecce homo” are the words of Pilate in the New Testament, in the Gospel of John 19:5. The *Ecce Homo* is a standard of Christian iconography, depicting the judgment of Christ. Pilate says the words “ecce homo” as he hands Jesus over to the crowd of angry citizens who demand that he be put to death. Is Nietzsche then put in the place of Jesus as the object of Pilate’s phrase, about to be sacrificed, and handed over to the crowd of the “cultured people”? Or, is Nietzsche the subject here in identifying with Pilate, the utterer of the words? Both Nietzsche as Jesus and Nietzsche as Pilate are possible, given the decontextualizing of the intertext. This maps onto the opening lines of the preface to suggest that Nietzsche is handing over Nietzsche, at the same time both sacrificer and sacrifice, washing his hands, or, putting on gloves, before the task at hand. Nor should we miss the cruel joke here: at least in the Christian register, one becomes what one is by being crucified. The centuries of iconographic *Ecce Homos* by so many artists would not exist had Jesus not fulfilled his destiny here. In the New Testament, Jesus’ followers and disciples transform him posthumously into an exemplary figure who is no longer a particular man but the Christ – a type and a destiny.

In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche writes that in the New Testament the “one solitary figure one is obliged to respect” is Pilate, for his “noble scorn” – his “what is truth?” – in response to Jesus’ claim to be *the* truth. In this same passage from *The Antichrist* Nietzsche also tells us we must “put gloves on” in reading the New Testament (AC 46). The same gesture condemns both the Gospels and the autobiographical in *Ecce Homo*. At the same time, Nietzsche constantly invites us to read him in both ways, *Ecce Homo* as the telling of his life, and his new gospel: he is the bringer of good tidings (EH IV 1).

Pilate’s question “What is truth?” in John 18:38 cited in this passage from *The Antichrist* also appears as an intertext in the early (unpublished) text of 1873, “On Truth and Falsehood in an Extra-Moral Sense”. This is the same section of John from which the “ecce homo” of Nietzsche’s title will be taken, the account of Jesus coming before Pilate for judgment. Nietzsche’s famous answer to this question, that truth is a “mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms”, is immediately followed by a history of how metaphors are transvalued into truth:

[T]o be truthful means using the customary metaphors – in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all. Now man of course forgets that this is the way things stand for him. Thus he lies in the manner indicated, unconsciously and in accordance with habits which are centuries old; and precisely *by means of this unconsciousness* and forgetfulness he arrives at his sense of truth. (TL 1)

Truth, then, is a crowd phenomenon, and it is no accident that Nietzsche chose this passage from John in “On Truth and Falsehood” to introduce the notion, for this is the moment when Pilate hands Jesus over to the crowd, a moment that will become, over centuries, the truth of Christianity. This resonates as well in Nietzsche’s choice of Pilate’s “*ecce homo*” as the allusion that constitutes the first half of the title to *Ecce Homo*. The scene with Pilate in *The Gospel of John* is set at that moment in between, when Jesus has not yet become the Christ which centuries of making believe will turn him into. It brings the notion of truth as a crowd or herd phenomenon into play in *Ecce Homo*, suggesting that what we make of the “Nietzsche” present in *Ecce Homo* will engage a similar process. Only this time, the reader is compelled to recognize how this process works as we construct a “Nietzsche”, and, if we are the right kind of reader, in full recognition of the fictionality of the process. The first half of the title, then, repeats the movement of the first paragraph we have been reading from *Ecce Homo*.

The second half of the title, “How One Becomes What One Is”, is a translation of line 72 of Pindar’s *Second Pythian Ode*: “*genoi hoios essi mathôn*”, with the “learn” suppressed.<sup>7</sup> Here the speaker of the words of Nietzsche’s title is Pindar, the fifth-century BCE Dionysian poet, and the object of his words of injunction is the tyrant Hieron on the occasion of his victory in the Pythian games. It has been generally agreed that line 72 in Pindar’s Pythian 2 should be translated as “show that you have learned what manner of man you are”.<sup>8</sup> According to Glenn Most, in this line Pindar is saying: “Look with favor upon my poem. Prove yourself by doing so to be the sort of man you yourself know that you are” (Most 1985, 103). In Pindar’s ode, one becomes what one is by learning the lesson of gratitude, both to the gods and, implicitly, to one’s poet.

Line 72 in Pindar’s text tells Hieron to become who he is immediately following a presentation of the myth of Ixion as a story of ingratitude, the moral of which is that gratitude is the proper response to fate, warning those who resent the god because life is not just according to human desires. Ixion had assumed that the god’s grace was calculable, and thus failed to understand the difference between divine and human justice.<sup>9</sup> Pindar writes, “Ixion learned a clear lesson”

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<sup>7</sup> On this suppression see below, section 6.

<sup>8</sup> This translation is Woodbury’s: see Woodbury 1945, p. 20. Woodbury also notes that the *genoi* and *essi* should not be understood as the opposition between becoming and being, or that of active and potential. This would be anachronistic to Pindar, as his critics have noted going all the way back to Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1922, p. 90). See also Burton 1962, p. 125 and Most 1985, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup> See Most 1985, p. 82. See also Hamilton 2003, p. 71.

(line 25). In turn, Pindar represents himself as poet, as one who has learned the same lesson, and, godlike, can teach it to Hieron. Just as with the Christian intertexts Nietzsche could be both Jesus and Pilate, here we can ask if Nietzsche is Pindar the poet, or, like Hieron, the exemplary object of praise. If we take Hieron as the referent, the wealthy aristocratic tyrant who can afford to pay for his own praise, then here too Nietzsche must live on his own credit.

If we stop here, we can see that there is a structural similarity in the two intertexts that Nietzsche has chosen for his title. The title, then, comprises two different versions by means of which an individual is transformed into an ideal type for posterity: the Christian and the Greek. Read in one direction, the relationship of “*ecce homo*” to “how one becomes what one is” replaces the suffering of Christ with that of the gratitude in Pindar, a gratitude framed in the same way it will be understood by Zarathustra. Read in the other direction, the allusions suggest that one becomes what one is by being crucified, and transformed by one’s disciples or one’s poet from the man into the exemplar. Nietzsche can be poet here to himself, and at the same time hand himself over. On the one hand, the text hands over Nietzsche to his readers and their expectations for an autobiographical text, knowing that they will inevitably construct “Nietzsche” as a stable referent outside the text as its author – with all the credit that earns him. On the other hand, the title deconstructs these very same expectations, sending the name “Nietzsche” off in multiple, even contradictory, directions. *Ecce Homo* is structured to let Nietzsche have it both ways in the way it shapes “Nietzsche” as an exemplary figure. Nietzsche’s transformation of Pindar’s “you” directed at Hieron into “one” (*man*) generalizes the command. In relation to the first part of the title this stages, again, the problem of the unique particular signaled by “*ecce homo*” versus the universal signaled by “one”. Yet again this replicates the Jesus/Christ operation (both unique particular and universal in one). However, it reframes this so that its connotations are no longer Christian but Greek. The *klea andron* (the human and worldly “fame of men”) created by the poet becomes the signified for the Christian *ecce homo* that in the hands of Paul and those who come after him signifies for Nietzsche the afterworldly “lie of the ideal”.

## 4 The Surplus Value of the Name: The Intratextuality of Nietzsche’s Title

I want to focus here on the relationship between the names Nietzsche and Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo*. The “How One Becomes What One Is” of the title is both

intertextual in its allusion to Pindar, and also intratextual in its allusions to Nietzsche’s use of Pindar’s phrase “Become what you are” in *The Gay Science* and in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. *The Gay Science* 270 is a brief line of dialogue with no context to suggest either who is speaking or to whom: “What does your conscience say? – ‘You shall become the person you are’”.<sup>10</sup> In “The Honey Sacrifice” it is Zarathustra himself who utters this command after telling his animals that he is waiting: “With my best bait I shall today bait the queerest human fish”.

For *that* is what I am through and through: reeling, reeling in, raising up, raising, a raiser, cultivator, and disciplinarian, who once counseled himself, not for nothing: Become who you are! [*Werde, der du bist!*] (KSA 4/297)

We must suppose, then, that Zarathustra is the speaker of the lines in *The Gay Science*, even as the lack of context for this command in this text allows us to place its author, Nietzsche, in the same position. It depends upon which order you read them in. In *Ecce Homo*, on the other hand, it is Nietzsche who refers to *his* texts as “fishhooks” – perhaps Zarathustra is using Nietzsche as bait, or vice versa (EH III BGE 1). The line that concludes the excursus between the preface and the main body of *Ecce Homo*, “How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life? – and so I tell my life to myself”, repeats, in somewhat altered form, Zarathustra’s line at the end of the first section of “On the Old and New Tablets” in Book III of *Zarathustra*: “Nobody tells me anything new: so I tell myself – myself”. Perhaps *Ecce Homo* is the something new, the writing of the new tablet for which Zarathustra waited.

In the passage on *Zarathustra* that concludes Nietzsche’s preface to *Ecce Homo* he singles out *Zarathustra* among his texts as the “highest book there is”, emphasizing the halcyon tone and voice with which Zarathustra speaks, and then writes: “Here there speaks no fanatic” (EH Preface 4). The same ambiguity of reference occurs in this line: the immediate referent is Zarathustra, but in *Zarathustra* it was Nietzsche who authored the words that Zarathustra “speaks”. *Ecce Homo* itself describes “Nietzsche” in very similar words to those with which he has just described Zarathustra as the opposite of the fanatic type: one who refuses to be an improver of mankind and thus a “moralistic monster”. The ambiguity of referent is only compounded when this concluding section of Nietzsche’s preface that quotes Zarathustra is signed “Friedrich Nietzsche”.

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10 “Was sagt dein Gewissen? – ‘Du sollst der werden, der du bist’” (KSA 3/519).

Nietzsche quotes from three different chapters of *Zarathustra* in this section. I focus upon the last, taken from “On the Gift-Giving Virtue” that ends Part I and that precedes the signature “Friedrich Nietzsche” at the end of the preface to *Ecce Homo*. I quote only part of this here:

You revere me; but what if your reverence *tumbles* one day? Beware lest a statue slay you.

You say you believe in Zarathustra? But of what importance is Zarathustra? You are my believers – but of what importance are all believers?

You had not yet sought yourselves when you found me. Thus do all believers; therefore all belief is of so little account.

Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only *when you have all denied me* will I return to you...

Friedrich Nietzsche.

Here too the matter of accounts is raised: belief has lost its credit – yet another reason why Nietzsche must live on his own credit. Furthermore, this intratext is itself shaped by intertexts. Zarathustra repeats in reverse the teaching of Jesus, that one must lose oneself to follow him (Matt. 16:24–25) and Jesus’ observation that Peter will deny him three times but that he will return (John 13–14). One should add that the murderous statue here is an allusion to Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, and the statue of the morally virtuous Commendatore that comes to life in revenge to kill his murderer, the libertine Don Giovanni. The passage Nietzsche quotes here is intertextually complex.

It is necessary to recognize the originals in order to read the passage. It is not, then, just the disciples’ problem of deciphering Zarathustra’s sayings, but ours as readers of Nietzsche’s text – and we know more than they do. The turning inside out of Jesus’ “lose yourself” positions Zarathustra for us as his opposite. Zarathustra promises his disciples that he will return once they have *learned* to deny him. Here too the gospel teaching is reversed: Peter would deny Jesus unwittingly and unwillingly; Zarathustra’s disciples must do so deliberately. But the allusions do not dispel the suspicion that Zarathustra might simply be a different kind of prophet and messiah, one with a new teaching that reverses the old. This all occurs after Zarathustra has warned his disciples to beware lest a statue kill them. What does the statue represent? In the frame of the narrative it is the disciples’ reverence and belief in Zarathustra. But for us the statue is that of the Commendatore in Mozart’s opera. Two things stand out here: Don Giovanni is himself a seducer, and he famously refuses to repent his actions. Act 2 scene 3 takes place at the grave of the Commendatore with its statue bearing the inscription “I’m waiting for revenge against my murderer” at its base. The statue warns Don Giovanni, but Giovanni laughs and invites the statue to dinner. In the final scene, act 3, scene 5, the statue comes to dinner and asks Giovanni



to repent. He refuses, and the statue carries him down to Hell. The presence of this intertextual statue in *Zarathustra* places the whole matter of belief, Christian or otherwise, in the context of revenge, a revenge not yet brought into the picture but that will be the focus of the second book of *Zarathustra*. We, as ideal readers of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, already know this, even though Zarathustra and his disciples do not. But this revenge is complicated, as we have both the revenge of the Christian Commendatore together with the refusal of that revenge in the figure of Giovanni signified by this one line in *Zarathustra*. Despite his refusal, Giovanni falls victim to the Commendatore's Christian revenge; at this point in the text it is still an open question whether or not the same fate waits for Zarathustra.

Why should this be the passage Nietzsche has chosen to end his preface and precede his signature, assuming that he has not chosen randomly here? I would suggest that it shapes a parallel between the problem of reading *Zarathustra* and the problem of reading *Ecce Homo*. Both risk inviting misunderstanding and confusion of the text with what it is not. In the case of *Zarathustra*, it is that Zarathustra might be just another prophet. In the case of *Ecce Homo*, it is that Nietzsche might be just another author writing an autobiography that confirms his reputation, transvaluing nothing. But one cannot bring the new into being *ex nihilo*, not if one wants to be read and to be understood. The classical tradition Nietzsche knows so well worked by appropriating old texts and reshaping them by means of intertextual allusions as, for example, when Virgil makes Romans out of Homer's Greeks by appropriating the structure of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the *Aeneid*. Nietzsche deploys this same technique in his works. Both *Zarathustra* and *Ecce Homo* work not through what they say but how they say it by undermining the old forms from within, incorporating and transforming them at the same time. In the paratactic relationship between the words of Zarathustra and the signature “Nietzsche”, the names of Zarathustra, Jesus and Nietzsche slide in and out of each other, impossible to pull apart. It is important to recognize that the intratexts make the names “Nietzsche” and “Zarathustra” interchangeable. This suggests that in order to read the semiotic of the name “Nietzsche” in *Ecce Homo* we need to know what the name “Zarathustra” signifies. *Ecce Homo* and *Zarathustra* are companion texts that need to be read together. When Nietzsche writes “I am one thing, my writings are another”, he is not implying the existence of a stable authorial subjectivity outside his text as guarantee for the narrative voice within the text, but in fact the opposite (EH III 1). The historical individual named Nietzsche is inaccessible, leaving only the Nietzsche constructed by the writing.

The name “Nietzsche” in *Ecce Homo*, then, is not the name of a unique individual signatory, but a type: not one name but every name. Nietzsche's *Ecce*



*Homo* does this by refusing to send the reader back to the empirical Nietzsche, even though as a text it operates in his name. We should not forget that Nietzsche precedes this quotation by telling us Zarathustra, too, is a seducer. All the work Nietzsche as author does to deconstruct the idea of Nietzsche as subject still leaves – the name of Nietzsche, and he has banked on that. His texts continue to have their effect in his name – and my use of the language of consubstantiality was intended here. This is the surplus value *Ecce Homo* creates, even as it gives it away.

## 5 The Appropriate Way to Praise (Oneself)

Here we can turn back to Pindar, and the poetic self or “I” present in his odes. The classicist Mary Lefkowitz has argued that the “I” statements present in Pindar’s poems are formal utterances of a poetic persona that shapes a self-representation of the poet as archetype.<sup>11</sup> This archetype must not be confused with the historical individual.<sup>12</sup> Pindar constructs this archetype to shape an *êthos* that gives him the right to praise. At the same time, he constructs a “Hieron” who, although a tyrant, conforms to the aristocratic ideals Pindar supports over against those of the *polis*. Pindar works to transcend the realities of wealth and power.<sup>13</sup> Key here is the aristocratic *êthos* of reciprocal gift-exchange. The victor in the games owes his fame to the poet, who confers upon him the *klea andron* – the fame of men – by attaching his victory in the here and now to the remote past of the heroes, thus validating the values of the aristocratic community.<sup>14</sup> In turn, the poet owes his fame to the historical individual victor at the games. His reward, ideally, is glory and prestige as sacred.<sup>15</sup> Poet and victor owe each other gratitude reciprocally. Pindar is writing at a time when the aristocratic prestige-generating system of poetry is in crisis, shifting to a patronage model which threatens to reduce the poet to a mere artisan working for hire and profit (or credit) that replaces reciprocity with a contract between poet and patron.<sup>16</sup> Pindar’s poem, in the course of praising Hieron, works to uphold the aristocratic ideal of the right way to praise and represents an idealized community of aristocrats who would recompense him properly for doing so. Ironically, the historical

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<sup>11</sup> See Lefkowitz 1991, p. 113.

<sup>12</sup> See Lefkowitz 1991, p. 145.

<sup>13</sup> See Nagy 1989, p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> See Nagy 1989, p. 139–142.

<sup>15</sup> See Nagy 1989, p. 136.

<sup>16</sup> See Nagy 1989, p. 133; see also Kurke 1991, p. 7 and p. 166.

Hieron would be long forgotten had Pindar not written his odes. It is Pindar’s fame that lives on.

The first-person voice in Nietzsche needs to be read in the same way, as a poetic voice constructing an archetype and an *ethos*, not as a voice referring us back to the historical Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s use of Pindar, then, is over-determined, as it draws upon both the content of Pindar’s praise and the form in which this praise is delivered. We must also think about the way “Nietzsche” as archetype is used to critique the assumptions of one audience – that of the “cultured people” with their too easy assumptions of the identity of the self, of the truth, and of their material comfort even in the wake of the death of God – and to shape those of an audience to come. Unlike Pindar, who can depend upon his signs being appropriately read even if they encode values on the verge of being lost, Nietzsche continually tells us he has no readers. We should, of course, take this with a grain of salt. Here, too, we should recall that Nietzsche is trained as a philologist and well aware of the classical literary technique that produces the new by repurposing the old. The difficulty of recognizing this technique indicates just how much of our knowledge of the textuality of this tradition has been lost in an age trained to read for content rather than form. Nietzsche’s heavy use of intertextuality becomes then a subversive strategy that in itself works to shape a very different kind of reader. *Ecce Homo* has to construct the code by which it should be read. Nietzsche has no community of peers, no one to sing his praises. So, his poetic voice must praise – himself, as he is the only one who could have the right to do so. On the model of Pindar’s praise of Hieron, we have Nietzsche’s praise of Nietzsche – “and so I tell myself my life”. In the absence of a community in which reciprocity is possible, Nietzsche takes on the task of being both poet and object of praise. What we need to remember is that *both* functions are constructed within *Ecce Homo* just as much as they are in Pindar.

## 6 The Relationship of *Ecce Homo* to Nietzsche’s Other Texts

The “portrait of the artist” that Nietzsche gives his reader is a portrait of one who embodies the qualities necessary to be able to speak from the perspective of the Eternal Return, the teaching of Zarathustra. As I have shown above, these teachings have a strong precursor in the texts of Pindar. The text of *Ecce Homo* taken as a whole constructs a “Nietzsche” as the man who has “turned out well”, and recovered from the sickness of *ressentiment* that the other texts signed by

“Nietzsche” diagnosed as the fundamental problem of modern thought. The name “Nietzsche” and the name “Zarathustra” are to be read together, the one signifying the other and vice versa as this is framed by the intratexts in *Ecce Homo*. Thus he shapes the *êthos* that gives him the right to speak. Nietzsche’s masks enact his new truths: they are the *êthos* that is appropriate to the notion of truth as interpretation and will to power. When Nietzsche sets out to tell us who he is, he rhetorically shapes a self-representation that will incline his future audience to be well-disposed towards him: “I have never understood the art of arousing enmity towards myself” (EH I 4). I believe that we should hear in Nietzsche’s many invocations of goodwill that goodwill (*benevolentia*) characteristic of the *êthos* of the Ciceronian ideal orator able through the portrayal of his own character to well-dispose his audience towards his cause.<sup>17</sup> The qualities of character that this entails depend upon the work done in Nietzsche’s other texts to show that our conceptions of truth and morality are now signs of cultural disease rather than health, the products of the metaphysicians’ “faith in opposite values” that maintains the “lie of the ideal” that constructs the world according to the oppositions of good and evil, true and false, long after it has ceased to serve the interests of life (BGE 2). The inherent instability of this arbitrary set of binary oppositions is covered over, “anchored”, by referring them to “Being” as an ultimate center – both their source and guarantee, just as the author’s name stands in guarantee for the text. He presents himself as one who is “clean” and untainted by the stink of ideals, and tells us we must not mistake him for what he is not:

I am, for example, absolutely not a bogeyman, not a moral monster – I am even an antithetical nature to the species of man hitherto honored as virtuous. Between ourselves, it seems to me that precisely this constitutes part of my pride. I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysos; I prefer to be even a satyr rather than a saint. But you have only to read this writing. Perhaps I have succeeded in giving expression to this antithesis in a cheerful and affable way – perhaps this writing had no point at all other than to do this. The last thing I would promise would be to “improve” mankind. (EH Preface 2)

This passage is quite complex. It suggests Nietzsche’s cheerfulness in opposition to the heavy weight and seriousness of philosophy thus far. It marks the name “Nietzsche” as a type in contradistinction to the virtuous man as a type. It also pulls into its web exactly the moral types of the “improvers of mankind” par excellence of the Western tradition, alluding to the Socrates of the *Symposium* with the phrase “even a satyr” and Augustine in the word “saint”, managing

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17 See Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.182; see also Wisse 1989, p. 234.

to invoke both as his prototypes and countertypes and to make subtle distinctions between them in terms of degrees of closeness to Dionysos, the only genealogy that matters.

Because Nietzsche is the opposite type to the “improvers of mankind”, we can perhaps understand why he suppressed the “learn” in Pindar’s phrase, reducing it to “become what you are”. In Nietzsche’s answer to the question “how one becomes what one is”, he writes:

That one becomes what one is presupposes that one does not have even the remotest idea *what one is*. [...] where *nosce te ipsum* would be the recipe for destruction, self-forgetfulness, self-*misunderstanding*, self-diminution, -narrowing, -mediocritizing becomes reason itself. (EH II 9)

“Learn” in the sense of “know thyself” has become the formula for the self-identical subject with a self-consciousness or soul that precedes all experience. For Nietzsche, under the perspective of the Eternal Return, there is no pre-existing subject – only the subject as a result, a fiction, a piece of fate. Here “learn” can only mean to understand what one *has* become, not what one “always already” is. Yet even here, Nietzsche does not abandon Pindar, for Pindar’s “learn” is written in the past tense. The Greek Pindar can thus be deployed against the Christian, precisely because he preceded not only it but also the Socratic version of this “know thyself” that was so useful to the early Christian fathers who needed a respectable philosophical structure for their theology.

In his self-description, Nietzsche celebrates not his self-identity but his capacity to hold together contradictions and multiplicity:

Order of rank among capacities; distance; the art of dividing without making inimical; mixing up nothing, “reconciling” nothing; a tremendous multiplicity which is nonetheless the opposite of chaos – this has been the precondition, the protracted secret labour and artistic working of my instinct. (EH II 9)

Rather than suture together the name outside the text with the name inside the text, Nietzsche celebrates their difference. Nietzsche’s self-representation, then, characterizes him as a convalescent, recovered from the sickness that the rest of us still suffer from. Because this Nietzsche has recovered, he is the “very opposite of the type of man so far revered as virtuous”, and thus able to be grateful to his entire life. Here, too, we can return to Pindar. Nietzsche/Zarathustra has learned the lesson of Ixion and Archilocus. Pindar used the poet Archilocus as the paradigm of the envious who do not accept the dispensation of the gods because they “do not realize the essential impermanence of any condition of human life” and are thus discontented with their lot and slander existence in

the belief that things should be other than they are.<sup>18</sup> Ixion had to realize the same thing: he failed to accept his life with gratitude. Pindar teaches gratitude and *amor fati* as the way to become what one is. But where in Pindar these mean one's submission to the gods, in Nietzsche in the wake of the death of God and the teaching of the Eternal Return that responds to this death, they can only mean a submission to life, including one's own life lived in the desire to live as one has lived – eternally.

He presents himself as able to accept fate and his past as such. Instead of viewing life as a disease to be overcome, he writes:

I do not want in the slightest that anything should become other than it is; I do not want myself to become other than I am...But that is how I have always lived. I have harbored no desire. Someone who after his forty-fourth year can say he has never striven after *honors*, after *women*, after *money!* – Not that I could not have had them ... (EH II 9)

The traditional virtues expected of a trustworthy character are all invoked in these statements. Nietzsche lets us know that, like Pindar, he does not seek fame or reward. He does not act out of revenge or disappointment, but out of concern for our general welfare – he is the last decent [*anständig*] man (EH IV 1). However, these markers of integrity are attached to a different set of values than those of the Christian tradition or even the Greek. There is no set of shared conventions addressed, rather a set of conventions that are to be created by those who can also prove themselves to be the kind of person that can become what one is in accepting the perspective of the Eternal Return.

## 7 Conclusion

A character is shaped in language that we cannot help projecting onto a screen as “author”. Yet, it is Nietzsche's own body of texts that supply the criteria and the signs by which to judge the *êthos* of the Nietzsche of *Ecce Homo*, and reciprocally, *Ecce Homo* that supplies the testimony that legitimates these same texts by shaping a self-representation that will incline his future audience to be well-disposed towards him: “I have never understood the art of predisposing people against me” (EH I 4). The intertexts and intratexts in the title and preface frame the problem of reading *Ecce Homo*: every time we try to jump out of the circle to the empirical Nietzsche, we are sent not outside but back to a text.

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<sup>18</sup> See Burton 1962, p. 132.

The idea that the subject Nietzsche outside the text is the guarantee of the subject Nietzsche in the text belongs to the oppositions his work deconstructs. Nor is this a case in which this particular autobiography happens to work the way it does, but need not unsettle our ordinary practice, because it is, after all, a parody. We are given to think – to read – that it is not the oppositions self versus text or life versus writing but that the text *as* text inevitably shapes figures or exempla that are projected beyond the text. According to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, even in the discourse of the deconstruction of the concept of the subject “everything happens as though it [the process of the decomposition of the subject] produced within itself a strengthening or reinforcement of the subject, even in the discourses that announce its dissolution, its shattering, its disappearance” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1998, p. 143). This is why Nietzsche said that he feared we would never get rid of God, because we still believe in grammar (TI III 5) – and yet writes. Failing to read well and reverting to the metaphysical notion of the self, subject or author in *Ecce Homo* is the statue Nietzsche warned might slay us.



Aaron Parrett

## *Ecce Homo* and Augustine's *Confessions*

### Autobiography and the End(s) of Faith

**Abstract:** This essay explores three relevant points of connection between Augustine's *Confessions* and Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*: First, both works relate to Christianity as a world-historical phenomenon; second, both works illustrate philosophy conducted as an exercise in "testimony", and present methods of self-conscious critique; finally, both works exhibit similar stylistic characteristics, including turns of phrase, tropes, and interrogative technique.

One seldom hears Nietzsche and Augustine mentioned in the same breath, perhaps because their philosophies stand so diametrically opposed. Yet, in spite of the contempt Nietzsche freely dispensed in regard to Augustine, one cannot help hearing an echo of the *Confessions* in *Ecce Homo*. The literary relationship between Nietzsche and Augustine is, to adopt something of an oxymoron, magnetically repellent. What I mean to suggest is that both these towering giants of philosophy turned to the autobiographical medium to generate a kind of aura or field around their work. In both cases the effect is a function of how each man understood the relationship between his life and his work and his vision of himself against the backdrop of his inevitable legacy. That both men produced biographies with similar passion, similar purpose and, occasionally, similar style adds to the effect. If we lay their respective works down next to each other in a certain way, we will see them draw together just as surely as we shall see them skitter away from one another should we lay them down in the alternate orientation. Though these philosophers may flee one another ideologically, aspects of their literary styles, at least in *Ecce Homo* and the *Confessions*, converge. So much for the conceit of this essay; from a more general perspective, a comparative examination of Nietzsche and Augustine may be illuminating for philosophers and theologians alike. As Gavin Hyman has noted, the "nihil" lay at the core of thinking for both Augustine and Nietzsche, and even if in the postmodern era "the nihilists have Nietzsche while the theologians have Augustine", it seems reasonable to expect that just as theology has learned a great deal from Nietzsche, "nihilists" stand to gain from reading Augustine (Hyman 2008, p. 36).

Nietzsche rarely refers to Augustine directly in his published works. In *The Gay Science* he disparages him thus:

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246551-007>



Do not misunderstand me: among such born *enemies of the spirit* emerges occasionally the rare piece of humanity that the people revere under such names as saint and sage. From among such men come those monsters of morality who make noise, who make history – St. Augustine is among them. (GS 359)<sup>1</sup>

Later, in *The Antichrist*, he reiterates this sentiment more pointedly:

Everything miserable that suffers from itself, that is afflicted with bad feelings, the whole ghetto-world of the soul *on top* all at once. One need only read any Christian agitator, St. Augustine, for example, to comprehend, to *smell*, what an unclean lot had thus come to the top. (AC 59)

He occasionally makes other mention of St. Augustine in his notes and letters, usually with similar venom. At the end of March 1885, he writes to Franz Overbeck, mentioning the *Confessions* specifically:

I have been reading, as relaxation, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, much regretting that you were not with me. O this old rhetorician! What falseness, what rolling of eyes! How I laughed! (for example, concerning the "theft" of his youth, basically an undergraduate story). What psychological falsity! (for example, when he talks about the death of his best friend, with whom he shared a *single soul*, he "resolved to go on living, so that in this way his friend would not wholly die". Such things are revoltingly dishonest). Philosophical value zero! *vulgarized* Platonism – that is to say, a way of thinking which was invented for the highest aristocracy of the soul, and which he adjusted to suit slave natures. Moreover, one sees into the guts of Christianity in this book. I make my observations with the curiosity of a radical physician and physiologist. (Nietzsche 1969b, p. 239–240)

This passage establishes with certainty that Nietzsche remained familiar with Augustine's *Confessions* even at the height of his philosophical career, when he was in the midst of producing the five or six books that would make him the literary immortal he later portrayed himself as in *Ecce Homo*. As a scholar trained in Latin and Greek, and a graduate of the Latinate curriculum at Schulpforta, Nietzsche, who started out his studies to become a minister, would have been well acquainted with Augustine's *Confessions* from his youth. One can detect the literary imprint of the *Confessions* throughout *Zarathustra*, for example, as Nietzsche critiques or parodies one Christian philosophical position after another. As a self-proclaimed antichrist(ian), Nietzsche naturally would have been obliged to attack at its roots the unchecked boscage against which he so stren-

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<sup>1</sup> Translations of quotations from Nietzsche's works are by Walter Kaufmann (AC, BGE, EH, Z) and Josefine Nauckhoff (GS); translations of quotations from Nietzsche's letters are by Christopher Middleton.

uously labored, including St. Augustine, one of the neo-Platonist cultivators of Christianity as we know it and a venerated father of the Church. Hence, in *Ecce Homo* we encounter a work that – in addition to whatever else it may be – can be viewed as a sort of counter-*Confessions*.

When it comes to these two ostensibly “confessional” works, genre itself emerges as a salient problem. Literary critics who consider either the *Confessions* of Augustine or Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* feel compelled to immediately point out that neither book is autobiography in the modern sense, but then admit that they are hard-pressed to identify into which specific literary category either should be classed: memoir? testimonial? megalomaniacal self-advertisement à la Norman Mailer, or some similar narcissistic genre? In any case, what remains beyond contention is that, quite apart from whatever value they hold for philosophy, these two works are undeniably *literary* masterpieces. Walter Kaufmann, for example, introduces his translation of Nietzsche's book by remarking that “*Ecce Homo* is one of the treasures of world literature” (Kaufmann 1992b, 657), and Henry Chadwick prefaces his translation of Augustine by observing that the “*Confessions* will always rank among the greater masterpieces of western literature” (Chadwick 1998, ix). Such common reverence alone ought to be enough to sponsor a comparison between the two works – but what common features do these works share that establish so unequivocally their canonicity? This is a broad, perhaps too abstract, exercise, to be sure, but it is worth acknowledging at the outset that whatever compelling power these works continue to exert on generations of readers must at some level consist in their *literary* quality, one aspect of which is their style.

In this essay I would like to explore three points of convergence between Augustine's *Confessions* and Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, three aspects of their magnetically repellent relationship. First, I want to consider their relationship to Christianity as a world-historical phenomenon: though these two philosophers approached Christianity from precisely opposite directions and at obvious cross purposes to one another, Christianity as a cultural force in human history directly informed both men's life-projects. Second, I want to consider the status of both works as examples of *testimony* – an undeniably loaded word – by looking briefly at examples in both works wherein we might catch each of these philosophers *in flagrante delicto* practicing their distinct methods of philosophical self-discovery. Last, I would like to return to the literary issue and discover how stylistically similar these two works are by looking at a few specific passages.

## 1 Christianity Between Bookends

If the *Confessions* and *Ecce Homo* shared nothing else in common, they at least would have at their core the same subject inspiring them. For Augustine, Christianity is an ideology and creed worthy of veneration, the self-reported source of his salvation, and the fundamental ground of his very being; for Nietzsche, Christianity is the most repellent and life-denying force ever invented by and unleashed upon humankind, a philosophical affront in need of demolition – a project to which he devoted most of his literary life and energy. His efforts attained a feverish pitch in three of the last books he wrote in 1888: *Götzen-Dämmerung* (*Twilight of the Idols*), perhaps the most methodical of his critiques of Christianity and Idealism; *Der Antichrist* (*The Antichrist*), wherein his assault reaches a strident crescendo; and finally *Ecce Homo*, which does not merely rehearse the anti-Christian sentiments of his previous works, but which curiously presents the message in the context of reviewing his career. One gets the sense that Nietzsche is purposely challenging the “autobiographical” mode, but also that in *Ecce Homo* he puts himself in the strange pose of both sending and receiving his dangerous new message. Perhaps he is simply trying to present himself *in process* (i.e., in the midst of *becoming* what he is) as opposed to Augustine, who maintains an identity throughout the *Confessions* that depends on his *being*.

In regard to the history of Christianity, we might consider the *Confessions* and *Ecce Homo* to be bookends of a sort: one stands at the beginning of Christianity, a solid bulwark against which its subsequent works will lean for the next millennium and a half. The other stands just as resolutely at the end of the Christian era and the dawn of the new age. The metaphor may be meaningful in spite of the fact that Augustine was neither the first Christian, nor even the first *academic* Christian, and that Christianity has persisted at least a century after *Ecce Homo*. The *Confessions*, nevertheless, is a work in which many Christian notions were crystallized and presented in a form that would deeply influence its highly personal mode for the next fifteen hundred years. At the same time, although other writers had espoused atheism and repudiated Christianity before Nietzsche, none had done so as vehemently and with the concentration of effort exhibited by Nietzsche in his last works.

It is no accident that Nietzsche begins his preface to *Ecce Homo* with a reference to Acts 14:17, when he says that he has not left himself “without testimony”, nor that he made the title of this work from the words that Pilate uttered when Christ was brought before him: “behold the man”. The irony in both allusions results from Nietzsche’s substitution of himself in two places where the

Christian source-text presents God in a less than flattering light. Nietzsche must therefore mean to include himself in his attack.

The title, of course, is drawn from John 19:5, where Pilate, after “finding no case” against Christ, presents him to the cruci-fixated crowd for their disposal. “Here is the man”, Pilate announces. “Take him yourself and crucify him; I find no case against him.”<sup>2</sup> Pilate’s tone in the passage seems scornful of both Jesus and the bloodthirsty crowd: on the one hand, the presumed “King of the Jews” has just appeared looking ridiculous in royal purple, having recently been scourged and wearing a crown of thorns, and on the other hand, the man before him awaiting judgment is obviously innocent of the charges brought by the crowd. In using “*Ecce Homo*” for a title, Nietzsche similarly forces us as readers to perceive the author of the book as both buffoon and as the embodiment of something far beyond him(self). (Recall also that, echoing a reviewer of one of his earlier works, Nietzsche writes in “Why I am a Destiny” in *Ecce Homo*, “I am no man, I am dynamite” (EH IV 1) – a boast at once jocose and ominous).

The reference to the book of Acts is equally ironic, since there the context has Paul and Barnabas trying to convince a crowd of pagans who have just witnessed a miracle that God, not Zeus or Hermes, is responsible for it. Paul says that although for a long time God let the various peoples of the world practice whatever religion they wanted, he never “left himself without witness”, because he was always there to provide the rain for their crops. In the context of Christianity, Paul’s logic is simply specious, since he suggests that evidence for God is wherever you find it. In echoing Paul, however, Nietzsche seems to suggest that his book *Ecce Homo* – as an expression of will to power – bears its own witness quite beyond any “self” we might want to attach to it.

Naturally, the *Confessions* is swollen with biblical allusion, as one would expect. Many of the metaphors Augustine uses again and again are drawn directly from Paul (“to see through a glass darkly”, for example). At the head of the list of essential notions that Augustine distilled from the scriptures and from neo-Platonism that would become tenets of Christian philosophy we must inscribe abhorrence of the body, and indeed a mistrust of everything *physical*. The *Confessions* reverberates with passages expressing intellectual aversion to the senses, repugnance for the delights of the body and its functions, resistance to even

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<sup>2</sup> “*Ecce homo*” can mean either “here is the man” or “here is a man”; although the context in John suggests the first interpretation is correct, Nietzsche might very well have the latter (or both simultaneously) in mind. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche comments on Napoleon’s reputed pronouncement upon meeting Goethe for the first time – “*Voilà un homme*” (BGE 209), which presents the same idea as “*ecce homo*”.

the slightest hint of carnality. Yet, as obsessed with exorcising sin and elevating himself above the plane of physical delight as Augustine obviously was, he nevertheless wallowed perversely in “concupiscence”, and invented the now ubiquitous Christian prayer, “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet (*da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo*)” – a particularly enduring hypocrisy invoked today by a number of sexually backsliding evangelists (Augustine 2002, 1:441; Augustine 1998, 145). Infusing himself with the neo-Platonist notion of the empirical world as *deficere ab essentia* (fallen away from being) and Paul’s notion that bodily desire fuels the kilns of sin, Augustine has become practically synonymous with the doctrine of *contemptus mundi* (contempt for the world), one of the definitive features of the Christian mentality in virtually all its forms.

Nietzsche, by contrast, labored strenuously against any philosophical system (e.g. Christianity or Platonism) that posited an “ideal” world beyond this one. He celebrated the Dionysian world of the senses, reducing the spirit or soul to merely an affect of the body: “body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body” as he succinctly puts it in Part I of *Zarathustra* (Z I 4). Nevertheless, *praxis* and *theoria* did not always converge for Nietzsche, either: he probably died a virgin, or very nearly, and his asceticism in spite of his veneration of the body is here less a case of hypocrisy than an exercise in sublimation, especially insofar as it did not involve (as in the case of Augustine) what Sartre would later call “bad faith”.

The gulf of Christianity stretching between Augustine and Nietzsche is marked at one end by *contemptus mundi*, and at the other end by *amor fati*. The author of the *Confessions* develops all his famous contributions to Christian ideology – original sin, the dilemma of free will, grace, a personal conception of God – as a result of a fundamental philosophical repugnance for *this* world. The author of *Ecce Homo*, however, admits no other world, professes his love for this life, and wields a hammer to smash the vast edifice of nineteenth-century Christianity for which Augustine had laid the foundation. Nietzsche hammers out the death of God, the genealogy of morals, the doctrine of eternal return, all of which ring with the unparalleled conviction in *Ecce Homo* he called *amor fati*.

Surely the most revealing instance of magnetic repulsion comes in the response each of these works presents as a response to the ancient Greek dictum *γνώθι σαυτόν*: “know thyself”. Augustine of course frames the question “Who am I?” within the framework of incipient Christian guilt: “I had become to myself a vast problem”, he writes in his *Confessions*: “*factus eram ipse mihi magno quaestio*” (Augustine 2002, 1:160). Augustine orients his compass to God as he descends into this *terra incognita* of the self: “*quoniam et quod de me scio, te*

*mihi lucente scio, et quod de me nescio, tamdiu nescio, donec fiant tenebrae meae sicut meridies in vultu tuo*" (Augustine 2002, 86).<sup>3</sup>

For Nietzsche, conversely, the Greek problem was best articulated by Pindar, whom he alludes to at the beginning of *Ecce Homo* as he announces his own fundamental philosophical desideratum: *to become what one is*.<sup>4</sup> In vehement contradistinction to Augustine, God can provide no help in this enterprise for Nietzsche, since "God" is merely "a gross answer, an indelicacy against thinkers: at bottom merely a gross prohibition for us: you shall not think!" (EH II 1). Moreover, Nietzsche pours out his final words (in *Ecce Homo*, but also in *The Antichrist* and *Twilight of the Idols*) asking not "Who am I?" but instead framing the fundamental philosophical task as "becoming what one is": a contrast that bears keen scrutiny. Any number of postmodern philosophers (Nietzsche's *epigoni*, all) have convincingly shown that to ask "who am I?" is a fruitless quest fraught with frustrating paradoxes because of the inherently metastable qualities of "self" and "being". Hegel's remark that "*Wesen ist, was gewesen ist*" (Essence is what *has been*) neatly condenses this anxiety into a formula. But to "become" *what* (rather than *who*) one is suggests an entirely alternative philosophical conception. As a consequence, *Ecce Homo* might very well be an "autobiography" or a "testimony", but one of *becoming* rather than *being*.

Augustine could not come truly to himself except through the mediating, salvational agency of God, whereas Nietzsche maintained throughout his career (underlining the notion in *Ecce Homo*) that God was an embarrassing indiscretion for anyone seeking true self-knowledge, and repudiated *ab initio* any need for salvation. In a general sense, *Ecce Homo* and Augustine's *Confessions* represent the ideological limits of what the Christian era has produced, especially if we are entering, as Sam Harris hopefully puts it, "the end of faith".<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, we have Augustine, with his "*salus extra ecclesiam non est*" (there is no salvation outside the church), and Nietzsche with his "*Gott ist tot*". Augustine heard the solemn call of Jesus, Nietzsche the joyful shouting of Dionysus;

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3 "For what I know of myself, I know in your light; and what I do not know of myself, I do not know until those dark qualities become bright as noon in the light of your face" (my translation).

4 "γένοι' οἷος ἑσσί μαθών", in Pindar's *Pythian Odes* II 73 (Pindar 1961, p. 178).

5 Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* (2004) is one of three celebrated bestsellers – the other two are Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (2006) and Christopher Hitchens's *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007) – all of which echo Nietzsche in identifying Christianity as one of the most pernicious ideologies ever to have corrupted the human spirit, even if they part with him in championing a kind of scientific rationalism to take its place. Moreover, the hopeful expectation that science by force of reason would soon eradicate religion (and especially Christianity) is rooted in the Enlightenment, and the arguments of Harris et al. were earlier articulated by Baron D'Holbach in the eighteenth century (1767).

Augustine: a Father of the Church; Nietzsche: a self-proclaimed antichrist. We must acknowledge that these two books belong in the company of one another simply because between them rest the library stacks of fifteen hundred years of spiritual and philosophical striving in Western literature within the context of Christianity.

## 2 Philosophy as Personal Testimony

Both the *Confessions* and *Ecce Homo* offer personal accounts of their authors' lives as backdrops for the philosophical conclusions that follow – a practice known as *testimony*. Augustine sought to convert his readership to the true faith by way of his testimony-as-confession, and Nietzsche used himself as a guinea pig for “becoming what one is” in his own testimonial work.

The word “testimony” itself has a complex pedigree, *testimonium* having evolved in late Latin from *testis*, witness, used in a legal sense. *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* lists “a public profession of religious experience” as one of the senses of “testimony”, a definition that clearly applies to Augustine, perhaps also to Nietzsche in a more complicated way. Garry Wills prefaces his commentary on the *Confessions* by arguing that “unsettling as it is to many, I translate *Confessiones* as *The Testimony*”. He does so both because he understands *confiteri* to mean “to testify” and because Augustine himself uses *testimonium* twice in the first paragraph of the *Confessions*. Wills suggests that the key to the issue lies in the important and “rich theological resonance” of the word *testimonium* and in the way Augustine himself defines *confiteri* (in his *Joannis evangelium tractatus*) as “to speak out what the heart holds true”.<sup>6</sup>

Nietzsche begins *Ecce Homo* with a similar, somewhat ironic, invocation of *testimony* in the foreword: “*ich habe mich nicht ‘unbezeugt gelassen’*” (I have not left myself ‘without witness’), he writes, an oblique reference to Paul (Acts 14:16–17), who remarks of God that “[i]n past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness [Luther Bible: “*und doch hat er sich selbst nicht unbezeugt gelassen*”] in doing good –

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<sup>6</sup> See Wills 1999, p. xiv–xvi. The passage from *Joannis evangelium tractatus* is “*Hoc est enim confiteri, dicere quod habes in corde: si autem aliud in corde habes, aliud dicis; loqueris, non confiteris*” (26.2); Augustine 1988, p. 261. In *Enarrationes in psalmos*, Augustine writes, “*Hoc quid sit, fratres, audite: Testimonium Israel, id est, in quibus cognoscatur quia est vere Israel* (128.8); Augustine 2004, p. 37.



giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy".<sup>7</sup>

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche remarks that "gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession [*Selbstbekenntnis*] of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir" (BGE 6). As Derrida and many other postmodernist readers have shown, Nietzsche's own cogent and compelling critique of truth as an absolute value forces us to question the veracity of his own attempts at such a philosophical "confession": Nietzsche's inauguration of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' must apply of course to his own writings as well.<sup>8</sup> *Ecce Homo* must be read on some level as Nietzsche's own *Selbstbekenntnis*, his own "*ungewollte und unvermerkte mémoires*".

Charles Altieri has tried to rescue *Ecce Homo* from the charge of narcissism by arguing that its emphasis on becoming in "how one becomes what one is" indicates that "one's potential for becoming is manifest as the panoply of properties that resist the negations of idealism, the imperative to fix oneself as what one is not" (Altieri 1985, p. 398). In the course of his discussion, Altieri refers to *Ecce Homo* as a "reverse" *Confessions*, pointing out that Augustine's testimony depends on "fixing his identity through a complicated series of models and stories within stories, all testifying to his capacity to imitate Christ and saintly imitators of Christ" (Altieri 1985, p. 399). Augustine remains mired in the mimetic mode, but for Nietzsche, "autobiography testifies to the development of a power to create and to impose meanings" (Altieri 1985, p. 399).

Augustine begins from the brute fact of original sin. He internalizes the story of the Fall, eats his own forbidden fruit, and organizes his entire testament around the basic assumption of his sinfulness. Born guilty, only God can redeem him. His testimony takes the form at once of a prayer of praise and gratitude and of a neo-Platonic meditation of man's place in the cosmos. His "testimony" necessarily involves praising God in direct address, since human beings "naturally wish to praise [God]" (*laudare te vult homo*), in spite of the fact that, as a man, "he carries his mortality and the testimony of his sin all around him" (*homo circumferens mortalitatem suam, circumferens testimonium peccati sui*) (Augustine

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<sup>7</sup> Incidentally, "without witness" appears as "*sine testimonio*" in the Vulgate Bible.

<sup>8</sup> The first to use the term "hermeneutics of suspicion" (*herméneutique du soupçon*) was Paul Ricœur in an essay published in 1964 as "La critique de la religion", though Michel Foucault is also often identified as one of the earliest proponents of the practice stemming from his seminal 1964 essay "Nietzsche, Marx, Freud", which appeared in 1967. Nietzsche initiated the practice before the term was coined and is acknowledged as inspiration for the term by both Ricœur and Foucault.



2002, p. 2–3). Testimony is unavoidable for Augustine because his entire existence as a human being depends on and tends toward God: the very fact of his *being* – notwithstanding its sinful nature – is his *testimonium*.

In *Ecce Homo*, by contrast, Nietzsche offers quite a different testimony: “*Eigentliche religiöse Schwierigkeiten zum Beispiel kenne ich nicht aus Erfahrung. Es ist mir gänzlich entgangen, inwiefern ich ‘sündhaft’ sein sollte.*” (EH II 1: Really religious difficulties I don’t know from experience. It has escaped me altogether in what way I was supposed to be ‘sinful’.) Early in his personal narrative, Nietzsche thus short-circuits the compulsion to confess that the conviction of original sin evidently produces in Christians such as Augustine; Nietzsche must therefore have a different purpose in offering *his* testimony. Of course, he begins the preface to *Ecce Homo* by announcing his ostensible purpose as one of establishing identity: “*Hört mich!*” he exclaims, “*denn ich bin der und der. Verwechselt mich vor allem nicht!*” (EH P 1: Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all – do not mistake me for someone else!). In the proclamation “*ich bin der and der*”, one can’t help hearing the echo of Nietzsche’s injunction, “*du sollst der werden, der du bist*”, yet another earlier articulation of the Pindarian epigram from *The Gay Science* (GS 270). Although Nietzsche’s unavoidably duplicitous caveat here must be a tantalizing *hors d’oeuvre* for postmodernists to gorge themselves on, the fact that there are multiple selves in *Ecce Homo* and that Nietzsche himself cannot claim a privileged position to tell us who he is both go without saying. In large part, our caution in approaching a “confessional” work like *Ecce Homo* reflects our acquaintance with the unreliability of previous personal testimonies, including Augustine’s *Confessions* (as well as Rousseau’s notoriously hyperbolic *Confessions*) which contains anecdotes that Nietzsche refers to in the above-mentioned letter to Overbeck as “revoltingly dishonest” (Nietzsche 1969b, p. 240).

Yet if there is a point of contrast between the two works that might offer some specific relevance to philosophy, I would suggest that it is this: whereas Augustine might unconsciously disclose to us his philosophical method in the *Confessions*, this is not his primary purpose; in *Ecce Homo*, by contrast, I suspect Nietzsche is well aware of the impossibility of presenting his “true” self (a necessary fiction), but he does intend to show by example *how* a philosopher of the new type conducts himself. Whereas in Augustine we get dogma masquerading as humility and praise, all in pursuit of the question “who am I?”, in *Ecce Homo* we receive a *method* cloaked in the guise of vanity and self-importance (“*warum ich so klug bin, warum ich so weise bin*”, etc.), all pursued according to the dictum “*du sollst der werden, der du bist*”.

Thus, Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* certainly is a kind of inverse *Confessions*.<sup>9</sup> Derrida suggested that *Ecce Homo* could be seen as a book of "Dionysian counter-confessions", a book stained, like the *Confessions*, with the tears of its author (Derrida 1993, p. 122).<sup>10</sup> Like Augustine, Nietzsche seeks to know himself, he seeks a kind of "truth", but he challenges Augustine's basic assumptions, including the notion of a soul, the notion of a self, and the intellectual dishonesty of invoking God to satisfy our quest for absolute truth. Whereas Augustine's *contemptus mundi* and disgust for our corporeal existence offer a departure point for the flight toward God, Nietzsche takes visceral offense at the idea of denying *this* world, and counters with the practice of *amor fati*.

### 3 Similarities of Style

Although it would be perhaps going too far to say that Augustine's *Confessions* was a specific model for the *structure* of *Ecce Homo*, I do not think there can be much doubt that Nietzsche had the *form* of the philosophical testimony in mind at least when he sat down to write *Ecce Homo*. In the previous sections I have tried to show the points of philosophical correspondence between these two works; I should like to conclude by mentioning a few correspondences of literary style.

To begin with a general point, it is interesting how filled with questions both these works are. Karl Jaspers famously remarked in reference to Augustine that he "thinks in questions", a quip that would apply equally well to Nietzsche (Jaspers 1962, p. 75). The first twenty lines of *Confessiones* contain four questions (six or seven questions, depending on the translation in English); the *Vorwort* to *Ecce Homo* also asks four questions (the Exergue raises a fifth: "*Wie sollte ich nicht meinem ganzen Leben dankbar sein?*") Without delving too digressively into an evaluation of the force of their respective questions, it seems legitimate to acknowledge that for both writers, philosophizing in the form of penetrating questions is a fundamental stylistic trope.

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce Benson cautions that "one might be tempted to characterize Nietzsche's 'confessions' in *Ecce Homo* as the inverse of Augustine's – not the tortured move *to* faith but the tortured move *away from* faith", and hence Benson argues that "Nietzsche moves – or attempts to move – from one faith to *another*" (Benson 2008, p. 15). Naturally the success of Benson's argument depends on how one defines "faith", but also on whether one interprets key Nietzschean doctrines (e.g. the myth of eternal recurrence) as parables designed to inspire faith, or as existential thought experiments whose purpose is to illustrate the urgent difficulties of *amor fati*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Benson 2008, p. 15.

Focusing again on just the openings of both works, we can observe also a curious reflexive quality to the writing that, while of course particularly suited to the autobiographical mode, suggests that for both authors the production of these works was itself a form of applying their philosophical principles to their own lives: for Augustine, the philosophical autobiography offered an opportunity to *confess* his faith; for Nietzsche, actually writing *Ecce Homo* provided an opportunity to “become what he was”.

For Augustine, this reflexive language is part and parcel of the philosophical crisis of identity and the first step toward his refuge in God: “*Factus ipse mihi magno quaestio*”, he writes at the outset, which can be translated as, “I had become a significant problem *to myself*”. The *Confessions* is a book heavy with reflection, with reflexivity. But so is *Ecce Homo* – Nietzsche ends his exertion with a similar reflexive announcement: “*Und so erzähle ich mir mein Leben*” (And so I tell my life *to myself*). Aside from whatever therapeutic value the confessional mode offers its practitioners, it also cannot help providing an occasion for them to apply to themselves whatever philosophical principles they tout.

Compare also Augustine’s celebrated “to Carthage then I came” passage with Nietzsche’s repudiation of living non-sensually:

I came to Carthage and all around me hissed a cauldron of illicit loves... [...] I was without any desire for incorruptible nourishment, [...] my soul was in rotten health [...]. I polluted the spring water of friendship with the filth of concupiscence. (Augustine 1998, p. 35)

And Nietzsche:

It was then that my instinct made its inexorable decision against any longer yielding, going along, and confounding myself. Any kind of life, the most unfavorable conditions, sickness, poverty – anything seemed preferable to that unseemly “selflessness” into which I had got myself originally in ignorance and *youth* and in which I had got stuck later on from inertia and so-called “sense of duty”. (EH III HAH 4)

As philosophically opposed as these passages are, they resonate with similar pathological language, a similar anxiety over the threat of unhealthiness surrounding them. For Augustine, the appropriate response is denial of the flesh (even if he wallows linguistically in his descriptions of concupiscence), whereas for Nietzsche, it is the denial itself that is to be denied.

Many of Nietzsche’s discussions in the works of 1888 demonstrate how such characteristically Augustinian denials were a recipe for decadence. It is almost as if he has Augustine specifically in mind when he remarks in *Ecce Homo* that “resistance to the natural instincts – in one word, ‘selflessness’ – that is what was hitherto called *morality*. – With the *Dawn* I first took up the fight against the mor-

ality that would unself man" (EH III D 2). Kaufmann notes that he coined the verb "unself" to meet the challenge of translating Nietzsche's "*Entselbstungs-Moral*", which we might also render as "the morality of self-denial", a cornerstone of the Christian edifice.

We might finally consider these two figures as presenting alternative responses to the classical tradition: Augustine saw wisdom in the ancients, however misguided they were, but he understood the entire tradition to have been supplanted by the advent of Christ. Nietzsche argued precisely the opposite: human life had never been more authentic than in the age of the Greeks and the Republic, and Christianity was responsible for reducing humanity to the pitiable state he found it in circa 1870. Nietzsche's language even bears an echo of Augustinian style when he describes this disaster: "After such vistas and with such a burning hunger in our conscience and science, how could we still be satisfied with *present-day man*?" (EH III Z 2). Augustine also spoke of a burning hunger driving his flight toward God, writing that "I have been *burning* to meditate in your law" (Augustine 1998, 221). Burning (in various senses) of course occurs throughout the *Confessions*, as Augustine chronicles the conversion of his burning lust for fleshly delights to a burning lust for God.

Added to these examples are a host of coincidences and superficial parallels worth noting: both books were written when their authors were roughly the same age; Nietzsche forty-four, Augustine forty-three. Perhaps both books thus also signal some kind of philosophical mid-life crisis, as both men sat down to compose these reflective works in early middle age – Augustine just as he was about to begin his life's core work as Bishop of Hippo, Nietzsche just a few weeks before he collapsed on a Turin street corner, hopelessly insane. Prior to this point in their respective careers, both men had been travelers throughout Italy – Augustine a peregrine because of intellectual restlessness, Nietzsche because of poor physical health. From his comments in the *Confessions*, we learn that Augustine loved fourth-century Rome, from *Ecce Homo* that Nietzsche despised nineteenth-century Rome. Freudians will note that both authors had ambivalent relationships to their fathers, who were in both cases conspicuous by their absence, and instead grew up under the influence of devout Christian mothers. In terms of style we may say also that both books are prayers – Augustine to God, Nietzsche to the few kindred spirits he hopes will discover him in a future he won't be around to experience. Both are tales of conversion: in Augustine's case, from Manichaeism to Christianity, in Nietzsche's case, from Christianity to devout anti-Christianity. *Ecce Homo* can be considered a literary response to *The Confessions* for all these reasons and more. Consequently, philosophy and literary criticism should perhaps devote deeper attention to reading Nietzsche, and especially *Ecce Homo*, as a response to Augustine.



André van der Braak

# How One Becomes What One Is

**Abstract:** Throughout his work Nietzsche uses Pindar’s injunction “Become who you are!” to spur his readers on to what appears to be an agonal process of self-cultivation and self-overcoming. However, whereas in his earlier work Nietzsche often uses various active metaphors to describe such a process of becoming who one is, in *Ecce Homo* he stresses the absence of any struggle, and describes “becoming what one is” as a physiological and subconscious process. The metaphors of self-cultivation and self-overcoming give way to a metaphor of forgetting oneself, even misunderstanding oneself. For Nietzsche, it seems, any conscious effort at becoming what one is, is ultimately counterproductive. This essay elucidates Nietzsche’s metaphor of forgetting the self, rather than cultivating or overcoming it, and reconstructs a non-intentional perspective on “becoming what one is” that supplements Nietzsche’s more active metaphors in his earlier work.

## 1 Introduction

Throughout his work Nietzsche uses Pindar’s injunction “Become who you are!” to spur his readers on to what appears to be an agonal process of self-cultivation and self-overcoming.<sup>1</sup> However, whereas Nietzsche in his earlier work often uses various active metaphors to describe such a process of becoming who one is, later on they increasingly give way to more passive metaphors. In Nietzsche’s later work, a naturalistic perspective can be found, which renders such active metaphors somewhat problematic. For, seen from the perspective of will to power, the notions of ‘I’ and ‘will’ are both recognized to be illusory. “Become who you are!” changes to “becoming what one is”. There can no longer be any voluntaristic master agent that can drive such a process. Consciousness is not an independent causal agent, but a by-product of subconscious bodily drives. Conscious thought is nothing but the expression of the many drives that make up the individual as will to power.

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<sup>1</sup> Translations of quotations from Nietzsche’s works are by R.J. Hollingdale (D, TI, WS), Walter Kaufmann (AC, BGE), Duncan Large (EH) and Graham Parkes (Z). Translations of quotations from the *Nachlass* and correspondence are by the author.

In *Ecce Homo*, this perspective can be found in its most radical form. Nietzsche stresses the absence of any struggle, and describes “becoming what one is” as a physiological and subconscious process, something that grows within us, underneath the surface of consciousness. Nietzsche describes “know thyself” as a recipe for ruin: in order to become what one is, one has to have no idea of who one is, and keep a distance from all the great imperatives. The metaphors of self-cultivation and self-overcoming – which suggest a conscious pursuit of emancipation and authenticity, leading up to a sovereign individual – give way in *Ecce Homo* to a metaphor of forgetting oneself, misunderstanding oneself, in order not to interfere with the “regulating idea” that grows below the surface of consciousness. For Nietzsche, it seems, any conscious effort at becoming what one is, is ultimately in vain.<sup>2</sup>

This essay will further elucidate Nietzsche’s metaphor of forgetting the self, rather than cultivating or overcoming it, and will reconstruct, on the basis of *Ecce Homo* and *Nachlass* excerpts from the same period, a non-intentional perspective on “becoming what one is” that supplements Nietzsche’s more active metaphors in his earlier work.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 *Ecce Homo* as Self-Help Book or Preparation for *The Antichrist*?

In the introduction to his excellent English translation of *Ecce Homo*, Duncan Large suggests that it can be read as an instruction manual for “how to become what you are” (Large 2007, p. xvii). Such an instruction would have to be compatible with Nietzsche’s conception of human individuality as the particular configuration of a person’s drives. “Becoming what one is” would refer to an individual process of educating the drives, in which what is optimal for one person is not necessarily optimal for another. Nietzsche’s own life is not a recipe to be followed, but serves as a model or example (*Vorbild*). In a modern way of speaking, we could view *Ecce Homo* then as a kind of self-help book that promotes the process of self-becoming as an ethical ideal, with Nietzsche himself as “an inspirational example of successfully achieved selfhood” (Large 2007, p. xvii).

Large describes self-becoming as connected to self-overcoming: “overcoming the parts of yourself that are not, ultimately, of yourself or do not, as Nietzsche

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<sup>2</sup> I have written more about this in my Dutch dissertation (van der Braak 2004).

<sup>3</sup> For a more extensive discussion of this matter, see van der Braak 2011.

puts it, belong to your task, your destiny” (Large 2007, p. xvii). This means that “you incorporate what was alien into your task by affirming it and deeming it retrospectively to have been a necessary stage in your personal development” (Large 2007, p. xvii). But can *Ecce Homo* really be seen as a self-help book?

In my interpretation *Ecce Homo* serves as an explanation of how Nietzsche has become a person that is capable of perceiving what is true, and of sniffing out lies. In other words, one who is capable of performing a reevaluation of values. Nietzsche wrote *Ecce Homo* in order to pave the way for a successful reception of *The Antichrist*, and its objective is to legitimize the author of that work. As Daniel Conway puts it, “*Ecce Homo* functions, in large part, to document Nietzsche’s legislative credentials” (Conway 1997, p. 115). With *Ecce Homo*, he wanted to prevent the confiscation of *The Antichrist*.

### 3 “The Truth is in My Nostrils”: Truth as Courage, Error as Cowardice

“Do not mistake me for someone else!”, Nietzsche warns the reader of *Ecce Homo* (EH Preface 1). Perhaps Nietzsche researchers should also take this to heart. One of the remarkable and even shocking things in *Ecce Homo*, for the Nietzsche researcher anyway, is Nietzsche’s insistence, already in the Foreword, that such a thing as “truth” *does* exist (EH Preface 3). This cannot be explained away as merely rhetoric, or a sign of impending madness, for Nietzsche holds the same perspective on truth – what Daniel Conway has called his “emergent realism” (Conway 1999) – in *The Antichrist* and *Twilight of the Idols*.

For Nietzsche, all speaking about consciousness, thought and convictions is merely a way of speaking about the ‘great reason’ of the body. From Nietzsche’s perspective of will to power, all philosophical judgments are symptoms of an underlying physiological condition. Philosophical allegiances either to “truth” or appearance” in a metaphysical sense are equally symptomatic of decadence. When Nietzsche speaks again, in 1888, about “reality”, he leaves its ontological status vague. We could interpret it, for now, as the Dionysian flux of life that the healthy are able to stand, and the decadent need to be protected from. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche speaks about the priest’s “instinctive hatred of reality” that goes with such decadence, a pathological recoil from it (AC 30). The opposite of that would be a healthy, receptive attunement to reality.

In the preface to *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche’s emphasis on truth and error seems to be not in an extra-moral sense, but in a moral sense. Being able to perceive truthfully seems a moral issue for Nietzsche: it has to do with who one is,



how tough one dares to be with oneself, how sincere one dares to be with oneself. “How much truth can a spirit *stand*, how much truth does it *dare*? – for me that became more and more the real measure of value. Error ( – belief in the ideal – ) is not blindness, error is *cowardice* ...” (EH Preface 3). But, on the other hand, how much reality one can stand simply depends on one’s health. The idealist cannot help recoiling from it, whereas the healthy person naturally embraces reality as it is. Later in *Ecce Homo*, as he discusses *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche says:

[O]ne comes only so close to truth as one’s strength *allows* one’s courage to dare advance. Knowledge, saying “yes” to reality, is just as much a necessity for the strong as are, for the weak (inspired by weakness), cowardice and *flight* from reality – the “ideal” ... They are not free to know: *décadents* need the lie, it is one of the conditions of their preservation. (EH III BT 2)

Because the healthy do not need to flee from reality, they not only have a wider range of perspectives at their disposal but are also capable of certain higher experiences that decadent people are not, Nietzsche claims. Because of this, they are more attuned to reality as it is and can gain subjectively valid knowledge of it.

## 4 How Those with a Great Destiny Become What They Are

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche describes how he, Nietzsche, became the healthy person with strong drives, strong enough to bear truth and expose the lies of, for example, decadent Christian priests. *Ecce Homo* is meant as an attack on idealism, consequently all conscious effort needs to be excised from his account of how he has become what he is. Therefore, the metaphors of self-cultivation and self-overcoming, of Nietzsche’s earlier work, are absent here.

The answers that Nietzsche gives are in terms of nutrition (in the widest sense of the word): “how do *you* personally have to nourish yourself in order to attain your maximum of strength, of *virtù* in the Renaissance style, of moraline-free virtue?” (EH II 1). This is followed by a discussion of German and English cooking. But we shouldn’t forget that in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche says that the mind resembles most of all – a stomach (BGE 230). Nietzsche continues to take on the subjects of place, climate and relaxation.

In section 9 of ‘Why I am So Clever’ in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes that he can no longer avoid answering the question of how to become what you are,

which is connected with the art of, not self-creation or self-becoming, but surprisingly enough the art of self-preservation. Such a self-preservation seems only important for a very small minority, those that assume they have an unusually great task:

[I]f you assume that your task, your destiny, the *fate* of your task lies considerably beyond the average measure, then no danger would be greater than facing up to yourself *with* this task. (EH II 9)

*Ecce Homo* is not a self-help book for a general audience; it is at most a self-help book for free spirits. But more likely, the format of a self-help book is a thinly veiled way for Nietzsche to speak about his own development:

Becoming what you are presupposes that you have not the slightest inkling *what* you are. From this point of view even life's *mistakes* have their own sense and value, the temporary byways and detours, the delays, the "modesties", the seriousness wasted on tasks which lie beyond *the* task. (EH II 9)

Nietzsche's affirmation of his own "byways and detours" could therefore be seen as not only an artistic form of self-creation, involving, as Large points out, a retrospective reinterpretation which inevitably involves bending the historical truth a little bit (Large 2007, p. xviii), but also as part of a more general theory of illness and health, which explains why Nietzsche's health is a form of "the great health", which makes him uniquely suited for performing a revaluation of values. Again, in my view, the single overriding purpose of *Ecce Homo*, which should be kept in mind with the interpretation of all its passages, is to show why Nietzsche is fit to perform a revaluation of values. Nietzsche continues: "[W]here *nosce te ipsum* would be the recipe for decline, then forgetting yourself, *misunderstanding* yourself, belittling, constricting, mediocritizing yourself becomes good sense itself" (EH II 9). In order to interpret this, let us turn to Nietzsche's use of the old notion, already popular in antiquity, of first and second nature.

## 5 First and Second Nature

In the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche speaks about second nature in a negative way: attempting to overcome the errors of the past leads at best to the construction of new instincts, of a second nature, that causes our inherited, inborn first nature to scorch and shrivel up (UM II 3). Usually this second nature

is weaker than the first nature. But eventually this second nature will become a new first nature.

In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes more positively that any education provides us with a second nature, a protective snake skin that allows our first nature to develop unhindered and to ripen underneath (D 455). He adds, however, that most people are unable to shed this skin when their first nature has ripened. The active *development* of one's second nature should be distinguished from the more passive *ripening*, and eventual revelation, of one's first nature. In his *Nachlass*, Nietzsche writes:

My being reveals itself – whether it develops?

From childhood on overloaded with foreign character and foreign knowledge. I am discovering myself. (NF 1878, 28[16]; KSA 8/506)

In *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Nietzsche says:

One day, when one has long since been educated as the world understands it, one *discovers oneself*: here begins the task of the thinker; now the time has come to call on him for assistance – not as an educator, but as one who has educated himself and who thus knows how it is done. (HAH II WS 267)

But the relationship between first and second nature is more complex. In two letters from December 1882, Nietzsche uses the distinction between first and second nature to answer some critical remarks from his friend Erwin Rohde, presumably about *The Joyous Science* that appeared that year. Apparently, Rohde was not all that impressed by Nietzsche's newfound life-affirming demeanor. In a letter to Hans von Bülow, Nietzsche writes:

What do I care when my friends say that my current “free-spirited” demeanor [*Freigeisterei*] is an eccentric, teeth-gritting *decision*, that is forced upon my own inclination? It may indeed be a “second nature”: but I will prove that only with this second nature I have come into the actual *possession* of my first nature. (KSB 6/290)

According to this interpretation, Nietzsche thinks Rohde has failed to differentiate between Nietzsche's *historical* first nature and his *actual* first nature (which now is able to manifest itself through an acquired second nature). In Nietzsche's letter to Rohde himself, he expresses himself slightly differently:

Yes, I do have a “second nature”, but not in order to destroy the first but to *stand* it. I would have long ago perished from my “first nature” – I almost did perish from it.

What you say about an “eccentric decision” is by the way completely *true*. I could name you place and time. But – *who* was it that *made the decision*? – For sure, my dearest friend, it was the *first* nature: **it wanted** “to live”. – (KSB 6/291)

Nietzsche suggests here that it was his first nature that decided to adopt the second nature, in order to protect the organism “Nietzsche” from itself. Reviewing *Human, All too Human* in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes about the re-emergence of his first nature:

That nethermost self, as if buried alive, as if made mute beneath the constant *need* to pay heed to other selves (– which is what reading is!) awoke slowly, shyly, hesitantly – but finally *it spoke again*. (EH III HAH 4)

Nietzsche also writes about *The Wanderer and his Shadow* and *Daybreak* as a return to himself.

Let us return to the interpretation of section 9 of ‘Why I am so Clever’. A second nature can function in service of a first nature. Therefore, Nietzsche writes, even a selfless Christian morality can be useful and effective in this way:

Brotherly love, living for other people and things *can* be a preventative measure for maintaining the harshest selfishness. This is the exception, when – against my habit and conviction – I side with the “selfless” drives: in this case they labor in the service of *egoism, self-discipline* [Selbstsucht, Selbstzucht]. (EH II 9)

Such a healthy egoism is only for strong natures. As Nietzsche notes in *Twilight of the Idols*: “The value of egoism depends on the physiological value of him who possesses it” (TI IX 33). The question in all this is, however: who decides to employ those selfless drives in the service of self-discipline? Who or what is behind the steering wheel? Nietzsche makes it very clear that it is not consciousness itself:

You need to keep the whole surface of consciousness – consciousness *is* a surface – untainted by any of the great imperatives. Beware even every great phrase, every great pose! With all of them the instinct risks “understanding itself” too soon – – Meanwhile, in the depths, the organizing “idea” with a calling to be master grows and grows – it begins to command, it slowly leads you *back* out of byways and detours, it prepares *individual* qualities and skills which will one day prove indispensable as means to the whole – it trains one by one the *ancillary* capacities before it breathes a word about the dominant task, about “goal”, “purpose”, “sense”. – (EH II 9)

This is an utterly perplexing passage. It seems unabashedly teleological. What is this organizing “idea” with a calling to be master? Is it one of the drives, some kind of master drive? Is it the unchangeable “granite of spiritual *fatum*” deep

within each person, that Nietzsche refers to elsewhere (BGE 231)? Furthermore, this passage also suggests that Nietzsche was destined to become the revaluator of all values, and that he had the courage and the good sense to let this guiding instinct unfold itself, while keeping his conscious mind in the dark. Nietzsche even continues with a remarkable, if patently false, rhetorical flourish:

I lack any memory of ever having exerted myself – there is no trace of a *struggle* evident in my life, I am the opposite of a heroic nature. “Wanting” something, “striving” for something, having in view a “purpose”, a “wish” – I know nothing of this from experience. [...] I have not the slightest wish for anything to be other than it is; I myself do not want to be different. But this is how I have always lived. I have never wished for anything. (EH II 9)

## 6 Teleology, Pregnancy, Procreation

How can all this be squared with Nietzsche’s perspective of will to power, of the world as a non-teleological plurality of conflicting wills to power, aimed at increasing their power, each at every moment drawing its ultimate consequence?

Wolfgang Müller-Lauter has called attention to a lingering ambiguity in Nietzsche’s thought on teleology. In describing Nietzsche’s views on the body as a command structure, Müller-Lauter points to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where the body is described as “a plurality with one meaning, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd” and “a great reason” (Z I 4). Plurality and unity, purposelessness and purpose seem to go hand in hand here. In a long note in 1884, Nietzsche assumes “that a *purposefulness* rules events on the smallest scale”, and speculates that this could be due to “*immensely higher* and more comprehensive *intellects* than the one we are conscious of” (NF 1883–1884, 24[16]: KSA 10/654).

Nietzsche’s thoughts on teleology can perhaps be clarified with the help of two metaphors: that of pregnancy, and that of procreation. In *Ecce Homo*, he speaks about how,

in that state of profound tension to which pregnancy condemns the spirit and basically the whole organism, a chance occurrence, any kind of external stimulation has too violent an effect, “sinks in” too deep. [...] A kind of self-immurement is one of the foremost instinctual ruses of spiritual pregnancy. Shall I allow an *alien* thought to climb secretly over the wall? – (EH II 3)

Therefore, Nietzsche advises, for example, against reading. When pregnant with a great task, self-defense is important: “Not seeing many things, not hearing them, not allowing them to approach you – first ruse, first proof that you are

no accident but a necessity” (EH II 8). In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes more about “the holy condition of pregnancy”:

*Ideal selfishness* – Is there a more holy condition than that of pregnancy? To do all we do in the unspoken belief that it has somehow to benefit that which is coming to be within us! – has to *enhance* its mysterious worth, the thought of which fills us with delight! In this condition we avoid many things without having to force ourself very hard! We suppress our anger, we offer the hand of conciliation: our child shall grow out of all that is gentlest and best. We are horrified if we are sharp or abrupt: suppose it should pour a drop of evil into the dear unknown’s cup of life! Everything is veiled, ominous, we know nothing of what is taking place, we wait and try to be *ready*. At the same time, a pure and purifying feeling of profound irresponsibility reigns in us almost like that of an auditor before the curtain has gone up – *it is growing, it is coming to light: we have no right to determine either its value or the hour of its coming.* All the influence we can exert lies in keeping it safe. “What is growing here is something greater than we are” is our most secret hope: we prepare everything for it so that it may come happily into the world: not only everything that may prove useful to it but also the joyfulness and laurel-wreaths of our soul. – It is in this *state of consecration* that one should live! It is a state one can live in! [...] This is *ideal selfishness*: continually to watch over and care for and to keep our soul still, so that our fruitfulness shall *come to a happy fulfillment!* Thus, as intermediaries, we watch over and care for to the *benefit of all*; and the mood in which we live, this mood of pride and gentleness, is a balm which spreads far around us and on to restless souls too. – (D 552)

Nietzsche’s remarks on pregnancy should be read with Diotima’s views from the *Symposium* (Nietzsche’s *Liebingsdichtung*)<sup>4</sup> in mind:

“All of us are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth. [...] [W]hen pregnant animals or persons draw near to beauty, they become gentle and joyfully disposed and give birth and reproduce; but near ugliness they are foulfaced and draw back in pain; they turn away and shrink back and do not reproduce.” (*Symposium* 206cd)<sup>5</sup>

Müller-Lauter points out that Nietzsche explains the body’s expansion of power by alluding to the phenomenon of procreation. Nietzsche calls procreating the real achievement of the individual and hence his “highest interest”; he understands procreation as the “*highest expression of power*” from “the center of the whole individuation” (NF 1886–1887, 7[9]: KSA 12/295). On the other hand, Müller-Lauter notes, procreation is the ultimate surrender of power: the entire body surrenders power in favor of the origination of a new body (Müller-Lauter 1999a,

<sup>4</sup> See Kaufmann 1974, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Plato 1997, p. 489). Incidentally – and this is not insignificant when speaking about *Ecce Homo* – according to Diotima, the goddess who presides at childbirth is *Moirai* (Fate).

p. 182). As Müller-Lauter points out, this blatantly contradicts Nietzsche's fundamental understanding of the conflicting wills to power.

Diotima does not distinguish between the male begetting and the female giving birth aspects of procreation. She describes procreation as a process of opening up, so that what one carries within oneself can manifest itself. The perspective on "becoming what one is" in *Ecce Homo* is about such an opening up and giving birth to what is inside. Such a process is only possible after having allowed one's first nature to grow uninterrupted by protecting it with a solid second nature. This giving birth has to do with Nietzsche's writings. For Nietzsche, becoming who he is has been connected with his task, his *Aufgabe*:

Become more and more who you are – the teacher and educator [*Bildner*] of yourself! You are not an author, you write only for yourself! Thus you cultivate the remembrance of your good moments and find their coherence, the golden chain of your self! In this way you prepare for the time when you have to speak! (NF 1881, 11[297]; KSA 9/555)

*Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche's presentation of the golden chain of his self, as the completion of his preparation for the time when he has to speak. It serves as a prelude to the publication of *The Antichrist*, "the greatest philosophical event of all time, with which the history of humankind will be broken into two opposing halves" (KSB 8/447).<sup>6</sup> Who would have the time or the inclination to write a self-help book when such a momentous event is under way?

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<sup>6</sup> Letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, 4 October 1888.

Rebecca Bamford

# *Ecce Homo*: Philosophical Autobiography in the Flesh

**Abstract:** This essay argues that in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche engages critically with philosophical methodology as a part of his wider interest in the transvaluation of all values. It shows that Nietzsche's remarks in the text are commensurate with his wider critical engagement with philosophical methodology in texts such as *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The advantage of reading the text as philosophical autobiography, this essay suggests, is that it helps us to appreciate that *Ecce Homo* offers a performative critique of philosophical methodology that prizes pure rationality at the expense of embodiment.

Give up pursuing eloquence, unless  
You can speak as you feel! One's very heart  
Must pour it out, with primal power address  
One's hearers and compel them with an art  
Deeper than words. [...]  
(Goethe, *Faust I*)<sup>1</sup>

After having looked long enough between the philosopher's lines and fingers, I say to myself: by far the greater part of conscious thinking must still be included among the instinctive activities, and that goes for philosophical thinking. We have to relearn here ... 'being conscious' is not in any decisive sense the *opposite* of what is instinctive: most of the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instincts  
(BGE 3)<sup>2</sup>

## 1 Introduction

Given the notoriety of chapter headings such as "Why I Am So Clever", as well as the proximity of its writing to Nietzsche's mental collapse in 1889, *Ecce Homo* has tended to be treated with some suspicion by philosophers. There are two

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<sup>1</sup> "Wenn ihr's nicht fühlt, ihr werdet's nicht erjagen./ Wenn es nicht aus der Seele dringt/ Und mit urkräftigem Behagen/ Die Herzen aller Hörer zwingt." Goethe 1987a, lines 534–538.

<sup>2</sup> Translations of Nietzsche's writings in this essay are from Nietzsche 2000a (EH), Nietzsche 1986a (HAH), Nietzsche 1974 (GS), Nietzsche 2005b (TSZ), Nietzsche 1996b (GM), and Nietzsche 1998 (BGE).



main reasons for this. First, it is not clear how Nietzsche's styles of address to his readers, his remarks on his cleverness and his wisdom, his explanation for why he writes such good books, and his claim that he is a destiny, are to be explained. Indeed, Nietzsche's comments on his previous works in *Ecce Homo*, such as his own assessment of the importance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (henceforth *Zarathustra*) within his body of work, have often been resisted.<sup>3</sup> Second, it is not clear what kind of philosophical work is done in *Ecce Homo*, adding to the general suspicion and confusion that surrounds this text. In particular, it is not clear whether or not *Ecce Homo* is a work of autobiography, philosophical autobiography, or philosophy.

I want to move analysis of *Ecce Homo* beyond the question of what kind of text it is, in order to focus more clearly upon its philosophical significance. I am interested in the question of what philosophical work is done in *Ecce Homo*, and how this is accomplished. I treat the text as a work of philosophical autobiography, using work by Julian Baggini to define philosophical autobiography as interplay between character and thought that is revelatory of a philosopher's particular mode of philosophizing.<sup>4</sup> My chief claim is that by critically engaging with philosophical methodology in and through *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche is opening up the possibility that philosophy can be done in a manner that is not *wholly* dependent on the "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject" (GM III 12).<sup>5</sup> I show that this critical encounter in *Ecce Homo* is commensurate with a set of claims that are also evident in Nietzsche's earlier critical engagements with philosophical methodology, in texts such as *The Gay Science*, *Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

## 2 The Meaning of "Philosophical Autobiography"

The nature of autobiography, and its philosophical significance, has recently begun to receive more sustained attention. Julian Baggini has claimed that we

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Tanner 1994. For a response to Tanner, see Loeb 2005.

<sup>4</sup> See Baggini 2002.

<sup>5</sup> The claim that Nietzsche holds an embodied account of subjectivity has been defended by Blondel 1991, and Brown 2006. The recent flurry of interest in Nietzsche's philosophy of mind has not paid substantial attention to *Ecce Homo*, even though scholars interested in this area have been analyzing the later works, especially *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, in order to develop a more detailed understanding of Nietzschean subjectivity. See e.g. Katsafanas 2005, Katsafanas 2013; Sachs 2008; Acampora 2006, 2015; Guay 2006.

can distinguish between biography and autobiography in one important respect: while a biographer may fail or succeed in revealing truths about their subject, in an autobiography the writer almost invariably reveals something of themselves, because the *act* of talking or writing is revelatory.<sup>6</sup> Baggini argues that autobiography is philosophical when something that is revealed about the author's personality or character sheds light on how they philosophize.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, using Quine as an example, Baggini contends that the interplay between character and thought *as revelatory of a philosopher's particular mode of philosophizing* is what distinguishes philosophical autobiography from other autobiographical writing by philosophers and others.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, Baggini points out that one of the most important things that philosophical autobiography can teach us is that philosophers “need to accept and understand the role of personal judgment in philosophizing” (Baggini 2002, p. 311). He therefore suggests that engaging with philosophers' autobiographies not only confronts us with the “seemingly obvious fact” that “different philosophical theories reflect deep-seated differences in personality”, but also that philosophical autobiography provides compelling evidence that philosophy may not be entitled to claim a purely objective disciplinary methodology, the products of which are entirely distinct from those who produce them, and that this argument places “the onus of proof onto those who deny the personal nature of philosophizing” (Baggini 2002, p. 301–302).<sup>9</sup>

Baggini's claim for the significance of philosophical autobiography to philosophical methodology distinguishes between truth and truthfulness:

If by ‘the truth’ of a life we mean the one, true, complete account of it, then no such truths can be told. But we can tell more or less truthful stories about our lives and those of others: ones which do not gloss over embarrassing facts, ones which reveal many sides of a personality and not just those we wish to promote. Relating such a truthful story is not about cataloguing the largest possible number of true facts about a person. It requires judgment and skill and is more like an art than science, or analytic philosophy. (Baggini 2002, p. 309)

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<sup>6</sup> See Baggini 2002, p. 299.

<sup>7</sup> See Baggini 2002, p. 300–301.

<sup>8</sup> See Baggini 2002, p. 301.

<sup>9</sup> See also Feyerabend 1995. In order to avoid reducing philosophical methodology to the “clash of opinions”, Baggini takes objectivity to be something for which philosophers may still strive, even without complete success; the products of philosophical methodology are to be constrained by facts and logic even though they may not be reducible to these (Baggini 2002, p. 307–308).

Baggini claims that he does not recall the source of the distinction between an account that is “the truth” and one that is “truthful”.<sup>10</sup> He might also have cited Bernard Williams’ extensive discussion of this distinction in *Truth and Truthfulness*, although given that this discussion was published in the same year as Baggini’s article, Baggini may well have lacked the opportunity to engage with it. Williams, of course, attributes the distinction between truth and truthfulness to Nietzsche; however, Baggini’s discussion overlooks Nietzsche entirely.<sup>11</sup>

By neglecting to discuss Nietzsche, Baggini misses an opportunity to facilitate a deeper understanding of Nietzsche’s claim that every great philosophy is “the personal confession of its author” (BGE 6). The view that philosophical autobiography is an extended speech act suggests a new way to show how Nietzsche might have sufficient warrant to make the personal confession claim of that section straightforwardly, as well as ironically – the latter being all that might initially be supposed from the critical-ironic tone that Nietzsche directs with such vehemence against philosophers throughout the first chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Baggini also misses an opportunity to help us develop our understanding of *Ecce Homo* by: (i) examining whether or not *Ecce Homo* meets the definition of philosophical autobiography that he develops, and (ii) explaining what more we learn about the philosophical worth of *Ecce Homo* when it is examined under the lens of this definition. In what follows, I pursue these concerns in greater depth.

### 3 *Ecce Homo* as Philosophical Autobiography

There is evidence of interplay between Nietzsche’s life, character and thought in *Ecce Homo*. For instance, Nietzsche describes how the idea of eternal recurrence came to him when he stopped at a “powerful” pyramidal rock not far from Surlei, while walking through the woods by the lake at Silvaplana (EH III Z 1). Nietzsche often remarks on the relationship between his physical location at the time of writing of a particular text, and the text itself (EH III BT, III HAH, III D, III GS, III TI, III CW). He provides a sustained discussion of the role of place, diet, and climate on well-being and productivity in the chapter “Why I Am So Clever” (EH II), developing a more direct connection between physiological and psychological aspects of his life and thought. For example, Nietzsche makes a series of remarks on the question of nutrition, linking his particular approach to con-

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<sup>10</sup> E. g. Baggini 2002, 309, p. 311.

<sup>11</sup> See e. g. Williams 2002, p. 11–15.

sumption of alcohol, coffee, tea, and German cuisine with explanations of what he calls his “cleverness” in the activity of thinking (EH II 1). Nietzsche explicitly identifies thinking as an activity, cautioning us to “give no credence to any thought that was not born outdoors while one moved about freely”, and in which our “muscles are not celebrating a feast, too”: “All prejudices”, Nietzsche warns, “come from the intestines” (EH II 1). Nietzsche also claims a philosophical interest in the connection between life and thought:

The good fortune of my existence, its uniqueness perhaps, lies in its fatality: I am, to express it in the form of a riddle, already dead as my father, while as my mother, I am still living and becoming old. This dual descent, as it were, both from the highest and lowest rung on the ladder of life, at the same time a *decadent* and a *beginning*—this, if anything, explains that neutrality, that freedom from all partiality in relation to the total problem of life, that perhaps distinguishes me. (EH I 1).

Here Nietzsche takes the particularities of his life to provide the conditions for his philosophy, including the trajectories that his thought follows, namely ascent and decline, which form a framework for his transvaluation project. To support this, he directly connects several of the key events in his personal life – the death of his father at the age of thirty-six, the decline of his own “vitality” at the same age, his retirement from his professorship at Basel – with the development of his thinking (EH I 1). First, Nietzsche claims that spending the summer of 1879 in St. Moritz “like a shadow”, and the winter of 1879 in Naumburg “as a shadow”, gave rise to *The Wanderer and his Shadow*; as he remarks, “I then knew about shadows” (EH I 1). Second, he suggests that during the winter of 1880, spent at Genoa, what he calls a “sweetening and spiritualization” linked to his “extreme poverty of blood and muscle”, produced *Dawn*, which he claims is characterized by a brightness and weakness compatible with “profound physiological weakness” and “excess of pain” (EH I 1).<sup>12</sup>

Nietzsche makes a direct connection between his own health and the transvaluation of values:

A long, all too long, series of years signifies recovery for me; unfortunately it also signifies relapse, decay, the periodicity of a kind of decadence. Need I say after all this that in questions of decadence I am *experienced*? I have spelled them forward and backward ... Looking from the perspective of the sick toward *healthier* concepts and values and, conversely, looking again from the fullness and self-assurance of a *rich* life down into the secret work of the

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<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche wrote to Heinrich Köselitz from Naumburg on 5 October 1879, discussing how his state of health impacted on his approach to writing *Dawn*. I discuss this and other connections between Nietzsche’s life and writing in the case of *Dawn* in Bamford 2012.

instinct of decadence—in this I have had the longest training, my truest experience; if in anything, I became master in this. Now I know how, have the know-how, to reverse perspectives: the first reason why a ‘transvaluation of values’ is perhaps possible for me alone. (EH I 1)

Nietzsche continues by explaining that his ability to reverse perspectives, combined with his overall health, enabled him to turn his “will to health, to life, into a philosophy” (EH I 2). Nietzsche therefore seems to be suggesting that his fundamental, or basic “health” – by which we might understand the state of his organism in its social and natural contexts – afforded him the possibility of engaging in the experience of experimental living through a spectrum of perspectives from sickness to health (EH I 2). This in turn enabled him to master a range of perspectives, making the possibility of transvaluation possible. Support for this view can be found where Nietzsche claims that the transvaluation of all values is the formula for an act of “supreme self-examination on the part of humanity, become flesh and genius in me” (EH IV 1) – in short, a claim for embodied self-mastery:

It is my fate that I have to be the first *decent* human being ... I was the first to *discover* the truth by being the first to experience lies as lies ... (EH IV 1)

This interplay between Nietzsche’s life, character, and thought in *Ecce Homo* shows that the text conforms to Baggini’s definition of philosophical autobiography.<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche asserts the existence of this interplay, and assigns philosophical significance to it. However, it is not clear what this significance is, or how such interplay actually works.

As a first step towards a clearer explanation, we can turn to work by Richard White, who has explicitly connected the project of transvaluation of all values with Nietzsche’s use of his own life in his philosophical writing, focusing in detail upon *Ecce Homo* as philosophical autobiography.<sup>14</sup> White draws our attention to what he calls the “physiological axis” around which *Ecce Homo* is organized, and suggests that by connecting the “minutiae” of embodied life in numerous examples with the notion of thinking, and especially philosophical thinking, Nietzsche is working to return us “to the body as the great blind spot of Western philosophy” (White 1997, p. 152, 164). White thereby connects Nietzsche’s emphasis on philosophy understood in terms of bodily activity

<sup>13</sup> See Baggini 2002.

<sup>14</sup> See White 1997, p. 150 – 173. The importance of White’s reading in this respect has been pointed out by Acampora 2006, p. 314 – 333.

with the embodied act of reading philosophical writing, thus connecting the writerly and readerly aspects of the activity of philosophizing in and through the body, and conceiving of this as part of Nietzsche's project in *Ecce Homo* (as well as in works such as *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Antichrist*) as rooting out false ideals, as part of engaging in the transvaluation of values.<sup>15</sup> Rather than simply reading Nietzsche's point in *Ecce Homo* as the claim that certain experiences are preconditions for certain philosophical work to be possible, White's reading of the text holds Nietzsche to be arguing that reading and writing philosophy can be done *in and through bodily experience*, that this *should* be done as such for the sake of the transvaluation project, and that *Ecce Homo actively performs* such embodied philosophizing.<sup>16</sup>

While as Acampora points out, White's account raises some fascinating possibilities for understanding the significance of embodiment to Nietzsche's philosophy, his account requires a clearer explanation of exactly how it would be possible for an autobiographical performance to do philosophical work, and how such work might be commensurate with Nietzsche's transvaluation project.<sup>17</sup> I cannot pursue such an extensive explanation here, so will restrict myself to defending the much more modest claim that Nietzsche engages critically with philosophical methodology in *Ecce Homo* including via consideration of the body.

As we know, in the third chapter of *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche seeks to explain why it is that he writes such good books. Obviously, there is a strong aspect of wry humor in the choice of this chapter title. I think that there is additional evidence of an equally serious aspect to the title, provided by Nietzsche's general remark there on his art of style (EH III 4). He claims that the meaning of every style is to communicate: specifically, it is to communicate a state, also described here as an inward tension of pathos (EH III 4). Nietzsche suggests that this happens by means of signs, including the tempo or rhythm of signs. A good style is one that "really communicates an inward state, that makes no mistake about the signs, the tempo of the signs, the gestures [...]" (EH III 4). Nietzsche remarks that his own instinct for this is infallible, and that given the multiplicity of his inward states, he has many stylistic possibilities. He claims to have the "most multifarious art of style that has ever been at the disposal of one man" (EH III 4). This is a remarkable claim, not least because, when read out of the context into which it

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<sup>15</sup> See White 1997, p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> See White 1997, p. 150–173.

<sup>17</sup> See Acampora 2006.

properly belongs, it sounds like nothing more than extreme self-aggrandizement. The following example helps to identify why his is not an entirely inflated claim:

... let us imagine an extreme case: that a book speaks of nothing but events that lie altogether beyond the possibility of any frequent or even rare experience—that it is the first language for a new series of experiences. In that case, simply nothing will be heard, but there will be the acoustic illusion that where nothing is heard, nothing is there. (EH III 1)

Nietzsche applies this example to explain misreadings of his work by modern Germans (EH III 1). We can also apply it to Nietzsche's explanation of his art of style (EH III 4), in order to understand how signs communicate inward states – as up to this point, all we have is the claim *that* they do so, not an explanation of *how* they do so.

What happens when we read Nietzsche's claim under the lens of its immediate context: the extensive discussion of the connection between thought, feeling and bodily reaction to Nietzsche's work in previous sections of "Why I Write Such Good Books" (EH III)? Paying attention to the nature of our response to this remark – whether we experience distaste at its apparent arrogance, amusement at its grandiosity, or irritation at its possibly unwarranted scope – and to our associated bodily changes, including changes in breathing, posture and/or stance, suggests that the broad spectrum of our bodily, affective, responses to the claim are fundamental to our reading of the text, and our evaluation of it.<sup>18</sup> Rhythm and tempo are experienced in, through, and by, bodies – they are not only present visually in a text. We may need to *see* a sign in order to read it, but we also need to *incorporate* its meaning within a bodily economy, including within the economy of embodied reading. This possible explanation need not anticipate conceptual content, though of course those who are "capable and worthy of the same pathos" (EH III), as Nietzsche puts it, will recognize the same inward tension of pathos within themselves. Nietzsche's comment that his acquaintances include several "guinea pigs who illustrate for me different reactions to my writings—different in a very instructive manner" (EH III 3) also suggests that behavioral and bodily responses should inform an explanation of how Nietzsche thinks that his art of style works. Nietzsche's own denial of the existence of "good style *in itself*" on the ground of its unsatisfactory idealism also strengthens the case for this analysis (EH III 4).

If good style may plausibly be said to transfer inward states via reading and writing as activities performed by the whole body, then the philosophical worth of *Ecce Homo* as philosophical autobiography can be more clearly accounted for

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<sup>18</sup> See also Janaway 2007 and Bamford 2014.

in two ways. First, the autobiographical writing needs to *describe* how interplay between life (embodied life) and philosophical thinking happens in Nietzsche's own case – so that we have the relevant signs needed to access the description and to comprehend it. Second, *Ecce Homo* as philosophical autobiography needs to perform Nietzsche's inward tension of pathos, in order for the feeling of this state to be transferred and incorporated by other bodies.

It is worth pointing out that the view I am attributing to Nietzsche is not entirely adrift from contemporary work in philosophy of mind and language, in which meaning is understood as embodied. For instance, Mark Johnson has developed a well-known account of embodied meaning as emergent through our visceral connections to life and the bodily conditions of life, including affects and bodily movements. This accounts for metaphor, and certainly of language conceived as metaphor, as embodied – enabling us to avoid making problematic ontological distinctions between texts, minds, and bodies, and to understand that the transference of states in reading and writing critically involves the body.<sup>19</sup> Connecting embodied language to the activity of philosophizing, Richard Menary has pointed out that if we combined a connected account of “neural, bodily and social dimensions of cognition” with Harris's definition of full literacy, in which writing is regarded as a particular mode of operation of the human mind and the key to a new concept of language”, then we would derive a powerful account of how we think by writing (Harris 2000, p. xi).<sup>20</sup>

## 4 Critical Metaphilosophy and Embodied Subjectivity

To support this explanation, we can return to the connection between flesh and genius as establishing the possibility of self-mastery in *Ecce Homo* chapter IV, section 1. Recall Nietzsche's remarks concerning the rise to the kind of mastery required for the sort of noble self-fashioning of which Nietzsche speaks in *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche had already accounted for the intrinsically aesthetic nature of perceptual experience in *The Birth of Tragedy*, “On Truth and Lies in an

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**19** See Johnson 2007, and also Lakoff and Johnson 1999. Johnson's work takes inspiration from the philosophy of John Dewey, and neglects Nietzsche. I give further attention to the resonances between Nietzschean and Deweyan philosophy of science in Bamford 2016. See also Clark 1997, Clark and Chalmers 1998; Spurrett and Cowley 2004.

**20** Cited by Menary 2007, p. 631. On this point, see also Ansell-Pearson and Bamford 2020, pp. 61–62.



Extra-moral Sense”, and *The Gay Science*, by pointing to the fact that human animals are consistently involved in the equation of unequal things in their perceptual experiences. His comment on the moral dimension of perceptual experience is another example of this: experiences involve evaluation, and such evaluation is itself an expression of distinctively somatic creativity (GS 114).<sup>21</sup>

Nietzsche points out that we consistently overlook this feature of ourselves. In section 301 of *The Gay Science*, he suggests that even and especially “contemplatives”, such as scholars of philosophy, wrongly assume that they are spectators in the face of life, when experiences give them reason to conceive of themselves as being continually involved in the fashioning of what they take merely to be a spectacle. Contemplatives are particularly prone to making this assumption, Nietzsche claims, because they can *look back* on their work, unlike the active human being who is caught up in the moment, an actor who is always already actively playing a part in the drama of life. Contemplatives are thus even more likely to think of themselves as passively thoughtful and reflective, and in so doing, to overlook the significance of the *creative power* involved in contemplation. Nietzsche emphasizes the unity of thinking and feeling that permits a contemplative type to fashion the growing and changing world of valuations, colors, perspective, affirmations and negations, and the significance of creativity in our wanting to become who we are (GS 335), in order to draw our attention to other modes of behavior that he thinks are just as important to the free spirit, if not more so. For instance, in the Preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science* in 1887, Nietzsche states that he has been awaiting a “philosophical physician” in the “exceptional” sense, who is prepared to “risk” the proposition that “what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all “truth” but something else – let us say, health, future, growth, power, life” (GS Preface 2).

A similar idea is evident in *Zarathustra*, where the wise holder of one of the professorial chairs of virtue is mocked by Zarathustra as a fool for his “forty thoughts a day”, thus marking a distinction between nihilistic professional virtues and the possibility of transvalued, creative, virtue:

Now I clearly understand what people were once seeking above all when they sought teachers of virtue. Sound sleep for themselves and opiate virtues to go with it!

For all these much-lauded wise men with their professorial chairs, wisdom was sleep without dreams; they knew no better sense for life.

And even today there are still some who are like this preacher of virtue, and not always as honest: but their time is up. (Z I 2)

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21 Drawing on Cox 1999, Acampora 2006 describes this as Nietzsche’s “artful naturalism”.

Nietzsche is suggesting here that the time of the opiate of professional virtue is ending. This invites us to explore subsequent sections of *Zarathustra* in terms of overcoming professional scholarly orthodoxy, insofar as such orthodoxy is tied to nihilism. Nietzsche indicates that knowledge and science have grown up beside the bad conscience, and on this basis, the enlightened men are encouraged to shatter the old tablets (Z III 12). The same infusion of professional scholarly virtues with nihilism motivates Zarathustra's criticism of the famous wise men, whose service to the people's superstitions – rather than to the truth – has made what he calls a “poorhouse” of wisdom (Z II 8). Even in the section “On the Higher Man”, the superior humans are warned to beware of scholars with their “cold and dried-up eyes”, who “hate ... because they are unfruitful” and claim not to lie even though “inability to lie is far from being love of the truth” (Z IV xiii 9).

The distinction between the nihilism of dogmatic professional orthodoxy and Zarathustra's teaching of the creative will is also evident when Zarathustra characterizes scholars as, among other things, “fine clockworks” who “pursue understanding as a kind of nut-cracking”, and explains that he has left the house of scholars because for too long, his soul sat “hungry at their table” (Z II xvi). Zarathustra's highest good is identified as being the creative, which is why “whoever must be a creator in good and evil” must “first be an annihilator and shatter values” (Z II xii): the highest evil belongs to the highest good. The orthodox professional scholar of philosophy cannot, of course, approach the highest good so construed. This is why Zarathustra is so delighted to have abandoned the house of scholars, and why he rejoices, remarking of the occasion that “thus my fate wills it – blessed be my fate!” (Z II xvi).

Important evidence supporting this same distinction between scholars and creative philosophers in *Ecce Homo* can be found in Nietzsche's parable of association with books, which provides an instructive description of the problematic nature of scholars, who “do little nowadays but thumb books” and who lose their capacity for independent, creative thought through excessive reading, leaving them in the position of merely responding to the stimuli of thoughts they have read: “When they don't thumb, they don't think” (EH II 8). Such scholars become decadents by the form of repetitive and unimaginative physical labor their reading takes – by being “read to ruin” (EH II 8). In his discussion of *Human, All Too Human* in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche describes his liberation from scholarly duty to “the ‘book’” – from the “continual pressure of having to listen to other selves”, which is what he takes reading to mean – as “the greatest benefit I ever conferred on myself” (EH III HAH 4). In the previous section, Nietzsche places this claim in the context of his own ten years of laboring at classical philology,

which he describes as a time in which the nourishment of his spirit came to a stop:

I had not learned anything new that was useful; I had forgotten an absurd amount for the sake of dusty scholarly gewgaws. Crawling scrupulously with bad eyes though ancient metrists—that's what I had come to!— It stirred my compassion to see myself utterly emaciated, utterly starved: my knowledge simply failed to include *realities*, and my 'idealities' were not worth a damn. (EH III HAH 3)

Following directly on from this, Nietzsche remarks that this realization sparked in him a desire to study physiology, medicine, and the natural sciences, as well as his understanding that pursuit of a vocation for which one in fact has no vocation is a form of narcotic, which can be used to deaden feelings of isolation and hunger. Wagner constitutes another such opiate, Nietzsche suggests, for those like himself who find themselves in the process of pursuing vocations that are contrary to their instincts (EH III HAH 3).

This is why Nietzsche takes such pains to acknowledge the advantage of his physiology to his philosophical endeavors in remarking that his father's "wicked heritage", by which he means his father's apparent predestination to die an early death, came to his aid at precisely the right time to enable him to achieve the interplay between life and thought necessary for him to realize his philosophical project (EH III HAH 4). His sickness detached him from his philological work, and also gave him the right to change his habits from those of a mere bookworm to those of a thinker; Nietzsche claims that this gradual return to himself was a supreme form of recovery (EH III HAH 4). His fatalism, his "great reason", are embodied (EH I 6).<sup>22</sup>

Nietzsche describes himself as a psychologist in *Ecce Homo*, in order to distinguish himself from "the world's common run of philosophers, the moralists and other hollow pots, cabbage heads", who have been consistently guilty, in his view, of naïve errors in reasoning based upon their moralizing commitment to selflessness, a key part of which is the separation of the conceptual from the corporeal (EH III 5). Morality, Nietzsche thinks, has "falsified all *psychologica*" by "moralizing" them; in so-called beautiful souls, he argues, something "is physiologically askew at bottom" (EH III 5). He appeals to what he thinks of as the natural embodied struggle between the sexes, which he thinks that Ibsen, a "typical old virgin", fails to appreciate, by identifying idealism with antinature, and by citing a proposition against "vice" from his own moral code, in which it is suggested that the impurification of sex by the concept of the impure is "the

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<sup>22</sup> On great reason and the embodied self, see Gerhardt 2006, p. 293.

crime *par excellence* against life” (EH III 5). Nietzsche continues this thought in the next section, drawing on a psychological insight in *Beyond Good and Evil* in order to cast himself as the “genius of the heart” who teaches rough souls to listen by means of rhythm and voice, descending into “the underworld of every soul” (BGE 295; EH III 6).

In his work prior to *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche develops a commitment to embodied subjectivity. What has received little attention, and what I am underlining here, is that he does so in *Ecce Homo* as a part of his broader project of the transvaluation of all values. Recognition of the mind as embodied supports Nietzsche’s critique of philosophical methodology that is wholly dependent upon conscious rationality, thereby facilitating a new way of philosophizing through nihilism and towards the possibility of a future for higher humans.<sup>23</sup> One-dimensional methodology would be insufficient to achieve transvaluation (*Umwertung*), given that when treated as an absolute value, it would require the same transvaluation as do other values. Moreover, according to Nietzsche (in, for example, the first chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*), one-dimensional methodology is problematic in so far as it involves the assumption that the world, including oneself, can be known entirely through the conscious facet of human existence alone (BGE 21).

This line of criticism of philosophical methodology may be difficult to accept, given that conscious reflection chiefly characterizes what philosophical activity is often taken to involve. Bluntly, there are not many accounts of philosophers as not wholly conscious, bodily, thinkers: we tend to talk mostly and uncritically of philosophical work as primarily rational and conscious. Yet all the same, Nietzsche is targeting this belief as an assumption on our part. He claims that we need to relearn that what we are as human animals is not *wholly* conscious and not *wholly describable* purely in terms of the conscious. As a consequence, we should not assume that philosophical activity is *wholly* conscious. Nietzsche had already acknowledged this point as early as *The Birth of Tragedy*, as this sense of philosophical activity as emergent in various modes of cognitive behavior is exemplified by the example of music-making (BT 14). Specifically, the music-making Socrates demonstrates his intuitive understanding that there is more to accounting for the human than the rational, which is illustrated by his musical activity at a moment in which his commitment to the rational emerg-

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<sup>23</sup> As Richardson 1996, p. 66–68, points out, Nietzsche was clearly aware that this was only one possible future for humanity, and it was by no means guaranteed. See also sections 203 and 242 of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

es as insufficient.<sup>24</sup> This is by no means a contradiction *for Socrates at this moment*, but it appears paradoxical from the perspective of pure rationality.

Book 1 of *The Gay Science* may also prove helpful in substantiating this view. There, Nietzsche identifies consciousness first as evolving as part of a continual process of becoming and, second, as potentially dangerous to humanity (GS 11). His remarks suggest that we think we are dependent not merely on explanations for the purpose of existence, but also on the typically conscious and rational nature of such explanations. Nietzsche contrasts such explanations with the *possibility* of other forms of explanation being enabled by his discussion, ones that might plausibly include instinctual, corporeally based modes of relating to our existence. Nietzsche thus explores the possibility that the hegemony of rationality is dangerous to the future of humans, or at least to their ongoing development. He is, however, grateful that our pride in consciousness inhibits its development. This may sound paradoxical at first glance, but it follows from the rest of his reasoning: the point is that we are so convinced that we possess consciousness to the fullest possible extent, that we fail to realize we may still need to work on acquiring it. The effect of our pride in consciousness is to slow down the development of consciousness, which ensures that we do not slip further into life-denying error in as far as our understanding of the significance of consciousness is concerned.

So, Nietzsche treats humanity and consciousness as contingencies with the aim of identifying *assumptions* concerning the methodology underpinning modern philosophy. Knowledge, Nietzsche suggests, needs to be reconceived *as instinctual*: a more satisfactory understanding of knowledge, he suggests, would be one in which knowledge is literally in-corporated, or returned, to the body (GS 11). This suggests that for Nietzsche, a more substantive account of knowledge and a more life-affirming way of doing philosophical work are possible outcomes of his broader project. I do not intend to pursue these possibilities here; all I do intend to claim is that there is evidence that Nietzsche is engaging us in critical reflection upon philosophy and its methodology.

I also think it is worth considering that Nietzsche's methodological concern may help to redeem the claim made in the final section (EH IV 9), from the supposition that Nietzsche's descent into insanity renders not only the following infamous claim, but much if not all of *Ecce Homo*, deeply problematic: "Have I been understood? —*Dionysus versus the Crucified.*—" If we understand *Ecce Homo* as involving critical engagement with disembodied philosophizing on Nietzsche's part, then this claim can be read as entirely commensurate not

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<sup>24</sup> See Sorgner 2004.

only with the rest of the text of *Ecce Homo*, but also with Nietzsche's broader transvaluative concerns. Dionysus in this remark is Nietzsche, but a Nietzsche who is reasoning with the "great reason" of the body, the "genius of the heart" challenging the Crucified's genius of disembodied antinature (BGE 295; EH III 6). Further support for this reading is evident in a section that continues the critical attack upon the Nietzschean evils of selflessness, antinatural idealism, and Christian morality that were encountered in *Ecce Homo* chapter III sections 5 to 6. Morality is "vampirism", Nietzsche claims, because it sucks out the blood of life itself (EH IV 8). This is an important part of why Nietzsche thinks the selflessness of Christian morality is deeply problematic, and why he requires a critical engagement with philosophical methodology to form a part of his transvaluation project:

Whoever uncovers morality also uncovers the disvalue of all values that are and have been believed; he no longer sees anything venerable in the most venerated types of man, even in those pronounced holy; he considers them the most calamitous type of abortion—calamitous because they exerted such fascination.

The concept of 'God' invented as a counterconcept of life—everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous, the whole hostility unto death against life synthesized in this concept in a gruesome unity! The concept of the 'beyond,' the 'true world' invented in order to devalue the only world there is—in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality! The concept of the 'soul,' the 'spirit,' finally even 'immortal soul', invented in order to despise the body, to make it sick, 'holy'; to oppose with a ghastly levity everything that deserves to be taken seriously in life, the questions of nourishment, abode, spiritual diet, treatment of the sick, cleanliness, and weather. (EH IV 8)

We know that Nietzsche suggests that he sought "a word that had the meaning of a provocation for everybody" (EH IV 7). A particular provocation in question, I suggest, is one that prompts our critical engagement with how philosophizing gets done.

## 5 Is there a Ghost in Nietzsche's Autobiographical Machine?

Not everyone will agree with my claim that critical engagement with disembodied philosophical inquiry is one of the key pieces of philosophical work being done in *Ecce Homo*. One such example is Douglas Wright's essay on philosophical autobiography in Montaigne and Nietzsche.<sup>25</sup> Wright's paper encourages us

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<sup>25</sup> See Wright 2006.

to return to consider the philosophical work being done in *Ecce Homo*, but makes some argumentative moves that seem to impute a certain dualism to the Nietzschean subject of *Ecce Homo*. Wright's analysis therefore raises a possible problem for my account, which emphasizes the importance of embodiment in Nietzsche's approach.<sup>26</sup>

Wright distinguishes between two activities in *Ecce Homo*: first, Nietzsche's critique of subjectivity as making the possibility of a life story problematic, and second, citing a passage from the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche's valuing of the capacity to weave threads of life narrative together. In trying to account for the relationship between the narrator of *Ecce Homo* and Nietzsche himself, Wright argues that what is really going on in *Ecce Homo* is that Nietzsche, as the author, is attempting to *substitute* the character of the narrator of *Ecce Homo*, distinguished by his "yes-saying 'tremendous nature'", for his own "flesh and blood life" – on the basis that the narrator is more authentically real than the "less unified and coherent author" (Wright 2006, p. 219). Wright's argument draws upon a perceived discrepancy between the "official" preface to *Ecce Homo* and the interleaf passage beginning "On this perfect day": the interleaf seems to look towards forty-four years being buried in the present moment of writing, while the Preface seems to look towards the future. Two pieces of evidence are cited in support of this view. First, in section 1 of the Preface, Nietzsche seems to be addressing us in terms of the future task of confronting humanity with the most difficult task it has faced. Second, in section 4 of the Preface, he borrows from the language of futurity with his quotation from Part I of *Zarathustra* (Z I xxii 3). Wright accounts for this perceived discrepancy by pointing to Nietzsche's claim that he "shall yet live to see" Zarathustra's vision of the "great noon[tide?]" at which the most elect consecrate themselves for the greatest of all tasks" (EH III BT 4). With this claim in mind, he argues that

[i]f we are to take such comments seriously – and they appear frequently enough that I think that we should – then we are directed to think of 'Nietzsche' not as an author finding consolation in the thought of a destiny that, sadly, he will never experience, but rather, as that which will only come into its own after its author is dead [...] The 'Nietzsche' who signs *Ecce Homo* in the moment of eternal recurrence, then, is the 'Nietzsche' who will be present at the moment of his future destiny, an eternally living Nietzsche [...]. (Wright 2006, p. 220 – 221)

If this is right, then we would have to accept Wright's claim that, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche sacrifices his natural life for the sake of immortality in the form of "a

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<sup>26</sup> See Wright 2006.



new textual version of himself, a self that will bear his name and image in perfect self-sufficiency for all eternity” (Wright 2006, p. 224). Further support for this view is found in passages such as “one pays dearly for immortality: one has to die several times while still alive” (EH III Z 5), and in the passage in which the act of reading, defined as having to listen to other selves, was avoided (EH III HAH 4). Wright uses this latter passage to re-describe reading and writing in terms of the interchange of subjectivity: reading is deemed the imposition of an alien subjectivity, and writing is deemed the transfer of subjectivity into a text by inscription (Wright 2006, p. 223). Wright thinks it might be possible to argue that the process of autobiographical writing would *create* life within a text: in writing autobiography, we would get “a ghost that would re-emerge on every reading to commune with the one who summons it” (Wright 2006, p. 224).

Wright seems to be imputing to Nietzsche a position in which Nietzsche cheats death of his physical contingency by making himself eternally downloadable, as it were, in the new and eternal virtual-text form of himself. This account of *Ecce Homo* as a form of philosophical autobiography challenges the broader coherence of Nietzsche’s thinking: if it is correct, then Nietzsche would, in so constructing his project in *Ecce Homo*, have abandoned his commitment to embodied subjectivity, either knowingly or unknowingly.<sup>27</sup> Two particular concerns might follow: first, the possibility that Nietzsche sometimes commits himself to dualism about the mind, and sometimes to monism, opens the door to the charge that Nietzsche’s thinking on subjectivity is less consistent and coherent than might previously have been imagined; second, an embodied conception of subjectivity would no longer clearly support the embodied component of philosophizing that I have claimed is at work in *Ecce Homo*. Therefore, it is particularly important to show how this dualism may be set aside.

First, we can take issue with the claim that Nietzsche would be comfortable with a distinction between his natural life and a textual life, which Wright defends by citing Diotima’s claim from Plato’s *Symposium* that we would all make a deal to perpetuate ourselves in the form of a perfected spiritual child.<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche need not consider such a deal necessary, given that he does not make a teleological claim for the success of his project of revaluing all values, or indeed for the broader future of humanity being a necessarily positive one (see e.g. GM III 27). Two main points support this view: (i) the notion of self-perpetuation runs counter to Nietzsche’s general prioritization of life-affir-

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<sup>27</sup> On the issue of commitment to embodied subjectivity, see e.g. Blondel 1991, Brown 2006, and Acampora 2006.

<sup>28</sup> See Wright 2006, p. 224.



mation ahead of the individuated concerns of any one particular human animal, which is based on (ii) the concept of a *perfected* spiritual child running counter to the metaphysics of becoming on which Nietzsche's perspectivism is based: such final perfection cannot be reached, or if it were reached, its perfection would immediately be lost. Evidence supporting these views can be found in, for example, sections 354 to 355 and 373 to 374 of *The Gay Science*, and sections 13 and 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*.<sup>29</sup> Second, there is no strong evidence in *Ecce Homo* to support the claim that Nietzsche is committed to the ontological distinction between natural and textual life that would sustain Wright's claim that Nietzsche is the eternally living author who signs *Ecce Homo* in "the moment of eternal recurrence", split apart from the Nietzsche who, as Paul Loeb suggests, is anticipating his own death at a moment when none of his readers have affirmed the thought of eternal recurrence.<sup>30</sup> At the least, there would have to be sufficient such evidence to overturn the embodied subjectivity commitment already identified. Someone might immediately object to this by pointing to the claim that "I am one thing, my writings are another matter" (EH III 1) as an example of such an ontological distinction being assumed by Nietzsche. However, this remark cannot support such a possible objection: doing so would overlook the placing of the remark in the context of Nietzsche's move from affirmatory remarks concerning *amor fati* (EH II 10) to an introduction of his discussion of ten published texts (EH III 1–6).

The key point supporting my view is that at the end of the second chapter of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche has been affirming his own existence, claiming for example that life was easiest for him when it made the hardest demands upon him (EH II 10). However, while he wants to affirm the fact of negative readings of his own work by modern Germans, he also wants to respond in a positive way to these. He is pressing home the point that he does seek readers for his work, and that he is glad of those readers he does have, even though he thinks that the negative readings of his work by modern Germans are inevitable, and that the fact of these readings strengthen the case that he has been making concerning the need for a transvaluation of all values. He explains negative readings of his work on the basis that nobody can get more out of a work than they already know, where knowledge is dependent upon what one can experience (EH III 1). Modern Germans are not, in Nietzsche's opinion, capable of hearing the positive message of his work; but as he points out in the next section, he

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<sup>29</sup> WP 481, 484 and 485 are also relevant here.

<sup>30</sup> See Loeb, 2010; Loeb 2005; Wright 2006, p. 220–221. For a more detailed analysis of death in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, see Loeb 2010.

does already have capable readers in “Vienna, in St. Petersburg, in Stockholm, in Copenhagen, in Paris, in New York”, readers such as Hippolyte Taine (EH III 2). He cannot guarantee more capable readers, but the fact that he has readers like Taine licenses Nietzsche’s evident hope for the future of his project, and indeed for the future of humanity. He thus addresses himself to *possible* “perfect” readers, whom he imagines as monsters of courage and curiosity, bold adventurers and discoverers, or in Zarathustra’s words, which Nietzsche cites, “the bold searchers [*Sucher*], tempters, experimenters [*Versucher*], and whoever has embarked with cunning sails on terrifying seas” (EH III 3; Z III ii 2).

Instead of needing to impute a dualism of authorial voice and authorial body to Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*, we can explain the relationship between Nietzsche’s body and the persisting authorial voice of *Ecce Homo* as being commensurate with Nietzsche’s understanding of subjectivity as embodied, held consistently in his writings. For example, consider the following remarks on the soul in “Why I Am A Destiny”:

The concept of the ‘beyond’, the ‘true world’ invented in order to devaluate the only world there is – in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality! The concept of the ‘soul’, the ‘spirit’, finally even ‘*immortal* soul’, invented in order to despise the body, to make it sick, ‘holy’; to oppose with a ghastly levity everything that deserves to be taken seriously in life, the questions of nourishment, abode, spiritual diet, treatment of the sick, cleanliness, and weather. (EH IV 8)

Here, Nietzsche quite clearly wishes to affirm the importance of the body and to claim an opposition to mind-body dualism, on genealogical grounds. This claim reprises his critical remarks on soul atomism in *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE 12).<sup>31</sup> There, Nietzsche challenges the kind of “soul atomism” that, he says, Christianity has taught best and longest, by claiming that the belief in soul atomism should be expelled from science in order to help us to expel its metaphysical consequences. Yet, as Acampora has pointed out, Nietzsche argues in the very same section that we might not need to get rid of the *soul hypothesis* at the same time as we get rid of *soul atomism*:

Between ourselves, it is not at all necessary to get rid of ‘the soul’ at the same time, and thus to renounce one of the most ancient and venerable hypotheses – as happens frequently to clumsy naturalists who can hardly touch on ‘the soul’ without immediately losing it. But the way is open for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such con-

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31 See Acampora 2006, p. 314–334, for an account of this task of refining the soul hypothesis.

ceptions as ‘mortal soul’, and ‘soul as subjective multiplicity’, and ‘soul as social structure of the drives and affects’, want henceforth to have citizens’ rights in science. (BGE 12)<sup>32</sup>

Of the possibilities in this section of *Beyond Good and Evil*, which Nietzsche suggests could be given “citizen’s rights” under science – “mortal soul”, and “soul as subjective multiplicity”, and “soul as social structure of the drives and affects” – one or more might be used to account for worries about the ontological status of the authorial voice of *Ecce Homo*, which Wright’s analysis treats as necessarily referring to a disembodied textual self, while avoiding the dualism that would embroil Nietzsche’s account of the embodied subject in internal contradiction.<sup>33</sup> This shows that Nietzsche’s discussion *already* includes space for a plausible explanation of how we can continue to speak meaningfully of him as the author of the embodied approach adopted in *Ecce Homo*, given the prime importance that he places upon physiology and his rejection of soul atomism. No sharp distinction between natural and disembodied textual life of the kind envisaged by Wright is necessary.

## 6 Conclusion

When read as philosophical autobiography, *Ecce Homo* offers a performative critique of philosophical methodology, which prizes pure rationality at the expense of the embodied dimension of philosophizing. This suggests that the bodies of readers may count as the critical spaces required for Nietzsche’s transvaluation project to succeed, and thus requires Nietzsche’s commitment to embodied subjectivity to be factored in as support for my discussion. Those who think that, when read as a philosophical autobiography, *Ecce Homo* commits Nietzsche to a dualism of mind and body that undermines the commitment to embodied subjectivity on which this mode of philosophizing is dependent, may suspect that Nietzsche’s thinking on the possibility of embodied philosophizing is not coherent.<sup>34</sup> However, given the strong connections between *Ecce Homo* and other texts in which Nietzsche is clearly committed to both embodied subjectivity and crit-

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<sup>32</sup> Acampora 2006, 325. On drives and subjectivity, see also Sachs 2008 and Katsafanas 2005, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> On strategic redeployment of these concepts, see Acampora 2006, p. 314–334.

<sup>34</sup> Already much has been said in defense of the notion that the Nietzschean subject is more than a simple monistic unity, and that it is comprised of a multiplicity of forces; see e.g. Acampora 2006, p. 321, which explores Nietzsche’s claim that our embodied subjective organism is like an oligarchy (GM II 1). See also: Katsafanas 2005, 2013; Acampora 2015; Bamford 2015a.

ical engagement with a philosophical methodology of pure, disembodied rationality, I think that this suspicion cannot be sustained. *Ecce Homo* is a part of the same critical engagement with nihilistic methodology – in short with philosophical nihilism – found in other texts by Nietzsche, and it aims to support and enrich his transvaluation project.<sup>35</sup>

If Nietzsche is indeed asking us to think more critically about philosophical methodology by constructing *Ecce Homo* as a philosophical autobiography, then we have reason to think that *Ecce Homo* should be given far greater attention – especially with respect to Nietzsche’s transvaluation project – than has previously been the case. We also gain two additional advantages. First, we have reason to explore whether *Ecce Homo* might enhance our understanding of the genre of philosophical autobiography, as well as of how philosophical autobiography might turn out to be important for understanding philosophical methodology. Second, the broader significance of Nietzsche’s critical engagement with disembodied philosophical methodology requires further attention, especially given that the role played by affects in philosophizing is receiving much more sustained attention than ever before outside Nietzsche studies as well as within it, for example in the context of epistemic value.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> On philosophical nihilism, see Danto 1965 and Bamford 2005.

<sup>36</sup> On the role of affect in Nietzsche’s approach to philosophizing, see for example Janaway 2007, Bamford 2014, and Bamford 2018. See also Hookway 2003 and McGinn 2003.



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## II Specific Concepts in *Ecce Homo*



Paul Bishop

# *Ecce Homo* and Nietzsche's Concept of Character

**Abstract:** The impact of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* on the young Nietzsche was immense, yet long after his initial enthusiasm and subsequent disillusionment, Schopenhauerian themes continued to inform Nietzsche's thinking. This essay discusses the Kantian-Schopenhauerian character (and its apparent rejection by Nietzsche) in general and Schopenhauer's distinction between the "empirical" and the "intelligible" character in particular. It argues that the doctrine of eternal recurrence lies at the heart of Nietzsche's interest in character as a coming-to-terms with the dialectic of freedom and necessity; and it concludes that the discussion surrounding the concept of character in Kant, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche forms the philosophical backdrop to the "science" of *Charakterologie*, as it came to be formulated in the early twentieth century by, among others, Ludwig Klages.

ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων

A man's character is his fate  
Heraclitus, DK 22 B 119

One has, assuming that one is a person,  
necessarily the philosophy of one's own person.  
GS Preface 2<sup>1</sup>

That the impact of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*) (1819; 1844; 1859) on the young Nietzsche was immense, is a matter of consent among his biographers (Safranski 2000, 36–39; Heise 2000, 25–31; Young 2010, 81–95; Astor, 75–81). Yet long after his initial enthusiasm and subsequent disillusionment, Schopenhauerian themes continued to inform Nietzsche's thinking, in ways that have not always been acknowledged.

For instance: in section 55 in Book 4 of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* – on the second aspect of the world as will: upon the attain-

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<sup>1</sup> "Man hat nämlich, vorausgesetzt, dass man eine Person ist, nothwendig auch die Philosophie seiner Person." Translations of Nietzsche quotations in this essay are by Walter Kaufmann (AC, BGE, EH, GS, TI) and R.J. Hollingdale (D).



ment of self-knowledge, the affirmation and the denial of the will-to-live – Nietzsche will have found the following lines:

As our physical path on the earth is always a line and not a surface, we must, in life, if we wish to grasp and possess one thing, renounce and leave aside innumerable others that lie to the right and to the left. If we cannot decide to do this, but, like children at a fair, snatch at everything that fascinates us in passing, this is the perverted attempt to change the line of our path into a surface. We then run a zigzag path, wander like a will-o'-the-wisp, and arrive at nothing. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 303)<sup>2</sup>

Just as, stylistically, Nietzsche's writing marks a more general shift from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries in the compactness, even terseness, of his discourse, we find this image, albeit in compressed form, in the final aphorism in the 'Sprüche und Pfeile' section of *Twilight of the Idols*: "The formula of my happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal* ..." <sup>3</sup> This stylistic compression of Schopenhauer is accompanied by, so to speak, a conceptual compression: similar problems, motifs, and themes in Schopenhauer's work re-emerge in Nietzsche's thinking. Thus behind the concept of *character* in Nietzsche lies the philosophical issue of the relation between determinism and free will. But what, in this context, does "character" – which, as a word, is more or less absent from Nietzsche's text, and yet, as a concept, informs his works as a whole – mean? In this essay I shall argue that reading *Ecce Homo* in the light of Schopenhauer helps clarify Nietzsche's purpose in this text and, in particular, explicates its subtitle.

## 1 The Kantian-Schopenhauerian Character and its Apparent Rejection by Nietzsche

At the outset one should acknowledge that, in his *early* writings, Nietzsche rejects the Kantian-Schopenhauerian terminology of character (Seidel 1971, cols 987–989). In his notes on Schopenhauer's ethics, written in late 1868/early 1869, for instance, Nietzsche declares that "the thing the philosophers call char-

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<sup>2</sup> "Wie unser physischer Weg auf der Erde immer nur eine Linie, keine Fläche ist; so müssen wir im Leben, wenn wir Eines ergreifen und besitzen wollen, unzähliges Anderes, rechts und links, entsagend, liegen lassen. Können wir uns dazu nicht entschließen, sondern greifen, wie Kinder auf dem Jahrmarkt, nach Allem was im Vorübergehen reizt; dann ist dies das verkehrte Bestreben, die Linie unseres Wegs in eine Fläche zu verwandeln: wir laufen sodann im Zickzack, irrlichterliren hin und her und gelangen zu nichts" (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 397).

<sup>3</sup> "Formel meines Glücks: ein Ja, ein Nein, eine gerade Linie, ein *Ziel*..." (TI I 44: KSA 6/66).

acter is an incurable sickness”,<sup>4</sup> and he argues that “philosophically considered it is the same, whether a character expresses itself or if its expressions are restrained; it is not the thought, no, it is already his constitution that makes the murderer, he is guilty without any deed”.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, he explores the idea that even if one granted credibility to the notion of the “intelligible character”, it is more important that, in education, one provides the will with worthy objects, for the highest task of humanity is, he claimed, “to breed great human beings”.<sup>6</sup> In a note from his *Nachlass* from the period late 1876 to mid-1877 (two years after the publication of the third *Untimely Meditation*, entitled “Schopenhauer as Educator”), where he describes Schopenhauer’s world-view as pantheism or even “pan-diabolism”, Nietzsche writes that “something like the character has no existence in itself, but is rather an alleviating abstraction.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1878, in the first volume of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche dismisses the (Schopenhauerian) concept of unchanging character (*der unveränderliche Charakter*), arguing that the “unalterable character” means no more than “that, during the brief lifetime of a human being, the motives influencing him or her are usually unable to scratch sufficiently deep to erase the script that many millennia have imprinted”.<sup>8</sup> In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche spoke dismissively of the term *charaktervoll*, saying of the statement, “[o]nce I have said I will do a thing, I do it”,<sup>9</sup> that “this mode of thinking counts as a sign of possessing character”,<sup>10</sup> and suggesting that vanity and ambition, rather than good reason, frequently lie behind the acts carried out in this spirit.<sup>11</sup>

In a later note, Nietzsche defines character as “*the consequence of a milieu – a firmly imprinted rôle*, by means of which certain facts are repeatedly *underlined*”

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4 “das Ding[,] was die Philosophen Charakter nennen, ist eine unheilbare Krankheit” (BAW 2/177).

5 “philosophisch betrachtet ist es gleich, ob ein Charakter sich äußert oder ob seine Äußerungen zurückgehalten werden; nicht erst der Gedanke, nein schon die Konstitution macht den Mörder, er ist schuldig ohne That” (BAW 2/177; cf. Hoyer 2002, p. 239).

6 “so ist es doch sehr wichtig, ob durch Erziehung dem Willen die würdigen Objekte gegeben werden oder nicht, [...] Große Menschen zu erziehen, ist die höchste Aufgabe der Menschheit” (KGW III.5/1, 121).

7 “so etwas wie der Charakter hat an sich keine Existenz, sondern ist eine erleichternde Abstraktion” (NF 1876–77, 23[27]: KSA 8/413; cf. Brusotti 1997, p. 156).

8 “dass während der kurzen Lebensdauer eines Menschen die einwirkenden Motive gewöhnlich nicht tief genug ritzen können, um die aufgeprägten Schriftzüge vieler Jahrtausende zu zerstören” (HAH I 41: KSA 2/65; cf. Müller-Lauter 1999b, p. 34).

9 “Was ich einmal gesagt habe, das thue ich” (D 301: KSA 3/223).

10 “diese Denkweise gilt als charaktervoll” (D 301: KSA 3/223).

11 D 301: KSA 3/223; Nietzsche 1982c, p. 304.

and *strengthened*".<sup>12</sup> Later still, in a section in Book V of *The Gay Science* (1886) in which he considers "how things will become ever more 'artistic' in Europe" – "[i]nwiefern es in Europa immer 'künstlerischer' zugehn wird" – Nietzsche problematizes the entire relation of art and nature with reference to character.<sup>13</sup> Here he contrasts the medieval period – those times when "the role has actually *become* character; and art, nature",<sup>14</sup> and the "ages when men believed with rigid confidence, even piety, in their predestination for precisely this occupation, precisely this way of earning a living, and simply refused to acknowledge the element of accident, role, and caprice" –<sup>15</sup> with our own age, in which "the individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and *can manage almost any role*, and everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases and becomes art".<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, if we move beyond these texts of the early and middle period to look more closely at Nietzsche's later philosophy, as expressed above all in *Ecce Homo*, we find it demonstrates certain striking affinities with the conclusions to which Schopenhauer – and, surprisingly perhaps, Kant – come. These affinities, moreover, inform his (self-)presentation in *Ecce Homo*, and render this perplexing text more comprehensible. For, as we shall see, Nietzsche can be read as a participant in a philosophical debate on character, one that goes back to Schopenhauer and, beyond him, to Kant: a debate about the problem of freedom and determinism.

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12 "die Folge eines Milieu – eine fest eingeprägte **Rolle**, vermöge deren gewisse Facta immer wieder *unterstrichen* und *gestärkt* werden" (NF Spring 1884, 25[462]: KSA 11/136).

13 GS 356: KSA 3/595–596; Nietzsche 1974, p. 302.

14 "aus der Rolle [ist] wirklich Charakter *geworden*, aus der Kunst *Natur*" (GS 356: KSA 3/595).

15 "Zeitalter, in denen man mit steifer Zuversichtlichkeit, ja mit Frömmigkeit an seine Vorherbestimmung für gerade dies Geschäft, gerade diesen Broderwerb glaubte und den Zufall darin, die Rolle, das Willkürliche schlechterdings nicht anerkennen wollte" (GS 356: KSA 3/595).

16 "der Einzelne überzeugt ist, ungefähr Alles zu können, ungefähr *jeder Rolle gewachsen* zu sein, wo Jeder mit sich versucht, improvisirt, neu versucht, mit Lust versucht, wo alle Natur aufhört und Kunst wird ..." (GS 356: KSA 3/596; Nietzsche 1974, p. 303). I am grateful to Werner Stegmaier for drawing this passage to my attention at our conference.

## 2 Schopenhauer on Character

Using Kant's argumentation in his critical philosophy on the problem of freedom and causality,<sup>17</sup> Schopenhauer distinguishes in *The World as Will and Representation* between two different kinds of character: the "empirical" and the "intelligible" character (see vol. 1, §28). The former relates to the latter as the phenomenon does the noumenon which, for Schopenhauer, is the will. Thus "empirical" character is "the mere unfolding"<sup>18</sup> of the "intelligible" character which, as such, is outside time. Inevitably the question of the relation between the "empirical" and the "intelligible" character raises the question of the free will versus determinism (see Solomon 2002, p. 63–87). For if, Schopenhauer argues, one's character is innate and immutable – and he thinks it is: it is *unveränderlich bestimmt*, as he puts it<sup>19</sup> – then does it matter what we do, if choice is an illusion? Does it matter which philosophy we embrace? Do we have nothing to do with our becoming, let alone our being? Surely, would it not be labour in vain (*vergebliche Mühe*) to work at the improvement of our character (*Besserung unseres Charakt-*

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17 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*], A 532–538; cf. Young 2005, p. 161. In the "Third Antinomy" of the first *Critique*, Kant examines the problem of freedom and causality (A 532/B 560 to A 538/B 566). Here he draws a distinction between "empirical" character and "intelligible" character, the former governed by causality and the second – problematically – an expression of freedom. (More precisely, Kant distinguishes between causality-according-to-nature and causality-from-freedom [A 432/B 560]. In his discussion of the antinomy of freedom and necessity, Kant concludes that there is no conflict between nature and causality-through-freedom (*Kausalität aus Freiheit*) [A 558/B 586]).

18 "die bloße Entfaltung", in *The World as Will and Representation*, I, §55 (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 301; Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 394).

19 *The World as Will and Representation*, I, §55: "Our character is to be regarded as the temporal unfolding of an extra-temporal, and so indivisible and unalterable, act of will, or of an intelligible character. Through this, all that is essential in our conduct of life, in other words its ethical content, is invariably determined, and must express itself accordingly in its phenomenon, the empirical character. On the other hand, only the inessential of this phenomenon, the external form of our course of life, depends on the forms in which the motives present themselves" ["Da nämlich unser Charakter als die zeitliche Entfaltung eines außerzeitlichen und mithin untheilbaren und unveränderlichen Willensaktes, oder eines intelligibeln Charakters, anzusehn ist, durch welchen alles Wesentliche, d. h. der ethische Gehalt unsers Lebenswandels, unveränderlich bestimmt ist und sich demgemäß in seiner Erscheinung, dem empirischen Charakter, ausdrücken muß, während nur das Unwesentliche dieser Erscheinung, die äußere Gestaltung unsers Lebenslaufes, abhängt von den Gestalten, unter welchen die Motive sich darstellen"] (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 301; Schopenhauer 1988, I, 394).

ers)?<sup>20</sup> However, in addition to the “empirical” and “intelligible” character as they are deduced by Kant, Schopenhauer adds a third: namely, “acquired” character.

Now, *this* character, or “acquired” character, is, in effect, what Goethe means by *Charakter* when, in the preface to his *Doctrine of Colours* [*Zur Farbenlehre*], he writes that one’s character “emerges from one’s deeds”.<sup>21</sup> Or as Goethe put it elsewhere, the history of the individual is the individual.<sup>22</sup> In the historical part of *Doctrine of Colours*, in the section dealing with Newton, Goethe explains the success of Newtonian theory with reference to the character of its proponent. And – “speaking of character” – he goes on to consider the concept of *character* in some detail: indeed, in *Doctrine of Colours* Goethe offers nothing short of small characterology, when he develops a taxonomy of character in terms of its plasticity (Goethe 1960, p. 172–175).<sup>23</sup>

For Goethe, character – defined at various points in his writings as “the life of a human being”,<sup>24</sup> as “the history of a human being”,<sup>25</sup> as both active and pas-

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20 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, I, §55: “Thus it might be inferred that for us to work at improving our character, or at resisting the power of evil tendencies, would be labour in vain; that it would therefore be more advisable to submit to the inevitable and unalterable, and to gratify at once every inclination, even if it is bad” (“so könnte man schließen, daß es vergebliche Mühe wäre, an einer Besserung seines Charakters zu arbeiten, oder der Gewalt böser Neigungen zu widerstreben, daher es gerathener wäre, sich dem Unabänderlichen zu unterwerfen und jeder Neigung, sei sie auch böse, sofort zu willfahren”) (Schopenhauer 1969, I, 301–302; Schopenhauer 1988, I, 394).

21 “It is in vain we try to depict the character of an individual; but if one represents the actions, the deeds of that individual, then an image of the character rises up” [“Vergebens bemühen wir uns, den Charakter eines Menschen zu schildern; man stelle dagegen seine Handlungen, seine Taten zusammen, und ein Bild des Charakters wird uns entgegentreten”] (Goethe 1955, p. 315). Compare with Goethe’s remark in his observations “In Fraternal Commemoration of Wieland” (“Zu brüderlichem Andenken Wielands”) (1813), when he writes: “One does not take into the consideration that character is related to the practical only. Only in respect of what the individual does, continues to do, and in respect of wherein he persists, does the individual demonstrate character” (“Man bedenkt nicht, daß der Charakter sich nur durchaus auf’s Praktische beziehe. Nur in dem, was der Mensch thut, zu thun fortfährt, worauf er beharrt, darin zeigt er Charakter”) (Goethe 1893, p. 335).

22 “die Geschichte des Individuums [ist] das Individuum” (Goethe 1892, 184). Goethe makes this remark in his scientific writings in the context of an appreciation of the work of the mineralogist Karl Wilhelm Nose (1758–1835).

23 “[D]a das Wort Charakter ausgesprochen ist” (Goethe 1960, p. 172).

24 “[D]as Leben eines Menschen”; *Italian Journey* [*Italienische Reise*], 2 October 1787 (Goethe 1950a, p. 411).

25 “[D]ie Geschichte des Menschen”; *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, book 7, chapter 5 (Goethe 1950b, p. 443). Therese is speaking to Wilhelm.

sive,<sup>26</sup> as being to beauty what the skeleton is to the living body,<sup>27</sup> as based not on talent but on personality,<sup>28</sup> as a supplement to knowledge,<sup>29</sup> and as “the fundamental determination” –<sup>30</sup> is something pre-eminently psychological – as he once explained to Riemer:

Character is a psychic habit, a habit of the soul, and to act in accordance with one's character means to act in accordance with one's psychic and spiritual habits, for these alone are comfortable for him, and only what is comfortable really belongs to us. [...] Character is thus both characteristic and habit. The former, when seen *a priori*; the latter, *a posteriori*.<sup>31</sup>

Yet it is nevertheless something that has practical consequences in the real world, as Leonore's famous remark in *Torquato Tasso* suggests: “A talent in tranquility is formed, / A character in the turbulence of affairs”.<sup>32</sup> (A similar link be-

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**26** Goethe, notes and sketches with the title “Schema zu einem Volksbuch, historischen Inhalts”: “Character expresses itself in the capacity to have an effect, to have a countereffect, and what's more, to limit oneself, to tolerate, to endure” (“Der Character überhaupt äußert sich in der Fähigkeit zu wirken, gegenzuwirken und, was mehr ist, sich zu beschränken, zu dulden, zu ertragen”) (Goethe 1907, p. 419). Compare with his remark in this same text that “the main trait of an absence of character is the lack of justice in someone's judgments” (“der Hauptzug des Characterlosen ist der Mangel an Gerechtigkeit im Urtheil”) (Goethe 1907, p. 419).

**27** Goethe, “The Collector and his Circle” (“Der Sammler und die Seinigen”), Letter 5: “Character is related to beauty as the skeleton is to the living human being” (“Der Charakter verhält sich zum Schönen wie das Skelett zum lebendigen Menschen”) Goethe 1953, p. 75).

**28** Conversation with Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer of 27 August 1808 (Biedermann, 1909, p. 533).

**29** Conversation with Friedrich von Müller of 31 March 1824: “Character does not supplement knowledge, but offers a supplement to it” (“Der Charakter ersetzt nicht das Wissen, aber er suppliert es”) (Biedermann 1910, p. 96).

**30** “[D]ie eigentliche Grundbestimmung”; Goethe, letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt of 17 March 1832 (Goethe 1967, p. 480).

**31** “Der Charakter ist eine psychische Gewohnheit, eine Gewohnheit der Seele, und seinem Charakter gemäß handeln, heißt seinen psychischen und geistigen Gewohnheiten gemäß handeln, denn diese sind ihm allein bequem, und nur das Bequeme gehört uns eigentlich an. [...] Charakter ist also Eigenschaft und Gewohnheit zugleich. Jenes *a priori* angesehen; dieses *a posteriori*”; Conversation with Riemer of 27 August 1808 (Biedermann 1909, 533). Compare with his earlier remark to Riemer in late 1806: “Character – that is, the mixture of one's first basic human drives, self-preservation, self-evaluation, and so on – is the point from which the development of the other spiritual powers begins and on which it rests” (“Der Charakter, d. h. die Mischung der ersten menschlichen Grundtriebe, der Selbsterhaltung, der Selbstschätzung usw. ist das, wovon auch die Ausbildung der übrigen Seelenkräfte ausgeht und worauf sie ruht”) (Biedermann 1909, p. 470).

**32** “Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille, / Sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt”; *Tasso*, act 1, scene 2, ll. 304 – 305 (Goethe 1987b, p. 63; Goethe 1952, p. 81). Compare with Goethe's maxim,

tween philosophy and character, between idealism and action, can also be found in the thought of Schelling,<sup>33</sup> which restates an idea found in Fichte.<sup>34</sup>)

For his part, Schopenhauer defines (acquired) character as “the character we obtain in life, through contact with the world”,<sup>35</sup> arguing that it is this character we mean “when anyone is praised as a person who has character, or censured as one without character”.<sup>36</sup> The acquired character is of importance, he says, not so much for “ethics proper” (*die eigentliche Ethik*), but very much for *das Weltleben* – or for “life in the world” (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 307; Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 401).<sup>37</sup>

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“character in small and great aspects means that the human being treats with consequence what he believes himself to be capable of” (“Charakter im großen und kleinen ist, daß der Mensch demjenigen eine stete Folge gibt, dessen er sich fähig fühlt”) (*Maxims and Reflections*, §839; Goethe 1953, p. 528). Numerous other maxims reflect Goethe’s development of a theory of character, for example, *Maxims and Reflections*, §864 (Goethe 1953, p. 529), or §1349 (Goethe 1953, p. 529), or §12 (Goethe 1953, p. 529).

**33** See Schelling’s *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study* (*Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*) (1803): “Without intellectual intuition no philosophy! [...] Those who do not have intellectual intuition cannot understand what is said of it, and for this reason it cannot be communicated to them. The minimum requirement is clear and genuine insight into the nothingness of all merely finite knowledge. Intellectual intuition can be developed; in the philosopher it must become his character, as it were – a regularly employed tool, a faculty for seeing things solely as they are in the Idea” (“Ohne intellektuelle Anschauung keine Philosophie! [...] Wer sie nicht hat, versteht auch nicht, was in ihr gesagt wird; sie kann also überhaupt nicht gegeben werden. Eine negative Bedingung ihres Besitzes ist die klare und innige Einsicht in die Nichtigkeit aller bloß endlichen Erkenntniß. Man kann sie in sich bilden; in dem Philosophen muß sie gleichsam zum Charakter werden, zum unwandelbaren Organ, zur Fertigkeit alles nur zu sehen, wie es in der Idee sich darstellt”) (Schelling 1966, p. 49–50; Schelling 1859, p. 255–256).

**34** According to Fichte in his first introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* in 1797 to 1798, “the kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends [...] upon the kind of person one is. For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it” (“Was für eine Philosophie man wähle, hänge [...] davon ab, was man für ein Mensch ist: denn ein philosophisches System ist nicht ein toter Hausrat, den man ablegen oder annehmen könnte, wie es uns beliebte, sondern es ist beseelt durch die Seele des Menschen, der es hat”) (Fichte 1994, p. 20; Fichte 1970, p. 195).

**35** “der [...] Charakter, den man erst im Leben, durch den Weltgebrauch, erhält” (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 1, p. 303; Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 396).

**36** “wenn man gelobt wird als ein Mensch, der Charakter hat, oder getadelt als charakterlos” (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 303; Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 396).

**37** Later, in his prize essay *On the Freedom of the Will* (*Über die Freiheit des Willens*), published in *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* (*Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik*) (1841), Schopenhauer notes four aspects of the human character: its individuality, its empirical nature,

Now, because of the innate and immutable nature of the (intelligible, and hence the empirical) character, one might think that an individual cannot change his or her path in life; but this, says Schopenhauer (in *The World as Will and Representation*, I, §55), is not so:

It might of course be supposed that, since the empirical character, as the phenomenon of the intelligible, is unalterable, and, like every natural phenomenon, is in itself consistent, man also for this very reason would have to appear always like himself and consistent, and would therefore not need to acquire a character for himself artificially through experience and reflection. But the case is otherwise, and although a man is always the same, he does not always understand himself, but often fails to recognize himself until he has acquired some degree of real self-knowledge. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 303).<sup>38</sup>

Because it is the case, or so Schopenhauer continues, that in life, in the “world”, we do indeed exercise a certain freedom of choice:

It is precisely the same in life, where we can follow some definite pursuit, whether it be of pleasure, honour, wealth, science, art, or virtue, seriously and successfully only when we give up all claims foreign to it, and renounce everything else. Therefore mere willing and mere ability to do are not enough of themselves, but a man must also *know* what he wills, and *know* what he can do. Only thus will he display character, and only then can he achieve anything solid. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 304).<sup>39</sup>

If, however, we do not come to know what we will, and hence what we can do, then we remain in the position described by Schopenhauer in the passage with which our discussion began:

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its constancy, and its innateness (Schopenhauer 1988, III, p. 406–411). According to Schopenhauer, the (internal) necessity that motivates our lives is what he terms “innate, individual character” (“der angeborene, individuelle Charakter”) (Schopenhauer 1988, III, p. 415).

**38** “Zwar könnte man meinen, daß, da der empirische Charakter, als Erscheinung des Intelligibeln, unveränderlich und, wie jede Naturerscheinung, in sich konsequent ist, auch der Mensch eben deshalb immer sich selbst gleich und konsequent erscheinen müßte und daher nicht nöthig hätte, durch Erfahrung und Nachdenken, sich künstlich einen Charakter zu erwerben. Dem ist aber anders, und wiewohl man immer der Selbe ist, so versteht man jedoch sich selbst nicht jederzeit, sondern verkennt sich oft, bis man die eigentliche Selbstkenntniß in gewissem Grade erworben hat” (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 396)

**39** “Gerade so ist es im Leben, wo wir irgend eine bestimmte Bestrebung, sei sie nach Genuß, Ehre, Reichthum, Wissenschaft, Kunst, oder Tugend, nur dann recht mit Ernst und mit Glück verfolgen können, wann wir alle ihr fremden Ansprüche aufgeben, auf alles Andere verzichten. Darum ist das bloße Wollen und auch Können an sich noch nicht zureichend, sondern ein Mensch muß auch *wissen*, was er will, und *wissen*, was er kann: erst so wird er Charakter zeigen, und erst dann kann er etwas Rechtes vollbringen” (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 397).



Until he reaches this, he is still without character, in spite of the natural consistency of the empirical character. Although, on the whole, he must remain true to himself and run course run by his daimon, he will not describe a straight line, but a wavering and uneven one. He will hesitate, deviate, turn back, and prepare himself for repentance and pain. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 304)<sup>40</sup>

In other words, the acquired character involves – to put it in Nietzschean terms – “a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal* ...” [“ein Ja, ein Nein, eine gerade Linie, ein *Ziel* ...” (TI I 44)], or it involves – to put it in Goethean terms – an act of renunciation (*Aufgeben*), but renunciation in a positive sense.

### 3 Kant on character

Behind Schopenhauer’s discussion of character lies not just Kantian epistemology, but also the specific conception of character developed by Kant. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (*Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*) (1798), for instance,<sup>41</sup> we find Kant elaborating at considerable length on the notion of character. Here, distinguishing between the character of a person, of gender, of nation (*Volk*) and of “race” (*Rasse*), and species (*Gattung*), Kant discourses on different temperaments (the famous four humours – sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, melancholy), but he is keen to distinguish “character” from nature or “temperament”. For to say of someone that he or she has a *particular* character does not mean the same as saying that he or she “has character”: as Kant puts it, “to be able to simply say of a human being: ‘he has a *character*’ is not only to have *said* a great deal about him, but is also to have *praised* him a great deal; for this is a rarity, which inspires profound respect and admiration

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**40** “Bevor er dahin gelangt, ist er, ungeachtet der natürlichen Konsequenz des empirischen Charakters, doch charakterlos, und obwohl er im Ganzen sich treu bleiben und seine Bahn durchlaufen muß, von seinem Dämon gezogen; so wird er doch keine schnurgerechte, sondern eine zitternde, ungleiche Linie beschreiben, schwanken, abweichen, umkehren, sich Reue und Schmerz bereiten” (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 397).

**41** In his *Nachlass* writings on philosophical anthropology, Cassirer draws attention to the significance of anthropology for Kant – “there is an epoch in his development when he saw anthropology as the real fundamental discipline, on which even ethics had to be based” (“es gibt eine Epoche in seiner Entwicklung, in der er die Anthropologie als die eigentliche Grundwissenschaft ansah, auf die auch die Ethik aufbauen müsse”) –, suggesting that Kant’s critical-transcendental method was a deviation from his original (anthropological) starting-point (Cassirer 2005, p. 21, cf. p. 23).

toward him".<sup>42</sup> Kant's definition of this kind of character is, so to speak, very characteristic (of him):

The only proof within a human being's consciousness that he has character is that he has made truthfulness his supreme maxim, in the heart of his confessions to himself as well as in his behaviour toward everyone else. (Kant 2006b, p. 195)<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, Kant adds, to have character is nothing less than a demand of reason itself, and the condition of human dignity. He argues as follows:

Since to have this is the minimum that one can demand of a reasonable human being, but at the same time also the maximum of inner worth (of human dignity), then to be a man of principles (to have a determinate character) must be possible for the most common human reason and yet, according to its dignity, be superior to the greatest talent. (Kant 2006b, p. 195)<sup>44</sup>

Yet there are also passages where Kant talks about character in a much less abstract way. For Kant, true character relies on nature, yet goes beyond it, and this is the essence of his distinction between "temperament" and "character":

Here it does not depend on what nature makes of the human being, but on what the human being *makes of himself*; for the former belongs to temperament (where the subject is for the most part passive), and only the latter enables one to recognize that he has a character. (Kant 2006b, p. 192)<sup>45</sup>

For the essence of true character lies in what Kant (and, after him, Schopenhauer) calls "acquired character": "The human being who is conscious of having

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42 "Von einem Menschen schlechthin sagen zu können: 'er hat einen *Charakter*', heißt sehr viel von ihm nicht allein *gesagt*, sondern auch *gerühmt*; denn das ist eine Seltenheit, die Hochachtung gegen ihn und Bewunderung erregt" (Kant 2006b, p. 191; Kant 1977, p. 633).

43 "Wahrhaftigkeit im Innern des Geständnisses vor sich selbst und zugleich im Betragen gegen jeden andern, sich zur obersten Maxime gemacht, ist der einzige Beweis des Bewußtseins eines Menschen, daß er einen Charakter hat" (Kant 1977, p. 637).

44 "Da diesen zu haben das Minimum ist, was man von einem vernünftigen Menschen fordern kann, zugleich aber auch das Maximum des inneren Werts (der Menschenwürde): so muß, ein Mann von Grundsätzen zu sein (einen bestimmten Charakter zu haben), der gemeinsten Menschenvernunft möglich und dadurch dem größten Talent, der Würde nach, überlegen sein" (Kant 1977, p. 638).

45 "Es kommt hiebei nicht auf das an, was die Natur aus dem Menschen, sondern was dieser *aus sich selbst macht*; denn das erstere gehört zum Temperament (wobei das Subjekt größtenteils passiv ist) und nur das letztere gibt zu erkennen, daß er einen Charakter habe" (Kant 1977, p. 634).

character in his way of thinking does not have it by nature; he must always have *acquired* it”.<sup>46</sup>

What Kant has to say about the development of character is highly intriguing, and it is powerfully expressed. He describes the grounding of one’s character in this sense as “like a kind of rebirth”,<sup>47</sup> much in the same way that the psychologist C.G. Jung spoke about rebirth as an “archetypal” process.<sup>48</sup> (In fact, Nietzsche provides Jung with models of several different kinds of rebirth.)<sup>49</sup> For Kant, character results, not from the slow processes of education, example and instruction, but rather “as if through an explosion” – that is, “an explosion which happens one time as a result of weariness at the unstable condition of instinct”;<sup>50</sup> and Kant notes that the period of one’s life when “this revolution” is attempted is rarely before one’s thirties, and it is achieved even more rarely before one’s forties.<sup>51</sup> (Kant’s assertion here is entirely in line with the principle of

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**46** “Der Mensch, der sich eines Charakters in seiner Denkungsart bewußt ist, hat ihn nicht von der Natur, sondern muß ihn jederzeit *erworben* haben” (Kant 2006b, p. 194; Kant 1977, p. 636).

**47** “gleich einer Art von Wiedergeburt” (Kant 2006b, 194; Kant 1977, p. 636 – 637).

**48** See Jung, “On Rebirth” (“Über Wiedergeburt”) (1940/1950), where Jung distinguishes between five different senses of rebirth (as metempsychosis, as reincarnation, as resurrection, as rebirth in the strict sense or *renovatio*, and as participation in the process of transformation), and he subdivides the fourth category of *renovatio* into (a) rebirth within the span of the individual life and (b) essential transformation (or the total rebirth of the individual) (Jung 1980, p. 113 – 115).

**49** For Jung, the Noonide Vision in *Zarathustra* is an example of an immediate experience of the transcendence of life (Jung 1980, p. 118), while Nietzsche’s encounter with Zarathustra (as recorded in his poem, “Sils Maria”) exemplifies an enlargement of personality, demonstrating how, “when a summit of life is reached, when the bud unfolds and from the lesser the greater emerges, then, as Nietzsche says, ‘One becomes Two’, and the greater figure, which one always was but which remained invisible, appears to the lesser personality with the force of a revelation’ (Jung 1980, p. 121). Meanwhile, the episode of the Tightrope Walker serves as a warning of the “awful danger” that attends a careless attitude toward such an event, analogous to Paul’s Damascus conversion, in turn described by the apostle as “leading captivity captive” [Ephesians 4:8; cf. Psalm 68:18] (Jung 1980, p. 121).

**50** “gleichsam durch eine Explosion”; “eine Explosion, die auf den Überdruß am schwankenden Zustande des Instinkts auf einmal erfolgt” (Kant 2006, p. 194 [translation modified]; Kant 1977, p. 637). As Nietzsche said, “I am not a man, I am dynamite” (“Ich bin kein Mensch, ich bin Dynamit”) (EH IV 1: KSA 6/365; Nietzsche 1992, p. 96).

**51** “Perhaps there are only a few who have attempted this revolution before the age of thirty, and fewer still who have firmly established it before they are forty” (“Vielleicht werden nur wenige sein, die diese Revolution vor dem 30sten Jahre versucht, und noch wenigere, die sie vor dem 40sten fest gegründet haben”) (Kant 2006b, p. 194; Kant 1977, p. 637).

biography enunciated by the great fourteenth-century mystic, Johannes Tauler.)<sup>52</sup> And we should remember: Nietzsche wrote *Ecce Homo* after his forty-fourth birthday ...

Curiously enough, Nietzsche's thinking echoes these ideas in Kant, when he develops his doctrine of "grand style" (Deschavanne & Tavoillot 2007, p. 314). In respect of their ideas about character, then, we discover a remarkable, and unexpected, conceptual proximity between Nietzsche and Kant. In *The Gay Science*, for example, Nietzsche urges us that "one thing is needful": namely, "to 'give style' to one's character".<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche's understanding of "grand style" as a harmony of instincts reworks Aristotle's definition of maturity as the golden mean,<sup>54</sup> and as early as in the first volume of *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche had defined the "morality of the mature individual" as follows:<sup>55</sup>

To make of oneself a complete *person*, and in all that one does to have in view the *highest good* of this person – that gets us further than those pity-filled agitations and actions for the sake of others. We all of us, to be sure, still suffer from the all-too-little regard paid to the personal in us, it has been badly cultivated. (Nietzsche 1986a, p. 50–51)<sup>56</sup>

In *Twilight of the Idols*, where he associates "grand style" even more closely with the aesthetic, Nietzsche defines it as an expression of "the highest feeling of power and security":

The highest feeling of power and security finds expression in that which possesses *grand style*. Power which no longer requires proving; which disdains to please; which is slow to answer; which is conscious of no witnesses around it; which lives oblivious of the existence

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52 In a sermon on the Ascension (based on the text, *Ascendens Christus in altum, captivam duxit captivatalem* [Ephesians 4:8]), Tauler taught that "until a man has reached his fortieth year, he will never attain lasting peace, never be truly formed into God, try as he may [...] Before the proper time has arrived, he cannot achieve true and perfect peace, nor can he enter into a God-seeing life" (Tauler 1985, p. 72–73). Tauler's assertion is borne out by the life story of his fellow mystic, Henry Suso. For further discussion and an overview of various theories of the stages of life, see Bishop 2011, p. 3–85.

53 "Eins ist Noth. – Seinem Charakter 'Stil geben' –" (GS 290: KSA 3/530; Nietzsche 1974).

54 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, book 2, chapter 14 (Aristotle 1944, p. 1406; cf. Deschavanne and Tavoillot 2007, p. 315). According to Aristotle, the prime of life is (for the body) between 30 and 35, (for the mind) about 49.

55 "Moral des reifen Individuums" (HAH I 95: KSA 2/91–92).

56 "Aus sich eine ganze *Person* machen und in Allem, was man thut, deren *höchstes Wohl* in's Auge zu fassen – das bringt weiter, als jene mitleidigen Regungen und Handlungen zu Gunsten Andere. Wir Alle leiden freilich noch immer an der allzugerungen Beachtung des Persönlichen an uns, es ist schlecht ausgebildet" (HAH I 95: KSA 2/92).

of any opposition; which reposes in *itself*, fatalistic, a law among laws: *that* is what speaks of itself in the form of grand style. (Nietzsche 1968c, p. 74)<sup>57</sup>

This same idea is taken up in *Ecce Homo* when Nietzsche discusses the concept of *Wohlgeratenheit*, of “having-turned-out-well”. Being someone who has “turned out well” is the exact opposite of what Nietzsche terms being a *décadent* (KSA 6/267), but it is also precisely what Nietzsche means when he talks about the *Übermensch*.<sup>58</sup> To illustrate the idea of having “turned out well”, Nietzsche uses a striking image – the image of self-sculpting:<sup>59</sup>

That a human being who has turned out well does our senses good: that he is carved out of wood at once hard, delicate and sweet-smelling. He has a taste only for what is beneficial to him; his pleasure, his joy ceases where the measure of what is beneficial to him is overstepped.<sup>60</sup>

The image of sculpting is intimately related to the idea of ‘character’, which derives, etymologically, from the Greek *χαρακτή* [*kharaktēr*], or an instrument for marking, from *χαράσσειν* [*kharassein*], to engrave (Seidel, col. 984). Furthermore, this image belongs in a tradition that reaches back to the Neoplatonic school of Plotinus who, in his *Enneads* (Ennead 1, Tractate 6, §9), writes:

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57 “Das höchste Gefühl von Macht und Sicherheit kommt in dem zum Ausdruck, was *grossen Stil* hat. Die Macht, die keinen Beweis mehr nöthig hat; die es verschmäh't, zu gefallen; die schwer antwortet; die keinen Zeugen um sich fühlt; die ohne Bewusstsein davon lebt, dass es Widerspruch gegen sie giebt; die in *sich* ruht, fatalistisch, ein Gesetz unter Gesetzen: *das* redet als grosser Stil von sich” (TI IX 11: KSA 6/119).

58 Elsewhere Nietzsche explains: “The word ‘superman’ to designate a type that has turned out supremely well, in antithesis to ‘modern’ men, to ‘good’ men, to Christians and other nihilists” (“Das Wort ‘*Übermensch*’ zur Bezeichnung eines Typus höchster Wohlgerathenheit, im Gegensatz zu ‘modernen’ Menschen, zu ‘guten’ Menschen, zu Christen und andren Nihilisten”) (EH III 1: Nietzsche 1992, 41; KSA 6/300).

59 Implicitly Nietzsche is thinking in terms of this image at the end of *Zarathustra*, part 2, “On the Blissful Islands” (“Auf den glückseligen Inseln”) (KSA 4/111–112); and in *Beyond Good and Evil*, §231: “At the bottom of us, really ‘deep down’, there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions” (“Im Grunde von uns, ganz “da unten”, giebt es freilich etwas Unbelehrbares, einen Granit von geistigem *Fatum*, von vorherbestimmter Entscheidung und Antwort auf vorherbestimmte ausgelesene Fragen”) (BGE 231: Nietzsche 1968a, p. 352; KSA 5/170).

60 “Dass ein wohlgerathner Mensch unsern Sinnen wohlthut: dass er aus einem Holze geschnitzt ist, das hart, zart und wohlriechend ist; sein Gefallen, seine Lust hört auf, wo das Maass des Zutraglichen überschritten wird” (EH I 2: KSA 6/267; Nietzsche 1992, p. 10–11).

Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful; he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue. (Plotinus 1969, p. 63)

Nor is Nietzsche alone in using this image.<sup>61</sup> For instance: similarly, if less dramatically, Ernst Cassirer writes in “On Basis Phenomena” (“Über Basisphänomene”) (c. 1940), part of his draft for a fourth volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (Philosophie der symbolischen Formen)*, that Goethe’s understanding of Socrates was the right one, and that the call of the Delphic oracle, *gnōthi seauton*, is really a call to action:

Know your *work* and know “yourself” *in* your work; know what you do, so you can do what you know. Give shape to what you do; give it form by starting from mere instinct, from tradition, from convention, from routine, from ἐμπειρία [= experience] and τριβή [= habituation] in order to arrive at “self-conscious” action – a work in which you recognize yourself as the sole creator and actor. (Cassirer 1996, p. 186)<sup>62</sup>

In so arguing, Cassirer in fact remains true to the totality of the original injunction inscribed above the temple of the oracle at Delphi: “Know thyself – and thou shalt know all the mysteries of the gods and of the universe”.

In his own discussion of this process of self-carving, of self-sculpting, Nietzsche explores what, in this context, renunciation means: it means he has learnt the lesson taught in his own “military school of life” in *Twilight of the Idols* – namely, “what does not kill me makes me stronger”:<sup>63</sup>

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61 For further discussion of this topos, see Onfray 1993, p. 77–90. A history of this image would include instances from Leibniz, Condillac, and St Rose of Lima, among others.

62 “Erkenne Dein Werk und erkenne ‘dich selbst’ *in* Dein Werk; *wisse*, was Du tust, damit du *tun* kannst, was Du weisst. *Gestalte* Dein Tun, bilde es aus dem blossen *Instinkt*, der Tradition, Konvention, der Routine, der *empeiria* and *tribē* um zum ‘selbstbewussten’ Tun – zu einem Werk, in den Du *Dich*, als seinen Schöpfer und Täter erkennst.” (Cassirer 1995, p. 190).

63 “*Aus der Kriegsschule des Lebens*. – Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich stärker.” (TI I 8: Nietzsche 1968c, p. 23; KSA 6/60). Compare with the epilogue to *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (§1): “*Amor fati*: that is my inmost nature. And as for my long sickness, do I not owe it indescribably more than I owe to my health? I owe it a *higher* health – one which is made stronger by whatever does not kill it” (“*Amor fati*: das ist meine innerste Natur. – Und was mein langes Siechthum angeht, verdanke ich ihn nicht unsäglich viel mehr als meiner Gesundheit? Ich verdanke ihm eine *höhere* Gesundheit, eine solche, welche stärker wird von Allem, was sie nicht umbringt!”) (NW Epilogue 1: Nietzsche 1976, p. 680; KSA 6/436). Later, in the section in *Ecce Homo* on ‘*The*

He divines cures for injuries, he employs ill chances to his own advantage; what does not kill him makes him stronger. Out of everything he sees, hears, experiences he instinctively collects together *his* sum: he is a principle of selection, he rejects much. He is always in *his* company, whether he traffics with books, people or landscapes: he does honour when he *chooses*, when he *admits*, when he *trusts*. [...] He believes in neither “misfortune” nor in “guilt”: he knows how to *forget* – he is strong enough for everything to *have* to turn out for the best for him. (Nietzsche 1992, p. 11)<sup>64</sup>

We should note well: Nietzsche says this is nothing less than a description of – himself!

We could equally describe this process of self-sculpting, the process by which ‘one comes to be what one is’, as one of ‘self-cultivation’, of *Selbstzucht* –<sup>65</sup> or to use a more conventional term, *Bildung*.<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche urges us to turn away our superficial consciousness, and directs our attention to “the organizing

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*Case of Wagner*’, Nietzsche offers a variant on this theme: “I myself have never suffered from any of this; I am not injured by what is *necessary*; *amor fati* is my innermost nature” (“Ich selber habe nie an Alledem gelitten; das *Nothwendige* verletzt mich nicht; *amor fati* ist meine innerste Natur. Dies schliesst aber nicht aus, dass ich die Ironie liebe, sogar die welthistorische Ironie”) (EH III CW 4: KSA 6/363; Nietzsche 1992, p. 94).

**64** “Er errät Heilmittel gegen Schädigungen, er nützt schlimme Zufälle zu seinem Vorteil aus; was ihn nicht umbringt, macht ihn stärker. Er sammelt instinktiv aus allem, was er sieht, hört, erlebt, *seine* Summe: er ist ein auswählendes Prinzip, er lässt viel durchfallen. Er ist immer in *seiner* Gesellschaft, ob er mit Büchern, Menschen oder Landschaften verkehrt: er ehrt, indem er *wählt*, indem er *zulässt*, indem er *vertraut*. [...] Er glaubt weder an ‘Unglück’, noch an ‘Schuld’: er wird fertig, mit sich, mit anderen, er weiß zu *vergessen*, – er ist stark genug, daß ihm alles zum Besten gereichen *muß*. – “ (EH I 2: KSA 6/267).

**65** Compare with *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche argues that “today the only way of making the individual possible would be by *pruning* him: possible, that is to say *complete* ...” (“Heute müsste man das Individuum erst möglich machen, indem man dasselbe *beschneidet*: möglich, das heisst *ganz* ...”) (TI IX 41: Nietzsche 1968c, p. 95–96; KSA 6/143); just as earlier, in *Daybreak*, he had suggested: “One can dispose of one’s drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis” (“Man kann wie ein Gärtner mit seinen Trieben schalten und, was Wenige wissen, die Keime des Zornes, des Mitleidens, des Nachgrübelns, der Eitelkeit so fruchtbar und nutzbringend ziehen wie ein schönes Obst an Spalieren”) (D 560: Nietzsche 1982c, p. 225; KSA 3/326).

**66** In his essay on Schopenhauer in the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche explores the nature of true education when he writes: “And that is the secret of all culture: [...] liberation, the removal of all the weeds, rubble and vermin that want to attack the tender buds of the plant, an out-streaming of light and warmth, the gentle rustling of nocturnal rain, it is imitation and worship of nature” (“Und das ist das Geheimnis aller Bildung: [...] Befreiung ist sie, Wegräumung alles Unkrauts, Schuttwerks, Gewürms, das die zarten Keime der Pflanzen antasten will, Ausströmung von Licht und Wärme, liebevolles Niederrauschen nächtlichen Regens, sie ist Nachahmung und Anbetung der Natur”) (UM III 1: Nietzsche 1983, p. 130; KSA 1/341).

'idea' destined to rule", which grows and grows "in the depths" of the individual, where we discover "a tremendous multiplicity, which is nonetheless the opposite of chaos".<sup>67</sup> In so writing, Nietzsche is drawing here on Goethe's concept of a "plural self" – for "each living thing is not a unity, but a plurality".<sup>68</sup> This plural self is a self that constructs itself into a totality, as Goethe explained in his final letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt, which has a number of ideas in common with Nietzsche (and Schopenhauer). According to Goethe, "the organs of the human being by means of practice, theory, reflection, success, failure"<sup>69</sup> (for "even the *blunders* of life [...] have their own meaning and value",<sup>70</sup> says Nietzsche), by means of "support and resistance" ["Fördernis und Widerstand"]<sup>71</sup> ("my humanity", Nietzsche tells us, "is a continual self-overcoming" [Nietzsche 1992, p. 18]),<sup>72</sup> and by means of "ever-repeated reflection", create something new, inasmuch as they "link, unconsciously and in free activity, the acquired with the inborn" (or combine the acquired with the empirical character, as Schopenhauer would say), "so that the result is a unity which astonishes the world".<sup>73</sup>

Over and against the advice of the Delphic Oracle and the morality of unselfing – that is, in opposition to "loss of centre of gravity, resistance to the natural instincts, in a word 'selflessness'" (Nietzsche 1992, p. 67) –<sup>74</sup>, Nietzsche champions the doctrine of eternal recurrence, a doctrine whose very *lack* of originality he is swift to emphasize in *Ecce Homo*. For the doctrine *could*, he tells us, have been taught by Heraclitus, and Stoic teaching shows traces of it (Nietzsche 1992, p. 51; KSA 6/313).

The doctrine of eternal recurrence lies at the heart of Nietzsche's interest in character as a coming-to-terms with the dialectic of freedom and necessity: for,

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67 "[D]ie organisierende, die zur Herrschaft berufne 'Idee' in der Tiefe [...] eine ungeheure Vielheit, die trotzdem das Gegenstück des Chaos ist" (EH II 9: KSA 6/294; Nietzsche 1992, 35).

68 "[J]edes Lebendige ist kein Einzelnes, sondern eine Mehrheit" (Goethe, *Zur Morphologie* [Goethe 1955, p. 56]).

69 "[D]ie Organe des Menschen durch Übung, Lehre, Nachdenken, Gelingen, Mißlingen" (Goethe 1967, p. 480).

70 "[S]elbst die *Fehlgriffe* des Lebens [haben] ihren eignen Sinn und Werth" (EH II 9: KSA 6/293).

71 "Fördernis und Widerstand" (Goethe 1967, p. 480).

72 "[M]eine Humanität ist eine beständige Selbstüberwindung" (EH I 8: KSA 6/276).

73 "Die Organe des Menschen durch Übung, Lehre, Nachdenken, Gelingen, Mißlingen, Fördernis und Widerstand und immer wieder Nachdenken verknüpfen ohne Bewußtsein in einer freien Tätigkeit das Erworbene mit dem Angeborenen, so daß es eine Einheit hervorbringt welche die Welt in Erstaunen setzt." Goethe, letter of 17 March 1832 (Goethe 1967, p. 480). For further discussion, see Wilkinson 1962, esp. p. 149.

74 "[D]er Verlust an Schwergewicht, der Widerstand gegen die natürlichen Instinkte, die 'Selbstlosigkeit' mit Einem Worte" (EH III D 2: KSA 6/331–332).



as a cosmological hypothesis, it expresses a *fatalism*, according to which the self is something given (i. e., “wie man wird, was man ist”); whilst yet, as an existential imperative, it presents the self as something to be constructed (i. e., “wie man wird, was man ist”) (see Nehamas 1983, p. 388–395). For the concept of eternal recurrence provides, as Nietzsche explains, the basis for the fundamental affirmation of the self – insofar as “the most fearful insight into reality”<sup>75</sup> constitutes “one more reason to *be oneself* the eternal Yes to all things, ‘the tremendous unbounded Yes and Amen” (Nietzsche 1992, p. 77 [translation modified]).<sup>76</sup>

Nietzsche has a name for this affirmation, for this yea-saying: he calls it *amor fati*.<sup>77</sup> And *amor fati* is, he tell us, “my formula for greatness in a human being”,<sup>78</sup> namely: “Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it [...] but to *love* it ...” (Nietzsche 1992, p. 37–38).<sup>79</sup> Yet how does the affirmation of necessity sit with the call to construct our own character? If everything is determined, how can we exercise free will, which, for Nietzsche, is something that does not exist? If the shape of our statue is (always) already predetermined, how can we sculpt it? If we are what we are, how then can we become it – or, rather, how could we *not* become it? Why bother to become what we are since, surely, what we have become, is what we must be?

It is precisely at this point that the link between what Schopenhauer means by “acquired character”, and what Nietzsche means by the doctrine of *amor fati*, becomes clear. For Schopenhauer (*The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, §55), the character(istic) of the acquired character lies in understanding our (intelligible, and thus empirical) character and assenting to – Nietzsche would say, affirming – it:

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75 “[D]ie furchtbarste Einsicht in der Realität” (EH III Z 6: KSA 6/345).

76 “[E]inen Grund noch hinzu, das ewige Ja zu allen Dingen *selbst zu sein*, ‘das ungeheure ungebegrenzte Ja- und Amen-sagen’ ...” (EH III Z 6: KSA 6/345). For further discussion of the affirmation of the self in relation to Nietzsche’s project for a reevaluation of all values, see Ridley 2005b.

77 Here Nietzsche’s thought returns to one of its earliest concerns: see, influenced by his reading of Hegel, Kant, Rousseau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (especially his essay, “Fate”), Nietzsche’s two early texts of 1862, entitled “Fate and History” [“Fatum und Geschichte”] and “Freedom of the Will and Fate” [“Willensfreiheit und Fatum”] (Nietzsche 1994b, p. 54–59 and p. 60–62).

78 “[M]eine Formel für die Grösse am Menschen” (EH II 10: KSA 6/297).

79 “Das Nothwendige nicht bloss ertragen, noch weniger verhehlen [...], sondern es *lieben* ...” (EH II 10: KSA 6/297). For further discussion, see section 7, entitled “Affirmation: The Love of Fate”, and therein the sub-section entitled “A Joyful and Trusting Fatalism”, in Murray 1999, p. 251–287 (esp. p. 267–278).

[Acquired character] is accordingly nothing but the most complete possible knowledge of our own individuality. It is the abstract, and consequently distinct, knowledge of the unalterable qualities of our own empirical character, and of the measure and direction of our mental and bodily powers, and so of the whole strength and weakness of our own individuality. This puts us in a position to carry out, deliberately and methodically, the unalterable role of our own person, and to fill up the gaps caused in it by whims or weaknesses, under the guidance of fixed concepts. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 305)<sup>80</sup>

Put in Nietzschean terms, Schopenhauer's argument is that we become what we are, when we understand what we are, and when we will it to be thus:

We have now brought to clearly conscious maxims that are always present to us, the manner of acting necessarily determined by our individual nature. In accordance with these, we carry it out as deliberately as though it were one that had been learnt, without ever being led astray by the fleeting influence of the mood or impression of the present moment, without being checked by the bitterness or sweetness of a particular thing we meet with on the way, without wavering, without hesitation, without inconsistencies. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 305)<sup>81</sup>

Or to put it another way, again in Nietzschean terms, Schopenhauer is arguing that we shall not be led astray by all these sidepaths, the tasks that lie beyond the task – by “the temporary sidepaths and wrong turnings, the delays, the ‘modesties’, the seriousness squandered on tasks which lie outside *the* task” –,<sup>82</sup> even

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**80** “Dieses [= *der erworbene Charakter*] ist demnach nichts Anderes, als möglichst vollkommene Kenntniß der eigenen Individualität: es ist das abstrakte, folglich deutliche Wissen von den unabänderlichen Eigenschaften seines eigenen empirischen Charakters und von dem Maaß und der Richtung seiner geistigen und körperlichen Kräfte, also von den gesammten Stärken und Schwächen der eigenen Individualität. Dies setzt uns in den Stand, die an sich ein Mal unveränderliche Rolle der eigenen Person, die wir vorhin regellos naturalisirten, jetzt besonnen und methodisch durchzuführen und die Lücken, welche Launen oder Schwächen darin verursachen, nach Anleitung fester Begriffe auszufüllen” (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 398).

**81** “Die durch unsere individuelle Natur ohnehin nothwendige Handlungsweise haben wir jetzt auf deutlich bewußte, uns stets gegenwärtige Maximen gebracht, nach denen wir sie so besonnen durchführen, als wäre es eine erlernte, ohne hiebei je irre zu werden durch den vorübergehenden Einfluß der Stimmung, oder des Eindrucks der Gegenwart, ohne gehemmt zu werden durch das Bittere oder Süße einer im Wege angetroffenen Einzelheit, ohne Zaudern, ohne Schwanken, ohne Inkonsequenzen” (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 398–399).

**82** “die zeitweiligen Nebenwege und Abwege, die Verzögerungen, die ‘Bescheidenheiten’, der Ernst, auf Ausgaben verschwendet, die jenseits *der* Aufgabe liegen” (EH II 9: KSA 6/293). Compare with Nietzsche's letter as professor of philology to Wilhelm Vischer-Bilfinger, his senior colleague at Basel, as early as January 1871: “Because it is in my nature I am strongly driven to think through a philosophical unity to its conclusion, and to work constantly, in long trains of thought, and undisturbed on a problem, I feel myself increasingly thrown hither and thither

though, within Nietzsche's perspective of total affirmation, even these have "their own meaning and value" (Nietzsche 1992, p. 34; KSA 6/293).<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Schopenhauer explains, we shall no longer be at a loss as to what decisions to take:

Now we shall no longer, as novices, wait, attempt, and grasp about, in order to see what we really desire and are able to do; we know this once for all, and with every choice we have only to apply general principles to particular cases, and at once reach a decision. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 305).<sup>84</sup>

Or, as Nietzsche would say, it is a case of "a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal* ..." <sup>85</sup>

Moreover, by acquiring *Charakter*, we shall, Schopenhauer says, spare ourselves pain, and even gain pleasure in our powers (*Kräfte*) – the closest Schopenhauer comes to expressing what Nietzsche calls the "will-to-power" (*Wille zur Macht*):

We also know the nature and measure of our powers and weaknesses, and shall thus spare ourselves much pain and suffering. For there really is no other pleasure than in the use and feeling of our own powers, and the greatest pain is when we are aware of a deficiency of our powers where they are needed. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 305)<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, the individual who follows such a course will become – and here Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are, in their choice of expression, almost identical – the individual *that he (or she) is*:

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by my daily, complex work and all that goes with it, and distracted from my path" ("Von Natur auf das Stärkste dazu gedrängt, etwas Einheitliches philosophisch durchzudenken und in langen Gedankenzügen andauernd und ungestört bei einem Problem zu verharren, fühle ich mich immer durch den täglichen mehrfachen Beruf und dessen Art hin und her geworfen und aus der Bahn abgelenkt") (KSB 3/175). It is instructive to read this entire letter in the light of Nietzsche's remarks in *Ecce Homo*.

**83** "ihren eigenen Sinn und Werth" (EH II 9: KSA 6/293).

**84** "Wir werden nun nicht mehr, als Neulinge, warten, versuchen, umhertappen, um zu sehn, was wir eigentlich wollen und was wir vermögen; sondern wir wissen es ein für alle Mal, haben bei jeder Wahl nur allgemeine Sätze auf einzelne Fälle anzuwenden und gelangen gleich zum Entschluß" (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 399)

**85** "ein Ja, ein Nein, eine gerade Linie, ein *Ziel* ..." (TI I 44: KSA 6/66).

**86** "Wir kennen eben so die Art und das Maaß unserer Kräfte und unserer Schwächen, und werden uns dadurch viele Schmerzen ersparen. Denn es giebt eigentlich gar keinen Genuß anders, als im Gebrauch und Gefühl der eigenen Kräfte, und der größte Schmerz ist wahrgenommener Mangel an Kräften, wo man ihrer bedarf" (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 399).

Now if we have found out where our strong and weak points lie, we shall attempt to develop, employ, and use in every way those talents that are naturally prominent in us. We shall always turn to where these talents are useful and of value, and shall avoid entirely and with self-restraint those pursuits for which we have little natural aptitude. We shall guard against attempting that in which we do not succeed. Only the man who has reached this will always be entirely himself with complete awareness. (Schopenhauer 1969, I, p. 305)<sup>87</sup>

Here we are clearly dealing with the philosophical problem of necessity and freedom, causality and free will, that Nietzsche engages at several points in his work.<sup>88</sup> As this alignment of passages from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche shows, however, the way out of the paradox of the necessity and freedom – that is, the (lack of) freedom to be (other than) what one is – is by means of a “metaphysical pirouette”, a move that consists in understanding that, in Hegel’s words, freedom lies in the consent to necessity.<sup>89</sup> (In this respect, there is an intriguing convergence between Nietzsche’s thought and Wagner’s.)<sup>90</sup> On this model, to consent to what is necessary (about one’s self) involves knowledge of what that necessity entails, and through one’s knowledge, and then one’s consent, being free.<sup>91</sup> The creation of (one’s own) freedom through consent to (one’s

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**87** “Haben wir nun erforscht, wo unsere Stärken und wo unsere Schwächen liegen; so werden wir unsere hervorstechenden natürlichen Anlagen ausbilden, gebrauchen, auf alle Weise zu nutzen suchen und immer uns dahin wenden, wo diese taugen und gelten, aber durchaus und mit Selbstüberwindung die Bestrebungen vermeiden, zu denen wir von Natur geringe Anlagen haben; werden uns hüten, Das zu versuchen, was uns doch nicht gelingt. Nur wer dahin gelangt ist, wird stets mit voller Besonnenheit ganz er selbst seyn” (Schopenhauer 1988, I, p. 399).

**88** See, for example, *Beyond Good and Evil* 21 (KSA 5/35–36), and *Twilight of the Idols* IX 38, 41 (KSA 6/139–140, 143); for an overview of this problem in Nietzsche, see Gemes and May 2009; Rutherford 2011.

**89** In *The Science of Logic (Die Wissenschaft der Logik)* (1812–1816) Hegel writes that “freedom is the truth of necessity” (“die Freiheit [ist] die Wahrheit der Notwendigkeit”) (Hegel 1986a, p. 249; cf. p. 246); and compare with his *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* [1830], vol. 1, §158: “This truth of necessity is thus freedom” [“Diese Wahrheit der Notwendigkeit ist somit die Freiheit”] (Hegel 1986b, p. 303).

**90** See Wagner’s letter to August Röckel of 25–26 January 1854, where he says of *The Ring*: “Wotan rises to the tragic height of willing his own decline. This is the sum of what we are to learn from the history of humanity: to will what is necessary and to accomplish it oneself” (“Wodan [sic] schwingt sich bis zu der tragischen Höhe, seinen Untergang – zu wollen. Diess ist Alles, was wir aus der Geschichte der Menschheit zu lernen haben: das Nothwendige zu wollen und selbst zu vollbringen”) (Wagner 1995, p. 265).

**91** Compare with Goethe’s idea, following Leibniz, of a “freedom of necessity”, since – both in the case of the *nisus formativus* in animals, and the *innerer Drang, göttlicher Auftrag* of human beings – true freedom is the freedom to be one’s being (see Will 1956, p. 56). In Italy, it seems, Goethe came to believe that, understood in an aesthetic sense – “these sublime works of art are also the sublimest works of nature, created by men following true and natural lives” (“diese

own) necessity implies that, to execute the dual manoeuvre of first knowing, and then consenting to, what one is, knowledge and creation of self are fused (cf. Leiter 2001): the construction of subjectivity and the attainment of freedom through consent to necessity thus go hand-in-hand. In this way – and only in this way – can one truly become what one is.

## 4 Conclusion

To conclude this discussion of the concept of character in *Ecce Homo*, I should like to make two points, one specific and the other more general. First, the essence of Nietzsche's concept of character, as a means to and as a product of self-transformation, is perhaps best expressed in the following aphorism (*Maxims and Reflections*, §855) by Goethe:

It is not art if one turns a goddess into a witch, or a virgin into a whore; but to do the opposite – to give dignity to what has been scorned, to make desirable what has been rejected, that requires either art or character.<sup>92</sup>

In Nietzsche's view, it might be argued, such a transformation requires both art *and* character.<sup>93</sup> And, if this is the case, does this mean that, for Nietzsche, art and character amount ultimately to the same thing?

Second, the discussion surrounding the concept of character in Kant, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche forms the philosophical backdrop to the "science" of *Charakterologie*, as it came to be formulated in the early twentieth century by, among others, Ludwig Klages (Seifert 1931; Müller 1983; Pongratz 1971, cols 991–992 and 994–996). Far from being (as it is now often regarded) an obscure part of intellectual history, *Charakterologie* or *Charakterkunde* was

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hohen Kunstwerke sind zugleich als die höchsten Naturwerke von Menschen nach wahren und natürlichen Gesetzen hervorgebracht worden") –, necessity is divine: "Everything arbitrary, everything imaginary crumbles away, there we have necessity, there we have God" ("Alles Willkürliche, Eingebildete fällt zusammen, da ist Notwendigkeit, da ist Gott") (Goethe 1989, p. 396; Goethe 1950, p. 395); see Rueger 1992–1993.

<sup>92</sup> "Es ist keine Kunst, eine Göttin zur Hexe, eine Jungfrau zur Hure zu machen; aber zur umgekehrten Operation, Würde zu geben dem Verschmähten, wünschenswert zu machen das Verworfenen, dazu gehört entweder Kunst oder Charakter" (Goethe 1953, p. 492).

<sup>93</sup> For further discussion of §299 in *The Gay Science*, entitled "What one should learn from artists" ("Was man den Künstlern ablernen soll"), in which Nietzsche asserts that "we want to be the poets of our life" ("wir [...] wollen die Dichter unseres Lebens sein") (GS 299: Nietzsche 1974, p. 239–240; KSA 3/538), see Anderson, 2005.

advanced by its proponents as an alternative to the increasingly dominant school of psychoanalysis, which itself drew inspiration, in various ways, from Nietzsche: a testimony to the fertility of Nietzsche's thought and to the diverse interpretations it was capable of sustaining. Klages was swift to acknowledge the work of his predecessors in the field: above all, Goethe and Nietzsche (Bishop 2002; Bishop 2002/2003). In a lecture held on several occasions from 1910 onwards, in an essay published in the *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts* in 1928, and in a book first published in 1932 (and subsequently reissued four times) with the title *Goethe as a Psychologist (Goethe als Seelenforscher)*, Klages presented Goethe as a phenomenologist (*Erscheinungsforscher*), a discoverer of the unconscious, a philosopher of artistic creativity (*Denker des Bildnerturns*), and as a characterologist (Klages 1983, p. 564–567; Klages 1989, p. 217–259). Equally, in a lecture given in Basel in 1919, in a series of five lectures delivered in Szczecin in 1920, and finally in a book-length publication entitled *The Psychological Achievements of Nietzsche (Die psychologischen Errungenschaften Nietzsches)* (1926), Klages paid tribute to his predecessor's work as a psychologist (*Seelenforscher*), while at the same advancing a critique of the latter's "signature concept", the will-to-power (Klages 1983, p. 703–707; Klages 1989, p. 1–216).

Klages' own definition of personality, as "spirit confined by soul" (*seelegefesselter Geist*) or "soul bound by spirit" (*vom Geiste gebundene Seele*) (Klages 1983, p. 550), echoes Nietzsche's famous distinction between Apollo and Dionysos, – and it has been argued by a series of commentators, notably Michael Pauen, that aesthetic experience plays a paradigmatic role in Klages' thought (Pauen 1994, p. 197). In short: Klages' notion of characterology can provide a deeper understanding of the concept of character in Nietzsche's thought. In turn, this might lead to a keener appreciation of the lines of filiation and continuity between eighteenth and nineteenth-century German thought in general, and between Goethe and Nietzsche in particular, as highlighted by a number of commentators (Martin 1996; Bishop and Stephenson, 2005) – and, most recently, the French intellectual historian Pierre Hadot who, in his last book, re-emphasized the place held by Goethe and Nietzsche alike in the ancient tradition of *exercices spirituels* (Hadot 2008, p. 256–267).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> For their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper I am grateful to Rebecca Bamford and Rainer J. Hanshe.



Katrina Mitcheson

## *Ecce Homo* as Nietzsche's Honest Lie

**Abstract:** Once we recognize that for Nietzsche a new practice of truth aims to overcome 'Truth' as the 'real world', we can reconcile Nietzsche's criticisms of 'Truth' with his praise of truth. If we are also to reconcile the importance of truthfulness, which Nietzsche declares in *Ecce Homo*, with the fictionalizations this text seems to contain, these fictions must be seen to serve this practice of truth. This essay claims that they do, and that *Ecce Homo*, therefore, operates as Nietzsche's 'honest lie', which contrasts to the "lie of the ideal" (EH Preface 2).

Nietzsche asks the question: "Granted we will truth: *why not untruth instead?* And uncertainty? Even ignorance?" (BGE 1). He diagnoses our concept of truth as aiming at a 'true' or 'real world' (*wahre Welt*) contrasted to the 'apparent world', and criticizes this concept of the 'real world' as life-negating. Yet the question he raises as to the value of truth is ultimately answered affirmatively. This is testified to by the many positive allusions to truth we find throughout his work. He claims in *Daybreak*, for example: "[F]or this goal no sacrifice is too great" (D 45). This praise for truth is affirmed in Nietzsche's last work *Ecce Homo*, in which he puts the question:

How much truth can a spirit [*Geist*] stand. How much can it *dare*? For me that became more and more the real measure of value. Error ( – belief in the ideal – ) is not blindness, error is *cowardice*... Every achievement, every step forwards in knowledge is the *consequence* of courage, of toughness towards oneself, of cleanliness [*Sauberkeit*] towards oneself... (EH Preface 3, translation modified)<sup>1</sup>

This positive valuation of truth has to be reconciled with Nietzsche's critique of truth. If truth can be affirmed, it must cease to operate in the service of the ascetic ideal.<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche values truth that overcomes its association with the 'real world'. To understand, therefore, how Nietzsche can answer the question of the

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1 Translations of quotations from Nietzsche's works are by Carol Diethe (GM), R.J. Hollingdale (AC, BGE, D, EH, TI, UM), Walter Kaufmann (CW), Duncan Large (EH), Josefine Nauckhoff (GS), Graham Parkes (Z) and Ronald Speirs (BT). Translations of quotations from the *Nachlass* are by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (WP) and Kate Sturge (Nietzsche 2003).

2 As Randall Havas stresses, Nietzsche's concern with truth is not a question of epistemology but an evaluative critique (Havas 1995). This does not mean, however, that his philosophy is not of interest for epistemological theory.



value of truth positively we have to understand how such overcoming can be achieved.

In the context of *Ecce Homo* there is the further problem of reconciling Nietzsche's praise of truth, and damning of falseness and mendacity (NF 1886–1887, 5[71] 2: KSA 12/211 / WP 5, AC 38), with the fictionalization apparent in the same text. *Ecce Homo* is famously hyperbolic, replete with exaggeration, self-aggrandizements and, at times, apparent falsification. How can we reconcile Nietzsche's professed commitment to honesty with these fictionalizations? Nietzsche understands truth as a practice to be actively engaged in. It can operate to purify us from delusions and cultivate new habits. A new practice of truth serves to overcome the old concept of truth. Once we recognize this we can reconcile Nietzsche's criticisms of truth with his praise of truth, the latter referring to a new truth practice that reveals the dishonesty at the heart of the concept of truth as the 'real world' and allows us to go beyond this concept. If we are also to reconcile the importance of truth and of honesty towards oneself, which Nietzsche declares in *Ecce Homo*, with the fictionalizations this text seems to contain, these fictions must be seen to serve Nietzsche's practice of truth. I claim that they do and that *Ecce Homo*, therefore, operates as Nietzsche's 'honest lie', which contrasts to the "lie of the ideal" (EH Preface 2).

I will proceed by describing Nietzsche's practice of truth, which stands in opposition to truth as the 'real world'. I will then delineate the requirements that must be fulfilled if we are convincingly to read his apparent falsehoods and implausible boasts in *Ecce Homo* as 'honest lies' in the service of the practice of truth. I will consider two examples of these fictions: Nietzsche's insistence that he was a pure Polish noble, and his claim that he sent *Human, All Too Human* to Wagner just as Wagner sent him *Parsifal*, maintaining that the two works crossed like swords. I argue that these fictionalizations can be interpreted as a demonstration of the unavoidably evaluative nature of self-presentation. These 'lies' thus operate to undermine the false ideal of objective truth (understood as the idea that truth is free from interpretation, and that its pursuit requires impartiality and the transcendence of perspectives). Further, as decisive selections made by Nietzsche, with evaluative significance, they are *his* truths.

Rather than imparting autobiographical facts, *Ecce Homo* shows us how to practise truth, by undermining the idea of objective truth, and giving us an example of how we can select our own truths. I argue that these examples not only operate as 'honest lies' in this way, but that the meaning of these particular selections can be understood precisely in terms of Nietzsche's opposition to the untruthfulness of the ideal of objective truth that aims to transcend the particularity of our perspectives.

# 1 The Practice of Truth

At the end of *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche claims that the concept of the 'real world' was "invented so as to devalue the *only* world which exists!" (EH IV 8). Thus, a practice of truth which aims at the 'real world' is nihilistic. Nietzsche describes nihilism as "the radical rejection of value, meaning, desirability" (NF 1885–1886, 2[127]: KSA 12/125). It involves the belief that there is no value in this world. As Bernard Reginster has pointed out, this can take the form of believing everything we value to be necessarily unrealizable or the belief that all values are false projections.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche understands nihilism as something which has a history and takes different forms (NF 1886–1887, 5[71]: KSA 12/211–217 / WP 55). The practice of truth bound up with the ascetic ideal is nihilistic in the first of Reginster's senses because in aiming at the 'real world' it is a "will to nothingness" (GM II 24, GM III 14). In aiming at an empty beyond, this truth practice renders the immediate valueless for us and makes the valuable unrealizable. To overcome nihilism, therefore, we must overcome this conception of truth.

Nietzsche traces the evolution of the idea of the 'real world', which binds the practice of truth to the ascetic ideal, from its roots in Platonism. The narrative of the development of truth in this form is presented by Nietzsche in the *Twilight of the Idols* passage "How the 'Real World' Finally Became a Fable: History of an Error". The first stage of this history is that of Platonism, and in this stage truth is already connected to an evaluative standpoint which Nietzsche repudiates. The object of truth in Plato is that of the universal, eternal forms, contrasted by Plato to the mere copies of these forms that make up the world of appearances. Plato holds that "all qualities; each of them is in itself single, but they seem to be a multiplicity because they appear everywhere in combination with actions and material bodies" (Plato 2003a, p. 198 [*Republic*, V, 476a]). For Nietzsche this notion of the 'real', as contrasted to the apparent, is inherently empty. To think of a 'real world' apart from particular manifestations, free from any interpretation, with all perspectives on it somehow subtracted, is

to think an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which seeing still becomes a seeing-something, so it is an absurdity and non-concept of eye that is demanded. There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival 'knowing'. (GM III 12)

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<sup>3</sup> See Reginster 2006, p. 27–28.

Hence, for Nietzsche, the Platonic practice of truth sets up an unobtainable goal of objective truth and at the same devalues the world of appearance, as mere appearance.

Plato says of sight-lovers who are preoccupied with the world of sense experience: “Those who love looking and listening [...] are incapable, of seeing and delighting in the essential nature of things” (Plato 2003a, p. 198 [*Republic*, V, 476b]). For Plato, our senses are thus a distraction from and not a means to knowledge. Hence, in the pursuit of truth the philosopher aims to free his soul from his body:

[W]hen is it that the soul attains to truth? When it tries to investigate anything with the help of the body, it is obviously liable to be led astray [...]. Surely the soul can reason best when it is free of all distractions such as hearing or sight or pain or pleasure of any kind – that is, when it leaves the body to its own devices, becomes as isolated as possible. (Plato 2003b, p. 126 [*Phaedo* 65b–c])

This purification from bodily distraction is associated with virtue and salvation: “[S]uch as have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live thereafter altogether without bodies, and reach habitations even more beautiful” (Plato 2003b, p. 194 [*Phaedo* 114c]).

As Nietzsche presents it, the Platonic concept of truth excludes the senses and the particularity of our bodies from the pursuit of truth, reifying rationality and attempting to separate the mind from the body. Nietzsche continues in his criticism of the ‘real world’ in *Ecce Homo*: “The concepts ‘soul’ [*Seele*], ‘spirit’ [*Geist*], ultimately even ‘immortal soul’ invented so as to despise the body, to make it sick” (EH IV 8). The Platonic and subsequent Christian practices of truth cultivate habits of denying the particularity of our drives, which now need to be broken. We have to unlearn the habit of ignoring the drives, which the practice of truth that aims at the ‘real world’ has cultivated. This requires and contributes to recuperation from the effects of denigrating our bodily instincts.

It is not the case, however, that Nietzsche’s relationship with Plato is purely negative. While the notion of objective truth which Nietzsche rejects is, in his historical account, rooted in Platonism, the possibility of overcoming this idea of truth through the activity of practising a new form of truth and cultivating new habits bears a strong affinity to the role of truth in the Socratic dialogues: as an individual exercise that had to be actively engaged in. As Michel Foucault emphasizes, truth in ancient Greek thought, including the Socratic method as it comes to us through Plato, requires the subject to change; they must undergo “purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for

the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth" (Foucault 2005, p. 15). For Nietzsche too, truth is an active process that individuals have to undertake, not a set of doctrines to be imparted to them.

Truth is both an individual activity and habit within us, that requires and causes us to change, and a cultural institution. It is this idea of truth as a habit and a cultural practice, with a contingent history, that explains why Nietzsche can reject truth, as it has been practised, on the basis of the values this practice instantiates and perpetuates, but not reject truth as such, and can hope to transform truth through reform in how we practise it. Thus, looking back at *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes: "[I]n plain words: the old truth is coming to an end..." (EH III TI 1).

Nietzsche also takes the motif of purity from Plato and turns it against him. In *Zarathustra* it is the "pure perceivers" and not the sight-lovers of *The Republic* who are impure (Z II 15). These deniers of the senses are dishonest in their denial of their own drives and in masking the involvement of their bodily sickness in the need to claim objectivity. They deceive themselves and others. Nietzsche confronts them thus:

So dare for once to believe yourselves – yourselves and your entrails! Whoever does not believe himself, always lies.

With the mask of a God you have decorated yourselves, you 'pure ones': into the mask of a God your repulsive ringworm has crawled.

Verily, you are deceivers, you 'contemplatives'! Even Zarathustra was at one time fooled by your godlike skins; he never guessed that they were crammed with coils of snakes. (Z II 15)

In this passage Nietzsche is associating the purity of the spirit (*Geist*) aimed at by Plato with the vile and the infected: the claim to purity reeks of the impure. Purification in Nietzsche's practice of truth involves a purification of the delusion of believing in the possibility of objective truths free from interpretation and from the dishonesty of thinking that the pursuit of this is free from bodily needs and drives. Nietzsche's practice of truth requires purification from the belief that there is pure spirit or mind.

According to Nietzsche, "*the great majority lacks an intellectual conscience*" (GS 2). There is the potential, however, for intellectual conscience – "a conscience behind your 'conscience'" which can ask "*how did it emerge*" (GS 335) – to develop out of our moral conscience. The process of spiritualization, in which we have come to have a strong will to truth, provides the means to go beyond our history of spiritualization. Such an intellectual conscience demands honesty in relation to oneself, a questioning of motives and exploration of the conditions of evaluation. It demands Nietzsche's practice of truth.

Nietzsche's method remains a practice of truth rather than an alternative to the practice of truth because, in addition to employing the virtue of honesty associated with truthfulness, it allows the critique of existing beliefs and the dismissal of some beliefs as false. The method of genealogy, practised with honesty towards oneself, and engaging the body and senses, reveals the roots of our truth claims, and their claim to objectivity, in our needs and drives. It thus reveals our claims to higher motives and to objectivity as mendacious. Nietzsche challenges us to purify ourselves from these false beliefs and to incorporate the truth that there is no objective truth, free from interpretation, and that our interpretations are shaped by bodily drives.

For Nietzsche, truth is not identified with transcending perspectives. The 'most objective', in the sense of the most impartial, is no longer the most truthful: "It was a false path, to stress the impersonal [...]. The 'impersonal' is only the enfeebled-personal" (NF 1881, 11[65]: KSA 9/466). Given that there is no measure of truth beyond interpretation, the problem is raised of what, for Nietzsche, makes a more truthful interpretation. A truthful interpretation is arrived at through honesty towards oneself, which does not deny the activity of the drives but embraces it, exploring and occupying the multitude of perspectives that are active within us. To be truthful we must have the honesty to own the status of our interpretations as interpretations. It remains, however, a question of truth. Through his genealogical exploration of the process of interpretation Nietzsche reveals the falsity in claims to have transcended all interpretation.

This practice of truth has the potential to be shattering, destroying our self-delusions and ultimately our belief in the idea of an objective truth and objective values that can act as an external authority and provide us with meaning from an external source. It operates, therefore, to deepen the experience of nihilism, revealing to those who have projected all value into another world that there is no other world. Having lost the habit of finding their own values in their own drives, the courageous knowledge-seekers will come to the conviction that there are no values. As those who value truthfulness, when they discover that man is in fact "a *monster of falsity*" they also come to be disgusted at humanity (AC 38):

[A]mong the forces that morality cultivated was *truthfulness*: *this*, in the end, turns against morality, discovers its *teleology*, the *partiality* of its viewpoint – and now the *insight* into this long-ingrained mendacity, which one despairs of ever shedding from oneself, is what acts as a stimulus: a stimulus to nihilism. (NF 1886–1887, 5[71] 2: KSA 12/211; WP 5)

In stimulating us to nihilism, however, Nietzsche's practice of truth also contains the potential for transformation. Such transformation requires first that the idea

of objective truth be undermined, through the exposure of its hypocrisy in its claim to objectivity and its denial of the role of drives and interests in interpretation. We must then succeed in *overcoming* the idea of objective truth and our reliance on it. We must unlearn the habit of denying our senses and drives and relearn an integration of mind and body which will allow us to find values in the particular. Overcoming the old practice of truth requires emancipation from our dependence on the authority of an objective ideal. This emancipation opens up possibilities of experimentation and transformation. *Ecce Homo* gives an account of how Nietzsche himself has undergone a process of emancipation through the practice of truth, at the same time as illustrating for his readers how to practise a truth which does not aim at the 'real world'.

## 2 The Honest Lie

In *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche reprises another Platonic motif, the noble lie, in his idea of an honest lie. This lie is contrasted to the dishonesty of those who think themselves too good to lie:

Our educated people today, our 'good' men, do not lie – that is true, but it does them *no credit!* The actual lie, the genuine, resolute 'honest' lie (listen to Plato about its value) would be something far too tough and strong for them; it would demand something of them that one *must not* demand, that they open their eyes to themselves, that they come to know how to distinguish between 'true' and 'false' with regard to themselves. (GM III 19)

To lie honestly one must first purify oneself of one's delusions and unconscious lies; one must stop lying to oneself. Hence if Nietzsche has learnt to distinguish between 'true' and 'false' with regard to himself, then what look to us like lies in *Ecce Homo* can be seen as honest lies. How, though, could such honesty be recognized by the reader? There is a sense in which the extent to which he is truthful towards himself and thus entitled to an honest lie cannot entirely be known by us but only by Nietzsche. What matters is rather that we make this journey ourselves. *Ecce Homo* is not offering up a doctrine to its readers, nor is its import to tell us facts about Nietzsche. As a text intended for an audience and celebrating truth, however, it must still be intended as an example of an honesty or truthfulness of sorts. It should inspire us to undertake a new practice of truth and to seek ourselves. Hence Nietzsche's citation in *Ecce Homo* from *Zarathustra*: "You had not yet sought yourselves: then you found me. Thus do all believers: that is why all belief is worth so little. Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves" (EH Preface 4). It does matter, therefore, that the reader should be able to discern an honesty in the 'lies' or exaggerations that Nietzsche presents,

such that these ‘lies’ should ultimately serve the practice of truth by showing us the way to practise it ourselves.

To read something as an honest lie, therefore, we look for signs of Nietzsche’s honesty towards himself. We need evidence that the process in which he decides to tell himself his life is “the *consequence* of courage, of toughness towards oneself, of cleanliness [*Sauberkeit*] towards oneself...” (EH Preface 3). Such cleanliness towards oneself is an honesty that stands in direct contrast to the good men who think themselves above lying but avoid looking into themselves. These so-called good men are covered over with the “gold-dust of unconscious human vanity” (BGE 230). The objective men and scholars, out of touch with the drives that sustain their quest for truth, are incapable of such honesty. The objective men are fearful of themselves, of finding out what they really are. They are “*sufferers* who do not want to admit what they are to themselves, with people drugged and dazed who fear only one thing: *coming to consciousness...*” (GM III 23).

Nietzsche’s contrasting honesty can be located in the refusal to pretend to any objectivity and the willingness to undertake an investigation that looks beneath the gold-dust of our vanity. It does not require a complete self-knowledge but a modesty that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge. It requires a willingness to embark on the dangerous voyage of self-exploration and the capacity for cruel self-investigation. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche declares: “We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers: and with good reason” (GM Preface 1). Honest self-examination offers us an “unexplored realm of dangerous knowledge”, a “sea” into which one’s “ship” may be steered and where “daring travellers and adventurers” may find deep insights (BGE 23). There are insights to be found in understanding the drives and needs that shape our interpretations and evaluations, insights that challenge our self-understanding and sense of self-worth.

The explicit portrayal of personal evaluations in the selection of truths thus signals honesty concerning the presence of evaluation and interpretation in all our claims. If Nietzsche is not trying to cover over his motives when he makes certain claims but expressing his evaluative stance openly, then we can suppose that he is honest towards himself. The tone maintained throughout *Ecce Homo* – the self-aggrandizing titles and claim that he is “dynamite” (EH IV 1), which are simultaneously self-mocking and claiming a real status and significance for his philosophy – indicate that Nietzsche makes no attempt to hide that his self-presentation is an evaluative act. Concealing the presence of evaluation and interpretation, denying the world of our drives and shutting out the evidence of our senses, is the purview of the old idea of truth which Nietzsche casts himself as slaying.

I do not set up any new idols; let the old ones learn what it means to have legs of clay. *Toppling idols* (my word for 'ideals') – that is more my kind of handiwork. Reality has been robbed of its value, its sense, its truthfulness insofar as an ideal world was *faked up*... The 'real world' and the 'apparent world' – in plain words: the *fake* world and reality... The *lie* of the ideal has till now been the curse on reality; on its account humanity itself has become fake and false right down to its deepest instincts – to the point of worshipping values *opposite* to the only ones which would guarantee it a flourishing, a future, the exalted *right* to a future. (EH Preface 2)

The clearly evaluative topics of “Why I Am So Clever” and “Why I Write Such Good Books”, when placed against this criticism of the mendacity and falsity of mankind, cannot be seen as naïve dishonesty but as honestly owning the evaluative nature of presenting oneself.

Such explicitly declared evaluation can, therefore, be seen as an honest lie. How can it further serve Nietzsche's practice of truth? First, if the role of evaluation can be made explicit in this way it operates to undermine the idea of the 'real world' and the possibility of objective truth by signalling the presence of evaluation, interpretation and selection in the claims we make. Nietzsche claims he “was the first to *discover* the truth, by being the first to sense – *smell* – the lie as a lie” (EH IV 1). If he can demonstrate the lie to us, expose the rancid heart of the claim to a pure objectivity, then we too should be compelled to abandon the old idea of truth, forced by our recognition of its falsity to change our understanding of truth and our self-understanding. Second, if we can understand the meaning of the particular selections and evaluations that Nietzsche is making, we can come to understand them as his truths. Of the truths he has grasped hold of, Nietzsche claims they “are nothing doubtful, rather decisions. I am the first to have the yardstick for 'truths' in my hand, I am the first to *be able* to decide” (EH III TI 2). If we can see how Nietzsche has earned a right to his selections, how he was able to get his hands on his own truths, and expose the pursuit of truth as the 'real world' as “The *wrong* path – people called it the way to 'truth'” (EH III TI 2), then we may be able to learn how to find our own truths.

I will turn now to two examples of Nietzsche's questionable claims, which I think fulfil the criterion of an 'honest lie', of being truthful in regard to oneself, because they are examples of explicit evaluation (as opposed to self-deluded denial of the presence of evaluation). These 'honest lies' can serve to encourage us towards, and illustrate the possibility of, a new practice of truth. Further, the meaning of these examples will be seen to involve Nietzsche positioning himself in his self-presentation against the untruthfulness inherent in the old ideal of truth.



### 3 Polish Nobility

In the section of *Ecce Homo* “Why I Am So Wise”, Nietzsche makes the claim: “I am a Polish nobleman *pur sang*, with which not a drop of bad blood is mixed, least of all German blood” (EH I 3).<sup>4</sup> This pretence to Polish ancestry is not new to *Ecce Homo*. In a notebook of 1882 Nietzsche had written that “the ancestry” of his “blood and name arises from Polish nobility, of the name of Niëtzy who about a hundred years ago left their home” (NF 1882, 21[2]: KSA 9/681). The name of Nietzky is one that Nietzsche had previously signed on a letter to Raimund Granier in 1862 (KSB 1/217).<sup>5</sup> That Nietzsky is a Polish name is itself a myth, however. As R.J. Hollingdale points out, drawing on Richard Blunck’s work, the name Nietzsche is a common German derivative of Nicholas, not a Polish name. Hollingdale also points out that Max Oehler and his researches in Weimar traced Nietzsche’s *German* ancestry, putting to rest the plausibility of Nietzsche’s claim to Polish descent.<sup>6</sup> Even if the myth of his father’s heritage were true, however, the claim as Nietzsche makes it in *Ecce Homo*, that he has not a drop of German blood, is clearly not a factual claim but rather an evaluative distancing from his maternal, Germanic family and from the Germans in general.<sup>7</sup> It is Nietzsche setting himself apart, distinguishing himself from contemporary German culture.<sup>8</sup> He even asserts that “I would not grant the young German

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**4** Prior to Nietzsche’s final revisions to the *Ecce Homo* manuscript his claim to Polish identity is less absolute. In the earlier version, on which the 1979 edition of R.J. Hollingdale’s translation is based, he does not claim pure Polish blood, but still lays claim to Polish ancestry and “racial instinct”. The first version is already a fiction, however; it is merely rendered more explicitly fictional in the revisions.

**5** See also Devreese and Biebuyck 2006.

**6** See Hollingdale 1999, p. 6.

**7** Duncan Large explores the developing meaning of Nietzsche’s genealogical fantasy and notes that in his late work Nietzsche’s identification as Polish signifies “*not being German*” (Large 1996, p. 76).

**8** In the 1979 Hollingdale translation, which does not include Nietzsche’s final changes to this section, he both claims that he is often taken as a Pole and that he is “perhaps more German than present-day Germans, mere Reich Germans, are still capable of being – I am the last *anti-political* German” (EH I 3). It is thus from a particular understanding of what it is to be German, which connects with Nietzsche’s criticism of contemporary culture and German idealism, that he wishes to distance himself. In the earlier manuscript Nietzsche could be read as contrasting the modern German with a more venerable history to which Goethe belongs and which he does claim as part of his heritage. He chooses to exaggerate his distance from the German more strongly in the final version but the evaluative significance is continuous between the two versions.

Kaiser the honour of being my coachman" (EH I 3). Its role in these terms, asserting his nobility against the Germanic, is manifest as it is followed by the observation that "one is least related to one's parents: it would be the most extreme sign of vulgarity to be related to one's parents" (EH I 3). It is not the facts of one's descent that matter. What matters is the selection of this narrative in order for Nietzsche to ally himself to a more distant ancestry towards which he feels a greater kinship.

The question of interest is, therefore, what is the evaluative meaning of Nietzsche's selecting a kinship with the Poles over Germans? A meaning that can be gleaned directly from *Ecce Homo* is found in his criticism of the Germanic:

I feel the desire, even the duty to tell the Germans once and for all just *what* they have on their consciences. *They have on their consciences all the great cultural crimes of four centuries!*... And always for the same reason, because of their innermost *cowardice* in the face of reality, which is also a *cowardice* in the face of truth, because of the untruthfulness that has become instinctual with them, because of 'idealism'... [...] Without a doubt, the Germans are idealists. – Just when an honest, unambiguous, perfectly scientific mentality had been achieved, through immense bravery and self-overcoming, the Germans were twice able to find ways to creep back to the old 'ideal', to reconcile truth and 'ideal', basically formulas for a right to reject science, for a right to *lie*. (EH III CW 2)

In rejecting German culture, and defining himself as having no kinship with Germans, Nietzsche is also rejecting all forms of idealism, whether in the Platonism of the people that is Christianity or in philosophy that contains the ascetic ideal at its heart by continuing to aim at a 'real world'. Nietzsche's identification of himself as Polish is an evaluative distancing from the old idols, or ideals. It is a rejection of German idealism and German practices of truth. He claims that the Germans "shall never have the honour of seeing the first *honest [rechtschaffen]* spirit in the history of spirit, the spirit in which the truth comes to pass judgement on four millennia of counterfeiting, conflated with the German spirit. The 'German spirit' is *my bad air*" (EH III CW 3).

This is borne out if we look back to Nietzsche's previous criticisms of German music. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche connects German music and thought: "music, our constipated, constipating German music. – How much tiresome heaviness, lameness, dampness, night-gown, how much *beer* there is in the German intellect!" (TI VIII 2). Nietzsche contrasts this to the necessity of lightness:

thinking needs to be learned just as dancing needs to be learned, *as a form of dancing* ... Who is there among the Germans who knows from experience that light shiver which spreads out to all the muscles from *light feet* in intellectual matters! [...] for *dancing* in

any form cannot be divorced from a *noble education*, the ability to dance with the feet, with concepts, with words. (TI VIII 7)

Thus as a *noble Pole*, Nietzsche sets himself apart from German idealism, and its heaviness. His practice of truth requires the noble's agility to dance between perspectives as opposed to either the dogged scholar's attempt to suppress them, or the idealist's romantic struggle to transcend them.

## 4 Crossing Swords with Wagner

Nietzsche's rejection of Wagner is associated with his position as a bastion of the German culture that Nietzsche is attacking. His opposition to Wagner, however, plays a special part in Nietzsche's narrative of his life. He cannot deny his close relationship with the composer or his early admiration for him, and he freely admits that he loved Wagner. However, something that is factually incorrect in the account of their break is Nietzsche's insistence in *Ecce Homo* that Wagner sent him a copy of *Parsifal* just as he sent to Wagner the manuscript of *Human, All Too Human*.<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche declares:

I sent two copies to Bayreuth among other places. By a miraculously meaningful coincidence a beautiful copy of the text of *Parsifal* reached me at the same time, with Wagner's dedication to me, "his dear friend Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Church Councilor". – This crossing of the two books – it seemed to me as if I heard them make an ominous sound. Did it not sound like the clash of *rapiers*? ... At any rate that is how we both felt: for we both said nothing. (EH III HAH 5)

Clearly the metaphor of a crossing of swords signals a sense of combat with Wagner and what he had come to represent for Nietzsche. Wagner is "the artist of decadence" (CW 5), and Nietzsche's battle against the figure, rather than the person, of Wagner is a battle against *décadence*.

What, then, is the particular significance of the event of the manuscripts crossing? Nietzsche selects in his self-presentation a representation of a moment in which he and Wagner have taken different paths. Nietzsche's understanding is that he too has been a *décadent*. He declares: "[I]n questions of *décadence* I am experienced" (EH I 1). Nietzsche considers his life, however, as an example of the possibility of convalescence. He was able to look "from the perspective of the sick towards *healthier* concepts and values" (EH I 1), and thus, "aside from

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<sup>9</sup> See Williamson 2004, p. 267.

being a *décadent*, then, I am also its opposite. My proof of this is, among other things, that I always instinctively choose the *right* means of dealing with unfavourable conditions" (EH I 2). In writing *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche claims he employed "a rigorous self-discipline with which [he] swiftly dispatched all the 'higher swindle', 'idealism', 'fine feeling' and other femininities that I had brought in" (EH III HAH 5). This book, written at a time in which Nietzsche describes himself as a serious invalid, represents the beginning of his convalescence from *décadence* towards a greater health.

The capacity for such convalescence stands in contrast to the capacity of the objective man who is incapable of knowing himself and thus incapable of knowing what he needs for recuperation. Nietzsche's convalescence at the time of *Human, All Too Human* involved turning away from idealism and towards a more scientific spirit. This was not, however, to embrace the scholarly or objective type, but only the comparative modesty of science compared to metaphysics (HAH 3, 6). Nietzsche's move towards the scientific was out of the needs of life, whereas objective men cut their pursuit of truth off from its roots in life's needs. Nietzsche describes objective men as "neuters", "subjectless" and "hollowed-out" (UM II 5). Later he writes of their "mirroring soul" (BGE 207). Able only to reflect, the objective man is a "man without content" (BGE 207). Hence, severed from the needs of life they still serve the ascetic ideal, and remain idealists (GM III 24, 25).

To oppose the ascetic ideal an awareness and ability to express the content of our drives is required. In contrast to the contemplatives we must "dare for once to believe yourselves – yourselves and your entrails!" (Z II 15). Thus, both in the case of the scientific and scholarly types, who have striven for impartiality, and in the case of Wagner, who has worshipped a romantic, transcendent ideal, what is lacking in their pursuit of truth is a rooting in the many bodily drives which make up the self, and thus an awareness of what life, and health, need. By not denying the body and the many drives within him Nietzsche has both the means to recovery and the right to an honest lie, which expresses the evaluative and partial nature of *his* interpretation.

Nietzsche's convalescence involves a rejection of idealism and a rejection of the claim to objective truth, which he associates in *The Case of Wagner* with weakness (CW 5). In contrast, *Parsifal* represents Wagner's descent into ever greater *décadence* and infection with Christian idealism: it demonstrates that "Wagner had become pious" (EH III HAH 5). The crossing of the manuscripts indicates the possibility of convalescence if one has the taste for what is curative and the courage for the fight, and the alternative possibility of a retreat back into idealism. As Nietzsche writes in the 1886 preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, the book written when Wagner still inspired hope in Nietzsche:

[I]t is very probable that it will *end* like this, that *you* will end like this, namely ‘comforted’, as it is written, despite all your training of yourselves for what is grave and terrifying, ‘metaphysically comforted’, ending in short, as Romantics end, namely as *Christians*. (GTVS 7)

The path to overcome *décadence* requires a fight against all idealism and the ascetic ideal of truth. Thus, Nietzsche’s honest lie, of the manuscripts crossing, is once again one that has a meaning that connects with his opposition to the ideal of the ‘real world’. It positions him against the old practice of truth and its metaphysical comforts, and emphasizes his own need to have actively fought against the temptation of idealism.

## 5 Conclusion

Not only does the explicit evaluative content of these two examples signal Nietzsche’s self-awareness, and thus “cleanliness [*Sauberkeit*] towards oneself” (EH Preface 3), but because we can discern the evaluative nature of these claims it also further erodes our belief in the idea of an objective truth free from such evaluation. That Nietzsche sees himself as combating the mendacious claim to such objectivity is apparent in the meaning of the selection of these particular ‘honest lies’, which pit him against idealism, as *his* truths. His selection and interpretation of his truths according to their evaluative meaning shows us an example of how we can hope to find new truths for ourselves. *Ecce Homo* can thus be seen as an ‘honest lie’ in the service of truth.

Julia S. Happ

## “**[K]ein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen**”

### Nietzsche's Ambivalent Concepts of (Literary) Decadence

**Abstract:** This essay presents Nietzsche's ambivalent concepts of (literary) decadence from *Die Geburt der Tragödie* to *Ecce Homo*. A set of universal concepts of decadence (“health versus sickness”, “endings versus beginnings” and “fragmentation versus wholeness”) is proposed and pursued, with its continuities and transformations. Nietzsche's paradox of literary decadence with its self-referential turns is at the center of attention: His trenchant critique of Wagner's decadence is voiced in the very style of literary decadence itself, and *Ecce Homo* even reveals decadent poetry.

## 1 Approaching Decadence:

### Decadence as a Central and Fluctuating Concept of Nietzsche's Thought – Decadence beyond Nietzsche: Continuities and Transformations of a Universal Cultural Phenomenon – Decadence and Literature

*Die Feigen fallen von den Bäumen, sie sind gut und süß:  
und indem sie fallen, reisst ihnen die rothe Haut.*

*Ein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen.*

*Also, gleich Feigen fallen euch diese Lehren zu, meine Freunde:  
nun trinkt ihren Saft und ihr süßes Fleisch!*

*Herbst ist es umher und reiner Himmel und Nachmittag –*

EH Preface 4: KSA 6/260

Thus spoke Nietzsche to convey his tenets, which are undeniably harder to digest than has been suggested. In this well-known passage from *Ecce Homo* – which originally stems from *Zarathustra* – Nietzsche touches upon an ambivalent phenomenon which preoccupied him most profoundly: decadence is lurking behind the fall of the ripe figs, while the organic metaphor is linked with Christian concepts, such as the Eucharist and the Apocalypse, as well as a desired Anti-Christian revaluation of all values. Decadence seems to be a problem which needs to be fought and essentially overcome, as the destructive “Nordwind” and the idea of revaluation presuppose; nonetheless, as we will see, Nietzsche holds deca-

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246551-012>

dence in high esteem and considers it a cultural necessity in his philosophy of life.

With the ambivalent overriding motto “[K]ein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen”, I wish to reflect on central concepts of decadence in Nietzsche’s works from the perspective of German literature. Without doubt, decadence is a key concept of Nietzsche’s thought (especially in the late works), a timely discourse in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture and an elusive aesthetic and literary phenomenon. Of course, I cannot offer a totalizing picture, given the brevity of this article, the complexity and constant flux of decadence and the inevitable perspectivism inherent in Nietzsche’s thought.

Nietzsche was often called a reluctant founding-father of modernism and one could argue in the same way regarding decadence.<sup>1</sup> He offers a highly ambivalent account of decadence throughout his career and develops his own form of literary decadence in his later works.<sup>2</sup> His versatile and contradictory theories of decadence then became influential at the turn of the century: Nietzsche not only became a “*Diskursivitätsbegründer*”<sup>3</sup> of (European) decadence; his thought unintentionally shaped a unique *Dekadenz* or *decadent style* in the German-speaking sphere of aesthetics and poetics, which is based on a set of doubly evaluated phenomena and undergoes (constant) transformations within the works of various turn-of-the-century authors.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Cf. Japp 1987.

2 As the subtitle of my article suggests, I prefer to speak of Nietzsche’s ambivalence of decadence in contrast to using the term dialectics, which is the common practice among Nietzsche scholars in German studies. A representative of this tradition is Borchmeyer 1989. Although I owe several valid aspects to Borchmeyer’s illuminating research, I would suggest replacing the philosophical term “dialectics” with the psychological term “ambivalence”. In view of Nietzsche’s constantly shifting perspectives on decadence, the psychological term “ambivalence” – an emotionally charged double evaluation – seems more fitting than the far more systematic, historico-philosophical term “dialectics” which we know from the Platonic dialogues to Adorno and Horkheimer and beyond. Cf. Graumann 1971, p. 204.

3 This term is borrowed from Kafitz’ influential study, cf. Kafitz 2004.

4 I cannot comment on this in great detail within the bounds of this contribution, and hence, some scattered remarks have to suffice. Expressed succinctly: the notion of a German-speaking poetics of *Dekadenz* – especially in view of the conservative modernists (such as Thomas Mann, Rilke and Hofmannsthal amongst others) – seems predominantly rooted in Nietzsche. I argue elsewhere that Nietzsche’s basic shapes of decadence, their double evaluations and constant re-configurations greatly contribute to the notion of (German) *decadent style*. Much has been written about decadence and *decadent style* in the last thirty years and, yet, the topic is nowhere near exhaustion. In the course of this contribution, I will comment on the central works on decadence in relation to Nietzsche. Furthermore, I owe the term *decadent style* to a solid study across all art forms by Reed. Reed views decadence as a transformative phenomenon and

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche claims to have spelled decadence backwards and forwards in the course of his career:<sup>5</sup> “Brauche ich, nach alledem, zu sagen, dass ich in Fragen der *décadence* erfahren bin? Ich habe sie vorwärts und rückwärts buchstabirt” (EH I 1: KSA 6/265). Around this time, Nietzsche also hyperbolically characterizes himself in a letter to Malwida von Meysenburg of 18 October 1888: “Ich bin, in Fragen der *décadence*, die höchste Instanz, die es jetzt auf Erden gibt: diese jetzigen Menschen mit ihrer jammervollen Instinkt-Entartung, sollten sich glücklich schätzen, jemanden zu haben, der ihnen in dunklen Fällen reinen Wein einschenkt” (KSB 8/452). Let us see what the self-appointed “highest” authority of decadence further has to say. “Was mich am tiefsten beschäftigt hat, das ist in der That das Problem der *décadence*”,<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche informs us in the foreword to *Der Fall Wagner*, which brought about the foundation of (German) literary decadence.

But, what, in fact, is decadence? How can I envisage decadence beyond Nietzsche’s hints? As commonly known, decadence is “as old as man himself”.<sup>7</sup> It is a ubiquitous phenomenon with a rich cultural history and a plurality of discourses and transformations. Etymologically, decadence is derived from the Latin verb *de-cadere* (n. *casus*) with the meaning of “decay, cease, fall into ruin”. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Latin noun *Decadentia* gradually becomes established in French (*décadence*), English (*decadence*) and German (*Dekadenz*).<sup>8</sup> Decadence primarily signifies a universal downward movement and a figure of fragmentation. It may furthermore allude to the bib-

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major “first steps toward what we call Modernism” (Reed 1985, p. 242). Reed’s observations on decadence, in contrast to my own, are largely based on the French tradition; he tries to distinguish between “[d]ecadent style and matter or manner” (Reed 1985, p. 18) and provides a plethora of useful examples of European decadent art.

5 When I refer to Nietzsche’s concepts of decadence in this essay, I am primarily interested in decadence from the perspective of German literature, i.e. an aesthetic notion of decadence, while the plurality of discourses and Nietzsche’s idiosyncratic appropriations cannot be given equal and adequate emphasis. I will not be concerned with a philosophical discussion of pessimism and nihilism in comparison to decadence. A convincing hierarchization of decadence vs. pessimism vs. nihilism has been proposed by Kuhn and could be briefly described as follows: Nietzsche’s concept of pessimism which appears in his works after his reception of Schopenhauer in 1865 can be envisioned as a precursor and later as a subsumable concept of nihilism. Nihilism again is later reflected as a synonym of decadence and later labelled as “*Logik der *décadence**”. Cf. Kuhn 2000, p. 213–215; p. 293–298; p. 301–302.

6 CW Foreword 1: KSA 6/11.

7 Calinescu 1987, p. 151.

8 *Dekadenz* appears in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century in the German-speaking world, as can be gleaned from *DUDEEN* 1989, p. 119. The history of the use of decadence in Romance (and English) contexts can be revisited in Bauer 2001, p. 21–41.



lical Fall of Man and to the notion of socio-cultural decline; this again is inter-related with apocalyptic notions, which evoke oscillations between endings and beginnings. Descent is turned into ascent which literary scholars, such as Rasch, convincingly label as double evaluation (“Doppelwertigkeit”) of decadence.<sup>9</sup> Both biblical and politico-cultural models are archetypes of decadence. “The Bible is a familiar model of history. It begins at the beginning and ends with a vision of the end; the first book is Genesis, the last Apocalypse.”<sup>10</sup> Apocalypse, in particular, unveils an interesting double structure of doom and revelation and can be regarded as “basale Denk- und Argumentationsfigur” and “ubiquitäres Strukturelement moderner Kunst und Literatur”.<sup>11</sup> The dichotomous or bifurcated structure of apocalypse – to my understanding – seems largely compatible with a basic shape or universal model of decadence, which is also paradigmatic of Nietzsche’s works: endings are followed by new beginnings.

A second archetype of decadence is the idea of socio-political decline, which is preserved in our cultural memory especially with regard to the ‘decline and fall of the Roman Empire’,<sup>12</sup> which has been rewritten in various occidental philosophies of history from Montesquieu and Gibbon to (pre)fascist philosophers, such as Spengler.<sup>13</sup>

The decisive turns of the etymology and transformations of discourses of decadence can be briefly described as follows: after a history with markedly negative economico-political and historical connotations, decadence appears in philosophical, aesthetic, anthropological, psychological and popular-scientific discourses in the nineteenth century and becomes more complex, especially in the 1880s and 1890s. Decadence was discussed as an aesthetic phenomenon much earlier in France (Voltaire 1770, Nisard 1834) than in Germany.<sup>14</sup> French (lit-

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**9** Rasch 1977, p. 30.

**10** Kermode 2002, p. 6.

**11** Moog-Grünewald and Olejniczak Lobsien 2003, vii. A detailed discussion of secularized apocalypse in literature exceeds the scope of my investigation here; I would therefore like simply to mention some interesting basic research in this field, which lingers in the background of my approach: Vondung 1988 and Pfeiffer 1983, p. 35–52.

**12** It cannot be denied that the Fall of the Roman Empire (and the facticity of this seemingly endless story of decline) has been a highly controversial debate amongst historians. This paper, however, adopts a literary perspective – as opposed to a strict historical one – and puts emphasis on cultural constructs, discourses and themes of decadence in philosophy and fiction.

**13** Cf. Morley 2005, p. 573–585.

**14** Cf. Koppen 1973, p. 32f., whose extensive study of European decadence and Wagnerism provides a substantial survey of Romance, English and also German decadence and helped to free

erary) decadence was perceived as an “extension of and a reaction to Romanticism; [...] as both a decorative, superficial art and a pioneering, profound aesthetic” (Weir 1995, p. 10). The turn from a critical and conservative evaluation to a positive reevaluation of decadence is due to Baudelaire’s *Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe* (1857); Baudelaire coins a positive “Littérature de décadence” (Baudelaire 1976 II, p. 319–337), with refined atmospheric nuances, innovative verse forms, a sophisticated artificiality, a glamorization of a collective feeling of (decadent) doom and praise of the splendours of the dying sun. “With Baudelaire, the term “decadence” loses its contemptuous flavor, no longer designates a minor kind of poetry or art in general, but a particular, higher type of modern poetry” (Gogroß-Voorhees 1999, p. 67).

This conviction is again substantiated and developed further in Paul Bourget’s famous essay on Baudelaire in his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883). In his small sub-chapter *théorie de décadence* Bourget establishes a first literary theory of decadence as the organic decomposition of a holistic, vaguely defined collective, tantamount to society. The members of this society undergo an anarchic process of emancipation so that the whole becomes fragmented into atoms.<sup>15</sup> Bourget then draws analogies between the social sphere and the style of literary texts. Decadent style equals innovation:

Un style de décadence est celui où l’unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l’indépendance de la page, où la page se décompose pour laisser la place à l’indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser l’indépendance du mot. Les exemples foisonnent dans la littérature actuelle qui corroborent cette féconde hypothèse. (Bourget 1887 [1883], p. 25)

While Baudelaire equips descent and decay with a positive meaning, Bourget popularizes aesthetic fragmentation. “While judging such fragmentation cata-

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this central literary concept from ideological stigmatizations by previous generations of German scholars.

15 “Par le mot de décadence, on désigne volontiers l’état d’une société qui produit un trop grand nombre d’individus impropres aux travaux de la vie commune. Une société doit être assimilée à un organisme. Comme un organisme, en effet, elle se résout en une fédération d’organismes moindres, qui se résolvent eux-mêmes en une fédération de cellules. L’individu est la cellule sociale. Pour que l’organisme total fonctionne avec énergie, il est nécessaire que les organismes composants fonctionnent avec énergie, mais avec une énergie subordonnée; et, pour que ces organismes moindres fonctionnent eux-mêmes avec énergie, il est nécessaire que leurs cellules composantes fonctionnent avec énergie, mais avec une énergie subordonnée. Si l’énergie des cellules devient indépendante, les organismes qui composent l’organisme total cessent par elle-même de subordonner leur énergie à l’énergie totale, et l’anarchie qui s’établit constitue la décadence de l’ensemble.” (Bourget 1887, p. 24f.)

strophic from a political and moral perspective, Bourget is able to recognize its innovative potential in psychological terms: decadence, he suggests, may stimulate new creativity of a morbid, melancholy, refined, sensual kind” (Bernheimer 2002, p. 10). Bourget’s influence on German thinkers and poets was quite remarkable; his early editions of the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* were extensively read by many German-speaking authors and thinkers, before Bourget turned culturally conservative in the 1890s.<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche read Bourget right after the volume appeared. Bourget left a lasting impression; fragments from *théorie de decadence* recur almost verbatim in Nietzsche’s texts.

## 2 Nietzsche’s concepts of Decadence:

### Semantic Usage of Decadence, Decline and Degeneration – Central Discourses of Decadence – Basic Models of Decadence – An Attempted Diachronic Survey of Nietzsche’s Concepts of Decadence

In Nietzsche’s complete works the lexeme decadence appears 360 times: He consistently uses the French spelling *décadence* in contrast to the German *Dekadenz*, which may imply a higher degree of sophistication, but clearly echoes Nietzsche’s reception of Bourget. Nietzsche was familiar with the idea of decadence before his reception of Bourget, but he largely uses synonyms, such as “Niedergang, Verfall, Entartung, Korruption, Degenereszenz, Degeneration, Disgregation, Idiosynkrasie, Neurose, Neurasthenie, Hysterie, Hypochondrie” in his early and middle works (Tongeren, Schank and Siemens 2004, p. 540). Even shortly after his reception of Bourget in 1883, Nietzsche’s explicit use of the term “decadence” seems scarce, for instance he still translates Bourget’s “style de *décadence*” as “Stil des Verfalls” in 1883 and 1884.<sup>17</sup> Also between 1883 and 1887 the word decadence appears less than ten times (Bauer 2001, p. 281), while in 1888 its use becomes inflated.

Nietzsche uses the word “decadence” for the first time in 1877 in a rather conventional context, when describing Cervantes (*Don Quixote*) as “*Décadence der spanischen Kultur*” (KSA 8/454). Another rare exception of his explicit use of decadence can be found in a letter to Carl Fuchs of April 1886, where he speaks about decadence in the context of music theory:

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Stoupy 1996.

<sup>17</sup> A more detailed and insightful account is provided by Kafitz 2004, p. 66–88.

Der Teil wird Herr über das Ganze, die Phrase über die Melodie, der Augenblick über die Zeit (und das Tempo), das Pathos über das Ethos (Charakter, Stil, oder wie es heißen soll –), schließlich auch der esprit über den ›Sinn‹. [...] [M]an sieht das Einzelne viel zu scharf, man sieht das Ganze viel zu stumpf – und man hat den *Willen* zu dieser Optik in der Musik, vor allem man hat das *Talent* dazu! Das ist aber *décadence*, ein Wort, das, wie es sich unter uns von selbst versteht, nicht verwerfen, sondern nur bezeichnen soll. (KSB 7/176)

This passage already anticipates Nietzsche’s well-known characterization of decadence from *Der Fall Wagner*. His cunning remark to Fuchs here – “[M]an sieht das Einzelne viel zu scharf, man sieht das Ganze viel zu stumpf” – precisely encapsulates the overall problem of decadence in Nietzsche’s works, while a basic model of Nietzsche’s decadence comes to the surface: The whole is no longer a whole, but dominated by a plethora of emancipated details.

Nietzsche’s ever-changing uses of the term “decadence” are derived from a multitude of scientific, non-aesthetic and aesthetic discourses, which has already been scrutinized by several scholars;<sup>18</sup> in the studies of the plurality of discourses and Nietzsche’s idiosyncratic adaptation of them, the aesthetic dimension is mostly and unavoidably neglected, while in conventional literary investigations the view of Nietzsche’s use of the term decadence has become rather commonplace, (as pioneering works on the subject seem to be often regurgitated).<sup>19</sup> Before devoting more attention to this aspect of aesthetic and literary

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**18** Nietzsche was well-read in medical, psychological and physiological sources of his times, a topic which cannot be adequately addressed here. Nietzsche scholars mostly refer to his intensive reception of Charles Féré, especially *Dégénérescence et Criminalité* (1888) and *Sensation et Mouvement* (1887), with regard to Nietzsche’s understanding of degeneration and hysteria. Cf. Horn 2000, p. 349; Müller-Lauter 1999b, p. 19; Stingelin 1999, p. 41. A more ambitious and variegated account is given by Horn, who traces back Nietzsche’s biomedical, physiological and psychological discourses of decadence, while the aesthetic and literary dimension of decadence is neglected. Horn shows that all the following authors were pertinent to Nietzsche’s conception of decadence: O. Schmidt’s *Descendenzlehre und Darwinismus* (1873), A. Comte’s *Einleitung in die positive Philosophie* (1874), A. Bain’s *Körper und Geist* (1874), W. Roux’ *Der Kampf der Teile im Organismus* (1881), G. H. Schneider’s *Der menschliche Wille vom Standpunkte der neueren Entwicklungstheorien* (1882), F. Galton’s *Inquiries into human faculty and its development* (1883), Carl von Nägeli’s *Mechanisch-physiologische Theorie der Abstammungslehre* (1884). Cf. Horn, 2000, p. 144–150.

**19** The central and most substantial works on literary decadence of the last thirty years are Koppen 1973; Rasch 1986; Wunberg 1995, p. 31–61; Bauer 2001, Kafitz 2004 and Pross 2013. Koppen, Rasch and Bauer collected a wealth of decadent motifs and themes, while Wunberg’s historicopoetic reflections shed new light on the development of poetic, lexematic autonomy from Naturalism to Modernism; Kafitz – in contrast to Bauer’s supposedly strict historical account – provides a systematic discourse analysis of decadence based on journals and the works of several turn-of-the-century authors and philosophers. Pross valuably extends Kafitz’s research and pres-

decadence, I would like to briefly sketch the central discourses and basic (non)-aesthetic models inherent to Nietzsche's decadence: I will then propose a set of basic models of Nietzsche's concepts of decadence and finally embark on a short chronological survey of tendencies of decadence in Nietzsche's complete works.

If one attempts to describe the main discourses of decadence in Nietzsche, I would suggest the following: first, historico-political cycles of rise and fall; second, cycles of biomedical degeneration and regeneration; third, vehement (anti-) Christian turns, while other Christian concepts are structurally and rhetorically in-built; finally, aesthetic notions of decadence, which culminate in a critique of Wagner's intoxicating music and atomizing decadent style. This style again becomes self-contradictory in view of Nietzsche's late aphorisms.

Without intending to be reductionist – or forcibly systematizing the unsystematic – I propose three overriding models of decadence, which seem to be universals. Firstly, the physiological opposition of health versus sickness. This can be pursued from *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, where Nietzsche speculates on the decline of Greek culture with tropes of sickly decay (KSA 1/132) to his enigmatic self-referential remarks on being decadent and non-decadent at the same time in *Ecce Homo* (KSA IV: 264). Nietzsche – bearing his bad health in mind – ascribed degeneration to himself and, at times, sickness and hysteria seem perfect preconditions for the philosopher: he claims to be able to afford bio-aesthetic degeneration – in contrast to Wagner – as a source of inspiration and asserts in *Ecce Homo*: “Als summa summarum war ich gesund, als Winkel, als Spezialität war ich decadent” (KSA 6/266). Paradoxically, decadence is diagnosed as a disease and considered a necessity for the development and progress of the self and the social sphere at the same time. Nietzsche states in his late fragments: “Die Erscheinung der *décadence* ist so notwendig wie irgendein Aufgang und Vorwärts des Lebens; man hat es nicht in der Hand, sie abzuschaffen – sie ist absolut notwendig und jeder Zeit und jedem Volke eigen” (NF 1888, 14 [75]: KSA 13/255–256).

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ents decadence as a complex discourse and historico-philosophical metanarrative of literary modernism. Others, even the most recent scholars, climb on the bandwagon of the traditional line from Koppen to Bauer, which is certainly justified, but risks becoming trite, as long as new strands of research in the field are essentially factored out and even primary texts are read in the same direction over and over again. Thus, I propose a careful compilation and reconfiguration of different approaches to decadent literature as well as a slightly different and innovative approach to Nietzsche.

Secondly, the related model of “endings versus beginnings”: a universal problem, which certainly exceeds the possibilities of this article.<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche often intertwines endings and new beginnings, ranging from his early ideas on history in the second *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung, Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*, to some of the paradoxes in *Zarathustra* and the conception of modern self in his critique of Wagner. In the second *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung*, for instance, he characterizes the young men of his time as latecomers – “Spätlinge” – and living memories whose reminiscences would be invalid without heirs or ancestry (KSA 1/307). This notion of the “Spätling”, however, implies the idea of a new beginning – an “Erstling”. In the midst of the idea of downfall and decline, Nietzsche wonders if it could be that “vielleicht unsere Zeit ein solcher Erstling [sei]” (KSA 1/311). Endings and beginnings unavoidably imply biblical overtones and certainly are related to the Apocalypse, especially in *Zarathustra*, and are again implied in *Ecce Homo*.

The third universal model of decadence encompasses organic, rhetorical and aesthetic decomposition versus the idea of the whole. In a nutshell: fragmentation versus totality. On the level of rhetoric, the second *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung*, for instance, is charged with decadent and pessimistic vocabulary. Nietzsche warns against an “overdose of history” and illustrates the condition of the modern self in a state of fundamental fragmentation as opposed to a former wholeness. Analogous to the fragmentation of his surroundings, the modern self suffers from a linguistic crisis. The modern self is hampered in living, as it is overburdened with the historical past and rapid expansion of knowledge, which are too hard to digest (KSA 1/272). Nietzsche’s model of fragmentation versus wholeness is presented in a rather different light in his critique of Wagner: the aesthetic context allows a rather positive turn in favour of the fragmentary which can be also perceived as cultural refinement. This shows again the versatility and constant shifts of evaluations, which again recalls our ambivalent motto: “[K]ein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen”. All of Nietzsche’s models of decadence seem to be dichotomously structured. One could further add: degeneration-regeneration, formation-deformation, ascent-descent, decline and progress as further models drawn from history, anthropology, philosophy, aesthetics and – subconsciously – theology.

I will now outline tendencies of Nietzsche’s development of decadence in his complete works by attempting a brief diachronic survey: from *Die Geburt der Tragödie* onwards, a certain degree of metaphors of decomposition can be

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<sup>20</sup> To give an example of the intricate debate on the problem of endings (and new beginnings), cf. Stierle and Warning 1996.

found as well as universal models of descent and ascent, endings and new beginnings with an apocalyptic overtone. Decadence is largely perceived as a pejorative, culturally pessimistic model in the early works, which comes to light in particular in the second *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung*. In it, decadence is shown as a negative figure of fragmentation, decline and degeneration; the seemingly unhealthy “fragmentary” stands in contrast to an idealized, but lost totality:

Zerbröckelt und auseinandergefallen, im Ganzen in ein Inneres und ein Aeusseres halb mechanisch zerlegt, mit Begriffen wie mit Drachenzähnen übersäet, Begriffs-Drachen erzeugend, dazu an der Krankheit der Worte leidend und ohne Vertrauen zu jeder eignen Empfindung, die noch nicht mit Worten abgestempelt ist: als eine solche unlebendige und doch unheimlich regsame Begriffs- und Wort-Fabrik habe ich vielleicht noch das Recht von mir zu sagen cogito, ergo sum, nicht aber vivo, ergo cogito. (UM II 10: KSA 1/329)

A subtle revaluation or inversion of degeneration, however, becomes already evident in an aphorism of *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*, entitled “Veredelung durch Entartung”. Degeneration, meaning the physiologically weak, is presented as innovation within an ideal society, where the stagnating strong ones receive cultural refinement from the weaker and more sensitive ones. This thought revalues decadence as innovation or a virtual “figure of the new” in physiological terms:<sup>21</sup>

Die Gefahr dieser starken, auf gleichartige, charaktervolle Individuen gegründeten Gemeinwesen ist die allmählich durch die Vererbung gesteigerte Verdummung, welche nun einmal aller Stabilität wie ihr Schatten folgt. Es sind die ungebundneren, viel unsichereren und moralisch schwächeren Individuen, an denen das *geistige Fortschreiten* in solchen Gemeinwesen hängt: es sind die Menschen, welche Neues und überhaupt Vielerlei versuchen. Unzählige dieser Art gehen, ihrer Schwäche wegen, ohne sehr ersichtliche Wirkung zu Grunde; aber im Allgemeinen, zumal wenn sie Nachkommen haben, lockern sie auf und bringen von Zeit zu Zeit dem stabilen Elemente eines Gemeinwesens eine Wunde bei. Gerade an dieser wunden und schwach gewordenen Stelle wird dem gesammten Wesen etwas Neues gleichsam *inokuliert*; seine Kraft im Ganzen muss aber stark genug sein, um dieses Neue in sein Blut aufzunehmen und sich zu assimiliren. Die abartenden Naturen sind überall da von höchster Bedeutung, wo ein Fortschritt erfolgen soll. Jedem Fortschritt im Grossen muss eine theilweise Schwächung vorhergehen. Die stärksten Naturen *halten* den Typus *fest*, die schwächeren helfen ihn *fortbilden*. (HAH 224: KSA 2/187–188)

In Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* the metaphorical use of decadence becomes far more explicit. The four parts are replete with deictic implications of decadence, topographical and at times paradoxical semantics of space, symbolic cycles of the

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Moog-Grünewald 2002.

seasons and hours. The fall and the afternoon hours signify the end as opposed to Zarathustra’s daybreak, noon and midnight as counter models of a new beginning. The human subject is again depicted as a fallen and divided one, a “*dividuum*” (if one uses Lou Andreas-Salomé’s fitting description borrowed from Nietzsche’s *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*) – and a literal *subiectum* (Andreas-Salomé 2000, p. 62).<sup>22</sup> The overcoming of the last man is repeatedly announced alongside a vision of the advent of the overman. Amongst the plurality of biblical counterfactuals of *Zarathustra*, a secularized apocalyptic diction from the Apocalypse of John – including the wind and the ripe figs of “Ein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen” – unites the old and the new, decomposition and recomposition.

Decadence as an aesthetic phenomenon emerges in Nietzsche’s late works on Richard Wagner, while physiological and psychological discourses (degeneration and hysteria) are present at the same time. Nietzsche oscillates between a fundamental identification with and distance from Wagner and his art, while the basic model of health versus sickness is present throughout. Nietzsche stylizes Wagner as an essential disease from which he suffers in a phase of decadence until (re)gaining a kind of higher sanity. In addition, Bourget’s model of fragmentation versus wholeness is employed with a subtle inversion to illustrate decadence as a literary style. Nietzsche’s ambivalently received *style de décadence* could be described as art of the detail (*détail*), which affects not only the level of content but also the level of (aphoristic) form.

In Nietzsche’s latest works we are then confronted with a ubiquitous and predominantly cultural-pessimistic radicalization of decadence. In *Götzen-Dämmerung* Nietzsche brutally attacks allegedly decadent types from antiquity (especially Plato and Socrates). In *Der Antichrist*, he then ferociously accuses Christianity/Protestantism of decadent asceticism. Nietzsche creates an apocalyptic and hyperbolic overestimation of himself, which culminates in the revaluation of all values and a new beginning of time from 30 September 1888 onward. This rhetorical move is also repeated in *Ecce Homo*. His autobiography, as we will see, sheds another ambivalent light on the problem of decadence as a virtual “tightrope walk of the paradoxical”.

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<sup>22</sup> I thereby mean a literally fallen subject, a modern self in a state of transcendental homelessness. It would lead too far to engage in the related question of (decadent) modern subjectivity, which is also dominant in Nietzsche’s reflections and, of course, indicative of the human condition on the verge of the twentieth century; cf. Pfister 1989 and Robertson 2002, p. 150–196.



### 3 Literary Decadence and Decadent Style: *Der Fall Wagner* – Decadence between Physiology, Psychology and Aesthetic

Schon im Sommer 1876 mitten in der Zeit der ersten Festspiele, nahm ich bei mir von Wagnern Abschied. Ich vertrage nichts zweideutiges; seitdem Wagner in Deutschland war, condescierte er Schritt für Schritt zu Allem, was ich verachte – selbst zum Antisemitismus ... [...] Richard Wagner, scheinbar der Siegreichste, in Wahrheit ein morsch gewordener verzweifelter décadent, sank plötzlich, hilflos und zerbrochen, vor dem christlichen Kreuze nieder ... (NW IX 1: KSA 6/432–433)

Nietzsche's polemical letter and case study of Richard Wagner is an implicit manifesto of literary decadence, which displays a variety of discourses of decadence and a self-referential paradox at the same time. If one looks at *Der Fall Wagner* from the perspective of German decadence, one could find a high degree of ambivalence even in the title of this controversial and verbose letter. *Der Fall Wagner* can be read as a counter-model to Nietzsche's metaphors of birth in his first book. While *Die Geburt der Tragödie* inaugurates Wagner's "Gesamtkunstwerk" as a rebirth of Attic tragedy, Nietzsche now celebrates the downfall of his idealization of Wagner. *Der Fall Wagner* not only implies the idea of *casus* (i.e. a literal *de-cadere*) but also the idea of a psycho-pathological *case study*, while others even sense a juridical overtone.<sup>23</sup> This was not the first case study of Wagner: a psychiatrist from Munich named Theodor Puschmann had already diagnosed Wagner with insanity fifteen years before.<sup>24</sup> As Nietzsche knew about this, one could also read his *Der Fall Wagner* as an ironic reply to Puschmann's analysis which he found spurious, for he claimed that Wagner suffered from hysteria. Moreover, Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner* blurs the boundaries of an-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Horn 1999, p. 333.

<sup>24</sup> According to Moore, Nietzsche was familiar with Puschmann's case study *Richard Wagner. Eine psychiatrische Studie* from 1873, but strongly disagreed with its claim that Wagner was insane. Thus, *Der Fall Wagner* can be interpreted as an ironic reply to Puschmann's diagnosis, in which Nietzsche associates Wagner with nervousness and hysteria as opposed to insanity. The contemporaneous discourse of (female) hysteria (and its bodily theatricality) was dominated by Charcot and his students (such as Nordau and Freud amongst others) from the perspective of psychoanalysis. At the same time, a clichéd unscientific discourse seems to be interwoven with Nietzsche's eclectic appropriation of hysteria, which has to do with an anti-Semitic cliché of a "theory" of ingenuity and a Jewish talent for theatricality (Sombart). Cf. Moore 2001, p. 246–266. See further on cultural phenomena of hysteria, psychoanalysis and theatrical hysteria in the arts, in Radkau 1998 and Worbs 1983.

alyst and patient. In a review of the *Magazin für Literatur des In- und Auslandes* (1888, Nr. 44: 694) the reviewer speaks of a “verrückte Schrift [...] in einem nervenkranken, überreizten Stil [...] als litte der Verfasser an einem geistigen Datterich” (Kafitz 2004, p. 88f). But more recent scholarship also has similar assumptions, which are articulated in a more sophisticated tone, for example by Kofman: “Has the doctor ‘been’ consulted? Well, rather, he consulted himself; for behind the case of Wagner [...] lies the case of Nietzsche” (Kofman 1994, p. 196).

I will now take a closer look at this text, while dealing at the same time with a genuine document of “literary decadence”.<sup>25</sup> As previously mentioned, Nietzsche calls decadence the deepest problem of his life in the foreword to *Der Fall Wagner* (KSA 6/11). After his fundamental discord with Wagner, which happened many years before – for whatever reasons – his enthusiasm for Wagner had turned into the very opposite. Despite being a decadent of his times, Nietzsche rebels against decadence as a philosopher, especially in *Der Fall Wagner* and *Ecce Homo*:

Wohlan! Ich bin so gut wie Wagner das Kind dieser Zeit, will sagen ein *décadent*: nur dass ich das begriff, nur dass ich mich dagegen wehrte. Der Philosoph in mir wehrte sich dagegen. Was mich am tiefsten beschäftigt hat, das ist in der That das Problem der *décadence*, – ich habe Gründe dazu gehabt. „Gut und Böse“ ist nur eine Spielart jenes Problems. Hat man sich für die Abzeichen des Niedergangs ein Auge gemacht, so versteht man auch die Moral, – man versteht, was sich unter ihren heiligsten Namen und Werthformeln versteckt: das *verarmte* Leben, der Wille zum Ende, die grosse Müdigkeit. (CW Foreword: KSA 6/11–12)

His famous self-characterization as decadent and non-decadent at the same time brings to light a Nietzschean paradox of decadence and a vain attempt to overcome it.

Nietzsche’s *Der Fall Wagner* reveals a critique of modernism, including medical, psychological, cultural-critical and aesthetic discourses. Nietzsche charac-

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<sup>25</sup> I can only hint at my understanding of literary decadence and the elusive problem of decadent style in this context. Literary decadence (from my perspective as a Germanist) encompasses an ensemble of motifs, themes, moods and basic figures of thought or universal models which are characteristic of the *fin de siècle*, but equipped with the above-mentioned ambivalent, double evaluative qualities which I have tried to demonstrate in Nietzsche. Furthermore, literary decadence incorporates a set of discourses and a distinctive literary style. This style can be inferred from Bourget’s figure of fragmentation and decomposition and Nietzsche’s anarchistic emancipation of the (aesthetic) detail. These phenomena, which come to the surface both thematically and structurally, are essential components of literary decadence/decadent style and were already described in literary scholarship as “*Lexemautonomie*” (see Wunberg 1995) and “*Sprachartistik*” (see Kafitz 2004).

terizes the decadent genius Wagner as: “Décadent, mendacious actor, rattlesnake, fake conjurer, tempter, poisoner and histrionic”. These derogatory attributes make clear that Nietzsche feels the need of being “saved from the saviour”. He furthermore perceives *decadent Wagnerism* as a European phenomenon: “Wie verwandt muss Wagner der gesamten europäischen *décadence* sein, dass er von ihr nicht als *décadent* empfunden wird! [...] Denn dass man nicht gegen ihn sich wehrt, das ist selbst schon ein Zeichen von *décadence*. Der Instinkt ist geschwächt” (CW 5: KSA 6/22). Nietzsche intertwines, like many of his contemporaries, a discourse of aesthetics, biomedicine and psychoanalysis which is interrelated with an ever-shifting opposition of health versus sickness. Wagner, the hysterical artist and “*névrose*” (KSA 6/22) is sick and also produces sick, degenerate art which contaminates his countless admirers. Nietzsche warns about Wagner’s intoxicating music in an excessively theatrical manner as if he was warning against an epidemic. Wagner is also envisaged as Nietzsche’s very own disease: Nietzsche presents us with the strange idea of overcoming *décadence* by calling Wagner a germ-like intruder into his immune system, who needs to be fought like a virus.

When describing Wagner’s decadent style more closely, the fragmentary quality of *décadence* recurs and reveals Nietzsche’s reception of Bourget:

– Womit kennzeichnet sich jede *litterarische* *décadence*? Damit, daß das Leben nicht mehr im Ganzen wohnt. Das Wort wird souverain und springt über den Satz hinaus, der Satz greift über und verdunkelt den Sinn der Seite, die Seite gewinnt Leben auf Unkosten des Ganzen – das Ganze ist kein Ganzes mehr. Aber das ist das Gleichnis für jeden Stil der *décadence*: jedes Mal Anarchie der Atome, Disgregation des Willens, „Freiheit des Individuums“, moralisch geredet – zu einer politischen Theorie erweitert „gleiche Rechte für Alle.“ Das Leben, die *gleiche* Lebendigkeit, die Vibration und Exuberanz des Lebens in die kleinsten Gebilde zurückgedrängt, der Rest *arm* an Leben. Überall Lähmung, Mühsal, Erstarrung *oder* Feindschaft und Chaos: beides immer mehr in die Augen springend, in je höhere Formen der Organisation man aufsteigt. Das Ganze lebt überhaupt nicht mehr: es ist zusammengesetzt, gerechnet, künstlich, ein Artefakt.– (CW 7: KSA 6/27)

It is obvious that Nietzsche’s definition of literary *décadence* echoes Bourget. However, after a negation of the “whole”, Nietzsche begins on the level of the anarchic single word and then spreads over to the respectively larger constituents. “The whole is no longer a whole”: instead a hybridized, artificial construct is assumed. Going beyond Bourget, Nietzsche’s model of fragmentation permeates not only the level of content but also the level of form. What remains, is a heterogeneous collection of aphorisms as shown in *Der Fall Wagner* and the works that follow it.

Literary *décadence* and *decadent style* seem to lie within the logic of a paradox in the late Nietzsche: *Décadence*, paralleled with Wagner and Wagner’s

music, is perfectly described and notoriously stigmatized in the fashion of *decadent style*. In accordance with Bernheimer one can say that “Nietzsche’s critique of Wagner could be read as decadent for the same reasons that Nietzsche finds Wagner to be decadent: separate units are animated at the expense of the overall effect”.<sup>26</sup>

And yet, literary decadence is an ambivalent and not simply a pejorative concept in Nietzsche’s understanding: Again, one could essentially argue for “Kein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen”: No matter how trenchantly Nietzsche criticizes (Wagnerian) decadent style, he never fully abandons his profound admiration for Wagner’s “miniaturism” or art of the detail, the refined nuances and amiable nervousness of decadent art:

Nochmals gesagt: bewunderungswürdig, liebenswürdig ist Wagner nur in der Erfindung des Kleinsten, in der Ausdichtung des Détails, – man hat alles Recht auf seiner Seite, ihn hier als einen Meister ersten Ranges zu proklamieren, als unseren grössten *Miniaturisten* der Musik, der in den kleinsten Raum eine Unendlichkeit von Sinn und Süsse drängt. Sein Reichtum an Farben, an Halbschatten, an Heimlichkeiten absterbenden Lichts verwöhnt dergestalt, dass Einem hinterdrein fast alle andern Musiker zu robust vorkommen. (CW 7: KSA 6/28)

Nietzsche, therefore, also holds decadence in high esteem and considers it a cultural necessity. The above passage even imitates a decadent mood, which Nietzsche could have adopted from Baudelaire, Bourget or any other representative of the French literary tradition of decadence. This can be further underlined by a letter to Carl Fuchs of mid-April 1886, where Nietzsche openly confesses: “ich meine, es giebt auch an der *décadence* eine Unsumme des Anziehendsten, Werthvollsten, Neuesten” (KGB III.3, 177). Hence, decadence also equals innovation and is positively charged in aesthetic and cultural terms.

## 4 [K]ein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen: Ambivalences and Paradoxes of Decadence in *Ecce Homo*

Neben einander gehen die *beiden* *décadence*-Bewegungen und Extreme:

- a) die üppige, liebenswürdig-boshafte, prunk- und kunstliebende *décadence*
- b) und die Verdüsterung des religiös-moralischen Pathos, die stoische Selbst-Verhärtung, die platonische Sinnen-Verleumdung, die Vorbereitung des Bodens für das Christentum...

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<sup>26</sup> Bernheimer 2002, p. 18.

(NF 1887–88, [11] 375: KSA 13/169)

This note from Nietzsche's late *Nachlass* points out the two extreme poles, to which his own understanding of decadence could be tentatively assigned: decadence as a pluralistic aesthetic phenomenon versus decadence as pejorative, cultural pessimistic phenomenon ranging from a critique of Greek Stoicism (*Götzen-Dämmerung*) to scornful, hyperbolic invectives against Christianity (*Der Antichrist*). In Nietzsche's latest works, everything seems to be taken to extremes: decadence too is taken up again and is crystallized anew in his autobiography *Ecce Homo*. I end with this text, which is at the center of this investigation.

Decadence appears in various forms in *Ecce Homo*: physiological-genealogical, psychological, cultural-pessimistic and (anti-)Christian models recur and are embedded into a texture with an affinity to *decadent style*. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche enigmatically introduces himself as “Jünger des Philosophen Dionysos” and repeats the well-known passage from *Zarathustra* of the north-wind and the ripe figs. My wordplay of “Ein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen” versus “Kein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen” embraces again the deep ambivalence of Nietzsche's ever-changing conception of the phenomenon. Nietzsche characterizes himself as “décadent zugleich und Anfang” in the first chapter of *Ecce Homo*, “Warum ich so weise bin”:

Das Glück meines Daseins, seine Einzigkeit vielleicht, liegt in seinem Verhängniss: ich bin, um es in Räthselform auszudrücken, als mein Vater bereits gestorben, als meine Mutter lebe ich noch und werde alt. Diese doppelte Herkunft, gleichsam aus der obersten und der untersten Sprosse an der Leiter des Lebens, *décadent zugleich und Anfang* – dies, wenn irgend Etwas, erklärt jene Neutralität, jene Freiheit von Partei im Verhältnis zum Gesamtprobleme des Lebens, die mich vielleicht auszeichnet. Ich habe für die Zeichen von Aufgang und Niedergang eine feinere Witterung als je ein Mensch gehabt hat, ich bin der Lehrer par excellence hierfür, – ich kenne Beides, ich bin Beides. – (EH I 1: KSA 6/264)

Ascent and descent are paradoxically intertwined. Nietzsche stylizes himself as a double entity of a “décadent” and “non-décadent” and embraces downwards and upwards, ascent and descent at the same time. The singularity of his position is explained from a genealogical, hereditary angle. Just like his father, whom he describes as “zart, liebenswürdig und morbid”, Nietzsche descended to the “niedrigsten Punkt [s]einer Vitalität” (KSA 6/264) at the age of 36. Unlike his father, Nietzsche overcomes his degenerative crisis and writes *Daybreak (Morgenröte)* during his period of reconvalescence with newly regained “Dialektiker-Klarheit”. One would be tempted to regard Nietzsche's relationship to decadence dialectically, were it not that Nietzsche labelled even dialectics itself as a “Déc-

adence-Symptom” (KSA 6/265) a few pages later (which also underlines the preferred use of “ambivalence” as opposed to “dialectics” in this article).

Von der Kranken-Optik aus nach *gesünderen* Begriffen und Werthen, und wiederum umgekehrt aus der Fülle und Selbstgewissheit des *reichen* Lebens hinuntersehn in die heimliche Arbeit des Décadence-Instinkts – das war meine längste Übung, meine eigentliche Erfahrung, wenn irgend worin wurde ich darin Meister. Ich habe es jetzt in der Hand, ich habe die Hand dafür, *Perspektiven umzustellen*: erster Grund, weshalb für mich allein vielleicht eine „Umwerthung der Werthe“ überhaupt möglich ist. – (EH I 1: KSA 6/266)

Thanks to his self-appointed command of perspectivism, Nietzsche curiously speaks of the benefits of illness and degeneration as “energisches Stimulans zum Leben” to all those, who happen to be healthy enough. Nietzsche now believes that he finds himself in the superior position of the healthy ones and seems to be able to afford Wagnerian intoxication as a means of inspiration; he indulges in decadence and claims to overcome decadence at the same time.

In the second chapter, “Warum ich so klug bin”, Nietzsche again reflects upon his relationship to Wagner in a rather unusual fashion. Wagner is introduced as a “Revolutionär” and “Artist” (KSA 6/288), whose late Romanticism could only be blended in Paris. Surprisingly, Nietzsche goes on with an exceptionally positive evaluation of artistic decadence and calls Baudelaire the first intelligent supporter of Wagner: “der erste richtig intelligente Anhänger Wagners überhaupt” (KSA 6/289). Unveiling the benefits of aesthetic decadence seems exceptional in view of his latest works (where the culturally pessimistic aspect of decadence clearly dominates). Nietzsche now claims that his ill-thinking of Wagner lies beyond the realm of art: Wagner’s transformation into a cultural-pessimistic, catholicized ascetic seems to be the reason for his grudge (KSA 6/289).

Aesthetic decadence in *Ecce Homo* is again combined with a self-referential turn, although differently than in *Der Fall Wagner*. While the Wagner case is dominated by a critique of aesthetic decadence in the fashion of *decadent style* – which is no longer a novelty – we now encounter a sentimental pining for decadent moods and even a “decadent poem” in *Ecce Homo*. Without further comments Nietzsche includes his own poem about Venice in his autobiography;<sup>27</sup> the poem indeed looks like an epitome of a *Littérature de décadence*:

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<sup>27</sup> Koppen justly characterized Venice as central topos of decadence in European nineteenth-century literary history. Venice in these years is a Wagnerian “Tristan- und Todesstadt” and the poem seems a clear reference to Nietzsche’s reminiscences of Wagner. Cf. Koppen 1973, p. 219. More recent and illuminating research portraying Venice as a symbol of decadence, decay and theatricality in literature has been provided by Schlemmer 2015.

An der Brücke stand  
 jüngst ich in brauner Nacht.  
 Fernher kam Gesang:  
 goldener Tropfen quoll's  
 über die zitternde Fläche hinweg.  
 Gondeln, Lichter, Musik –  
 trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus...

Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,  
 sang sich, unsichtbar berührt,  
 heimlich ein Gondellied dazu,  
 zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit.  
 – Hörte Jemand ihr zu? ...  
 (EH II 7: KSA 6/291)

Venice, a cultural symbol of death, decay and late Romanticism seems to connote with Wagner, *Tristan* and Nietzsche's suffering from the fate of music as from an open wound (KSA 6/357).<sup>28</sup> The poem invokes "a harmonious coalescence of opposites in voicing a shimmering of the soul" (Grundlehner 1986, p. 300). Synaesthetic dissolution is combined with a heightened sensitivity to visual and auditory perception. The autumnal colors, the timbres and alluded hours of night and dawn create a "decadent atmosphere"; also the gondola can be interpreted as a well-known symbol of death (from Goethe via Platen to Thomas Mann); the trembling waters and the quivering self veer between elation and a fear of solitude. The idyllic moment seems interrupted by the last line, where the self fears external listeners. Besides, the suggested dissolution of the poem suggests decadent (de)composition not only as a theme, but also as a poetic form. Hence, Nietzsche emerges as a "clandestine" decadent poet himself, but only for an instant.

Decadence, both from aesthetic and other angles, undergoes constant transformations and revaluations in *Ecce Homo*. The figure of the *décadent* is primarily introduced from a negative perspective and applies to all wise men, saints and saviours other than Zarathustra (KSA 6/260) and later on, as we know, to scholars and philologists (KSA 6/293). Regarding Nietzsche's own hereditary constellation, however, the refined *décadent* – embodied by his late father and the patrilinear line – is viewed positively and crudely contrasted with the rude health of his prosaic matrilinear line (KSA 6/263). Then, again, Socrates and a

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<sup>28</sup> The relation between Venice, *Tristan* and Wagner was addressed by Koppen and Podach. Moreover, Grundlehner derives from Nietzsche's correspondence with Peter Gast that the poem was inspired by his visit to Venice in 1885 and the memory of this last night, standing on the Rialto bridge. See Grundlehner 1986, p. 299.

pejorative notion of the *décadent* come into play (KSA 6/265). Nietzsche subsequently characterizes himself as “decadent and non-decadent” alike and draws inspiration and intoxication from decadence. In contrast to all other perspectives, Nietzsche praises Wagnerian aesthetic decadence and reveals his preference for a sentimentalized late nineteenth-century art in his poem, a virtual embodiment of *décadent style*.

After this episode, the figure of the *décadent* is portrayed in a negative fashion and another paradox arises towards the end of the text: Optimism and pessimism are thought to be equally decadent and harmful (KSA 6/368) shortly before the invocation of the revaluation of all values. Decadent values are eventually re-emphasized as “Niedergangsmoral” and the argument of *décadents* as beneficial members of society from *Menschliches Allzumenschliches* is inverted and renounced: “Wenn eine *décadence*-Art Mensch zum Rang der höchsten Art aufgestiegen ist, so konnte dies nur auf Kosten ihrer Gegensatz-Art geschehn, der starken und lebensgewissen Art Mensch” (EH IV 5: KSA 6/369). We have arrived at the peak of Nietzsche’s perspectivism, a dismantling of all truths and all lies and an eventual overcoming of decadence and the human species *per se*.

*Ecce Homo* closes with the famous chapter “Warum ich ein Schicksal bin”: “Ich kenne mein Los. [...] Ich bin kein Mensch, ich bin Dynamit” (EH IV 1: KSA 6/365). In the end, the destructive imagery from *Götzen-Dämmerung* and the dynamite of *Ecce Homo* evoke a “*démolition*” or “Apokalypse der Apokalypsen”.<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche calls for another revaluation of all values or “Umwertung aller Werthe” (KSA 6/365), repeats his culturally pessimistic ideas of decadence and perpetuates his invectives against Christianity and moral critique, which catapult his reflections into highly polemical and negative paths. He finally repeats three times: “– Hat man mich verstanden? – Dionysos gegen den Gekreuzigten” (KSA 6/374), and inaugurates the beginning of his own ending. Shortly before falling victim to irrevocable insanity in early January 1889, Nietzsche imitates the “Hammer” and destructive “Nordwind” one more time in order to make himself “understood”. He strikes an apocalyptic tone – which shows an entirely different aspect of decadence and a potential way of overcoming it, were it not that:

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Hendrik Birus’s argument of Nietzsche’s “Apokalypse der Apokalypsen”: Birus underlines Nietzsche’s counter-reactions to the eschatological discourses of his time, which are driven against a Wagnerian notion of doom, in particular. Regarding Nietzsche’s late works, Birus assumes that Nietzsche incorporates the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition to finally abandon it, which culminates at the end of the *Antichrist* as well as *Ecce homo*. Near to his own, tragic “Privat-Apokalypse”, Nietzsche can no longer distinguish between “endgültige[r] Vernichtung der Apokalypsen” and their triumphal recurrence. See Birus 1996, p. 57.



Es ist ein Selbstbetrug seitens der Philosophen und Moralisten, damit schon aus der *décadence* herauszutreten, dass sie gegen dieselbe Krieg machen. Das Heraustreten steht ausserhalb ihrer Kraft: was sie als Mittel, als Rettung wählen, ist selbst nur wieder Ausdruck der *décadence* – sie *verändern* deren Ausdruck, sie schaffen sie selbst nicht weg. (TI II 11: KSA 6/72)

While Nietzsche appears like a fiery “Nordwind zu reifen Feigen”, the fundamental ambivalence of his notions of decadence, including literary decadence, however, cannot be disentangled: I would rather conclude that “[K]ein Nordwind bin ich reifen Feigen” remains a fitting motto to embrace the complexities and deep ambivalences of Nietzsche’s concepts of decadence, which make German decadent literature philosophically unique.

Carol Diethe

## Lost in Translation: or Rhubarb, Rhubarb!

**Abstract:** “I was the first to discover how to make the art of great rhyme, great style of punctuation, into the expression of an immense ebb and flow of sublime, superhuman passion; [...]” (EH III 4). Nietzsche’s use of language in *Ecce Homo* matches this panegyric, but it often makes translation fraught. *Ecce Homo* is one of Nietzsche’s most translated works. Grammatically, he appears to write lucidly, but his rhetorical devices make him difficult even in German. This essay identifies and discusses some of the particular difficulties faced by translators of *Ecce Homo*. These include Nietzsche’s use of the definite article, punctuation, spacing, figures of speech, puns and wordplay, assonance, pathetic fallacy, understatement, litotes, biblical allusions, deliberate ambiguity and metaphor. Indeed, the whole of *Ecce Homo* can be read as an extended metaphor, with the double-entendre of the title shouting “Behold Nietzsche!” while at the same time referring to Pontius Pilate’s words when arraigning Jesus. Additional difficulties for the modern translator are presented by Nietzsche’s psychological and physical diagnoses, his misogynistic vocabulary, and his appropriation of specific terms such as “Weib” “Moralin”, “Geist” and “Nächstenliebe”. Yet translators should resist the temptation to make Nietzsche too modern.

*Ecce Homo* must rank with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as one of Nietzsche’s most translated works. Grammatically, he appears to write lucidly, but his rhetorical devices such as reeling off lists of verbal nouns or leaving verbs out altogether, make him difficult even in German. In spite of his claim to be a leader of style, he can sometimes sound precious, though it has to be said that German academics in Nietzsche’s day fostered many an obscure multiple-clause structure. Of course, it is Nietzsche’s *intention* to be difficult, and he is mightily pleased with his success, declaring in section 4 of “Why I Write Such Good Books” in *Ecce Homo*:

Every style is good that really communicates an inner state, that does not make mistakes with the signs, the tempo of signs, gestures – all laws of rhetorical punctuation are the art of gesture. My instinct here is infallible [...] Before me, nobody knew what could be done with the German language, – what could actually be done with language. – I was

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246551-013>

the first to discover how to make the art of great rhyme, great style of punctuation, into the expression of an immense ebb and flow of sublime, superhuman passion; [...] (EH III 4)<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche's use of his language matches his panegyric, but it often makes translation fraught. From the start, i. e. in the first section of the chapter "Why I am so Wise", he manages to compress a layered meaning into words or phrases, knowing their etymology and drawing out affinities that the reader can only tease out laboriously.<sup>2</sup> Even when Nietzsche uses a straightforward list, the last of the sequence "and" is rarely used, whereas in English, the word "and" normally does sterling work for the last set of words:

A long, far too long line of years means I am getting better, – but at the same time it also means relapse, decline, periodic forms of *décadence*. (EH I 1)<sup>3</sup>

Another favourite technique that Nietzsche has used to structure his sentence is apposition, which increases the output of information in a very characteristic way. An example is from the final chapter of *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am a Destiny", where the context is that "blindness towards Christianity is a crime *par excellence*":

The millennia, the peoples, the first and the last, philosophers and old wives – discounting five, six historical moments, myself seventh – in this respect they are all worthy of each other. The Christian was hitherto the 'moral being' and as a curiosity beyond compare – and, as 'moral being', more absurd, mendacious, vain, frivolous, more disadvantageous to himself than even the greatest despiser of humanity could dream up. (EH IV 7)<sup>4</sup>

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1 "Gut ist jeder Stil, der einen inneren Zustand wirklich mittheilt, der sich über die Zeichen, über das Tempo der Zeichen, über die *Gebärden* – alle Gesetze der Periode sind Kunst der Gebärde – nicht vergreift. Mein Instinkt hier ist unfehlbar [...] Man weiss vor mir nicht, was man überhaupt mit der deutschen Sprache kann, – was man überhaupt mit der Sprache kann. – Die Kunst des *grossen* Rhythmus, der *grosse Stil* der Periodik zum Ausdruck eines ungeheuren Auf und Nieder von sublimer, von übermenschlicher, Leidenschaft ist erst von mir entdeckt; [...]" (EH III 4; KSA 6/304–305). All translations of Nietzsche in this essay are my own.

2 See EH I 1: KSA 6/265.

3 "– Eine lange, allzulange Reihe von Jahren bedeutet bei mir Genesung, – sie bedeutet leider auch zugleich Rückfall, Verfall, Periodik einer Art *décadence*" (EH I 1: KSA 6/265).

4 "Die Jahrtausende, die Völker, die Ersten und die Letzten, die Philosophen und die alten Weiber – fünf, sechs Augenblicke der Geschichte abgerechnet, mich als siebenten – in diesem Punkte sind sie alle einander würdig. Der Christ war bisher *das* 'moralische Wesen', ein Curiosum ohne Gleichen – und, *als* 'moralisches Wesen', absürder, verlogener, eitler, leichtfertiger, *sich selber nachtheiliger* als auch der grösste Verächter der Menschheit es sich träumen lassen konnte" (EH IV 7: KSA 6/371–372).

Here we have a list where the use of the definite article might need some pruning for English ears. Nietzsche's list usually ends abruptly with a dash, and then a summing-up begins, where a characteristic hiatus is created by two em-dashes mid-sentence (EH II 9). Here, Nietzsche seems to infer that people are all equally *bad* in their blindness towards Christianity, although what he actually *says* is that they are all equally worthy of each other, the point being that Nietzsche frowns on anything Christian at this stage. After this comes the definition of the Christian, followed by the noun phrase "a curiosity beyond compare" in standard apposition, followed by yet another list, this time of adjectives. Note the ambiguity of the word *Christ* here: Nietzsche could be referring to Christ, although "*the moral being*" suggests one superlative person -- himself. The context deals with multiple Christians, all of them wrecking the world, in Nietzsche's opinion.

Nietzsche generates pace with "rhetorical punctuation", which makes full use of colons and semi-colons and is largely straightforward providing one sticks to the original as far as possible. The long dash at the end of a section allows Nietzsche to make his point and turn to a new topic in the next section if he so wishes; he sometimes reverses the tactic by beginning a section with a long dash, an example being the end of section 6 and beginning of section 7 of the *Ecce Homo* chapter, "Why I am so Clever".<sup>5</sup> More often, he closes a section with three suspension points. Of course, many sections just end with a full stop. In the following quotation from *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche helps by putting a comma before the first dash on the page (like so, –) – a declaration that the reader will be pleased to grapple with the final, ecstatic pronouncement, "– and success!"

– But I saw the land, – not for one moment did I deceive myself as to path, sea, danger – and success! (EH III UM 3)<sup>6</sup>

If pressed, I would say that the long dashes – – generate speed and the characteristic three suspension points ... create pause for thought, but Nietzsche's mastery is such that it is folly to generalize. I am more confident about the indent at the beginning of each paragraph. Unless Nietzsche's punctuation and spacing are honored throughout the text, any translation will have lost integrity before a word has been translated.

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<sup>5</sup> See EH II 6–7: KSA 6/290.

<sup>6</sup> "– Aber ich *sah* das Land, – ich betrog mich nicht einen Augenblick über Weg, Meer, Gefahr – und Erfolg!" (EH III UM 3: KSA 6/320).

# 1 Figures of Speech

Wordplay with Nietzsche frequently takes the form of assonance, as with *Selbstsucht*, *Selbstzucht* (EH II 9: KSA 6/294), which both sound identical and mean “selfishness, self-discipline”. Here, English would probably render this as “selfishness *and* self-discipline”, leaving out the comma. For this pair of nouns, no English translation is satisfactory; something like “self-seeking”, “self-breeding” might come a bit closer to Nietzsche’s assonance, but it is not an accurate translation. When Nietzsche then sets out to pun, it is often impossible to translate the wordplay wittily. Compare Nietzsche’s pun that Wagner could be called “*Magner*” (or Cud-chewer) in a variant manuscript for part of the *Ecce Homo* chapter, “Why I am So Clever”:

How many stomachs must he himself have had, to always chew the cud one more time, having just done it, without mercy, right in front of us! I call him *Cud chewer* ... (EH II 5)<sup>7</sup>

Throughout Nietzsche’s works we are bombarded with just about every form of figure of speech; most are commandeered to press Nietzsche’s claims, like the symbol of “the Cross”. The same is true of understatement and its less usual form, litotes, which affirms by negating the contrary. This is from a section of *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe the Ancients”, and has little to say for itself in the *Götzen-Dämmerung* section of *Ecce Homo*, with only three pages! However, Nietzsche’s very witty remarks in *Twilight of the Idols* on litotes are as follows:

My taste, which might well be the opposite of a tolerant taste, is even here far from uttering a wholesale Yes: in general it dislikes saying Yes, it would rather say No, most of all it prefers to say nothing.... (TI X 1).<sup>8</sup>

Pathetic fallacy is also common, as in the demand for music to be “cheerful and deep like an afternoon in October” (EH II 7); personification is rife: “I am the anti-ass [Esel = ass or donkey] par excellence” (EH III 2). The whole of *Ecce Homo* can be taken as an extended metaphor, with the double-entendre of the title shouting “Behold Nietzsche!” while at the same time referring to Pontius Pilate’s words when arraigning Jesus (John 19:5). Indeed, Nietzsche’s readers lose

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<sup>7</sup> “Wie viele Magen muss er selber gehabt haben, um immer noch einmal wiederzukäuen, was er uns eben schon unerbittlich vorgekaut hat! Ich nenne ihn *Magner* ...” (EH II 5: KSA 6/294).

<sup>8</sup> “Mein Geschmack, der der Gegensatz eines duldsamen Geschmacks sein mag, ist auch hier fern davon, in Bausch und Bogen Ja zu sagen: er sagt überhaupt nicht gern Ja, lieber noch Nein, am allerliebsten gar nichts ...” (TI X 1: KSA 6/154).

much if they do not realize how much Nietzsche gleaned from the Bible to hammer home his points.

Many idiomatic sayings translate directly into English and some words, often in Nietzsche's work, are simple and clear. This is where Nietzsche was ahead of his time, when other German philosophers wrote with opaque verbosity. I shall never forget telling Middlesex students that Hegel was hard to read: they vigorously defended his fluency of expression, but they only read him in English translation, where the terminology was, perforce, smoothed out. However, we should not make Nietzsche too modern, either.

## 2 The Language of the Psychologist

Turning now to the language of Nietzsche as self-styled psychologist, *Ecce Homo* is a sustained attempt to reverse Christian practice and praise the body over the mind. He promotes good digestion in particular and often speaks of the bowels and stomach. Although bodily functions are mentioned factually, they are rarely without a figurative dimension. The whole body (“*Leib*”) and its parts – head, hand, arm, foot, legs, eyes and ears – appear frequently, with attendant references to sight and sound and usually finding a happy equivalent in English. However, Nietzsche often uses the word “fingers”, as in the unusual image of the fingers for nuance (EH I 1), where we would perhaps say “nose” or even “touch”. But it is a brave translator who will maintain the word nose where Nietzsche writes “finger”, especially now that the complete original text can be searched for specific words; so again, sticking to the original is usually the best ploy.

Within this physical framework, Nietzsche sets out his stall as psychologist, or scholar of the soul, mind, and self (psyche means all three). Rejecting “the Beyond” and other fantasies, Nietzsche concentrates on the study of the self, using the term *Selbstsucht* frequently, *Egoismus* more rarely. Indeed, his emphasis on the self is maintained throughout, as it has been in *Twilight of the Idols*. I do not think that *Selbstsucht* and *Egoismus* are interchangeable, just as I never thought that Freud's “*das Ich*” (the I) was more properly rendered in the Latin word “ego”. Let me quote from Coleridge, who arguably also had a claim to being a psychologist. In a parody of J. G. Fichte in Chapter 9 of *Biographia Literaria*, published in 1817, Coleridge wrote:

I, I, I! I myself I! [...] All souls and all bodies are I myself I! / All I myself I! / [...] / All my I! all my I! (Coleridge 1951, p. 186, note 34)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Note the pun on all my eye = rubbish.

It is well known that Freud avoided contact with Nietzsche's works. I think he, too, would have been wary of Freud's dream interpretations and other speculations. In fact, Nietzsche sometimes sounds like a *physician* rather than the psychologist he claims to be, but in his case there would be no question of a Hippocratic oath, as he is only interested in the noble caste:

Selfishness is only worth as much as the physiological value of the one who possesses it. – [...] A sick person, a figure of *décadence*, has no right to egoism. (TI IX 33)<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche sees himself as a “kidney-tester” (an expression he coins from the phrase “*auf Herz und Nieren prüfen*”), to put something to the acid test, which comes from Jeremiah 17:10: “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins” (*Ich der Herr kann das Herz ergründen und die Nieren prüfen*), so – someone who can gauge another's character:

The first test when I sound out the kidney of a human being is whether that person has an aura of physical distance and everywhere sees, or indeed distinguishes, rank, grade, order between one human and the next: this makes you into a *gentilhomme*; in every other case you belong irretrievably among the big-hearted, oh-so-good-humored category of canaille. (EH III CW 4)<sup>11</sup>

Nietzsche's claim to psychological expertise stretches to comments on the criminal type; his X-ray eye can single out beginner-iconoclasts because they look like criminals, as in this example from *Twilight of the Idols*:

All great innovators, viewed with a “kidney-tester's” exploring eye, at the time when they were new to innovation, and “unproved” as yet by success – look identical to hardened criminals. (TI IX 45)<sup>12</sup>

Convinced of his perceptiveness and proud of his infallible sense of hearing and sight, as well as insight, Nietzsche also lauds his general fitness in *Ecce Homo*, which is ironic for the reader who knows that his mental collapse came just days

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**10** “Der Egoismus ist so viel werth als der physiologisch werth ist, der ihn hat. – [...] Ein Kranker, ein Gebilde der *décadence*, hat auf Egoismus kein Recht” (KSA 6/131; Variant Ms Heft W II 6).

**11** “Das Erste, worauf ich mir einen Menschen ‘nierenprüfe’, ist, ob er ein Gefühl für Distanz im Leibe hat, ob er überall Rang, Grad, Ordnung zwischen Mensch und Mensch sieht, ob er *distinguit*: damit ist man gentilhomme; in jedem andren Fall gehört man rettungslos unter den wiet-herzigen, ach! so gutmütigen Begriff der canaille.” (KSA 6/362).

**12** “Alle grossen *Neuerer* sehen, mit dem Auge des Nierenprüfers ausgeforscht, in den Zeiten, wo sie nur erst neuerten, wo sie noch kein ‘Erfolg’ bewies – grossen Verbrechern zum Verwech-seln ähnlich” (TI IX 45; Variant Ms W II 6).

after his final corrections had been sent to his publishers in Leipzig at the end of 1888.

### 3 Vocabulary

Today's English vocabulary is considerably larger than the German, and has absorbed Germanic as well as Romance words, while the German language has remained essentially Germanic. When Nietzsche constantly uses the word "*tief*" meaning "deep", where English translators tend to go for "profound", this is because, in Nietzsche's day, there was only that one word available in German. Only in the late 1960s did the German word "*profund*" enter the dictionaries. Nietzsche could have chosen to use the French word "*profond*", but he did not do so, not once (except in a quotation from Renan, where he retained the French), and he was someone who plundered foreign languages to express exactly the right word. Profound comes from "*pro fundus*" or "before the bottom" in Latin. In the case of Middle High German "*tief*", the Anglo-Saxon word was "*deop*" and the Dutch "*diep*", all with a link to *taufen* = to baptize; the English word "dip" stems from "*taufen*" as well. "The deep" and "*die Tiefe*" convey the original sense of "underground" or "underwater". It is clear that Nietzsche values certain things about this word – such as its echo of immersion in water – that are not conveyed in the Latin term. Therefore, I think we should be as accurate as possible in translations, for example, if Nietzsche writes "*ewige Wiederkunft*" and then I translate this as "eternal return", and for "*ewige Wiederkehr*" I write "eternal recurrence", which has a slight leaning towards continuous movement whereas "*Wiederkunft*" suggests yet another, perpetual, coming back – compare "*die Ankunft*" – arrival. Possibly Nietzsche did not care which term he used. Fashion has its day and then declines, but this was probably not what Nietzsche, the man of the future and self-styled dynamite, meant at all. Though the essays belong to his early output, his sense of destiny pervades them. Nietzsche had many conservative traits, such as his antifeminism and antisocialism, that might invite the epithet "unfashionable", but *he himself* thought he was avant-garde, a man ahead of his time.

Nietzsche in a low mood does not make for good reading. Here we find a man almost at the end of his tether in *Ecce Homo*. He hates his mother and his sister, and tries to show that he is Polish, which is not true. Nietzsche had a very good vocabulary, using Latin and Greek when appropriate, and even tried a few English words, but now that he is so fraught, the pages do not help his nerves.



## 4 Where are the Ladies?

Alas for old women! The dictionary allows the archaic “old wives” for “*die alten Weiblein*”, married or not, but here it has a pejorative undercurrent that Nietzsche is keen to exploit, not least because the term applies to women of low status: compare the word “fishwife”. Of course, Nietzsche had the word “*Frau*” at his disposal, a word that he frequently used in *The Gay Science* and elsewhere and that has always been construed as complimentary to women. “*Frau*” for women is the German default word and it was in Nietzsche’s day, too; in fact, nowadays an older single woman in a German-speaking country will be addressed as “*Frau*”, not “*Fräulein*”, whereas the English language insists on Miss for such a person or borrows the American Ms. Old-fashioned now but very current in Nietzsche’s day was the loan word “*Dame*” from the Latin “*domina*”, as in our obsolete “dame” (only used now as an honorary title or a joke). The English term “lady” is now becoming rare.

The type of women Nietzsche saw as trying to usurp man’s role by clamoring for a university education would have come from good families and would have been addressed in society as “*gnädiges Fräulein*” or “*gnädige Frau*”. In the chapter “Why I Write Such Good Books” of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche makes a preposterous claim to being “perhaps the first psychologist of the Eternal-Feminine” (EH III 5), and goes on to denigrate the female sex by using the term “*Weib*”, and especially its diminutive “*die Weiblein*”, with increasing contempt (EH III 5: KSA 6/306). It is possible that Nietzsche had some sort of grudge against women in general during the writing of *Ecce Homo* – certainly we know that he inserted a hate message about his mother and sister at the eleventh hour – and I would argue that there is sometimes a sexual slur attached to Nietzsche’s descriptions of women as well. His phrase “*Idealistin von Weib*” was an insult aimed at women; however, Malwida von Meysenbug, who wrote the seminal *Memoiren einer Idealistin* (1876), a landmark in early German feminism, was quite happy to have Nietzsche as a friend. That was in the old days. Nietzsche was now deranged, but he could still throw out insults regarding the remark “Malwida as Kundry”. Nietzsche remarked to Peter Gast in a letter dated 25 November 1888: “recently I thought of including Malwida in *Ecce Homo* as a laughing Kundry”. We recall Kundry’s blatant lust in Wagner’s *Parsifal*, which Wagner ordains must be exorcized. However, Nietzsche was not yet fully mad: writing to Malwida in Rome, 4 January 1889, he says:

Although Malwida is generally Kundry, who laughed for a second while the world shook, there is much to pardon, because she loved me greatly: see the first book of the 'Memoirs'.<sup>13</sup>

To see Nietzsche in that state was certainly very moving. Nietzsche was unnecessarily unpleasant to several women friends during 1888, as his letters reveal. In section 5 of "Why I Write Such Good Books" in *Ecce Homo*, what is at stake is the attack he launches on emancipated women who, according to Nietzsche, want to debase woman's level of rank. He makes the attack stronger by the use of "Weib"; in the following quotation, he could and should say "*Rang-Niveau der Frau*", as in "*Frauenbildung*", "*Frauenschule*":

While they elevate themselves, as 'woman as such', as 'higher woman', as 'woman idealist', they want to bring down woman's general level of rank; no surer way of doing that than high school education, trousers and bovine political rights to suffrage [...]. An entire species of the most malignant idealism – which can be found, incidentally, in men, too, for example in Henrik Ibsen, that typical old virgin – (EH III 5)<sup>14</sup>

In Germany today, the Catholic Ave Maria benediction has had to be altered: "*Du bist gebenedeit unter den Frauen*" has replaced "*unter den Weibern*". The water is muddied because English has no direct equivalent for "*Frau*", so these distinctions are not obvious in English translation, where "woman" often seems fine and is what we would put in any case. So for English readers, "woman" is the default term – since we have no alternative – which is why bells are not set ringing when Nietzsche speaks of "*die kleinen Weiber*" – little women – or, if there is any alarm, it is over the word "little" rather than the word "*Weib*." Note also that Nietzsche insults virgins as well as Ibsen when he calls the Norwegian a "virgin"; "*Jungfrau*" is the factual term for virgin in German; the very similar but more contemptuous word for spinster is "*Jungfer*", equivalent to the English term "old maid". It is now time to review the etymology of "*Weib*" properly.

It appears that both "*Weib*" and "wife" come from the same route as headgear worn by the married woman of old. As Kluge's etymological dictionary states, the notion of winding and covering are intrinsic to the root of the word

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13 "Obwohl Malwida bekanntlich Kundry ist, welche gelacht hat in einem Augenblick, wo die Welt wackelte, so ist ihr doch Viel verziehn, weil sie mich viel geliebt hat: siehe ersten Band der 'Memoiren'" (KSB 8/575 [Nr. 1248]).

14 "Sie wollen, indem sie *sich* hinaufheben, als 'Weib an sich', als 'höheres Weib', als 'Idealistin' von Weib, das allgemeine Rang-Niveau des Weibes *herunterbringen*; kein sichereres Mittel dazu als Gymnasial-Bildung, Hosen und politische Stimmvieh-Rechte [...] Eine ganze Gattung des böartigen 'Idealismus', der auch bei Männern vorkommt, zum Beispiel bei Henrik Ibsen, dieser typischen alten Jungfrau –" (KSA 6/306–307).

“Weib”. There is an interlink with “Weib” and wife (English), emanating from the verbs “to wipe” and “to wind”, the Middle Low German “wipen” or “wip” (a bundle of cloth), and Old High German “wifan” (“to wipe”); “wipe” is still an English slang word for a handkerchief, as in Kleenex wipes. In addition, the word “wimple” is “a piece of cloth draped around the head in the Middle Ages, and still part of the habit of some nuns”. It is also pretty much what Muslim women wear in Britain today, rather than fully veiling themselves. Kluge states that the bride was veiled (Middle High German: “bewimpfen”), whereas the married woman wound something round her head (Old High German: “wifan”). I say all this to establish clear water between a woman’s veil at her marriage ceremony and Nietzsche’s sustained use of the veil metaphor, “*der Schleier*”. As we have seen, the history of the German word for “woman” (*Weib*) leans on her headcovering, and some of Nietzsche’s slurs on “woman” are tantamount to calling her a “towel-head” today, albeit heavily camouflaged.

## 5 Other Styles

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche compares this vision of a sailing ship to a woman. While not mentioning the word “*Schleier*”, the image of a ship’s sails in connection with a woman conjures up the idea of a veil. Nietzsche uses the metaphor of “veils” and “sails”, without letting on to his readers that German is not the route to the double-entendre (which stems from the Latin “*velum*” and its plural “*vela*”, in French “*le voile*” and “*la voile*”, respectively).<sup>15</sup> What Nietzsche appears to be doing is setting up a number of tropes, the main one being his own butterfly likeness to the ship’s white sails; morphed into a quasi-Argonaut, his nautical journey into unknown territory will thread through *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and finish in *Ecce Homo* where, as we have seen, closure comes: “I saw the land” (EH III UM 3). In the section entitled “Vita femina” in Book IV of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche uses the term “enthüllen” to reinforce his venture of lifting the golden veil that hides life, but what are we to make of the final remark: “*Ja, das Leben ist ein Weib!*” (GS 339), unless it is a throwaway remark. By 1888, things were more straightforward with Nietzsche when he castigated Schleiermacher and others for being “veil-makers” (EH III CW 3), after which the mystique of the veil was well and truly jettisoned.

Within the context of attacking Christian doctrine, Nietzsche lays stress on *Widernatur* (against nature), his use of the term to convey his dismay at poison-

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<sup>15</sup> See GS 60: KSA 5/424.

ing natural instincts. This means that Christianity and other faiths are all decadent, in Nietzsche's view. But what chance does one have with "*Moralin*", a word coined by Nietzsche to make morality sound like a chemical substance? A popular word now, "*Moralin*" is used as though moral philistinism is an element like air or water. When Nietzsche expresses the word "*moralinfrei*" it is benign (EH II 1). This is almost untranslatable; something like "free of zealotry" or "free of ostentatious morality" has to be dredged up. And now for "*Geist*". The main dictionary definition for this is "mind, intellect", followed by the alternative "spirit". I think English philosophy has maneuvered Nietzsche's "*Geist*" into "*spiritus*" – the default word in translation. This is unfortunate, because the English word "spirit" is the default word for "otherworldly being", starting with the Holy Spirit, which in German, perversely if you like, means "*der Heilige Geist*" (as it echoes the English "Holy Ghost"). To speak of a person's "spirit" or "mettle" is a secondary usage. "*Geist*" has all these meanings and more, but because Nietzsche loathed any metaphysical belief, we should use the word "mind" with more conviction. Indeed, I think it is mandatory in Nietzsche's discussion of "*Geist*" in his review of *The Case of Wagner* in *Ecce Homo* (EH III CW 3). I praise Graham Parkes' adoption of "mind" as the default word for "*Geist*" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where he mainly uses "free mind", though I myself prefer to keep the term "free spirit", as that is used in English to describe a certain mindset. As Nietzsche demonstrates, German does not have a precise term for this, as *Freigeist* also means *Freidenker* or free-thinker. To make things explicit, Nietzsche often uses the French term *libre penseur* when speaking of the free thinker, whom he did not admire, while *Freigeisterei* becomes his term of abuse for the phenomenon. Sometimes only the context can reveal whether the *Freigeist* to whom Nietzsche refers is a free-thinking liberal or a Zarathustrian free spirit like Kaiser Friedrich II.<sup>16</sup>

Still on the subject of vocabulary, I reject the use of the word "altruism" for Nietzsche's *Nächstenliebe* or "neighborly love". Nietzsche uses *altruistisch* sparingly, and as discussed, I think it is always better to use the nearest English equivalent instead of using Latin-based words, unless of course Nietzsche has done so; after all, he was not one to hold back if he wanted to use a foreign term. In addition, *Nächstenliebe* has biblical resonance and marks up yet another insult targeted at Christianity, while *Altruismus* is neutral in that regard. It is usually straightforward to render Nietzsche's terms with an English equivalent, although there are exceptions: for example, "science" for "*Wissenschaft*" is too specific, but we have little alternative. I have used "knowledge" for "*Wissen*—

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<sup>16</sup> See AC 60: KSA 6/250.

*schaft*” in *The Antichrist* when Nietzsche is talking about biblical times. *En passant*: Nietzsche, in line with the fashion of his day, uses a plethora of small words that the English do not use lightly and never have done. Sometimes he blithely inserts “*eben*”, “*doch*”, “*aber*”, “*insgleichen*”, “*auch*”, “*erst*”, and the like, and when these are slavishly translated, a pedantic effect is produced. Perhaps one really ought to translate these carefully to show that Nietzsche was not always as forthright as one might think from some of the translations.

## 6 Variant Manuscripts

Having picked over just a few of the many points that are either lost or problematic in translation, I want to finish by offering a passage from a variant manuscript to which English readers who know no German will not have had access before. Uniquely, Nietzsche wrote and rewrote variants for all the works collected in volume 6 of Colli and Montinari’s *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) with a zeal not calculated to please a jobbing translator who has to render them all, warts and all, into intelligible English. Perhaps it was a sign of the onset of madness that Nietzsche found it necessary to write and rewrite some passages which in the end contain very few changes. But sometimes the variants are refreshingly direct, as in the variant for Nietzsche’s review of *The Case of Wagner* in *Ecce Homo* (EH III CW). Nietzsche rewrote this section during his revision at the beginning of December 1888. The earlier version of the printer’s manuscript of mid-November still exists, as does a preliminary stage. The latter is found on the reverse side of the page where the “Law Against Christianity” (which ends *Twilight of the Idols*) is written. The printer’s marks are very confusing, but basically the closed square brackets denote Nietzsche’s deletion, and the “crow’s feet” denote Nietzsche’s addition. As you will know if you possess volume 14 of the *Kritische Studienausgabe* of Nietzsche’s works, *Ecce Homo* has page after page of these variants, printed in a minuscule font. In this short passage it is virtually impossible to make a straight sentence, but Nietzsche was obviously trying to relay the fact that his constipation-inducing relations with the Germans could be remedied with rhubarb. Not only is it a mild laxative, it is also the actor’s special word to simulate conversation, as in rhubarb! rhubarb! when a crowd thinks something is boring, as well as the informal American word for a heated discussion. It is typical of Nietzsche that there are several layers of meaning, even for the humble word “rhubarb”:

Nearly all my winters in Nice were wasted, not through the proximity of Monte Carlo, [but] <always just> through [the <obstructive> proximity] proximity of German bovines [< and

other anti-Semites>] [: that slows down my bowels, – now I know that you can refute the Germans with rhubarb]. Now I know how to refute the Germans – [with rhubarb] not with reasons but rhubarb ...]<sup>17</sup>

After taking the additions and deletions of the passage under discussion into account, all that is left is:

Nearly all my winters in Nice were wasted, not through the proximity of Monte Carlo but the proximity of German bovines – now I know how to refute the Germans – not with reasons but with rhubarb!

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**17** “Fast alle meine Winter in Nizza sind mir verloren gegangen, nicht durch die Nähe von Montecarlo, [sondern] <immer bloß> durch [die <obstructive> Nähe] Nähe von deutschem Hornvieh [<und anderen Antisemiten>] [: das, verzögert meinen Darm, – jetzt weiß ich, daß man Deutsche mit Rhabarber widerlegt]. Jetzt weiß ich womit man Deutsche widerlegt – [mit Rhabarber] nicht mit Gründen, mit Rhabarber...]” (KSA 14/504).



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### III *Ecce Homo* in Relation to Nietzsche's Other Writings





Frank Chouraqui

# Self-Becoming, Culture and Education

From *Schopenhauer as Educator* to *Ecce Homo*

**Abstract:** This essay traces the changes in Nietzsche's notion of self-becoming from the time of the *Untimely Meditations* to *Ecce Homo*. It argues that the place of self-knowledge in the process of self-becoming recedes as Nietzsche matures, and that this resolves a number of tensions present in the early writings, notably tensions concerning the relations between individual and cultural agency.

It is now widely acknowledged that Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* (1873–1876) offer great insight into his later projects. *Ecce Homo's* subtitle – “How One Becomes What One Is” – takes over Nietzsche's idiosyncratic formula of greatness, whose first sketch we find in *Schopenhauer as Educator* (UM III), a text which famously opens with this declaration: “Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself” (UM III 1). There, Nietzsche uses the figure of Schopenhauer as an “educating figure”, that is to say, a figure whose impact on culture informs, supports or encourages the flourishing of mankind. For Nietzsche, the aim of education is self-becoming and the great lesson of Schopenhauer is precisely the *possibility* of self-becoming.

In this essay, I examine *Ecce Homo* and *Schopenhauer as Educator* together in order to investigate the evolution of Nietzsche's thought on self-becoming and culture. Although the two texts have a lot in common, there is a shift in emphasis between them. This shift is twofold: first, Nietzsche's view of the method for self-becoming shifts from self-*knowledge* to self-*creation*; second, the status of cultivation shifts from the individual to the cultural.

## 1 Education: From Self-knowledge to Self-creation

The contrast between the two texts is nowhere sharper than in the question of self-knowledge. In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche writes that self-knowledge is “the best way to find oneself” (UM III 1). In *Ecce Homo*, on the contrary,

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246551-014>

he writes: “[T]hat one becomes what one is presupposes that one doesn’t have the remotest idea what one is” (EH II 9).

This tension between the need for self-knowledge and the need for self-ignorance informs much of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and it will provide insight into Nietzsche’s later thinking on the issue. Daniel Breazeale correctly points out that in *Schopenhauer as Educator* this tension is played out into a dialectic of “essentialism” (which requires self-knowledge) and “anti-essentialism” (which excludes it). The advantage of the anti-essentialist view, Breazeale suggests, is that it requires one to *actively* transform oneself; the advantage of essentialism on the other hand, is that it allows for a notion of self-becoming that is not “blind” or “arbitrary”: there is something that we are to become and that stands as a criterion for our progress towards that goal (Breazeale 1998, p. 15).

In fact, this tension simply spells out the paradox of *any* reflexivity insofar as reflexivity always establishes a proximity *and* a distance within a self: there would be no reflexivity if both terms were strictly identical but there would be no reflexivity either if both terms were strictly external to each other. Indeed, this paradox involves complications for the early Nietzsche, and his understanding of the term “becoming”. In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, it is clear that Nietzsche expects the reflexivity of self-becoming to *lead* into the non-reflexivity of self-identity. That is to say, he expects becoming to lead into being. Thus, it is easy to see why Nietzsche will later (and in *Ecce Homo* in particular) be led to rework the strict opposition that is taken for granted in the early work, in light of his deepening of questions surrounding the relations of being and becoming.

In both *Ecce Homo* and *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche is very clear as to who his audience is: the modern man is a victim of timeliness and identifies with what is not himself but a general historical and social fiction. Such a man sees himself everywhere *but* in himself. He declares:

[H]e who lets concepts, opinions, past events, books, step between himself and things – he that is to say, who is in the broadest sense born for history – will never have an immediate perception of things and will never be an immediately perceived thing himself [...] if a man perceives himself by means of the opinions of others, it is no wonder if he sees in himself nothing but the opinions of others! (UM III 7; see also EH II 2–3)

Thus Nietzsche regards his task as making our current condition of unselfing lead out of itself. In his words, we must divert the “objective” towards the “subjective” (UM III 4). Although this may seem paradoxical, Nietzsche in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, begins with a reverse movement: in order to move from the objective to the subjective, we must begin by portraying the subjective in the guise of the objective in order to make it accessible to the reader, who is conta-

minated with objectivism. For such a man, Nietzsche contends, can only approach himself if he is presented with himself as an object, as a man whose sense of self has been lost (UM III 4).

His method for doing this is to use the monumental figure of Schopenhauer. As a historical and cultural object, the figure of Schopenhauer is accessible even to the sick, “unselfed” man. The educating figure belongs outside of the self, in the objective realm. Nietzsche’s intention, however, is to use the figure of Schopenhauer in order to offer us a *reflection* of *ourselves*. He presents the movement from reflexivity to self-identity in terms of a dialectic of knowledge and its “effects”. Roughly speaking, the process goes thus: a) *Knowledge* of the tutelary figure creates b) Emotions, from which is deduced c) *Self-knowledge* which enables d) *Self-becoming*. a) and c) belong to the realm of knowledge, while b) and d) are existential states. In Breazeale’s terms, a) and c) represent the “essentialist” input and b) and d) the “anti-essentialist” (he changes “anti-essentialist” to “existentialist” in a later essay (Breazeale 1997, p. xix). In the rest of this discussion, I will call the movement from a) to b) “inspiration”. The movement from c) to d) I will call “decision”.

## i Inspiration

Inspiration must be understood as a spontaneous desire for the creation of an unknown object, accompanied by the trust that this object will be revealed when the work is complete. Breazeale correctly shows that, for Nietzsche, inspiration is the mechanism by which one turns one’s encounter with a great figure into a means of self-knowledge; it is the criterion for the choice of an educator.<sup>1</sup> In his second *Untimely Meditation (On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life [UM II])*, Nietzsche had already approached monumental history in terms of an “inspiration” (*Anreizung*) that encourages one “to imitate, to do better” (UM II 2). Monumental history is the history of great men; it “awakens some who, gaining strength through reflecting on past greatness, are inspired with the feeling [*beseligt fühlen*] that the life of man is a glorious thing” (UM II 2). Further, Nietzsche defines this “inspiration” in terms of *possibilities*: one “learns from it that the greatness that once existed was in any event once *possible*, and may thus be possible again” (UM II 2).

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<sup>1</sup> “What have you truly loved hitherto? What has exalted your soul? Place before yourself the series of these revered objects and perhaps they will provide you, through their nature and series, with a law, namely, with the fundamental law of your own true self.” Quoted in Breazeale 1998, p. 17.

The way that greatness in the educator inspires greatness in the disciple can therefore be recognized as the experience of *possibility*. For Nietzsche, possibility is not on the side of the epistemic content of the fact but of its experiential content because it is always understood in the first person: “[I]f this is possible, it is possible for me”, says the disciple. Accordingly, *Schopenhauer as Educator* goes further than *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* in defining greatness: to be great is no longer to be a monument of history, but to be oneself. In other words, greatness is a different thing for each person and is not attached to any great deed; it is attached to a *pathos*. This is crucial, because it means that the act of “imitation” mentioned above, which is presented as the result of inspiration, needs to be qualified. What is to be imitated in the great man is no single action or object, no *fact* about him, it is simply this one thing: that the great man was himself. In fact, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* expresses concern with the potential misunderstandings of this notion of inspiration and how it may lead to fanaticism. Nietzsche writes: “monumental history deceives by analogies, with seductive similarities, it inspires the courageous to foolhardiness, and the inspired to fanaticism” (UM II 2). Inspiration therefore, is an open and ambivalent process whose outcome in either education or fanaticism can only be decided by the nature of the disciple. The problem remains unsolved until *Ecce Homo*, where Nietzsche declares in the chapter “Why I Am So Clever” that the key lies in the personal “taste” of the disciple (EH II 8) and that “all questions of politics, the ordering of society, education have been falsified down to their foundations because the most injurious men have been taken for great men” (EH II 10). As Nietzsche maintained since the *Untimely Meditations* and until *Ecce Homo*: our hero has to be a mirror to ourselves, and indeed, Schopenhauer teaches us precisely this (UM III 4).

In other words, we will get from our “educator” only what we invest in him. This gives rise to some worries: choosing an educator is a fully active act on the part of the disciple. In fact, it is a direct consequence of the reflective project of self-becoming: if the disciple is to find herself in the educator, then the educator can only be defined after the disciple. Hence, there is every reason to believe that such an act will be carried out in a fashion directly proportional to the level of “taste” of the disciple.

This is why Nietzsche’s final word on inspiration in *Ecce Homo*, which relies on constraint and breeding, is also a final attempt at avoiding the fanatical potential of the emphasis he once placed on inspiration. For the later Nietzsche, if knowledge of the other is to lead into self-knowledge, its *inspirational* dimension has to outweigh its *factual* dimension; the ratio of factual knowledge and inspiration must always remain in favour of inspiration. If this *imbalance* is not achieved, we run the risk of fanaticism that is to say, an attitude that seeks self-be-

coming through *imitation*, and not *inspiration*. Indeed, by the time of *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche has dramatized the difference between imitation and inspiration which he now presents as strictly analogous to the difference between self-becoming and unselfing: he who is inspired becomes himself while he who imitates is a “zero”: “What? You are looking for something; you want to multiply yourself by ten, by a hundred? You are looking for disciples?—Look for zeros!—” (TI IX 14).<sup>2</sup> In other words, imitation is the reduction of the disciple to the educator; inspiration on the other hand, is the reduction of the educator with (and by) the disciple. This is why in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche opposes being “grounded in oneself” and being a “selfless” and an “objective” man:

You have to be firmly grounded in *yourself*, you have to stand on your own two feet to be able to love at all. At the end of the day, this is something women know all too well: they could not care less about selfless, purely objective men. (EH III 5)

In other words, an objective man is an object for himself, because he identifies with another man who is the object of his thought.

## ii Decision

This problem surfaces again in *Schopenhauer as Educator* when it comes to the effect of self-knowledge for self-becoming (UM III 5). It is a matter of drawing from this new knowledge a *real* outcome, or in Nietzsche’s words, a “practical activity”, “in short, to demonstrate that this ideal *educates*” (UM III 5). This explains why he says that one obtains from their encounter with an educator a “chain of duties”, which can weigh heavily on some of us (UM III 5). However, this chain is no different from this “fundamental law of [one’s] own true self” mentioned earlier. So why should it be experienced as a “weight”? Once more, it is the balance between crystallized facts and their inspirational value that holds the answer: As a “chain of fulfillable duties,” the law of the self is, to use Heidegger’s expression, “exact but not correct” (Heidegger 2002, p. 58). It may represent accurately who one is, but it transforms self-becoming into a set of duties, that is, into an external project. As such, it only estranges us further from ourselves: we become parodies of ourselves. We encounter the same problem as we did with the question of imitation: the focus is shifted from the “pathos” – or existential disposition – to the *facts*. Thus we can see how *Schopenhauer as Educator* plays an ambiguous game with the notion of knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> See also, for example, EH Preface and GS 255.

From the outset Nietzsche identifies the paradox involved in self-becoming, namely that it bridges the gap that separates a world of unselfing from one's true self and that in so doing it both affirms and denies the incommensurability of both terms. As with most incommensurables, Nietzsche seeks to bridge this gap thanks to a speculative movement of knowledge and experience. Yet the presence of knowledge within self-knowledge is problematic because it involves a certain degree of *freedom* for the subject: the freedom to choose their educator, to choose how this educator will reflect their true self, and finally, the freedom to act upon the discovery of their true self. In short, there is no device yet to ensure that the model of inspiration (where one discovers one's true self by experiencing his emotional response as a marker of his deepest kinship) prevails over the model of imitation (where one is deceived by one's identification with the non-self). In order to achieve this, Nietzsche says that he needs to "conscientiously reduce this new circle of duties to a formula" that will contain the right balance of inspiration over factuality (UM III 5). It is in *Ecce Homo* that such a formula is presented.

There, we encounter the opposition of knowledge and inspiration in a radicalized form. The third section of the account of *Zarathustra* is devoted entirely to the question of inspiration and it is worth noting that it opens by establishing a sharp contrast between inspiration and *knowledge*:

Has anyone at the end of the nineteenth century a distinct conception of what poets of the strong ages call *inspiration*? [...] One hears, one does not seek, one takes, one does not ask who gives, a thought flashes up like lightning, with necessity, unfalteringly formed—I have never had any choice. (EH III Z 3)

For Nietzsche, this characterization of inspiration is connected to a certain use of language: in *Ecce Homo*, he devotes section 4 of "Why I Write Such Good Books" to what he calls his "style", that is to say, a use of language that emphasizes the experiential dimension of his own thoughts over their objective content and manages "to communicate a state, an inner tension of *pathos* through signs." For Nietzsche "every style is *good* which actually communicates an inner state" (EH III 4). The device that ensures that language will always have an effect that prevails over its epistemic meaning is metaphor. In the section on *Zarathustra*, he affirms that metaphor is "mighty" and he declares: "the involuntary nature of image, of metaphor is the most remarkable thing of all" (EH III Z 3), because it is the "return of language to the nature of imagery" (EH III Z 6); that is to say, among other things, of perception. Metaphor is "mighty" because it produces physical reactions, its effect is physical, "involuntary" and not intellectual: it creates in one "an ecstasy whose tremendous tension sometimes discharges it-

self in a flood of tears, while one's steps now involuntarily rush along, now involuntarily lag, a complete being outside of oneself" (EH III Z 3).

### iii Amor Fati

This "being outside of oneself" should not be confused with unselfing. On the contrary, it is described as absolute coincidence with one's self, for in this state, "everything is in the highest involuntary but takes place as a tempest of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity" (EH III Z 3). In *Ecce Homo*, "inspiration" is presented as making the inspired poet "merely a mouthpiece, merely a medium of overwhelming forces" (EH III Z 3), yet the context makes it clear that it does so without "unselfing" him.

We can now go back to the original sentence from *Ecce Homo*: "[T]hat one becomes what one is presupposes that one doesn't have the remotest idea what one is" (EH II 9). We can now see how this sentence echoes the concern expressed in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that a chain of ideals would weigh too heavily on our shoulders. For Nietzsche, we are larger and more complex than this set of ideals and pieces of self-knowledge can grasp; further, there is a logical inversion in seeking self-knowledge *in order to* become oneself because it is easy to confuse our true self with the self that we are being at present, precisely the one we need to shed: for Nietzsche the risk is for the "instinct to understand itself too early":

The entire surface of consciousness—consciousness *is* a surface—has to be kept clear of any of the great imperatives. Even the grand words, the grand attitudes must be guarded against! All of them represent a danger that the will risks 'understanding itself' too early (EH II 9)

That is to say, one must not turn to self-understanding before achieving their own self-becoming. In short: self-understanding and self-becoming are mutually exclusive. In *Ecce Homo* therefore, the refusal to understand oneself provides full freedom for the true self to express itself "subterraneously": "[I]n the meantime, the organizing idea destined to rule [the true self] grows and grows in the depths—it begins to command, it slowly leads back from sidepaths and wrong turnings..." (EH II 9).

Nietzsche links this renewed idea of self-becoming to the thought of *amor fati*: the ignorance of oneself in self-becoming is a sign of self-sufficiency and absolute peace, a peace that is, Nietzsche claims, offered by his "innermost na-



ture” of *amor fati*, (EH IV)<sup>3</sup>. The rejection of self-knowledge in favor of fate (and implicitly *amor fati*) is famously expressed in *On the Genealogy of Morality* through the opposition of “fatalism” and “*le petit fatalisme*” (GM III 24). This sheds light on the logical inversion between the conceptions of self-becoming advanced in *Schopenhauer as Educator* and *Ecce Homo*: the true self no longer appears as a future project pursued by the “untrue self”; rather, it is by affirming the true self that the untrue self will be overcome. To put it another way, what has been called “decision” above, namely, the move from self-knowledge to self-becoming by appeal to a “chain” of *factual* duties, is re-formulated through *amor fati*. This explains why in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of his efforts to rejuvenate language in *Zarathustra*: there, he suggests, language is no longer descriptive of *facts* but affirmative, that is to say, expressive and performative. On several occasions in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche defines Zarathustra’s language as “dithyramb” and in turn dithyramb as the language of affirmation (EH III Z 7). The dithyramb is also built to transcend words and their factual meaning: it does not *describe* but it *impacts*: “[T]o have understood, *that is to say experienced*, six sentences of that book, would raise man to a higher level of mortals” (EH III 1, my emphasis). If we remember the characterization of “inspiration”, we can now clarify the role of *amor fati*: the dithyramb arises from inspiration and expresses a superior truth that is not found in facts. Similarly, *amor fati* offers us an ecstasy into the higher whole that looks beyond particulars. This makes self-knowledge suddenly irrelevant to the attainment of self-becoming, because it appears now that self-becoming is brought about by self-affirmation and expression. This expression needs to be protected, and this is why Nietzsche affirms clearly that self-ignorance is the guarantee of this protection.

For Nietzsche, *amor fati* presents itself as a formula for “pure affirmation” (GS 276). This affirmation is the affirmation of “necessity” and it can also be found in *Schopenhauer as Educator*: “[A]ll that can be denied deserves to be denied” (UM III 153). Later on, Nietzsche goes on to affirm that only the particular can be denied (Z I ix; TI IX 49), and that the pathos of denial is precisely “*le petit fatalisme*” which turns the undeniable *whole* into a series of discrete and deniable *facts*.

I therefore propose that Nietzsche’s thought of *amor fati* is one of his most accomplished attempts at a critique of the traditional recourse to consciousness

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<sup>3</sup> See also EH II 9: “I do not want myself to be other than I am, but that is how I have always lived. I have harboured no desire”.

in education. *Amor fati* is first and foremost a critique of “local fatalism”<sup>4</sup> (Dennett 1984, 105): in *amor fati*, all local facts, events and objects become disregarded and revalued in light of the fact that denying any one of them would amount to denying the whole of reality. On the contrary, Nietzsche’s fatalism is opposed to “*le petit fatalisme*” or “factualism” and *Zarathustra* already declared: “They meet an invalid, or an old man, or a corpse- and immediately they say: ‘Life is refuted!’ But they only are refuted, and their eye, which seeth only one aspect of existence” (Z I ix)<sup>5</sup>.

This opposition between *amor fati* and “local fatalism” leads necessarily to a form of education which does not rely on the analytic abilities of consciousness, with its “chain of duties”, but to a holistic education which offers an attitude to oneself that achieves self-becoming without necessitating self-knowledge. With *amor fati*, therefore, we can understand better the hidden reasons why Nietzsche considers the concepts of “choice”, “decision”, “consciousness”, “facts” and discrete “duties” as part of the web of objective thinking which constitutes not the means but the main obstacle to self-becoming.

#### iv Will to Power

This later rejection of self-knowledge in favor of self-becoming results in the rejection of the original argument for self-knowledge. When the argument posited that one had to *represent* to oneself the objective of their transformation in order to achieve it (thereby placing self-becoming in the dependency of conscious decision), Nietzsche’s discovery of the self as will to power makes self-becoming without self-knowledge possible. According to Nietzsche, we can direct our efforts towards an unknown object, in this case, oneself. If “decision” can become “expression” in *amor fati*, it is because the intellect no longer possesses the monopoly of this directionality, and therefore, because directionality becomes distinct from representation. In fact, the doctrine of the will to power extirpates di-

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<sup>4</sup> Both Robert Solomon (Solomon 2006, 184) and Maudemarie Clark (Clark 1990, 182) seem to support the “local view” although they offer no arguments for their preference. For a more extended critique of the local fatalism readings of Nietzsche, see Chouraqui 2015a, p. 272ff.

<sup>5</sup> Fate extends far beyond the bounds of our own narrow outlook, for us to judge it and “pick and choose” as the “local” view contends would be like shooting in the dark. See also, among many others: “What is most intimate in me teaches me that everything that is necessary, seen from above and interpreted within a *higher* economy, is also the useful in itself – one has to not only endure it, but also to *love* it . . . *Amor fati*: here is my innermost nature” (NW Epilogue 1).

rectionality from the jurisdiction of the understanding (that is to say, from the realm of conscious decision, of discrete facts and objective chains of duties) to place it firmly in the instinctual realm: if the model of self-knowledge proposed in *Schopenhauer as Educator* finds its relevance in the necessity to ensure that what one becomes is precisely oneself, this involves that the process of self-becoming is made up of three instances: the actual self, the movement of transformation (becoming) and the self that is to be attained (the “true” self). Of course, this view relies on a strict sense of “what one is” envisaged as a perfect state applicable to both the untrue self (as a criterion of its failure) and the true one (as a criterion of its success), obviously making the transition problematic: it seems that such a sense of “what one is” is so demanding that it makes it incommensurable to the current state: that of “not being oneself”.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche overcomes this tension by reversing the problem: it is now the transitional virtue of “becoming” that is given priority over the state of univocal being. This move was made possible by the discovery of the will to power as an attempt to stabilize his ontology of becoming. Such an ontology allows the inclusion of the project of self-becoming within being: if being is becoming, we can attain being without *aiming at* anything. Out of the three elements mentioned above (the current self, the self that one truly is, and the becoming supposed to lead the former into the latter), only two become necessary, namely, the present self and the movement of becoming. Therefore, a deep grounding in the present self is sufficient to ensure a projection towards the true self.

This point is controversial. John Richardson for example, gives a remarkably concise expression of the opposite view, namely, the view that Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power installs consciousness and intentionality within becoming, making any transformation the result of a conscious and thematic representation. In the context of his critical examination of Nietzsche’s opposition to Darwin, he writes: “Nietzsche’s terms ‘will’ and ‘drive’ suggest an intentional end-directedness – that either power or survival is an intended goal” (Richardson 2002, p. 545). If, as it seems, Richardson means by this any form of teleological structure (and not just a projective structure), this seems to me to be in sharp opposition with several passages, and most notably with one in section 12 of the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, in which Nietzsche draws a sharp distinction between causes and purposes, and emphatically tries to avoid misunderstandings of the type Richardson seems to fall prey to here. Nietzsche insists in this section that results occur without purpose, and that human activity, and organic life in general, is the expression of an impulse and not of a purpose. He writes unambiguously: “[T]he origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application to a system of

ends, are *toto coelo* separate”; and further, “every purpose and use is just a *sign* that the will to power has achieved mastery... the ‘development’ of a thing, a tradition, an organ, is therefore certainly not its *progressus* towards a goal, still less is it a logical *progressus*” (GM I 12). It must be admitted therefore, that the appearance of the will to power in Nietzsche’s philosophical vocabulary allows for a new form of becoming, precisely a becoming powered from behind, as it were, and not teleologically determined. From now on, becoming oneself can credibly be described as achievable regardless of any self-knowledge, and even, as possible only by ignoring who one is, so as to avoid self-objectification and self-parody.

## 2 Culture: From Generalized Education to the Politics of Breeding

The opposition between self-becoming and self-knowledge has consequences for Nietzsche’s early account of education: for the early Nietzsche, education is essentially a negative movement, a *getting rid* of what stops us from being ourselves, of the “unself” inside us. It acts from the outside in, and this is for the reasons described above, that is to say, for paradoxical reasons. Precisely because Nietzsche is attempting to extricate the great individual from the herd, he needs to account for the web of connections that maintains this individual in a state of sickness (UM III 3). In his usual manner, Nietzsche devotes much of *Schopenhauer as Educator* to the portrait of the philosopher confronted to an unresponsive and scornful social environment. Such a social climate, he insists, is unfavourable to the attainment of greatness. This means that the ideal of self-becoming has consequences outside the individual and that it requires a new social order to become sustainable: an appeal to culture has now become indispensable.

In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, culture is defined as “the promotion of superior beings”; as such, it is the “trans-figuration of nature”. Nature, too, aims at the promotion of the higher individuals but its method is economically wasteful. The task of human culture is to rationalize the “extravagance” of nature by ensuring that there is no waste of higher natures and that all superior attempts reach home (UM III 7).<sup>6</sup> It is a duty that applies to all of us, not just the geniuses. In addition, the process of culture is dependent on self-knowledge: one must

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<sup>6</sup> “[Nature] propels the philosopher into mankind like an arrow, it takes no aim but hopes it will stick somewhere” (UM III 7).

know who one is in order to adopt one's proper position in society: the best would be to be a higher being. Failing that, one's duty is to support the development of those who are, by serving them.<sup>7</sup>

## i The Great Man in an Indifferent Environment in *Schopenhauer as Educator*

Of course, Nietzsche is already aware of the difficulty of achieving such a social order, because “though one may be ready to sacrifice one's life to the state, for instance, it is another matter to sacrifice it on behalf of another individual” (UM III 162).<sup>8</sup> The only way to attain such a “condition”, he suggests, is to attach oneself to an educating figure. Consequently, this puts culture in the dependence of education, and it is clear in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that Nietzsche views culture as a form of generalized education.

Here, the problem described above reappears: any proper education, if it is to provide self-knowledge, involves activity not on the part of the educator but on the part of the student and this activity, in turn, is uncontrollable insofar as it teaches only what the student puts into it.<sup>9</sup> The risk is that the choice of educator will simply mirror the self-*mis*understanding of the disciple. Nietzsche is aware of this problem; he opens his section on culture by acknowledging that if his concept of culture is correct, education as previously described (in terms of self-knowledge) becomes an inadequate method of achieving culture and in a passage already cited he declares:

Now, in face of such objections I am willing to concede that in precisely this respect our work has hardly begun and that from my own experience I am sure of only one thing: that from the ideal image it is possible to fasten upon ourselves a chain of fulfillable duties, and that some of us already feel the weight of this chain. But before I can conscientiously reduce this new circle of duties to a formula I must offer the preliminary observations. (UM III 5)

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<sup>7</sup> “Culture is the child of each individual's self-knowledge and dissatisfaction with himself” (UM III 6). See also Nietzsche 2006.

<sup>8</sup> “[I]t is hard to create in anyone this condition of intrepid self-knowledge because it is impossible to teach love; for it is love alone that can bestow on the soul, not only a clear, discriminating and self-contemptuous view of itself, but also the desire to look beyond itself and to seek with all its might for a higher self as yet still concealed to it” (UM III 6).

<sup>9</sup> “Ultimately, no one can extract from things, including books, more than he already knows” (EH III 1); see also a letter from 1885: “the person who stands before these paintings with youthful and raging senses and with great expectations will find just as much truth as he is able to see”. Quoted in Breazeale, 1998, p. 22.

In other words, the carrying over of the difficulties linked to self-knowledge – namely that it provides a multitude of facts and not a “pathos” – becomes an obstacle for a theory of culture and will have to be overcome later thanks to a unique formula that will not act as a chain – that is to say, that will not be calcified into any piece of fixed objective knowledge – but will precisely create a “pathos”.

## ii The Great Man in a Hostile Environment in *Ecce Homo*: Will To Power

In Nietzsche’s later texts, starting around 1884, the freedom of the weak becomes defined as something essentially hostile to any education. This move coincides with the introduction of blind directionality via the hypothesis of the will to power. For Nietzsche, all power is permanently discharged so that unless it encounters a greater constraining power, any individual will discharge its power outwards. This leads Nietzsche to shift his original view of the great man as simply solitary (UM III 3), into that of a man confronted by *hostility*.<sup>10</sup> Those who have achieved self-becoming are able to discharge all of their power outwards, and therefore, they would constitute a threat to the weak. One key to this insight can be found in Nietzsche’s encounter with Darwin and his famous rejection of what he takes to be Darwin’s understanding of the “survival of the fittest”. Just a few months before the writing of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche notes: “Strange though it may sound, one always has to defend the strong against the weak” (WP 685).

It should be noted, however, that the aim of culture remains the same in this new context: precisely in Darwin’s alleged error, Nietzsche reaffirms the challenge of a transfiguration of nature, and re-establishes the question of the economics of life introduced in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. In *Ecce Homo*, he describes the Great Man as having to grow spikes like a hedgehog in order to protect himself from the spirit of the age, yet this process of growing spikes is “exhausting” and wasteful (EH II 8). In the case of the Great Man then, the “extravagance” of nature has not been ruled out, instead, it has been dramatized by appeal to the concept of the will to power: in fragments 13:14 [123] and [133] of Spring 1888, Nietzsche opposes Darwin precisely on account of the fact that what he calls the “lucky strokes” enjoy a life expectancy inversely proportional to their greatness. The argument, which takes over the metaphor presented in

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<sup>10</sup> “Self-preservation [for the great man] manifests itself most unambiguously as an instinct for self-defence” (EH II 8).

*Schopenhauer as Educator* of nature's random propelling of great men is a direct transposition of the argument for a transfiguration of nature. Yet, there is one difference: it is no longer a question of *promoting* the hero against a background of *neutral* randomness, it is now a question of *defending* him against the weak. Here, there is no doubt that the model of voluntary education (with its multiple potentially disastrous misunderstandings – especially on the part of the weak) becomes far too feeble and that only *constraint* will make the individual submit to another, higher individual.

This shift is crucial for two reasons: first, it involves a move away from the individual-based model of education towards a specifically political model: there can be no self-becoming without *everyone's* self-becoming. Second and consequently, it leads to a view of politics as *breeding* and constraint.

### iii The Appeal to Breeding as Constraint

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche reminds us of the *provisional* character of the remarks presented in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. The *Untimely Meditations*, he says, were “first expressions” (EH III UM 3). That is to say, among other things, that according to Nietzsche, these essays record the beginnings of his search for the final formula mentioned above. The provisional aspect of UM 3 suggests that Nietzsche's project lies beyond offering an educational model of the relationship of the educator and the disciple; Nietzsche is really attempting to create a philosophy that *in turn* can educate, a philosophy based on this one formula.<sup>11</sup> This has great consequences for the conception of culture as generalized education: we cannot expect people to attain self-knowledge as long as they are the ones charged with freely determining this knowledge. In other words, what one should expect from Nietzsche is a “stimulus” that is not reflexive but *external* (Breazeale 1998, p. 18). This structure removes the object of reflection from the ambiguity where it once found itself – being altogether a historical object and a monumental educator. Paradoxically, this appeal to pure externality rids us of the problems related to the ambivalence of reflexivity spelled out above. The key that makes such an externality worth cultivating lies precisely in the fact that this new formula is *all impact* and no intellectual meaning. Nietzsche himself emphasizes the shift that occurred between the *Untimely Meditations*

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<sup>11</sup> In his account of the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche affirms that he used Schopenhauer “as one takes an opportunity by the forelock, in order to say something, in order to have a couple more formulas, signs, means of expression in [his] hands” (EH III UM 3).

and *Ecce Homo*: “[W]here I am today [as opposed to at the time of the *Untimely Meditations*], at a height at which I no longer speak with words but with lightning bolts – oh how far away I was from this in those days!” (EH III UM 3).

Of course, all of this depends on Nietzsche’s ambition to provide a transformative experience that is not essentially propositional. This is the great challenge that it took the entirety of *On the Genealogy of Morality* to meet. By section 24 of the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche has shown that, far from eradicating them, the will to truth only transformed the beliefs in moralistic ideals into a belief in an ideal truth. Yet all these ideals are not essentially distinct, for they are all *ascetic* ideals. For Nietzsche, we must offer a new ideal, one of a nature entirely other than these. We must overcome the fact that the discovery that the will to truth was ascetic only complicates matters by finding an “ideal” that can inspire us even as it does not present itself as true. To be sure, these high demands place Nietzsche in the most difficult situation, at the close of a book throughout which it has been suggested that “ideals” are *essentially* supported by the affirmation of backworlds [*Hinterwelten*], and therefore are necessarily ascetic.

Nietzsche’s hope lies precisely in the *inspiring* power of experience: we must be driven to action, or to transformation, by our *experience* of a thought and not by our *belief* in it. The task therefore, is to provide a thought whose *impact* overpowers its *truth content* to the point that it creates a response regardless of its being true or not, a thought in short, whose signifier exceeds the signified. After all, this mechanism is nothing other than the one used by the slaves as their secret weapon in their “revolt in morality”: the fear elicited by any talk of afterlife and punishment has led the beautiful, blond beasts to distrust themselves without any examination of the truth of such claims.<sup>12</sup> Even in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche foresaw that forcing men into a cultivating society would have to be done by means of discourse, yet a discourse that would be entirely performative: “One has to compel man to take [the goal of culture] seriously, that is to say, to let it inspire them to action. I consider every word behind which there does not stand such a challenge to action to have been written in vain” (UM III 184).

The formula sought after would be the “great cultivating idea” of Eternal Recurrence delivered later by Zarathustra (WP 1056). In a note from 1884, Nietzsche declares: “To the paralyzing sense of general disintegration and *incompleteness* I opposed Eternal Recurrence” (NF 1883–84, 24[28]: KSA 10/662). It is not our pur-

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<sup>12</sup> For an extended analysis of the place of hyperbole in the slave revolt in morality, see Chouraqi, 2015b.



pose here to determine how the idea of Eternal Recurrence opposes incompleteness, but it is enough to stress how Nietzsche's declaration confirms the link between eternal recurrence and self-becoming. The "sense of incompleteness", which is the challenge posed by the modern condition of unselfing in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and which was to be overcome by education, must now be overcome by a thought that Nietzsche famously describes in several notes from 1887 as "a means of breeding and selection".<sup>13</sup> In fact, *Ecce Homo* makes it clear that *amor fati* and Eternal Recurrence are intrinsically linked by their pathos of affirmation and he concludes *Ecce Homo* by affirming the necessity to *breed* in order to re-establish the natural order in relation to self-becoming: "In the concept of the 'selfless' or the 'self-denying'... all that which ought to perish—the law of selection crossed" (EH IV 8). And this "crossing of the law of selection" calls for the thought of Eternal Recurrence as a breeding thought. Therefore, it seems that Nietzsche expects the thought of Eternal Recurrence to bring about a social and individual rearrangement grounded beyond knowledge, and whose members dwell in *amor fati*.<sup>14</sup> In this formula, it seems that Nietzsche has found the perfect balance in a thought whose impact necessarily outweighs its propositional content – a hyperbole.

### 3 Conclusion

It has now become clear that the movement that led Nietzsche from his first sketch of self-becoming and of culture in *Schopenhauer as Educator* to his most mature formulae for these in *Ecce Homo* is structured by the ambiguities contained in the first. The younger Nietzsche viewed self-becoming as the outcome of a singular education that dialectically mixes factual knowledge with existential experiences. The appeal to knowledge was already problematic for Nietzsche: he needed to maintain self-knowledge in order to ensure that one was not mistaken in one's goals, but he knew that this appeal also left the door open to self-deception. Similarly, Nietzsche established culture as the promotion of great men, defining its role in relation to nature, as its "transfigura-

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<sup>13</sup> For example, 12:9[8] (1887) and 11:26[376] (1884).

<sup>14</sup> "No longer joy in certainty but in uncertainty" (11:26[284] 1884) "abolition of 'knowledge in itself'" (11:26[283] 1884). In the terms of this discussion, "Eternal Recurrence" presents itself as a *possibility* and thus as an experience. According to Nietzsche, the mere idea of Eternal Recurrence is an idea that must be *endured* (11:26[376] and 11:26[283] of 1884), which implies that the very *thought* of it, not even its being a proven reality is an idea that most will be unable to endure.

tion". Again, this required self-knowledge in order to identify one's role in culture and this view of culture amounted to a generalization of education as defined above. This appeal to knowledge created tensions within Nietzsche's early text, because it built oneself and culture *themselves* into objects of knowledge and rules of conduct. The problem with this objectivism was that it maintained the subject's relationship to itself within the external relationship of the object.

The later developments in Nietzsche's writings, however, allow us to ease the tension at work in the early text. If self-knowledge seems to be a necessary (albeit problematic) element of self-becoming, Nietzsche's later discovery of the self as drives allows for a new solution. One no longer needs to know *who* one is in order to *become* it: self-becoming is no longer a project, but an existential mode of being in its own right. The true self is no longer teleologically conceived as an aim, even less as a represented or imitable object. Indeed, in the section of *Ecce Homo* entitled "Why I am a Destiny" Nietzsche's text moves from the imperative of self-becoming to the question of great politics. One of the most salient points however, is that Nietzsche presents himself as an *example* of self-becoming and of *amor fati*, but *not* as a "hero", ("I am the reverse of a heroic nature" [EH II 9]) or as an educating figure. Indeed, this is Nietzsche's most concentrated warning against drawing facile parallels between the educating figure of Schopenhauer in *Schopenhauer as Educator* and that of Nietzsche himself in *Ecce Homo*; after all, it was Schopenhauer's personality and not his ideas that was to edify us, whereas in Nietzsche's case, it is the exact opposite: Nietzsche's legacy is a break in history, not through his personal place in culture, but through the thoughts he has sown in culture and which are meant to become educating experiences of possibilities.

As regards *education*, this involves a shift from on the one hand a negative education that "liberates" one from the non-self that one finds oneself embedded into and on the other hand the direct affirmation of *amor fati*. This does not remove the element of liberation from self-becoming, but it reverses its place in the process: where liberation through a series of acts of consciousness was seen as a precondition for self-becoming in the early text, liberation is now seen as simultaneous with self-becoming. Nietzsche has replaced self-knowledge with self-expression.

As regards *culture*, this involves a shift from a generalized education to a politics of breeding: the introduction of the doctrine of the will to power makes it impossible to rely on the voluntary submission of the weak, as Nietzsche still did in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. Instead, one needs a more forceful cultural device than mere education and self-knowledge. Culture becomes a matter of breeding.

These two advances call for a device that would present itself as an *experience* and not an *object of knowledge* whilst at the same time offering a compelling force that would permit the re-establishment of the natural hierarchical order that was reversed by the advent of the weak: such is the place of the thought of Eternal Recurrence in Nietzsche's thinking about culture.

Paul S. Loeb

# Ecce Superhomo

## How Zarathustra Became What Nietzsche Was Not

**Abstract:** This essay proposes a new interpretation of *Ecce Homo* that shows Nietzsche casting himself in a much more modest and self-critical light than has so far been supposed. In this reading, the chief point of Nietzsche's autobiography is to draw up a catalogue of his all-too-human deficiencies in order to show how he nevertheless triumphed by pointing the way to a future superhuman teacher who would be able to overcome these deficiencies. In Nietzsche's view, his own greatest all-too-human flaw is that he was unable to affirm life. His *amor fati* was not a true life-affirmation because it depended on self-deception and because, more importantly, it did not entail the desire to eternally relive his identical life. Instead, he fashioned a poetic, mythical, and prophetic story in which the narrative structure exhibited this future teacher's extreme realism and overwhelming desire to eternally relive his identical life – a desire which, paradoxically, is inspired in him by his actual experience of having already eternally relived his identical life.

*Um Mittag war's, da wurde Eins zu Zwei ....*

*Nun feiern wir, vereinten Siegs gewiss,*

*Das Fest der Feste:*

*Freund Zarathustra kam, der Gast der Gäste!*

(BGE „From High Mountains. Aftersong“; KSA 5/243)

## 1 Introduction

There are two features of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* that readers have found especially odd and disconcerting: his hyperbolic praise of himself and of his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. After some reflection, scholars have decided that the first of these features can be usefully understood without resorting to speculation about Nietzsche's incipient mental breakdown. The key, they have agreed, is to hear Nietzsche's cheerful and satirical tone – as communicated, for example, in his humorously boastful chapter titles.<sup>1</sup> Duncan Large aptly conveys the

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Kaufmann first suggested this kind of reading in the introduction to his translation of *Ecce Homo* (Nietzsche 1968a, 664).

recent consensus when he explains that *Ecce Homo* is perhaps “not so much an exemplary autobiography as a spoof, a parody” and that we might find “an ironic, self-deprecating sense of humour at work (or play) here” (Large 2007, p. xx).<sup>2</sup> Besides, Large adds, we don’t have to read *Ecce Homo* as *sui generis* or as redefining the genre of autobiography, “but rather [as] just taking the generic immodesty of the autobiography to its extreme” (Large 2007, p. xxi). As Large rightly notes, this extreme immodesty serves Nietzsche’s additional aims of countering the Christian ideal of humility, of proposing a new model of the educator, and of exemplifying a new affirmation of the stylized self.

However, the second of these features of Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* has proved less tractable. This is in part because it is harder to find a humorous tone in his extravagant praise of *Zarathustra*. Also, although most scholars today are willing to concede that Nietzsche was to some extent entitled to his grandiose self-assessment, they are much less amenable to his high opinion of *Zarathustra*. Bryan Magee probably speaks for many of these scholars when he writes:

But I also think that it is important to warn readers away from what is still probably [Nietzsche’s] most famous book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: it is pseudo-poetic, self-conscious in quite the wrong way, written in olde worlde incantatory speech as if in imitation of a book by an Old Testament prophet. Hugely popular in the age of turn-of-the century late romanticism, it seems absurd to most readers a hundred years later – indeed I would say it now borders on the unreadable; and if a new reader starts with it he is likely to be put off Nietzsche altogether. (Magee 2000, p. 314)<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, in the last two decades or so, a scholarly consensus has emerged that the two works Nietzsche wrote immediately after *Zarathustra* – *Beyond Good and Evil* and, especially, *On the Genealogy of Morality* – are far superior works, indeed his finest and most important works.

In this essay, I want to explore an interesting connection between these two features of Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* and I want to suggest how this connection might offer a new perspective on his autobiography. Although it can appear at first that Nietzsche is merely bragging about his virtues and accomplishments, a closer reading shows that he is also drawing up a catalogue of his human-all-too-human flaws, deficiencies and inadequacies. At the same time, and often in the middle of the same page, or even in the same paragraph, of this ongoing self-critique, Nietzsche presents a contrasting portrayal of the sublime protagonist of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Alexander Nehamas, and other scholars fol-

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<sup>2</sup> See also Meyer 2012 and More 2014.

<sup>3</sup> See also Fink 2003, p. 53–55; Gadamer 1988, p. 223–224; and Tanner 1994, p. 46–60.

lowing him, have persuasively argued that *Ecce Homo* is the story of how Nietzsche constructed his own self.<sup>4</sup> But Nietzsche's deliberate contrast between his flawed self and his superior fictional creation suggests an additional and perhaps more significant story of how he constructed the figure he calls his "son" by assigning to him the superhuman overcoming of the human deficiencies he found in himself.<sup>5</sup> The narrative of *Ecce Homo* thus allows us to understand *Zarathustra* as Nietzsche's arduous attempt to overcome what he was by imagining a future teacher who would be everything that he was not and could never be. Applying Nietzsche's remarks about Shakespeare to himself, as he encourages us to do, we should say that Nietzsche's highest formula for himself is that he conceived the type Zarathustra (EH II 4).<sup>6</sup>

On this reading of *Ecce Homo*, there is perhaps less reason to be perplexed by Nietzsche's extravagant praise of his *Zarathustra* book, and there is perhaps some reason to think of the two later books as complacent by comparison. Nietzsche even seems to point to this limitation of his two later books when he describes them in *Ecce Homo* as mere preparations, commentaries, or fish hooks for his earlier *Zarathustra* (EH III BGE 1). Indeed, this advice is not confined just to the *Zarathustra*-infatuated narrative of *Ecce Homo*.<sup>7</sup> For the *Geneal-*

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4 See Nehamas 1985, p. 7–8, p. 196–199; Large 2007, p. xxi–xxii.

5 Compare Michael Tanner's very different suggestion that "the predominance of Zarathustra in [*Ecce Homo*] is partly the result of a degree of identification which Nietzsche had not previously allowed himself" (Tanner 1992, p. xi).

6 In these same remarks, Nietzsche explains that the great poet creates only out of his own reality, which I take to mean envisioning a superior type who is able to overcome the reality of his own inadequacies. I think this is why Nietzsche says that such a poet cannot endure his own work afterward and that he himself would begin sobbing whenever he re-read *Zarathustra*. I therefore agree, of course, with Thomas Brobjer's obvious and long understood claim that *Zarathustra* is to some extent Nietzsche's autobiography and that "Nietzsche consciously constructed Zarathustra out of himself, out of his experiences, and his thinking" (Brobjer 2008, p. 30). But, contrary to Brobjer, this fact does not explain Nietzsche's high opinion of *Zarathustra*. For why then does Nietzsche not praise *Ecce Homo* even more highly than *Zarathustra*? And why is there no reflection in *Zarathustra* of the inadequacies and misfortunes catalogued in *Ecce Homo* – especially Nietzsche's health problems? Where Brobjer goes wrong, it seems to me, is in thinking that Nietzsche identified himself with Zarathustra and that there is "almost total agreement between Nietzsche's and Zarathustra's teachings" (Brobjer 2008, p. 30). I argue against this latter claim below and at greater length in Loeb 2010, p. 207 ff. Brobjer himself quotes Nietzsche's explicit advice to Overbeck and to his sister, "[d]o not believe that my son Zarathustra speaks *my* views" (2008, p. 185 n.3), but implausibly claims that this refers to Nietzsche's unrealized plans to go beyond *Zarathustra* with "a higher state, figure, and book than Zarathustra" (Brobjer 2008, p. 42; see Loeb 2010, p. 213–214 note 13).

7 Nietzsche insists that he has not said a word in *Ecce Homo* that he could not have said five years ago through the mouth of Zarathustra (EH IV 8). But scholars (cf. Brobjer 2008, p. 43) often

ogy already includes an extended passage at the end of the second essay in which Nietzsche emphasizes his own inadequacy as compared to the future redeemer Zarathustra (GM II 24–25). Insofar as many scholars today privilege Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* over all his other works, they should take this passage seriously and reconsider their dismissal of *Ecce Homo*’s celebration of *Zarathustra*.

## 2 Jesus and John the Baptist

The title of Nietzsche’s autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, thus invites us to contrast Nietzsche’s own human-all-too-human deficiencies with the superhuman prowess of his fictional creation Zarathustra.<sup>8</sup> In this title, Nietzsche alludes to the Vulgate version of the New Testament and to Pontius Pilate’s words as he presents Jesus to the assembled Jewish leadership (John 19:5). Since Jesus is the central and divine figure in the New Testament, Nietzsche’s application of these words to himself might seem self-aggrandizing. But we should recall that in the *Antichrist*, composed at the same time as *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche compliments the Roman governor for dismissing Jesus’ impudent abuse of the word “truth” (AC 46). According to Nietzsche, Pilate is the only figure who commands respect in the New Testament and his retort to Jesus, “What is truth?”, are the only words of value in the New Testament. Since Jesus invoked the concept of truth while suggesting his connection to divinity, Pilate was in effect dismissing Jesus’ implication that he was something more than a man. So when Pilate says, “Behold the man,” as he displays the scourged and suffering Jesus, his point is that Jesus is merely a man and not a threat to those who want him killed. The point of Nietzsche’s allusion, then, is that he, too, is merely a man, and indeed a similarly scourged and suffering man.

Nietzsche’s preface to *Ecce Homo* reinforces the contrast introduced by his title. Although he begins by imploring his readers to listen to him and not to mistake him for someone else, he concludes by suppressing his own voice and in-

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misinterpret this remark to mean that he has said in *Ecce Homo* everything that he said then through the mouth of Zarathustra. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche only mentions, but does not teach, the doctrines of the superhuman and eternal recurrence that he says belong to Zarathustra.

**8** Strictly speaking, as I explain in my study of *Zarathustra* (Loeb 2010, p. 198–203), Nietzsche depicts Zarathustra as no longer human, not as superhuman. Zarathustra is thus the first transitional individual on the way to a stronger superhuman species and he acts as a herald for this species. See also Marsden 2005 for Nietzsche’s many references to the superhuman in *Ecce Homo*.

structing his readers to listen instead to the halcyon tone emanating from Zarathustra's mouth (as exemplified in three quotations from *Zarathustra*). Nietzsche performs this same ventriloquist act throughout *Ecce Homo*, but he explains it only in the *Genealogy* passage mentioned above. After reviewing a series of crucial tasks that will be accomplished by a man of the future who must come to us one day (*muss einst kommen*), Nietzsche reveals this man's identity as follows: "— But what am I saying here? Enough! Enough! At this place only one thing behooves me, to be silent: otherwise I usurp that which only one younger, one 'more of the future,' one stronger than I am (*einem Stärkeren, als ich bin*), is at liberty to do — that which only Zarathustra is at liberty to do, Zarathustra the godless" (GM II 25).<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche's phrasing here alludes again to the New Testament, but this time to the story of John the Baptist. According to this story, John appeared in the wilderness as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that God would send a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah. In response to those who believe that he himself is the expected Messiah, John proclaims his anticipation of the true Messiah's impending arrival: "Someone will come after me who is stronger than I: and I am not worthy of bending down before him and loosening the straps of his sandals." (*Es kommt einer nach mir, der ist stärker als ich: und ich bin nicht wert, dass ich mich vor ihm bücke und die Riemen seiner Schuhe löse.*) (Mark 1:7, Luther's translation). Like John the Baptist, then, Nietzsche sees himself as preparing the way for someone who will be far stronger than he is. And like John the Baptist, Nietzsche defers completely to this envisioned future teacher and even feels a duty to suppress his own voice lest he should usurp a task for which he himself is not strong enough.<sup>10</sup>

### 3 Zarathustra's Strength and Realism

In the immediately preceding section of the *Genealogy* (GM II 24), Nietzsche explains in detail what he means by the kind of strength that he himself is missing and that he attributes instead to the teacher whose arrival he is preparing. Zarathustra, he predicts, will possess a strength that is only possible in a stronger and self-confident future age where spirits are habituated to solitude, where

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<sup>9</sup> Here and throughout this essay I use, with slight modifications, the translations by Walter Kaufmann of Nietzsche's writings in Nietzsche 1954, 1968a, 1974.

<sup>10</sup> Kaufmann therefore misses and minimizes Nietzsche's artful design when he writes that most of the all too many references in *Ecce Homo* to *Zarathustra* are embarrassing and that Nietzsche's numerous long quotations from *Zarathustra* were intended for readers who did not know his earlier book (Nietzsche 1968a, p. 661).



they are strengthened by war and victory, and where they are accustomed to needing conquest, adventure, danger and even pain. Also, Zarathustra's strength will require a great health that brings along with it a kind of sublime malevolence and malicious wisdom. With this strength, Nietzsche writes, Zarathustra will be able to reverse the bad conscience so that it becomes wedded to all aspirations to the extra-sensory beyond, to all negation of the natural and animal instincts, and to all the ideals that are hostile to life and slander the world. This strength will drive Zarathustra out of any realm that is "apart" and "beyond" and will compel him to immerse himself in reality so as to bring home the redemption of this reality from the curse those ideals have laid upon it. With this strength, Zarathustra will be filled with great love and great contempt for humankind; he will liberate the will and restore its goal to the earth and humankind; he will free us from the great nausea; and he will conquer God and nihilism.

This explanation in the *Genealogy* helps us to understand Nietzsche's story in *Ecce Homo* of how he conceived the superhuman type of Zarathustra. For in his otherwise self-congratulatory appraisal of himself and his life, Nietzsche dwells at great length on the various decadent aspects of the modern age and culture in which he was born, raised, educated, and forced to live and think (cf. EH III UM 1–2). Accordingly, he envisions a stronger future age and culture for Zarathustra (EH III BGE), a tragic age born of the hardest but most necessary wars (EH III BT 4; EH IV 1). Also, at the surprising start of his autobiography, Nietzsche reveals to his readers the extent to which he has been physiologically sick all his life and therefore *decadent* (EH I 1, 2, 6). In this way he assigns a physiological great health and a superhuman well-being to a Zarathustra type, whose naïve and parodic play with all earthly seriousness will often appear inhuman (EH III Z 2). Finally, Nietzsche tells us that profound disgust with human beings, and profound pity for human beings, were his two greatest dangers (EH I 8; EH IV 6; GM III 14). Hence he foresees Zarathustra's overcoming of the great nausea (EH I 8; EH III Z 8) and the great pity (EH I 4; EH III Z 8).

However, the most extensive, interesting, and puzzling aspect of the explanation in the *Genealogy* is Nietzsche's claim that Zarathustra's superhuman strength will manifest itself most profoundly in his compulsion to submerge, bury, and absorb himself within reality. This process, he writes, will then enable Zarathustra to redeem reality from the curse laid upon it by all the human ideals that have been hostile to life, nature, and the world. Indeed, Nietzsche mentions Zarathustra's redemptive task four times in this brief passage, thus prodding us to look at the crucial speech on redemption in his earlier *Zarathustra* book. On my reading of *Ecce Homo*, then, it should be the case that Nietzsche leaves this redemptive task to Zarathustra because these world-slandering ideals led

Nietzsche himself to become hostile to life and incapable of fully understanding and affirming reality.

But Nietzsche does not appear to see himself in this way or to defer to Zarathustra in this respect. If anything, a systematic study of *Ecce Homo* shows that he is concerned above all else to explain to his readers how he spent his entire life combating the phenomenon he calls “idealism” (*Idealismus*). Nietzsche usually puts this word in scare quotes because he thinks that it is a pretty word invented by philosophers to conceal their instinctive and cowardly mendaciousness in the face of reality (EH III 5; EH III CW 2). Idealism, he says, is the faith in an “ideal” or in “ideals” that are designed to falsify and devalue reality (EH III BT 2):

What humankind has so far considered seriously have not even been realities, but mere imaginings—more strictly speaking, lies prompted by the bad instincts of sick natures that were harmful in the most profound sense—all these concepts, ‘God,’ ‘soul,’ ‘virtue,’ ‘sin,’ ‘beyond,’ ‘truth,’ ‘eternal life.’ (EH II 10)

Yet Nietzsche tells us that his cleverness prevented him from devoting any attention or time, even as a child, to any of these lies (EH II 1). Moreover, in one of the most discussed passages from *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche tells us that all idealism is “mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary”, and that greatness in a human being is *amor fati* – that is, not wanting anything to be different, and not merely bearing what is necessary, still less concealing it, but loving it (EH II 10). *Amor fati*, he tells us, is his inmost nature (EH III CW 4, see also EH II 9), and there is therefore more greatness and will to power in him than in any previous human being (EH III BT 4). This excess of strength, Nietzsche implies, has compelled him to achieve the highest and deepest understanding and affirmation of life, existence, and reality (EH III BT 2–3). As for Zarathustra’s redemptive task, namely, “saying yes to the point of justifying, of redeeming even all of the past,” Nietzsche says that this is *his* task too – and then quotes Zarathustra’s definition of redemption: “To redeem those who lived in the past and to turn every ‘it was’ into a ‘thus I willed it’” (EH III Z 8).

## 4 Nietzsche’s Weakness and Idealism

In short, there is a puzzle here as to how we should reconcile Nietzsche’s famously affirmative stance in *Ecce Homo* with his claim in the *Genealogy* that he is merely preparing the way for a future superhuman type who will finally be strong enough to fully understand and affirm reality. I think that the solution

to this puzzle takes us into the heart of Nietzsche's autobiographical project. Notice, first of all, that Nietzsche mentions only his *personal* indifference toward idealistic concepts like "God", "sin", and "beyond". He is keen to tell us, however, about the catastrophic influence these same concepts had on his *cultural* upbringing and therefore on his own life-long habits and customs.

Nutrition, Nietzsche says, is the key to attaining one's maximum strength. Yet his worthless and idealistic German education taught him to ignore realities and led him to eat as badly as possible until he reached a mature age (EH II 1). The right place and climate, he says, are essential for rapid metabolism and for attaining the great animal vigor and the tremendous quantities of strength that are needed to see and accomplish one's predestined great task. Yet under the influence of idealistic *ignorance in physiologicis* he spent his entire life, except for the last ten years, in places and climates that were disastrous for his physiology (EH II 2). Recreation and the right choice of recreation are essential, he says, for the one who is predestined to a great task and needs some relief from himself and his own seriousness. Yet he was condemned to Germans his whole life, always lacked adequate company, has no welcome memories whatever from his whole childhood and youth, and under the influence of idealism during his Basel period his spiritual diet "was a completely senseless abuse of extraordinary resources, without any new supply to cover this consumption in any way, without even any thought about consumption and replenishment" (EH II 2). Self-defense, Nietzsche writes, commands the one who is a necessity to say no as rarely as possible. For when defensive expenditures become the rule and habit, they entail an extraordinary and entirely superfluous impoverishment, an energy that is wasted on negative ends, and a weakness that prevents any further self-defense. Yet living in Germany for most of his life, his instinct forced him to cast up a barrier to push back everything that constantly assailed it. In addition, Nietzsche observes, the instinct of self-defense becomes worn out in scholars who do nothing but react to other thinkers (EH II 8). Yet he himself was led by the idealistic goal of a classical education into the blunder of a philological career that led him away from the task of his life: "[W]hy not at least a physician or something else that opens one's eyes?" (EH II 2).

In all these various ways, then, Nietzsche confesses to his readers that most of his life was spent not only ignoring the most basic prerequisites for gaining strength, but also wasting and depleting the great strength that belonged to him in the first place. It is true that Nietzsche tells us of his strenuous efforts to relearn, correct, and replace his ingrained idealistic habits and customs. But he also tells us that these efforts came too late in his life and only when he was already close to dying (EH II 2). It is also true that Nietzsche cites his instinctive ability to keep recuperating from his severe health problems as evi-

dence that he is fundamentally healthy (EH I 2). But this still falls far short of the physiological great health that he attributes to the Zarathustra type depicted throughout *Zarathustra*. Finally, it is also true that Nietzsche seems to redeem some of his past idealistic blunders as attributable in part to the long, secret work and artistry of his subconscious instinct for putting the selfless drives to work in the service of self-love and self-discipline: “To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is. From this point of view, even the blunders of life have their own meaning and value—the occasional side roads and wrong roads, the delays, ‘modesties,’ seriousness wasted on tasks that are remote from *the* task” (EH II 9).<sup>11</sup> As an example, Nietzsche mentions the prudence he showed in practicing the scholar’s craft as an important kind of preparation for his eventual task (EH III UM 2). Yet this account serves to rescue only those blunders of life, wrong roads, delays, and wasted seriousness that were under the secret control of Nietzsche’s subconscious instincts. None of the most ruinous external factors that trained him so idealistically since childhood could have been under this control: not his nutrition, place, climate, company, or education. Hence we should conclude that Nietzsche envisions a stronger future age for Zarathustra that includes a radical improvement in all of these external cultural factors. Nietzsche prepares the way for this stronger age by teaching his future readers to overcome their idealism and to focus instead on the “little” things, that is, on the basic concerns of life itself (EH II 10).<sup>12</sup>

Let me suppose at this point, then, that Nietzsche does indeed confess in *Ecce Homo* to having lost his life-long struggle with idealism. This would mean that Nietzsche recognized that he did not gain all the strength he could have and that he wasted most of the great strength he had to begin with. From this point, it should follow as well that Nietzsche recognized that he did not have the strength needed to fully understand and affirm reality – which is why he says in the *Genealogy* that only the much stronger Zarathustra will be able to do this for the first time. I think we can find evidence for this conclusion in *Ecce Homo*, but this will require a closer look at some of the passages cited above and especially at Nietzsche’s concept and exemplification of *amor fati*.

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11 As I argue below, however, Nietzsche thinks that these external factors and chance events *can* be rescued through his *amor fati* strategy. This means that Brian Leiter (2001, p. 286–287) and Aaron Ridley (2005a, p. xviii–xix) are mistaken to fold Nietzsche’s remarks about prudential selflessness into his account of *amor fati*. This mistake leads Leiter to conflate what he calls Nietzsche’s “causal essentialism” with what I call Nietzsche’s “holistic necessity”. See Simon May (2009, p. 97–98) for a similar conflation.

12 See Domino 2002.

## 5 Zarathustra's Yes-Saying and Eternal Recurrence

I will begin by returning to that *Ecce Homo* passage in which Nietzsche seems to suggest that his excess of strength has compelled him to attain the highest possible understanding and affirmation of life, existence, and reality (EH II BT 2–3). A closer reading shows that in fact Nietzsche does not mean his own excess strength, but rather that of his envisioned stronger type, Zarathustra (see also EH IV 5). For this is how he describes the real opposition to the idealism in that same passage: “[A] formula for the highest affirmation, born of fullness, of over-fullness, a yes-saying without reservation, even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything that is questionable and strange in existence [...] [an] ultimate, most joyous, most wantonly extravagant yes to life [...]”. Yet this is precisely the kind of affirmation that Nietzsche attributes to his protagonist at the very end of the published *Zarathustra*, in the chapter entitled, “The Yes and Amen Song”.<sup>13</sup>

More precisely, the “formula for the highest affirmation” (*Formel der höchsten Bejahung*) is Nietzsche’s famous characterization of eternal recurrence at the start of *Ecce Homo*’s account of *Zarathustra*: “Now I shall relate the history of *Zarathustra*. The fundamental conception of this work, *the thought of eternal recurrence*, this highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable [*diese höchste Formel der Bejahung, die überhaupt erreicht werden kann*] [...]” (EH III Z 1). In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche explains that the teaching of eternal recurrence belongs to Zarathustra (EH III BT 3).<sup>14</sup> He also tells us why: Zarathustra does not object to the eternal recurrence of existence even though this entails his most abysmal thought of the eternally recurring small human being (EH III Z 6). By contrast, Nietzsche himself *does* object to the eternal recurrence of existence because this entails his own most abysmal thought of the eternal recurrence of his own mother and sister (EH I 3). Thus, whereas Nietzsche depicts the future Zarathustra as proclaiming his love of life’s eternal recurrence (Z III xvi), Nietzsche himself writes in one of his contemporaneous notes: “I do not want life *again*. How have I borne it? Creating. What has made me endure the sight? the vision

<sup>13</sup> See Loeb 2010, p. 42–43, p. 77–81, p. 106–107, p. 196–197.

<sup>14</sup> At the end of *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche signs himself as the teacher of eternal recurrence. But in describing the doctrine there, he avoids Zarathustra’s claim that life returns *identically*. He also prefaces his signature by announcing his discipleship to the philosopher Dionysus whom he identifies with Zarathustra, and he follows his signature by deferring to Zarathustra’s “Old and New Tablets” speech.

of the superhuman being who *affirms* life. I have tried to affirm it *myself* – alas!” (NF 1882–1883, 4[81]: KSA 10/137). Here again we can see quite clearly Nietzsche’s project of conceiving a superhuman type who is able to overcome his own human deficiencies. Nietzsche confesses that he himself did not have the strength that is required to affirm life, that is, to want life *again*, so the best he could do was to endure life by envisioning a future Zarathustra type who would indeed have the strength to do this.<sup>15</sup>

This last point will seem strange to scholars who are used to thinking that Nietzsche saw himself as the ultimate life-affirmer. It will seem strange especially to those scholars who are used to citing Nietzsche’s formula of *amor fati* as his ultimate formula of life-affirmation and who are used to thinking of *Ecce Homo* as his autobiographical attempt to exemplify this formula.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, most scholars have failed to draw any principled interpretive distinction between *amor fati* and eternal recurrence or between the different senses in which Nietzsche regarded these as formulas of affirmation.<sup>17</sup> Julian Young’s philosophical biogra-

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<sup>15</sup> I recognize that my primary textual evidence for this interpretive claim consists of Nietzsche’s late addition to the manuscript of *Ecce Homo* (in EH I 3) and an unpublished note (NF 1882–83, 4[81]: KSA 10/137). But these are consistent with each other and also with the absence of any place in Nietzsche’s writings where he says that he himself affirms life’s eternal recurrence. The only place I have found that comes close to this, but still falls short, is an unpublished note from 1888 (NF 1888, 16[32]: KSA 13/492). Here Nietzsche writes that an experimental philosophy, as he lives it, wants to cross over to the opposite of negation, to a Dionysian yes-saying to the world, as it is – “it wants the eternal circulation,—the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements” (— *sie will den ewigen Kreislauf, – dieselben Dinge, dieselbe Logik und Unlogik der Knoten*).

<sup>16</sup> For example, in his introductory overview of Nietzsche’s entire philosophy, Robert Pippin highlights *amor fati* as Nietzsche’s central ideal of affirmation that he “introduces in *The Gay Science* and returns to ever after” (Pippin 2012, p. 8). Here Pippin fails to consider Nietzsche’s own distinction between his presently formulated *amor fati* ideal and the superior ideal of eternal recurrence that will be formulated by Zarathustra in the future. The reason, I would argue, is that Pippin takes a strictly chronological approach to Nietzsche’s writings, arguing that Nietzsche “appeals to *amor fati* (relatively early, or early middle, in [*The Gay Science* 1882]) and late (in *Ecce Homo* [1888]), [so] we can expect a continuity of the same enthusiasm” (Pippin 2012, p.10). But in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche challenges this chronological approach by claiming that his middle book, *Zarathustra*, is actually the philosophical goal for which even his later works are preparations.

<sup>17</sup> Domino 2012 offers further reasons for drawing this distinction, but I do not agree with all of these reasons because I do not agree with his interpretations of *amor fati* and eternal recurrence. He also offers further examples of scholars who fail to draw this distinction. One exception to this scholarly consensus is Aaron Ridley, who says that eternal recurrence is different from *amor fati* because the former involves “supra-mundane world-redemption” whereas the latter involves the redemption of individual lives from the point of view of those who live them (see Rid-

phy is typical in this respect when he cites Nietzsche's introduction of *amor fati* in section 276 of *The Gay Science* and then writes:

Since all the facts in one's life are 'necessary' in the sense that, being past, they are unalterable, ideal happiness consists in loving absolutely everything that one had done and had happened to one. And what this means—since even a single 'negation' is a failure of *amor fati*—is, in a word, that one needs to be able to love the 'eternal return'. (Young 2010, p. 336)<sup>18</sup>

At this point, Young cites the demon's whispered revelation of life's eternal recurrence (GS 341), and then suggests that, according to Nietzsche's stringent criterion, measuring up to the ideal of happiness is possible only if one is capable of the response, "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine!" (GS 341).<sup>19</sup>

Actually, however, this response points forward to the next section (GS 342) and to Nietzsche's introduction there of Zarathustra. So what Nietzsche has in mind with his conjunction of sections 341 and 342 in *The Gay Science* is that the protagonist of his next book will indeed be capable of this response. And we have just seen that this is how he depicts Zarathustra's response in the "Yes and Amen Song" chapter at the end of the published book. Also, Young makes an exegetical leap and a conceptual leap when he claims that *amor fati*, or loving all of one's past life, means that one needs to be able to love the eternal recurrence of one's past life. For Nietzsche does not mention eternal recurrence in his introduction of *amor fati* (GS 276), or in his two references to *amor fati* in *Ecce Homo* (EH II 10; EH III CW 4). The reason seems obvious:

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ley 2005a, p. xviii, note 21). But I argue below for an immanent and first-person-perspective understanding of Zarathustra's recurrence-based redemptive task. Another exception is Robert Solomon, who claims that eternal recurrence is different from *amor fati* because the former is an abstract thought-experiment aimed at the overall affirmation of non-recurring life whereas the latter is a concrete thesis concerning the important details of one's life (see Solomon 2006, p. 204). But I argue below that this interpretation of eternal recurrence is self-contradictory and that, properly interpreted, eternal recurrence is a concrete cosmological thesis regarding all the details of one's life. Solomon also contends that *amor fati* and eternal recurrence are distinct because the former concerns the acceptance of one's life so far, whereas the latter is also a way of thinking about one's future (see Solomon 2006, p. 205). But, as I point out below, Nietzsche formulates *amor fati* as also extending into the future.

**18** See also Young's remark on the next page: "This then – desiring the eternal return, i.e. *amor fati* – is Nietzsche's ideal of happiness" (Young 2010, p. 337; see also p. 362). For an earlier and more extended version of this reading, see Young 2003, p. 85–96. Here he writes: "That we should be able to 'love fate' and 'will the eternal recurrence' are the same idea in different language." (Young 2003, p. 91).

**19** Cited in Young 2010, p. 33.



one might love all of one's past life and yet not want it to be eternally repeated. I think that this was the case for Nietzsche himself, and so I turn now to show this.<sup>20</sup>

## 6 Nietzsche's Yes-saying and *Amor Fati*

Young's reading of Nietzsche's introduction of *amor fati* in *The Gay Science*, section 276 is fairly standard, and includes a set of mistakes centered around the concept of the past. Here is Nietzsche's text:

I want to learn more and more to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them [*das Nothwendige an den Dingen als das Schöne sehen*]:—thus I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse, I do not even want to accuse the accusers. *Looking away* shall be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer!

Young's first mistake, then, is to suppose that in this passage Nietzsche is especially concerned with the past. For Nietzsche doesn't mention the past at all here, and his account in *Ecce Homo* shows that the past was not his focus: "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but *love it*" (EH II 10). Here Nietzsche says that *amor fati* consists in wanting nothing to be different either backward or forward in time, and he therefore implies that his concept of loving what is necessary also extends to future events – indeed to all eternity.<sup>21</sup> Also, applying this con-

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**20** The only place in any of his writings where Nietzsche suggests a connection between these two doctrines is once again that unpublished note from 1888 (NF 16[32]: KSA 13/492), in which he writes: "Such an experimental philosophy as I live [...] wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this—to a Dionysian yes-saying to the world, as it is, without deduction, exception and selection—it wants the eternal circulation:—the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. Highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand as Dionysian to existence—: my formula for this is *amor fati*..." Han-Pile equates eternal recurrence with *amor fati* on the basis of this single unpublished note (2011, p. 230 ff.), but I think it suggests at most that willing eternal recurrence entails *amor fati* and not the reverse (as I argue below).

**21** Notice, however, that this reference to eternity does not entail any claim about eternal recurrence, since there is no suggestion that what lies backward in time eventually returns as the same in the future. As Han-Pile observes, Nietzsche explains *amor fati* as concerning a chain of events that unfolds *ad aeternitatem* without ever repeating itself (2011, p. 230).



cept to himself, Nietzsche says that he has never experienced a feeling of struggle and that at the very moment he is writing he looks upon his ample *future* as upon a calm sea in which there is no ripple of desire: “I do not want in the least that anything should become different than it is; I myself do not want to become different” (EH II 9).

Young’s second mistake, then, is to suppose that Nietzsche identifies his concept of fate or necessity with the sense of unalterability that is often attributed to the past.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the *Ecce Homo* passage just quoted suggests that Nietzsche has in mind some *general* concept of fate or necessity from which there follows the unalterability of the future as well as the past, indeed of all eternity. Nietzsche does not offer an explanation of this general concept in the passages cited above, but he does say a little more in his Epilogue to *Nietzsche contra Wagner*:

I have often asked myself whether I am not more heavily obligated to the hardest years of my life than to any others. As my innermost nature teaches me, all that is necessary, as seen from the heights and in the sense of a *grand economy*, is also advantageous in itself [*So wie meine innerste Natur es mich lehrt, ist alles Nothwendige, aus der Höhe gesehn und im Sinne einer grossen Ökonomie, auch das Nützliche an sich*]: one should not only bear it, one should *love* it. *Amor fati*: that is my innermost nature. —And as for my long sickness, do I not owe it indescribably more than I owe to my health? I owe it a higher health—one that is made stronger by whatever does not kill it! *I also owe my philosophy to it ...* (NCW Epilogue 1: KSA 6/436).

Here Nietzsche explains that something is fated or necessary when it is seen from the heights or in the sense of a grand economy. The task, then, is to learn how such a fated or necessary thing can also be regarded as advantageous in itself so that one is able to love it. As an example, Nietzsche cites his long illness. Regarded from the heights or in relation to a grand economy, his long illness was fated and necessary. Since this long illness was so hard and almost killed him, Nietzsche poses the problem as to how he can possibly learn to love precisely the fatedness or necessity of this illness. How can one learn to love the very fatedness or necessity of the hardest and ugliest things in one’s life? His solution is to notice that his long illness was also advantageous because it was responsible for making him stronger and for giving him his higher health and his philosophy. Nietzsche can love the fatedness or necessity of his long illness – that is, not want it to be missing or to be different in any way – because without it he would not have gotten stronger, or acquired his higher health, or conceived his philosophy.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. also Groff 2003, p. 35.

There is a set of important and famous passages from *Twilight of the Idols* that use the same language as these remarks about *amor fati* and that help us gain a better understanding of what Nietzsche means when he says that things can be regarded as fated or necessary when seen from the heights or in relation to a grand economy. In the first of these, Nietzsche imagines the moralist urging a single individual that he ought to be such and such. According to Nietzsche, this advice is ridiculous: “The single human being is a piece of *fatum* from the front and from the back, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be. To say to him, ‘Change yourself!’ is to demand that everything be changed, even retroactively” (*Der Einzelne ist ein Stück fatum, von Vorne und von Hinten, ein Gesetz mehr, eine Nothwendigkeit mehr für Alles, was kommt und sein wird. Zu ihm sagen “ändere dich” heisst verlangen, dass Alles sich ändert, sogar rückwärts noch.*) (TI V 6). Here we see Nietzsche using the same allied concepts of *fatum* and necessity, along with the same suggestion of backward and forward movements in time. His point depends upon what I will call his concept of *holistic* fate or necessity: every particular is a piece of fate or a necessity in relation to the whole, which means that no particular can be changed without changing the whole. This claim depends in turn on Nietzsche’s well-known metaphysical theory that all particulars are entangled together to such an extent that all of them are necessary in the economy of the whole. This entanglement extends forward as well as backward, and so it is not just past events that are holistically necessary, but future events, too, and, indeed, all events into eternity (Z IV xix 10).

In the second *Twilight* passage, Nietzsche returns to this same point, arguing that the fatality (*Fatalität*) of a human being’s essence – his being there at all, his being in these circumstances, or his being in this environment – cannot be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be: “One is necessary, one is a piece of fatefulness, one belongs to the whole, one is in the whole [*Man ist nothwendig, man ist ein Stück Verhängniss, man gehört zum Ganzen, man ist im Ganzen*],—there is nothing which could judge, measure, compare, or sentence our being, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing, or sentencing the whole. ... *But there is nothing besides the whole!*” (TI VI 8). Here again we find Nietzsche’s metaphysical concept of holistic fate or necessity: to say that something is fated or necessary is to say that it cannot be absent or different in any way because it belongs to the immanent whole and because its existence and essence cannot be disentangled from the existence and essence of all that has been and all that will be.<sup>23</sup> Hence *amor fati*, or loving what is neces-

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<sup>23</sup> As Joan Stambaugh (1994, p. 75–93, chapter first published in 1985) and Yirmiyahu Yovel

sary in a thing, means loving the thing's non-subtractability and non-alterability in relation to the whole or grand economy.<sup>24</sup> In a final passage from *Twilight*, Nietzsche writes that Goethe was a realist who “stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the faith that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole—he does not negate any more” (TI IX 49). Such a faith, Nietzsche declares, is the highest of all possible faiths, a Dionysian faith – a point to which he returns in *Ecce Homo* when he describes Zarathustra as a Dionysian yes-sayer without reservation for whom “nothing in existence may be subtracted, nothing is dispensable” (*Es ist Nichts, was ist, abzurechnen, es ist Nichts entbehrlich*) (EH III BT 2).<sup>25</sup>

## 7 Nietzsche's Personal Providence

There are thus two different senses of “necessity” at work in Nietzsche's account of *amor fati*. The first of these is what I have called *holistic* necessity and concerns the *metaphysical* sense in which nothing can be disentangled from its relation to the immanent totality of everything else in the world. The second sense I will call *theodicean* necessity because it concerns the *hermeneutic* sense in which even the most unfortunate transitional stage in a process can be interpreted as having a necessary utility, benefit, or advantage for the desired completion of this process. The task, then, is learning how to love the holistic necessity of even the most unfortunate aspects of existence by proving their theodicean ne-

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(1986) pointed out in their groundbreaking essays, Nietzsche's concept of *amor fati* is a transformation of Spinoza's concept of *amor dei*. See Higgins (2000, p. 148–149), for a later development of some of the same themes. On my reading, then, Nietzsche's idea of fate alludes back to Spinoza's pantheistic theory of immanent and holistic necessity.

**24** I thus disagree with recent interpretations of *amor fati* and *Ecce Homo* that trace Nietzsche's concept of fatedness back to his theory of the human subject or agent. According to Leiter, Nietzsche thinks that his life is fated because there are essential natural facts about him that significantly circumscribe the range of trajectories he can realize (Leiter 2001, p. 289). According to Pippin, Nietzsche thinks that his life is fated because he believes that his lack of self-knowledge concerning his own instinctual and hidden motivations leaves him with minimal power to shape and order his life on the basis of his reflection and will alone (Pippin 2012, p. 11–16). But both of these interpretations depend on a conflation of Nietzsche's remarks about prudential selflessness with his account of *amor fati*. See note 11 above.

**25** In the unpublished note from 1888 cited above, Nietzsche writes in the same vein of “a Dionysian yes-saying to the world, as it is, without deduction, exception and selection” (*einem dionysischen Jasagen zur Welt, wie sie ist, ohne Abzug, Ausnahme und Auswahl*) and then: “Highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand as Dionysian to existence—: my formula for this is *amor fati* ...” (NF 16[32]: KSA 13/492).

cessity.<sup>26</sup> To return to Nietzsche's example cited above, he learned to love the metaphysical necessity of his long illness through his interpretation of its necessary and indispensable contribution to his supremely valued philosophy.

As scholars like Young have noted, Nietzsche follows up his introduction of the *amor fati* problem in section 276 of *The Gay Science* with an entire section that explains this hermeneutic and theodicean solution. Here Nietzsche describes the high point in life when one's practical and theoretical skill in interpreting and arranging events, or the dexterity of one's wisdom, have reached their peak. This is the moment, he says, when

the idea of a personal providence confronts us with the most penetrating force, and the best advocate, the evidence of our eyes, speaks for it—now that we can see how palpably always everything that happens to us *turns out for the best*. Every day and every hour, life seems to have no other wish than to prove this proposition again and again. Whatever it is: bad weather or good, the loss of a friend, sickness, slander, the failure of some letter to arrive, the spraining of an ankle, a glance into a shop, a counter-argument, the opening of a book, a dream, a fraud—either immediately or very soon after it proves to be something that 'must not be missing': it has profound significance and use precisely *for us!* (GS 277)

Notice that most of the examples Nietzsche provides here are events that would usually be considered unfortunate and due to chance. Thus, in response to the question he poses in the previous section of *The Gay Science* as to how we can learn to love the metaphysical necessity of such events, Nietzsche suggests a hermeneutic strategy for proving that they had a theodicean necessity for reaching our presently experienced high point in life.<sup>27</sup> By using our peak interpretive skills we are able to prove to ourselves that these unfortunate chance events have turned out for the best (*zum Besten gereichen*) and that, indeed, they must not be missing (*nicht fehlen durfte*). Of course, this does not mean that there is some kind of divine providence or pre-established harmony at work in our lives, and Nietzsche is careful to warn his readers not to forget the lessons he had imparted in *The Gay Science* about de-deification and the beautiful chaos of existence (GS 109).

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<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, some scholars notice just one or the other of these senses of necessity and are therefore led to collapse Nietzsche's two-stage argument into an either purely metaphysical argument (cf. Han-Pile 2011) or a purely hermeneutic argument (cf. Ridley 2005a, p. xvi–xxi). Brian Domino (2012, p. 292–294) misses both these senses of necessity.

<sup>27</sup> If I understand her argument correctly, Béatrice Han-Pile (2011, p. 240, p. 245, p. 253 note 38) thinks that section 277 of *The Gay Science* is merely critical and hence refuses to acknowledge Nietzsche's theodicean strategy (especially in *Ecce Homo*, which she barely discusses) and thus the most important textual support for attributing to Nietzsche an erotic, as opposed to agapic, understanding of *amor fati*.

In *Ecce Homo*, then, Nietzsche shows us how he learned to love the fatedness of even the most unfortunate aspects of his life. Referring back to section 276 of *The Gay Science*, he repeatedly mentions and alludes to his *amor fati* innermost nature. Concerning, for example, the fact that Germans ignored his writings, he insists: “I myself have never suffered from all this; what is necessary does not hurt me; *amor fati* is my innermost nature” (EH III CW 4).<sup>28</sup> Also, referring back to section 277, he describes himself as using unfortunate chance events to his advantage, so that what does not kill him makes him stronger (*er nützt schlimme Zufälle zu seinem Vortheil aus; was ihn nicht umbringt, macht ihn stärker*) and so that everything must turn out for the best for him (*dass ihm Alles zum Besten gereichen muss*) (EH I 2). Among these unfortunate chance events, Nietzsche includes the external factors we reviewed above: the modern age in which he lived, the German culture in which he was raised and educated, the climate surrounding him, the family he was born into, his severe and probably inherited health problems, the career choice pressed upon him, and so on. *Ecce Homo*, then, is Nietzsche’s attempt to use his peak hermeneutic skills to offer an interpretation of his life that allows him to say *amor fati* to all of this. He thus shows his readers how all of these fated, or holistically necessary, unfortunate chance events were actually necessary from a theodicean perspective for reaching the high point in his life when he is recounting his life to himself: “On this perfect day [of his forty-fourth birthday], when everything is ripening and not only the grape turns brown, the sun just fell upon my life: I looked backward, I looked ahead, I never saw so many and such good things at once. [...] How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life?” (EH Exergue: KSA 6/263). Notice that Nietzsche also looks *ahead* from the standpoint of this high point in his life, thus extending his love toward the holistic necessity of all that is to follow in the *future*.

There are of course many potential problems with Nietzsche’s hermeneutic strategy for affirming his life, and scholars have been quick to point these out. As with any counterfactual interpretation, we might want to question

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**28** In an unpublished note from 1888, Nietzsche explains the theodicean necessity that allows him to love the holistic necessity of being ignored by his German contemporaries: “— One last point, perhaps the highest: I *justified* the Germans, I alone. We are opposed, we are even un-touchable for each other, —there is no bridge, no question, no glance between us. But that is just the condition for that extreme degree of selfishness, of self-redemption, that became human in me: I am *solitude* as human being. —That no word ever reached me, this *forced* me to reach myself ... I would not be possible without a countertype race, without Germans, without *these* Germans [...] I want nothing differently, not even backward—I was not *permitted* to want anything differently ... Amor fati ...” (NF 25[7]: KSA 13/641).

Nietzsche's theodicean conclusions. For example, is it really true that the unfortunate chance events were needed and advantageous for reaching his present peak moment in life?<sup>29</sup> We have already seen the extent to which Nietzsche laments the catastrophic influence of idealism on his life. Also, there are places in *Ecce Homo* where he seems to suggest that some of the results are beyond the reach of his hermeneutic strategy – for example, his selflessness during his Basel period, for which he will never forgive himself (EH II 3). Moreover, is it really true that the moment in which he is writing is a peak compared to what it could have been absent all of these unfortunate chance events? What if Nietzsche finds out that this is not a peak moment after all and decides to re-interpret his past again, but this time as leading to an entirely different later moment?<sup>30</sup>

We might also wonder whether Nietzsche's hermeneutic strategy is not the source of many omissions, exaggerations, and even lies that he tells in *Ecce Homo*.<sup>31</sup> So what prevents Nietzsche's resulting love of fate from being a merely artistic pose without any authority over his commitments?<sup>32</sup> Moreover, since Nietzsche tells us that we are not transparent to ourselves, how can he be sure that his own invocation of fatalism is not self-deceived?<sup>33</sup> In addition, in section 276 of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche resolves to make looking away (*Wegsehen*) his only negation, and he certainly does this in *Ecce Homo* with many of the unfortunate chance events in his life. But is not even this sort of negation still a kind of failure in his attempt to be only a yes-sayer?<sup>34</sup> Worse still, it would appear that Nietzsche is actually an ingrate when he simply looks away from certain aspects of his life (like his pension, or his friend Overbeck) that were indispensable for his intellectual flourishing.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the suspicion that Nietzsche's theodicy leads him to offer a falsified or selective story of his life might lead us to wonder further whether he failed in his quest to love the fatedness of the unfortunate chance events in his life.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps Nietzsche really did want these unfortunate chance events to be subtracted or altered and perhaps his biographical falsifica-

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<sup>29</sup> See Young 2003, p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> See Young 2003, p. 95.

<sup>31</sup> See Large 2007, p. xvii–xviii.

<sup>32</sup> See Young 2003, p. 95.

<sup>33</sup> See Pippin 2012, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> See Tanner 1994, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> See Platt 1993, p. 67–68.

<sup>36</sup> See Jensen 2011, p. 206.

tion shows that he was one of those who secretly accused life and wanted to take revenge on life.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, I want to leave aside for now all of these interesting questions and simply grant the effectiveness and success of Nietzsche's strategy in *Ecce Homo* for learning *amor fati*.<sup>38</sup> The most interesting question, I think, is whether Nietzsche believed that this strategy could be of any use for learning to love life's eternal recurrence. I have already said that I think he did not, and this point is supported by the complete absence of any such suggestion anywhere in *Ecce Homo*. Nowhere in the text does Nietzsche say that he wants to *relive* the unfortunate chance events he has experienced, and, as we have seen, in one place he makes it clear that he does not.<sup>39</sup> This is when he describes his treatment at the hands of his mother and sister as a perfectly infernal machine that fills him with unspeakable horror even up to the present moment, and then confesses that this constitutes his most profound objection against eternal recurrence (EH I 3). Still, at the beginning of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche expresses gratitude to his still-living mother as the source of life within him (EH I 1), so we can suppose that he does at least attempt to incorporate her into his theodicean interpretation. Also, despite his sister's extensive role in his life, Nietzsche does not mention her anywhere else in *Ecce Homo*, thus fulfilling his New Year's resolution to make looking away his only negation and in that sense still incorporating her into his hermeneutic strategy for loving the ugliness that was fated in his life. Yet neither of these interpretive moves enables him to love the prospect of *reliving* his life with his mother and sister. So we should conclude that Nietzsche regarded himself as having learned to love his life's fatedness but *not* its eternal recurrence.

This contrast helps us to see how Nietzsche regarded the love of eternal recurrence as a superior kind of affirmation. For it does not allow even the "looking-away" negation of any fated unfortunate chance event and it overcomes even the worst horror that might be felt regarding any such fated unfortunate chance event. However, Nietzsche recognized that he himself was incapable of this superior kind of affirmation and so he delegates this task to the future, stronger Zarathustra type. Indeed, Nietzsche seems to draw on his own horror over his

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<sup>37</sup> See Solomon 2006, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> Domino (2012) argues, unconvincingly I think, that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche hopes to avoid infecting his readers with the disease of his own decadence by deliberately reporting to them that he has failed to live up to the ideal of *amor fati*.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Platt (1993, p. 70 ff.) repeatedly claims that throughout *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche says "once more" to all of his life experiences, but there is not a single line in the text to support this claim.

mother and sister when he anticipates Zarathustra as being similarly burdened with the most abysmal thought of the eternal recurrence of the dwarfish human being whom he despises (Z III ii 1; Z III xiii 2). But Nietzsche's point is that Zarathustra will be superior to him because he will not consider this an objection to the eternal recurrence of existence, "but rather one reason more for being himself the eternal yes to all things, 'the tremendous, unbounded saying yes and amen'" (EH III Z 6).

## 8 Zarathustra's Redemptive Task

Let me return finally to the last puzzling passage cited earlier, in which Nietzsche says that Zarathustra's redemptive task is also his, namely, the task which Zarathustra defines quite strictly as saying yes to the point of justifying, of redeeming all of the past. If my arguments so far have been convincing, and especially if we take seriously Nietzsche's deference to the redeemer Zarathustra in the conclusion to the second essay of the *Genealogy*, then Nietzsche cannot mean that his task is identical with Zarathustra's.<sup>40</sup> What he means is that he has conceived a stronger type who will be able to accomplish the redemptive task that he himself cannot accomplish. In particular, Nietzsche cannot mean that he himself has accomplished the task that he quotes from Zarathustra's speech on redemption: "To redeem those who lived in the past and to turn every 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it' – that alone I should call redemption" (EH III Z 8). For Nietzsche never describes himself anywhere in *Ecce Homo* as having performed this task, not even in his review of the tasks he performed in his other books besides *Zarathustra*. In addition, as we have seen, Nietzsche's teaching of *amor fati* does not concentrate exclusively on the past but concerns the entanglement of all things into the future as well. Nowhere in his account of *amor fati* does Nietzsche worry, as he has Zarathustra worry in his redemption speech, about the apparent fact that we are not able to will backward, that is, exert any influence on the past. So it is in no way a feature of Nietzsche's *amor fati* insight that he learned how to do what Zarathustra calls redemption, turning every "it was" into a "thus I willed it". Indeed, and most importantly, on the reading I have offered above, it *cannot* be the case that Nietzsche's *amor fati* teaching shows him how to do this.

Recall that Nietzsche's *amor fati* teaching depends on a hermeneutic theodicy performed from the standpoint of a peak moment in life that sees all of the fated unfortunate chance events in the past as being indispensably advanta-

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<sup>40</sup> As opposed to Brobjer 2008, p. 30.



geous to this peak moment and as therefore turning out for the best for him. In *Ecce Homo*, as we have seen, Nietzsche himself looks out from the vantage point of a perfect birthday in the last quarter of his forty-fourth year, a year in which he has completed *The Twilight of the Idols*, *The Antichrist*, and the *Dionysian Dithyrambs*. From this vantage point he looks backward and tells himself the story of his life. This story is guided by his *amor fati* teaching and consists in a retrospective reinterpretation of all those fated chance events in his past life that at the time had seemed merely ugly, bad and unfortunate. Now, however, he has acquired the peak theoretical and practical skills needed to interpret and arrange these past events so that he can see them as leading inexorably and advantageously to just this perfect day in which he feels joyful, accomplished, and complete. To every one of these events belonging to his ‘it was’, Nietzsche is now able to say, “thus I will it!” – meaning that he now loves these events from the standpoint of his *presently* experienced bliss.

Notice, however, that this interpretive feat does not allow Nietzsche to turn these past events into “thus I *willed* it” – meaning that he loved these past events *at the time* he was experiencing them. Indeed, it is a presupposition of Nietzsche’s hermeneutic theodicy that he did *not* love these past events at the time he was experiencing them – that, in fact, he hated them back then. This is precisely why he needs to perform the *amor fati* operation in the first place, in order to convert every “I hated that past event back then” into “I now see how to love that past event”. But eternal recurrence, as Nietzsche introduces it in section 341 of *The Gay Science* and as he treats it at much greater length in *Zarathustra*, entails that he must relive his identical life down to every last detail, including his thoughts and feelings. And this means that he must relive not just every single one of those fated unfortunate chance events, but also the exact same hatred that he felt for them at the time that he experienced them. Certainly Nietzsche will later be able to relive that future moment when he is able to convert this hatred into love, but this future moment is of no help to him at all during the time when he is reliving his identical experience of that hatred. *Amor fati*, then, does not in any way help Nietzsche to learn how to love his life’s eternal recurrence.<sup>41</sup> Whatever objections he has to his past experience of his most hated past events, these objections are multiplied to infinity by the prospect of his life’s eternal recurrence. His presently experienced *amor fati* does nothing to ameliorate these multiplied objections. Nietzsche may indeed have learned how to love the

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<sup>41</sup> David Owen claims that according to Nietzsche “being characterized by the disposition of *amor fati* is a sufficient condition for responding joyously to the prospect of eternal recurrence and *vice versa*” (Owen 2009, p. 213). But he does not offer any argument or textual evidence to support this claim.

fated unfortunate chance events from his past, but he has in no way learned how to love the eternal reliving of these chance events. He thus imagines a stronger type in the future who will be able to learn what he himself was incapable of learning.

The key places in which Nietzsche envisions how Zarathustra will learn to love his life's eternal recurrence are the *Zarathustra* chapters, "On Redemption", "On the Vision and the Riddle", and the four concluding chapters of Part Three. In the first of these chapters, quoted by Nietzsche (EH III Z 8), Zarathustra suggests that he needs to teach himself how to will backward in time in order to be able to say that he has willed all the gruesome chance events in his past. Although he does not explain what he means by this, it is clear that Nietzsche is pointing his readers toward Zarathustra's unveiling of his teaching of eternal recurrence in the ensuing "Vision and Riddle" chapter. For here Zarathustra teaches himself what Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo* calls the "unconditional and endlessly repeated circular course of all things" (*unbedingten und unendlich wiederholten Kreislauf aller Dinge*) (EH III BT 3). Or rather, Zarathustra recounts a vision in which he saw himself teaching himself that he had been in this identical situation before and that he would be eternally returning to this identical situation. At this point, Zarathustra says that his vision showed him an experience that he recalls having in his most distant childhood – thus suggesting that he had returned into his identical life and in particular into the time of his most distant childhood.

What is important here is Nietzsche's suggestion that Zarathustra can be aware that he is returning into his identical life because he will have a memory of having lived it before. In addition, Nietzsche suggests that Zarathustra can also have a *prospective* memory of certain aspects of his identical life that he has lived before but still not experienced in this iteration of his repeated life. For Zarathustra says that he next had a prevision (*Vorhersehn*) of someone who turns out to be himself as depicted in the concluding chapters of Part Three. He says that he foresaw what turns out to be his own struggle with nausea at the prospect of an eternally recurring small human being in the "Convalescent" chapter. Most interesting of all, Zarathustra says that his prevision showed him interacting with his future self. After being summoned by his future self in the guise of a dog that is howling for help, he offers advice that is successful in helping his future self overcome his near-fatal struggle with his nausea. In this scene, that is, Nietzsche shows his readers that the Zarathustra of the "Convalescent" chapter uses his newly awakened knowledge of eternal recurrence to teach himself how to will backward to the younger Zarathustra who is having the prevision recounted in the "Vision and Riddle" chapter. Or, to put this more precisely, Nietzsche shows his readers how Zarathustra's new knowledge of eternal re-

currence enables him to teach himself how to leave reminders of his present experience so that these can be recalled when needed at earlier points in his lifetime.

This is a very brief summary of my interpretation of certain aspects of this very complex scene in Nietzsche's poetic book. But I think it is enough to suggest how Nietzsche envisioned Zarathustra's advantage in learning to love the prospect of eternally reliving his life. Applying his hermeneutic theodicy, Nietzsche can enable himself to love those fated unfortunate chance events in his past as necessarily contributing to the present peak moment in his life. But this does not help him to love those same chance events at that time in the past when he actually experienced them. In fact, it is precisely because he hated them back then that he resolves to love them now. So the prospect of eternally reliving this past hatred can only fill him with dread and nausea. Zarathustra, by contrast, can use his new knowledge of eternal recurrence to ensure that he remembers his redemptive peak moment *at the actual time in the past* when he is experiencing those fated unfortunate chance events. This is why Zarathustra declares his love of eternal recurrence shortly after he has employed backward-willing to help himself overcome his great nausea at the prospect of reliving his experience of the dwarfish small human being. In fact, since this declaration of love is actually Zarathustra's redemptive peak moment, there is a paradoxical sense in which his love of eternal recurrence is precisely what enables him to achieve his love of eternal recurrence.

I recognize, of course, that this reading of *Zarathustra's* theory of redemption is quite a departure from the current scholarly understanding of this theory. I have argued for this reading in detail elsewhere and I think that it is strongly supported by the textual evidence.<sup>42</sup> There are also some significant incidental reasons why scholars have not noticed this reading before. One of these reasons I have already mentioned: most scholars conflate Nietzsche's concepts of *amor fati* and eternal recurrence, and so they are inclined simply to project Nietzsche's theodicy strategy for loving his fate onto Zarathustra's backward-willing strategy for redeeming his past.<sup>43</sup> The other reason is that Georg Simmel's influential critique of eternal recurrence convinced most scholars of two points. The first is that the eternal recurrence of the same logically precludes any memory of such eternal recurrence, since the addition of memory would bring change. The second point is that Nietzsche is most charitably interpreted as proposing,

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<sup>42</sup> See Loeb 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Nehamas 1985, p. 160–162; Higgins 1987, p. 187–188; Clark 1990, p. 255–260; Tanner 1992, p. xiv; Groff 2003, p. 35; Young 2003, p. 90–92; Anderson 2005, p. 200–203; Richardson 2006, p. 224–225; Large 2007, p. xvii.

not a true cosmological theory, but rather a thought-experiment for testing one's affirmation of one's *non*-recurring life. Given these two assumptions, there is of course little chance of noticing the ideas of circular time and prospective memory that motivate Zarathustra's performance of redemptive backward-willing.

However, I have argued at length elsewhere that Simmel was mistaken and that both of his points should be rejected.<sup>44</sup> In the first place, a memory of eternal recurrence does not bring any change as long as this memory is itself eternally recurring. But Simmel and others have mistakenly assumed some original or first iteration in which there is not yet any such memory. Actually, then, cosmological eternal recurrence entails that the mnemonic human animal must have a memory of eternal recurrence that is itself eternally recurring.<sup>45</sup> Second, if we suppose that life does not actually recur, then my desire for it to recur is actually proof of my life-denial. If life does not recur, and there is no afterlife, then my life is transitory and my death is final. So, wanting my life to be eternal and wanting my death not to be final would be proof of my wanting life to be other than it is. Strictly speaking, then, the desire for life's eternal recurrence can only be a test of life-affirmation if life does indeed eternally recur. Thus when Nietzsche himself confesses that he does not want to live *again* and that he has therefore failed to affirm life, this is because he believes that it is a necessary feature of life that it does indeed eternally recur. And since his *amor fati* strategy for affirming life cannot help him to want to live again, it follows that this strategy does not actually ensure his affirmation of life.<sup>46</sup>

I think this last conclusion helps to explain the many skeptical questions I reviewed earlier concerning the effectiveness and authenticity of Nietzsche's

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<sup>44</sup> See Loeb 2010, 2011a, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Brian Domino misses this point in his interpretation of eternal recurrence (Domino 2012, p. 288–290).

<sup>46</sup> According to Simon May, willing eternal recurrence is a “more thoroughgoing affirmation of temporality” and a more “stringent test” than *amor fati* because the latter “is consistent with willing one lifetime and saying ‘that’s enough!’ – an attitude that is still resigned, and which is still compatible with seeking an eventual exit from this world, from time, and from suffering.” By contrast, May claims, “affirming the Eternal Return is not consistent with welcoming any exit from time or suffering” (May 2009, p. 98). However, May himself believes that life is actually *non*-recurring, and that there is really only one lifetime, and that there is indeed an eventual exit from this world. But this means that he is committed to arguing that *amor fati* is the more thoroughgoing affirmation of temporality and the more stringent test of life affirmation. Willing the eternal recurrence of *non*-recurring life means adopting what May calls a life-denying metaphysics of transcendence, and May admits as much when he says that the test of strength for an individual who fears final death and the absence of any eternity would be to affirm a finite existence (2009, p. 98 note 25). For more on this issue, see Loeb 2013, p. 662–669.

*amor fati* strategy. When we think closely about Nietzsche's account of *amor fati*, and when we scrutinize his attempt to exemplify this account in his autobiography, we cannot help but recognize his failure to achieve what he valued most. But this is as it should be, for now we are forced to take seriously Nietzsche's celebration of his artistic creation of Zarathustra. As Nietzsche explains in the *Genealogy* (GM III 4), it is best to separate an artist from his work and not to take the artist as seriously as his work. Nietzsche thus writes his autobiography in order to show his readers that he himself is not what he is able to represent, conceive and express. Just as a Homer would not have created an Achilles if he had been an Achilles, and a Goethe would not have created a Faust if he had been a Faust, so too a Nietzsche would not have created a Zarathustra if he had been a Zarathustra.

## 9 Conclusion

In this essay, I have proposed a new interpretation of *Ecce Homo* that shows Nietzsche casting himself in a much more modest and self-critical light than has so far been supposed. On my reading, the chief point of Nietzsche's autobiography is to draw up a catalogue of his all-too-human deficiencies in order to show how he nevertheless triumphed by pointing the way to a future superhuman teacher who would be able to overcome these deficiencies. Nietzsche thus asks his readers to behold the man, himself, so that they might be better able to behold his single greatest achievement, the creation of a new superhuman type, his "son" Zarathustra. He asks his readers to hear his story of how he became what he was in order that they might better understand and appreciate his earlier book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which the protagonist becomes everything that he was not and could never be. In Nietzsche's view, his own greatest all-too-human flaw is that he was unable to affirm life. This is because he was so conditioned by his "idealistic" age and decadent modern culture that he made all the wrong life-decisions about everything that mattered most, such as diet, place, climate, companionship, education, and career. These mistakes robbed him of his great inborn strength and forced him to resort to a kind of theodicean, providential reasoning in which he retrospectively interpreted the unfortunate chance events in his life as indispensable contributions to the achievement of the peak life-moment in which he is writing *Ecce Homo*. But this *amor fati* was not a true life-affirmation because it depended on self-deception and because, more importantly, it did not entail the desire to eternally relive his identical life. Having discovered the truth of cosmological eternal recurrence, Nietzsche despairingly realized that he was not strong or healthy enough to be

able to accept the reality of his life's eternal repetition. So, instead, he prepared the way for a stronger and healthier future age in which there might emerge a superhuman type who would not be ruined by idealistic conditioning and who would therefore not need to resort to delusional providential reasoning in order to affirm life. He fashioned a poetic, mythical, and prophetic story in which the narrative structure exhibits this future teacher's extreme realism and overwhelming desire to eternally relive his identical life – a desire which, paradoxically, is inspired in him by his actual experience of having already eternally relived his identical life.<sup>47</sup>

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47 Thanks to Nick Martin for his helpful editorial advice on this essay.



Thomas Brobjer

# The Roles of Zarathustra and Dionysos in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and Late Philosophy

**Abstract:** This essay examines Nietzsche's two possibly most important symbols generally and especially in *Ecce Homo*, namely, Zarathustra and Dionysos. Zarathustra was the teacher of eternal recurrence, but he also represents the overcoming of morality, as well as atheism, skepticism and the like. Dionysos became an even more important symbol, representing tragedy, life-affirmation, revaluation, the antichrist and immoralism. He more than anything else is a symbol of total affirmation. Zarathustra can be regarded as more or less synonymous with Nietzsche himself, while Dionysos represents a god, the future and Nietzsche's teacher. This fits well and is compatible with the author's claim that *Ecce Homo* is both backward- and forward-looking.

Zarathustra and Dionysos are the two most important symbols in *Ecce Homo*, and in all of Nietzsche's late writings. *Ecce Homo* begins and ends with references to Dionysos, and contains many further references in between: "I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysos" (EH Foreword 2), and ends with "Have I been understood? – *Dionysos against the crucified one...*" (EH IV 9). This emphasis on Dionysos becomes even more pronounced when we know that the planned fourth volume of his *Umwertung aller Werthe* was meant to be entitled *Dionysos* or *Dionysos philosophos*.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, it can be argued that Zarathustra is at least as prominent and important. *Ecce Homo* also begins and ends with references to Zarathustra (immediately after and before those to Dionysos): "Among my writings my *Zarathustra* stands alone. With it I have given humanity the greatest gift it has ever been given. This book, with a voice that stretches over millennia, is not only the most exalted book there is [...] it is also the *most profound* book" (EH Foreword 4) and "I have not said a word just now that I might not have said five years ago through the mouth of Zarathustra. (EH IV 8) Between them are more than twice as many references to Zarathustra as to Dionysos, and these are almost without exception

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1 See KSA 13, 19[8], 22[14] and 23[8 and 13].



longer and more informative than those to Dionysos.<sup>2</sup> To that we can add the very large number of often long quotations from *Also sprach Zarathustra* (frequently without the source being given, though mostly it is obvious).

The usual interpretation of the fact that Zarathustra and *Also sprach Zarathustra* are so enormously pronounced in *Ecce Homo* is that Nietzsche regarded *Also sprach Zarathustra* as by far his most important work. Most scholars today do not agree with this judgement, but admit that this seems to be how Nietzsche regarded it. My argument is that while it is true that Nietzsche regarded *Zarathustra* as by far his most important book among those he had written, he also planned and worked on another even greater work, for which *Ecce Homo* was to be preparatory and about which he also makes many grand claims. Since most previous discussions of *Ecce Homo* have tended to overlook this forward-looking role of *Ecce Homo*, they have falsely understood almost all the congratulatory statements and grand claims to refer only to *Also sprach Zarathustra* – and thus exaggerating Nietzsche’s already excessive comments about that book. Those who read *Ecce Homo* backwards (as an autobiography) have understood the focus of the book to be merely on *Also sprach Zarathustra* rather than on it together with the *Umwertung aller Werthe* and Dionysos. This has probably been part of the reason why the book has relatively low status among contemporary scholars; it is not to *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Ecce Homo* that most readers go to find ‘the new Nietzsche’ or ‘the relevant Nietzsche’ or Nietzsche’s most profound and explicit critique of truth, science, values, history and the self.

My claim is that Nietzsche did enormously emphasize *Also sprach Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*. This is perhaps best seen in his statement in the penultimate section of the last chapter: “I have not said a word just now that I might not have said five years ago through the mouth of Zarathustra.” Nietzsche had already in 1883 and 1884 claimed that *Also sprach Zarathustra* was his “best book”,<sup>3</sup> but he also felt that it only constituted a sort of “preface, entrance hall”<sup>4</sup> for something else, the revaluation of all values, which would require many years of preparation, which now in 1888 had begun to come to fruition.<sup>5</sup> It was when writing *Also sprach Zarathustra* that Nietzsche began the literary revaluation project,

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<sup>2</sup> Dionysos (and related words) are mentioned 29 times in *Ecce Homo*, while Zarathustra appears 79 times.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Overbeck, 1 February 1883. In the letters from 1888, that view becomes common, see, for example, letter to Seydlitz, 12 February 1888: “*ein non plus ultra*”.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Overbeck, 8 March 1884.

<sup>5</sup> Already in the letter to Overbeck, 8 March 1884, Nietzsche writes that if the idea of eternal recurrence will be believed as true “then *everything* will change and turn, and *all* present values will be devalued”.

while the philosophical revaluation project also intensified further at this time. In Nietzsche's eyes, *Also sprach Zarathustra* constituted a stepping stone (perhaps almost a necessary stepping stone), while all the other books are in comparison mere pebbles, to the momentous planned *magnum opus* (*Hauptwerk*), during the autumn and winter 1888 entitled *Umwertung aller Werthe*, in four volumes.<sup>6</sup> Since no one read and understood *Also sprach Zarathustra*, it was natural that he emphasized *both* books in *Ecce Homo*, *Also sprach Zarathustra* and the coming *Umwertung aller Werthe*, both Zarathustra and Dionysos.

Nietzsche seems to do all he can to draw attention to and raise knowledge of Zarathustra while Dionysos may seem to be a symbol of the future, barely visible in the mist of dawn. That is not an unreasonable view, considering that the Dionysos-book was yet to come while the Zarathustra-work was already published, but little read. But what do these figures symbolize, apart from books? What is their relation to one another? Do they ever meet?

If we are able to answer these questions about their roles and meanings – and their relation to one another – we will gain further insight into the role and meaning of both *Ecce Homo* and the unfinished *Umwertung aller Werthe*-project, and perhaps also the philosophical position Nietzsche was moving toward before his collapse. In attempting to answer these questions I will examine Nietzsche's use of these two symbols in *Ecce Homo*, but also in his other late writings.

Perhaps an alternative way to rephrase these questions might be: Was that which Nietzsche planned to treat in *Umwertung aller Werthe* a more philosophical version of the contents of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, or was it meant to go beyond that? Was Nietzsche, as he sometimes suggests, moving into a new phase of his thinking? However, this question cannot be completely answered without a very thorough and extensive examination of Nietzsche's late notebooks, and thus cannot be answered here. One should be aware that it is a question which almost certainly has no simple answer, and can at most be answered by identifying a tendency.<sup>7</sup>

Let us begin by reviewing the roles of Zarathustra and Dionysos in Nietzsche's writings generally. We can start by noting that on the whole they are fairly equal as symbols for Nietzsche when measured by how frequently he used them. Throughout his writings, there are approximately an equal number of references to them, though of course they differ in that Nietzsche's interest in Dionysos

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<sup>6</sup> See Brobjer 2011.

<sup>7</sup> According to Nietzsche's own statements in letters, it seems that he regarded it as the latter, that he was in or attempted to move into, a new phase.

began early and was at its most intensive during the early 1870s, while he only ‘discovered’ Zarathustra in 1881 and referred to the figure most frequently during the years 1882 to 1885. More relevant, at least for our interest here, is that the late Nietzsche’s use of these symbols, that is, his use of them after 1885, is almost evenly distributed.

## 1 Zarathustra as Symbol

Nietzsche found and picked up the figure of Zarathustra as his spokesman while reading the cultural historian and anthropologist Friedrich von Hellwald’s *Culturgeschichte in ihrer natürlichen Entstehung bis zur Gegenwart* (Augsburg, 1874) in August 1881. The introduction of *Also sprach Zarathustra* (and thus also of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, section 342) is almost a direct quotation from Hellwald, and this is even truer of Nietzsche’s very first reference to Zarathustra in his notebook, where the introduction of the figure Zarathustra is set immediately under a draft title (presumably of a planned book), underlined several times, “Midday and Eternity” (both terms are closely associated with the idea of eternal recurrence) and a subtitle: “*Outlines for a new life*” (KSA 9, 11[195]).<sup>8</sup> The next two notes are on the same theme, and the second one, under the title “*Zum Entwurf einer neuen Art zu leben*” is dated “Sils-Maria 26 August 1881” – that is, Nietzsche found the figure of Zarathustra just a few weeks after his discovery of the idea of eternal recurrence, which occurred early in August 1881.

We can thus here not only see the origin of the figure Zarathustra for Nietzsche, but more importantly, see the close connection between Zarathustra and the idea of eternal recurrence, and the fact that he already then planned a work divided into four books, in which Prometheus for a brief period was going to play a role, and the fourth book was going to be ‘dithyrambic’ and present the idea of eternal recurrence.<sup>9</sup> This draft can perhaps he regarded as a very early draft for both *Also sprach Zarathustra* and the *Umwertung aller Werthe*, before they had even become separate projects. Later in 1881, Nietzsche planned a work with the name Zarathustra in the title, and uses the expression “*So sprach Zarathustra*”, which soon became “*Also sprach Zarathustra*”.<sup>10</sup> By this time he had already written a number of very *Also sprach Zarathustra*-sounding notes. We should thus not be surprised that Nietzsche already in 1882, the year before

<sup>8</sup> The subtitle was immediately changed to ‘*Draft for a new way to live*’.

<sup>9</sup> See KSA 9, 11[197]. Prometheus was quickly replaced by Zarathustra and/or Dionysos.

<sup>10</sup> See KSA 9, 12[225].

he wrote the first book of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, knew that he was going to move into a new phase and would write this book (as he said on the cover of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*).

After 1885 and the intensive concern with Zarathustra in the years before that, Nietzsche all but avoids Zarathustra as a symbol in his notes. However, references to Zarathustra (or to the title or book *Also sprach Zarathustra*) do occur on a number of occasions. Most frequently these are in relation to a planned book of poems involving Zarathustra (which eventually were published as *Dionysos-Dithyramben*, but which appear already in the notes from 1885 to 1886, or earlier, but most frequently from the summer of 1888 onwards). Otherwise Zarathustra appears in general references to *Also sprach Zarathustra* (especially in drafts to prefaces to *Morgenröthe*, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* and *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*), as part of titles of books and chapters, and in several notes in which he states that he should not have written *Also sprach Zarathustra* in German and that he with it has been throwing pearls before swine, and how difficult *Also sprach Zarathustra* is to understand (one must have suffered and enjoyed every word of it). In the notes from 1886 to 1888 we thus see that Zarathustra and *Also sprach Zarathustra* were important, but we do not see signs of the great importance that he seems to attribute to them in *Ecce Homo*.

Nietzsche began to use Zarathustra as a symbol and spokesperson in his published works already in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, but in the end he deleted all but the last reference to him in that work.<sup>11</sup> Instead he wrote the four books of *Also sprach Zarathustra* between 1883 and early 1885. In a number of notes from 1885 he considered one or several further books about Zarathustra, in the last of which Zarathustra was going to die.<sup>12</sup> This project was not followed up and completed. Nietzsche's next book, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, was written to expand and elaborate on themes from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, or, perhaps more accurately, it was written to discuss ideas and themes which had occupied Nietzsche during the *Also sprach Zarathustra*-period, many of which had not entered *Also sprach Zarathustra*. It is, after all, a sort of time-less book, while much of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* is concerned with a critique of modernity, and thus discusses

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11 Originally, Zarathustra was mentioned in GS 68, 106, 125 (in the first draft it was Zarathustra who proclaimed the death of God), 291, 332 and 342. Furthermore Nietzsche says much later, in his letter to Fritzsche of 29 April 1887, while proofreading the fifth book which he added in 1887, that he has made a number of additions to it for the purpose of giving it "yet more the character of a *preparation for Also sprach Zarathustra*" (KGB III.5, 63–64).

12 See KSA 11, 34[144 and 145], 35[39, 41, 73, 74, 75] and 39[3]. See also KSA 12, 2[129], where Zarathustra also dies, although this seems not to be a continuation of *Also sprach Zarathustra* but probably a draft for a book of poems.

themes not always suitable for *Also sprach Zarathustra*. *Zur Genealogie der Moral* was written to elaborate on themes from *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (as was stated on the cover of the book), especially from the last chapter. In fact, in both *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* and *Zur Genealogie der Moral* Nietzsche even avoided many themes, often closely akin to those in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, which he planned to treat later in *Umwertung aller Werthe*. In *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Zarathustra is only mentioned once, in the long poem, *From High Mountains: Epode*, which ends the book, and where Nietzsche describes his life of increasing solitude after *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches* until Zarathustra became his new friend. He there describes how “one became two”, that is, how he became Zarathustra and himself, or, better expressed, how Zarathustra was born out of Nietzsche.

In *Zur Genealogie der Moral* Zarathustra is referred to three times, in the last section of the preface and in the second and third essays. They all contain or suggest high praise of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, but with little actual content. In the last section of the preface Nietzsche emphasizes the stern requirements for understanding the book:

For example, so far as my Zarathustra is concerned, I don't consider anyone knowledgeable about it who has not at some time or another been deeply wounded by and profoundly delighted with every word in it. For only then can he enjoy the privilege of sharing with reverence in the halcyon element out of which that work was born, in its sunny clarity, distance, breadth, and certainty. (GM Preface 8)

Having called forth the anti-Christ and anti-nihilist of the future in the penultimate section of the second essay, Nietzsche in the short last one gives the honour to Zarathustra:

But what am I talking about here? Enough, enough! At this stage there's only one thing appropriate for me to do: keep quiet. Otherwise, I'll make the mistake of arrogating to myself something which only someone younger is free to do, someone “with a greater future,” someone more powerful than I—something which only Zarathustra is free to do, Zarathustra the Godless. . . (GM II 25)

He begins the third essay with a motto from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, but otherwise does not refer to him or it in the essay. We thus see a relatively modest role for Zarathustra in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* and in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, but nonetheless signs and claims that Zarathustra is of the utmost importance.

Both the figure of Zarathustra and the book *Also sprach Zarathustra* are given extremely prominent roles in *Ecce Homo*, much more so than in other books written during his last active year, 1888. However, even in the other late books, although Zarathustra is not always referred to frequently, he is still iden-

tified as a paramount symbol. In *Der Fall Wagner* Zarathustra is only mentioned once, in the preface, where it is stated that to possess the far-seeing eye of Zarathustra makes one realize the corruption of our own time. In *Götzen-Dämmerung*, in the 'Fabel'-chapter, a brief history of how we have falsely viewed reality from Plato until the present, Zarathustra represents the last stage mentioned, when the error has been removed. Furthermore, *Also sprach Zarathustra* is referred to as the most profound book – and at the same time he places the *Umwertung aller Werthe* (and perhaps Dionysos) beside it<sup>13</sup> – and *Götzen-Dämmerung* ends with a long quotation from it. In the *Dionysos-Dithyramben* (which for a long time Nietzsche intended to call *Songs of Zarathustra*), Zarathustra is the main character in five of the nine poems, while Dionysos is present in only one of them. In *Der Antichrist*, which was meant to be published after *Ecce Homo*, the role of Zarathustra is more limited. The first reference, in the preface, emphasizes Zarathustra as an important stepping-stone or precondition: “This book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them is even living yet. Possibly they are the readers who understand my *Zarathustra*”. The only two other occurrences are less significant; Nietzsche uses and quotes Zarathustra against notions that martyrdom proves anything about truth, and he points out that all great intellects, including Zarathustra, are skeptics (AC 53–54).

There are probably two reasons why Zarathustra's presence in *Der Antichrist* is more limited than in the other books of 1888. The first is that Zarathustra after all is a literary figure, the main character in the metaphorical work *Also sprach Zarathustra*, which Nietzsche called both a symphony and a poem. As such, he is very useful as a metaphor or simile or for poetic descriptions – but less fitting in the kind of direct arguments and polemics which *Der Antichrist* consists of. The second is that it seems likely that Dionysos was meant to take over as Nietzsche's supreme symbol, at least in the fourth volume of the *Umwertung aller Werthe*. Their respective roles in the first three volumes are perhaps an open question, but a certain reduction in the frequency of references to Zarathustra seems natural.

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<sup>13</sup> In the last section, 51, of the chapter 'Reconnaissance Raids of an Untimely Man' in *Götzen-Dämmerung* Nietzsche writes: “I have given humanity the most profound book it possesses, my *Zarathustra*: I shall shortly give it the most independent one” (TI IX 51).

## 2 Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo*

Nietzsche's references to and claims about Zarathustra and *Also sprach Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo* are very frequent and enormously pronounced. However, the references to and quotations from *Also sprach Zarathustra* do not quite fill the book, as some readers may feel, but are primarily limited to the last section of the preface and to two chapters; the review of *Also sprach Zarathustra* and the final chapter.<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of this essay we saw how strongly Nietzsche emphasized *Also sprach Zarathustra* in the last section of the preface. However, the other message he puts across is almost the opposite one – the existential one that the reader should not believe in or follow Zarathustra, but instead find and follow himself.

In the first chapter of *Ecce Homo*, Zarathustra is used in Nietzsche's argument against pity and compassion, with reference to the fourth book of *Also sprach Zarathustra* (EH I 4) and referred to as a dithyramb to solitude, that is to say to intellectual cleanliness and how to avoid disgust of man (EH I 8). In the second chapter, Nietzsche makes two more personal points in relation to *Also sprach Zarathustra*. The first that its style is outstanding (which is a claim that also recurs later in the book), but more importantly how deeply touched he himself always is by reading it.<sup>15</sup> The second point, also in section 4, emphasizes how different it is in comparison to *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (presumably to all three volumes) – thus confirming that he felt that he had moved into a completely new phase since then.

Considering Nietzsche's claims that *Also sprach Zarathustra* is his best book, it is not surprising that its place is prominent in the chapter 'Why I Write Such Good Books'. Most of the references to Zarathustra in the first part of the chapter,

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**14** The 25 quotations from, or specific references to, *Also sprach Zarathustra* in *Ecce homo* are fairly equally distributed to the first three books of *Also sprach Zarathustra*: four to the first book, ten to the second and eleven to the third book. There are no quotations from the fourth book, which had only been published in a tiny private edition, and only about ten copies distributed. He once refers to it, in section four of 'Why I Am So Wise', here under the title "The Temptation of Zarathustra", under which title he considered a possible re-publication of it.

**15** The main two reasons for this are likely to be because it contains some aspects of the goal and "task" which Nietzsche also now strives toward, and is related to the fact that *Also sprach Zarathustra* is to a remarkable degree autobiographical in the sense that by it and in it Nietzsche succeeded in overcoming much in himself and sublimate it into this mixture of art and philosophy. See, for example, his letter to Overbeck of 12 February 1887 (KGB III.5, 21). See also Brobjer 2008.



before the reviews, are either Nietzsche's own high praise of the work or references to how it has been misunderstood by reviewers and friends, and he refers to *Also sprach Zarathustra* when he speaks of his knowledge of women. He here also calls Zarathustra "that *destroyer* of morality" and attempts to clarify the concept of the overman (*Übermensch*) by negative example and by distancing it from Darwinism and Carlyle-type heroism.

In his review of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, eternal recurrence is referred to as Zarathustra's teaching, and he claims that Zarathustra constitutes an "immense act of purifying and consecrating humanity" (EH III BT 4). Thereafter, almost the whole of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* is treated as merely a preparation for *Also sprach Zarathustra* (and perhaps also to the revaluation). The longest review, by far, is that of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and in it we encounter a fairly detailed and reliable (but also enormously self-congratulatory) account of his writing of the first three books of *Also sprach Zarathustra* (the fourth book, which he had not published, is not mentioned here), and his mental exhaustion thereafter. On several occasions he refers to the search for new ideals and the revaluation of values. The chapter culminates in the last three sections, 6 to 8, where the figures of Zarathustra and Dionysos are merged, and it, or they, are described as representing a total affirmation of reality (see more below in the section on their meeting).

Just as *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* was largely regarded as preparatory to *Also sprach Zarathustra*, so too is *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* largely regarded as a necessary recuperation after *Also sprach Zarathustra*. In his discussion of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, the importance of Zarathustra is emphasized, and not only as a critic of present values but also for suggesting the new revalued values: "Above all, there was no *counter-ideal* – till Zarathustra" (EH III GM).

In the final chapter of *Ecce Homo*, Zarathustra continues to be strongly emphasized. He is described as more truthful and braver than any other thinker, which enabled him to overcome morality and to become (the symbol of) the first immoralist. Zarathustra is then used and quoted to criticize the present human ideal, "the good men", including both optimists and pessimists. Zarathustra is used to suggest an alternative human ideal of "the exceptional man", "a relatively superhuman type" that "conceives reality *as it is*" – but who perhaps will be regarded as evil when measured by present values. The last reference to Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo* is the paramount claim, quoted above, that Nietzsche has said nothing in *Ecce Homo* that he could not have said through the figure of Zarathustra five years earlier.

Zarathustra is the teacher of eternal recurrence, and as such enormously important to Nietzsche. On the other hand, I think one must say that both Zarathustra and Nietzsche failed as teachers. Neither in the book *Also sprach Zarathustra*,



where Nietzsche and Zarathustra more suggest than expound on the idea of eternal recurrence, nor outside of the book, are people aware of this idea, nor are the few that have that knowledge persuaded by it. A poetic and metaphorical intimation of eternal recurrence was not sufficient. Nietzsche knew that he also needed to present it (and other aspects) as philosophy – as the philosophy of the god Dionysos – and that was one of the purposes of the *Umwerthung aller Werthe*.

However much Zarathustra and *Also sprach Zarathustra* are praised in late notes and in *Ecce Homo*, Zarathustra always represents the present and the past, not the future.<sup>16</sup> In fact, if we examine the relatively few philosophical notes from after the summer of 1888 (but this is also true for all the notes already from after the summer 1887), and which appear not to be early drafts to *Ecce Homo* or to the *Dionysos-Dithyramben*,<sup>17</sup> Zarathustra does not occur at all.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, in Nietzsche's late letters, Zarathustra (most often the book rather than the figure) is fairly frequently referred to, and in 1888 several of these references praised the book almost to extremes, in line with how he speaks of it in *Ecce Homo*.

### 3 Dionysos as Symbol

Nietzsche's interest in Dionysos goes back to long before he became professor and published *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, before even his university studies; it goes back as far as his schooldays at Schulpforta.<sup>19</sup> It reached a climax during

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**16** It may seem that the reference to Zarathustra at the end of the second essay of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, quoted above, is an exception which points forward, but in my reading, the purpose of this section is to point the reader to go and read *Also sprach Zarathustra*, i.e. he points backward in time rather than forward.

**17** Three notes also concern Nietzsche's plans to publish the fourth book of *Also sprach Zarathustra* (KSA 13, 22[13, 15 and 16]).

**18** Except in two problematic notes from September or October 1888, KSA 13, 22[23] and 23[10], in which the same statement is repeated: "The highest law of life, formulated by Zarathustra, demands that one is *without pity* towards all rejects and refuse of life, – that one *exterminate* [...] *Christianity* in a single word". It is problematic in the sense that at first it seems to be enormously ruthless, and shows contempt for the weak – but on closer reading he seems to mean life-denying values and ideologies, and therefore his only example is Christianity. It is also problematic because it is so untypical of him, he writes it down four times in a row, virtually identically, and in that it seems to go against his claim in *Götzen-Dämmerung* that one should affirm enemies (including Christianity), not eradicate them.

**19** In a letter to Pinder, 24 September 1859, Nietzsche mentions a no longer extant German school essay he had written on a theme of ancient mythology, entitled '*Ino und Athamas*'. This possibly constitutes Nietzsche's first encounter with the figure of Dionysos, which later

the years 1869 to 1872. However, this early concept of Dionysos is somewhat different from the later one, so we can for the moment leave this to one side and notice that already immediately after 1872 Dionysos all but disappeared from Nietzsche's writings (including his notes and letters).

To understand the role of Dionysos in Nietzsche's late published books fully, one needs to be aware of the development of the symbol Dionysos in Nietzsche's notes. During the period 1873 to 1882 Dionysos is almost completely absent from Nietzsche's notebooks. However, during the Zarathustra-period, especially from 1884 onward, Dionysos acquires a relatively prominent place. Already by the summer of 1883 Nietzsche seems to consider him as an important symbol.<sup>20</sup> By 1884 he plans to use Dionysos in the title of his next book.<sup>21</sup> At this time, during the second half of 1884, it seems as if Nietzsche also ordered Friedrich Creuzer's *Dionysus* (Heidelberg, 1809), although he probably never received it and it is

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will become so important for him, for Ino was the sister of Semele, Dionysos' mother, and the one to whom the god-child was entrusted. Also in 1859 Nietzsche began to occupy his mind – and writing – with the figure Prometheus which would remain an important preoccupation for a number of the following years. It seems as if Nietzsche's interest in Prometheus foreshadows his later interest in Dionysos (for example, Nietzsche selected an etching of Prometheus for the cover of his first book, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*). Nietzsche's first work on Dionysos can be found in his commentary on the first choir-song of Sophocles' *King Oedipus* with the title 'Primum Oedipodis regis carmen choricum', written as a school essay at Pforta in Latin, Greek and German during the spring of 1864 (BAW 2/364–399). Here Nietzsche discusses, among other things, the origins of Greek drama. He emphasizes the difference between German and Greek drama and the importance of the choir and music in ancient times; indeed, he argues that the Greek drama had its *origin* in lyric and music. He emphasizes the importance of both Apollo and Dionysos. We see here many of the fundamental themes of Nietzsche's first book, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872).

**20** KSA 10, 8[14], summer of 1883. This note, which begins "My first solution: **Dionysian wisdom**", seems to reflect Nietzsche's reawakened awareness of Dionysos, which occurs while he is closely reading and annotating Leopold Schmidt's *Die Ethik der alten Griechen*, 2 vols (1882), and planning to write a text on the Greeks as having profound knowledge of the human situation. While reading Schmidt, Nietzsche also for the first time connects his idea of eternal recurrence with the Greeks and their mysteries (KSA 10, 8[15]), which only comes to expression in his published works at the end of *Götzen-Dämmerung*. Nietzsche was at this time working on the first book of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and also liberating himself from his more 'positivistic' free-spirit period, see e.g. KSA 10, 9[9].

**21** See KSA 11, 25[2], March 1884 and KSA 11, 29[65], from late 1884. The former note seems to refer to a book of poems, while for the latter there is no information whether it was planned as a book of prose or poetry.

not in his library,<sup>22</sup> but he also in November 1884 bought another work by Creuzer in which Dionysos is present, his *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, four volumes (1836–1843).<sup>23</sup> By the spring of 1885, at the latest, Nietzsche had certainly begun making plans for a book on his philosophy, with Dionysos both in the title and as a major figure in it: “Dionysos: An Attempt to Philosophize in a Divine Manner”.<sup>24</sup> Thereafter follow a string of notes in which Dionysos constitutes either the title of planned books or parts of books.<sup>25</sup> We should thus not be surprised when Nietzsche in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* alludes at a future work involving Dionysos. In fact, in Nietzsche’s plan for *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, in the winter of 1885 to 1886, with, at that stage, eleven chapters, the last chapter was summarized with the word “Dionysos”, revealing the importance of the penultimate section 295 (discussed below).<sup>26</sup> Already at this time, during the summer of 1885, Nietzsche pronounced that “the Christian teaching was the opposite to the Dionysian one” (KSA 11, 41[7]),<sup>27</sup> which we recognize from the end of *Ecce Homo*. In his notes for working through the fifth book of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, he summarizes 14 themes, of which two – “Pessimism and Dionysianism” and “Against Romanticism” – were later combined in section 370, ‘What is Romanticism?’ (discussed below) (KSA 12, 2[204]). We can again learn from the notes that Dionysos is more important than it may appear for those who have only read Nietzsche’s published books. The Dionysian is frequently set against pessimism. One important note is called “My new road towards ‘Yes’”, in which he briefly describes his new pessimism which does not lead to a rejection of life but to a Dionysian affirmation of the world (KSA 12, 10[3]). As an important aesthetic symbol, the Dionysian is also often set against romanticism in the notes. At the time of writing *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, during the summer of 1887, the title ‘*Dionysos philosophos*’ occurs for the first time (KSA 12, 5[93]),<sup>28</sup> and Nietzsche speaks of “my Dionysos-ideal ...”,

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**22** The bookseller Lorentz, in two notes from October and November 1884, tells Nietzsche that he is searching for this book for him. See letter to Overbeck, 3 March 1888, and KGB III 7/3.1, p. 275.

**23** These four volumes contain no annotations, but a number of dog-ears which Nietzsche often used to mark pages.

**24** See KSA 11, 34[181 and 182], where the first note is an early draft of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 295.

**25** See KSA 11, 34[191, 192, 201, 248] and 35[26, 47, 73], 36[6] and 42[6].

**26** See KSA 12, 1[187], 2[11 and 44] and 4[4].

**27** See also KSA 11, 42[1].

**28** Possibly, connected to it are 9[115] and 10[95]. The first is a long note for a satyr-play about Theseus, Ariadne and Dionysos.

here in relation to the necessity for dissimulation and play-acting (KSA 12, 10[159]).

In many notes from early 1888, Nietzsche extensively discusses *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, and in so doing also defines the meaning of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Although he implicitly claims to discuss his own views as expressed in the early 1870s (and *both* these artistic symbols are indeed discussed as more or less equally important, as he viewed them then, while in the late 1880s he tended to ignore the Apollonian), but, at least for the Dionysian, he seems to describe it more along the line of what it meant to him in 1888:

The word “*Dionysian*” means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change; the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction. (KSA 13, 14[14])<sup>29</sup>

This affirmative – and Dionysian – view of the world is referred to in a number of late notes: “A highest state of affirmation of existence will be created, in which even pain, every sort of pain, is ever included as a means to ascending: the *tragic-Dionysian* state” (KSA 13, 14[24]).<sup>30</sup> Another theme in the later notes is that with which *Ecce Homo* ends, Dionysos against the crucified one, against Christianity.

The last references to Dionysos in the notes, from September and October 1888, are as part of the listings of the titles of the coming work *Umwertung aller Werthe*, specifically the fourth volume with Dionysos in the title,<sup>31</sup> and as an early draft to the discussion of Dionysos in the last chapter of *Götzen-Dämmerung*.<sup>32</sup>

In the published works, Dionysos only returns after having been absent since *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872), in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886), that is, shortly after he had decided and begun work on his *magnum opus* in four volumes. Dionysos is only present in a single section,<sup>33</sup> the penultimate one, 295,

<sup>29</sup> I am quoting Kaufmann’s translation of this note as *Der Wille zur Macht* 1050.

<sup>30</sup> Compare also KSA 13, 14[33], 16[32] and 17[3]. Especially 16[32] is an important note, in which both *amor fati* and eternal recurrence is related to the Dionysian.

<sup>31</sup> KSA 13, 19[8], 22[14] and 23[8 and 13].

<sup>32</sup> KSA 13, 24[1].

<sup>33</sup> Dionysos was also emphasized in part of the early draft to section 36, see KSA 11, 38[12] and KSA 14, p. 727.

but there he is presented precisely as Nietzsche's teacher and a symbol of the coming work. Nietzsche spends a full page on describing Dionysos (and a large part of this was also quoted in section six of 'Why I Write Such Good Books' in *Ecce Homo*). He thereafter continues:

Meanwhile, I have learned much, all too much more about the philosophy of this god [...] I, the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysos: and perhaps I might at last begin to give you, my friends, a little taste of this philosophy, in so far as I am permitted to? In a hushed voice, as is only proper: for it involves much that is secret, new, unfamiliar, strange, uncanny. The very fact that Dionysos is a philosopher, and that gods too therefore philosophize, seems a by no means harmless novelty and one calculated to excite suspicion precisely among philosophers [...] Certainly the above-named god went further, very much further, in conversations of this sort, and was always many steps ahead of me. (BGE 295)<sup>34</sup>

The most important message of this penultimate section is not what it says, but what it promises – that it points forward to a coming work where Nietzsche has gone one step further in his philosophical development with the help of Dionysos, that is, to the *Umwertung aller Werthe*, and especially to its fourth volume, *Dionysos philosophos*.<sup>35</sup> Also the second edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1887), with the added fifth book, ends by pointing to the revaluation of all values-project in the penultimate section, 382, with a whole page description of the search for new ideals and values, and although Dionysos is not explicitly mentioned, he is indicated as the god of the theatre and of tragedy in several ways,

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**34** Nietzsche continues after the quoted text: “I would have to extol his courage as investigator and discoverer, his daring honesty, truthfulness and love of wisdom. [...] [Dionysos says about man] I like him: I often ponder how I might advance him and make him stronger, more evil and more profound than he is [...] also more beautiful” (BGE 295). Important early versions of this text where Dionysos plays a prominent role are KSA 11, 34[181], 41[9] and KSA 12, 2[25].

**35** Burnham (2007) and Lampert (2001) who in their often profound and insightful commentary and interpretation of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* respectively, fail to see and comment that this book, and especially the final sections, point forward to the *Umwertung aller Werthe*. The same is true of Acampora and Ansell Pearson. The authors strongly emphasize that *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* builds up an “anticipation for great things to come throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*” (Acampora and Ansell Pearson 2011, p. 192), and they emphasize the penultimate section of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 295, and Dionysos in it – but throughout the study they remain *within* the book – and thus never mention Nietzsche's plans to write a *Hauptwerk* (which is stated both in the subtitle of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* – “Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future” – and on the cover, where he had listed *Der Wille zur Macht* in four volumes as a work in progress). The expectation Nietzsche is building up in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* is obviously for his planned *Hauptwerk*.

including in the very last words “the tragedy *begins*”.<sup>36</sup> However, Dionysos occurs only explicitly in one section of the fifth book of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (written and added at the end of 1886), in the pivotal section 370, where the Dionysian represents the creative suffering from the overfullness of life as opposed to romantic suffering and creation out of poverty, as Nietzsche’s most important criteria for distinguishing higher and lower forms of art and music. Furthermore, the Dionysian is also used as a counterpart to pessimism, not as its opposite, optimism, but as a sort of tragic pessimism, which Nietzsche calls Dionysian pessimism. The use of Dionysos and the Dionysian in this section is important, but does not as explicitly point forward to his coming work *Umwerthung aller Werthe* as at the end of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, although his claims that the Dionysian pessimism will come some day may also indicate that it was one of the themes he planned to expand upon in the coming work. The next time Dionysos occurs in Nietzsche’s published works is in a somewhat vague but important statement at the end of the penultimate section of the preface to *Zur Genealogie der Moral*:

But on the day when we say with full hearts: ‘Onwards! our old morality is part of the *comedy* too!’, on that day we will have discovered a new plot and potential for the Dionysian drama of the ‘*Fate of the Soul*’ – : and one which that grand old eternal comic poet of our existence will exploit, on that you may depend!... (GM Preface 7)<sup>37</sup>

Thereafter Dionysos becomes a major figure and symbol in *Götzen-Dämmerung* and *Ecce Homo*.<sup>38</sup>

In *Götzen-Dämmerung*, Dionysos has a similar role to that which he will have in *Ecce Homo*, but not quite as pronounced; Nietzsche claims to have learnt from Dionysos, and we are given some allusions to what he represents, especially aesthetically. Furthermore, in the whole last chapter, ‘What I Owe the Ancients’, Dionysos is strongly emphasized and the teaching of eternal recurrence, as well as tragedy, are closely associated with him. We can note that Dionysos is more present than Zarathustra in *Götzen-Dämmerung*. In the last section of the book (ex-

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<sup>36</sup> This is also a reference to Zarathustra, for that work begins with those three words (and that is also the case in the very last section of the fourth book of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* where Zarathustra is introduced).

<sup>37</sup> “An dem Tage aber, wo wir aus vollem Herzen sagen: ‘vorwärts! auch unsre alte Moral gehört in die Komödie!’ haben wir für das dionysische Drama vom ‘Schicksal der Seele’ eine neue Verwicklung und Möglichkeit entdeckt —: und er wird sie sich schon zu Nutzen machen, darauf darf man wetten, er, der grosse alte ewige Komödiendichter unsers Daseins!...” (GM Preface 7).

<sup>38</sup> ‘Dionysos’ or ‘Dionysian’ are mentioned 18 times in *Götzen-Dämmerung*, and on 29 occasions in *Ecce Homo*. He is not mentioned in *Der Fall Wagner* and *Der Antichrist*.

cept the final quotations from *Also sprach Zarathustra*) there is again a strong reference to Dionysos, and just as in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* and *Ecce Homo*, a promise of what was to come is given: “I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysos – I, the teacher of eternal recurrence ...” (TI X 5).<sup>39</sup>

## 4 Dionysos in *Ecce Homo*

Nietzsche begins *Ecce Homo* by emphasizing that he is a follower of the philosopher Dionysos (in line with what he had said in the final sections of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* and *Götzen-Dämmerung*). His second reference gives an example of this – he claims that his knowledge and understanding of women comes from Dionysos. Not surprisingly, Dionysos figures prominently in Nietzsche’s review of his first book, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*.<sup>40</sup> He claims that one of the two greatest new insights of the book is: “its understanding of the *Dionysian* phenomenon among the Greeks – it provides the first psychology of it and sees it as the single root of all Greek art”. He also clearly states here its most important function: “in the Dionysian symbol the outermost limit of *affirmation* is reached” (EH III BT 1).

In *Der Antichrist*, Nietzsche declares “Let us not undervalue this: *we ourselves*, we free spirits, are already a ‘revaluation of all values’, an *incarnate* declaration of war and victory over all ancient conceptions of ‘true’ and ‘untrue’” (AC 13). The “we” are not clearly defined (and in *Götzen-Dämmerung* Nietzsche says: “I say we out of politeness”), but is likely to include those to whom he refers at the end of the second section: “Anyone who not only understands the word “Dionysian” but understands *himself* in the word “Dionysian” has no need for a refutation of Plato or Christianity or Schopenhauer – he can *smell the decay...*” (EH III BT 2).

Nietzsche continues to give more variants of his definition of the Dionysian, in quoting himself from the last chapter of *Götzen-Dämmerung*: “Saying yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems; the will to life rejoicing in the *sacrifice* of its highest types to its own inexhaustibility – *this* is what I called Di-

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39 In a letter to Gast of 30 October 1888, he writes about this ending: “Sind Sie zufrieden, daß ich den Schluß mit der *Dionysos-Moral* gemacht habe? Es fiel mir ein, daß diese Reihe Begriffe um keinen Preis in diesem Vademecum meiner Philosophie fehlen dürfe. Mit den paar Sätzen über die Griechen darf ich Alles herausfordern, was über sie gesagt ist. – Zum Schluß jene Hammer-Rede aus dem Zarathustra—vielleicht, *nach* diesem Buche, *hörbar*... Ich selbst höre sie nicht ohne einen eiskalten Schauer durch den ganzen Leib.”

40 Nietzsche seems to begin with a self-critique of how he set up the two principles Apollonian and Dionysian and made them into metaphysical principles.



onysian [...] *being oneself* the eternal joy of becoming, that joy which also encompasses the *joy of destruction ...*” (EH III BT 3). Nietzsche claims to be the first who transforms this essentially artistic psychology “into a philosophical pathos”. This is an interesting reformulation of his task – of what he is attempting to achieve by the revaluation of all values and in the *Umwertung aller Werthe*. This has not yet been done – he summarizes: “*tragic wisdom* is lacking”. However, he gives some examples of what such philosophical pathos and tragic wisdom consists of by referring to some aspects of the philosophy of Heraclitus: eternal recurrence and “the affirmation of transience *and destruction*, the decisive feature of any Dionysian philosophy, saying “yes” to opposition and war, *becoming*, with a radical rejection of even the concept of ‘being’” (EH III BT 3). If the revaluation of values succeeds, Nietzsche promises a tragic, Dionysian and life-affirming era in which also music will again be Dionysian.

Nietzsche continues to describe Dionysos and the Dionysian in the last three sections of his review of *Also sprach Zarathustra*. As we shall see below, it is also here that Dionysos and Zarathustra meet and sometimes almost merge. He describes his own inspiration while writing *Also sprach Zarathustra* – an inspiration out of an incomparable surfeit of strength – and then describes and quotes several aspects of *Also sprach Zarathustra* with the words: “*But this is the concept of Dionysos himself*” (see the discussion below).

In the review of his last books, those written after *Also sprach Zarathustra*, he again refers to Dionysian music, Dionysos’ close association with tragedy and to Dionysos as the god of darkness, which connects him to that whole concept of the hidden and the forbidden which Nietzsche often refers to, and had referred to in the foreword of *Ecce Homo*:

Philosophy, as I have understood and lived it so far, is choosing to live in ice and high mountains – seeking out everything alien and questionable in existence, everything that has hitherto been excluded by morality. From the long experience which such a wandering *in the forbidden* gave me, I learnt to view the reasons people have moralized and idealized so far very different from what may be wished: the *hidden* history of philosophers, the psychology of their great names came to light for me – How much truth can a spirit *stand*, how much truth does it *dare?* – for me that became more and more the real measure of value. [...] *Nitimur in vetitum* [‘We strive for what is forbidden’]: under this sign my philosophy will triumph one day, for the only thing that has been altogether forbidden so far is the truth. (EH Foreword 3)

The last chapter of *Ecce Homo*, ‘Why I Am a Destiny’, ends with a reference to Dionysos; before that Nietzsche repeats the claim that he has made several times earlier, namely, that it is part of the Dionysian nature to be “incapable



of separating no-doing from yes-saying” – creating and destroying belong together.

The very last words of *Ecce Homo*, and possibly the very last words Nietzsche published<sup>41</sup> – “*Dionysos against the crucified one...*” – refers to the planned *Umwertung aller Werthe* – both its first volume, *Der Antichrist*, in which he severely criticizes Christianity, and the fourth volume, in which he planned to expound upon Dionysian philosophy, including eternal recurrence. This is supplementary to most of the rest of the chapter, which, primarily points at the third planned volume on the theme of immoralism.

At the very end of his active life, in January 1889, Nietzsche identified with Dionysos, as can be seen in his letters, but by then he was certainly affected by mental confusion and the collapse. On 1 January 1889, he signs one draft note “Nietzsche Dionysos”, but then uses just “Dionysos” in the actual dedication meant to be sent with the *Dionysos-Dithyramben* to the author Mendès. Then, on 3 January 1889, in a note to Cosima Wagner, he writes: “It is an advantage that I am a human being [...] I have among the people of India been Buddha, in Greece Dionysos [...] This time, however, I will come as the victorious Dionysos, that will make the earth into a festival”.<sup>42</sup> Thereafter he signs seven letters as the crucified one, and seven as Dionysos.

After having seen what Dionysos represents to Nietzsche, we also become aware that Nietzsche alludes to him on many occasions even when he is not mentioned explicitly. In fact, many of the late Nietzsche’s writings seem to abound with allusions to Dionysos. Further information about what Dionysos represents to Nietzsche, and to Nietzsche’s affirmative philosophy, can hence be gained if the discussion is broadened to include themes such as the divine, tragedy and the tragic, the transhuman and some of Nietzsche’s references to religion and paganism.

Nietzsche also associates Dionysos with secrets and secret teachings, in keeping with Dionysos’ classical role as a god of the mask, of the theatre and of darkness. Further, Nietzsche also associates him with the secret mysteries that formed part of ancient Greek religion. In a more modern sense, the secret nature of his teaching is due to its being so new, radical and dangerous

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<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche was finalizing three books for publication at the time of his collapse, *Ecce Homo*, *Nietzsche contra Wagner* and *Dionysos-Dithyramben* (and the manuscript of *Der Antichrist* remained unpublished) – so strictly speaking, there can be no definite last published words by him – but there can be little doubt that he regarded *Ecce Homo* as much more important than the other two incomplete but almost completely finished works.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche adds in a last sentence that he has also hung on the cross.

(going against all the present values and customs) that much of it have of necessity been kept secret.

After having examined the evidence we have of Nietzsche's explicit references to Dionysos, it is also important to be aware of the fact that the god is a vague promise of the future. To capture some of his meaning and what he represents one needs perhaps also to use a more synthetic and imaginative approach.

## 5 The Meeting of Zarathustra and Dionysos

Zarathustra and Dionysos hardly ever meet, but a few times they do or at least they come close to meeting. Almost all occasions when they are spoken of in the same breath are in *Ecce Homo*, in the reviews of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and *Also sprach Zarathustra*. However, the first time they occur next to one another is much earlier and in a very different context. In the winter of 1884 to 1885 Nietzsche lists all of his books, from *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, as number one, to *Also sprach Zarathustra*, as number seven. He adds as number eight: "Dionysos or: the Holy Orgies" – thus already then Zarathustra represented the past and present, while Dionysos represented the future (KSA 11, 29[65]). The next time they occur together is also in a plan for a book, in the early summer of 1885, a book divided into four sections or books.<sup>43</sup> In it we see Nietzsche's plan to let Zarathustra die and Dionysos take over. It seems to be a sort of continuation of his *Also sprach Zarathustra*-books: What would happen if everything Zarathustra preached were to come true? This is elaborated in the draft for the first two books (or parts); thereafter the third book is characterized as: "III. The superhuman conception of the world. Dionysos", and the fourth was intended to relate Zarathustra's return to his cave and animals, blessing the world and dying. We thus here see an early version of how Nietzsche planned to let his interest shift from Zarathustra, without rejecting him and what he stands for, to Dionysos. However, in the end Nietzsche never wrote a continuation of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and his Zarathustra never died.

Nietzsche hints at another slightly different but related approach in two letters from 1888, at the time when he planned a public edition of the fourth book of *Also sprach Zarathustra*. He describes this book and its place, to Carl Fuchs, 29 July 1888, with the words: "More precisely, it is an intermission between Zarathustra and that, *which follows* ('I name no names ...')." The more exact title,

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<sup>43</sup> See KSA 11, 35[73].

the more descriptive one, would be: “*The Temptation of Zarathustra: An Intermission*”.<sup>44</sup> It is my hypothesis that the name that is not mentioned is Dionysos.<sup>45</sup>

The later accounts of their meetings, all but one of them in *Ecce Homo*, are more as between two equals, but also more vague and occur mostly through metaphors. For example, in the last section of Nietzsche’s late preface to *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, he describes Zarathustra as “that Dionysian monster” (GTVS 7), and in *Ecce Homo* it is suggested that Nietzsche’s (and possibly also Zarathustra’s) understanding of women is part of their Dionysian dowry (EH III 5). The other sort of metaphorical meeting involves language and style. The dithyramb, or *dithyrambos*, was a form of choral lyric sung to the god Dionysos in Greek antiquity. Nietzsche on several occasions in *Ecce Homo* refers to the whole or parts of *Also sprach Zarathustra* as a dithyramb, for example, “the whole of my *Zarathustra* is a dithyramb to solitude, or, if I have been understood, to *purity*...” (EH I 8). Later, he refers to the poem ‘The Seven Seals’ in the third book of *Also sprach Zarathustra* as a dithyramb (EH III 4), and he says that Zarathustra uses “the language of the *dithyramb*” (EH III Z 7).

The primary and most fundamental ground shared by Zarathustra and Dionysos, the idea of eternal recurrence, is referred to in the third section of the review of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, but a real meeting between the two is avoided. The section begins by referring to a total affirmation of life as Dionysian, and that, before Nietzsche, “this transformation of the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos: *tragic wisdom*” was lacking. But looking for possible predecessors, he states that “the doctrine of the ‘eternal recurrence’, in other words of the unconditional and infinitely repeated circulation of all things – ultimately this doctrine of Zarathustra’s *could* also have been taught already by Heraclitus”. In the next section this kinship is repeated, but more vaguely, with references to the Greek spirit and to tragedy, and with several references to Zarathustra, but they do not actually come together.

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**44** Compare also the letter to Brandes of 8 January 1888, where he expresses himself in a similar way. In the private edition of this book from 1885, it had the title: ‘The Fourth and Last Part’. Nietzsche had also, when he finished the third part, regarded it as the last part. When Nietzsche republished *Also sprach Zarathustra* in 1887, he did not include the fourth book, but the other three parts were then bound together in one volume.

**45** Another alternative would be that Nietzsche intended to let Zarathustra return, and thus to plan to write either a fifth book of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, or another sort of work in which the figure Zarathustra appears, but there is no evidence whatsoever among Nietzsche’s late notes that he had any such plans. Furthermore, the fact that he says “I name no names” implies that it is going to be someone other than Zarathustra.

They are finally brought completely together, in any real sense, for the first time in the last three sections of Nietzsche's review of *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Nietzsche says here that his "concept of 'Dionysian' became the *highest deed*" in *Also sprach Zarathustra*. He continues:

Zarathustra feels himself to be the *highest of all species of being*; and when we hear how he defines it, we will dispense with searching for his like.

– the soul that has the longest ladder and so reaches down deepest,  
the most comprehensive soul, that can run and stray and roam the farthest within itself,

the most necessary soul, that with pleasure plunges itself into chance,  
the being soul, that *wills* to enter Becoming; the having soul, that *wills* to enter willing and longing –

that flees from itself and retrieves itself in the widest circles,

the wisest soul, which folly exhorts most sweetly,

the soul that loves itself the most, in which all things have their streaming and counter-streaming and ebb and flood – –

*But that is the concept of Dionysos himself.* [...] Zarathustra [...] the opposite of a no-saying spirit [...] Zarathustra is a dancer [...] who has the harshest, most terrible insight into reality, who has thought the 'most abysmal thought', nevertheless finds in it no objection to existence, or even to the eternal recurrence of existence – but rather yet another reason *to be himself* the eternal 'yes' to all things, 'the enormous and unbounded Yes- and Amen-saying' ... 'Into all abysses I carry my blessing Yes-saying' ... *But that is the concept of Dionysos once again.* (EH III Z 6)

In section seven, Zarathustra is referred to as "such a Dionysos", and after a long quote from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: "Nothing like this has ever been composed, ever been felt, ever been *suffered*: this is how a god suffers, a Dionysos" (EH III Z 8). Zarathustra, at his best, becomes like Dionysos. Nietzsche ends the review of *Also sprach Zarathustra* by referring to Zarathustra's "imperative 'Become hard!', the deepest conviction *that all creators are hard*, is the true badge of a Dionysian nature" (EH III Z 8). This is thus another trait and teaching which they share.

Throughout these three sections, Zarathustra and Dionysos 'meet' as near equals and without tension. However, they are not quite the same or equal. Zarathustra needs to strive and overcome his disgust of man, while Dionysos likes man. Zarathustra is the teacher of eternal recurrence, but Dionysos is that thought and the total affirmation itself. Zarathustra at his best comes close to the god Dionysos.

What we thus see is that the meeting of these two symbols constitutes no great problem for Nietzsche. Although slightly different, Nietzsche makes them compatible, and transferring his allegiance from Zarathustra to Dionysos,

which never actually occurs due to Nietzsche's mental collapse, but is prepared for, would not constitute a problem.

That Zarathustra is used so much as a symbol in *Ecce Homo* probably reflects the simple fact that the transference to Dionysos and the affirmative aspect of the revaluation of all values had not yet been reached, neither by Nietzsche the author and philosopher, nor in the text of *Ecce Homo*, which was to be published before the *Umwertung aller Werthe*. Furthermore, a reading and understanding of *Also sprach Zarathustra* is the best way to prepare for the *Umwertung aller Werthe*, according to Nietzsche (see, for example, the foreword to *Der Antichrist*).

This harmonious relationship between Zarathustra and Dionysos can also be seen in that Nietzsche for a long time hesitated about which was the better symbol to use for the title of his late collection of poems. For a long time he planned to call it 'The Songs of Zarathustra', and Zarathustra is also the major figure in them, but in the end Nietzsche decided to give preference to the superior representation and symbol of the future, and entitled it *Dionysos-Dithyramben*.

We have seen that the number of references to Zarathustra and Dionysos after 1885 are almost evenly split, and full of praise for both. However, the nature of the references differs in that Zarathustra is continually seen as Nietzsche's equal, and sometimes identified with Nietzsche himself, while Dionysos is always referred to as a god or as his teacher, and thus as standing above and beyond Nietzsche. Furthermore, all the references to Zarathustra and *Also sprach Zarathustra* are to the present or past, while many of those to Dionysos are directed toward the future.

## 6 Conclusion

As we have seen above, Zarathustra was a symbol for many things for Nietzsche. More than anything else, he was the teacher of eternal recurrence; but he also represents the overcoming of morality, thus immoralism, but also atheism, skepticism and the like. He is a severe critic of present values and ideals, and he also suggests new "half-written tables of values". Zarathustra can easily be taken to constitute Nietzsche's most important symbol, and that impression seems confirmed by Nietzsche's claim that there were no counter-ideals before *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and that he has said nothing in *Ecce Homo* that he could not have said already five years before, through the mouth of Zarathustra.

We have also seen that Dionysos in Nietzsche's writings came to represent many important *topoi*; tragedy, life-affirmation, creativity (and destruction) and realism. He also represents darkness (and the forbidden – which Nietzsche

had referred to both at the end of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, the beginning of *Ecce Homo* and in many late notes – probably another allusion to what was to come in the planned *Umwerthung aller Werthe*), revaluation, the antichrist,<sup>46</sup> *ex-tasis*, music, immoralism and association with Ariadne (which eventually will lead Nietzsche to identify with Dionysos).

Dionysos is a symbol which connects the late Nietzsche with the early Nietzsche, at least with *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (which we also could notice in the review of that work in *Ecce Homo*, and in the last chapter of *Götzen-Dämmerung*). This was valuable for Nietzsche, and helped him develop his attempt at a revaluation of all values, for many of the revalued values have close kinship with ancient Greek values. But it has also led many modern commentators and readers astray in accepting Nietzsche's own exaggerated claims of the similarities between his early and late thinking.

Although the picture of Dionysos is in many ways vague, he more than anything else is a symbol of total affirmation. Thus he is closely associated with tragedy, *amor fati* and eternal recurrence. Most of the other things he symbolizes in *Ecce Homo* follow directly from this.

The best interpretation of the meaning of the symbols Zarathustra and Dionysos, and their relation to one another, seems to be that Zarathustra is more or less synonymous with Nietzsche himself (in a somewhat improved version).<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche frequently refers to him as “my son” and at least twice to himself as Zarathustra's father and also as his mother (in the sense of being pregnant with him),<sup>48</sup> and in *Ecce Homo* he states that his own name and that of Zarathustra's are interchangeable (EH III BT 4). Zarathustra thus becomes a symbol which follows Nietzsche's intellectual development, and is therefore associated with a human and with an ever moving ‘present’. Dionysos, on the other hand, represents a god, the future and Nietzsche's teacher – that is, that which draws and tempts Nietzsche onwards – a state which can never be achieved, but always striven towards. This fits well and is compatible with my claims that *Ecce Homo*

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46 See GTVS 1.

47 In a letter to Overbeck, 10 February 1883, he writes: “It contains in the greatest possible sharpness a picture of my essence, the way it is after I have thrown off my complete load” (“*Es enthält in der grössten Schärfe ein Bild meines Wesens wie es ist, sobald ich einmal meine ganze Last abgeworfen habe*”).

48 Zarathustra as Nietzsche's son: KSA 11, 26[394] and 34[204], KSA 12, 6[4] and in many letters, such as for example in the letter to Fritsch, 29 August 1886. As father: KSA 12, 6[4] and letter to Gast, 6 April 1883. As being pregnant with Zarathustra (EH III Z 1). Nietzsche also explicitly on several occasions refers to how ‘autobiographical’ *Also sprach Zarathustra* is, for example in letter to Overbeck, 10 February 1883, quoted above, and to Hillebrand, 24 May 1883: “*Alles was ich gedacht, gelitten und gehofft habe, steht darin*”.

is both backward- and forward-looking, that both Zarathustra and Dionysos are emphasized in it.

This is true for Zarathustra and Dionysos as Nietzsche's symbols – Zarathustra as representing Nietzsche and his development – it is from this perspective not surprising that Zarathustra becomes such a dominant figure in *Ecce Homo* (which is meant to present Nietzsche, or a somewhat idealized picture of Nietzsche) – while Dionysos represents his goal and future, and is more alluded to and pointed towards.

However, they are not only Nietzsche's symbols, they are both also Nietzsche's creations. He answers, in *Ecce Homo*, the question why he chose Zarathustra as one of his symbols; because he, as the one who first moralized the world, who performed “the translation of morality into the metaphysical” and regarded “the struggle of good and evil [as] the true driving-wheel” should also be the first to acknowledge the mistake and thereby become “the first immoralist” (EH IV 3).<sup>49</sup> But why did he choose Dionysos? He needed not just a prophet, but a god. For his purpose, to represent new values and ideals – and to replace the old God – a new god seems an apt symbol. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a more suitable one. And if it were to be a god, Dionysos is surely the perfect choice. Not only because of what he stands for according to Greek mythology (such as being a god of tragedy, *extasis*, darkness, mystery, masks and repetition), and that Nietzsche thus reconnects with his own early work and first book, but also because ancient Greek values constitute so much of both specific and of general stimulus for the new revalued values. Furthermore, this new god, in contrast to the old God, is not only non-metaphysical but also a conscious *symbol*, that is, not something one believes in, but something that reminds us of our values and ideals. In fact, if we examine Nietzsche's view of gods and how they are created, we get a sort of answer to why he selected Dionysos. At the end of the second essay of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (on guilt etc.) Nietzsche discusses what the conception of gods can mean:

The fact that *conceiving* gods does not necessarily, in itself, lead to a degraded imagination –that's something we have to consider for a moment, the point that there are *more uplifting* ways to use the invention of the gods than for this human self-crucifixion and self-laceration of man, in which Europe in the last millennia has become an expert. Fortunately that something we can infer if we take a look at the *Greek gods*, these reflections of nobler men, more rulers of themselves, in whom the *animal* in man felt himself deified and did *not* tear himself apart, did *not* rage against himself! [...] In this way, the gods then served to justify

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<sup>49</sup> More can be said about this, but since our interest is *Ecce Homo* and its relation to the *Umwertung aller Werthe*, we will move on to Dionysos.

men to a certain extent, even in bad things. They served as the origin of evil—at that time the gods took upon themselves, not punishment, but, what is *nobler*, the guilt ... (GM II 23).

A year later, in the early summer of 1888, Nietzsche expresses it even more strongly in a long note entitled ‘Towards a History of the Concept of God’, where he argues that the nature of a god or gods is merely the reflection of the creative will, or will to power, of a people. In the last, fifth, section of this note he writes:

Almost two millennia and not a single new god! [...] – And how many new gods are still possible! As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say *god-forming* instinct occasionally again wants to become active: how differently, how variously the divine has revealed itself to me each time! [...] I should not doubt that there are many kinds of gods... There are some one cannot imagine without a certain halcyon and frivolous quality in their makeup... Perhaps light feet are even an integral part of the concept ‘god’ ... Is it necessary to elaborate that a god prefers to stay beyond everything bourgeois and rational? and, between ourselves, also beyond good and evil? His prospect is *free* – in Goethe’s words. (KSA 13, 17[4])<sup>50</sup>

Nietzsche used the first four sections of this note, which are all critical of Christianity, for *Der Antichrist*, but not the last section. It seems to me likely that he saved this last section on purpose to be used in the last volume of the *Umwertung aller Werthe*, with the more affirmative and constructive approach suitable for the title *Dionysos philosophos*.

In the last few lines after this, Nietzsche connects to Zarathustra: “And to call upon the inestimable authority of Zarathustra in this instance: Zarathustra goes so far as to confess: ‘I would believe only in a god who could *dance*’... To repeat: how many new gods are still possible! – Zarathustra himself, to be sure, is merely an old atheist. One must understand him correctly! Zarathustra, it is true, says he *would*; but Zarathustra *will* not...” (KSA 13, 17[4]).

This may be read as an example of the transferral of allegiance from Zarathustra to Dionysos. Zarathustra is a powerful symbol for fighting the old values and liberating oneself, and even for pointing forward (wanting a god who can dance), but he is nonetheless not able to represent these new values. Already in a letter from May 1885 (Nietzsche had by then began work on his future four-volume *magnum opus*) he writes: “Do not believe that my son Zarathustra

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<sup>50</sup> Sections 16 to 19 of *Der Antichrist* are closely based on section 1 to 4 of this note. The last section, 5, has been published (and translated into English) as section 1038 of *Der Wille zur Macht*.



speaks *my* opinions. He is one of my preparations and intermissions”.<sup>51</sup> To represent the revalued values was to be the task of Dionysos.

The last words in the block-quotation above are an allusion to the final scene of Goethe’s *Faust*, but it is also relevant to relate it to the end of the chapter ‘Reconnaissance Raids of an Untimely Man’ in *Götzen-Dämmerung* (which was meant to constitute the end of the book) and the discussion of Goethe in the last three sections there, 49 to 51. Nietzsche praises Goethe enormously here, and one can see much of Nietzsche’s affirmative or positive human ideals in that portrait:

He bore its strongest instincts in himself [...] he did not divorce himself from life but immersed himself in it; he never lost heart, and took as much as possible upon himself, above himself, into himself. What he wanted was *totality*: he fought against the disjunction of reason, sensuality, feeling, will [...] he disciplined himself into a whole, he *created* himself... (TI IX 49)

After having thus described Goethe (and his human ideal), he connects him to Dionysos:

Such a *liberated* spirit stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism, with *faith* in the fact that only what is individual is reprehensible, that everything is redeemed and affirmed in the whole – *he no longer denies*... But such a faith is the highest of all possible faiths: I have baptized it with the name of *Dionysos*. (TI IX 49)

We again notice the enormous importance of Dionysos to Nietzsche, but also that he makes clear that Dionysos is just a symbol. What is primary is the total affirmation.

Immediately after this account of Goethe at the end of *Götzen-Dämmerung* he summarizes, in the last sentence of the last section, 51, of what was intended to have been the end of the book: “I have given humanity the most profound book it possesses, my *Zarathustra*: I shall shortly give it the most independent one. –” (TI IX 51), that is, he points and promises soon to publish his planned four-volume *Hauptwerk*, entitled *Revaluation of All Values* (see the foreword of *Götzen-Dämmerung*), which both this work and *Ecce Homo* is preparatory for.

For those who read *Ecce Homo* primarily as an autobiography, the emphasis in the text on Zarathustra is at least in part comprehensible (although, apparently, irritating to many commentators), both as attempting to give attention to that work and as pointing out that it was his best work (although, according to most commentators, he unfortunately uses exaggerated language to get this message

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<sup>51</sup> Letter to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, 7 May 1885.

across). Most modern readers, at least academic readers, do not share this view and prefer other texts by Nietzsche.<sup>52</sup>

However, for such readers Nietzsche's references to Dionysos make little sense. Why begin and end the book with references to Dionysos, not to speak of all the references in between? And why do *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* and *Götzen-Dämmerung* end in similar ways? This becomes just a shot in the dark – or may perhaps be seen as a sort of nostalgia for his first book (but, then, why is that which Dionysos represents so different in these later books?).

For those who read *Ecce Homo* as pointing forward, the references to Dionysos are obvious allusions and pointers to what was to come. As he writes to his publisher, *Ecce Homo* "is a in the highest degree preparatory text".<sup>53</sup> Of that which was planned, only *Der Antichrist* was written (with no reference to Dionysos), but there are strong reasons to assume that he planned to write three further volumes, and that some of that planned content can be found in his late books and more in his late notes. Realizing this 'forward-looking' intention of *Ecce Homo* means reading it in a different manner to the way it has usually been read.<sup>54</sup>

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52 In the Anglo-Saxon world there has generally been a strong liking for *Zur Genealogie der Moral*.

53 Letter to Naumann, 6 November 1888.

54 In my forthcoming study *Nietzsche's 'Ecce Homo' and the Revaluation of All Values: Dionysian versus Christian Values*, I examine in particular the consequences of reading the book forward, as promising further texts in the future, rather than as backward-looking and as an autobiography.



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## **IV Revaluation and Revolution**



Martine Prange

# From “Saint” to “Satyr”

## Nietzsche’s Ethics of Self-Transfiguration in *Ecce Homo* and its Contemporary Relevance

**Abstract:** Reviewing his earlier writings in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche casts a vivid light on his philosophical development. However, because *Ecce Homo* was primarily meant as a “preface” to the planned book *Revaluation of All Values* (Umwertung aller Werthe), it is more than just the intellectual autobiography it is usually taken for. It is also a book of “transition”, in which Nietzsche outlines the work to be done next. This essay seeks to sketch out the specific contribution of *Ecce Homo* to Nietzsche’s revaluation of all values philosophy by reading it as a “preface” and book of “transition”. In following this path, the author stretches the standard interpretation of *Ecce Homo* as an autobiography, suggesting that the book occupies a place at the center of Nietzsche’s intellectual heritage rather than at the (chronological and symbolic) end and in the margin. At the very least, *Ecce Homo* is *not only* an autobiography in which Nietzsche merely recapitulates the intellectual path he has travelled until that point, *but also* a philosophical work, and, therefore, part of the *philosophical* program of revaluation that Nietzsche was undertaking in 1888.

## 1 Introduction

Reviewing his earlier writings in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche casts a vivid light on his philosophical development.<sup>1</sup> However, because *Ecce Homo* was primarily meant as a “preface” to the planned book *Revaluation of All Values* (Umwertung aller

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<sup>1</sup> *Ecce Homo* is part of a group of four autobiographical-philosophical writings written in 1888. The others are: *The Case of Wagner* (1888), *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) and *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1889). In the last months of 1888, Nietzsche also wrote *The Anti-Christ* (1894), which he considered the first of his *Revaluation* books, *Dionysus Dithyrambs* (1892) and *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1889). There was already an onset of symptoms of insanity before January 1889, when Nietzsche fell victim to madness, casting a shadow over all these works. Some of these writings were drawn and reworked from the *Will to Power* notebooks. For more details, see Schaberg 1995, p. 155–185.

Werthe),<sup>2</sup> it is more than just the intellectual autobiography it is usually taken for. It is also a book of “transition”, in which Nietzsche outlines the work to be done next. In that sense, *Ecce Homo* is easily comparable to *The Gay Science* (1882), the book that wraps up Nietzsche’s “free spirit” years by announcing Zarathustra’s new philosophy of hope, and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), which promises to prelude the “philosophy of the future” (GS 342).<sup>3</sup> The expression “revaluation of all values” stands for both a book and a philosophy, in a similar way to “gay science” and “genealogy of morals”. The “revaluation of all values” contains an ethics of the self and a meta-philosophy of morals.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I will try to sketch out the specific contribution of *Ecce Homo* to Nietzsche’s revaluation of all values philosophy by reading it as a “preface” and book of “transition”. I attempt to answer the following questions: first, What promises and announcements does Nietzsche make in *Ecce Homo* that frame and inspire his work to come, the work called *Revaluation of All Values*? Second, What do they reveal about the revaluation of all values philosophy? Third, how does the “revaluation of all values” relate to Nietzsche’s “free-spirit” philosophy? The last issue is important in two ways. Because we want to understand Nietzsche’s philosophical development in more detail, it is of historical-philosophical importance. Moreover, because we want to get a clearer picture of the differences – be they in degree or essence – between the “free spirit philosophy” (“*Freigeisterei*”) and revaluation of all values, the exact nature of their relation *and* the living relevance of Nietzsche’s philosophy, it is of conceptual-systematic importance.<sup>5</sup> Despite the similarity between “free-spiritedness” and “revaluation of all values”, residing in the involved ethics of “self-transfiguration” conceptualized as a recovery from “sickness” to “health” and in the association with the spirit of “Dionysus”, certain aspects deserve clarification. For example, it is not unambiguous yet whether “free-spiritedness” is a stage in the process of revaluation or whether the revaluation of all values is part and parcel

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2 In some English translations, e.g. the one I use for *Ecce Homo*, “*Umwerthung aller Werthe*” is translated as “revaluation of values”. For this chapter, I have chosen to change that to “revaluation of all values”. Translations of quotations from Nietzsche’s works are by Carol Diethe (GM), R.J. Hollingdale (D, HAH), Josefine Nauckhoff (GS), Judith Norman (AC, BGE, EH), Graham Parkes (Z) and Ronald Spiers (BT). Translations of quotations from the *Nachlass* and correspondence are my own.

3 The subtitle of *Beyond Good and Evil* is “Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future”.

4 When the phrase is written in italics and with capitals as *Revaluation of All Values*, I refer to the planned book. Otherwise, I refer to the philosophy of revaluation of all values.

5 Compare also Bamford 2015b and the different contributions therein.

of a wider philosophy advanced by the “free spirit” figure.<sup>6</sup> To gain clarity in this matter, a comparative analysis of the 1886 prefaces and *Ecce Homo* is carried out in sections 2 and 3 below.

The question ensuing from this analysis is whether Nietzsche develops an exemplary “figure” or “paradigm” of the philosophical life in *Ecce Homo* similar to the “*Freigeist*”, the figure that impersonates the ethics and practical *act* of “self-transfiguration”, labelled “*Freigeisterei*”. In other words, does the “homo” of the title *Ecce Homo* or the narrative subject “I” in the book embody the *revaluation of all values*? The final question to be addressed below then is: Does Nietzsche call his readers to follow his philosophical praxis and embrace his philosophical goals? Calling his *Freigeisterei* books “*precepts of health*” (HAH II Preface 2), he seems to exceed the purely personal level.<sup>7</sup> In other words, is *Ecce Homo* a book “written only for myself”, as Nietzsche claimed of his books in general, or is it a programmatic book that wants to speak to or perhaps even *educate* others?

In following this path, I stretch the standard interpretation of *Ecce Homo* as an autobiography, suggesting that the book occupies a place at the centre of Nietzsche’s intellectual heritage rather than at the (chronological and symbolic) end and in the margin. At the very least, *Ecce Homo* is *not only* an autobiography in which Nietzsche merely recapitulates the intellectual path travelled until that day, *but also* a philosophical work, and, therefore, part of the *philosophical* programme of revaluation that Nietzsche was undertaking in 1888.

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6 In a note of September 1888, “Der freie Geist” appears as the book title of the second book of four, which together make up the *Revaluation of All Values* books (NF 1888, 19[8]: KSA 13/545). The books are: 1. *Der Antichrist*. Versuch einer Kritik des Christenthums. 2. *Der freie Geist*. Kritik der Philosophie als einer nihilistischen Bewegung. 3. *Der Immoralist*. Kritik der verhängnisvollsten Art von Unwissenheit, der Moral. 4. *Dionysos*. Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkunft.

7 See also point five of section 2, below. The Free Spirit books are: *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (1878), *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (1879, published as an appendix to the second edition of *Human, All Too Human*), *The Wanderer and his Shadow* (1880), *Day-break: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (1881), *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (1882). We should also include Nietzsche’s poems *Idylls from Messina* (1882) in this series. *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* and *The Wanderer and his Shadow* were together republished as *Human, All Too Human II* in 1886.



## 2 The 1886 Prefaces: “*Freigeisterei*”<sup>8</sup>

What is the specific contribution of *Ecce Homo* in prefacing the revaluation of all values philosophy? Let us first look at the 1886 prefaces which launch Nietzsche’s *Freigeisterei* books *Human, All Too Human I and II*, *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science*. By connecting Nietzsche’s “*Freigeisterei*” philosophy and his *Revaluation of all values* project, we can come to a better understanding of that question.

When Nietzsche changed publishing houses in 1886, he agreed with his new publisher E.W. Fritsch to republish all the “free-spirit” books. For this event, Nietzsche wrote new prefaces, in which he looked back on the years between the summer of 1876 (when the first Bayreuth Festival took place and his break with Wagner was finalized) and the summer of 1882 (when *The Gay Science* came out and he experienced a new pinnacle of joy because of his friendship with Lou Salomé). The prefaces have only one topic: Nietzsche’s “recovery” from the “sickness” that, he maintains, his earlier Wagner-discipleship, musical taste, hopes of German culture, and metaphysical beliefs had caused. In addition, he argues that his recovery is the result of his new life and philosophy of “*Freigeisterei*”.

After repudiating Wagner in the summer of 1876, Nietzsche felt as if he were on top of a mountain, in “high air” (“*Höhenluft*”) (EH III HAH 5).<sup>9</sup> From there, he looked down upon his old beliefs and the people of his past, enjoying the freedom of finally determining his own thoughts. He explained to his friend Carl Fuchs: “how I *myself* am at the moment, living in the pursuit of knowledge in the smallest things, while before I only adored and idolized the *wise men* [...] now I dare to pursue wisdom myself, and *be* a philosopher myself; before I worshipped the philosophers” (KSB 5/335).<sup>10</sup> To Mathilde Maier, Nietzsche confessed why and when he had come to the belief that he had to develop his own ideas, and be an independent philosopher:

During the summer in Bayreuth, I became fully aware of this: I escaped into the mountains after the first rehearsals I attended, and there, in a small village in the woods, I made the

<sup>8</sup> This section draws upon Prange 2005, p. 31–35; 2013, p. 189–192.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. NF 1885, 41[2]: KSA 11/675–676 and Nietzsche to Carl Fuchs, June 1878 (KSB 5/335).

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche to Carl Fuchs, End of June 1878. Compare in this regard Nietzsche’s letter to Erwin Rohde of End of January and Mid February 1870 (KSB 3/95), where Nietzsche writes: “In contrast, when the time is there, I want to express myself as seriously and as candidly as possible. Science, art and philosophy grow together in me so much now that I shall give birth to centaurs one day, in any event”.

first drafts, around a third of my book [*Human, All Too Human I*], then under the title "the ploughshare". (KSB 5/338)<sup>11</sup>

*The Ploughshare* became the book now known as *Human, All Too Human I*. It meant a radical break with Nietzsche's earlier philosophy and launched his years of "Freigeisterei". But what is "Freigeisterei"?<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche's *Freigeist* (or 'freier Geist') is not a person who has progressive, modern and democratic ideals, such as (English) libertines or (French) 'libres penseurs'. *Freigeisterei* rather indicates emancipation based on taste instead of Enlightenment moral ideas and the belief that state politics play a vital role in completing the emancipation. Different from libertinism, *Freigeisterei* points to the liberation from moral and religious doctrines, state power and the bourgeois life.

*Human, All Too Human I* is dedicated to Voltaire, known for his pleas for religious tolerance. However, the *Freigeist* is religious only in the sense that it cherishes life itself as divine (associating life often with "Dionysus"). Rather than simply arguing for the separation of church and state, the free spirit seeks to promote atheism by fighting the Christian religious and moral principles inexhaustibly. The free spirit understands life as material, chaotic and ephemeral, and seeks to justify this under the motto "*amor fati*" ("love of fate"), meaning "love life as it is", in all its tragic, ugly and beautiful aspects (GS 276). Further, the free spirit does not believe in the political and moral values of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*, because (s)he considers these to be moral ideals that contradict man's natural inequality and selfishness. Instead, (s)he believes in the *agon* between individuals as the principle of society and culture. This "*agon*" is an artistic and competitive process of self-alienation, self-overcoming and self-creation carried out in contestation with others. In the *agon*, every person develops his or her natural dispositions and artistic potential to the fullest. *Freigeisterei* thus is an ethical praxis of self-improvement for which the "other" is indispensable – as friend, enemy, teacher and model.<sup>13</sup> What follows is a characterization

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11 To Mathilde Maier, 15 July 1878. This part of the letter is written mid-February, in response to Wagner's letter of 12 February (KGB II/2, p. 145 f.).

12 We should note that Nietzsche used "*freier Geist*" next to "*Freigeist*". The term is introduced into Nietzsche's philosophy in the subtitle of *Human, All Too Human I*, "a book for free spirits", which was dedicated to the French Enlightenment thinker Voltaire (the pen name of François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778). But we find the term already in NF 1870–1871, 5[22]: KSA 7/97 and 5[42]: KSA 7/103, where Nietzsche plans to write *Die Tragödie und die Freigeister*. For further discussion, see Vivarelli 1998, 121 ff.

13 For more on this in relation to Kant and Goethe's cosmopolitanism, see Prange 2007 and Prange 2014.

of Nietzsche's *Freigeisterei* in five points; these points are descriptive and indicative rather than complete and absolute.

First, *Freigeisterei* stands for a *liberation* or *emancipation* from previous ideological convictions. In the first instance, Nietzsche gave this name for his own liberation or "recovery" from Romanticism and Wagnerian music.

Second, it describes a particular *therapy*.<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche speaks of an "*anti-romantic self-treatment*" (HAH II Preface 2), in which he banned all romantic music and the north (Germany) and travelled to the south (Italy).<sup>15</sup> He chose to stay in a foreign environment, to "remove" himself from his "entire hitherto". Nietzsche calls this undertaking the exploration of an "unexplored *clime of soul*" (HAH II Preface 5), explaining it as "a curative journey into strange parts, into *strangeness* itself, to an inquisitiveness regarding every kind of strange thing...".<sup>16</sup> To live in other cultures provides access to diverse and conflicting modes of thought, and the opportunity to explore different, to wit non-Christian and aesthetic, perspectives on life.<sup>17</sup> "Estrangement" (HAH I Preface 3/ "*Entfremdung*") or "self-alienation" (HAH I Preface 5/ "*Selbstentfremdung*") implies focusing intellectually on what is strange – not with the purpose of reducing it to what is known, but of *learning* about other perspectives in a competitive relationship.

A turn from cold, abstract thought to what Goethe labelled "living thought" ("*lebendiger Begriff*") is also an essential part of the therapy. Not only does the free spirit validate things in their strangeness, their "otherness", but (s)he also confirms the appearance of things as all there is, because (s)he no longer believes "that truth remains truth when one pulls off the veil" (GS Preface 4).<sup>18</sup> This appreciation of the surface as a characteristic of the free spirit's "health"

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**14** For an analysis of Nietzsche's philosophy as a form of self-therapy, see Ure 2008.

**15** "I began by *forbidding* myself, totally and on principle, all romantic music" (HAH II Preface 3). I argue (Prange 2013, p. 199 ff.) that Nietzsche's convalescence was not only a matter of stopping listening to German music and travelling to Italy, but also of starting to listen to Italian opera, develop a matching musical aesthetics, and "Italianizing" German music. Nietzsche begins this process, including the much-neglected reconsideration of his musical aesthetics, with the book *Human All Too Human*. I further argue that Goethe and Epicurus are key figures in the development of a new (musical) aesthetics.

**16** For that reason, Nietzsche also labels his "*Freigeisterei*" books "travel books". Cf. NF 1876–1877, 23[196]: KSA 8/473–474 and the preface to *Ecce Homo*: "Philosophy as I have understood it and lived it so far is [...] visiting all the strange and questionable aspects of existence, everything banned by morality so far" (EH Preface 3).

**17** "[A]ccess [...] many and contradictory modes of thought" (HAH I Preface 4). See also HAH I Preface 6.

**18** This awareness is understood by Nietzsche as typically Greek: "Those Greeks were superficial – out of *profundity!*" (GS Preface 4).

is further explained in the preface to *Human, All Too Human I*. There, it is said that the free spirit has regained an eye for the things around him/ her and takes “pleasure in foregrounds, surfaces, things close and closest, in everything possessing colour, skin and apparitionality” (HAH I Preface 1).

Third, *Freigeisterei* is the freedom to make up one’s own mind. We may perhaps even interpret it as Nietzsche’s “*sapere aude!*” It is an act of free, critical thinking in discussion with others, yet aware of the anti-foundationalism of human reason. Hence, it ties in with yet also exceeds what Kant famously described as the way to and nature of “Enlightenment”.<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche goes further than Kant in the attempt to determine the borders of knowledge and establish a universal law for human action by questioning the value of the “truth”, the “good”, and reason instead of supplying truth and morality with a rational foundation, as Kant intended. Nietzsche even states that “truth” is a moral value, claiming that morality is philosophy’s “Circe” (D Preface 3).<sup>20</sup> Hence, as autonomous thinking, *Freigeisterei* implies the nihilistic negation of the truth and reason and the affirmation of life beyond good and evil or “immoralism”.<sup>21</sup>

Fourth, *Freigeisterei* is a cultural ideal or fact of Europe’s future. It is bound up with the idea of Europe as one nation, one culture and one economy, which, according to Nietzsche, is an inevitable fact of the future (HAH I 475). In the ideal situation, Europe will become a cosmopolitan and “free-spirited” culture, inhabited by what Nietzsche calls “good Europeans”:

That free spirits of this kind *could* one day exist, that our Europe *will* have such active and audacious fellows among its sons of tomorrow and the next day, physically present and palpable [...] I should wish to be the last to doubt it. (HAH I Preface 2)

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**19** Kant 2006a, p. 17–18.

**20** Hence his vehement critique of Kant’s categorical imperative.

**21** Intriguingly, Nietzsche speaks of the “freezing” of idealism in his explanation of the free-spiritedness of *Human, All Too Human* in *Ecce Homo* (EH III HAH 1). He repeats this metaphor in the epigraph to Book IV of *The Gay Science*, emphasizing again that he only reached true liberation by understanding “all idealism” as a human need to conceal the truth that there is no truth behind the veil of appearances. He further describes it here as “taking hold of oneself” and expressing a “spirituality of noble taste” (EH III HAH 1) and further on explains the “return to myself” as “the highest type of convalescence” (EH III HAH 4). Even more often, this “return to the self” or “convalescence” is the result of “warmth”, sun and light. Nietzsche explicitly connects his convalescence to his stays in the south, as I point out in Prange 2005 and Prange 2013.

Fifth, “*Freigeisterei*” is an enterprise, not only for Nietzsche, but for “us”, all “free spirits”, “the healthy ones”, the “good Europeans” (HAH II Preface 6).<sup>22</sup> In other words, if we want Europe to become “good” and “healthy”, its inhabitants must develop themselves individually into “free” beings, in accordance with, or maybe even following, Nietzsche’s therapy. “What has happened to me,” Nietzsche explicitly writes, “must happen to everyone in whom a *task* wants to become incarnate and ‘come into the world’” (HAH I Preface 7). The free spirit books are, therefore, not “travel books” in the general sense of the term, but, in putting forward “*precepts of health*” (HAH II Preface 2 / “*eine Gesundheitslehre*”), they offer a doctrine (“*Lehre*”) or “therapy” as to how to regain one’s health and become a “free spirit”.<sup>23</sup> As Nietzsche indicates here, his personal experiences of sickness and health contain precepts for all future “good Europeans”.

To conclude this section: although Nietzsche does not refer to his *Freigeisterei* in the prefaces as *Umwertung aller Werthe*, he suggests that there is a special connection between the two, when he remarks that his “recovery” was instigated by the question: “Can *all* values not be turned round?” (HAH I Preface 3.). This triggers the question whether the “revaluation of all values” precedes the liberation of the free spirit. Is “free-spiritedness” the *result* of the revaluation of all values or its *precondition*? How exactly do the two relate? To answer this question, let us turn to *Ecce Homo*, its preface to begin with.

### 3 *Ecce Homo*: “Revaluation of All Values”

In *Ecce Homo*’s preface, Nietzsche presents himself as a messenger who “will have to confront humanity with the most difficult demand it has ever faced” (EH Preface 1). Because his is such an enormous responsibility, he feels that he should introduce himself to humanity in such a way that we understand why he, and not someone else, is assigned this task. He formulates this task as follows: “perhaps the whole purpose of this essay was to articulate this opposition [between satyr and saint, MP] in a cheerful and philanthropic way” (EH

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<sup>22</sup> As Nietzsche explains, the “good Europeans” are the “homeless” persons, who resist chauvinism, Romanticism and German *idealism*. The “homeless” persons do not feel at home “in this today”, because they consider themselves “children of the future” (GS 377).

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche says this in the preface to *Human, All Too Human II*, but this certainly holds for the other free-spirit books, too. In fact, I argued in Prange 2005 and Prange 2013 (p. 228 ff.) that this is most tenable in *The Gay Science*, as it is the book which expresses Nietzsche’s gratitude about his regained health most explicitly.

Preface 2). This seems to indicate that humanity is in any case faced with the demand to choose to become either the "saint" or the "satyr" type or to transform from (moral) "saint" into (immoral, i. e., a-moral) satyr.

Nietzsche presents himself here as possessing such a unique kind of wisdom and distinctive character that he is "chosen" to herald our future – a character which is "the opposite of the type of person who has been traditionally admired as virtuous" (EH Preface 2). This seems to imply that Nietzsche's mission of informing the world of coming ages is assigned to him because he has already made the step from moral, or "virtuous", "saint" to "satyr", a pre-Hellenistic, Greek follower of Dionysus. Nietzsche indeed explicitly identifies himself with the satyr in *Ecce Homo*, when he states: "I am a disciple of Dionysus; I would rather be a satyr than a saint" (EH Preface 2).<sup>24</sup> Who or what exactly is the (Nietzschean) satyr, and how can one become one?

The satyr figure already turns up in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, particularly in the context of its discussion of the chorus in chapters 7 and 8.<sup>25</sup> There, the Dionysian "satyr" is understood as "*Naturwahrheit*" (natural truth) and opposed to the "shepherd", whose ideal of a paradisiacal world-peace is regarded as mendacious idyllicism and "cultural lie" (BT 8). The shepherd is an expression of the modern longing "for what is original and natural" (BT 8). By contrast, the satyr symbolizes humankind in its tragic origin and as an "emblem of the sexual omnipotence of nature" (BT 8). The Greeks created the satyr as the archetype ("Urbild") of humankind, Nietzsche explains. In possession of the innermost, deepest understanding of nature, he was the "proclaimer of wisdom from the deepest heart of nature" (BT 8). In contrast to the shepherd, the satyr is a wicked, very sexual, tough, macho, natural being without any clue as to romantic love and the experience of pleasure in serene beauty. The satyr is thus the counter-figure of the "idyllic shepherd" in *The Birth of Tragedy*, similar to the child figure.

Both satyr and child represent the aesthetic realm "beyond good and evil" – as opposed to the idyllic shepherd, who represents the belief that humanity in its origin is good and which Nietzsche, in his debut book, associates with Italian opera.<sup>26</sup> A sublime form of "innocence" or "naïveté" characterizes the aesthetic sphere. The child and the satyr are not so much will-deniers (such as Schopenhauer's "saint") as figures that play with the multiple and contradictory will-im-

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the famous last sentence of the book: "*Dionysus versus the Crucified*" (EH IV 9).

<sup>25</sup> This part of the essay draws upon my analysis of the satyr in Prange 2013, p. 160–162. Although Nietzsche attached quite some importance to the satyr figure, it is hardly discussed in studies on *The Birth of Tragedy*. Compare Nietzsche's letter to Erwin Rohde, 16 July 1872 (KSB 4/23–24).

<sup>26</sup> Especially in BT 21.

pulses. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT 22), Nietzsche connects Goethe's use of Schiller's term "aesthetic play"<sup>27</sup> with Heraclitus's imagery of the playing child to explain that the world of semblance (or: empirical reality) is a matter of

playful construction and demolition of the world of individuality as an outpouring of primal pleasure and delight, a process quite similar to Heraclitus the Obscure's comparison of the force that shapes the world to a playing child who sets down stones here, there, and the next place, and who builds up piles of sand only to knock them down again. (BT 24)<sup>28</sup>

It must be underlined here that the child "is not a moral agent" (Came 2004, 55). "Playing" is certainly not "carrying out decisions" (Came 2004, 59). Nor is the child "based on the Kantian-Schopenhauerian model of the experience of an individuated human subject", as Daniel Came suggests (Came 2004, 59), but rather on Schopenhauer's Romantic depiction of childlike innocence as human paradise. Contrarily, the innocent child is Nietzsche's symbol of the aesthetic realm, where creativity, fantasy, playfulness and forgetfulness rule. The playing child does not deny the will, but is nevertheless "will-less" (*Willen-los*) in its self-forgetfulness.<sup>29</sup> "Will-less", here, is to be understood in the Kantian sense of "without interest" (*interesselos*), i.e. without an interest beyond the (serious) play itself.<sup>30</sup> The imagery of the child in Nietzsche rather is reminiscent of Schiller's famous adage in his *Aesthetic Letters* that "man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is *only fully a human being when he plays*".<sup>31</sup> As described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "Innocence the child is and forgetting, a beginning anew, a play, a self-propelling

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**27** Goethe to Schiller, 9 December 1797. Goethe writes (quoted by Nietzsche in BT 22): "I have never succeeded in treating any tragic situation artistically without some lively pathological interest, and I have therefore chosen to avoid them rather than seek them out. Could it be yet another of the merits of the ancients that even subjects of the most intense pathos were merely aesthetic play for them, since in our case truth to nature must be involved if a work of this kind is to be produced?"

**28** Diels-Kranz fragment 22 (B 52), which says: "eternal life is a child, is at play like a child with board-checkers; mastery belongs to a child". Cited in Bishop and Stephenson 2005, p. 52 note 8. Compare BT 24.

**29** See BT 22.

**30** Compare Babich 1995, p. 31–51. However, before connecting Nietzsche's playfulness to post-modernism and opposing this to modernist irony, I would like to point to, first, the continuous Romantic character of Nietzsche's concept of play and, second, the "irony" that is also often involved with Romanticism. I agree with Babich's observation that the child is "deeply significant within Nietzsche" (Babich 1995, p. 46).

**31** In Letter XV (Schiller 1982, p. 106–107).



wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yea-saying" (Z I "Of The Three Metamorphoses").<sup>32</sup>

The child symbolizes the creation of new values in its affirmative approach to life, because the play is a "play of creating" (Z I "Of The Three Metamorphoses"). The figure of the child further symbolizes the liberation from the moral and dialectical interpretation of the world, the moment in which humanity is finally able to let life be, and be *in* the world instead of being locked up in a subject-object relationship. Hence, the child represents the moment in which humankind has stopped judging, submerging itself in the endless realm of imagination, fantasy and play. The child, therefore, represents the moment of transcendence from the common, daily life and of immanence or unity insofar it is one with the world. This is, I think, suggested all the more by *Ecce Homo's* rather hyperbolic account of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, which repeats a long passage from *Gay Science* about the "great health" (GS 382). It starts as follows: "We who are new, nameless, hard to understand; we premature births of an as yet unproved future – for a new end, we also need a new means, namely, a new health" (EH III Z 2). The new and the nameless ones are questioners and victors of idealism. Having examined idealism very carefully, they anticipate a new ideal: "the ideal of a spirit that plays naïvely, i.e. not deliberately but from an overflowing abundance and power, with everything that was hitherto called holy, good, untouchable, divine" (EH III Z 2). The realization of this ideal starts with questioning everything Western man has accepted as valuable. It is the question, What is the value of values? or Can *all* values not be turned round? To ask this question, one has to be "harsh" and "clean" towards the self that is willing to "*knock over idols*" (EH Preface 2). This is similar to Nietzsche's definition of the philosophical life: "a life lived freely in icy and high mountains – visiting all the strange and questionable aspects of existence, everything banned by morality so far" (EH Preface 3).<sup>33</sup>

Parallel to the 1886 prefaces, *Ecce Homo* does not describe only the process of a personal change, as a simple autobiography would. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche

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**32** In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the child symbolizes the stage of "*amor fati*" in the progression of sickness towards health, the full embrace of life and creation of new values, following the "lion" stage, which symbolizes the "no" to life as dominated by old moral values and the praxis of active negation and destruction of these old, obsolete values in order to create "freedom for new creation" (Z I "Of The Three Metamorphoses"). The first stage of "sickness" is represented by the "camel", which carries the burden of the past.

**33** To live in strange places it is necessary to learn to "gaze with many eyes", to look at things from different perspectives. However, perspectivism is a precondition for the creation of values, which is the real philosophical task. See BGE 211.



also sets us, his readers, the task of “satyrization”. This is the “Dionysian task” to destroy the past with lust in order to reach “salvation” (EH III Z 8) and great health. The *Umwertung aller Werthe* is the “counter-ideal” (EH III GM) against the ascetic “priestly” morality, which Nietzsche calls “the detrimental ideal *par excellence*, a will to the end, a decadence ideal” (EH III GM). By contrast, Nietzsche holds up the hope that this priestly end is not necessary, that human history is not teleological, and may be different: “[N]obody before me knew the right way, the way up: only starting with me did hopes, tasks, prescribed paths for culture exist again – *I am the bearer of these glad tidings...* This also makes me a destiny” (EH III TI 2). His responsibility as messenger who “will have to confront humanity with the most difficult demand it has ever faced” is not fulfilled by simply explaining himself by means of narrating his life. Much more than that, *Ecce Homo* is the transformation of an experience into wisdom. In holding up the figure of the satyr, *Ecce Homo* advocates an ethics of self-transfiguration, which reproaches Stoic, Christian and Schopenhauerian asceticism to rehabilitate the aesthetic. This is indicated by the subtitle of the book. *Wie man wird was man ist* does not describe one particular person, i.e. Nietzsche, but more widely proposes a “precept of health” as to how transform oneself from a “saintly” type into a “satiric” type, that is “dynamite” (“*Dynamit*”) and a “buffoon” (EH IV 1). In *Ecce Homo* humanity turns out not to be mostly human as “saint”, but as “satyr”.

The *revaluation of all values* is the “philosophy of the future”, and *Ecce Homo* points to that future. In order for that future to come, we have “to become what we are”, namely: healthy and satiric. For that to come about, “self-examination” (EH IV 1) of the whole of humanity, or, as Nietzsche calls the self-examination and revaluation of all values, a “*great politics*” (EH IV 1) is necessary: “*Revaluation of all values*: that is my formula for an act of humanity’s highest self-examination, an act that has become flesh and genius in me” (EH IV 1).

## 4 Conclusion

What is the philosophical merit of *Ecce Homo*? This resides, first, in the fact that it advances an ethics of self-transfiguration aimed at the full, “Dionysian” embrace of life. As such, it launches Nietzsche’s new “philosophy of the future”, the *Revaluation of All Values*. If the revaluation of all values amounts to this transfiguration, if only partly, then it seems to me that the revaluation of all values does not deviate from Nietzsche’s former *Freigeisterei*, insofar as the *Freigeisterei* also defended the “aesthetic” and “Dionysian” life against the moral and Christian approach to life. Then, *Freigeisterei*, *Selbstbesinnung*, *Grosse Politik*,

*Umwertung aller Werte* would seem to be different names for the same concept, describing the ideal and process of both personal, cultural and historical change of "aestheticization", which Nietzsche foresees and fulfils. Seen from this angle, *Ecce Homo* is as much a "free spirit" book as any other book Nietzsche wrote since *Human, All Too Human I* (1876).<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it deserves to occupy a place at the heart of Nietzsche's philosophical legacy as much as any other of his books, rather than being consigned to the margins where it currently dwells.

What is the living relevance of *Ecce Homo*? The living relevance of this book resides in its plea for free *thinking*, in a time in which free *speech* has become more important than *thinking* and religions tend to reject religious pluralism (including atheism) and irony. With a call to look critically at oneself and humanity, and to become "satiric", Nietzsche reminds us of the importance of *practising* self-criticism and self-irony, especially since we tend to take ourselves all too seriously and mistake our beliefs and convictions for the truth. In advocating an ethics that revolves around self-transfiguration, he also points to the fact that toleration cannot be demanded without the effort to make one tolerable. In the current times of religious pluralism and insecurity, Nietzsche's *aesthetic* view of life thus seems important (how ironic) also for moral and social reasons. The realm of the aesthetic and the Dionysian experience of life is a realm in which pluralism and differences are celebrated and *genuine* openness to others is required. We may therefore agree with Nietzsche's own description of his books as containing "precepts of health". This also goes for *Ecce Homo* in its explicit call to look at the self from a strange and "satirical" perspective. As such, its philosophical merit continues today.<sup>35</sup>

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34 One could even claim that *The Birth of Tragedy* was a free spirit book, too, in its analysis of a decadent human culture which has to be cured. Only the cause of the decadence and the "medicine" he diagnosed and proposed were very different from the later one.

35 I thank Rebecca Bamford for her very helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.



C. Heike Schotten

## “Ecrasez l’infâme!”

### Nietzsche’s Revolution for All and (N)one

**Abstract:** Nietzsche’s hyperbolic rhetoric in *Ecce Homo* has been dismissed as megalomaniacal excess or a sign of his impending madness. By contrast, this essay argues it is essential to Nietzsche’s autobiography, which may be more properly read as the manifesto of his revolutionary corpus. The crucial difference between *Ecce Homo* and other manifestos, however, is Nietzsche’s obsession with the proper performative articulation of *himself*, rather than his readers. The irretrievably unique character of the revolution he advocates, then, is a movement that, like his *Zarathustra*, is simultaneously a revolution for “all” and “none”, and entirely because it is a revolution/revelation ultimately only of “one”.

And why should I not go all the way?  
I like to make a clean sweep of things.  
EH III CW 4<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche begins the preface to *Ecce Homo*, his explicitly named autobiography, by asserting, “[s]eeing that before long I must confront humanity with the most difficult task ever made of it, it seems indispensable to me to say *who I am*” (EH Preface 1). In this essay I seek to uncover what possible connection there might be between confronting humanity with its most difficult task and Nietzsche’s autobiographical declaration of who he is. These grandiose yet seemingly otherwise unrelated activities are linked, I suggest, by Nietzsche himself who, in this particular text, presents himself not simply as the revolutionary critic and annunciator of crisis par excellence in the history of Western civilization, but in fact *as* that very revolution himself. Thus “the most difficult task” and Nietzsche’s autobiography amount effectively to the same thing: an inducement of the wholesale overthrow of Christianity through textual, performative self-declaration. In other words, should Nietzsche succeed in properly revealing himself to his readers, he will have been read with understanding and thus have brought about the revolution *Ecce Homo* claims to predict.

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1 Translations of Nietzsche quotations are by Walter Kaufmann (AC, BGE, EH, GS, TI) and R.J. Hollingdale (D).

This reading foregrounds the importance of *Ecce Homo* within Nietzsche's overall corpus. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche asserts that all philosophy is autobiography (BGE 6). This is why he complains, in the very next sentence of that first prefatory aphorism of *Ecce Homo*, that his explicitly autobiographical activity should be unnecessary – his readers should already know who he is, for he has written plenty of books: he has not left himself “without testimony” (“*unbezeugt gelassen*”). Unfortunately, however, he has not been understood. The readiest evidence of this is also the primary misunderstanding Nietzsche seeks to rectify in *Ecce Homo*: Nietzsche has not been understood as the fundamentally revolutionary being he is. This is why *Ecce Homo* is overwhelmingly characterized by the use of revolutionary rhetoric, a text wherein Nietzsche claims that the true philosopher is “a terrible explosive, endangering everything” (EH III UM 3) and declares specifically of himself: “I am no man, I am dynamite” (EH IV 1). This explosiveness connotes total destruction; it is compatible with Nietzsche's earlier claim in *Beyond Good and Evil* that “*Genuine philosophers*” are

*commanders and legislators*: they say, “*thus it shall be!*” They first determine the Whither and For What of man, and in so doing have at their disposal the preliminary labor of all philosophical laborers, all who have overcome the past. With a creative hand they reach for the future, and all that is and has been becomes a means for them, an instrument, a hammer. Their “knowing” is a *creating*, their creating is a legislation, their will to truth is – *will to power*. (BGE 211)

Genuine philosophical activity, in other words, is revolutionary: it combines the destructive (explosion) and the constructive (legislation) into a single act, overcoming the past in a masterful act of creativity oriented toward the future. This gives us some insight, then, into not only Nietzsche's idiosyncratic understanding of philosophy, but also why *Ecce Homo* would be Nietzsche's quintessentially revolutionary text. If the true philosopher is in some sense a revolutionary, and all philosophy is in some sense autobiography, then the explicit self-manifestation of *Ecce Homo* reveals autobiography as the necessary location and articulation of revolutionary desire.

*Ecce Homo* can thus be read as the manifesto of Nietzsche's overall political-philosophical corpus, a reading that accounts for the aggressive and hyperbolic rhetoric that has so often puzzled or distressed Nietzsche's readers about this text. In general, Nietzsche's larger-than-life claims in *Ecce Homo* have been read as either megalomaniacal excess or signs of their author's impending madness, qualities deemed unphilosophical and thus unworthy of serious intellectu-

al scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> Such a view requires subtracting Nietzsche's rhetoric from consideration of *Ecce Homo* altogether, an approach that leaves so little text left over it is no wonder the book has been dismissed as unworthy of philosophical consideration. Claudia Crawford has alternatively suggested that *Ecce Homo* continues the religious rhetoric and project of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, positioning Nietzsche as the prophet of his autobiography just as Zarathustra is the prophet of that resonantly biblical text (Crawford 1999). While this reading has the virtue of taking Nietzsche's rhetoric seriously, it does so by declaring Nietzsche's project to be fundamentally apolitical – at best utopian and at worst salvific – and overlooking the fact that the language of prophecy is only one of many discursive strategies employed by Nietzsche in this richly rhetorical text.<sup>3</sup> To date, none has considered that Nietzsche's rhetoric resonates most resoundingly with that most modern of political projects, *revolution*.<sup>4</sup> Though Nietzsche has occasionally been acknowledged as invested in a kind of revolutionary longing,<sup>5</sup> none has yet considered what it might mean to read Nietzsche as participating in and continuing a radical political project begun by Rousseau and Marx, much less what it might mean to read *Ecce Homo* as the threshold postmodernist update of the *Communist Manifesto*.<sup>6</sup>

For those who might find my assertion of Nietzsche's explicitly political commitments laughable or deny outright his concern with transformation on a mass scale, Nietzsche himself offers an important clarification in this regard. In the concluding chapter of *Ecce Homo*, entitled “Why I am a Destiny”, Nietzsche states that his term “immoralist” must be taken in the sense of two different “negations”: first, as the negation of Christian morality, and second, as the neg-

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2 See e.g. Danto 1965, p. 182–183.

3 As Janet Lyon notes, the language of prophecy is only one of the “constitutive discourses” upon which the manifesto draws, discourses “which include, among others, the discourses of religious prophecy and chiliarism (or millennialism); the martial language of war or siege; and the forensic mode of persuasive rhetoric” (1999, p. 13).

4 On the modernity of revolution, see: Arendt 2006, especially Chapter 1; R. Williams 1983, p. 271–274; and Lyon 1999.

5 See Yack 1992.

6 Unless it be to declare such consideration a mistake, the best and most unequivocal example being Geoff Waite's insistence that: “If the question of intention remains relevant, particularly illicit is the use of Heidegger and Nietzsche to serve as the philosophical base of radically liberatory politics” (1996, p. 450 note 369). In an argument harmonious with but chronologically prior to Waite's, Stanley Rosen claims Nietzsche is a revolutionary, albeit “a revolutionary of the right in his radical aristocratism and antiegalitarianism” (1989, p. 192). I do not address the specific issue of Nietzsche's usefulness for left politics here; for this, see my *Nietzsche's Revolution: “Décadence”, Politics, and Sexuality* (Schotten 2009).

ation of the type of man that flourishes within and because of it, the so-called “good” man (EH IV 4). While Nietzsche clearly endorses both negations, what they together suggest is a way of understanding Nietzsche’s project beyond the narrow view that tends to dominate Nietzsche scholarship – namely, as a philosophy that occasionally delves into questions of politics but is, on the whole, not a political endeavor.<sup>7</sup> Here Nietzsche presents his own project as consisting of both a social and an ethical critique: he objects to a particular organization of human life, Christian morality, and he objects to the kind of subject that is constituted by that organization of life, the so-called “good” man. Unlike the standard division of Nietzsche’s thought into the domains of politics and philosophy, then (with the former inevitably found lacking – due either to its content or its mere existence),<sup>8</sup> it seems rather that Nietzsche’s overall *political* project has two tiers or domains of critique, namely, the collective (i.e., social) and the individual (i.e., the ethical/subjective). Significantly, Nietzsche consistently argues that the “good” man or slavish subjectivity he critiques throughout his writing is a *historical* accomplishment – the pathetic specimen “modern man” is in fact a by-product of the Christian organization of social life. But this renders Nietzsche’s critique of “individuals” (e.g., the dyspeptic, the priest, the actor, the “scientific man”) and ethical norms (like pity, “neighbor love” and asceticism) essentially political insofar as they are acknowledged to be the effects of an elaborate apparatus and strategic situation of power called “Christianity”.<sup>9</sup> In order to alter or re-constitute the subjectivity of these so-called “good” men, Nietzsche argues that a revaluation of values is necessary – a radical transformation of power relations such that a different, healthier, more masterful

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7 Walter Kaufmann’s inaugural English-language reading of Nietzsche as essentially “anti-political” (Kaufmann 1974) set a kind of default position in Nietzsche scholarship, even among political theorists. See, for example, Ansell-Pearson 1994, Connolly 1993, Leiter 2002, Nehamas 1985, Nussbaum 1997, Rorty 1989, Thiele 1990. Important exceptions include Daniel W. Conway’s *Nietzsche and the Political* (1997), the competing volumes *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans* (Ferry and Renaut 1997) and *Why Nietzsche Still?* (Schrift 2000), and newer volumes that explicitly take up the question of Nietzsche’s political thought: Siemens and Roodt 2008, and Knoll and Stocker 2014.

8 For different versions of this view, see Schutte 1984, and Warren 1988.

9 This is a reading of politics and power more indebted to Foucault than either Marx or standard approaches in Political Science, but surely Foucault takes his cues regarding the emergence of modern subjectivity and the importance of genealogical method in unearthing it in part from Nietzsche himself, who also de-privileges a view of power relations as primarily top-down and repressive (rather than bottom-up and productive) as well as the presumption that states and subjects are the necessary starting points of political analysis (rather than the products of a complex nexus of historicized circuits of power/knowledge). See, e.g., Foucault 1994, Foucault 1978, Foucault 1997 and Foucault 2007.

form of subjectivity may be produced (one that may even be beyond subjectivity itself).<sup>10</sup> Considered in this way, Nietzsche's philosophy looks to be political through and through, a status consistent with his understanding of true philosophy as the simultaneous destruction and creative construction of the world. Or, as he says: “The question concerning the origin of moral values is for me a question of the very first rank because it is crucial for the future of humanity” (D 2).

In the first half of this chapter, then, I defend the claim that *Ecce Homo* is a manifesto through examination of the peculiarly performative rhetoric that characterizes the modern manifesto itself, demonstrating the ways in which *Ecce Homo* exemplifies these rhetorical features and thus may be considered a manifesto in the generic sense – i.e., as a member of the manifesto *genre*.<sup>11</sup> In the second half of the chapter, I consider Nietzsche's specific problematic, showing how he alters the traditional set-up of the modern manifesto by deliberately highlighting its autobiographical character. Unlike Marx and the manifesting revolutionaries who followed in his wake, Nietzsche in the end (can) offer(s) no reasons for the revolutionary upheaval for which he calls. His revolution is, like autobiography itself, without any justification other than the idiosyncratic particularity of the existence to which it is only ambiguously tethered. Thus, everything turns on the proper self-revelation that occurs in this manifesto – i.e., its rhetorical and persuasive force – for only when Nietzsche is read with understanding will his revolution have come to pass and his project be victorious. This triumph is how Nietzsche becomes what he is, a becoming that turns on the assimilation of his readers *into* him, a revolutionary autobiography that we must subsequently understand as necessarily undertaken for all – insofar as it is a manifesto – and yet for (no) one, insofar as its success would, in the end, facilitate the victory of only a single person, Nietzsche himself, who grandiloquently

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**10** While the aspiration to produce “something better” than what currently exists seems – as does any revolutionary desire – eminently un-Foucauldian (a question I address in Schotten 2015), nevertheless the possibility that what might unfold beyond or after Christianity is somehow other than or beyond subjectivity itself may resonate with Foucault's much-discussed suggestion, at the end of Vol. I of the *History of Sexuality*, of a turn away from “sex-desire” to the more multifarious and uncircumscribable anti-formation of “bodies and pleasures” (Foucault 1978, p. 157).

**11** In doing so I rely on Puchner 2006 and, to a lesser extent, on Lyon 1999. It should be noted that I here take for granted the character of Nietzsche's philosophy as fundamentally revolutionary – as characterized, at least by 1886 and after, by an essentially radical and total desire to overthrow the Christianity that has menaced and corrupted European humanity, thereby transforming human nature and possibility in the process. I recognize this reading is controversial; for substantiation, see my *Nietzsche's Revolution* (2009).



presents himself as the future of and only salvation for a decadent modern humanity.

## 1 The Most Difficult Task: “*Ecrasez l’infâme!*”

According to Martin Puchner, Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* changed the world on the basis of more than just its content – it also founded a new genre, the genre of the manifesto itself.<sup>12</sup> What makes the manifesto distinctive from other kinds of radical writing is not, for example, its apocalyptic manifestation (of the kind we find in *Ecce Homo*, but also in the writings of Münzer or Winstanley) or what Puchner calls philosophical self-foundation (the insecure and therefore aggressive usurpation of existing sovereign authority which we find in *Ecce Homo* but also, arguably, in many early modern philosophical texts such as Descartes and Hobbes), but rather in the manifesto’s explicitly “political voice”: the manifesto is a brief, direct, urgent appeal, spoken in a tone of impatience that does not simply record history but attempts to contribute to it through its own rhetorical activity. The manifesto, in other words, aims through its style and tone to be a tool of revolution itself. There is thus, Puchner argues, a defining tension between words and deeds – between the call to action and the action itself – that characterizes manifestos and demands a “Marxian speech-act theory” (Puchner 2006, p. 23) to account for their distinctively political activity.

Puchner’s Marxian speech-act theory claims that the manifesto forges a kind of “literary agency” through its attempt to articulate a felicitous performative of the Austinian variety. However, because manifestos are defined by their radical *challenge* to existing structures of authority, they fundamentally lack the authorizing conventions that could make their words into deeds. Moreover, the manifesto addresses a recipient who does not yet fully exist; to render its pronunciations true it must interpellate the very party for whom it claims to speak. Manifestos, then, seize an authority they do not yet possess in an essentially theatrical enactment of its authoritative pronouncements and the revolution to come. The defining rhetorical posture of the manifesto, in other words, is a political and a future-directed speech act (Puchner 2006, p. 32). It aims to change the world through its address to a public it must itself create. As Puchner puts it: “Only the manifesto practices what the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach preaches, namely, a new practice of philosophy that would be geared not toward theory but toward action, toward actually changing the world” (Puchner 2006, p. 28).

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<sup>12</sup> See Puchner 2006.

Each of these aspects of the manifesto's political voice are acutely on display in *Ecce Homo*. Surely the text can be read as a short, sharp, direct, and urgent appeal, spoken in a “political voice” that demands a change in existing conditions and tries to contribute to it. This is particularly on display in Nietzsche's best-known and most extravagant rhetoric in *Ecce Homo*, from the first aphorism of “Why I am a Destiny” that has seemed to so many as evidence of psychosis:

One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous – a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up *against* everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. [...] For when truth enters into a fight with the lies of millennia, we shall have upheavals, a convulsion of earthquakes, a moving of mountains and valleys, the like of which has never been dreamed of. The concept of politics will have merged entirely with a war of spirits; all power structures of the old society will have been exploded – all of them are based on lies: there will be wars the like of which have never yet been seen on earth. It is only beginning with me that the earth knows *great politics*. (EH IV 1)

While such claims have been dismissed or psychologized away because of their violent and extreme content, what readers have neglected to note is what Puchner rightly makes clear: the manifesto speaks from “a position of weakness” (Puchner 2006, p. 26), its insecurity explaining its outwardly aggressive character. As Puchner notes, because manifestos lack the authorizing context and agent necessary to render their speech-acts effective performatives, they must launch their pronouncements in the space of the anterior future, promising what *will have* become true in a display of revolutionary bravado. That Nietzsche becomes increasingly passionate (or shrill, depending on one's relative sympathy with his project) about these pronouncements does not necessarily reflect an increasingly unstable psychological disposition, then, but rather betrays a vulnerability that arises at precisely those moments when Nietzsche's deepest political investments are articulated. Thus it is unsurprising that Nietzsche's rhetoric becomes especially feverish near the end of “Why I am a Destiny”, wherein he demands repeatedly to know if he has been understood and bewails the sorry state of humanity:

Christian morality – the most malignant form of the will to lie, the real Circe of humanity – that which *corrupted* humanity. It is *not* error as error that horrifies me at this sight – not the lack, for thousands of years, of “good will,” discipline, decency, courage in matters of the spirit, revealed by its victory: it is the lack of nature, it is the utterly gruesome fact that *antinature* itself received the highest honors as morality and was fixed over humanity as law and categorical imperative. To blunder to such an extent, not as individuals, not as a people, but as humanity! (EH IV 7)

What? Is humanity itself decadent? Was it always? – (EH IV 7)

The concept of “God” invented as a counterconcept of life – everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous, the whole hostility unto death against life synthesized in this concept in a gruesome unity! The concept of the “beyond”, the “true world” invented in order to devaluate the only world there is – in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality! (EH IV 8)

And all this was believed, *as morality!* – (EH IV 8)

The historical weight of centuries of Christian morality becomes increasingly unbearable to Nietzsche the more specifically he details its crimes, perhaps particularly as this legacy is contrasted with his comparative weakness and relative inability to overthrow its domination. These considerations explain not simply the tone of Nietzsche’s rhetoric in this section but also its alleged hyperbole. For if we take this rhetoric seriously (rather than dismissing it as extravagant or unwarranted), we see that Nietzsche is in fact deeply distressed regarding an existent situation of what a Marxist might call oppression, a Foucauldian might call domination, and Nietzsche calls the “curse on reality”, on account of which “mankind itself has become mendacious and false down to its most fundamental instincts – to the point of worshipping the *opposite* values of those which alone would guarantee its health, its future, the lofty *right* to its future” (EH Preface 2). Thus the penultimate sentence of this text declares, in a political voice with a revolutionary fervor Voltaire himself never fully mustered, “*Ecrasez l’infâme!*” (EH IV 8).<sup>13</sup>

That Nietzsche’s revolutionary rhetoric has been so easily discounted suggests not simply uneasiness regarding its radical or violent content, but also philosophers’ discomfort with philosophical texts that do not seem to speak the “straightforward” language of “traditional” philosophy.<sup>14</sup> Reading *Ecce Homo* as a manifesto, however, makes clear that Nietzsche’s language is operating at a level other than the solely constative. As Puchner argues, the manifesto operates through explicitly political and future-directed performatives which, because of their only tenuous and proximate success, remain open to charges of “mere” theatricality. As Austin makes clear, vowing eternal wedded bliss while

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**13** As Lyon observes, “manifestoes frequently operate as textual equivalents of violence, retort, and even political or aesthetic brinkmanship, all of which signal an inevitable and cumulative explosion of impatience in the face of repeated or longstanding abuses and broken promises” (Lyon 1999, p. 27).

**14** See, e. g., Leiter 2002, p. xii; Richardson 1996, p. 6. But, as Lyon notes: “‘Manifesto’ may be shorthand for a text’s particular stridency of tone [...] the term refers both to the form and to the passional state (frustration, disappointment, aggressive resolve) that precedes or engenders the text. To call a text a manifesto is to announce ahead of time its ardent disregard for good manners and reasoned civility” (Lyon 1999, p. 12).

playing a bride on the stage does not a marriage make – this perhaps happy performance is nevertheless void as a performative, and is explicitly expunged by Austin from consideration in his definitive study of performatives.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Puchner insists that “theatrical echoes” haunt the Austinian performative too (Puchner 2006, p. 24). Performatives in general must always “battle and conquer the threat of theatricality in order to become speech acts” (Puchner 2006, p. 25), a struggle that is particularly foregrounded in the text of the manifesto. Indeed, the manifesto “tries to exorcise its own theatricality by borrowing from an authority it will have obtained in the future. All manifestos are intertwined with the theatrical, driven by it and troubled by it, and they all seek to turn the theater into a source of authority” (Puchner 2006, p. 25).

This analysis aptly sums up one prominent tension of Nietzsche’s rhetorical situation in *Ecce Homo* (and not just in *Ecce Homo*): his simultaneous interest in, and professed disavowal of his interest in being understood. Of course, Nietzsche *must* be interested in, being understood – he writes books, after all, which he publishes and for which he seeks an audience and about whose misunderstanding and lack of readership he frets incessantly. And if *Ecce Homo* is, as I am arguing, a manifesto, then surely Nietzsche cares about being understood. How, then, to account for his equally vehement claims that “I am one thing, my writings are another matter”, and “it would contradict my character entirely if I expected ears *and hands* for *my* truths today: that today one doesn’t hear me and doesn’t accept my ideas is not only understandable, it even seems right to me” (EH III 1)?

This is Nietzsche’s most successfully performative moment, if only because its truth rests on the confirming context of the overall misunderstanding and outright disinterest that *did* greet his books; as we know, Nietzsche really was, for most practical purposes, neither heard nor seen in his day. However, that he does not *wish* to be heard or seen is patently ridiculous, and the theatricality of this claim threatens to turn *Ecce Homo*’s strident seriousness into comedy. Indeed, how can this larger-than-life literary figure truly claim he wishes to escape notice? Ostensibly, this dilemma is resolved by the equally theatrical conclusion he draws from the resounding silence under which he complains his name remains buried – namely, that he will be born posthumously, that one day a few chairs will be set aside for the interpretation of *Zarathustra* (EH III CW 2). This is a promise Nietzsche himself cannot redeem, one that can only become true on the basis of his texts’ future reception, over which Nietzsche (knows he) has little control. While the first of these claims operates as a kind of reverse psy-

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15 See Austin 1975, p. 22.

chology (“I don’t want to be read” = “please read me!”), it is the second promise of his posthumous birth that is the necessarily futural, revolutionary performative, battling and attempting to forestall its own theatricality. What Nietzsche does here is seize upon his lukewarm reception as an opportunity to entice potential followers to take on his task for themselves by appealing to their vanity, with “readership” becoming a self-congratulatory separation of themselves from the herd of mediocre humanity (e. g., “Those who can breathe the air of my writings know that it is an air of the heights, a *strong* air. One must be made for it. Otherwise there is no small danger that one may catch cold in it” [EH Preface 3]). It operates by enticing would-be readers and followers by denying their fitness for entrance into his “labyrinth of audacious insights” (EH III 3).<sup>16</sup> Should this strategy prove successful, Nietzsche *will* be born posthumously, be read and understood – at least by a few – and will thereby have rendered the purely theatrical promise of posthumous birth a performative reality.<sup>17</sup>

On its own, of course, this strategy is radically insufficient, for if one is seeking to foment revolution, one cannot merely entice a handful of ostensible elites to one’s cause; one must ultimately persuade the masses. This is why Nietzsche shifts strategies toward the end of *Ecce Homo*, concluding his manifesto with a more explicit yet no less theatrical declaration and explanation of his status as a destiny, the world-historical revolutionary personage that will topple “all power structures of the old society” (EH IV 1). This is Nietzsche’s no-holds-barred attempt to render the theatrical promises of his elitist seduction strategy successful on a mass scale – to explain the “meaning” of his texts even if their details remain lost on most. It is why, for example, Nietzsche declares himself to be an “immoralist”; as he says, he “needed a word that had the meaning of a provo-

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**16** Cf. GS 381: “*On the question of being understandable*. – One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood. It is not by any means necessarily an objection to a book when anyone finds it impossible to understand: perhaps that was part of the author’s intention – he did not want to be understood by just ‘anybody’. All the nobler spirits and tastes select their audience when they wish to communicate; and, choosing that, one at the same time erects barriers against ‘the others’. All the more subtle laws of any style have their origin at this point: they at the same time keep away, create a distance, forbid ‘entrance,’ understanding, as said above – while they open the ears of those whose ears are related to ours”. The entirety of this aphorism is instructive on this matter; see also BGE 30, 44.

**17** It is important to note that there is no reason why those upon whom this tactic works will, in fact, *be* the superior few they may congratulate themselves for being. As a tactic, this strategy may meet with a certain sort of “success” that nevertheless fails to facilitate the revaluation Nietzsche envisions (a contingency of which he was painfully aware). The enormous riskiness of such a strategy – and its obvious pitfalls – are magnificently detailed (and diagnosed as symptoms of Nietzsche’s own decadence) in Conway 1997.

cation for everybody” (EH IV 7); it is his “badge of honor” (EH IV 6). His self-identification as an immoralist, as the “*Revaluation of all values* [...] become flesh and genius in me” (EH IV 1), makes clear his interest not simply in being understood, but in being understood as the fundamentally revolutionary being he is by everyone, not just a(n “elite”) few.

Taken together, these rhetorical strategies and their complex interrelationship forge the literary agency of *Ecce Homo*, which attempts to “assassinate two millennia of antinature and desecration of man” and inaugurate “[t]hat new party of life which would tackle the greatest of all tasks, the attempt to raise humanity higher” (EH III BT 4) through rhetorical persuasion of both direct and indirect sorts. As Nietzsche says regarding his book, *Daybreak*:

“There are so many dawns that have not yet glowed” – this Indian inscription marks the opening of this book. Where does its author seek that new morning, that as yet undiscovered tender red that marks the beginning of another day – ah, a whole series, a whole world of new days? In a *revaluation of all values*, in a liberation [*Loskommen*; getting away] from all moral values, in saying Yes to and having confidence in all that has hitherto been forbidden, despised, and damned. (EH III D 1)

Nietzsche theatrically foresees this “world-historical” task of liberation as bringing about not simply a new morning but the “great noon” of humanity, calling it “the vision of a feast that I shall yet live to see” (EH III BT 4). This performative, autobiographical proclamation is his practicing of what Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach preaches, his attempt to change the world through the performative act of philosophizing itself.

## 2 Who Nietzsche Is: A Revolution for All and (N)one

If it is essential to the accomplishment of his world-historical task that Nietzsche properly say “who he is”, he certainly does not disappoint in this regard, offering a manifold series of self-declarations in this text:

I am, for example, by no means a bogey, or a moralistic monster – I am actually the very opposite of the type of man who so far has been revered as virtuous. [...] I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus. (EH Preface 2)

Apart from the fact that I am a *décadent*, I am also the opposite. (EH I 2)

I am the *opposite of a décadent*. (EH I 2)

However un-Christian this may seem, I am not even predisposed against myself. (EH I 4)

I am always equal to accidents; I have to be unprepared to be master of myself. (EH I 4)

I am merely my father once more and, as it were, his continued life after an all-too-early death. (EH I 5)

I am warlike by nature. (EH I 7)

I am one thing, my writings are another matter. (EH III 1)

I am the *anti-ass par excellence* and thus a world-historical monster. – I am, in Greek, and not only in Greek, the *Antichrist*. (EH III 2)

I am the first *immoralist*. (EH III UM 2)

I am a nuance. (EH III CW 4)

I am no man, I am dynamite. (EH IV 1)

Perhaps I am a buffoon. (EH IV 1)

I contradict as has never been contradicted before and am nevertheless the opposite of a No-saying spirit. (EH IV 1)

I am a bringer of glad tidings like no one before me. (EH IV 1)

For all that, I am necessarily also the man of calamity. (EH IV 1)

I am by far the most terrible human being that has existed so far; this does not preclude the possibility that I shall be the most beneficial. (EH IV 2)

I am the first immoralist: that makes me the annihilator *par excellence*. (EH IV 2)

This series of “I am”s placed next to one another is a confounding and even comic morass of competing claims. Yet Nietzsche provides a key to their decipherment, not simply in his subtitle (“How One Becomes What One Is”) or in his chapter headings (which answer the “what” of that subtitle with the word “Destiny” – the book’s successful understanding constitutes the “how”), but also in his step-by-step self-declaration that constitutes the structure of *Ecce Homo*. For the task of this text is not simply to bring the revolution into being; it is to bring *Nietzsche* into being. Indeed, these are effectively the same thing, for bringing Nietzsche into being will bring the revolution into being just as, in the *Communist Manifesto*, bringing the proletariat into being will bring the communist revolution into being. *Ecce Homo* is the vehicle by which Nietzsche makes himself and/as the revolution.

*Ecce Homo* thus reveals not simply what Nietzsche believes makes himself a revolution/ary, but also the fundamentally idiosyncratic character of that revolution/ary. For example, one must be “wise”, which means having experience of what one negates. In Nietzsche’s particular case, this experience means long and arduous struggle with illness. Luckily he was healthy enough to withstand it, as evidenced by his excellent sense of smell and his naturally warlike dispo-

sition. One must also be “clever”, which is the ability to learn whatever is important that one does not already know from experience (thus supplementing one’s wisdom). Nietzsche says he is clever both because he has discerned the truly important questions in life – nutrition, climate and recreation – and also because this discernment has allowed him to reject all those false and petty questions of human existence that have thus far seemed most important and recognize them as the lies they are – God, immortality of the soul, redemption, etc. (EH II 1, 10). One must also write “good books”. The meaning of “good” in this sense has been discussed in the previous section; here, however, Nietzsche claims his books are good because of his instinctive style, which aptly communicates his inward states, and his penetrating grasp of psychology, which allows him to intuit the subtleties of his readers and attune his rhetoric to them accordingly. Despite the possible generalizability of all these qualities, their specific form in Nietzsche’s own life and – as we will see – his personally extraordinary embodiment of them make clear that only Nietzsche himself could successfully have learned and undertaken them, and thus that only Nietzsche himself is truly revolutionary.

Just as with the ruminations on his character, Nietzsche’s reflections on his texts explain them as by no means random or unanticipated, but rather as part of a purposive and coherent trajectory that renders each retrospectively intelligible. That trajectory is the development and constitution of his revolutionary task. Thus Nietzsche claims that in *The Birth of Tragedy* he discovered what was missing from modernity, Dionysian or tragic wisdom, which he explicitly hopes to recover; the *Untimely Ones* constitute “four acts of assassination” against German culture, perhaps some necessary if preliminary ground-clearing work (it is here that Nietzsche first declares himself to be an “immoralist”) (EH III UM 2); *Human, All Too Human* “is the monument of a crisis” for Nietzsche (EH III HAH 1) wherein he coolly appraises all idealism, Wagnerianism and scientific reason and breaks with each of them with a decisive “sureness” by which he “got hold of my task and its world-historical aspect” (EH III HAH 6). Thus in *Daybreak* Nietzsche’s “campaign against morality” (EH III D 1) begins, waged happily, he says, in the name of humanity’s future. Like *Daybreak*, *The Gay Science* continues this joyful Yes-saying; and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* marks the birthing of a figure and a text possessed of the same task as Nietzsche: saying “Yes to the point of justifying, of redeeming even all of the past” (EH III Z 8).<sup>18</sup> With *Beyond*

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<sup>18</sup> This admission makes clear that *Ecce Homo* is not Nietzsche’s only autobiographical text, and the possibility that Zarathustra is Nietzsche’s alter ego, obvious as it may seem, nevertheless cannot be ruled out.



*Good and Evil* Nietzsche says the “task for the years that followed now was indicated as clearly as possible. After the Yes-saying part of my task had been solved” – within which he is presumably subsuming his previous work – “the turn had come for the No-saying, *No-doing* part: the revaluation of our values so far, the great war – conjuring up a day of decision” (EH III BGE 1). He then says the *Genealogy* poses “three decisive preliminary studies by a psychologist for a revaluation of all values” (EH III GM); with *Twilight of the Idols* this task becomes clear and perfect, just as “the old truth is approaching its end” (EH III TI 1). As Nietzsche says here:

And in all seriousness: nobody before me knew the right way, the way *up*; it is only beginning with me that there are hopes again, tasks, ways that can be prescribed for culture – *I am he that brings these glad tidings*. – And thus I am also a destiny – . (EH III TI 2)

Referring to himself as a destiny for the first time, Nietzsche makes clear that *Twilight* marks a self-consciously revolutionary turn, noting that the same day he finished it he began “the tremendous task of the revaluation”, i.e., *The Antichrist(ian)*, a book intended to be the first of a four-volume *magnum opus* entitled *Revaluation of All Values*. This project was to be not simply a deep critique of modernity, but also a piece of revolutionary rhetoric intended to incite the very revolution it claimed to foresee, an operation akin to Nietzsche’s description of the *Antichrist(ian)* as “the shattering lightning bolt of the *Revaluation* that will make the earth convulse” (EH III CW 4). Finally, Nietzsche devotes the section on *The Case of Wagner* to complaining about the Germans for undermining every important moment in history, up to and including himself. Thus Nietzsche must explain why he is a destiny, a fact lost on those who, along with the “millennia, the nations, the first and the last, the philosophers and old women” are all worthy of each other, “excepting five, six moments in history, and me as the seventh” (EH IV 7).

It may not be simply the Germans’ beer-drinking obliviousness that has prevented the world from learning about Nietzsche’s status as a destiny, however. It may also be the fault of Nietzsche himself who, like his alter ego and prototype Zarathustra, is a poor teacher and more generally a lousy communicator with the people he is ostensibly trying to reach. As we have seen, Nietzsche attempts to dismiss this communicative failure by saying things like this:

Let us imagine [...] that a book speaks of nothing but events that lie altogether beyond the possibility of any frequent or even rare experience – that it is the first language for a new series of experiences. In that case, simply nothing will be heard, but there will be the acoustic illusion that where nothing is heard, nothing is there. This is, in the end, my average experience and, if you will, the originality of my experience. (EH III 1)

While there is surely a grain of truth to this, it is also an obvious defense mechanism in the face of the abysmal failure of his apocalyptic predictions regarding modernity's impending implosion and the lack of recognition of his own pivotal role in bringing that crisis into being. Hence his already noted theatrical declaration that he will be born posthumously, a claim that may be transformed into a felicitous performative only on the basis of an elitist discourse of reverse psychology along the lines of: “My triumph is precisely the opposite of Schopenhauer's: I say, *‘non legor, non legar’*” (EH III 1).

There are similar moments of theatricality in Nietzsche's self-presentation in “Why I Am So Wise” and “Why I Am So Clever”. In “Wise”, for example, everything turns on Nietzsche's claim that he is essentially healthy by nature. Despite his bouts of illness, despite his acknowledgement that he, too, is *décadent*, Nietzsche nevertheless insists that “As *summa summarum*, I was healthy; as an angle, as a specialty, I was *décadent*” (EH I 2); and “I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again: the condition for this – every physiologist would admit that – is *that one be healthy at bottom*” (EH I 2). In “Clever”, Nietzsche insists that he never struggled, never willed, never tried arduously to accomplish anything. This is, in fact, a prime reason why Nietzsche is the only genuine candidate for the revolutionary redemption of modernity. For knowledge of his task required no struggle, and his status as the revaluator of all values entailed no exertion, being a purely instinctual condition:

For the task of a *revaluation of all values* more capacities may have been needed than have ever dwelt together in a single individual – above all, even contrary capacities that had to be kept from disturbing, destroying one another. An order of rank among these capacities; distance; the art of separating without setting against one another; to mix nothing, to “reconcile” nothing; a tremendous variety that is nevertheless the opposite of chaos – this was the precondition, the long secret work and artistry of my instinct. Its *higher protection* manifested itself to such a high degree that I never suspected what was growing in me – and one day all my capacities, suddenly ripe, *leaped forth* in their ultimate perfection. (EH II 9)<sup>19</sup>

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**19** The obvious allusion to pregnancy here, wherein Nietzsche effectively *gives birth* to the revaluation of values, foreshadows his account of the maternal delivery of the thought of eternal recurrence in the section on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (an account which does not, as Crawford suggests, relate an experience of divine inspiration [Crawford 1999, p. 282–283] but rather, as Nietzsche himself notes, an experience of giving birth: “if I reckon forward from that day [of insemination?] to the sudden birth that occurred in February 1883 under the most improbable circumstances [...] we get 18 months for the pregnancy. This figure of precisely 18 months might suggest, at least to Buddhists, that I am really a female elephant” [EH III Z 1]). Unlike with most deliveries, however, Nietzsche is clear that his birthing of the revaluation of values involved no labor pains whatsoever – he is apparently exempt from the Biblical curse upon humankind that all labor be painful. Indeed, Nietzsche does not even seem to have known he

Thus Nietzsche concludes: “I cannot remember that I ever tried hard – no trace of *struggle* can be demonstrated in my life; I am the opposite of a heroic nature”. Contradicting his own self-presentation as horrified by the dominion of Christianity and deeply invested in the future fate of humanity, Nietzsche says: “‘Willing’ something, ‘striving’ for something, envisaging a ‘purpose,’ a ‘wish’ – I know none of this from experience” (EH II 9).

Yet Nietzsche’s claims regarding his overall healthiness and placidity are hard to believe. His formula for greatness in a human being may be *amor fati* (EH II 10), but his agony at his failed authorial reception and the carefully crafted text of *Ecce Homo* itself – wherein Nietzsche rebels against his instincts and decides unequivocally to declare who he is – render these claims hollow. Nietzsche insists that “[l]ife was easy for me – easiest when it made the hardest demands on me” (EH II 10) and claims that he looks upon his “*ample!*” future “as upon calm seas: there is no ripple of desire. I do not want in the least that anything should become different than it is; I myself do not want to become different” (EH II 9). Yet, coming from the man who seeks the total overhaul of European modernity and following, as it does, the claim that this unperturbed becoming what he is amounts to Nietzsche’s *becoming* the revaluation of values, it is difficult to swallow. Later, after complaining that no one, not even his friends, has truly studied him in the way he deserves and that everyone else in Germany seems content never even to speak his name, Nietzsche stubbornly insists nevertheless that “I myself have never suffered from all this; what is *necessary* does not hurt me; *amor fati* is my inmost nature” (EH III CW 4). Surely Nietzsche doth protest too much.

These important performative moments of self-characterization that parade so obviously on the stage of theatricality are significant, for they reveal the areas wherein Nietzsche believed himself to be least persuasive and indicate where he believes he must be successful if he is to effect the revolutionary transformation he seeks. It is not fully clear why these three areas might be considered by Nietzsche to be most important for his revolutionary success; however, one can certainly speculate. First, we might argue that readers *must* be persuaded by Nietzsche’s superabundant health if we are to find him a credible diagnostician and legitimate attending physician to the sick patient of modernity. After all, Nietzsche is clear that the *décadent* is unable to determine the difference between health and sickness, much less cope with the adversity that attends ill-

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was pregnant (although Kelly Oliver has ingeniously suggested that Zarathustra’s complaints about nausea may, in the context of his clear appropriation of maternity, be construed as morning sickness; see Oliver 1995, p. 148).

ness: “Apart from the fact that I am a *décadent*, I am also the opposite. My proof for this is, among other things, that I have always instinctively chosen the *right* means against wretched states; while the *décadent* typically chooses means that are disadvantageous for him” (EH I 2). Second, we must believe in Nietzsche’s instinctual realization of this diagnosis and revolutionary solution for perhaps similar reasons – Nietzsche’s essentially easy, unconscious, and painless becoming of the revaluation of all values suggests its authenticity, its utterly instinctual character. Finally, we must believe Nietzsche’s theatrical promises of posthumous birth because to do so suggests the inherent worth of his texts despite their apparent difficulty and hints at the important secrets that lie waiting yet to be discovered within them. Indeed, Nietzsche’s assertion of his posthumous birth attempts to produce his texts as *powerful*, as able to create the kind of future effect that he is still only insisting they possess.

If Nietzsche manages to master these three moments of theatricality and somehow transform them into felicitous performatives through successful control of the reception of his life and work, *this itself* will constitute a transformation of his audience into his perfect readers – or really, what is more like it, into his devotees. Because what we notice about these three important moments of recognition is that none of them require mastery of difficult philosophical or political concepts. They merely involve reading, seeing or perceiving Nietzsche in an appropriate way – as healthy, characterized by *amor fati*, and instinctually a revaluation of all values. If he is able to produce readers who see this Nietzsche when they read *Ecce Homo*, he will have brought into being a cadre of followers who see him as not exactly “right” about anything but, rather – and more importantly – as fundamentally revolutionary, as “the lightning bolt of truth” that finally and necessarily struck a sick, false, *décadent* Europe. As Nietzsche says of himself, “What defines me, what sets me apart from the whole rest of humanity is that I *uncovered* Christian morality” (EH IV 7). And this uncovering is not a political position or a philosophical idea but rather an event of the first magnitude: “The uncovering of Christian morality is an event without parallel, a real catastrophe. He that is enlightened about that, is a *force majeure*, a destiny – he breaks the history of mankind in two. One lives before him, or one lives after him” (EH IV 8).

This is why Nietzsche’s revolution turns so crucially on proper self-revelation and -constitution, and it explains why *Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche’s revolutionary manifesto and not its rhetorical counterpart, *The Antichrist(ian)*. Nietzsche’s proper self-revelation will have a properly revolutionary effect – it will allow him, finally, to be both seen and heard. But if that were to happen, then a revolution would have already occurred, for Nietzsche would suddenly become visible and audible in a way that he has not yet experienced (as he sighs, “I live on

my own credit; it is perhaps a mere prejudice that I live" [EH Preface 1]). Thus in the end it does not really matter whether Nietzsche is explaining his ostensible "biography" or the historical trajectory of his texts – both come out the same in the end insofar as both find their conclusion in his claim that he is a destiny, a destiny that he is the Antichrist. Indeed, both of the only sometimes plausible narratives Nietzsche tells in this text – that of his life and of his texts (which he urges us not to confuse) – conflate Nietzsche and Zarathustra (not to mention Dionysus) into a single personage – the Antichrist – who is burdened with the monumental task of redeeming a rotten and corrupted Christian modernity. This suggests not simply that Nietzsche is a revolutionary, a radical critic who articulates crisis and calls for action, but that in fact he himself is the very revolution for which he calls in this text and elsewhere. As he himself puts it, "I am, in Greek, and not only in Greek, the *Antichrist*" (EH III 1).

This analysis also reveals how Nietzsche's manifesto significantly diverges from those of the genre Puchner documents. First, rather than being primarily concerned with the explicit formation of its recipients – the party for whom, in Marxian manifestos, the revolution is being waged (e.g., the proletariat) – Nietzsche is most concerned about the correct construction of himself. *Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche's performative attempt at *self*-constitution; indeed, this text operates fundamentally as Nietzsche's self-presentation *as* revolutionary. A mere glance at the table of contents is enough to confirm this, wherein we see subtitles more properly read as paranoid than psychotic: Why I am So Wise, Why I am So Clever, Why I Write Such Good Books, and Why I am a Destiny. If we remember Nietzsche's opening statement and complaint – that given the disproportion between the magnitude of his task and the smallness of his contemporaries he has been neither heard nor seen – we understand that such over-the-top self-characterization is mandated by the increasing crisis of misunderstanding that plagues Nietzsche's texts overall, a crisis that correlates precisely with the increasing stranglehold of Christianity's power over modernity. Nietzsche believes that a proper self-revelation will have the interpellative and transformative effect on his readers that Marx, on Puchner's account, believed the *Communist Manifesto* would have on the proletariat.

This is where the second crucial difference emerges: unlike the Marxian manifestos Puchner analyzes, Nietzsche believes that proper self-revelation will *itself* transform his readers (and thus modernity). This is quite different from the Marxian endeavor to construct the proletariat so that they become the class who will effect the revolution. In Nietzsche, the idea is that if he articulates himself properly, he will have the requisite effect on his readers that will allow him to be understood, and that if he is able to make himself understood, then that is the equivalent of the revolution having occurred. For if Nietzsche

were to be understood, this would mean that his readers would no longer be the limited, childish, impotent, lazy, dogmatic, blinking herd animals of modernity. They would instead be Nietzsche's proper readers, people who share his perceptions and experiences to such an extent that his words are intelligible to them. As Nietzsche says of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, to understand “six sentences from it – that is, to have really experienced them – would raise one to a higher level of existence than ‘modern’ men could attain” (EH III 1). But if Nietzsche's readers were to understand *Ecce Homo* in this way – if they were, as he says, to really experience it – they would be so fundamentally transformed that modernity itself will have necessarily been overthrown. For this is the very meaning of “Zarathustra”: “The self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness; the self-overcoming of the moralist, into his opposite – *into me* – that is what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth” (EH IV 3, emphasis added). Unlike in Marx, wherein the requisite effect on his readers is that they become the revolutionary agent, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche himself is the revolutionary agent, and rather than inciting someone else to effect change, he is inciting it himself through a rhetorical inducement of his readers to *become him*. Nietzsche is thus both revolutionary critic *and* revolutionary class, and the effect of his words will not create a class for-itself but rather a humanity that is for-Nietzsche. Hence the title of this manifesto: only through our adequately beholding the man can that man finally and truly become what he is. Only when Nietzsche is properly understood will we have become him, and the revolution have finally arrived.

The consequence of these two extraordinary differences between Marxian manifestos and Nietzsche's own is that for Nietzsche, there can be no final or definitive justification for the revolutionary transformation he seeks, no argument in favor of this transformation that is not largely if not entirely rhetorical. After all, if Nietzsche is primarily interested in crafting the recipients of his manifesto in order to adequately construct and complete himself, then surely the justification for revolution could just as easily be his own exquisite taste and discernment as much as the devastation of the human condition as wrought by Christianity. This is the surprising consequence of making autobiography the location of the manifesto: Nietzsche himself is the best – and only – reason why the revolution he advocates should in fact take place. In the end, there is no argument, no reason *why* that will justify this revaluation of all values other than Nietzsche himself and his own sensibility and (dis)taste. Thus, as “an opponent of Christianity *de rigueur*” (EH I 7), Nietzsche says, “I do not refute ideals, I merely put on gloves before them” (EH Preface 3).

This is not to say that Nietzsche offers no reasons at all to support his claim that Christianity is the greatest calamity ever to have befallen Europe. But it is to say that if those reasons fail, he has a multitude of other persuasive rhetorical

tactics, because he knows very well that reasons themselves only partially persuade and often not in the ways that really count, much less at levels of understanding that are truly transformative. As Nietzsche argues: “States of consciousness, any faith, considering something true, for example – every psychologist knows this – are fifth-rank matters of complete indifference compared to the value of instincts” (AC 39); as Janet Lyon observes, “the manifesto is, after all, a text of radicalism which forges an audience through its efforts at *affective* and *experiential* intelligibility” (Lyon 1999, p. 28, emphasis added). Moreover, Nietzsche knows that the project of offering reasons stinks of the will to truth with which modernity is sick, the will to truth being a secularization of the Christian loathing of life and its demand that life have a purpose other than meaningless suffering and death. Indeed, the self-referential circle in which Nietzsche is supposedly caught – his offering a critique of truth in the idiom of truth, for example, or his condemnation of Christianity in what looks like a very Christian insistence on combating lies, vice and disease – is both apparent to Nietzsche and not necessarily vicious. It is why he retreats into the discourse of taste as (another of) his final justification(s) for the revolutionary overthrow of Christianity. Because ultimately, there *are* no definitive reasons why we should get rid of this pervasive form of life in modernity. There is only Nietzsche himself and the testimony of his excellent instincts. Or, as he puts it: “Whoever does not merely comprehend the word ‘Dionysian’ but comprehends *himself* in the word ‘Dionysian’ needs no refutation of Plato or Christianity or Schopenhauer – he *smells the decay*” (EH III BT 2).

As we have seen, should Nietzsche succeed in transforming the pathetic specter of modern humanity into the robust and appropriate receptors of his perfectly constituted and presented revolutionary self, he will have succeeded in bringing about the revolution for which he so longs. This is a revolution *for all* that, as an act of self-revelation by an inscrutable figure who may never succeed in rendering himself or his project intelligible, is effectively a revolution *for none*, an eerie parallel with the situation of that equally inept prophet of Nietzsche’s obscure political philosophy, Zarathustra. However, while the interpellation of the reader that occurs in both the Nietzschean and the Marxian manifesto requires recognition on the part of the recipient in order to effectively be a vehicle of the revolution itself, there is an important difference in what the audience sees. In Marxian manifestos, the proletariat comes to recognize *itself* as those for whom the revolution is being fought and as those who must take up the struggle if it is to succeed. By contrast, in Nietzsche’s manifesto, his readers come to recognize themselves as *devotees of Nietzsche* who will take up *his* cause because they have been transformed into readers who effectively *are* him. Insofar as Nietzsche must re-tool his readers in order to render their expe-

riences and aspirations identical with his, he seeks in some sense to make his readers *into him*, and a successful reception of his texts in this sense means they will have become able to recognize themselves *as Nietzsche*. This is also, then, a revolution for *one* – it is a revolution intended for all that seeks to transform them into a single personage, Nietzsche himself. What links this one with his desire to communicate himself to all and the only tenuous and insecure achievement of that project is the unequivocal demand *Ecrasez l'infâme!*, an autobiographical demand of the most personal sort that is nevertheless a profoundly political claim in the name of the modern humanity for which Nietzsche speaks. Should that demand become intelligible in the person of Nietzsche himself who entreats and, more importantly, embodies it, philosophy will have become praxis, praxis will have become philosophy, and both will be indistinguishable from autobiography. We will have become Nietzsche, and Nietzsche will have become us. And we/Nietzsche will have become true philosopher/s, revolutionaries who undertake to change the world and will have changed it, effectively through the act of interpreting it.





Yannick Souladié

## A “Foretaste” of Revaluation

**Abstract:** *Ecce Homo* is not a book alone; Nietzsche gave it a precise task in his work. Just as the new prefaces of 1886 were to have concluded Nietzsche’s past philosophy to announce the planned and eventually abandoned book *The Will to Power*, *Ecce Homo* reinterprets his previous works and his whole life according to the work which was supposed to crown and achieve his philosophy: *The Antichrist: Revaluation of All Values*. This essay attempts to show that, like *The Antichrist*, its fiery preface, *Ecce Homo*, lays the foundation for a philosophy of pure affirmation, a Dionysian philosophy.

Nietzsche’s philosophy is frequently considered incomplete, mainly because of the abandonment of *The Will to Power*. Following Heidegger, it has often been alleged that the drafts of *The Will to Power* had a deeper meaning than his last books (*Twilight of Idols*, *The Antichrist*, and *Ecce Homo*). But work by Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari showed that Nietzsche gave up his project of *The Will to Power* to dedicate himself to the project of the *Revaluation of All Values*, which eventually became *The Antichrist*.

Far from considering his work as incomplete, then, Nietzsche presents *The Antichrist* as his “most independent” book, and considers it one of his two major works,<sup>1</sup> the other being *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (TI IX 51). “Now I have the absolute conviction that everything has turned out well, from the beginning – everything is unity and aims at unity” (KSB 8/545),<sup>2</sup> he writes to Heinrich Köselitz after completing *Ecce Homo*. Far from having given up on completing his philosophy, Nietzsche deems its unity can be fulfilled only through a revaluation of all Christian values, through a “Curse upon Christianity”.<sup>3</sup> The last philosophy of Nietzsche is a “philosophy of the Antichrist” (BGE 256).

What role is *Ecce Homo* supposed to play in this project of the *Revaluation of All Values*? According to Nietzsche, it is a “preparatory book” (KSB 8/463),<sup>4</sup> a

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1 Nietzsche presents his *Revaluation of All Values* as his “major work” in two letters to his publisher C.G. Naumann, 7 September 1888 (KSB 8/411) and 6 November 1888 (KSB 8/465).

2 Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 22 December 1888.

3 *Fluch auf das Christenthum* is the final subtitle of *The Antichrist* (KSA 6/165). Translations of quotations from Nietzsche’s works are by Walter Kaufmann (AC) and Duncan Large (EH). Translations of quotations from the *Nachlass* and correspondence are by the author.

4 Letter to Naumann, 6 November 1888.

“Preface” to *The Antichrist* (KSB 8/467).<sup>5</sup> *Ecce Homo* was conceived as an introduction to the *Revaluation of All Values*: the idea of revaluation can be found on every page. Just as the new prefaces of 1886 were to have concluded Nietzsche’s past philosophy to announce *The Will to Power*, *Ecce Homo* reaches an assessment of his previous works and announces “the shattering lightning-bolt of the *Revaluation*” (EH III CW 4).<sup>6</sup> We will have to pay special attention to the last part of *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am a Destiny”. Nietzsche actually writes to Georg Brandes that this last part “gives a foretaste of what is about to happen” (KSB 8/501),<sup>7</sup> namely *The Antichrist* – indeed, Nietzsche planned to publish *Ecce Homo* two years before *The Antichrist*.<sup>8</sup>

If *Ecce Homo* is considered a “Preface” to *The Antichrist*, then its last part, “Why I am a Destiny”, represents an appetizer, a kind of trailer. It ends on a famous sentence: “– Have I been understood? – *Dionysus against the crucified one* ...” (EH IV 9). What is it, in this last sentence, that appears so essential to Nietzsche, that he deems it necessary to clarify that “understanding” it means “understanding” him? How is this sentence connected with *The Antichrist*? What has to be “understood” in this opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified?

“Why I am a Destiny” insists on the opposition between Dionysian values and Christian values. Describing himself as a “Dionysian nature” (EH IV 2), Nietzsche opposes “Christian morality” (EH IV 5–8). This Dionysian nature is presented as something highly positive: “I contradict as no one has ever contradicted before and yet am the opposite of a no-saying spirit”, he writes in the first subsection (EH IV 1). My “Dionysian nature [...] is incapable of separating no-doing from yes-saying” (EH IV 2), he further adds.

What is the relation between this positive aspect of Dionysus and the “anti-” of the Antichrist? Some readers consider *The Antichrist* a purely negative work, a provocation, an unwarranted piece of evilness against Christianity.<sup>9</sup> According to Heidegger, any “anti-” is conditioned by the essence of what it opposes.<sup>10</sup> If we follow this logic, *The Antichrist* should be conditioned by this Christianity which it “curses”. Does the meaning of Nietzsche’s *Antichrist* really come down to this? – I don’t think so: Nietzsche chooses this term with great care. If the English

5 Letter to Köselitz, 13 November 1888.

6 Cf. Roos 2000, p. 47.

7 Draft letter to Georg Brandes, early December 1888.

8 See draft letter to Helen Zimmern, 8 December 1888 (KSB 8/512).

9 See, among others, Drews 1904, p. 484; Bertram 1920, p. 8–9; Jaspers 1938, p. 8–9; Copleston 1942, p. 26, p. 116; Girard 1984; Fink 2003, p. 121.

10 See Heidegger 1977, p. 217.

systematically translate the word “Αντίχριστος”, appearing in the Johannine epistles, as “Antichrist”, the Germans can choose between three different translations: “*der Endchrist*” (the final Christian), “*der Widerchrist*” (the contra-Christian) and “*der Antichrist*” (the anti-Christian). *Der Endchrist* is a seldom-used theological term: it designates more specifically the fake Messiah that must come at the end of times to preach a counter-religion. Luther occasionally uses the term, generally to indict the Pope and the papacy.<sup>11</sup> *Der Widerchrist* was used by theologians and scholars in Nietzsche’s time. It was the term Luther used in his edition of the New Testament and remained the official translation of *Αντίχριστος* until the twentieth century. *Der Antichrist* is a more contemporary term: derived from Romance languages, in the nineteenth century it was in common parlance and little used by scholars.

Nietzsche purposely chose *der Antichrist* rather than *der Widerchrist* generally used by the scholars of his time. By doing so, he made it clear that he wanted to be understood by all, and not simply by scholars. Rarely seen in the Scriptures, the Antichrist became, little by little, a well-known figure, even for unbelievers, in the same way as the Devil, with whom it is often related. It is the multitude, the “popular position” which, first of all, recognized in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* an embodiment of the Antichrist:

the *popular position*, which can be understood in me alone, precisely my attitude to Christianity, has been well and clearly understood. “Aut Christus, aut Zarathustra!” Or in German: it’s the old Antichrist promised for a long time. (KSB 6/435 f.)<sup>12</sup>

The choice of the word *der Antichrist* instead of *der Widerchrist* indicates that Nietzsche aims to appear as a kind of freak, since *der Antichrist* is a word which frightens the multitude.

Nietzsche’s Antichrist appears as a political figure. With him begins a new reign, the reign of antichristian values, those that “the good” always dreaded. The Antichrist is the first tangible sign of new times. But more than all of this, by choosing the Greek prefix “anti-” rather than the German prefixes “Wider-” and “End-”, Nietzsche indicates the Greek origin of his Antichrist. In *Ecce Homo* he directly points to its Greek root when he writes: “I am, in Greek, and not only in Greek, the *Antichrist*...” (EH III 2).

The prefix “anti-” refers to Dionysus. So, when in the “Attempt at a Self-Criticism” of *The Birth of the Tragedy* Nietzsche wonders what the “true [*rechten*]

<sup>11</sup> See Luther 1520a, p. 414, 425, 434, 453–454; Luther 1520b; Luther 1520c; Luther 1520d; Luther 1537–1538, p. 213–20.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Köselitz, 26 August 1883.

name of the Antichrist” could be, he finds the name of the sylvan god. This “Anti-Christian” doctrine:

What should it be called? As a philologist and man of words, I baptized it, taking some liberties – for who knew the correct name of the Antichrist? – after the name of a Greek god: I called it the *Dionysian*. (GTVS 5)

What has to be “understood” in *Ecce Homo*, is that there has never been on earth a more essential opposition than the one between Dionysus and the ideal of the Christianity, between Dionysus and Christ. In reading *Ecce Homo*, the necessity of the advent – of the publication – of an Antichrist has also to be “understood”.

The last sentence of *Ecce Homo* logically announces *The Antichrist*. Within the concept “Antichrist”, the Greek prefix “anti-” refers to Dionysus, to this essentially approving principle, for whom the negative aspect, however violent it can be at times, is always secondary. The “-christ” of Antichrist indicates the same as “the Crucified”, namely not Jesus but Christ. Indeed, Nietzsche differentiates, in *The Antichrist*, Jesus as a historical character from the mythical figure of Christ, forged by the first Christian community.<sup>13</sup> The Christ is the “‘Saviour’ whom he [Paul] invented” (AC 58), the Christian ideal of the human. The sentence “*Dionysus against the crucified one*” is thus equivalent to the concept “Antichrist”.

Far from being purely negative, the Antichrist refers to Dionysus, to an active principle. *The Antichrist* is therefore not the projection of any form of resentment that could be linked to the private character Friedrich Nietzsche against Christianity, but has to be understood as an active principle which turns against Christianity, insofar as this religion, which appeared after the sylvan god, is entirely directed against this Dionysian life. Indeed, it is Christianity and not the Antichrist-Dionysus that must be considered as an “anti-”, as a curse on healthy life, if we “understand” Nietzsche. We read in a note from 1885 that “Christian doctrine was the counter-doctrine opposed to the Dionysian” (NF 1885, 41[7]: KSA 11/682). Originally, the Greek civilization (but the Roman and Jewish ones as well)<sup>14</sup> had set itself up in a healthy relationship to nature. Christianity first

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**13** In *The Antichrist*, Jesus is never called “Christ” but “the Nazarene” (AC 7), “the Redeemer” (AC 24, 28–29, 31–33, 35, 41–42, 44), “the Galilean” (AC 24), “Jesus of Nazareth” (AC 27) or simply “Jesus” (AC 27, 29, 32, 40–42). The figure adored by the first Christian community is then called “Christ” (AC 39, 41), “the Messiah” (AC 31, 40), “the God on the Cross” (AC 51, 58) and “the Saviour” (AC 58).

**14** “Originally, especially at the time of the kings, Israel also stood in the right, that is, the natural, relationship to all things.” (AC 25). Cf. AC 58–59.

opposed these accomplished civilizations, corrupted in them what it could corrupt, and cursed what still resisted it. Insofar as it turns against this movement, which was built in reaction to the healthy life, the Antichrist can rightfully bear the name of Dionysus.

In Nietzsche’s last works, Christianity is always characterized in a negative way. It is described as the “mortal enmity against the lords of the earth, against the ‘noble’” (AC 21), as “a form of mortal enmity against reality that has never yet been surpassed” (AC 27); Christianity “stands opposed to every *spirit* that has turned out well; [...] it utters a curse against the spirit, against the *superbia* of the healthy spirit” (AC 52).

Section 5 of *The Antichrist* claims that Christianity “has made an ideal of whatever *contradicts* the instinct of the strong life”. Insofar as its “ideal” was built in opposition to an active principle, it appears that it is Christianity, and not the Dionysian Antichrist, which is conditioned by the essence of what it opposes. Section 21 thus describes the essence of Christianity as deeply negative – Nietzsche uses the expression “*Christlich ist der Hass ...*” (Christian is hatred of ...) several times:

Christian is [...] hatred of all who think differently; the will to persecute. [...] Christian is mortal enmity against the lords of the earth, against the “noble” [...] Christian, finally, is the hatred of the *spirit*, of pride, courage, freedom, *libertinage* of the spirit; Christian is the hatred of the *senses*, of joy in the senses, of joy itself ... (AC 21)

Christianity is thus determined as a reactive entity that can only be described through its opposition to what is accomplished. In this way, Christianity appears as a pure product of resentment. As the resentment morality, it has been built on a “no” uttered against a pre-existent order of values.<sup>15</sup> What is this pre-existent order? It is that of “reality”, of “nature” (AC 15), of nobility. Christianity “leads a war unto death [*Todfeindschafts-Krieg*] against everything noble on earth” (AC 60).

This reference to what is “noble [*vornehm*]” surely isn’t innocent: it leads us directly to the opposition between a noble morality and a resentment morality as it is set out in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (GM I 10) – “master morality” and “slave morality”, according to certain texts (BGE 260). In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche thus writes that there is no “greater contrast of values” than that between “Christian values” and “noble values” (AC 37).

The late Nietzsche seems to think that the expression “Christian morality” is much more suitable than “resentment morality” or “slave morality” to describe

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. AC 24 and GM I 7–10.

what opposes the noble morality. Indeed, in “Why I am a Destiny”, Nietzsche – who appears as “the Immoralist” – keeps stigmatizing “Christian” morality:

Have I been understood? – What sets me apart and aside from all the rest of humanity is having *discovered* Christian morality. [...] Blindness in the face of Christianity is the *crime par excellence* – the crime *against life* ... [...] Christian morality – the most malignant form of the will to falsehood, the true Circe of humanity: the thing that *ruined* it. [...] The sole morality that has hitherto been taught, the morality of unselfing oneself, betrays a will to the end; at the most fundamental level it *denies* life. (EH IV 7)

It is Christian morality that most essentially opposes Dionysus, whom *Ecce Homo* describes as “the enormous and unbounded Yes-and Amen-saying” (EH III Z 6).<sup>16</sup>

The form of *The Antichrist* itself testifies to its deeply approving Dionysian nature: this work was built according to the logic of the noble morality, the morality of “good and bad”. The first paragraph begins as follows:

Let us face ourselves. We are Hyperboreans, – we know very well how far off we live. “Neither by land nor by sea will you find the way to the Hyperboreans” – Pindar already knew this about us. “Never on foot or ship could you explore the marvelous road to the feast of the Hyperboreans.” Beyond the north, ice, and death – *our* life, *our* happiness ... We have discovered happiness. (AC 1)<sup>17</sup>

*The Antichrist* does not begin with a criticism, with a *negation* of Christianity, but with a praise of the Hyperboreans. Hyperboreans belong to Greek mythology: through them, Nietzsche insists on the Dionysian nature of the “we” he uses, of the small community of superior spirits to whom he claims to belong. Nietzsche recognizes peers and calls them “intrepid”, claims that they are characterized by “the abundance, the tension, the damming of strength”, that they know a kind of “happiness” only accessible to some Chosen ones (AC 1). Right after that, the second paragraph begins with a definition of “What is good?” We can recognize there the logic of the noble morality: those who are proud, successful, overcoming, first define themselves as “the good ones”. It is only in the second paragraph that the philosopher wonders “What is bad?”

Antichrists must be regarded as the “evil ones” from the First Essay of the *Genealogy* who, originally, considered themselves “the noble ones”, “the good ones”, “the beautiful and happy ones” (GM I 10). After the priestly revaluation of values, those good ones were universally regarded as “evil ones”. But in

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Z III 4.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, X.29–30 (Pindar 1961, p. 291f.).

fact, those evil ones are not negative people, *anti* people, but noble and strong ones. They were slandered and cursed by inferior people, filled with resentment. Adopting a similar attitude, the Christians uttered a “curse” against these noble and positive people that were Dionysian people; they called them “antichrists”. Simultaneously, they set up as an ideal of kindness, as a positive ideal, this “Christ”, this Crucified One who opposes Dionysus.

Like the evil one of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the Antichrist, after genealogical inquiry, turns out to be an essentially positive figure. Nietzsche appears as “the Antichrist” in a very political perspective: he knows that, by doing so, he will be regarded as an “evil one” by the multitude, by the moral herd, but he expects that his peers will recognize him as one of theirs, as a “good one”.

Zarathustra, the first psychologist of the good, is – consequently – a friend of the evil. [...] he makes no secret of the fact that *his* type of man, a relatively superhuman type [*übermenschlicher Typus*], is superhuman precisely in relation to the *good*, that the good and the just would call his overman [*Übermensch*] a *devil* ... (EH IV 5)

Those who only regard the Antichrist as a negative figure, a “*Teufel*”, an “evil one”, remain prisoners of the plebeian evaluation of “good and evil”, as it is described in the First Essay of the *Genealogy*. Nietzsche’s readers who consider *The Antichrist* only in its aggressive relationship to Christianity remain prisoners of the axiological system of the resentment morality, of Christian morality: they see the figure of the Antichrist only as an “evil” figure and ignore its Dionysian and approving nature, its “good” nature. They do not seem to be able to “understand” Nietzsche, or his opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified.

*Ecce Homo*’s last sentence effectively announces *The Antichrist*. It builds up the “unity” between this work and the previous ones (KSB 8/545).<sup>18</sup> “*Dionysus against the crucified one*” can thus be understood as a rephrasing of the opposition between a noble morality (the morality of “good and bad”) and a resentment morality (the morality of “good and evil”) as it is set out in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Dionysus would embody what is “good”, the Crucified what is “bad”. This Dionysian morality would oppose a Christian morality: the morality of “Christ versus the Antichrist”. Just as the “good one” of the noble morality was renamed “evil one” by resentment morality, “Dionysus” would have been renamed “anti-Christ” by Christian morality, as an aggressive and evil nature, essentially turned against the Christians. By proudly exhibiting the positive nature of the Antichrist, Nietzsche would try to restore the morality of “Dionysus versus the Crucified” as opposed to the morality of “Christ versus the Antichrist”.

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**18** Letter to Köselitz, 22 December 1888.



As the resentment people of *On the Genealogy of Morals* had called the noble people “evil ones”, Christianity cast suspicion on any attempt to ennoble humanity. It pronounced a curse on the highest types of human: “the Church sends all the ‘great men’ to hell” (NF 1887–1888, 11[153]: KSA 13, 73). It has always presented them as “antichrists”, as the ones one had to dread (AC 3). Taking advantage of this fear, it promoted the development of an opposite human type:

this higher type [...] has been the type most dreaded – almost *the* dreadful – and from dread the opposite type was willed, bred, and *attained*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick human animal – the Christian ... (AC 3)

The restoring of the Dionysian morality, the Revaluation of all values, will thus have a double meaning. On the one hand the “bad ones” must be designated as bad, for according to *The Antichrist*, “the values which are symptomatic of decline, *nihilistic* values, are lording it under the holiest names” (AC 6). Thus, Christianity will have to be cursed. On the other hand, the “evil ones” have to be renamed as “good ones”. All those who were cursed by Christianity for millennia (the atheists, the Jews, the artists, the free spirits) must now be re-evaluated. Indeed, according to *The Antichrist*, what Christianity slanders must have some value:

They attack, but everything they attack is *distinguished* thereby. To be attacked by a “first Christian” is *not* to be soiled ... On the contrary: it is an honor to be opposed by “first Christians.” One does not read the New Testament without a predilection for that which is maltreated in it, – [...] *whomever* he hates, *whatever* he hates, *that has value* ... The Christian, the priestly Christian in particular, is a *criterion of value*. (AC 46)<sup>19</sup>

According to the logic of the revaluation of all values, those who were demonized by Christianity must now be considered as highly valued.

The aspects of existence that are rejected by Christians and other nihilists occupy an infinitely higher place in the hierarchy of values than what the *décadence* instinct has seen fit to sanction, to *call* “good”. (EH III BT 2)

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**19** Cf. AC 9: “Whatever a theologian feels to be true *must* be false: this is almost a criterion of truth. His most basic instinct of self-preservation forbids him to respect reality at any point or even to let it get a word in. Wherever the theologians’ instinct extends, *value judgments* have been stood on their heads and the concepts of ‘true’ and ‘false’ are of necessity reversed: whatever is most harmful to life is called ‘true’; whatever elevates it, enhances, affirms, justifies it, and makes it triumphant, is called ‘false’ ...”.

*The Revaluation of All Values* will revalue the word “Antichrist”, which has been cursed and painted as negative by the defenders of Christian morality, although he embodies pride, perfection and power. *Ecce Homo* thus announces a new morality, a new educational politics that will promote the advent of higher human types.



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## **V Inspiration, Madness and Extremity**



Maria João Mayer Branco  
**Nietzsche's Inspiration**

Reading *Ecce Homo* in the Light of Plato's *Ion*

**Abstract:** In this essay the author discusses section 3 of *Ecce Homo's* chapter on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which Nietzsche describes his experience of inspiration. The essay tries to clarify that same experience – usually attributed not to philosophers but to artists – by confronting Nietzsche's text with Plato's *Ion* in order to explore how Nietzsche's description of inspiration is linked to his conception of destiny and, secondly, its key role in Nietzsche's understanding of what philosophy is.

*Wenn Denken dein Schicksal ist, so verehere dies Schicksal mit göttlichen Ehren und opfere ihm  
das Beste, das Liebste.  
So geht alle Zwietracht, alles Widerstrebende in Eintracht und Einklang zusammen.  
Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>*

## 1

In this essay I discuss section 3 of *Ecce Homo's* chapter on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which Nietzsche describes his experience of inspiration (*meine Erfahrung von Inspiration*). The main question I wish to address is why he devotes a section of *Ecce Homo* to the inspiration at stake in philosophical thinking, evoking an experience that is usually attributed not to philosophers but to artists. For a better understanding of what Nietzsche calls inspiration, I shall recall some ideas developed in Plato's *Ion*, principally the idea that poetical inspiration corresponds to a divine gift that cannot be controlled by the poet by means of voluntary choice. In so doing, I will try to follow Sarah Kofman's indication and establish a relation between Plato's dialogue and Nietzsche's words in *Ecce Homo* in order to clarify, first, how Nietzsche's description of inspiration is linked to his

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<sup>1</sup> "If thinking is your destiny, then honour this destiny with divine honors and offer it what is best, and most lovable. Thus every discord, every conflict comes together into concord and union." (Nietzsche, NF 1877 22[95], KSA 8/397)

conception of destiny and, second, its key role in Nietzsche's understanding of what philosophy is.<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche's text reads as follows:

– Does anyone at the end of the nineteenth century have a clear idea of what poets in strong ages called inspiration? If not, I will describe it. – If you have even the slightest residue of superstition, you will hardly reject the idea of someone being just an incarnation, mouthpiece, or medium of overpowering forces. The idea of revelation in the sense of something suddenly becoming visible and audible with unspeakable assurance and subtlety, something that throws you down and leaves you deeply shaken – this simply describes the facts of the case. You listen, you do not look for anything, you take, you do not ask who is there; a thought lights up in a flash, with necessity, without hesitation as to its form, – I never had any choice. A delight whose incredible tension sometimes triggers a burst of tears, sometimes automatically hurries your pace and sometimes slows it down; a perfect state of being outside yourself, with the most distinct consciousness of a host of subtle shudders and shiverings down to the tips of your toes; a profound joy where the bleakest and most painful things do not have the character of opposites, but instead act as its conditions, as welcome components, as necessary shades within this sort of excess of light; an instinct for rhythmic relations that spans wide expanses of forms – the length, the need for a rhythm that spans wide distances is almost the measure of the force of inspiration, something to balance out its pressure and tension . . . All of this is involuntary to the highest degree, but takes place as if in a storm of feelings of freedom, of unrestricted activity, of power, of divinity . . . The most remarkable thing is the involuntary nature of the image, the metaphor; you do not know what an image, a metaphor, is any more, everything offers itself up as the closest, simplest, most fitting expression. It really seems (to recall something Zarathustra once said) as if things approached on their own and offered themselves up as metaphors (– ‘here all things come caressingly to your speech and flatter you: because they want to ride on your back. Here you ride on every metaphor to every truth. Here words and word-shrines of all being jump up for you; all being wants to become a word here, all becoming wants to learn to speak from you’). This is my experience of inspiration; I do not doubt that you would need to go back thousands of years to find anyone who would say: ‘it is mine as well’. – (EH III Z 3)

Nietzsche begins by stating that he is going to shed light on something which, at the end of the nineteenth century, is treated with suspicion. Highlighting the complexity and simultaneity of the contradictory aspects that constitute what he calls inspiration, he describes a sudden and involuntary yet joyful experience that corresponds to the state of being outside oneself but distinctly conscious; he refers to the situation in which suddenly and involuntarily “something becomes visible, audible” and “one no longer knows” what one is saying or whether what one is saying corresponds to the truth or to a poetic creation since “it really

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<sup>2</sup> See Kofman 1993, p. 262. Kofman's reference to Plato's dialogue is convincing but it leaves untouched several aspects that it is my intention to develop here.

seems” that things are offering themselves up as words; and he ends the text by declaring that what he has just described is his experience of inspiration, and that he would probably have to go back millennia to find someone for whom this word would evoke the same experience.

My first suggestion is that this travelling back millennia to the time of “poets of stronger ages” evokes the Greek understanding of what Nietzsche calls “inspiration”. And it is this same understanding that is addressed in Plato’s *Ion*, to which I shall now turn.

## 2

Nietzsche’s description recalls some aspects of Socrates’ presentation of the rhapsode in Plato’s dialogue.<sup>3</sup> To a certain extent, the reference to *Ion* seems obvious, as Nietzsche describes inspiration as the state in which one is only the “incarnation”, the “mouthpiece” and a “medium of overpowering forces”, a state in which one is only the vehicle for something else that becomes present through the person receiving it. Furthermore, Nietzsche highlights a kind of ignorance about what is happening, namely the fact that it is impossible to justify or explain something that appears all of a sudden with the character of a “revelation”, that is to say, of an novelty that seems to be without precedent.

This brings to mind Socrates’ account of what takes place when the rhapsode recites Homer, in particular, of the rhapsode’s (and the poet’s) ignorance of what happens to them while reciting (and composing) poetry. As is well known, Socrates deduces this ignorance from Ion’s (and Homer’s) lack of competences regarding the specific activities about which the poems speak (Plato 1925, 531b–532a). In other words, the rhapsode and the poet simply ignore what they say because they do not possess the skills or techniques involved in those very activities. Socrates uses the image of the chain of magnetic rings (Plato 1925, 533c–534d) to suggest that poets compose their poems by virtue not of technique or specialized knowledge (Plato 1925, 537e, 538b) but of what he calls the *theia moira* or “divine dispensation”.<sup>4</sup> Like the rhapsode, the poet

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<sup>3</sup> I will limit my analysis to the *Ion*, although it is evident that a complete treatment of the notion of inspiration in Plato’s thought would have to deal with what he famously argues in the *Phaedrus* concerning this notion. This must, however, be left for a future occasion. For an interesting discussion on the notion of inspiration in both the *Ion* and the *Phaedrus*, see Morgan 2010.

<sup>4</sup> As Janaway puts it, “Plato thinks that the ability to speak correctly, truly, or wisely stems from knowledge or *technē*, to possess which is to apply rational principles of which one is fully con-



is able to compose poetry only when the Muse inspires him, that is to say, when he is “possessed” or inspired (Plato 1925, 534b). According to this view, Ion’s inspiration corresponds to a state where a lack of a specific and regular knowledge that involves learning and training is, as it were, compensated by an exceptional capacity to create a discourse precisely about what one did not learn nor practiced.

For the Greeks, *theia moira* meant “divine destiny” or “divine chance”, in other words that which could not be known in advance, the unpredictable side of experience. Concerning what was not controlled or determined by human reason, the *theia moira* combined, thus, necessity with contingency and for the Greeks it meant fate.<sup>5</sup>

The sense in which *theia moira* is used in the *Ion* is closely linked to the difficulty of clarifying the reason for the rhapsode’s (and the poet’s) excellence or ‘divinity’. As Socrates shows, this excellence cannot be attributed to what they know about the activities to which they refer, nor to what they know about their own poetic activity. What is remarkable, then, is the fact that, not possessing any knowledge about what they speak about, poets are nevertheless able to hit on the truth *by chance*, as Plato says of Homer in *Laws*.<sup>6</sup> “By chance” means

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scious. By contrast, to speak finely or beautifully, as poet, performer, or eulogist, so as to bring about pleasure and emotional involvement in an audience, is not a matter of knowledge or *techne*, but of inspiration” (Janaway 1995, p. 33).

<sup>5</sup> On Plato’s use of the expression *theia moira*, as well as its evolution in Greek literature and culture from the tragic poets to Plato and Aristotle, see Green 1963, especially p. 143, p. 164, p. 298–300, p. 414, p. 420. The expression is equivalent to *theia tyche* and literally means “divine destiny” or “divine chance”, a “lucky event” which is so wonderful that it can only have a divine origin. Being the same as the *theia tyche*, the *theia moira* thus involves chance or luck. For *tyche*, as Green remarks, “often amounts to little more than luck, or its result, one’s personal fortune, whether good or bad” (Green 1963, p. 143). So, *tyche* means “chance” but in Greek culture “chance” is, at the same time, what happens for no predictable reason and what happens necessarily – “destiny” understood as one’s “lot” (and not as the result of choice). *Moira* and *tyche* express essentially the same idea: a necessity that is contingent in the sense of not being controlled or determined by reason. I thank my colleague João Constâncio for calling my attention to Green’s work.

<sup>6</sup> “[W]hat worries Plato is that while poetry’s words convey thoughts, the process by which these thoughts come to lodge in the mind of the audience is suspect. [...] [N]o one has over-riding authority or responsibility for truth anywhere in the chain. It can happen that a thought is picked up which announces something true and important, as Plato says elsewhere [*Laws* 682 a]. But this is only ‘hitting on’ the truth by an unreliable method, and is not sufficient for anyone to claim knowledge. The chief negative point of the *Ion* is that Ion’s ability to speak finely about Homer arises ‘not from *techne* or knowledge’. Instead it is ‘by divine dispensation (*theia moira*)’ that our rhapsode is enabled to speak so finely of Homer” (Janaway 1995, 25).

in a way that is neither deliberate nor determined by any previously established knowledge, method or rule, it means that something happens in a way that is unexpected and seems unprepared. In Plato's *Ion*, the *theia moira* names precisely both an event that is extraordinary in the sense that it does not seem possible to identify its antecedents (it is "divine") and that, instead of requiring effort or merit, appears like a gift (a "dispensation").

The Greeks believed that poetic inspiration – or enthusiasm<sup>7</sup> – corresponded to *theia moira* in the sense that it did not depend on the poet's will but on the capacity to create or bring about something unprecedented or unparalleled that seemed to emerge, like god's creations, *ex nihilo*. They considered that inspiration was "given" by the inspiring Muse and "heard" by the poet.<sup>8</sup> The encounter with the Muse did not occur through science, calculation or choice, but by *Moirai* or fate. It might be desired but it might or might not happen, and so was understood as contingent. But at the same time, once it happened it had a necessary character to the extent that it was irreversible, irrevocably inscribing itself in the history of the person to whom it happened. Thus, if it could not be predicted, the fate of the inspired individual could not be avoided either; it had to be accepted and integrated into the life of the person whom it had befallen.

Fate is always unique and *Ion's* uniqueness, for example, was to be excellent at reciting, not poetry in general, but only Homer's poetry and no one else's. Indeed, as Socrates argues, poets are destined to the precise genre to which the Muse inspires them (the dithyramb, the eulogy, the epic, the iamb etc. [Plato 1925, 534c]), so that "one poet is suspended from one Muse, another from another: the word we use for it is 'possessed'" (Plato 1925, 536b).

However, as already seen, the poet and the rhapsode's uniqueness must not be mistaken for the possession of a specific knowledge or technique. According to Socrates, the inspired individual does not receive from the Muse any particular knowledge or any specific *techné* (such as the charioteer's, the doctor's, the fisherman's, the seer's, etc. – 538b–e). Rather, the Muse inspires him to one partic-

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7 According to Dodds, the original and literal sense of "enthusiasm" is shown by the Delphic Pythia who "became *entheous, plena deo*: the god entered into her and used her vocal organs as if they were his own". See Dodds 1997, p. 70.

8 Also following Dodds' reading, "like all achievements that are not wholly dependent on the human will, poetic creation contains an element that is not 'chosen', but 'given'; and to old Greek piety 'given' signifies 'divinely given'". Dodds refers to Hesiod and claims that the poet did not regard the names that appeared in his poems as something he had "invented" but as something "he heard", "as something the Muse had given to him" and this fact makes clear that "creative thinking [was] not the work of the ego" but a "gift" of the Muses (Dodds 1997, p. 80–81).

ular genre and not to others. The difference between possessing a technique or science of a specific object and being excellent in performing a particular art is that, unlike the artistic ability (talent or inspiration), science and technique can be learnt and taught.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, artistic creation cannot occur by applying a method or rule established in advance by others, that is to say, by learning and reproducing procedures that can be transmitted and imitated.<sup>10</sup> This is why the inspired individual neither possesses a specific and perfectible ability nor any determined knowledge that he has acquired by learning from others. Nevertheless, he feels suited to practising one art and not others, an art, moreover, which does not correspond to any technique or knowledge in particular, but refers to many particular techniques and forms of knowledge (such as medicine, sailing etc.). This also explains the fact that, when Socrates asks Ion what is the proper object of his excellence, the rhapsode does not hesitate in answering “everything”.

According to Socrates, what the inspired individual receives from the Muse is, in fact, not a technique or knowledge but a “power” (Plato 1925, 533d). Inspiration is hence not a question of learning from the Muse how to create or recite a poem, and it is also not a question of accessing a model that can subsequently

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**9** Janaway refers to this aspect without developing it further, quoting Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* §47 – “No Homer or Wieland can show how his ideas [...] enter and assemble themselves in his brain, for the good reason that he does not himself know, and so cannot teach others” – and then Janaway asks: “[A]lmost an allusion to the *Ion*?” (Janaway 1995, p. 20). In fact, it seems that, when addressing the problem of the absence of a determinate rule or concept for the creation of the work of art in the *Critique of Judgement* §46, Kant gives the name of “genius” or “talent (natural gift)” to what Plato called *theia moira* or Muse in *Ion*. For Kant, “genius is a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given; it is not a mere aptitude for what can be learnt by a rule” (Kant 1914, §46). This is why, he goes on saying, the artist “cannot describe or indicate scientifically how he brings about its products [...] he does not himself know how he has come by his Ideas, and he has not the power [...] to communicate it to others in precepts that will enable them to produce similar products.” (Kant 1914, §46). It is in this way that Kant distinguishes a scientist from an artistic genius arguing that the ignorance in which the latter finds himself regarding what he does was named in accordance with the meaning of the word *genius*, i.e. “that peculiar guiding and guardian of the spirit given to a man at his birth from which suggestion these original Ideas proceed”. Contrary to Newton, Homer and Wieland could not know how their ideas came to their minds and this is why “it is not possible to learn how to write spirited poetry” (Kant 1914, §47). On the relation of Plato’s *Ion* and Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, see also Benjamin 2015.

**10** Again with Kant, “since learning is nothing but imitation, it follows that the greatest ability and teachableness (capacity) regarded *qua* teachableness, cannot avail for genius.” (Kant 1914, §47).

be reproduced or of imitating a form that is previously fixed.<sup>11</sup> No knowledge, information or technical skill can explain the activity of the rhapsode (who is comparable, according to Socrates, to the actor, Plato 1925, 536a) and the poet, who do not know why they do what they do but who nevertheless devote themselves to doing it, communicating to others the same enthusiasm that has taken hold of them.

The image of the magnetic chain highlights precisely this kind of communication. It is about a transmission of power or force, and this is the third aspect that is relevant to the comparison of Plato's text and the "overpowering forces" mentioned by Nietzsche in his description of inspiration: the magnet stone "not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings" (Plato 1925, 533d–e).

Magnetic power stands here for a physical or natural force of attraction that does not tend to concentrate in a single pole but is transmitted to what is attracted or inspired in such a way that the recipient of the force becomes a new pole of attraction, a new centre of force. In other words, being an attractive force, magnetism disseminates itself, keeping its power to the same extent that it expands. It is therefore a paradoxical force that grows to the extent that it is spent, increasing with its own expending, and by calling it 'divine' Socrates stresses precisely the exceptionality of such paradoxical phenomenon. What is at stake, then, is not something like to have privileged access to secret or hidden information, to a divine model that is afterwards reproduced, but to experience two contradictory movements that are manifest in nature – attraction and expansion – and to transmit the same experience to others. Socrates thus argues that the Muse inspires some men by transmitting a power to them and that these men, in turn, transmit it to other men: "[T]he Muse inspires men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration [*enthousiasmos*] spreads to others, and holds them in a connected chain" (Plato 1925, 533e). More than a form of knowledge, a supra human model or a technical skill, it is this force, or enthusiasm, that is at stake in the notion of *theia moira*, to which Socrates also calls a *theia dynamis* (Plato 1925, 533d3, 533d6). Since it is dynamic, what is transmitted cannot be fixed, and since it is a force it is less an *ergon* than an *energeia*, i. e. not something that is made but the capacity for making. Accordingly, and like its natural or physical analogon, inspiration refers to something that is received and that circulates, that can be given to others – a gift which ultimately has no owner, coming as if from nowhere and belonging to no one.

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11 See Benjamin 2015.

Indeed, although Socrates stresses that the gift is divine, his description does not necessarily correspond to a recognition that the giver of the force has greater power than the one who is receiving it. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, in the *Ion* Plato gives greater emphasis to the transmissible nature of the inspiring force than to its divine nature or origin.<sup>12</sup> In the image of the chain of rings, what is highlighted as being characteristic of magnetic force is precisely its transitivity, the communicability of this force to the different elements in the chain that do not conserve it, do not keep it to themselves but instead make it circulate. So, it is not so much a question of what is transmitted (e.g. technical, epistemic or metaphysical content) as of the transmission itself. And it is for this reason that *Ion* does not need to know what he is saying, and does not need to know the objective content to which Homer's words correspond to, just as Homer did not necessarily know the techniques that he describes in his poems.<sup>13</sup> What happens is rather that the inspired individuals must give away or pass on the force that they received, inspiring others with the strength of their enthusiasm.

For this reason, poetry is less a question of reproducing words or knowledge, than of being, as Nietzsche says in the *Ecce Homo* passage on inspiration quoted above, a "mouthpiece" for this force, of giving voice to it so that it can be transmitted. To receive inspiration, to be possessed or enthused, is to be a "vehicle" or "medium" for a power, a *dynamis* that tends to an ongoing transmission. What is received is not something one learns and can, in turn, teach or explain, but a force that one is able to communicate or share. The Muse does not teach the poet, and the poet does not teach the rhapsode, who in turn does not teach his audience. The Muse conveys, inspires and enthuses the poet who in turn inspires the rhapsode and so on. Moreover, the transmission that takes place along the chain of rings does not imply a progressive diminution of the power transmit-

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<sup>12</sup> See Nancy 1982, p. 55–82.

<sup>13</sup> This point distinguishes the theses developed in the *Ion* and those developed in *The Republic*, in which Plato praises Homer and then criticizes his ignorance about the things of which he speaks (Plato 1994, 595b–c). While the connections with the theses in the *Ion* are many and allow this dialogue to be read in the light of *The Republic*, the latter work, as is well known, treats poetry as an educational, instructive and political undertaking that is dangerous for the city. This, however, does not deny its seductive charm, against which no objection would be made if it were able to morally and politically justify itself (see Plato 1994, 607c–d). If the condemnation of poetry in book X is mainly aimed at Homer as educator (see Plato 1994, 606 d), its main target in books II and III are the bad objects of poetic imitation. Therefore, according to Nancy's reading in the essay cited above, while *Ion* contains the seeds of Plato's criticism of poetry in *The Republic*, this fact can only fully determine the way that we read that dialogue if we allow ourselves to be led into the trap into which the rhapsode falls in that text: to consider poetic texts as technical and pedagogical texts.

ted, a decay of energy. Nowhere in the *Ion* does Plato refer to a fading of the magnetic force along the chain, which suggests that the force is transmitted intact. In fact, no force exists “in itself”:<sup>14</sup> it requires difference and plurality because its existence depends on a variety of singular instances to which it is communicated as a *pathos*. Hence, if this communication does not involve a weakening of the force, it neither implies unification or dissolution of the participants in one and unique instance. On the contrary, the more points it manages to touch, the greater its power.

### 3

The three aspects discussed above – namely, the *theia moira*'s connection with the notion of fate, its difference from *techné* or knowledge and the fact that it consists in a transmission of force, power or energy – can be recognised in Nietzsche's words previously quoted. The enthusiasm of the inspired individual who “receives” and “hears” the gift of the Muses seems to correspond to the idea that “you listen, you do not look for anything, you take, you do not ask who is there” and to Nietzsche's declaration “I never had any choice”. Moreover, Nietzsche associates “the involuntary nature of the image, the metaphor” with a state of ignorance about what is true and what is metaphorical, a state in which everything is offered and finds its simplest expression without corresponding to a particular knowledge, i.e. to something that has been learned. But instead of reducing inspiration to simply repeating or reproducing what he “hears”, that is to say, to absolute passivity on the part of the inspired individual who receives the gift of inspiration, what Nietzsche's words suggest is the contradictory aspect of this experience. More precisely, if there is no choice, Nietzsche also affirms that inspiration is a state that corresponds not to the mere endurance of a coercion but to a feeling of “delight” and “profound joy” in which everything “is involuntary to the highest degree, but takes place as if in a storm of feelings of freedom, of unrestricted activity, of power, of divinity”.

The words “power” and “divinity” recall what has been said about the *theia moira* and about the force transmitted by enthusiasm, the force which Plato also calls a *dynamis*, and that arouses the opposite of passivity, bringing about what Nietzsche calls “activity”. “Freedom” is the name given by Nietzsche to this feeling of activity, power and divinity that accompanies something that is “involuntary to the highest degree”. That the inspired individual is free means that he

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14 As Deleuze writes, “the being of a force is plural” (Deleuze 1962, p. 6).

does not subordinate or sacrifice himself to the inspiring force. If there is a *pathos* at work in inspiration, the latter does not exclude an active dimension that is concomitant with being affected.

Also, according to the *Ion*, inspiration, or enthusiasm does not consist of passively experiencing something since it enables poetic creation, i.e. the creation of forms that communicate the enthusiastic force. The inspired individual, although possessed by the force and moved outside himself, is not dissolved into another thing and he is not nullified for the benefit of what is possessing him. This aspect is indicated very clearly by what the rhapsode says about his state: when he relates a tale of woe, his eyes fill with tears, and when it is of fear or awe, his hair stands on end with terror and his heart leaps (Plato 1925, 535b). Nevertheless, he never loses sight of the effect that he has on his audience. Indeed, *Ion* remains simultaneously “fully aware” (Plato 1925, 535e) of these effects, or, as Nietzsche writes in *Ecce Homo*, distinctively conscious. Therefore, “to be outside of oneself”, as Nietzsche writes, is not to be *completely* outside of oneself in a way that would involve a total loss of control, an absolute absence, although it consists of being receptive to something that is not controlled, as was pointed out with regard to the *theia moira*. Attention or awareness is concomitant with the inspiration described by Plato and Nietzsche, which means that the *pathos* of enthusiasm admits a simultaneity of different (and even contradictory) states and not a dissolution into a single state. Put differently, the inspiration or possession discussed both by Nietzsche and Plato in the texts here in question is a state in which the inspired individual seems to split into a multiplicity of different states being able to maintain these states in their difference through the force that he receives.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche already hinted at this. In section 8 he describes the way in which “Dionysiac excitement” is able to “transmit to an entire mass of people” an artistic gift through the multiplicity of voices of the dithyrambic chorus. The same section offers a description of how divine (Dionysian) enthusiasm is transmitted first to the Choreutes, second from the Choreutes to the characters in the tragedy, and third from the characters to the spectators, in a series that is analogous to the one described by Plato in the image of the magnetic chain. In order for this chain to be constituted, however, its elements cannot be mixed up in a collective and uniform pathos, that is to say, each element has to preserve its singularity as a ring in the chain through which the force is transmitted. Hence, if Dionysus transmits force to the Choreutes, this means that Dionysus is not the Choreutes, just as they are not the tragic heroes, who, in turn, are not the spectators. In other words, no identification or unification takes place between the elements of the force-transmitting chain since it is their difference – their freedom – that allows enthusiasm to be transmitted.



On the other hand, as already mentioned, enthusiastic receptiveness implies an active element to which Nietzsche calls in section 5 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, and in *Ecce Homo* the generating of a “*Gleichnis*” (or vision – BT 8).<sup>15</sup> In other words, the activity involved in enthusiasm or inspiration is a creativity, a creative reception not limited, thus, to a mere identification with the inspiring force.

In section 12 of *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche quotes Ion's words where the rhapsode claims to behave in accordance with what he says (Plato 1925, 535c), apparently not paying attention to what the rhapsode says about being “fully aware” of the audience's reactions (Plato 1925, 535e) and therefore not completely identifying with what he says. But while in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche seems to disregard Ion's awareness, this seems nevertheless evoked in *The Dionysian Worldview* where the “Dionysian state” is described not as pure “intoxication”, but as a “playing with intoxication”, that is to say, as a state in which enthusiasm and being outside of oneself coexist with being a spectator of the same state.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult not to perceive here the echoes of what Ion says about the possibility of reproducing with his body and voice the emotions of which he speaks and at the same time being vigilant, witnessing “from the platform” (Plato 1925, 535e) – in other words, like a spectator – the enthusiasm that his performance arouses.

Where this point is concerned, the rhapsode can be compared to an actor,<sup>17</sup> whom Nietzsche describes in section 3 of *The Dionysian Worldview* as the repre-

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15 Since it is not possible to dwell here in detail on the relationship between Nietzsche's notion of inspiration in *Ecce Homo* and his early texts, I will limit myself to saying that the description of what happens to the poet in *The Birth of Tragedy* 5 shows that while the process begins with his becoming “entirely at one with the primordial unity”, this process is not exhausted there. In this state, the poet “produces a copy of this primordial unity as music” and subsequently generates yet another “image”, a “*Gleichnis*”. But while the poet initially withdraws from his “subjectivity”, he does not disappear by being fused with the *Ur-Eine*; instead, he divides and multiplies, becoming “at one and the same time subject and object, simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator” (BT 5). This process of dividing generates images, *Gleichnisse*, which will themselves inspire those who read or hear them. On Nietzsche's understanding of lyrical composition in *The Birth of Tragedy*, see Buschendorf 1999, p. 105–130. It should also be noticed that the heroes on stage in tragedy are not “copies” or “idols” of Dionysus, since, in its enthusiasm, the chorus does not reproduce or copy the image of the god, who, in any case, does not possess one single aspect but a multiplicity of them: “Dionysus manifests himself in a multiplicity of figures” (BT 10).

16 “[T]he attendant of Dionysus must be in a state of intoxication and at the same time he must lie in ambush, observing himself from behind. Dionysian art manifests itself, not in the alternation of clear-mindedness and intoxication, but in their co-existence” (DW 1).

17 In the essay “*Le paradoxe et la mimésis*”, Lacoue-Labarthe has called attention to a similar process described by Diderot in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (see Lacoue-Labarthe 1986,



sentation of the “Dionysian man”. In fact, in section 8 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the “truly gifted actor” who “sees with palpable immediacy before his very eyes the image of the role he has to play” is understood as an illustration of the “original phenomenon of drama”, the “self-mirroring” or the “experience of seeing oneself transformed before one’s eyes” which defined the tragic chorus.

This leads us back to what was said earlier about *theia moira* and also to the idea that the inspiring force is, as Nietzsche conceives it, tragic. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, this force is given the name Dionysus. And if the notion of *theia moira* presented in the *Ion* refutes the possibility of predicting what is going to happen, the illusion of controlling events, it can be compared to the Dionysian who, in sections 11 and 12 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claims was expelled from tragedy by Euripides, “the thinker, not the poet”. In becoming more of a critic or a thinker than a poet, Euripides missed the tragic effect. Nietzsche quotes Plato on the losing of consciousness and reason on which poetic creation depends and adds that, “like Plato, Euripides undertook to show the world the opposite of the ‘unreasoning’ poet” (BT 12). And if “the opposite of the ‘unreasoning’ poet” is what Plato showed the world with his dialogues, the opposite of the ‘unreasoning’ poet is a philosopher, i.e., the poet who reasons (BT 14).

The portrait of the unreasoning poet is given in Plato’s *Ion* and it was argued that in that text Plato aims more to refute the pretension to knowledge claimed by the rhapsode as a critic or judge of Homer than his recitative abilities.<sup>18</sup> This interpretation opens up space for understanding that the distinction between po-

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p. 15–36). In my attempts to ascertain whether or not Nietzsche knew of Diderot’s text, I am very grateful to Giuliano Campioni’s elucidations on the matter. According to his valuable findings, it seems that Nietzsche did not read Diderot’s text directly but it is certain that he knew Diderot’s position at least indirectly, mainly through Talma, who seems to have plagiarized Diderot’s words that Nietzsche himself quotes in the Nachlass 1887–1888 11[62], KSA 13/30–31. On Talma and Diderot’s *Paradoxe*, see Bastier 1904, p. 108, and Freer 1966.

18 See, for instance, Janaway: “The dialogue is designed primarily to refute *Ion*’s claims to knowledge in his *discourse about Homer* – i.e. in his role as a critic or eulogist of Homer. His critical abilities are not an exercise of *techne* because they do not proceed on generalizable principles . . . . As regards poetic composition and performance, it is specifically their fineness or beauty that cannot be explained by way of *techne*. Poets and performers who delight us do not really know how they do it they cannot explain their successes in terms of rational procedures they have followed” (Janaway 1995, p. 16); “[in the *Ion*] the question is raised, however, of whether or how artists and their critics need to possess genuine expert knowledge; and it is indeed fair to ask a critic, with what sort of expertise does he judge a poet to be great?” (Murdoch 1997, 392–393); “[...] [L]’hermeneia n’est pas une activité de jugement, de discernement; elle n’est pas une activité critique [...]. Socrate ruse en jouant d’un glissement vers la compétence critique, glissement auquel *Ion* s’est prêté, mais qu’il n’a pas lui-même vraiment engagé. [...] [J]uger les prestations de rhapsodes est bien autre chose qu’être soi-même un rhapsode” (Nancy 1982, 60).

etic creation and critical activity nevertheless allows the possibility of a relationship between them in which the former is not necessarily dismissed. Put differently, if Plato gives primacy to philosophy he nevertheless acknowledges something valuable in the artistic domain that philosophy can elucidate. Indeed, in the *Ion* Socrates defines the poet as “a light and winged and sacred thing” (Plato 1925, 534b) which seems not to merit reproach for anything unless his ignorance regarding himself (which, in any case, Ion accepts and corrects accepting Socrates’ thesis). By contrast, in *The Republic* poets are expelled from the ideal city because they represent a danger, a political threat that Plato explicitly relates to the imitative power that defines them. As an imitator of “all things” (Plato 2003a, 398a), the poet is (like the actor) someone who does not seem to possess any specificity of his own. Not possessing a specific skill or ability, it is not possible to place him in a particular class or assign a specific and useful role to him in the context of the correct and just division of roles in the city (which is determined by the philosopher). On the other hand, what he does has effects on other citizens because it arouses affects that must be regulated in accordance with pre-established (once again by the philosopher) models and not left free to be object of manipulation.

Thus, in *The Republic*, the condemnation has to do with the fact that it is impossible for the poet to judge the political consequences of what he does and the effects that he arouses in those who listen to him, that is to say, the condemnation has to do with the refusal of the possibility that the poet can be an educator (Plato 2003a, 606d). If, however, poetical texts are not considered as texts that teach and convey knowledge, Plato seems to accept that there are marvellous aspects in poetry and calls the poet “a holy and wondrous and delightful creature” (Plato 1994, 398a).

This is the view put forth in the *Ion*. While establishing the poet’s ignorance with regard to what he does and showing that the poet and the rhapsode are not critics (good judges, good evaluators, good legislators), the dialogue demonstrates that, even accepting his quota of ignorance (Plato 1925, 532d), the philosopher is the one who is able to practice the critical activity that the poet and the rhapsode lack, namely, by shedding light on what poets and rhapsodes are. Accordingly, in accepting the philosophical definition of what he is, the rhapsode recognises in the philosopher a knowledge that he himself does not possess and submits himself to his power, to the enchantment of his explanation and to the image (the *Gleichnis*) of the magnetic chain proposed by Socrates. On the other hand, Plato’s text also indicates that the philosopher’s knowledge likewise exceeds a specific technique: in order to demonstrate his thesis about what poetic inspiration is, Socrates has to represent the role of the rhapsode, to recite Homer himself, to make comparisons between Ion and the entire class of craftsmen, and

ends up identifying him with the god Proteus (Plato 1925, 541e)<sup>19</sup>. In other words, Socrates' argumentation shows that, like rhapsodes and poets, philosophers are also capable of imitating many things, while distinguishing themselves from all of them. Indeed, Socrates' procedure in the *Ion* suggests that, not being nor knowing anything specific, philosophers are nevertheless capable of speaking and arguing about many things (and Plato more than any of them, playing here Socrates, Ion, Homer etc.).

The question is therefore that of knowing to what extent it can be said that the philosopher is also “a light and winged and sacred thing”, that is to say, an inspired being who obeys *theia moira*. It is true that this is not explicitly argued in the *Ion*. However, it is also true that the dialogue presents the philosopher as someone who, without possessing any specific knowledge or technique, knows what a poet is. Furthermore, Socrates does not say how he came to know it or how he arrived at the metaphor of the chain that explains what poetic creation is. And we can therefore consider that he was inspired while conceiving it, and inspired by the natural phenomenon of magnetism, or, to come back to Nietzsche's words on inspiration, that he received the metaphor of the magnetic chain “not knowing what an image, a metaphor, is anymore” because in it just offered itself up “as the closest, simplest, most fitting expression”.

## 4

Let us return to our initial questions, inspired by *Ecce Homo's* section on inspiration. Nietzsche starts by mentioning a “superstition” that he had earlier criticised. Indeed, in *Human, All Too Human I*, the belief that inspiration is a “miracle”, as if the artist's idea had “descended from heaven” (HAH I 155, 156), was already sharply criticised and Nietzsche refers to the “superstition” and the “cult” of geniuses according to which “these spirits would be of superhuman origin” (HAH I 162, 163 and 164). In these earlier texts, Nietzsche refutes the superstitious and mystifying understanding of inspiration that in *Ecce Homo* he will try to replace with a philosophical interpretation. It is this interpretation that I wish to discuss in the light of the reading given above of Plato's *Ion*, in which inspiration is said to correspond to a divine gift.

In order to do this, I shall begin by considering *Ecce Homo* and attempt to clarify the purpose of this work by considering Sarah Kofman's assumption that it subverts the autobiographical genre because it says who Nietzsche is by

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<sup>19</sup> See Nancy's reading (Nancy 1982).

showing how he became who he is.<sup>20</sup> The book begins with the following two announcements: “it seems imperative for me to say who I am” and “I am the one who I am! Above all, do not mistake me for anyone else!” (*Ecce Homo* Preface 1). And who is Nietzsche? “I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus”, he writes and “I would rather be a satyr than a saint” (EH Preface 2). Hence, Nietzsche identifies himself with the disciple of a god, and this god is a philosopher. Nevertheless, Nietzsche also tells us that he is a philosopher himself: “I have the right to understand myself as the first tragic philosopher” (EH III BT 3). So, he is a disciple of a god-philosopher who understands himself as a philosopher, and this means that being a disciple of Dionysus does not prevent him from philosophizing, as it were, on his own. Put another way, this means that, for Nietzsche, a disciple is not necessarily a “believer” or a “fanatic” who simply and dogmatically reproduces allegedly divine teachings or wisdom or that, as he will write, is incapable of thinking for himself, of philosophizing.

On the other hand, by establishing the difference between a philosopher and a believer, Nietzsche is highlighting another important definition of himself, namely, the fact that he does not want believers himself. He makes this claim in the Preface by quoting *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part I, ‘Of the Bestowing Virtue’, section 3 and by distinguishing Zarathustra from a prophet, a founder of religions, a fanatic: “nothing is being ‘preached’ here, nobody is demanding that you believe” (EH Preface 3). Later on he will explicitly write that he is “not remotely the religion-founder type”, that he does not want “true believers” and that he would rather be a buffoon (*Hanswurst*) than a saint – even though he might be a buffoon out of whom “the truth speaks” (EH IV 1). In short, Nietzsche distinguishes himself from saints and founders of religions and declares himself to be a philosopher, a disciple of Dionysus, a satyr and a buffoon. Moreover, being a philosopher, he does not want uncritical followers or believers, that is to say, he does not want imitators.

My suggestion is that this relationship to Dionysus can be understood as that which the poet has with the *theia moira* in Plato’s *Ion*. Dionysus is the name of the force that inspires Nietzsche as it inspired the dithyrambic choir and the lyrical poet described in *The Birth of Tragedy*. This suggestion clarifies, in the first place, why he understands himself to be a philosopher of a special type, that is to say, a tragic philosopher, “the first tragic philosopher” who, for the first time, i.e., in a radically new way, a way that has no precedents in the history of phi-

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<sup>20</sup> See Kofman 1992, p. 21–33.

losophy, “turned the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos” (EH III BT 3).<sup>21</sup> Second, it helps to elucidate another definition of himself that appears in *Ecce Homo*; namely, when he writes “I am the inventor of the dithyramb” (EH III Z 7).

Throughout the book, Nietzsche mentions several texts from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* which he calls “dithyrambs”, and says that the picture of the dithyrambic artist given in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* is, in fact, a picture of himself as a dithyrambic artist (EH III BT 4). According to section 7 of the fourth *Untimely Meditation*, the most important feature, “the central point of power” of the dithyrambic artist is what Nietzsche calls “the demonic transmissibility and self-relinquishment of his nature, with which others are able to communicate just as readily as it communicates with other natures, and whose greatness consists in its capacity both to surrender and to receive” (UM IV 7). These words allow us to return to our reading of Plato’s *Ion*, especially to the notion of the transitivity of the force being communicated and the receptiveness to it of each element in the magnetic chain. Being the one who is able “both to surrender and to receive”, the dithyrambic artist is permeable to the force and the central point of his power is his ability to transmit it to others, that is to say, the capacity to give (which is the theme of Zarathustra’s “The Night Song”). Moreover, in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* section 7, Nietzsche describes the “twofold path” through which dithyrambic art compels the artist to “translate” his experience into a “visible spectacle”, whereby he is “at once the actor, poet and composer” (UM IV 7), recalling the description mentioned earlier of both the lyric poet and the chorus in *The Birth of Tragedy*. He also writes that those who have “participated” in the dithyrambic artist’s “energy” have “as it were through him acquired power against him”, suggesting again that participation does not imply mere uncritical and passive reproduction of contents, but rather an acquisition of power or dithyrambic “energy”.

However, in spite of the possible resemblances between the *Ion* and Nietzsche’s ideas on inspiration, it still remains unclear why a philosopher should be the inventor of the dithyramb if he is not a poet. Indeed, even when Nietzsche speaks of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo* he distinguishes its author from poets (EH III Z 6), underlining the uniqueness of his writings. If any connection exists between Nietzsche and Plato’s descriptions of inspiration, it is not based on an identification of philosophers with poets. However, if poets ignore why and how they become poets, they do not have doubts about the thing

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21 “Before me this transposition of the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos did not exist” (EH III BT 3). See also CW 1 and Djuric 1989, p. 221–241. On Nietzsche’s conception of Plato’s philosophy “aus der relationale Spannung von Logos und Pathos” and its relation with the concept of Dionysos, see Müller 2005, p. 242.

in which they excel, as Ion's proudness shows, i.e. they know who they are. The same seems to apply to philosophers, and particularly to the case of Nietzsche, who wrote *Ecce Homo* in order to say who he is. Nietzsche knows or seems to know who he is, i.e. he knows his "lot" (EH IV 1), and he knows that he is not a poet, even though he calls himself the inventor of the dithyramb while declaring at the same time, and to avoid any confusion, that he is a philosopher.

*Ecce Homo* provides a list of negative definitions of the philosopher: he is not a founder of religions (EH Preface and EH IV 1), nor a poet (EH III Z 6); he is also not an "academic", a "professor of philosophy" or a "scholar" (*Gelehrter*): "The way I understand the philosopher, as a terrible explosive that is a danger to everything, how remote my idea of a philosopher is from anything that includes even a Kant, let alone academic 'ruminants' and other professors of philosophy" (EH III UM 3).

Leaving aside for a moment the image of the explosive and the relationship that it might have with our reading of the *Ion*, it can be said that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche returns to the distinction he had already established in *Schopenhauer as Educator* and in other works between a philosopher and a scholar and applies it to himself, to the philosopher who knows who he is but whose knowledge about himself does not come from study, erudition, or learning in the sense of acquiring knowledge through the reading of books. Distinguishing himself from scholars, Nietzsche distances himself from those who "spend basically all their time 'poring over' books" and "ultimately become completely unable to think for themselves" because "When they think, they are responding to some stimulus (– a thought they have read about)" (EH II 8). In contrast to the explosive substance that the philosopher is, scholars are "just matches that have to be struck to emit sparks – 'thoughts'" – whereas the philosopher is someone who is able to think for himself even when he is, as Nietzsche claims to be, the disciple of a god. What defines him is the ability to think and not the reaction to external stimuli, the repetition of thoughts thought by others. To think is his force or his fate, that which makes him who he is.

However, even though he comes to know who he is, the philosopher is not someone who knows many things; in other words, to be a philosopher also involves a certain degree of ignorance, as Socrates never ceased to insist. Nietzsche recognised this degree of ignorance in himself in a text where he distinguishes philosophers from *Gelehrte*, repeating the formula that he uses in *Ecce Homo*: "[O]ur task is and remains above all not to mistake ourselves for someone else" (GS 381). Distinguishing the philosopher from the scholar, the "weight" of the latter and the "taste for independence" of the former, Nietzsche also refers to the agility and lightness of the philosopher whose ideal is the "dance" in which consists his "service of God" (GS 381). In fact, a philosopher can be

many things while he philosophises (as shown by Socrates/Plato in the *Ion*), i. e. to think involves some degree of plasticity and it is in this sense that philosophy is analogous to dance or that dancing can be a metaphor for thinking.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, both in *The Gay Science* and in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche highlights yet another aspect declaring that, although the philosopher and the scholar are different, the philosopher can also be a scholar.<sup>23</sup> While the difference between both implies that they should not be mistaken for one another, the philosopher can nevertheless be a scholar without this preventing him from becoming what he is. Nietzsche indicates thus that this ability to be other than the one one is without confusing oneself with this 'other' – which recalls the description of the rhapsode in the *Ion*, of the poet in *The Birth of Tragedy*, of the Dionysian actor and artist or of the Dionysian disciple in *The Dionysian World View* – is not reciprocal; that is to say, while the philosopher can be a scholar, a strict scholar is never a philosopher.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* section 231 as well as in *The Gay Science* section 381, Nietzsche stresses the weight of erudition that blocks the agility and lightness that thinking requires. Being different from a scholar, that is, being as light as the poet described by Socrates in the *Ion*, the philosopher (and also the philosopher Nietzsche) is “among other things” or “even” a scholar. Philosophical “lightness” or “taste for independence” allows him to be many things – “a critic and a skeptic and a dogmatist and historian and, moreover, a poet and collector and traveler and guesser of riddles and moralist and seer and “free spirit” and practically everything” (BGE 211) – not because he is an expert, someone who possesses technical or scientific knowledge about a variety of things, but because he is “a being who is frequently running away from himself, frequently afraid of himself, – but too curious not to always come back to himself ...” (BGE 292).

Not being artists, poets or dancers (or being able to be all of these), philosophers know “the art of separating without antagonizing; not mixing anything, not ‘reconciling’ anything; an incredible multiplicity that is nonetheless the converse of chaos”. But to be many things implies neither a process of “let[ting] yourself go” (TI IX 47) nor a going in every direction. In fact, it corresponds quite to the opposite, namely, to a “discipline” that allows there to be “obedience in one direction for a long time” (BGE 188). Such an obedience is the opposite of a *laisser-aller* and Nietzsche calls it “freedom”, writing that it requires following

<sup>22</sup> On this metaphor in Nietzsche’s philosophy, see Badiou 1998.

<sup>23</sup> “We are different from scholars, although we are inevitably also, among other things, scholarly” (GS 381); “For a long time I even had to be a scholar” (EH III UM 3).



the “tyranny of arbitrary laws” or “inspiration” (BGE 188). Consequently, he ends up declaring: “It is clever of me to have been many things and to many places so I can become one thing, – can come to one thing.” (EH III UM 3).

In this context, the meaning of the term inspiration seems to become clearer, as well as Nietzsche’s confession: “I never had any choice”. Indeed, one does not choose to be a philosopher because philosophy is not something one can acquire, nor a profession one can choose. What Nietzsche suggests by describing *his* experience of inspiration is that to be a philosopher is a fate in the Greek sense of this term, that is, a contingent need and not a choice.<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche’s inspiration destined him for philosophy and this means that it was philosophy that granted him his singularity, which made him become what is was, which made him become Nietzsche, the author of *Ecce Homo*. While artists act out of inspiration but do not “know” what they do (GS 369), i.e. while artists are not “critics” (NF 1888 14[170]: KSA 13/356–357), Nietzsche knows his “lot” (EH IV 1) and he tells us why he wrote such good books and how he became what he is. This, however, “becoming what you are”, “presupposes that you do not have the slightest idea what you are”. As Nietzsche declares: “To ‘will’ anything, to ‘strive’ after anything, to have a ‘goal’, a ‘wish’ in mind – I never experienced this.” (EH II 9) He never “wanted” anything, he simply let an “organizing, governing ‘idea’” grow inside him, an ‘idea’ that he also calls “instinct” (EH II 9) or “inspiring genius” (BGE 6).

If “it is difficult to learn what a philosopher is, because it cannot be taught”, learning it requires “to ‘know’ by experience [*aus Erfahrung*]” (BGE 213). In other words, in order to learn what a philosopher is one has to be exposed and affected by the philosophical pathos, by the force of a thought that, like the magnetic force in Plato’s *Ion*, inspires or transmits the ability to think. However, as said above, Nietzsche conceived this force as an explosive one, thus apparently distinguishing it from the magnetic power that is at stake in Plato’s *Ion* and from its force of attraction. Nevertheless, just as the Platonic image of the magnetic chain simultaneously and paradoxically involves the idea of an attraction that expands, circulates or expands itself, so Nietzsche’s metaphor of the explosive may suggest more than a merely destructive force. We can, for example, consider that an explosive is a device that shatters into many pieces that are thrown in many directions and can reach many targets and that the targets that it hits

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<sup>24</sup> See D 130, in which Nietzsche says that the Greeks gave the name “Moirā” to what we call “the realm of chance” where “everything happens senselessly, things come to pass without anyone’s being able to say why or wherefore”, and GM II 17, in which destiny is described as being “without cause, reason, consideration or pretext”. On the importance of the concept of “*Schicksal*” in *Ecce Homo*, see Stegmaier 2008b.



(and one can never previously know which targets it will hit, or how many victims it will make) do not, in principle, and just as the stones affected by magnetism, remain unscathed. Also characteristic of the explosive is its sudden, unexpected, unsuspected nature: just like the *theia moira*, the explosion cannot be anticipated, it blows unpredictably as “something that throws you down and leaves you deeply shaken” (EH III Z 3). Yet another aspect is the disproportion between its appearance and the dimension of its effects: just as a simple, regular stone can contain or harbour in itself the wondrous – ‘divine’– force of magnetism, an explosive is also quite a modest and anodyne substance in comparison with its potential effects. And until it blows up, it is silent, mute, although it contains the possibility of a deafening explosion. In this respect, it can be compared to the “calmest words” and quiet thoughts that “bring the storm” (Z II xx, quoted in EH Foreword 4) or with the “*grosse Ereignisse*” that are the “quietest” (Z II xviii).<sup>25</sup>

Hence, as much as a magnetic stone, an explosive houses a tension; that is to say, it houses a force that is compressed and wants to expand and “span[s] wide expanses of forms” (EH III Z 3). In describing his inspiration, Nietzsche also speaks of a tension and of the need for rhythm “to balance out its pressure and tension”. Rhythm is an essential element of what he calls “my art of style”, whose meaning is “to communicate a state, an inner tension of pathos, with signs, including the tempo of these signs” (EH III 4). Rhythm and style are therefore the materials used to construct Nietzsche’s explosive, i. e. it is through them that “an inner tension of pathos” is communicated, assuming, Nietzsche also says, “that there are people capable and worthy of a similar pathos, that there are people you can communicate with” (EH III 4).

This brings us back to three main ideas about inspiration already hinted at above. On the one hand, inspiration is not reduced to mere passivity but contains a creative element, an “activity” (which, in Nietzsche’s case, is stylistic, rhythmic and metaphorical, to the extent that what happens or appears are, like in Socrates’s case, and like in poetry, *Gleichnisse* – EH III Z 3); on the other hand, it concerns transmission, the communication of an affect, a pathos (which Nietzsche claims to have transformed, for the first time, into a philosophical one); and, lastly, it assumes the existence of receivers, that is to say, being a destiny, it is itself destined to others, it is destined to be shared, transmitted, communicated – it is a gift, not only for the one receiving it, but in itself. As in the *Ion*, the inspired individual cannot fail to transmit the force that he has received, he has a “sun-like nature” and is condemned “by an excess of light and power” to irra-

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25 On the notion of great events, see Badiou 2011.

diate, to explode, to give it away (EH III Z 7). He is thus what Nietzsche calls a genius, i.e. an explosive being, like “dynamite” (TI IX 44, “My Concept of Genius”).

Geniuses are a “destiny” (a “necessity” that emerges “accidentally”) and, as such, they are “necessarily wasteful”: their greatness is “in giving itself away” (TI IX 44). Geniuses must explode, i.e. they are like the hero that “pours out, pours over, consumes himself, does not spare himself, – fatalistically, disastrously, involuntarily, as a river is involuntary when it overflows its banks” (TI IX 44). Nietzsche was aware of his genius (EH IV 1), and to clarify in what sense it can be understood that he presents himself as a hero in *Ecce Homo* requires avoiding the “misunderstanding” involved in interpreting “heroism” – “a hero’s indifference to his own well-being” – as “sacrifice” (TI IX 44). It is this clarification that will finally allow us to understand the meaning of Nietzsche’s previously mentioned statements: “I am the first tragic philosopher” and “I am the inventor of the dithyramb”.

Inspiration has to be given, transmitted, communicated.<sup>26</sup> The “people capable and worthy of a similar pathos”, the “people you can communicate with” (EH III 4) are the readers imagined by Nietzsche, those to whom the force of his fate, or his inspiration, can be transmitted. They will neither be “believers”, as said before, nor *Gelehrte*, because philosophical inspiration is not a transmission of teachings or contents to be repeated, but of the ability to think for oneself, to think creatively. “When I imagine a perfect reader”, Nietzsche writes, “I always think of a monster of courage and curiosity who is also supple, cunning, cautious, a born adventurer and discoverer” (EH III 3). If the philosopher is a light thing, the reader must also be “supple”, must be able “to fly”, able to experience “true ecstasies of learning” (EH III 3). Philosophy and philosopher’s works must therefore move the reader as did the dithyrambic songs of the tragic chorus through which Dionysian enthusiasm was transmitted. And this means that they must attract and expand, i.e. inspire thinking in others, and communicate to them the force, power, or freedom to think.

Nietzsche identifies himself with the inventor of the dithyramb and we writes that the dithyramb is the language that a Dionysian spirit speaks when he speaks to himself (EH III Z 7).<sup>27</sup> However, as the language of an inspired soul, and being

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<sup>26</sup> This is the meaning that Nietzsche probably has in mind when he sets Zarathustra in search of listeners, when he calls him *Schenkender* or *Geber*, when he attributes to him the “bestowing virtue” that is the light of the sun or the glow of gold. On the dynamic of giving and receiving and its relationship to Dionysus, see Stiegler 2005, p. 180.

<sup>27</sup> I must leave untouched here the role played by Nietzsche’s poetic writings regarding his claim of being the inventor of the dithyramb, but I would like nevertheless to make clear that

an explosive language, the dithyramb cannot correspond to a soliloquy, to a solitary monologue. In fact, the dithyramb from which tragedy was born was not a solitary speech, but a dialogue between the characters and also between one character and the chorus.<sup>28</sup> It presupposed a multiplicity of elements or voices and their participation. Moreover, as Vernant and Vidal-Naquet have argued, the heroes presented on stage were not exactly models to be copied or imitated, but through the dialogues with the Choreutes and with each other they rather became “objects of debate”.<sup>29</sup> Tragic heroes communicated to the audience the power of questioning and debating, and rather than praising the exemplary virtues of the hero, the songs of the chorus wondered and meditated about him. Ceasing thus to be models to be followed or imitated, tragic heroes became a problem to themselves and to others. A problem, that is to say, something worth considering and meditating upon, something that inspires thought. Could there be a more precise definition of the way with which, by telling himself the story of his life (EH Foreword), Nietzsche presents himself to posterity?

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in claiming to be so he is referring to his philosophical works. On Nietzsche’s lyrical poems, see Gritzmann 1997, p. 34–71.

**28** As Jacqueline de Romilly showed, tragedy not only included and articulated two distinct elements, the chorus and the characters, but it was born out of the dithyramb that consisted of a dialogue between a character and a chorus. See Romilly 1970.

**29** See Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1986, p. 14.

John F. Whitmire, Jr.

# Apocalyptic ‘Madness’

## Strategies for Reading *Ecce Homo*

**Abstract:** *Ecce Homo*’s bombastic claims and much of its strange style can be best explained by noting Nietzsche’s ironic appropriation and redeployment of a series of literary techniques and stylistic elements common to Judeo-Christian apocalyptic narratives: a first-person narrative describing a revelatory disclosure (and its subsequent interpretation); a cosmic dualism of forces (Dionysus and “the Crucified”) and radical eschatological worldview; and an exhortation to shift our cognitive and behavioral comportment to reflect the altered perspective so revealed. No more a work of “madness” than the book of Revelation, then, its stylistic purpose is to highlight the importance of Nietzsche’s life and work as the surmounting of the (ostensibly) life-denying Christian worldview.

The human will [...] *needs a goal* – and it will rather  
will *nothingness* than *not* will. – Am I understood? ...  
Have I been understood? ... ‘*Not at all, my dear sir!*’ –  
Then let us start again, from the beginning.  
GM III 1<sup>1</sup>

Have I been understood? – *Dionysus versus the Crucified* ...  
EH IV 9

## 1 The Text and Its ‘Madness’

For those who see in Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* a compelling treatment of a number of issues surrounding human selfhood, illness, affirmation and so forth, the text is its own apologia. For many others, however, the long and unfortunate association of this little book with Nietzsche’s impending madness is enough to keep them from taking it seriously. The tide, however, recently began to turn against these individuals in the philosophical secondary literature. Dan Conway, for instance, noted nearly thirty years ago that scholars have begun reconsidering this

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Nietzsche quotations are by R.J. Hollingdale (UM), Walter Kaufmann (BGE, GM, Z), Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (WP) and Judith Norman (AC, EH, TI).

text with an increased interest.<sup>2</sup> Conway attributes this to the influence of Walter Kaufmann, who first drew attention to the nature of the text as “exemplificatory”.<sup>3</sup> Despite the work of Kaufmann, Alexander Nehamas and others in this regard, however, there remain only a handful of sustained, monograph-length studies of *Ecce Homo*,<sup>4</sup> and Nietzsche’s “autobiography” is still viewed far less often as a real philosophical work (particularly by non-specialists) than other texts in the corpus.<sup>5</sup> Are there really any good grounds for refusing to treat it as such, or is this neglect simply the result of an ill-fated *prima facie* judgment of an author’s insanity?

The association of *Ecce Homo* with Nietzsche’s madness has actually existed since prior to the work’s first publication. As Kaufmann notes, *Ecce Homo* was suppressed by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche for twenty years, and only published for the first time in 1908, for at least two reasons. The first of these, of course, was so that she could authoritatively (and selectively) quote from his own self-interpretation; the second, however, was due to its bombastic and seemingly

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<sup>2</sup> See Conway 1993, p. 56. Large 1995, p. 448, contains a helpful bibliography of work published on *Ecce Homo* to that point (see in particular footnotes 34–35). Since the initial conference presentations of this essay (2006, 2008), Nicholas D. More 2014, has provided a very good survey of the literature on *Ecce Homo*, filtered through his own schematization of ways of reading Nietzsche.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Kaufmann 1974, p. 407–411. Kaufmann argues that *Ecce Homo* is, in fact, Nietzsche’s *Apology*. He is also perhaps the first person to note that nearly all the literature on Nietzsche ignores *Ecce Homo* (p. 408) – or, we might add, nervously skirts around it, as with Heidegger’s notorious appropriation.

<sup>4</sup> Most important is Sarah Kofman’s majestic, two-volume work, *Explosion I. De l’“Ecce Homo” de Nietzsche*, and *Explosion II. Les enfants de Nietzsche*. All translations from these texts are my own. Kofman’s text, roughly eight times the length of *Ecce Homo*, attempts to explain every single word of the text (cf. Large 1995, p. 442), and is (roughly speaking) devoted to 1) the deconstruction of the madness-reason couplet as well as 2) an examination of the kind of subject that is constructed by and in autobiography. At the time of the initial work on this essay, the only monograph in English on *Ecce Homo* was, so far as I could tell, Thomas Steinbuch, *A Commentary on Nietzsche’s “Ecce Homo”* (1994). (Since then, Nicholas More has published *Nietzsche’s Last Laugh*, which also utilizes genre-issues to make a compelling case against *Ecce Homo* as a product of madness.) The title of Steinbuch’s monograph is somewhat deceptive, as it is a linear commentary on only Part I (“Why I Am So Wise”) of *Ecce Homo*, with some references made to other sections of the text and to others of Nietzsche’s works. Steinbuch argues that Nietzsche’s struggle against his own declining life represents the source of his philosophy of self-overcoming.

<sup>5</sup> Conway (1993), for instance, reads *Ecce Homo* precisely against the more recent tendency of interpreters to take it – or rather, the “idol of the ‘Serious Nietzsche’” that is allegedly evoked and parodied there – seriously.

megalomaniacal claims, which she rightly surmised would lead many to consider that he was already insane when he was writing it.<sup>6</sup>

It is principally this problem, then – the work's supposedly "insane" character – that I take up in this chapter, as a propaedeutic to a positive reading of some of the substantial philosophical issues raised in and by this important text, which I contend represents a significant and substantial addition to Nietzsche's consideration of the problems of human selfhood and agency (the notion of a "willing" agent, which is severely problematized in many of Nietzsche's later works, receives a particularly interesting analysis here). My analysis of Nietzsche's literary gestures in *Ecce Homo* aims to remove the single most important impediment to taking the work seriously in its own right, reconstructing its exorbitant claims in terms of the overall project of the text, and within a well-established literary-theological tradition. I argue, on both extrinsic and intrinsic grounds, that *Ecce Homo* is decidedly not a work of madness, but rather a thoroughly sane re-statement and manifesto of Nietzsche's lifelong *agon* with Christianity, couched (at least partially) in a literary style that he appropriates from the Christian tradition, and then ironically redeploys in a counter-gesture that highlights the importance of his own work.

Before examining the work itself as a piece of philosophy (or literature), though, we must first take account of some of the textual issues surrounding *Ecce Homo*, the last book consisting of (almost) entirely new work that Nietzsche himself prepared for publication.<sup>7</sup> There are at least three early versions of Nietzsche's autobiography,<sup>8</sup> a state of affairs which has left open the possibility that there were other intended alterations or corrections to the text submitted during the final days before Nietzsche's collapse, but not included within the body of the work as it was eventually released by his sister. These alterations, if they existed, might give us some further insight into Nietzsche's mental condition at the time he was writing the text, and thereby enable us to assess whether there is an increasing deterioration in the literary style or philosophical substance of his work (and consequently in his mental state) just prior to his

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<sup>6</sup> See Kaufmann 1992a, p. 669. All the while Elisabeth was mystifying, fabricating, and destroying Nietzsche's personal correspondence in order to take control of his legacy. Cf. Montinari 2003b, p. 105, and Large 1995, p. 445–449, for a helpful recapitulation of the publication history and reception of *Ecce Homo*.

<sup>7</sup> The last revisions that Nietzsche submitted to the publisher were carried out on 2 January 1889, just days before his famous collapse of 7 January (cf. Montinari 2003b, p. 111). *Nietzsche contra Wagner: Out of the Files of a Psychologist*, composed almost wholly of passages from others of Nietzsche's works, was prepared after (the initial drafts, at least, of) *Ecce Homo*.

<sup>8</sup> See Montinari 2003b, p. 108; and p. 121, note 12.

collapse. In fact, it now seems virtually indisputable that a final set of alterations submitted by Nietzsche to Naumann did exist, but were removed by Peter Gast.

Mazzino Montinari reconstructed the place of at least one of the intended corrections on the basis of a discovery in Gast's literary estate.<sup>9</sup> This fragment has a great deal to do with lines of descent and Nietzsche's personal relationship with his immediate family: in it, he claims that he is a:

Polish nobleman *pur sang*, without a drop of bad blood mixed in, least of all German. When I look for the most profound antithesis to me, for the incalculable commonality of the instincts, I always discover my mother and sister: to regard myself as related to such German *canaille* was a blasphemy against my divinity. (EH I 3)<sup>10</sup>

He confesses that the most abysmal idea, for him – the “gravest objection to the ‘eternal recurrence’” – has always been his mother and sister (EH I 3).<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the immediate references to his own family, probably the most important statement we find in this late addition is his “sovereign feeling of distinction toward everything considered noble today. I would not”, he avers, even “allow the young German kaiser the honor of driving my coach” (EH I 3). But whereas we might, on a first reading, take the seeming megalomania (‘my divinity’!) and the extreme virulence Nietzsche expresses towards his own mother and sister (and Germans in general) to bear the marks of impending madness,<sup>12</sup> they are really, as Montinari and others have pointed out, no more extreme than many other sections of this work or others, before and during 1888.<sup>13</sup>

Montinari's own judgment in the matter is that “Nietzsche left behind a finished *Ecce Homo*, but we do not have it” (Montinari 2003b, p. 120). At this point, then, we can only consider the text that we have (emended as Montinari and the newer critical edition have it), and not speculate on what else Nietzsche might have added or corrected in the final version. We can, however, make at least one significant judgment on the basis of the most definitive edition. For our own purposes, the most important thing to glean from this fragment and the

<sup>9</sup> See Montinari 2003b, p. 103–125; and Montinari 2003a, p. 126–140 (chapter nine and the Documentary Supplement).

<sup>10</sup> This section, qtd. Montinari 2003b, p. 104–105, is included in the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, as well as in the Cambridge translation of *Ecce Homo*, replacing the old section three of “Why I Am So Wise”.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Z III ii 2, and Z III ii 13, where Zarathustra claims that his own most abysmal thought, the one that disgusted him most, was the eternal recurrence of the small man.

<sup>12</sup> Indicating, ironically, as has also been noted before, a final break with both of them just prior to falling into their care.

<sup>13</sup> See Montinari 2003b, p. 105.

other notes written in the month before his collapse is Nietzsche's very lucidity.<sup>14</sup> The fact that the numerous additions and corrections Nietzsche submitted may be inserted seamlessly into the text – “they stand in a logical literary relation to one another” – and the clarity with which he directed them, testifies to the point that Nietzsche had not “lost his ‘literary mind’” until the very end (Montinari 2003b, p. 111). Given the coherence of his corrections and alterations with the original text, there is no real external justification for considering that Nietzsche's mind was on any kind of rapid downwards slide towards madness in the final days preceding his Turin breakdown. This in itself is an important point to establish, given the kinds of criticisms that the text has faced over the past hundred years. The coherence of the alterations with the near-final text leaves open, of course, the possibility that Nietzsche had *already* lost his mind prior to the collapse of 1889. The only possible response to this claim is to turn to the text itself; consequently, we will need to examine the reasons for this allegation, as well as some of the strategies that have been offered for reading *Ecce Homo*, which counter it.

Before doing that, however, let us consider very briefly one other reason that *Ecce Homo* might have been marginalized – aside, that is, from the assertion that its author was already mad – even within the philosophical traditions that have taken Nietzsche seriously. One could surmise that the quasi-autobiographical genre of the text, with its admixture of literary auto-criticism, might have been enough to put off any serious philosophical consideration. But interpreters used to coping with “the most multifarious art of style that anyone has ever had at his disposal” (EH III 4) do not really face a new kind of difficulty in *Ecce Homo*, for Nietzsche himself never observed a strict delimitation of genre in his philosophy. His work is always operating at the boundaries – as much of genre as of discipline. After 1885, the closest that Nietzsche comes to a sustained philosophical treatise on a single issue – in anything like our usual sense of that form – is in the three essays of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Else-

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<sup>14</sup> *Inter alia*, the documentary evidence from Nietzsche's last notes and letters suggests that by December, *The Antichrist* has become for him the whole (as opposed to the first of four parts) of the “Revaluation of All Values”. This means, in Montinari's view, that “we may [now] rightfully claim that Nietzsche considered his lifework as completed” at this point (Montinari 2003b, p. 110). Conway gives this fact a more negative reading (wrongly, I believe), claiming that Nietzsche's realization that *Der Antichrist* would be the only book of *The Revaluation of All Values* amounted to a concession of failure: “he would never produce the philosophical *Hauptwerk* that would elevate him to a position alongside Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer” (Conway 1993, p. 58).



where, he moves from aphorism to polemic to literary criticism to autobiography.<sup>15</sup>

Alexander Nehamas summarizes several philosophers' attempts to come to terms with this "stylistic pluralism" in his *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*; his own account, with which I generally agree, is that this pluralism is neither a continuing effort to find the one style that "gets things right" (Kaufmann) nor an expression of absolute indeterminacy (Derrida and Kofman).<sup>16</sup> Rather, it is an attempt to get around some of the difficulties ("performative contradictions" or "self-referential incoherences", depending on one's philosophical orientation) that would be raised in saying things like "I am a perspectivist". The stylistic plurality of Nietzsche's writings "show his perspectivism without saying anything about it, and to that extent they prevent his view that there are only interpretations from undermining itself" (Nehamas 1985, p. 40). To return to our question, then, the oddity of the genre(s) in itself is not enough to explain the neglect of *this* text (especially given the copiousness of the overall Nietzsche scholarship).<sup>17</sup>

## 2 Reading the 'Madness' Out: Previous Strategies

It appears, then, that by far the largest impediment to taking the text seriously is its exceedingly bombastic claims: Nietzsche seems here at least to be flirting with the madness that will shortly overcome him. One need only, we are told, consider the titles of the chapters to foresee his impending collapse: "Why I Am So Wise", "Why I Am So Clever", "Why I Write Such Good Books" and "Why I Am a Destiny". In the final chapter of the text, we find these elaborate claims made explicitly: "I know my lot. One day my name will be connected with the memory of something tremendous, – a crisis such as the earth has never seen ... I am not a human being, I am dynamite" (EH IV 1). He goes on to affirm his world-historical importance with passages like this one: "The *uncovering* of Christian morality is an event without equal, a real catastrophe. Anyone who knows about this is

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<sup>15</sup> This admixture of styles makes me broadly sympathetic to More's recent (2011, 2014) arguments that we should consider not just *Ecce Homo*, but Nietzsche's work as a whole as a kind of satire – though see my further comments below on this point, particularly note 46.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Nehamas 1985, p. 18–22 and p. 36–41.

<sup>17</sup> For a couple of autobiographical texts that I believe *have* been marginalized by philosophers largely due to considerations of genre, see Whitmire 2006a, 2006b and 2010.

a *force majeure*, a destiny – he splits the history of humanity into two parts. Some live *before* him, some live *after* him ... “ (EH IV 8).

As we have not yet begun to mark our calendars *Anno Nietzscheanis*, however, our task here is to provide some kind of justification for taking seriously a text that makes claims like this. There are, in fact, quite a number of strategies we might take in reading these passages, which would enable us to avoid the charges of madness. One possible strategy would be to insist on the importance of hyperbole within all of Nietzsche's texts, not just *Ecce Homo*. Both Bernd Magnus and Alexander Nehamas have argued that hyperbole is the constitutive feature of Nietzsche's rhetoric, a pointed performative reversal of Socrates' vaunted (ironic?) humility.<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche seems to confirm this performative strategy himself, saying: “And why shouldn't I see this through to the end? I like to make a clean sweep of things” (EH III CW 4). Nietzsche's presentation of himself – or, if you like, Zarathustra, the prophet of Dionysus – as a replacement for the Christ, also confirms this kind of reading. It is, of course, often noted that the words “*ecce homo*”, or “behold the man”, are (in the Vulgate) Pilate's statement to the crowd to whom he presents Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Those inclined to find a bit of irony within the hyperbole, however, ought to note the larger context of the passage for the full effect: Jesus has just been scourged, crowned with thorns, and robed in a royal purple mantle; and he is crucified shortly after this presentation, within the same chapter of the book of John.

A second strategy would be to emphasize the parodic and ironic aspects of *Ecce Homo*.<sup>20</sup> Although we need not subscribe to Brian Leiter's broader claim that “the real purpose of [...] [any] autobiographical undertaking [...] [is] an extended exercise in self-congratulation” (Leiter 1998, p. 221), we may still at least recognize that Nietzsche is self-consciously parodying all of those “humble” autobiographies that surreptitiously attempt to show Why Their Authors Are So Wise while at the same time concealing that that is their true aim. As else-

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**18** See Magnus et al. 1993; Magnus and Higgins 1996, p. 57; and Nehamas 1985, p. 22–28. Kofman (1992 and 1993) also notes the hyperbolic excess of the text. Duncan Large argues, in his contribution to this volume, that *Ecce Homo* is hyperbolically hyperbolic – that is, Nietzsche's “normal” use of hyperbole is here exponentially heightened – Nietzsche raised to the power of Nietzsche, if you like. Interestingly, Michael Platt notes that Nietzsche in fact reverses several elements of the *Apology* – demanding to be put on trial, attacking the god, and trying to corrupt the youth (Platt 1993, p. 43).

**19** John 19:5. This occurs seven verses after the phrase for which Nietzsche valorizes Pilate – “What is truth?” – at John 18:38. Cf. AC 46.

**20** Magnus and Higgins also insist that we recognize the humor of *Ecce Homo*; Layton 1973 considers its humor, but points specifically to its shock value as an intentional rhetorical strategy, as well.

where, Nietzsche's strategy here would be, on this reading, a depth-psychological one: ironically cutting through the superficial layers of falsity to reveal a crucial psychological insight. Of course, he had already pointed out this sort of thing directly in the first of the *Untimely Meditations*, on David Friedrich Strauss.<sup>21</sup>

Leiter also points to a second irony operating in *Ecce Homo*, however – namely, that it is *not* in fact self-congratulatory in Nietzsche's case. On his reading of Nietzsche's own philosophical position:

Nietzsche wrote such wise and clever books for the same reason that the tomato plant grows tomatoes: *because it must*, because it could not have done otherwise. But there is no self-congratulation involved in simply reporting what had to be, and Nietzsche evinces none. (Leiter 1998, p. 222, emphasis in original)

I have my doubts as to whether any serious reader of *Ecce Homo* could fail to find any self-congratulation there, but be that as it may, this reading would suggest that Nietzsche is simply telling us how he became what he had to be.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, Nietzsche himself tells us that he “would rather be a satyr than a saint” (EH Preface 2), and Kofman lays a great deal of stress on the buffoonery and satirical (sic: not “satirical”<sup>23</sup>) elements of *Ecce Homo*. Comparing the Dionysian effect of this work to that of Alcibiades in the *Symposium*,<sup>24</sup> she rightly reminds us that the satyr – that curiously amoral and buffoonish Greek mixture of god and animal, which is always linked with wine, sex and song – is the companion and disciple of Dionysus. Nietzsche's buffooneries, she tells us, are “the non-negligible auxiliaries in his struggle against Christian morality”, noting also Nietzsche's comment that “in the entire New Testament there is not one single *bouffonnerie*: but that fact refutes a book” (Kofman 1992, p. 33).<sup>25</sup> Walter Kauf-

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**21** “It may be that everyone over forty has the right to compile an autobiography, for even the humblest of us have experienced and seen from closer quarters things which the thinker may find worth noticing. But to depose a confession of one's beliefs must be considered incomparably more presumptuous” (UM I 3).

**22** I have also argued (2009) that Nietzsche's emphasis on the drives and affects overrides any sense of voluntaristic self-fashioning in his later works. André van der Braak argues a similar point with respect to *Ecce Homo* in his contribution to this volume.

**23** Nicholas More (2011 and 2014) argues that *Ecce Homo* is, in terms of genre, actually a satire. While I think that the importance of satirical elements within this text (and Nietzsche's work as a whole) is unarguably clear, I argue here for a more substantive generic connection to *Ecce Homo* (and one that most helps to dispel the claims of madness) in apocalyptic.

**24** See Kofman 1992, p. 31–32.

**25** Kofman cites the French edition of Nietzsche's text; I have provided here Kaufmann and Holingdale's corresponding translation from WP 187.

mann, too, notes Nietzsche's remarks that he would rather be a satyr, and that he was, perhaps, a buffoon.<sup>26</sup> With the satyr's buffoonery, however, there is always a corresponding nobility, a nobility which Kofman seems to find in *Ecce Homo's* very grandiosity: it is, she claims, at the same time a parody of transubstantiation, in which the Christian Deity is interred in order to be resuscitated as a pagan; and a grandiose, architectural monument immortalizing himself.<sup>27</sup>

Each of these strategies has its advantages, but all of them miss some of what I take to be Nietzsche's crucial hints for reading *Ecce Homo*. Leiter is correct in sensing a certain amount of irony and self-parody here, but not all of the arrogation is parody *simpliciter*, as he seems to believe: some of it, at least, is quite serious in tone. As Kofman notes, "to take him purely and simply for a satyr would also be to mistake him" (Kofman 1992, p. 32). She urges us to hear the rest of the context of John 19, in which Pilate has inscribed "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" over the cross. Pilate's skeptical questioning and "noble", ironic responses to Jesus in that chapter, she claims, open up the very possibility of the genealogical critique: Pilate, *qua* antichrist, is effectively the intellectual ancestor of Nietzsche, ironically (by way of the crown, the mantle and the inscription) calling into question the supposed divinity of this man he presents to the crowd.<sup>28</sup> Lest we too quickly dispense with this interpretation as an over-reading of Nietzsche, we should also recall Nietzsche's own words in *The Antichrist*, which Kofman cites in this regard: that Pilate is the only really noble personage in the entirety of the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> I take her to mean by this that Pilate is the only character in the New Testament who displays anything like the *pathos* of distance, the need to separate oneself from the *profanum vulgus*, that Nietzsche valorizes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Ecce Homo* and elsewhere.

### 3 An Apocalyptic Strategy

Magnus' general strategy of emphasizing the literary trope of hyperbole is, I think, a good formal strategy; however, we can make this literary formalism more substantive by paying attention to the explicitly theological language here, language which leads us even beyond the context of the book of John

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<sup>26</sup> See Kaufmann 1974, p. 409–410; we might note, in passing, that the "buffoon" passage mirrors almost precisely the satyr passage: "I would rather be a satyr than a saint" (EH P 2); "I do not want to be a saint, I would rather be a buffoon" (EH IV 1).

<sup>27</sup> See Kofman 1992, p. 53–54.

<sup>28</sup> See Kofman 1992, p. 45–49.

<sup>29</sup> See Kofman 1992, p. 47; cf. AC 46.

that Nietzsche himself evokes. Within this more general context, Nietzsche is, I believe, also making explicit use of several features of the ancient literary-theological tradition of apocalypse,<sup>30</sup> a tradition with which Nietzsche the classical philologist was certainly familiar. The best-known apocalypse is of course the concluding book of the Christian New Testament, “Revelation” (Greek “*Apokalypsis*”, transliterated as Apocalypse), though other apocalyptic texts survive, in partial or fuller form, both within the canonical Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (the so-called “Synoptic Apocalypse” in Mark 13 and parallels, Daniel 7–12, 4 Ezra<sup>31</sup>) and outside them (a large number, including 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, The Apocalypse of Peter). Nietzsche was certainly never averse to utilizing (and inverting) Judeo-Christian Scriptural motifs – as, for instance, in the empty tomb (and many other references to Easter Sunday) of *Zarathustra*, Part IV (especially in “The Sign”); and even apocalyptic ones, as in the “Seven Seals” section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part III.<sup>32</sup> It should be no surprise, then, to see him utilizing some of these same motifs in *Ecce Homo*, as well. I will argue that these are in fact essential to the rhetorical strategy of the text.

There are also two extrinsic links that we might note here from the beginning. First, the book of Revelation, attributed to the prophet “John”, has traditionally been associated with the other Johannine literature of the New Testament, and Pilate’s “*ecce homo*” presentation itself occurs only in the book of John, not the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche himself calls attention to this linkage in the *Genealogy*, where, in his attempts to uncover the spirit of *ressentiment* in Judeo-Christian morality, he calls “the Apocalypse of John, the most wanton of all literary outbursts that vengefulness has on its conscience” (GM I 16). He goes on to say that “one should not underestimate the profound consistency of the Christian instinct when it signed this book of hate with the name of the

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**30** For a good general introduction to Apocalyptic, see the following: Hanson 1992a and 1992b, Grayson 1992, J. Collins 1992, and A. Collins 1992; as well as Rowland 1982, J. Collins 1984, Aune 1986, and McGinn et al. 2003. In the following general analysis of apocalyptic, I rely to some degree on each of these volumes, as well as on Mazzaferri 1989 and Bauckham 1993, both valuable studies of the canonical apocalypse.

**31** I Corinthians 15:20–28 and Isaiah 24–27 also share at least some traditional features of apocalyptic.

**32** Tagliapietra 2002 provides a good discussion of Nietzsche’s use of apocalyptic in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; Tagliapietra also deals briefly with both *The Antichrist* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* in this regard.

**33** In Nietzsche’s own time, the Johannine authorship of the Apocalypse was “a postulate of the critics”, insofar as the apostolic origin of the text was accepted by the Tübingen school. Cf. Barton 1898, p. 776–777.

disciple of love, the same disciple to whom it attributed that amorous-enthusiastic Gospel" (GM I 16).

Second, and more importantly, whereas apocalypse would indeed become a feature of later Jewish and Christian thought, there was at one time a strong scholarly consensus that it actually originated in ancient Zoroastrianism.<sup>34</sup> Anders Hultgard has noted that

for almost two centuries the problem of Iranian influence on Jewish and Christian eschatology has attracted Western scholarship and also stirred up an ancient debate. The end and renewal of the world, apocalyptic time reckoning, the signs and tribulations of the end, the struggle of God and his Messiah against evil, personified in the figure of Satan and his demons, would thus be ideas having a foreign origin. (Hultgard 2003, p. 60)<sup>35</sup>

This fact would not be lost on the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, who notes that Zarathustra (Zoroaster) was "the first to see the struggle of good and evil as the true wheel in the machinery of things" (EH IV 3). One of the chief features of apocalyptic literature is a radical dualism of good and evil, the fight between good and evil translated into the very core of being, or, as Nietzsche puts it, in a phrase that might have served as a commentary on apocalyptic literature:

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**34** This view has since been superseded by "studies indicating that the Persian sources upon which the hypothesis rested were written over a half millennium after the period of the alleged influence". See Hanson 1992b, p. 281. For the earlier scholarly connection to Zoroastrian thought, cf. Rist 1962. For a source close to Nietzsche's own time, cf. Jackson 1896, who notes the "striking likeness between the religion of ancient Iran, as modified by Zoroaster, and the teachings of Christianity" (Jackson 1896, p. 150), pointing specifically to "the ancient Persian doctrine of eschatology, a millennium, a resurrection, the coming of a Saoshyant or Saviour, the punishment of the wicked in a flood of molten metal, and the establishment of a kingdom or sovereignty of good which is to be the regeneration of the world [...] the coming of a new order of things at the great crisis or final change of the world. This final change is to be the beginning of the wished-for kingdom or good sovereignty, and of a regeneration of the world" (Jackson 1896, p. 155–156).

**35** He goes on to note that "the adherents of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* in the first three decades of the twentieth century [...] suggested a thoroughgoing influence from Iranian traditions especially on Jewish and Christian apocalypticism, messianism, and eschatology" (Hultgard 2003, p. 59). Although Hultgard ultimately comes to the conclusion that there is "no direct and general borrowing of the Iranian apocalyptic eschatology as such by Judaism and Christianity", he does argue for an indirect influence. He further points out (Hultgard 2003, p. 53–55) that Zoroastrian thought (including its eschatology) is attested as early as Plutarch (among other Greek writers, but there decisively in his "Of Isis and Osiris"), who himself cites Theopompus of Chios (c. 4 BCE). Cohn 1993 continues to trace this apocalyptic eschatology to Zoroastrianism, but he seems to hold the minority view on this issue at present. Regardless of the current scholarly consensus, Nietzsche himself clearly seems to have believed there was a connection, as I discuss below.

“morality translated into metaphysics as force, cause, goal in itself” (EH IV 3). That, Nietzsche tells us, is why he himself chose Zarathustra as his mouthpiece, as the prophet of Dionysus, to show the (doubly apocalyptic) self-overcoming of the morality of good and evil by its first and greatest exponent.

## 4 Altizer on Nietzschean Apocalyptic

Some interpretive work has already been done on Nietzsche’s general relation to apocalyptic eschatology – most importantly by Thomas J.J. Altizer of the “death of God” theological movement that emerged in the early 1960s. Altizer claims that

no thinker has so deeply enacted our apocalypse as did Nietzsche, an enactment not only bringing our history to an end, but unveiling its origin as did no other thinking, an origin which itself is an apocalyptic origin, one that Nietzsche knew as occurring in the ancient Persian Zarathustra. (Altizer 2000, p. 1)

He thus construes Nietzsche’s philosophy generally as operating within a broadly apocalyptic, eschatological paradigm:

Believing that the Persian Zarathustra created a moral and religious vision which later became the foundation of Western history, Nietzsche created a new Zarathustra whose prophetic proclamation embodies the end of Western history [...] [and] which will be followed by the advent of a wholly new historical era. (Altizer 1966a, p. 149)

This proclamation will effectively invert traditional (ecclesial) Christian categories by insisting on an absolute affirmation of the profane (eternal recurrence) rather than the transcendent, sacred, absolute Other.

Altizer’s own theological emphasis is on the eschatological form of Christian faith and its ultimate apocalyptic fulfillment in our time with the proclamation of the death of God: “a consistently eschatological negation of an original sacred must culminate”, he claims, “in an affirmation of the radical profane [...] [and] a consistently Christian dialectical understanding of the sacred must finally look forward to the resurrection of the profane in a transfigured and thus finally sacred form” (Altizer 1966c, p. 155).<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere, he argues that “the word appears in our history in such a way as to negate its previous expressions”

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<sup>36</sup> Several of Altizer’s other early works, centering on apocalyptic Christianity, are also anthologized in this volume.

(Altizer 1966d, p. 137) – that is to say, in the absolute immanence of the radically profane. His question, then, is whether it might be possible to “find a way to understand and affirm absolute immanence as a contemporary and kenotic realization of the Kingdom of God, an expression in our experience of an original movement of Christ from transcendence to immanence” (Altizer 1966a, p. 151). If this is so, then we might actually be able to “give ourselves to the darkest and most chaotic moments of our world as contemporary ways to the Christ who even now is becoming all in all” (Altizer 1966a, p. 152), rather than merely abandoning the radical secularity of the post-modern world in a movement of Gnostic withdrawal.<sup>37</sup>

The affirmation of the eternal recurrence, then, would not represent a simple negation of Christianity, but rather a radical, dialectically sublated form, in which one “dares to open himself to the Christ who is fully present, the Christ who has completed a movement from transcendence to immanence, and who is kenotically present in the fullness and the immediacy of the actual moment before us” (Altizer 1966a, p. 154–155).<sup>38</sup> Thus, he claims, we have in Nietzsche’s Zarathustra not an Antichrist *simpliciter*, but “a radical Christian image of Jesus”,

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**37** The Gnostic movement of flight from the concrete historical situation or “world” in which we find ourselves is illegitimate for Altizer because it fails to grasp the fully dialectical significance of the Incarnation: “If the Incarnate Word is a Word that makes all things new then we must not naively believe that it is only the world and not the Word which is affected by the process of Christian ‘repetition’. Such a conception isolates the Word from the world and renounces the reality of the Incarnation” (Altizer 1966d, p. 137). In short, the Word is profanized by the flesh, just as the flesh is sacralized by the Word.

**38** This dialectical sublation, then, reflects the movement of the Incarnate Word in our historical epoch – viz., the *logos* becomes flesh in the post-modern world by the full realization of the kenotic gesture described in the second chapter of Philippians, a kenosis so complete that God himself dies: “the contemporary Christian is confronted with a world of total darkness, a darkness dissolving or negating everything that Christianity once knew as faith [...]. The Christian, moreover, who knows the Christ who is the embodiment of the self-negation of God, can know the Satan or Antichrist who is present to us as the actualization or the historical realization of the death of God. Insofar as an eschatological epiphany of Christ can occur only in conjunction with a realization in total experience of the kenotic process of self-negation, we should expect that epiphany to occur in the heart of darkness [...] a primordial chaos in the actuality of history that it is a redemptive epiphany, an epiphany unveiling the full reality of alienation and repression, thereby preparing the way for their ultimate reversal. Therefore the Christian is finally called to accept the Antichrist, or the totality of the dead body of God, as a final kenotic manifestation of Christ” (Altizer 1966a, p. 119–122).



insofar as he looks remarkably similar to the *ressentiment*-free Jesus we see in *The Antichrist!* (Altizer 1966a, p. 60–61).<sup>39</sup>

Despite this notable (though dubious) contribution to Christian theology, however, Altizer's work has (generally speaking) been programmatically oriented towards his own goal of outlining an atheistic form of Christianity;<sup>40</sup> he has not generally focused on an in-depth examination of how apocalyptic themes and motifs function in Nietzsche's works.<sup>41</sup> Thus a large degree of exegetical work remains to be done with the various texts. We must now return to *Ecce Homo*, then, in order to re-contextualize the "madness" so many readers have claimed to find there, as part of Nietzsche's own (literary) strategy. In *Ecce Homo*, I believe, Nietzsche is self-consciously redeploing the ultimate weapon in the Christian arsenal – the eschatological intervention of God in the unfolding process of world history – against precisely that (allegedly) life-denying world-view.

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**39** I take Altizer to be making roughly the same move with respect to Nietzsche's position on Christianity as Heidegger deploys with respect to Nietzsche's metaphysics of absolute Flux. Cf. Altizer 1966b for more on this point. Equating Dionysus with the Jesus of the *Antichrist* even in loose terms seems to me to be quite tenuous. The Jesus we see there, though free of *ressentiment*, looks rather like a pathologically withdrawn child in some of Nietzsche's descriptions, where he is characterized by an instinctive hatred of reality, an inability to experience anger and hostility, an "infantilism that has receded into spirituality" (AC 32). Cf. AC 29–32 on this issue.

**40** Altizer not only follows the tenor of Nietzsche's thought, but fruitfully invokes Hegel and William Blake as radical Christian prophets in this regard, as well. For a later summary of this position, of Nietzsche as "our purest apocalyptic thinker" who gives us "our only thinking which is a pure and total apocalyptic thinking [...] of absolute reversal", cf. also Altizer 2000, p. 1f.

**41** The (minor) exception to this point is *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which Altizer takes up several times in *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*. See particularly (in addition to the passages already cited in that work) p. 58–61, p. 118–121 and p. 148–157. Still, he is chiefly interested there, as elsewhere, in putting Nietzsche to work (viz., in examining how eternal recurrence could mark the attitude towards the world of an atheistic Christianity), rather than in an exegetical analysis of the text.

## 5 Apocalyptic and *Ecce Homo*

Although *how* to define apocalyptic remains a somewhat contentious issue in the literature,<sup>42</sup> the chief features of the genre with which we will be concerned are these:

- a) a first-person narrative (often pseudonymous) describing a revelatory disclosure, often including prophetic visions and an angelic messenger that aids in the interpretation of the revelation;
- b) a radically eschatological worldview, often presented as the culmination of a cosmic dualism of forces in which God's imminent intervention in world history is expected to end this Age and establish another in a triumphalistic moment of judgment, frequently anticipated by repetitions of violence or woes to come; and
- c) the presence of a direct or indirect paraenesis or exhortation to change our lives to reflect the altered, transcendent perspective on this world that was disclosed in the revelation.<sup>43</sup>

Although some commentators have called into question whether *all* apocalyptic texts include each of these elements, and some (such as Christopher Rowland) have even challenged the received view that the eschatological component is *the* distinctive feature of apocalypse as a literary genre, these traits, taken as a group, are both common enough among the canonical and extra-canonical texts extant in Nietzsche's own time to call them constitutive for our purposes.<sup>44</sup> More importantly, each of these features is also present in some way (in some cases directly, in others precisely inverted) in *Ecce Homo*.

Of course, Nietzsche's text does not contain *all* of the features we find in many other apocalypses. Many apocalyptic narratives within the Christian and Jewish traditions, however, do not contain all these features, either. There are

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**42** The most current scholarly consensus on the genre is quoted in Hanson: "'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world" (Hanson 1992a, p. 279). This definition was established by a group headed by John J. Collins, in *Semeia 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, after surveying a number of texts to which Nietzsche had no access (viz., the "Dead Sea Scrolls"). John J. Collins, who edited that volume of *Semeia*, also quotes this definition in his *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (1984), p. 4.

**43** My schematization here derives largely from J. Collins 1984, p. 4–5; and Hanson 1992a.

**44** The biblical texts include Revelation; the second half of Daniel (7–12); Isaiah 24–27; I Corinthians 15; the "Synoptic Apocalypse"; extant extra-canonical sources were 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and the Sibylline Oracles. See J. Collins 1984, p. 2, for more on this issue.

no visions, for instance, in Isaiah 24 to 27, and no pseudonymity in I Corinthians 15. In any case, the point is not to insist on the fact that the entirety of *Ecce Homo* is, in and of itself, an apocalypse, but to realize that it contains quite a large number of apocalyptic themes and rhetorical tropes that radically reverse central motifs in Christian and Jewish apocalypses.<sup>45</sup> As with Nietzsche's corpus in general, this text bears literary characteristics and styles appropriate to multiple genres, without limiting itself to any particular one.<sup>46</sup> The issue for us, then, in the remainder of this essay, is to understand how apocalyptic motifs can help us contextualize some of the more radical remarks we find in *Ecce Homo*. Let us, then, examine the major apocalyptic features embodied in the text.

## 5a) Apocalyptic Disclosure and Interpretation

As we noted above, a series of divine visions is quite a common way for a revelation to be effected, but there are other means of vouchsafing it in apocalyptic texts, as well: "otherworldly journeys, supplemented by discourse or dialogue and occasionally a heavenly book" (J. Collins 1984, p. 4). Nietzsche describes his own experience of the eternal return by which he was made pregnant with

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**45** J. Collins notes that while "apocalyptic" was formerly used both as a noun and an adjective, confusing some issues, the "more recent scholarship [...] distinguishes between apocalypse as a literary genre, apocalypticism as a social ideology, and apocalyptic eschatology as a set of ideas and motifs that may also be found in other literary genres and social settings" (J. Collins 1984, p. 2). Although this distinction would be anachronistic for the biblical scholarship of Nietzsche's own time, in the terms of current scholarship I am referring both to the use of an apocalyptic eschatology, as well as to various motifs of the genre of apocalypse, in *Ecce Homo*.

**46** Although here More argues that the stylistic pluralism or "admixture of forms" of *Ecce Homo* is part of what marks it as a satire, understood in its etymological origins as *satura lanx* or "full dish". Satire is "a mixture, a *multa admixta* (copious miscellany) as Roman satirist Varro has it" (More 2011, p. 10). See More 2014 for a fuller explication of this argument. As noted above, I find More's treatment broadly compelling, particularly when he cites evidence such as a hypothetical book-title, "The Dionysian Philosopher/A Menippean Satire" (More 2014, p. 92 note 106). I am also generally sympathetic with his (and other) approaches to Nietzsche that foreground the more "literary" elements of his work. What I find problematic is More's elision of different definitions of satire that enable his expansive reading: the broader the definition of satire (already a "copious miscellany") employed, the less falsifiable the claim that this – or any – work is properly a "satire". In other words, when he makes claims such as that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche "recast his entire corpus as a species of what I call philosophical satire: the comic attack by hyperbole of philosophy itself" (More 2014, p. 3) and "Nietzsche wrote satires of philosophy, not philosophy proper" (More 2014, p. 89), I think he is reading the genre of "philosophy" quite narrowly, and "satire" quite broadly.

the idea of *Zarathustra* (as a figure or “type”) as a kind of rapturous, ecstatic experience that overtakes him “‘6,000 feet beyond people and time’” (EH III Z 1). At the heart of the book, then (the commentary on *Zarathustra*), we find Nietzsche unfolding a narrative explanation of how he came to the disclosure in that text.

The writing of *Zarathustra* he goes on to describe in revelatory terms, as an experience in which everything “is involuntary to the highest degree, but takes place as if in a storm of feelings of freedom, of unrestricted activity, of power, of divinity. [...] This is my experience of inspiration” (EH III Z 3). In fact, he tells us,

[i]f you have even the slightest residue of superstition, you will hardly reject the idea of someone being just an incarnation, mouthpiece, or medium of overpowering forces. The idea of revelation in the sense of something suddenly becoming *visible* and audible with unspeakable assurance and subtlety, something that throws you down and leaves you deeply shaken – this simply describes the facts of the case. You listen, you do not look for anything, you take, you do not ask who is there; a thought lights up in a flash, with necessity, without hesitation as to its form, – I never had any choice. (EH III Z 3)

This is, then, a demythologization of the phenomenon of prophetic inspiration in decidedly this-worldly terms: “[M]y muscular dexterity has always been at its best when the richest creative energies were flowing through me. The *body* is inspired: let us leave the ‘soul’ out of it” (EH III Z 4). But it is nevertheless a portrayal of revelatory inspiration: the flash of vision in which the type of Zarathustra appears is a perfect example of a vouchsafing of a book of “divine” secrets, which Nietzsche himself will present to us as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The divinity revealed here, of course, is not Yahweh or Christ, but Dionysus – “The force that through the green fuse drives the flower / Drives my green age”.<sup>47</sup>

Lest we have any remaining doubt that this is the case, Nietzsche goes on to say the following about *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “Not a single moment of this *revelation of truth* has been anticipated or hinted at by any of the greatest people” (EH III Z 6: my emphasis). There can be no mistaking this language: the phrase “revelation of truth” is, in the German, “*Offenbarung der Wahrheit*”; and *Offenbarung* is the name of the concluding book of the Christian New Testament (Revelation).<sup>48</sup> The “angelic” messenger who aids in interpreting the divine revelation or visionary experience will of course be Nietzsche himself, in *Ecce Homo*, for Nietzsche tells us explicitly that he has “not said anything [in *Ecce Homo*] that [he] would not have said five years ago through the mouth of Zara-

<sup>47</sup> Arrowsmith 1959, p. 149, cites Dylan Thomas’ poem in the introduction to his translation of *The Bacchae*, in *Euripides V*. The poem’s complicated play of life and death, and man, nature and divinity, is emblematic for the Dionysian. See also Llewelyn 2009, p. 123.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. “*Offenbarung der Wahrheit*” (revelation of truth) at EH III Z 6.

thustra” (EH IV 8). I will return to what I take to be the core of this hermeneutic unfolding of *Zarathustra* (in the chapter “Why I Am So Clever”) when I return to the hortatory or paraenetic function of the text below.

## 5b) Apocalyptic Eschatology

The second key feature to note is a radically eschatological worldview, often characterized in other apocalypses as a rupture in time and history, or a doctrine of two Ages. We have already seen evidence of this in passages that might have looked, outside of this context, like the rantings of a madman: “The *uncovering* of Christian morality is an event without equal, a real catastrophe. Anyone who knows about this is a *force majeure*, a destiny – he splits the history of humanity into two parts. Some live *before* him, some live *after* him ...” (EH IV 8). Nietzsche is here arguing that his philosophical intervention, his overcoming of Christian morality, represents the end of this historical era for mankind, opening the possibility for another kind of history thereafter. The “free spirits” or “philosophers of the future” who understand the significance of this event are thus freed to live “beyond good and evil”.<sup>49</sup>

Now, whereas the traditional view of apocalyptic eschatology is based on the reassuring hope that God will intervene in history to right the wrongs of the current, distorted world order, punishing the wicked and vindicating the good, Nietzsche’s is based on the overthrowing of an ostensibly disfiguring, life-denying otherworldliness by a this-worldly vision of life. His version is unabashedly self-centered:<sup>50</sup> *his* name will be associated with the greatest crisis of the world order; *he* is the “*force majeure*” or the “dynamite” that explodes into history, breaking it in two, and, by extension, he will judge the (metaphysical) heavens and the earth, casting down the idols of the past. This is nothing if not a triumphalistic fatalism – he is, as he says, a destiny.<sup>51</sup>

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**49** Two specific textual points might also be noted here, with reference to the shift to a new perspective by way of an unveiling of divine secrets: 1) the word translated “uncovering” here (*Entdeckung*), would be another way to translate the Greek *apokalypsis* or the Latin *revelatio*; and 2) in the phrase “anyone who knows about this”, Nietzsche uses *aufklärt*, which Kaufmann’s more literal rendering of “is enlightened about this” actually picks up more clearly, giving us a hint (once again) of a visionary experience.

**50** Rather than the traditional pseudonymity of apocalypses – though with the notable exception of John of Patmos, the author of the book of Revelation.

**51** It is tempting to consider the fact that whereas many apocalypses seem to have a motivational function – that is, helping believers remain faithful and not give up hope in the face of crisis, suffering, or victimization (cf. Hanson 1992b, p. 280) – Nietzsche’s apocalypse, in which he tells

This doctrine of the shattering of history and the opening of a new Age is confirmed in *Ecce Homo's* companion volume, *The Antichrist*. At the end of that text, Nietzsche notes that “time is counted from the *dies nefastus* when this catastrophe began, – from the *first* day of Christianity! – *Why not count from its last day instead? – From today? – Revaluation of all values! ...*” (AC 62). He goes on to declare that his “Law against Christianity [is] Given on the Day of Salvation, on the first day of the year one (– 30 September 1888, according to the false calculation of time)” (AC 62).

Aside from the broad brushstrokes of an apocalyptic eschatological doctrine of two Ages, we also have in *Ecce Homo* the kind of more specific, traditional catalogue of forthcoming woes evinced in many apocalyptic narratives as signs that the end of this age is imminent:

I contradict as nobody has ever contradicted before, and yet in spite of this I am the opposite of a nay-saying spirit. I am a *bearer of glad tidings* as no one ever was before [...]. And yet I am necessarily a man of disaster as well. Because when truth comes into conflict with the lies of millennia there will be tremors, a ripple of earthquakes, an upheaval of mountains and valleys such as no one has ever imagined. [...] all power structures from the old society will have exploded – they are all based on lies: there will be wars such as the earth has never seen. (EH IV 1)

Nietzsche's vision here echoes not only the prophet John's description of the opening of the Seven Seals in the book of Revelation,<sup>52</sup> but also Jesus' own descriptions of the last times in the Synoptic Apocalypse: “Wars and rumours of wars [...] must come to pass, [when] nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places” (Matthew 24:6–7).<sup>53</sup> In fact, there will be “great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21). So whereas one might read Nietzsche as offering an empirical prediction of the World Wars of the twentieth century as owing to his philosophy, we need not do so. It makes far more sense to understand him, in his final

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himself his own story, his *destiny*, may very well fulfill a similar psychological function, for him personally. More suggests something similar, given that roughly two-thirds of Nietzsche's books remained unsold at that time (More 2014, p. 23–24); *Ecce Homo* would, then, be a fantasy projection into the future “in which the world recognizes his greatness, world history is split in two, a gift to humanity is received, and his eternal fame assured” (More 2014, p. 126). All of these make perfect sense when viewed in the substantive context of classical apocalyptic literature. 52 Cf. Revelation 6.

53 Cf. also Ezra 38:20, Isaiah 64:1, Nahum 1:5, 4 Ezra 9:3, and Revelation 6:12; 8:5, and 11:13 (among others).

works, as inserting himself into a substantive philosophical debate, but doing so by way of a concrete literary-theological tradition, *as* the Antichrist.<sup>54</sup> And in fact he tells us this explicitly, not just explicitly in his signature on *The Antichrist*, but also in *Ecce Homo*: “I am, in Greek, and not just Greek, the *Anti-Christ* ...” (EH III 2).<sup>55</sup>

So we have here a restatement of the upheavals that must come to pass before the rebirth of the world: earthquakes, wars and cataclysms of various sorts are traditionally understood as the birth pangs of the new world; and Nietzsche’s insertion of himself into this tradition ought thus to be taken as a literary device for expressing the *Untergang* of the old (Christian-Platonic) world’s values that must take place before any new values can be set in their place. For, as he tells us (quoting (himself as) Zarathustra): “*whoever wants to be a creator in good and evil first has to be a destroyer and smash values*” (EH IV 2). Or, elsewhere in his corpus: “If a temple is to be erected *a temple must be destroyed*: that is the law – let anyone who can show me a case in which it is not fulfilled!” (GM II 24). We should also note, in this context, that the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem was thought to be another of the signs of God’s impending apocalyptic intervention in world history.<sup>56</sup>

In place of the traditional cosmic dualism of good and evil leading up to this apocalyptic moment, Nietzsche gives us his own titanic battle, but a battle between an other-worldly ideal (“the Crucified”) and a this-worldly ideal (Dionysus). His bombast, consequently, is both positive and negative: “I am by far the most terrible human being who has ever existed; this does not mean that I will not be the most charitable. [...] I obey my Dionysian nature, which does not know how to separate doing no from saying yes” (EH IV 2).<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche thus considers himself not only a world-destroyer, an Age-ender, but a “bearer of *glad tidings* as no one ever was before” (EH IV 1).<sup>58</sup> To say “yes” to these “glad tidings” (literally, of course, his “gospel” or “evangel” – of life as will to

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54 Another of the “signs” of the last times that Jesus points to is the arising of “false Christs”. Cf. Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22.

55 Cf. Steinbuch: “Nietzsche’s choice of the words ‘*ecce homo*’ for the title of his autobiography is one of many instances of his wish to present himself to us as the Anti-Christ” (Steinbuch 1994, p. 4). *The Antichrist* itself is, of course, just more external confirmation of this point.

56 At Mark 13:2, Jesus says “Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down”.

57 Cf. with this NF 1888, 15[13]: KSA 13/412: “I teach the No <to> all that makes weak – that exhausts. I teach the Yes to all that strengthens, that stores up strength, that justifies the feeling of strength” (WP 54).

58 Cf. EH III TI 2: “I am he that brings these glad tidings”.

power and the innocence of Becoming) implies an all-out war on that which is counter to life, which is anti-nature (and this is first and foremost Christianity for Nietzsche at this point in his work): “Negation and *destruction* are conditions of affirmation” (EH IV 4). Nietzsche is horrified by “the absolutely horrible state of affairs where [in Christianity] *antinature* itself has been given the highest honour as morality” (EH IV 7). The fact that Christianity taught people “to hate the very first instincts of life; that a ‘soul’, a ‘spirit’, was *invented* to disgrace the body; the fact that people were taught that there is something unclean about sexuality, the presupposition of life” (EH IV 7) – all this remains, for him, Christianity’s greatest testimony against itself. His negation, destruction, or revaluation of all values hitherto must be understood, then, as the no-saying part of a project that is essentially affirmative towards *life*:<sup>59</sup> “The affirmation of passing away *and destruction* that is crucial for a Dionysian philosophy, saying yes to opposition and war, *becoming* along with a radical rejection of the very concept of ‘being’ – all these are more closely related to me than anything else people have thought so far” (EH III BT 3). In this vein, Gary Shapiro quotes a letter of Nietzsche to Brandes from November 1888 in which Nietzsche claims that *Ecce Homo* is the necessary prelude to *The Antichrist*, conceived now as the entirety of *The Transvaluation of All Values*. Shapiro takes this to mean that *The Antichrist* requires *Ecce Homo* to balance it “by showing that the great curser and destroyer is one who lives in the halcyon element of the ‘perfect day’” (Shapiro 1985, p. 119). In other words, in my terms, *The Antichrist* is the summation of the requisite no-saying part of Nietzsche’s essentially affirmative project, which is again affirmed in *Ecce Homo*.

Nietzsche is very obviously playing with the idea that his “glad tidings” are precisely that apocalyptic promise of a new heaven and a new earth, which has begun with the Messiah’s appearance (or reappearance), but can appear fully only after the cataclysmic convulsions – the *Untergang* – of this age. Nietzschean evangelism, then – his good news of the Age to come – consists in “the basic idea of [Zarathustra], *the thought of eternal return*, the highest possible formula of affirmation” (EH III Z 1). This is identified in the same section as “the *affirmative* pathos *par excellence*, which I have named the tragic pathos”; and, later on, with both the concepts of Dionysus and the Overman as well (EH III Z 6). And if this boundless “Yes” is understood as a kind of love, we also have Nietzsche’s final formulation of it as “*amor fati*” (EH II 10). The very point of this text, then, is to interpret the entirety of his life and oeuvre as a campaign against

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<sup>59</sup> We must remember to this effect that Christianity has been, in Nietzsche’s analysis, *the* value, the measure of *all* Western values: “until now, the Christians have been *the* ‘moral beings’” (EH IV 7).



Christianity in favor of a new possibility, that of an existence in which one says Yes to life, and “does No” to the life-denying “decadence morality or, to put it plainly, *Christian morality*” (EH IV 4). The final words of the text bear this out: “– Have I been understood? – *Dionysus versus the Crucified ...*” (EH IV 9).<sup>60</sup> And Nietzsche himself is the messenger: “*I am the bearer of these glad tidings ...*” (EH III TI 2).

### 5c) Apocalyptic Paraenesis

Finally, we have paraenesis, or the “exhortation” to shift our cognitive and behavioral standpoint. In a typical apocalyptic, this shift is from a merely earthly standpoint to the divine or transcendent perspective, so that not only the world’s future becomes clear, but also the significance of events in the past and present.<sup>61</sup> In *Ecce Homo*, of course, that kind of movement is short-circuited and reversed, and we are urged to take the kind of perspective on things that eliminates all the “mendaciously” other-worldly emphases of Christianity. In fact, we have already identified the precise location in the text where Nietzsche described the revelatory moment in order to effect this paraenetic shift to a this-worldly ideal: the “type” of Zarathustra and “what he presupposes physiologically: it is what I call *great health*” (EH III Z 2). This moment occurs in Nietzsche’s interpretation (or re-interpretation) of his own earlier texts, and more precisely in his discourse on the importance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as we saw above.

Towards what, then, are we redirected by this hortatory gesture? I believe the unfolding of the exhortation is chiefly to be found in the second chapter of the book, “Why I Am So Clever”. In that chapter, Nietzsche focuses on issues with a very particular relevance to the body: the importance of nutrition, what to eat and drink, the proper weather and place, and so forth. Why? Of what possible concern could “all these petty matters that people usually think are not worth worrying about” (EH II 10) actually be, next to God, freedom, and immortality? Let us allow him to answer that question:

Answer: these petty concerns – nutrition, location, climate, recuperation, the whole casuistry of selfishness – are far more important than all the concepts people have considered

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<sup>60</sup> Layton 1973, p. 85, also takes these final words as the keystone to Nietzsche’s philosophy.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. particularly Rowland on this issue. Whereas apocalyptic has virtually always been linked with eschatology, Rowland shows that apocalyptic is just as much involved in trying to understand things (from the transcendent perspective) as they are *now* as with future events (cf. Rowland 1982, p. 2).

important so far. This is exactly where people have to start *re-educating* themselves. The things that humanity used to think seriously about are not even realities, just figments of the imagination or, to put it more strongly, *lies* from the bad instincts of sick natures who were harmful in the deepest sense – all the concepts of “God”, the “soul”, “virtue”, “sin”, the “beyond”, “truth”, “eternal life” [...] All questions of politics, of social organization, of education are shown up as forgeries at a very basic level when the most harmful people are taken for great human beings, – when people are taught to despise “petty” matters, by which I mean the fundamental concerns of life itself. (EH II 10)

The exhortation that we receive in this text, then, is that if we are concerned with accomplishing, creating, and indeed, life itself, we must put away the old, false concerns (in an imaginary “soul”, for instance), in order to recognize that it is the maximizing of the strength of our bodies that we ought to be focused on. And this focus will entail an exquisite attention to the most minute details of “petty” things like nutrition, for, as Nietzsche says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “bad cooks – and the utter lack of reason in the kitchen – have delayed human development longest and impaired it most” (BGE 234).

Now, this kind of perspective is of course not offered as a series of universal laws for bodily health (which would just be another imagining, for Nietzsche – this time based on the false ideality of “the body”), but as dicta that are appropriate for Nietzsche’s own concretely material body. His “cleverness” lies not only in his understanding that these are the truly important issues, but also (as Brian Domino persuasively argues) in understanding precisely what his own body’s needs actually are, with respect to nutrition, climate and so forth.<sup>62</sup> Or, as Nietzsche puts it, “[w]e can formulate it in rough and ready terms: ‘what do you *yourself* eat in order to achieve the maximum of strength, of *virtù* in the style of the Renaissance, of moraline-free virtue?’” (EH II 1). Nietzsche elaborates further on this point in *Twilight of the Idols*:

It is crucial for the fate of individuals as well as peoples that culture begin in the *right* place – *not* in the “soul” [...]: the right place is the body, gestures, diet, physiology, *everything else* follows from this [...]; Christianity, which despised the body, has been the greatest disaster for humanity so far. (TI IX 47)

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<sup>62</sup> See Domino 2002, where Domino contends that the transition from “Why I Am So Wise” to “Why I Am So Clever” represents Nietzsche’s transition from theoretical wisdom to a kind of practical wisdom, the knowledge of what is appropriate to *his* body, just as the *phronimos* knows what is appropriate to *his* situation. This fits well, I believe, with my own contention that the paraenetic task of the text is to encourage the development of precisely this kind of practical wisdom in us, as a function of the shift to a this-worldly perspective on life.

He also reiterates there that “It was Christianity with its fundamental *ressentiment against* life that made sexuality into something unclean, it threw *filth* on the origin, the presupposition of life” (TI X 4).<sup>63</sup> The paraenesis here is embodied in the exhortation that we, too, should shift our perspective from one focused on the world to come and its attendant metaphysical baggage, to this world, to our bodies and their needs in this life.

## 6 Conclusion

So, while there are certainly hyperbolic elements in the text, there is clearly no reason whatsoever to dismiss it offhand as the work of a madman. Indeed, on my reading, the non-satirical (to use Kofman’s phrase) elements of *Ecce Homo* that seem to extend beyond the pale are part of a perfectly comprehensible project that totalizes the entirety of Nietzsche’s life and work under the rubric of “Dionysus, Zarathustra, Antichrist”. As is often the case with Nietzsche, the style and rhetorical motifs of this text lend us a great deal of insight into the project itself: the diagnosis of European nihilism as an outgrowth of Christianity, and its destined overcoming via the dynamite of Nietzsche/Zarathustra. This occurs by way of a literary-philosophical subversion of the apocalyptic Christian hope of a New Heaven and a New Earth – fed, as he believes, by *ressentiment* – and its replacement with a fully affirmative this-worldly vision of life and reality.

Beyond the importance for understanding Nietzsche’s own project, however, the paraenetic function of the text is an invitation to us, as well: *Ecce Homo* is, importantly, not subtitled “How I Became What I Am”, but “How to Become Who You Are” or “How to Become What One Is”.<sup>64</sup> And that, as we have seen, involves paying careful attention to the “small” matters of one’s own body that Nietzsche discusses in “Why I Am So Clever”. By doing that, we, too – or at least some of us – may join him on this route to “the great health” (EH III Z 2), which for Nietzsche is what enables genius to function: as we saw above, the body itself must be inspired, with energy flowing freely through it, to produce anything great. This “great health” is not the absence of illness or decadence (for

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**63** In the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, roughly the same point is made with respect to our natural instinct or inclination towards cruelty.

**64** Here I think More 2014, p. 48, mistakes the subtitle of the text as principally first-person: How I, Nietzsche, Became What I Am. Given my understanding of the work as hortatory, I think we have to take it as an admonition to us – not in the mode of imagining a higher self and pursuing that as a self-conscious goal (More 2014, p. 44–45), but, as I will argue in a forthcoming piece for which this essay is propaedeutic, a kind of becoming un-(self-)conscious.

Nietzsche recognizes that he himself is also a decadent, at least in part), but rather its overcoming, as for instance in this case:

The way Julius Caesar guarded against sickliness and headaches: huge marches, the simplest regimen, staying outside for extended periods of time, constant strains and exertions – these are, basically, the general guidelines for protecting and maintaining the subtle, extremely vulnerable, most highly pressurized machine that is called genius. – (TI IX 31)

Whether we have adequately appropriated the good news of this history-shattering exhortation to affirm *this* life, which Nietzsche both delivered (as inspired revelation) and interpreted (as *angelos* or messenger), is left an open question for us to meditate upon at the end of the text. “Have I been understood? – *Dionysus versus the Crucified ...*” (EH IV 9)<sup>65</sup>

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**65** I would like to thank: Matt Baldwin, of Mars Hill College; the members of the Western North Carolina Continental Philosophy Circle; the members of the NC Religious Studies Association present at their 2006 annual meeting, and the participants at the University of London’s conference on *Ecce Homo* in November 2008, all of whom provided insightful suggestions and helpful comments on earlier drafts of this work.



Martin Liebscher

## Podachs zusammengebrochenes Werk

### Erneutes Abschreiten der Grenzen psychologischer Nietzsche-Deutung

**Abstract:** Erich F. Podach, Erbe der Basler Tradition der Nietzscheforschung und vehementer Gegner der Editionen des Nietzsche-Archivs um Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, veröffentlichte im Jahre 1961 eine kommentierte Fassung von “*Ecce Homo*”. Seine darin vertretene Grundannahme, wonach die letzten Schriften Nietzsches beredter Ausdruck von Nietzsches Wahn seien, und die Forderung der Wegkürzung psychopathologischer Aspekte, führten zu heftiger Kritik. Insbesondere der Beginn der Historisch-Kritischen Ausgabe von Colli und Montinari läutete das Ende solcher Psychopathologisierungsversuche der Philosophie Nietzsches ein. Es soll aber in diesem Aufsatz deutlich gemacht werden, dass die Grenzen der Psychologisierung stets aufs Neue bewusst gemacht werden müssen, um dem “Psychologen” Nietzsche philosophisch gerecht zu werden. Wenn Nietzsche im Vorwort zu “*Ecce Homo*” fordert, ihn nicht zu verwechseln (KSA 6/257), spricht er einer Psychologisierung geradezu das Wort, und die Philosophie muss sich auf ein philosophisches Rollenspiel einlassen, um dem zu entsprechen.

Im Jahr 1961 – sechs Jahre vor dem Erscheinen des ersten Bands der kritischen Gesamtausgabe – gab Erich Podach eine kommentierte Ausgabe der Schriften Nietzsches aus der Zeit seines zweiten Turiner Aufenthalts 1888 heraus. Der Band beinhaltet neben *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, *Der Antichrist* und den *Dionysos-Dithyramben* auch den nachgelassenen Text des *Ecce Homo*. Podach verlieh der Sammlung den programmatischen Titel *Nietzsches Werke des Zusammenbruchs*,<sup>1</sup> programmatisch, insofern damit bereits seiner Intention Ausdruck verliehen wurde, diese späte Schriften Nietzsches psycho-biographisch zu durchleuchten, um mystisch philosophischen Spekulationen zur Person und Philosophie Nietzsches Einhalt zu gebieten. Damit setzte Podach konsequent seinen kritisch biographischen Ansatz der dreißiger Jahre fort, der ihn zu einem Hauptexponenten des Kampfes gegen die Mythologisierungen Nietzsches durch das Weimarer Nietzschearchiv gemacht hatte – man darf ihn hier getrost zu den Erben der Basler

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1 Siehe Podach 1961.

Tradition zählen. Diese in den 30er Jahren gegen das Archiv hilfreiche biographische Redlichkeit erklärte Podach in den 60er Jahren, insbesondere in den *Werken des Zusammenbruchs* und *Ein Blick in Nietzsches Notizbücher*,<sup>2</sup> einer kommentierten Auswahl von Nachlassfragmenten aus dem Jahr 1963, zu der einzig redlichen Methode der Annäherung an Nietzsches Schriften. Die Biographik erschließe das psychologische Profil Nietzsches und eröffne derart den Zugang zu den Inhalten seiner Texte. Die Ausschließlichkeit seines Verfahrens führte ihn jedoch dazu, den Gehalt der Philosophie Nietzsches nach Berücksichtigung der psychologischen Erkenntnisse als minimal und die philosophische Nietzscheinterpretation als verirrt abzutun – zumindest wurde das von der Kritikern so verstanden. Vor allem die Vertreter einer philosophischen Nietzscheforschung wandten sich gegen Podachs psycho-biographischen Ansatz, derart erfolgreich sogar, dass diese Richtung der Nietzscheforschung mit Podach ihren letzten Vertreter verloren hat und man heute ohne weiteres von Podachs zusammengebrochenen Werken sprechen muss.

In der Folge soll dessen Forschungsansatz anhand seiner Herausgabe des *Ecce Homo* dargestellt werden, um in einem zweiten Schritt die philosophische Kritik gegen diese Psychologisierung festmachen zu können – das vernichtendste Urteil sprach hier Eckhart Heftrich in seinem Aufsatz „Die Grenzen der psychologischen Nietzsche-Erklärung“.<sup>3</sup> Dieses Titels habe ich mich erinnert, als die Rede von einer Konferenz zum Anlass des Hundertjahr-Jubiläums der Erstveröffentlichung des *Ecce Homo* war, und mich gefragt, welche Rolle die Frage nach Nietzsches Geistesverfassung im Oktober 1888 für heutige Interpreten spielt. Ist es jetzt möglich, eine philosophische Interpretation dieses autobiographischen Textes zu geben und die psychologischen Versatzstücke zu Nietzsches Geisteszustand, die uns die Biographik liefert, nicht zu berücksichtigen? Um dieser Frage nachzugehen, möchte ich in Anlehnung an Heftrichs Titel, nochmals die „Grenzen der psychologischen Nietzsche-Erklärung“ abschreiten und nachsehen, ob aus den Trümmern von Podachs zusammengebrochenem Werk noch etwas geborgen werden kann.

## 1 Erich Podachs Herausgabe des *Ecce Homo*

Podachs kommentierte Ausgabe des *Ecce Homo* und der anderen Turiner Schriften Nietzsches wurde in Fachkreisen zunächst euphorisch gepriesen. Eugen Bi-

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<sup>2</sup> Siehe Podach 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Siehe Heftrich 1964.

sers Rezension gibt die Erwartung wieder, die man in Podachs editorisches Unternehmen setzte:

Frucht einer mit erstaunlicher Akribie und Einfühlungsgabe durchgeführten Kleinarbeit kann sie für sich beanspruchen, erstmals den philologisch gesicherten Text des Spätwerks zu bieten. Der Wert dieser Edition ist umso höher zu veranschlagen, als mit ihr der blinde Fleck im Nietzsche-Bild verschwindet, der wie sonst wohl nur der als „Wille zur Macht“ arrangierte Nachlaß jene folgenschweren Fehldeutungen provozierte, die Nietzsches Nachwirkung kaum weniger als seine eigene Problematik belasten. (Biser 1963, S. 466–467)

Bestimmt war diese Reaktion nicht überzogen. Erstmals lag eine Ausgabe vor, welche den Inhalt der *Ecce Homo* Kassette – ohne das fälschlicherweise darin eingeordnete *Antichrist Material* – sowie einige lose dem *Ecce Homo* zugeschriebene Blätter ohne editorische Eingriffe wiedergab. Jeder konnte sich nun selbst ein Bild vom Bestand machen. Ausgewiesen mit einem detaillierten Kommentar hatte die Forschung einen von bisherigen Ausgaben unabhängigen Zugang. Podach ging in seinen Anmerkungen kritisch mit der Praxis des Nietzsche-Archivs vor Gericht, distanzierte sich aber auch von der historisch-kritischen Ausgabe und der dreibändigen Nachkriegsausgabe von Schlechta.

Es war das Verdienst Podachs, nachgewiesen zu haben, dass es sich bei dem so genannten „Druckmanuskript“ letzten Endes um ein Erzeugnis von Peter Gast handelte (Podach 1961, S. 188). Dieser hatte eine „Kopie“ von Nietzsches Manuskript im Frühjahr 1889 in Venedig angefertigt, wobei er „erst alles abschrieb, dann Teile auswählte und zusammenfügte. Das gab die Vorlage für die Abschrift. Die Manuskripte Nietzsches werden erst endgültig geordnet, die letzten Korrekturen, Eintragungen und Streichungen vorgenommen worden sein, nachdem die Abschrift von Gast – die Redaktion des *Ecce Homo* mit Hilfe von Zwischenabschriften – abgeschlossen war. Danach wäre die Gastsche Abschrift dem „Druckmanuskript“ vorangegangen, die Kopie also älter als das Original“ (Podach 1961, S. 188).

Dieses Auswahlverfahren erwähnt Gast auch in einem Brief an Overbeck vom 27. Februar 1889, den Montinari in seinem Kommentar zum *Ecce Homo* anführt:

Nur wollte ich, daß Sie, verehrter Herr Professor, die Schrift aus meiner Copie kennen lernten, also ohne die Stellen, welche selbst mir den Eindruck zu großer Selbstberauschung oder gar zu weit gehender Verachtung und Ungerechtigkeit machen, – [...] (KSA 14/459)

Die ausgelassenen Stellen – manche erwähnt Nietzsche in Briefen der Zeit der Entstehung – sind zum überwiegenden Teil verschwunden: einiger weniger wurde Podach während seiner Editionstätigkeit habhaft und publizierte sie, manche wurde von der Familie oder vom Archiv vernichtet. So etwa die berühmte



Kriegserklärung, welche die Mutter aus Angst vor Repressalien verbrannte, – von der Schwester übrigens handschriftlich vermerkt. Andere wurden noch später während der Archivarbeit zur Kritischen Gesamtausgabe (KGW) wiederentdeckt: Montinari berichtet vom Fund eines Blattes im Peter Gast Archiv im Jahr 1969, welches den Abschnitt 3 von „Warum ich so weise bin“ in seiner authentischen Form wiedergibt.<sup>4</sup> Es handelt sich um Nietzsches Ausfall gegen die Familie: „mit solcher canaille mich verwandt zu glauben wäre eine Lästerung auf meine Göttlichkeit“, sowie „dass der tiefste Einwand gegen die ‚ewige Widerkunft‘, mein eigentlich abgründlicher Gedanke, immer Mutter und Schwester sind“ (EH I 3: KSA 6/268). Davon wusste Podach noch nicht – im Vergleich, eine Stelle aus demselben Abschnitt in Podachs Ausgabe des *Ecce Homo*: „Aber meine Mutter, Franziska Oehler, ist jedenfalls etwas sehr Deutsches, insgleichen meine Großmutter väterlicher Seits, Erdmuth Krause“ (Podach 1961, S. 219).

Dass Podach auf diese Weise der Schwester doch noch auf den Leim ging, ist eine ironische Note mehr im Zusammenhang mit der Editionsgeschichte des *Ecce Homo*. Denn gerade die Herausgabe dieses Werkes sollte seine jahrzehntlange akribische Forschung gegen die Fälschungen des Nietzschearchivs krönen. In Bezug auf den *Ecce Homo* hatte er bereits in den dreißiger Jahren auf den unlauteren Legimitationsversuch der Schwester hingewiesen, die Veröffentlichung des Werkes zurückzuhalten. Dabei berief sie sich auf einen angeblichen Brief Ihres Bruders vom Oktober 1888, in dem er ihr einen derartigen Auftrag erteilt hätte:

Ich schrieb in diesem goldenen Herbst, dem schönsten, den ich je erlebt habe, einen Rückblick auf mein Leben, nur für mich selbst. Niemand soll es lesen mit Ausnahme eines gewissen guten Lama's, wenn es über's Meer kommt, den Bruder zu besuchen. Es ist nichts für deutsches Hornvieh, dessen Kultur im lieben Vaterland so erstaunlich zunimmt. Ich will das Manuskript vergraben und verstecken, es mag verschimmeln, und wenn wir allesamt schimmeln, mag es seine Auferstehung feiern. Vielleicht sind dann die Deutschen des großen Geschenks, das ich ihnen zu machen gedenke, würdiger. (Förster-Nietzsche 1908, S. 802)

Der Brief findet sich im fünften Band der Gesammelten Briefe, herausgegeben von Elisabeth Förster Nietzsche im Jahr 1908. Ein Original gibt es nicht, sondern nur ein handschriftliche Kopie von Elisabeth. Die Authentizität ist zweifelhaft.

Trotz dieser offensichtlichen Unredlichkeiten der Schwester ergreift Podach für sie in den Nachkriegsjahren das Wort. Seine Anklage richtet sich nicht mehr gegen sie – über ihre unsägliche Tätigkeit am Archiv wüßte man nun ohnehin Bescheid –, sondern gegen jene einstigen Helfer, die sich nunmehr zu Anklägern

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<sup>4</sup> Siehe Montinari 1972.

stilisierten. Podachs Diktum am Ende seines Buches Nietzsches Werke des Zusammenbruchs lautet demnach:

Wir sind am Ende. Das erlaubt, Gesagtes zu wiederholen. Frau Förster-Nietzsche hat gefälscht. Man hat ihr das ermöglicht und leicht gemacht, sie ermuntert und unterstützt. Andere haben auch gefälscht, manche schlimmer als sie. Unter ihren Anklägern von heute gibt es Leute, die ihre Helfeshelfer von gestern waren oder ihr nur übelnehmen, daß sie die Wahrheit nicht in die ihnen genehme Richtung bog. Über die Editionen, die unabhängig von ihr zustandekamen: *hic figura docet*. Nietzsche ist die nach Leben und Werk am stärksten verfälschte Erscheinung der neueren Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte. (Podach 1961, S. 430)

Die Hauptstoßrichtung seiner Kritik richtet sich dabei gegen die Editionstätigkeit Karl Schlechtas. Dessen Historisch-kritischer Gesamtausgabe (BAW), von der 5 Bände in den Jahren 1933 bis 1938 erschienen sind, weist er grobe Verfehlungen nach.<sup>5</sup> Am bekanntesten wurde sein Nachweis, dass es sich bei einem angeblichen Jugendgedicht Nietzsches, das in diese Ausgabe aufgenommen wurde, tatsächlich um eine Abschrift von Theodor Storms Gedicht „Mondlicht“ handelte. Ein weiterer Kritikpunkt betraf die angebliche Unabhängigkeit des wissenschaftlichen Ausschusses gegenüber dem Nietzschearchiv – im Falle der Brüder Oehler war diese bestimmt nicht gegeben – bzw. die politische Integrität mehrerer Mitglieder, die Emges etwa oder die Heyses, beide überzeugte Anhänger des Nationalsozialismus.

Schlechtas Nachkriegsausgabe der Werke Nietzsches in drei Bänden (1954–56) mit Indexband (1965) sorgte für Aufsehen,<sup>6</sup> insofern Schlechta darin den Mythos des „Willens zur Macht“ als Werk Nietzsches zerstörte. Aufmerksame Leser hätten dies bereits aus dem Kommentar von Otto Weiss zur Großoktavausgabe Bd. XVI wissen können. Schlechta gibt nun das Material des Willens zur Macht in einer anderen Anordnung heraus und lässt den Titel weg. Sein Verfahren stößt auf heftigen Widerstand: zum einen von jenen, die noch immer am „Willen zur Macht“ als Werk festhalten wollten, zum anderen bei Podach, der es nicht für ausreichend hielt, dasselbe Material nur in anderer Anordnung herauszubringen. Nur anhand des Nachlassmaterials in Weimar sei eine neue Ausgabe gerechtfertigt. Schlechta verteidigt sich mit dem Argument, das Material in Weimar sei nicht mehr zugänglich, als Gesamtbestand auch nicht mehr erhalten.<sup>7</sup>

Podach bestreitet dies: Das Material sei seit dem Jahr 1951 wieder in der alten Form zugänglich, zwar nicht mehr in der Villa Silberblick, aber im Goethe-Schiller

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<sup>5</sup> Siehe Podach 1935.

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche 1954–1956, Nietzsche 1965.

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche 1954–1956, Bd. 3, S. 1431–1432.

Archiv. Als Schlechta die Unzugänglichkeit des in der DDR befindlichen Archivs 1960 wiederholte und seine Ausgabe auch mit dem Hinweis auf die Unbrauchbarkeit des Nachlasses verteidigte, war dies wohl einer der Auslöser für Podach, die Turiner Schriften und anderes spätes Nachlassmaterial neu und anhand der tatsächlichen Mappen überprüft herauszugeben. Die Editionspraxis Schlechtas würde sich nicht wesentlich von jener der Schwester unterscheiden – einzig eine neue Legende wäre hinzugekommen, jene von der Dämonisierung der Archivleiterin, die nun für jeden editorischen Fopas verantwortlich gemacht werde.

## 2 Podachs biographisch psychologische Intention

In einem 2002 erschienenen Abriss zur Geschichte der Nietzsche Rezeption findet man einen Kommentar zu Podach, in dem das Urteil der heutigen Forschung in einer Zeile zusammengefasst wiedergegeben wird: „Ansonsten [neben Wilhelm Lange-Eichbaum; Ml] versucht Erich F. Podach am nachdrücklichsten nachzuweisen, daß Nietzsches letzte Werke von 1888 bis einschließlich ‚Ecce Homo‘ auf seine Geisteskrankheit zurückzuführen ist [sic]“ (Agell 2006, S. 206–207). Auch Jörg Salaquarda fasste Podachs Position in ähnlicher Weise zusammen: „Podach hat allerdings mit grimmiger Entschlossenheit den Nachweis zu führen versucht, daß bei sauberer historisch-kritischer Auslegung wenig sachlich Relevantes übrig bleibt und daß die psychologische Deutung letztlich die ‚Wahrheit‘ zutage fördern“ (Salaquarda 1980, S. 12). Inwiefern dieses Verdikt gerechtfertigt ist, soll ein Blick auf Podachs Forschungsprogramm zeigen. Dabei stößt man allerdings auf die Schwierigkeiten, dass er selbst ein solches nie explizit formuliert hat, und man sich nur auf kurze Anmerkung in Kommentaren im Rahmen seiner Herausgeberschaft und seiner biographischen Schriften beziehen kann.

Da ist zunächst das 1930 erschienene Buch *Nietzsches Zusammenbruch*, dessen Intention es laut Klappentext sei, den Sinn und Wert des Zusammenbruchs und der letzten Schaffensperiode, bisher im Schatten der Krankheit und Fehldeutungen preisgegeben, zu enthüllen und dadurch zum Angelpunkt des Nietzscheverständnisses zu machen.<sup>8</sup> Das ließe vermuten, das Urteil der Nachwelt – Podach hätte die Erkrankung Nietzsches gegen eine philosophische Deutung der Spätschriften gesetzt – könne hier nachgewiesen werden. Bei genauerer Durchsicht kann davon aber keine Rede sein. Im Gegenteil, Podach greift vehement Kurt Hildebrandt an, der in den Werken und Briefen Nietzsches nach Anzeichen der

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<sup>8</sup> Siehe Podach 1930.

Geisteskrankheit gesucht hatte. Nicht nur weist er Hildebrandt philologische Fehler nach, sondern kritisiert dessen Versuch als haltloses Unterfangen. Über den „Ecce Homo“ schreibt er in diesem Zusammenhang:

[...] [D]ie niemals gelehrt-trockene Prosa N.'s ist im Ecce Homo auf einer unerreichten Höhe geistsprühender Lebendigkeit, wie nur er sie mit weltverantwortlicher Haltung zu vereinigen vermochte. Gar hinter den mythisch-dichterischen Selbstschilderungen paralytische Euphorie zu vermuten, ist ein durch keine exakten Unterlagen stützbares Wagnis. (Podach 1930, S. 32)

Des Weiteren spricht er davon, dass in Nietzsches Text von „Krankhaftem“ gar nichts zu merken sei, stattdessen aber von einer beißenden Ironie (ebd., S. 33). Noch deutlicher wird er wenige Seiten später:

Auf die Versuche, das „Umschlagen“ des „gesunden Größenbewußtsein in Größenwahn“ vor der Turiner Katastrophe festzustellen, braucht nach alledem nicht mehr eingegangen zu werden. [...], daß einfach kein biographisches oder ärztliches Material vorliegt, das die Preisgabe „normalpsychologischer“ Deutung seines Tuns bis in die Katastrophe hinein irgendwie rechtfertigen könnte. (ebd., S. 35)

Nun bedeutet das nicht, Podach vertrete die offizielle Ansicht der Familie, wonach Nietzsche von einem Tag auf den anderen erkrankt sei und der Zusammenbruch sozusagen den Beginn der Krankheit markiere. Vielmehr nimmt er Mutter und Schwester als Zeuginnen, wonach gerade sie immer die Gefahr einer Geisteskrankheit verspürt hatten:

Sollte dieser Mitteilung Gasts der Sinn beigelegt werden, Nietzsche hätte nie mit der Möglichkeit seiner geistigen Erkrankung gerechnet, dann wäre auf verschiedene publizierte und unpublizierte Äußerungen Nietzsches zu verweisen, die einer solchen Annahme widersprechen. Allerdings hat das wenig zu sagen. Gerade beim wirklichen Bedrohtsein fehlt in der Regel jedes Gefühl für die eigene geistige Abartigkeit, und als Nietzsche von der Psychose überwältigt wurde, besaß er keine Krankheitseinsicht. Ebenso waren seine episodischen psychotischen Zustände vor der Schlußerkrankung von euphorischen Stimmungen begleitet. Während er nach Außen dissimulierte, fühlte sich Nietzsche, wenn die Gefahr am größten war, in seiner „Ausnahme“-Natur am geborgensten. Mutter und Schwester dagegen fürchteten ein solches Unheil zu Krisenzeiten verschiedentlich und nicht bloß redensartlich als Erklärung für Nietzsches unverständliche Handlungen oder Affektentladungen. (Podach 1937, S. 239)

Welche Rolle schreibt Podach aber der Krankheit selbst zu, wenn er zwar annimmt, diese sei bereits vor dem Januar 1889 aufgetreten, gleichzeitig aber bestreitet, dass sie sich in irgendeiner Form in seinem Werk manifestiere? Am nächsten zu einer Antwort kommt Podach im Vorwort zur englischen Übersetzung von Nietzsches Zusammenbruch. Hierin – der Titel ist inakkurat mit *The madness*

of Nietzsche übersetzt<sup>9</sup> – rechtfertigt sich Podach gegenüber den deutschen Kritikern, die ihm vorgeworfen hatten, das Denken Nietzsches auf seine Krankheit zurückführen und dadurch abwerten zu wollen.

Nach Podach war Nietzsches Erkrankung Teil seines Schicksals und könne nicht von seinem Leben abgesondert werden.<sup>10</sup> Möchte man sich diesem zuwenden, gäbe es zwei Herangehensweisen: zum einem könne man ein kausalisches Verständnis biographischer Phänomene, angelehnt an die naturwissenschaftliche Methode, verwenden. Podach kritisiert diesen Standpunkt: „Where the true subject of biography, that is to say the *special* and the *individual* begins, the *explanatory*, that is to say, the subordination to ‚laws‘ and ‚types‘ comes to an end“ (ebd., S. 14). Podach zählt auch die Psychoanalyse zu dieser Gruppe – wofür es durch Freuds Anlehnung an die positivistischen Naturwissenschaften auch Anhaltspunkte gibt.

Dem stellt Podach einen Standpunkt entgegen, den er als den philosophischen bezeichnet. Von diesem aus müsse der Sinn und die Bedeutung des Lebens als Ganzes in Betracht gezogen werden: „A Man’s creative work is, as Binswanger, the well-known Swiss psychiatrist has clearly shown, a part of his ‚inner life story‘, and his work must not be confused with his ‚function‘. It is part of his life significance. Nietzsche’s creative work is, of course, his philosophy“ (ebd., S. 14 f). Daher sei es die Aufgabe eines Biographen, Nietzsches Schicksal weitestgehend nachzuvollziehen und ihn gerade in der explosiven Stimmung der Turiner Tage zu verstehen, als er mit der inneren und der äußeren Welt zu kämpfen hatte. Nietzsche und sein Werk dürften nicht auf seine Krankheit zurückgeführt werden, sondern die Psychose müsse als notwendiger Bestandteil des Ganzen im Rahmen einer Interpretation berücksichtigt werden: „In considering Nietzsche even in his illness the author would appeal to those who in the words of Novalis hold that ‚the life of a truly canonical man‘ must be symbolic from beginning to end“ (ebd., S. 16). Dementsprechend muss das gefällte Urteil über Podach revidiert werden, als es ihm nicht um eine psychopathologische Erklärung der Werke Nietzsches ging, sondern darum, die Krankheit Nietzsches nicht zu ignorieren oder auf einen plötzlichen Zusammenbruch zu reduzieren.

Nach Podachs Meinung dürfe der offene Ausbruch der Krankheit nicht mit ihrem vorherigen und eigentlichen Verlauf verwechselt werden. Was aber bedeutet das für den *Ecce Homo*? 1930 schildert Podach die Entstehung des Werkes als Resultat der Schwierigkeiten, die inneren psychische Turbulenzen mit dem äußeren Erscheinungsbild zusammenzubringen. „Alles was tief ist, liebt die

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<sup>9</sup> Siehe Podach 1931.

<sup>10</sup> Siehe ebd., S. 13.

Maske“ (KSA 5/57), heißt es in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*. Auch Jung verwendet diesen Begriff der Maske, der Persona, um die soziale Anpassung des Menschen zu beschreiben: welches Bild man aber nach außen gibt, wird durch unbewusste Faktoren wie verdrängte Inhalte oder unausgelebte Lebensentwürfe, d. h. durch den Schatten, gesteuert. Podach bezieht sich hier zwar nicht auf Jung, aber das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen innen und außen wird in ähnlicher Weise dargestellt:

In den EH-Wochen, angesichts des Wagnisses, ohne Cäsars Legionen, ohne Napoleons Armeen einen Umsturz Europas zu bewirken, wird der „Hanswurst“ zur letzten Maske der Selbstbeherrschung, zum Gegengewicht der Kräfte, die ihn zur Selbstopferung drängen. (Podach 1930, S. 79)

In seinem Kommentar zum *Ecce Homo* dreißig Jahre später beschreibt Podach diesen psychischen Ausgleichsversuch ausführlicher. Ausdruck des Ungleichgewichts sei der Streit zwischen der ursprünglichen Intention, einen Rückblick auf sein Leben zu werfen, und den sich zunehmend aufdrängenden Phantasievorstellungen politischer Machtergreifung. Dieser Konflikt zeigt sich anhand der „fortwährenden Änderungen und Umdispositionen“ während der Arbeit am Text.<sup>11</sup> Dennoch, so meine ich, spricht Podach dem Text selbst niemals die logische Gültigkeit und Kohärenz ab, um ihn hernach als Ausdruck von Nietzsches Wahnvorstellung abtun zu können. Gerade konträr zu einer derartigen Auffassung schließt Podachs Kommentar mit einer literaturgeschichtlichen Einordnung des Textes als einer „Satura Menippae“, eines Spottgedichts. Grelle Überzeichnungen gehen demnach auf die bewusste Verwendung satirischer Stilmittel zurück.

Allerdings verfasst Nietzsche dieses Spottgedicht zu einem Zeitpunkt, da er zusehends vom Realitätsverlust bedroht wird. Nach Podach schreibt er gegen diese Bedrohung an, möchte sich dadurch nochmals der Realität versichern: „Es war im Umkreis seiner Ideen über die bevorstehende politische Machtergreifung, wo die Emotionen und das Größenbewußtsein sich Nietzsches zuerst bemächtigen, wo er die Fähigkeit, zwischen Sinn und Widersinn zu unterscheiden, und das Gefühl für die Wirklichkeit verlor“ (ebd., S. 179). Von hier aus geht Podach noch einen Schritt weiter, in dem er diesen Kampf gegen die Psychose als die generelle Motivation für Nietzsches Schreiben annimmt:

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**11** „Nietzsche begann *Ecce Homo* als den Rückblick auf sein Leben, dann wurde es zur Manifestation seiner wechselnden Stimmungen und momentanen Eingebungen, um in einer geistig-politischen Machtergreifung in seiner phantomatisch gewordenen Welt zu enden. Da sich die späteren Phasen auf Kosten der früheren Ausdruck verschaffen wollten, kam es zu fortwährenden Änderungen und Umdispositionen“ (Podach 1961, S. 169).

Das könnte auf eine ebenso innig wie unheimliche gegenseitige Durchdringung von Charakter und Krankheit hinweisen. Es wären dann seine früheren Werke nicht zuletzt aufzufassen als von ihm errichtete Schutzwehren gegen die Kardinalstörung bei allen Psychosen: die Entfremdung von der Wirklichkeit, der vertrauten Welt der Sinne und des von ihnen genährten Intellekts. (ebd., S. 181)

Freud und die von Podach abgelehnte Psychoanalyse gingen zwar nicht so weit, das Schreiben von einer Psychose herzuleiten, aber in der Diskussion zu *Ecce Homo* am 28. Oktober 1908 spricht Friedman (alias Frey) ebenfalls von der neurotischen Verschiebung der Sichtweisen der eigenen Individualität und der Welt.<sup>12</sup> Auch die Krankheit als Nietzsches Schicksal findet dort Erwähnung. Wie dem auch sei, Podach sieht sich nach der Veröffentlichung dieses Interpretationsansatzes heftiger Kritik ausgesetzt – allen voran jener von Eckhart Heftrich.

### 3 Heftrichs Grenzen der psychologischen Nietzsche-Erklärung

Heftrichs Verdikt zu Podachs Ansatz, den die Nachwelt so bereitwillig wiederholte, bestand darin, dass Podach den Versuch unternommen habe, durch die Kombination von psychologischer und quellenkundlicher Forschung zu beweisen, dass es keine ernstzunehmende Philosophie Nietzsches gäbe. Der Blick in die Notizbücher Nietzsches diene dazu, den Mythos einer kohärenten Philosophie Nietzsches zu widerlegen – diese Stellen seien Ausdruck seiner Erkrankung. Heftrichs Urteil zu Podachs Herausgabe der Spätwerke:

So diene ihm die Präsentation von Nietzsches Schriften aus der Zeit des Zusammenbruchs erstens dazu, Schlechta, und über ihn hinaus zahlreiche Autoren zu bekämpfen, welche in den vergangenen zwei Jahrzehnten über Nietzsche geschrieben hatten; zweitens betrieb er die Nietzsche-Philologie zum Zwecke der Entlarvung Nietzsches. (Heftrich 1964, S. 79)<sup>13</sup>

Dabei bezieht er sich auf Stellen aus Podachs Herausgabe von Stellen aus dem Nachlass, welche dieser mitunter mit heftigen Angriffen auf die philosophische Nietzschedeutung kommentierte. So heißt es an einer Stelle, der große Denker Nietzsche sei eine Ausgeburt seiner Ruhmsucht, ein Mißverständnis ahnungsloser Nietzscheverehrer und ein Armutszeugnis der Philosophie von heute, nicht zuletzt auch das Produkt des mit ihm betriebenen Geschäfts und eines snobistischen

<sup>12</sup> Nunberg/Federn (Hg.) 1977, S. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Wieder in: Salaquarda 1980, S. 173.

Getues.<sup>14</sup> Man versteht die Erregung Heftrichs, aber im Kontext eines genaueren Blicks auf Podachs Forschungsansatzes, wie wir ihn weiter oben geworfen haben, wird die Aussage verständlich. Sie wendet sich nicht notwendigerweise gegen den Gehalt der Philosophie Nietzsches, sondern gegen jene Mythologisierungen durch eine allzu unkritische philosophische Nietzscheverehrung. Ebenso muss Podachs Aussage, der Philosoph der Ewigen Wiederkunft, der Umwertung und des Willens zur Macht sei eine Phantasmagorie, vor dem Hintergrund einer transitorischen Zeit vom Archiv zur Kritischen Gesamtausgabe gelesen werden, einer Zeit, in welcher der „Wille zur Macht“ als Werk noch in den Köpfen präsent war, der fragmentarische Charakter von Nietzsches Denken im Nachlass aber noch nicht zum Allgemeingut der Forschung gehörte. Dennoch wurde munter spekuliert und philosophiert, ohne eigentlich Kenntnis der Quellen zu haben.

Die Berechtigung einer solchen Kritik wird Podach letztlich von Heftrich auch zugestanden, dennoch lässt er in seinen Angriffen nicht locker und tönt weiter, Podach würde Nietzsches Werk den philosophischen Gehalt absprechen, da seine psychologische Forschung dieses als Ausdruck der Krankheit ansehen würde. In seiner Widerlegung beruft er sich auf Karl Jaspers, dessen Urteil als Psychiater hier besondere Bedeutung zukäme: Jaspers räume nicht nur die Möglichkeit einer geistigen Erkrankung Nietzsches vor 1888 ein, sondern halte sie sogar für gewiß, käme aber zu gänzlich anderen Schlüssen als Podach.<sup>15</sup> Jaspers sehe die Parallele „zwischen der geistigen Entwicklung des Werks und den biographisch feststellbaren oder vermuteten psycho-physischen Veränderungen“ (Jaspers 1936, S. 103), im Gegensatz zu Podach leugne er aber dessen Philosophie nicht. Das tut Podach auch nicht – man vergegenwärtige sich nochmals seine Kritik an Hildebrandts Versuch, Nietzsches Philosophie auf Spuren des Wahnsinns zu durchleuchten. Wir haben gesehen, dass Podach das Werk Nietzsche als kompensatorische Leistung Nietzsches versteht, sich gegen den Realitätsverlust der Psychose zur Wehr zu setzen. Im Jahr 1930 hält Podach fest, „daß einfach kein biographisches oder ärztliches Material vorliegt, das die Preisgabe „normalpsychologischer“ Deutung seines Tuns bis in die Katastrophe hinein irgendwie rechtfertigen könnte“ (ebd., S. 35). Weder Jaspers noch Podach gestehen also der Krankheit jene für den philosophischen Gehalt der Philosophie Nietzsches zerstörerische Wirkung zu, wie sie nach Heftrich für Podachs Versuch kennzeichnend ist. Und wenn Heftrich am Ende seiner Kritik nochmals Jaspers zitiert, wo dieser über die Gefahr der pathographischen Betrachtung schreibt, dass es unwissenschaftlich und unredlich sei, seiner sachlichen Verwerfung den objektiven Anstrich einer ver-

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14 Siehe Podach 1963, S. 11.

15 Siehe Heftrich 1964, S. 86–88.



nichtenden psycho-pathologischen Tatsachenfestellung zu geben,<sup>16</sup> dann zeugt das nur davon, dass Heftrich den Ansatz Podachs mit einem psychopathographischen a là Moebius verwechselt. Dann aber hat er Podach deutlich missverstanden und die Nachwelt mit ihm.

Haben diese Überlegungen außer einer teilweisen Rehabilitation Podachs noch etwas zu bieten? Ich glaube schon. Wenn wir uns heute mit einem Text wie *Ecce Homo* auseinandersetzen, befinden wir uns in der ausgezeichneten Lage, dass uns die Werke und Briefe in einer kritischen Gesamtausgabe zugänglich sind und wir über Nietzsche als Person wahrscheinlich mehr wissen als über irgendeinen anderen Denker des 19. Jahrhunderts. Damit wären die beiden Grundvoraussetzungen gegeben, die nach Podach einer philosophischen Interpretation vorangehen sollten. Dennoch ist die Gefahr der Mythologisierung nicht vorbei, vielleicht weniger von Seiten einer philosophischen Nietzscheverehrung als von jenen, die, nun da der philologische Bestand gesichert scheint, eine philologische und biographische Annäherung an das Denken Nietzsches als obsolet verwerfen und sich den verschiedenen Wellen modischer Nietzscheinterpretation unkritisch hingeben. Der *Ecce Homo* als unvollendete Nachlassschrift der Turiner Zeit wird hier zum Prüfstein intellektueller Redlichkeit. Daran soll uns Podachs „zusammengebrochenes Werk“ erinnern.

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16 Siehe Jaspers 1936, S. 102.

Duncan Large

# “The Magic of the Extreme”

Hyperbolic Rhetoric in *Ecce Homo*

**Abstract:** *Ecce Homo* has always been an embarrassment. Nietzsche himself was embarrassed by how quickly he wrote it, but the embarrassment has featured more generally in its reception, for to generations of his editors and publishers, translators, commentators and other readers it has been the most awkward of his works. Until relatively recently *Ecce Homo* was routinely dismissed as tainted by Nietzsche’s incipient madness. This essay follows the example of Sarah Kofman and Aaron Ridley and argues that *Ecce Homo* is far from being a document of insanity, and that despite its rhetorical excesses it shows Nietzsche to be still very much in control. The essay contends that *Ecce Homo* is indeed an unbalanced, unstable, excessive text, yet even here Nietzsche is still rigorously pursuing the same philosophical themes that characterize his mature work as a whole.

## 1 Introduction: An Embarrassing Text

Let us begin by acknowledging a home truth: *Ecce Homo* has always been an embarrassment. Nietzsche himself was embarrassed by how quickly he wrote it, but the embarrassment has featured more generally in its reception, for to generations of his editors and publishers, translators, commentators and other readers it has been the most awkward of his works. We need only open the book and look at the provocatively self-congratulatory chapter titles to know that something scandalously unusual is going on. We generally feel uncomfortable with self-proclaimed virtue – but challenging, discomfiting the reader is, of course, the point here. Perhaps in this final text Nietzsche has undergone *Zarathustra*’s third metamorphosis of the spirit and entered the child stage, but in a negative sense, regressing to the child’s narcissism, with its strident boastfulness and attention-seeking. “*Hört mich!*” – “*Oyez!*”, “Hear me out!” he announces in the book’s first paragraph.<sup>1</sup> No longer content to let the world ignore him, he will be his own town crier until enough readers acknowledge his presence. He may be about to unleash on the world the most momentous work that it has ever

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<sup>1</sup> I have used my own English translations of TI and EH, Hollingdale’s HAH and Middleton’s *Selected Letters*.

seen, but in the meantime he will buttonhole you and browbeat you with self-aggrandizing advertisements.

*Ecce Homo* has had a distinctly chequered publication and reception history, and the main reason the text was marginalized for so long was that until relatively recently it was routinely dismissed as tainted by Nietzsche's incipient madness. Since it was written in the last few weeks before Nietzsche's collapse into indisputable insanity in January 1889, it therefore "stands to reason" (so the argument ran) that anyone who can give his chapters such outrageously immodest titles must already have been decidedly over the edge. Oscar Levy, in his introduction to Anthony M. Ludovici's translation of 1911, can offer no better *captatio benevolentiae* than: "The nearer Nietzsche comes to his madness, the better he wrote. The book written nearest to his madness is 'Ecce Homo'" (Levy 1927 [1911], p. ix). We can also cite the qualms evinced by the two doyens of American and British Nietzsche translation in the post-war period. Walter Kaufmann quotes from "Why I Am a Destiny" and remarks on "the touch of madness in the uninhibited hyperbole of Nietzsche's phrasing" (Kaufmann 1968, p. 111.) and even R.J. Hollingdale, faced with what he acutely calls "the pathos of *absolute affirmation*" in *Ecce Homo* (Hollingdale 1979, p. 12),<sup>2</sup> feels obliged to admit: "Some passages are crazy – they are products of a mind no longer able to segregate fantasy from fact; close allied to which are those dithyrambs of self-appreciation, unparalleled public relinquishments of inhibition, which led the earliest readers of the manuscript – e.g. the theologian Franz Overbeck – to reject it as a document of insanity" (Hollingdale 1979, p. 7).<sup>3</sup>

2 Hollingdale himself puzzlingly exaggerates this "pathos", though, by following Ludovici in translating the title of the section "*Warum ich so gute Bücher schreibe*" as "Why I Write Such Excellent Books" (corrected to "Why I Write Such Good Books" in the 1992 reprint).

3 Many later German critics have not found Nietzsche's style in *Ecce Homo* any less rebarbative. Thomas Mann writes of the passages on *Zarathustra*: "*Jeder wird zugeben, daß es hektische, von entgleitender Vernunft zeugende Ausschreitungen des Selbstbewußtseins sind*" (Everyone will admit that these are hectic excesses of self-awareness that bear witness to the slipping away of reason), and remarks censoriously: "*Natürlich muß es ein großer Genuß sein, dergleichen niederzuschreiben, aber ich finde es unerlaubt*" (Of course it must give great pleasure to write such things down, but I find it impermissible) (2005, p. 365). Hans-Martin Gauger echoes Mann's criticism, although he seeks simultaneously to deny and to excuse such "excesses" (1984, p. 351–5): "*Man muß [...] diese Äußerungen ernst nehmen: sie gehören unmittelbar zu dem, worum es Nietzsche in 'Ecce homo' geht. Schließlich: diese Äußerungen sind das einzig 'verrückte' Element dieser Schrift*" (We have to take these remarks seriously: they are integral to what Nietzsche is driving at in *Ecce Homo*. In the end these remarks are the only "mad" element in the work) (1984, p. 355). He concludes by adopting Montinari's more "forgiving" position: "*Sein 'schriftstellerisches Bewußtsein' hat Nietzsche gewiß ganz zuletzt verloren*" (It's certain that Nietzsche lost his "writerly awareness" only right at the end).

Now it is widely accepted that *Ecce Homo* is one of the most beautifully written books in the German language. Both Kaufmann and Hollingdale acknowledge its greatness, even while they set about the impossibly demanding task of rendering its inimitable style.<sup>4</sup> The problem comes with Nietzsche’s own strident and unembarrassed proclamations of his writerly virtues within the text itself, which have in turn proved nothing but embarrassing for a great many critics since, signally discomfited by the self-assuredness of such heights of affirmation. In her monumental two-volume study of the text, Sarah Kofman duly confronts this central question which has proved so prejudicial to the reception of *Ecce Homo*:

It has been possible to consider *Ecce Homo* a “mad” text above all because of [its] tone which is so singular, dazzling, stunning, and jubilant – unbearable for the moral man who takes himself seriously, because such a text breaks with the “conventional”, acceptable tone, with all the customary modesty and reserve adopted in general by those who speak of “themselves” in the “first person” (Kofman 1992, p. 30).

Kofman strenuously resists such readings, interpreting the provocation of *Ecce Homo*’s style as essential to the text’s *satyric* character and a further aspect of its closing formulation: “‘*Dionysus against the Crucified*’. Right up against him, in parody” (Kofman 1992, p. 20). For Kofman, *Ecce Homo* is a pagan celebration of the disruptive and subversive potential of thought as Dionysian festival, set against the norm of (ultimately Christian) humility. She not only takes the “mad” text seriously but furthermore, like Nietzsche himself affirming his unqualified motherly love for all his “children” in *Ecce Homo*, she refuses to abandon any of its passages as qualitatively different from the rest. Aaron Ridley, similarly, takes issue with the way Hollingdale reads signs of mental collapse into some passages in *Ecce Homo*, arguing:

Incipient insanity may take the form of hyperbole, and what is exaggerated may be true, or interesting, even when pitched at a level that can seem deranged. [...] Precisely the kinds of passage that Hollingdale singles out as early signs of madness strike me as helpful dramatizations of a distinctive strand in Nietzsche’s later philosophy. (Ridley 2005a, p. ix–x)

In this chapter I will follow the example of Kofman and Ridley in arguing that *Ecce Homo* is far from being a document of insanity, and that despite its rhetorical excesses it shows Nietzsche to be still very much in control.

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4 Cf. Kaufmann 1967, p. 201; Hollingdale 1979, p. 8.

## 2 Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Hyperbole

The stylistic peculiarities of *Ecce Homo* become apparent if we compare it with Nietzsche's earlier work. Now Nietzsche had always been a keen student of rhetoric, and gave several lecture courses on ancient rhetoric in his early years at Basel.<sup>5</sup> His early interest in the dithyrambic mode of ecstatic self-expression is evident in his first book (BT 2), although of course *The Birth of Tragedy* itself was not written in anything like that style, and in his later "Attempt at a Self-Criticism", written in 1886 in the wake of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche would castigate himself for speaking and not singing in it (GTVS 3).

In his middle period works, Nietzsche is actively critical of the kind of hyperbolic literary style that indulges in exaggeration and superlatives:

*Dark and too bright side by side.* – Writers who in general are unable to express their thoughts with clarity will in individual instances take pleasure in employing the strongest, most exaggerated designations and superlatives [*die stärksten, übertriebensten Bezeichnungen und Superlative*]: thus producing a light-effect like torches flaring on confused forest pathways. (HAH I 204)

*The narrator.* – He who narrates something soon reveals whether he is doing so because the subject interests him or whether by doing so he hopes to arouse interest. In the latter case he will exaggerate, employ superlatives [*übertreiben, Superlative gebrauchen*] and the like. He will then usually narrate badly, because he is thinking not so much of the subject as of himself. (HAH I 343)

*Insignia of rank.* – All poets and writers enamoured of the superlative [*in den Superlativ verliebt*] want to do more than they can. (HAH II AOM 141)

It is clear from Nietzsche's notebooks of the period that his critique of superlative style at this point is part of a larger project, his critique of Wagner, whom he describes as "always intent on finding the *most extreme* expression – with every word; but the superlative weakens" (NF 1878, 27[24]: KSA 8/491). A decade later, though, this critical stance has clearly been abandoned in *Ecce Homo* – ironically enough, at precisely the point when he has finally gone public with his qualms about Wagnerian "histrionism" by publishing *The Case of Wagner*.

In this context the penultimate chapter of *Twilight of the Idols*, "What I Owe the Ancients", makes an interesting bridge, for – as its title would suggest – it was written at the same time as other early drafts for *Ecce Homo*, and its person-

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<sup>5</sup> See GW II and Nietzsche 1989b. On Nietzsche's early lectures on rhetoric, see Behler 1995 and Most and Fries 2014. On Nietzsche and rhetoric more generally, see de Man 1979, Kremer-Marietti 1992 and Porter 1994.

al tone sits somewhat uneasily with the rest of the text into which it was subsequently incorporated. In *Twilight* generally, Nietzsche still prefers – for the sake of “politeness” (TI III 5) – to speak with the voice of the “we”, but in this chapter the first person plural is abandoned as he seeks to emphasize his singularity, especially at its close: “I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus – I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence” (TI X 5).<sup>6</sup> Here Nietzsche claims, for example, to have been the first to put his finger on the importance of the Dionysian in ancient Greek culture (TI X 4) – one of the few such claims he makes in *Twilight*,<sup>7</sup> but, as Kofman points out, a gesture of self-promotion so typical of *Ecce Homo*, where “Nietzsche constantly proclaims that he is an exceptional being, unprecedented and unparalleled, always and everywhere the ‘first’”.<sup>8</sup> Yet “What I Owe the Ancients” opens on a note of modesty – “In conclusion, a word about the world which I sought to approach, and to which I *perhaps* found a new approach” (my emphasis)<sup>9</sup> – and Nietzsche’s self-praise here is displaced onto the great Roman prose stylists, surfacing only obliquely as an “ambition” to scale their heights (TI X 1),<sup>10</sup> whereas in *Ecce Homo* itself he “reclaims” such projections as aspects of his “own” project, and any coyness regarding his own style is dispelled. Hence his infamously emphatic comments in “Why I Write Such Good Books” on the singular multiplicity of his styles, or on *his* being the first to have discovered “[t]he art of *grand* rhythm, the *grand style* of the period expressing an immense rise and fall of sublime, superhuman passion” (EH III 4).

Nietzsche sums up the general effect of his (late) style in a *Nachlass* note from the autumn of 1887:

The spell that fights on our behalf, the eye of Venus that charms and blinds even our opponents, is the *magic of the extreme*, the seduction that everything extreme exercises: we immoralists – we are *the most extreme*. (NF 1887, 10[94]: KSA 12/510; WP 749)

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6 Compare, for example, “we immoralists” (TI I 36; TI V 3 and 6; TI VI 7), or the relative “impersonality” of “*The Immoralist Speaks*” (TI IX 32) with *Ecce Homo*’s “I am the first *immoralist*” (EH IV 2). Compare “Great men, like periods of greatness, are explosives” (TI IX 44) with *Ecce Homo*’s “I am dynamite” (EH IV 1). See Large 2013.

7 There are three others in the whole text, all in its later chapters: “an insight which I was the first to formulate” (TI VII 1); “our morality of fellow-feeling [...] which I was the first to warn against” (TI IX 37); and “The aphorism, the apophthegm, in which I am the first among Germans to be a master” (TI IX 51: cf. note 9 below).

8 Kofman 1992, p. 30.

9 Cf. TI VIII 1: “Perhaps I know the Germans; perhaps I can tell even them a few truths”.

10 Cf. TI IX 51, which immediately precedes “What I Owe the Ancients” and shares its ambivalent tone – on the one hand the superlative claims, on the other the detour via Goethe and the emphasis on ambition (“*mein Ehrgeiz ist*” ...) rather than attainment.

Just as Wagner uses where possible the extreme registers of all the orchestral instruments, so Nietzsche – despite what J.P. Stern has called his “middle mode of discourse” (Stern 1979, p. 199) – exploits where possible the extreme registers of intensity in a language of “Dionysian” affirmation.<sup>11</sup> Even within Nietzsche’s *oeuvre* as a whole, though, in *Ecce Homo* he is at his most “exceedingly Nietzsche”: it is the limit case in its claims for the virtues and future importance of its “first-person” narrator, in the exhaustive repertoire of superlatives which it brings into play. Heidegger, ironically enough, refers to *Ecce Homo*’s “exaggerations” with a litotes, referring to the text as “*jene letzte und an Übertreibungen scheinbar nicht sparsame Selbstdarstellung*” (that final self-portrait, apparently not short on exaggerations) (Heidegger 1961, I p. 260). Derrida draws attention rather to the way in which (in Nietzsche as elsewhere) the “anti-” and the “hyper-” are inextricably linked,<sup>12</sup> and we can see this confirmed not only in *The Antichrist*, where from the outset Nietzsche styles himself a “Hyperborean”,<sup>13</sup> but in *Ecce Homo*, too, where he “styles himself” so *hyperbolically* throughout a text placed firmly under the sign of the preposition “*gegen*” – “*Dionysus against the Crucified*” (EH IV 9) are its concluding words (cf. KSB 8/488).

Christian J. Emden writes of “Nietzsche’s occasional drift into hyperbole” (Emden 2014, p. 77), but for Alexander Nehamas, “Nietzsche’s writing, and his thinking, is *essentially* hyperbolic” (Nehamas 1985, p. 31). Nehamas describes “the figure of exaggeration or hyperbole” as the “single most pervasive feature of [Nietzsche’s] writing” and argues that it is “a feature that remains remarkably constant from the time of *The Birth of Tragedy* to that of *Ecce Homo*” (Nehamas 1985, p. 22). Following Nehamas, more recent commentators have stressed various aspects of the hyperbolic in Nietzsche’s philosophy, from “Hyperbole and the Case of Eternal Recurrence” to “Hyperbolic Naturalism”,<sup>14</sup> but I would like to return to hyperbole as a stylistic trope, and argue that extreme style has been neglected even in studies which have focused on Nietzsche’s rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> Whilst agreeing with Nehamas on the crucial importance of the trope in Nietz-

11 Cf. Alan Megill’s characterization of him as a “prophet of extremity”, in Megill 1985.

12 “You are “hyper”, you speak “hyper” at the very moment that you are speaking “against”” (Beardsworth 1994, p. 32).

13 He even considered entitling the work “*Wir Hyperboreer*” [“*We Hyperboreans*”] (cf. NF 1888, 23[3]; KSA 13/601).

14 See, respectively, Magnus, Stewart and Mileur 1993, p. 138–145, and Sedgwick 2016. Claudia Crawford writes that “Nietzsche also crafted his life as the hyperbolic life” (Crawford 1999, p. 273), while Joel Westerdale sees a “dynamic of transgression through superabundance” as a constant through Nietzsche’s career, including in the aphoristic middle works (Westerdale 2013, p. 142).

15 Cf. Thomas 1999 and Schläffer 2007.

schean stylistics, I would argue that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche’s use of hyperbole *itself* becomes hyperbolic. *Ecce Homo*, I would like to argue, is in this respect an “über-Text”, even the first “hyper-text”.

### 3 “The Magic of the Extreme”

In order to demonstrate this I would like to look next at a set of statistics. Following Nehamas’ lead, I have combed through *The Birth of Tragedy*, the First Part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Ecce Homo* in order to compare them from the point of view of Nietzsche’s use of the superlative. By this I mean simply the grammatical superlative construction, whether adjectives or adverbs. I ignored words which are superlative in form but not perceived as superlatives, like the temporal *einst* (previously), *jüngst* (recently), or the spatial *nebst* (beside) and *nächst* (next to).<sup>16</sup> This is what emerged:

**Table 1:** Frequency of Superlatives in Selected Nietzsche Texts

Text	Superlatives	Total Words	Frequency (x 10 <sup>-3</sup> )
BT (“Preface”, 1–25)	351	38,685	9.07
BT (“Attempt at a Self-Criticism”)	38	3,323	11.44
Z I	129	15,089	8.55
EH	437	30,214	14.46
EH I 3	11	398	27.64

These statistics make clear that the relative frequency of superlative usage increases markedly in *Ecce Homo*, even when compared to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) and the 1886 preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, “Attempt at a Self-Criticism”. Now for the purpose of compiling these statistics my definition of “superlative” was kept deliberately very narrow, restricted to the grammatical (inflectional) superlative strictly speaking. My trawl picked up *höchst* (highest, most highly), but it did *not* account for the great majority of Nietzsche’s adverbial intensifiers such as *ausserordentlich* (extraordinarily), *beständig* (constantly), *erstaunlich* (aston-

<sup>16</sup> Included are, however, nominalized uses of *Nächste* (neighbour), including the term *Nächstenliebe* or “neighbourly love”. The repeated punning on *Nächstenliebe* and *Fernsten-Liebe* (“love of the most distant”) in the Z chapter “*Von der Nächstenliebe*” demonstrates that Nietzsche wants to reactivate the dormant superlative sense of the word.



ishingly), *ganz* (wholly), *rein* (purely), *stets* (always), *überhaupt* (altogether), *ungeheuer* (immensely, monstrously), *unbestreitbar* (incontrovertibly), *vollkommen* (perfectly), *vollständig* (completely) or *zu* (too). My search results did not include periphrastic superlative phrases such as *ohne Gleichen* (unprecedented), or its equivalents in other languages, e.g. *non plus ultra*, *par excellence*; they did not include words in the prefix *über-*; they did not even include the occasional mention of the term *Steigerung* (intensification) or *Superlativ* (superlative) itself.

Clearly we need to cast the net more widely to do full justice to Nietzsche's use of hyperbolic constructions, though, so with this in mind let us "drill down" into the detailed texture of Nietzsche's prose. For a more detailed analysis I will take as an example EH I 3, the controversial paragraph which Mazzino Montinari substituted in 1969, and which I have prepared below as follows. Words underlined in bold are grammatical superlatives in German; those marked in bold are other exaggerations, what I will call "quasi-superlatives" pertaining to qualities and concepts such as infinity, boundlessness, totality, wholeness, purity. Finally, I have underlined anything that seems to me to represent a further intensification, any lexical items carrying emotional charge and representing a departure from the neutral register. This is all in addition to the emphases which Nietzsche uses in the original, marked in italics.

Ich betrachte es als ein grosses Vorrecht, einen solchen Vater gehabt zu haben: die Bauern, vor denen er predigte – denn er war, nachdem er einige Jahre am Altenburger Hofe gelebt hatte, die letzten Jahre Prediger – sagten, so müsse wohl ein Engel aussehen. – Und hiermit berühre ich die Frage der Rasse. Ich bin ein polnischer Edelmann **pur sang**, dem **auch nicht ein Tropfen** schlechtes Blut beigemischt ist, **am wenigsten** deutsches. Wenn ich den **tiefsten** Gegensatz zu mir suche, die **unausrechenbare** *Gemeinheit* der Instinkte, so finde ich **immer** meine Mutter und Schwester, – mit solcher canaille mich verwandt zu glauben wäre eine Lästerung auf meine Göttlichkeit. Die Behandlung, die ich von Seiten meiner Mutter und Schwester erfahre, **bis auf diesen Augenblick**, flösst mir ein **unsägliches** Grauen ein: hier arbeitet eine **vollkommene** Höllmaschine, mit **unfehlbarer** Sicherheit über den Augenblick, wo man mich blutig verwunden kann – in meinen **höchsten** Augenblicken, ... denn da fehlt **jede** Kraft, sich gegen giftiges Gewürm zu wehren ... Die physiologische Contiguität ermöglicht eine solche disharmonia praestabilita ... Aber ich bekenne, dass der **tiefste** Einwand gegen die „**ewige** Wiederkunft“, mein **eigentlich abgründlicher** Gedanke, **immer** Mutter und Schwester sind. – Aber auch als Pole bin ich ein **ungeheurer** Atavismus. Man würde Jahrhunderte zurückzugehn haben, um diese **vornehmste** Rasse, **die es auf Erden gab, in dem Masse instinktrein** zu finden, wie ich sie darstelle. Ich habe gegen **Alles**, was heute noblesse heisst, ein **souveraines** Gefühl von Distinktion, – ich würde dem jungen deutschen Kaiser **nicht die Ehre zugestehn, mein Kutscher zu sein**. Es giebt einen **einzigen** Fall, wo ich meines Gleichen anerkenne – ich bekenne es mit tiefer Dankbarkeit. Frau Cosima Wagner ist **bei Weitem** die **vornehmste** Natur; und, damit ich **kein Wort zu wenig** sage, sage ich, dass Richard Wagner der mir **bei Weitem verwandteste** Mann war ... Der Rest ist Schweigen ... **Alle** herrschenden Begriffe über Verwandtschafts-Grade sind ein

physiologischer Widersinn, **der nicht überboten werden kann**. Der Papst treibt heute noch Handel mit diesem Widersinn. Man ist am wenigsten mit seinen Eltern verwandt: es wäre das äusserste Zeichen von Gemeinheit, seinen Eltern verwandt zu sein. Die höheren Naturen haben ihren Ursprung **unendlich** weiter zurück, auf sie hin hat am längsten gesammelt, gespart, gehäuft werden müssen. Die grossen Individuen sind die ältesten: ich verstehe es nicht, aber Julius Cäsar könnte mein Vater sein – oder Alexander, dieser leibhaftige Dionysos ... **In diesem Augenblick**, wo ich dies schreibe, bringt die Post mir einen Dionysos-Kopf ... (EH I 3)

I consider it a great privilege to have had such a father: the farmers to whom he preached – for after he had lived several years at the Altenburg court, in his last years he was a preacher – said that that was how an angel must look. – And with this I touch on the question of pedigree. I am a Polish nobleman pur sang, with which **not a drop** of bad blood is mixed, **least of all** German blood. When I look for my profoundest opposite, **ineradicable vulgarity** of the instincts, I **always** find my mother and sister – to think of myself as related to such canaille would be a blasphemy against my divinity. The treatment I have experienced at the hands of my mother and sister, **right up to this moment**, fills me with **unspeakable** horror: here a perfectly infernal machine is at work, **unerringly** sure of the moment when a bloody wound can be inflicted on me – in my **most exalted** moments ... for at such times one lacks **all** power to defend oneself against poisonous vermin ... Physiological contiguity makes such a *disharmonia praestabilita* possible ... But I confess that the **most profound** objection against the ‘eternal recurrence’, my **truly abyssal** thought, is **always** mother and sister. – But even as a Pole I am a **tremendous** atavism. You would have to go back centuries to find this race, the **noblest there has ever been on earth**, quite so **instinctually pure** as I represent it. I have a **sovereign** feeling of distinction compared to **everything** that is nowadays called *noblesse* – I would not grant the young German Kaiser the honour of being my coachman. There is **but one** instance where I acknowledge an equal – I confess it with profound gratitude. Frau Cosima Wagner is **by far** the **noblest** of natures; and so as not to say a **word too little**, I say that Richard Wagner was the man who was **by far** the **most closely related** to me ... The rest is silence ... **All** the prevailing notions about degrees of relatedness are the **most outrageous** kind of physiological nonsense. The Pope is even today trading on such nonsense. You are **least** related to your parents: it would be the **most extreme** sign of vulgarity to be related to one’s parents. The higher natures have their origin **infinitely** further back; they have had to be collected, saved, accumulated for, **for the longest time**. The great individuals are the **oldest**: I do not understand it, but Julius Caesar could be my father – or Alexander, that Dionysus incarnate ... **At this moment**, as I am writing this, the postman brings me a Dionysus head ...

Admittedly this is not an exact science, but nonetheless one cannot, I think, fail to be struck by the sheer density of extremity in this passage: there are 11 actual (grammatical) superlatives; 25 further exaggerations, some of which need to be rendered in English using superlatives – “not a drop”, “unspeakable”, “perfectly”, “unerringly”, “tremendous”, “most”, “infinitely”, plus the totalizing terms “everything” and “all”. Also included in this category are exaggerated time phrases: “always”, “right up to this moment”, “eternal”. Underlined are 16 further intensifications – where Nietzsche uses charged vocabulary like “angel”,

“infernal”, “*canaille*”, “poisonous vermin”, “divinity”, including positive and comparative adjectives – “great”, “higher”, and so on.<sup>17</sup> We end up with a mass of emphatic text indicating an extraordinary level of hyperbolic excess in one shape or form: beyond the actual superlative constructions, there are many more hyperbolic moves.

This is an exceptional passage, to be sure, and its superlative quotient of  $27.64 \times 10^{-3}$  is almost twice the average even for this text, but there are numerous similar passages elsewhere. Another example would be the passage quoted earlier in which Nietzsche advances hyperbolic claims about his own stylistic achievements, in “Why I Write Such Good Books”:

Man weiss vor mir nicht, was man mit der deutschen Sprache kann, – was man **überhaupt** mit der Sprache kann. – Die Kunst des *grossen* Rhythmus, der *grosse* Stil der Periodik zum Ausdruck eines **ungeheuren** Auf und Nieder von **sublimier**, von **übermenschlicher**, Leidenschaft ist **erst** von mir entdeckt; mit einem Dithyrambus wie dem **letzten** des *dritten* Zarathustra, „die sieben Siegel“, überschrieben, flog ich tausend Meilen über das hinaus, was bisher Poesie hiess. (EH III 4)

Before me, people did not know what can be done with the German language – what can be done with language *tout court*. – The art of *grand* rhythm, the *grand* style of the period expressing an **immense** rise and fall of **sublime**, **superhuman** passion was **first** discovered by me; with a dithyramb like the **last** in the Third Part of *Zarathustra*, entitled “The Seven Seals”, I flew a thousand miles beyond what had hitherto been called poetry.

## 4 Conclusion: Nietzsche’s Search for Singularity

I hope to have demonstrated by now that *Ecce Homo* is not just chronologically (and contingently) Nietzsche’s *ne plus ultra*, since from a number of other perspectives, too, it represents a limit case in Nietzsche’s work: his most hyperbolic text, the one in which he carries many of his philosophical and stylistic tendencies to their absolute extreme. In various ways, *Ecce Homo* maps out the contours of extremity. Nietzsche himself writes of “the magic of the extreme”, and there is a certain intoxicating rhetorical force to the accumulation of intensification in so many of these passages. Yet the reader can also come away feeling battered and brow-beaten by a style that at times simply grates and entirely fails to

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<sup>17</sup> Given that the year of *Ecce Homo*’s eventual publication, 1908, was an Olympic year, one is put in mind of Baron de Coubertin’s Olympic motto “*citius, altius, fortius*” (usually translated “faster, higher, stronger”, but all three Latin words are adverbs, so “more speedily, more loftily, more strongly”), with which Nietzsche would doubtless have concurred.

endear its author. Nehamas refers to Nietzsche “shouting”;<sup>18</sup> a more contemporary analogy, perhaps, would be reading one of those shouty text messages or e-mails written entirely in capitals.

Now it is but a short step from the acknowledgement of this stridency to the assertion that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche had lost his stylistic self-assurance because he had already tipped over the edge into madness. *Ecce Homo* is an unbalanced, unstable, excessive text – in the extremes of the claims it makes – and it has been an easy step for many to see it as *merely* presaging the calamity to come, less the summation of Nietzsche’s achievement, Nietzsche’s “last will and testament”, than a testament to his impending insanity. This seems to me too easy a move to make, though, for it is to ignore the fact, as it seems to me, that even in a very late text like *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche is still rigorously pursuing the same philosophical themes that have marked his mature work as a whole. By this I mean, in particular, that his hyperbolic rhetoric in this text is of a piece with what I would call the search for (ultimately Romantic) singularity which characterizes his philosophy more generally.

Through its hyperbolic excesses *Ecce Homo* achieves a certain stylistic singularity, to be sure,<sup>19</sup> but this has been Nietzsche’s main writerly goal at least since he formulated the desire to surpass Luther and Goethe as masters of German prose,<sup>20</sup> and was already instantiated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Spatial singularity, a place of isolation, is often privileged in Nietzsche’s figurative language. We see this in his self-identification with the *Einzelgänger* who treads a solitary path, the Wanderer and His Shadow, the hermit who shuns the mediocrity of the herd. It is this search for spatial singularity that takes Zarathustra, eagle-like, up into a mountain fastness, or the hyperboreans to the land beyond the north wind (AC 1). The extreme is a place in which only one can dwell. Most pertinently of all, singularity (individualism) is a central philosophical theme for Nietzsche, too, as he constantly appeals to the singular first person, the *sui generis*, the one and only. Nietzsche is the thinker par excellence of hierarchy, of the structured distance between man and man, who celebrates nobility, distinction, all that he gathers under the term “pathos of distance”. At the apogee of Nietzsche’s hierarchical pyramid, occupying the point of singularity, we can place the “*Übermensch*”, of course – who is generally referred to in the singular – but it seems to me that one of the things Nietzsche is doing in *Ecce Homo* is claiming the unique subject-position of the “*Übermensch*” for himself. It is typical of *Ecce Homo*, for

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18 “Nietzsche, as he very well knew, shouts” (Nehamas 1985, p. 23).

19 Cf. Crick 2009.

20 Cf. letter to Erwin Rohde, 22 February 1884 (KSB 6/479).

example, that in it Nietzsche (repeatedly) claims to be the first to do something: the first to understand the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy* (EH III BT 1), the first tragic philosopher (EH III BT 3), the first psychologist of the eternal feminine (EH III 5), the first immoralist (EH III UB 2; EH III MA 6; EH IV 2), the first decent human being (EH IV 1), etc. Such inaugurations, assertions of chronological primacy, are moments of temporal singularity, but in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche goes further, for like the “*Übermensch*”, whose advent lies over the horizon in the monstrous temporal singularity of the “*Übermorgen*”, the day after tomorrow,<sup>21</sup> in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche seeks to cleave history in two, inaugurating a new age of time reckoning – like Jesus and Mohammed, indeed. As he put it in a contemporary letter to Köselitz:

It [*Ecce Homo*] so transcends the concept of “literature” that there is no parallel to it even in nature herself; it blasts, literally, the *history* of mankind in two – the highest superlative of *dynamite* [*höchster Superlativ von Dynamit*] ... (KSB 8/513)

Affirmation of the eternal return then applies the stamp of infinity to this unique temporal singularity, as at the gate “*Augenblick*” in *Zarathustra*. The two temporal extremities are the moment and the eternal, and Nietzsche lays claim to them both.

Of course, in reading *Ecce Homo* now we cannot help being struck – after the event, after *its* event – by another aspect of its extremity, namely that it is a last text composed in the shadow of impending insanity. Like an astronomical singularity, *Ecce Homo* is ultimately a site of cataclysmic violence, the ego-“explosion” of which Kofman writes. In failing to subdue the dangerous hyperbolic forces (psychic and stylistic) at his command, Nietzsche the magician of the extreme turns into a rather different, sorrier, figure at the last (in the truly deranged letters of January 1889), the sorcerer’s apprentice. But right up till that point it seems to me that we readers can be grateful for Nietzsche’s exhilarating excesses, and saddle up for *Ecce Homo*’s remarkable ride.

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<sup>21</sup> See Large 1994.

Werner Stegmaier

# Nietzsche's Self-Evaluation as the Destiny of Philosophy and Humanity

(*Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am a Destiny” 1)

**Abstract:** The first aphorism of “Why I Am a Destiny” in *Ecce Homo* (EH IV 1) is the most challenging and the most frightening in Nietzsche's work. For many readers, it proves that Nietzsche was mad at that time. Yet read in the context of Nietzsche's work, the aphorism has a very precise and comprehensible meaning. It presents a surprising outline of Nietzsche's whole later philosophy. The author demonstrates this by interpreting it sentence by sentence.

## 1 Nietzsche's Presumption of a Fateful Revaluation of All Values

Nietzsche's philosophical claims appear to have culminated, in *Ecce Homo*, in self-indulgence. “I bear the destiny of humanity on my shoulders”, he wrote there (EH III CW 4); and in “Why I Am a Destiny” he called himself a destiny. No philosopher before Nietzsche spoke in this way; none declared himself the destiny of philosophy and of humanity. We must confront even this unheard-of claim,<sup>1</sup> and ask why he spoke in this way. Is this simply a case of self-indulgent

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Translated by Lisa Marie Anderson. This text is a shortened and revised version of Stegmaier 2008b. [*Translator's note:* Translations of Nietzsche's published works in this article are taken from standard English sources (generally from Walter Kaufmann's translations), with minor alterations made where necessary. Translations from the *Nachlass* and from other German sources are my own unless otherwise noted.]

1 Martin Heidegger especially insisted upon this; he saw *Ecce Homo* not as the “apotheosis of uninhibited self-presentation and boundless self-mirroring” nor as “the harbinger of erupting madness”, nor even simply as a “biography”, but rather in fact as “a ‘destiny’, the destiny not of an individual but of the history of the era of modern times, of the end of the West” (Heidegger 1987, p. 3). Following Heidegger, Rodolphe Gasché interpreted EH as a “*Gestalt*” in the sense of the form of a being (*ιδέα* in the Platonic sense, *εἶδος* in the Aristotelian sense), in the sense of the mature form of Nietzsche's life to be sure, but nonetheless as a *Gestalt* that, contrary to Heidegger, obliterates “the metaphysical duality of being and becoming” (Gasché 1985, p. 275) through the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Even such a keen Nietzsche

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246551-024>

rhetoric, or could Nietzsche's revaluation in fact be a destiny? It is possible that it is both. Nietzsche could have spoken in this way in order finally to be heard – and then also to be recognized and acknowledged in his unheard-of claim. But this claim could also be ironic – in the sense of Socrates, whose assertion that he knew nothing could likewise only appear presumptuous in the face of his superior knowledge. Yet only under the protection of this presumption could Socrates question his interlocutors in such a presumptuous way as he did, thereby exposing all their knowledge as groundless. With irony he approached even the Oracle of the god of Delphi, which proclaimed destinies and had proclaimed that no one was wiser than Socrates – a proclamation that Socrates did not accept, as one generally would a divine oracle, but rather steadfastly set out to test. He presumed the right to subject a divine oracle to philosophical examination, invoking his own god who spoke only to him and remained unknown and foreign to others, his *δαίμόνιον*. With this double presumption, which cost him his life,<sup>2</sup> he *became* the destiny of philosophy and of humanity and attained world-historical importance with his “world-historical irony”, as Nietzsche calls it (EH III CW 4). Primarily, however, Nietzsche competed with Socrates,<sup>3</sup> to whom even “Christian morality” fundamentally owed its persuasiveness, as Nietzsche wanted to show. With his own revaluation he confronted Socrates' world-historical revaluation, himself using a knowledge that remains avowedly questionable,

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interpreter as Eric Blondel could see in *Ecce Homo* only “an accumulation of lies, apotheoses, falsifications”, in other words, “selfishness” (Blondel 1994, p. 293) – to which Nietzsche himself explicitly confessed (EH II 9). Peter Sloterdijk confirms Nietzsche's “selfishness” (2001a, p. 45) or “megalomania” (2001a, p. 40), both of which he places in quotation marks: “The light values of Nietzsche's most exposed statements about himself are so excessive that even the most benevolent and freethinking readers, even those who, in their intoxication, are agreeable to him, avert their eyes at these moments” (Sloterdijk 2001a, p. 40). But Sloterdijk also legitimizes this selfishness in describing “the event of Nietzsche as a catastrophe in the history of language” (Sloterdijk 2001a, p. 8) and his “obscene abundance of self-praise” as the unleashing of the “eulogistic power of language” or of “speaking well [*Gutreden*]” – of speaking well not for Nietzsche's own sake, but in order to overcome the *ressentiment*-laden “speaking-poorly-systems [*Schlechtrede-Systeme*]” of metaphysics and morality (Sloterdijk 2001a, p. 28f.). Sloterdijk writes that Nietzsche pursued “the revaluation of all embarrassments [*Peinlichkeiten*]” with the “cynicism” of a Diogenes of Sinope (2001a, p. 46) and offered his readers a new innocence of extravagant speaking well through the “gift-giving virtue” with which he has his Zarathustra speak (Sloterdijk 2001a, p. 51). Of course, in the end Sloterdijk counts Nietzsche only as a “trend designer” of the “individualistic wave”, as a “life-style-brand”: “Only a fool, only a poet, only an ad writer” (Sloterdijk 2001a, p. 54, p. 57). And not a philosopher?

2 See Scholz 2000, p. 170.

3 “Socrates, to confess it frankly, is so close to me that almost always I fight a fight against him”. Quoted in Kaufmann 1974, p. 398. See also Müller 2005, p. 188–220.



using irony. His presumption of a fateful revaluation of all values stands *opposed* to that which he himself “uncovered” as a presumption, namely the Socratic and Christian revaluation of all values, which had held for millennia. Nietzsche’s revaluation was intended as nothing more than this “uncovering”,<sup>4</sup> the exposure of the Christian revaluation; and then the intention was not to elevate his own revaluation into the divine realm, but rather to bring the Socratic and the Christian revaluations, both of which invoked a god, back into the human, all-too-human realm. By raising himself up, with world-historical irony, to the level of a divine standard, Nietzsche exposes the putatively divine standards as human ones. Read in this way, even Nietzsche’s final writings – as much as their tone frightens us, as megalomaniacal as they appear – could be taken seriously. Perhaps their tone is so frightening because he startles us out of that claim to divine standards that has, over thousands of years, become self-evident.

In the first aphorism of the chapter “Why I Am a Destiny”, Nietzsche explains what it meant, for him, to be a destiny. This aphorism sets the fundamental tone for the rest of the section. The loud, even overloud tones in which Nietzsche speaks about himself here are meant, as they always are in his writings, to predominate over more subtle distinctions. Nietzsche speaks with great passion – and, at the same time, ironically.<sup>5</sup> As he noted to himself, he works consciously with the “*magic of the extreme*”.<sup>6</sup> Thus an aphorism like EH IV 1 poses special methodological problems of interpretation. Nietzsche’s thought cannot be measured by the standards it calls into question. Therefore, one has to rely, as an experiment, on Nietzsche’s own standards. But these standards are, for their part, not readily grasped. Nietzsche avoided all fixed def-

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4 See EH IV 8: “The uncovering of Christian morality is an event without parallel, a real catastrophe. He that is enlightened about that, is a *force majeure*, a destiny – he breaks the history of mankind in two. One lives before him, or one lives after him. / The lightning bolt of truth struck precisely what was highest so far: let whoever comprehends *what* has here been destroyed see whether anything is left in his hands.” One can dismiss these as the remarks of one already mad or megalomaniacal, as fanatical hubris. Nietzsche himself took that into consideration in *Ecce Homo* and concluded: “in vain would one seek for a trait of fanaticism in my character. There is not a moment in my life to which one could point to convict me of a presumptuous and pathetic posture” (EH II 10).

5 On the varieties of irony in (Socrates, Kierkegaard and) Nietzsche, see Howey 1975. Alexander Nehamas remarks that “irony, which in Socrates’ case consists of saying ‘too little,’ functions for him just as hyperbole, which is saying ‘too much,’ functions for Nietzsche” (Nehamas 1985, p. 26). But in Nietzsche ironic hyperbole is also possible.

6 See NF 1887, 10[94]: KSA 12/510 [WP 749]: “The spell that fights on our behalf, the eye of Venus that charms and blinds even our opponents, is *the magic of the extreme*, the seduction that everything extreme exercises: we immoralists – we are *the most extreme ...*”



initions, in accordance with the maxim that “all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated elude definition; only that which has no history is definable” (GM II 13). He always uses his concepts in a specific context that gives them a specific meaning; in changing contexts, therefore, they take on changing meanings, without thereby becoming ambivalent. A methodologically reflective interpretation of Nietzsche must trace the contexts in which he uses his concepts and reveal the semiotic processes in which they are able to take on ever new meanings. Only this practice, as extensive and time-consuming as it is, guarantees a methodological analysis of Nietzsche’s philosophy that satisfies his methodological demand that his writings be read “slowly” in their own contexts, without prematurely extracting general “lessons” from them.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I will attempt to clarify briefly the concepts in this aphorism within the context of this aphorism, within the context of *Ecce Homo*, and within the context of Nietzsche’s work in general. Where they add to our understanding, I will also consult notes that Nietzsche did not publish.<sup>8</sup>

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7 See Stegmaier 2009.

8 This aphorism is full of formulas and sentences that are quoted constantly, but in isolation, and have thus become clichés of Nietzsche’s philosophical identity (“I am no man, I am dynamite”, “Perhaps I am a buffoon...”, “so far one has called *lies* truth”, “an act of supreme self-examination on the part of humanity”, “I have to be the first *decent* human being”, “I contradict as has never been contradicted before”, “I am a *bringer of glad tidings* like no one before me”, “It is only beginning with me that the earth knows *great politics*”). But the aphorism has seldom been interpreted in context. Walter Kaufmann’s “Commentary” to his translation of *Ecce Homo* (Nietzsche 1967, p. 326) contains only two brief historical references. Steinbuch’s commentary on EH confines itself to the section “Why I Am So Wise” and to that which bespeaks “inner dynamic”, “growth of life in himself” (Steinbuch 1994, p. 4 f.), “freedom of life”, “surplus of life in himself” (p. 8), “superfluity of life”, “greater fullness of life” (p. 9). In the course of her interpretation of EH, Sarah Kofman also treated the aphorism “Why I Am a Destiny” 1 (see Kofman 1993, p. 341–349). She developed numerous connections to EH as a whole and to Nietzsche’s oeuvre, but also to Hegel (even without recourse to modern search aids); as she writes at the end, she thus entered into a “symbiotic” relationship with Nietzsche, learned to “love” him in the course of her interpretive work, was pulled back and forth between him and Freud (Kofman 1993, p. 371 f.). Daniela Langer offers a thorough analysis of the rhetoric of this aphorism, primarily of the symmetries of its construction, its antithetical conceptualizations and its syntactical features (Langer 2005, p. 120–130).

## 2 Nietzsche's Aphorism *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am a Destiny" 1

Nietzsche speaks of "destiny" (*Schicksal*) in his writings several hundred times. Here he uses the word in the title of the section but not in its first aphorism itself; there he uses the words "fate" (*Loos*) and "calamity" (*Verhängniss*).<sup>9</sup> But he remains sceptical about the *concept* of destiny:<sup>10</sup> "destiny" is a concept that we make for ourselves out of an unforeseeable and inalterable occurrence, in order to identify (and sometimes also to personify) the unidentifiable. The concept contains the uncontainable, and in containing the uncontainable becomes a paradoxical concept. But in consciously unleashing the unforeseeable and inalterable, one can also "play destiny" and thus "be destiny" for someone or something.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, a philosopher can be a destiny if he calls into question concepts and convictions upon which he and others have built their lives as if they were self-evident, and if he brings new concepts and convictions into play upon which they can build their lives instead. It is in this way that Nietzsche's Zarathustra *wills* that he be a destiny, and this will becomes *his* destiny.<sup>12</sup> According to its usual concept, a destiny is unwilled, "imposed". To will one's destiny is thus to make yet another paradox of the already paradoxical concept of destiny. It then contains not only the uncontainable, but also both the unwilled and the willed. That is why Nietzsche has Zarathustra call destiny an "experience", something that can be experienced but not comprehended (*begriffen*).<sup>13</sup> If one accepts the unwilled, then it is no longer contrary to his own will, and one can stand "triumphant and with firm feet [...] on his destiny" (Z III "On Involuntary

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9 In Z III "The Wanderer", Nietzsche has Zarathustra use the same word: "I recognize my lot, he finally said sorrowfully. Well, I am ready. Now my ultimate loneliness has begun. / Alas, this black sorrowful sea below me! Alas, this pregnant nocturnal dismay! Alas, destiny and sea! To you I must now go *down!* Before my highest mountain I stand and before my longest wandering; to that end I must first go down deeper than ever I descended /- deeper into pain than ever I descended, down into its blackest flood. Thus my destiny wants it. Well, I am ready." This passage was clearly the model for the aphorism EH IV I.

10 See NF 1876/77, 23[163]: KSA 8/464: "Once words are there, people believe that something must correspond to them, e.g. soul god will destiny etc."

11 See GS 338 and NF 1882, 2[9]: KSA 10/45–46.

12 See Z II "Upon the Blessed Isles": "But thus my creative will, my destiny, wills it. Or, to say it more honestly: this very destiny – my will wills."

13 Z III "The Wanderer".

Bliss”).<sup>14</sup> It is in this sense that the “sovereign individual” whom Nietzsche conceives in the *Genealogy of Morals* can make a promise, “because he knows himself strong enough to maintain his word in the face of accidents, even ‘in the face of destiny’” (GM II 2). To be sovereign is to be able to make something that one wills out of anything that happens. And those who will their destinies can also themselves function as destinies: they arrive “like destiny, without cause, reason, consideration, or pretext; they appear as lightning appears, too terrible, too sudden, too convincing, too ‘different’ even to be hated” (GM II 17). Destiny is without reason and visible causes, it is not to be comprehended reasonably according to general concepts, and in willing destiny, one is himself not to be comprehended reasonably. One can nevertheless himself bring reason, *his* reason, into *his* destiny. This is how Nietzsche ultimately presents himself in *Ecce Homo*. Here he calls his “task” a “destiny” that he has taken on willingly (EH II 9). What constitutes greatness, he says, is tying a “knot in the destiny of humanity” (EH III Z 5), and since that has fallen to him, he also wills it. The semiotic process in Nietzsche’s use of the word “destiny” thus points to Nietzsche himself, culminating finally in his own destiny. This – or something very much like it – will continue to be apparent in what follows. Nietzsche’s concepts develop such that they allow him finally to comprehend himself. In the aphorism *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am a Destiny” 1, which comprises little more than a page (in the KSA edition), Nietzsche orients all the major themes of Western philosophy (destiny, religion, truth and politics) toward *one* vanishing point: himself and his reevaluation of all values. I will now interpret the aphorism step by step.

<sup>[1]</sup> I know my fate. <sup>[2]</sup> One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous <sup>[3]</sup> – a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up *against* everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. <sup>[4]</sup> I am no man, I am dynamite. – <sup>[5]</sup> Yet for all that, there is nothing in me of a founder of a religion – <sup>[6]</sup> religions are affairs of the rabble; <sup>[7]</sup> I find it necessary to wash my hands after I have come into contact with religious people ... <sup>[8]</sup> I want no “believers”; I think I am too malicious to believe in myself; I never speak to masses ... <sup>[9]</sup> I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced *holy*: you will guess why I publish this book *before*; it shall prevent people from doing mischief with me... <sup>[10]</sup> I do not want to be a holy man; sooner even a buffoon ... Perhaps I am a buffoon ... <sup>[11]</sup> Yet in spite of that – or rather *not*

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**14** Nietzsche’s Zarathustra warns against the “illusion” of an imposed destiny (Z III “On Old and New Tablets” 9): if one does not want to succumb to destiny, one must be hard and inexorable like destiny – by accepting that which is beyond his control as his own will (ibid., 29 and 30). Thus Nietzsche has the animals (and only the animals) tell Zarathustra that it is “your destiny” to be “*the teacher of the eternal recurrence*” (Z III “The Convalescent” 2). And he has Zarathustra tell the “retired” pope: “Rather no god, rather make destiny on one’s own, rather be a fool, rather be a god oneself!” (Z IV “Retired”).

in spite of it, because so far nobody has been more mendacious than holy men – the truth speaks out of me. – <sup>[12]</sup> But my truth is *terrible*; for so far one has called *lies* truth. – <sup>[13]</sup> *Revaluation of all values*: that is my formula for an act of supreme self-examination on the part of humanity, <sup>[14]</sup> become flesh and genius in me. <sup>[15]</sup> It is my fate that I have to be the first *decent* human being; <sup>[16]</sup> that I know myself to stand in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia ... <sup>[17]</sup> I was the first to *discover* the truth, because I first experienced lies as lies – *smelled* them out ... <sup>[18]</sup> My genius is in my nostrils ... <sup>[19]</sup> I contradict as has never been contradicted before and am nevertheless the opposite of a No-saying spirit. <sup>[20]</sup> *I am a bringer of glad tidings* like no one before me; I know tasks of such elevation that any notion of them has been lacking so far; only beginning with me are there hopes again. <sup>[21]</sup> For all that, I am necessarily also the man of calamity. <sup>[22]</sup> For when truth enters into a fight with the lies of millennia, we shall have upheavals, a convulsion of earthquakes, a moving of mountains and valleys, the like of which has never been dreamed of. The concept of politics will have merged entirely with a war of spirits; all power structures of the old society will have been exploded into the air – all of them are based on lies: there will be wars the like of which have never yet been seen on earth. It is only beginning with me that the earth knows *great politics*. – (EH IV 1, trans. Walter Kaufmann, slightly modified)

[1] The text begins with irritations. The word “know” (“**I know my fate.**”) leads us to expect a sure knowledge. But one cannot actually know one’s “fate” [*Loos*]: the word “lot” [*Los*] emphasizes that which is random and uncontainable. In professing to know a fate, one speaks as a prophet. But prophets (at least those of the Hebrew Bible) do not foretell destinies so much as they primarily “see” – despite the resistance of common foolishness – and then proclaim what has already happened (in the case of the biblical prophets, primarily the turning away of the chosen people from God) and what the consequences must be.<sup>15</sup> Having seen and proclaimed the “death of God” for his age, Nietzsche wants to show what the consequences of *that* are very likely to be; in fact he had already done so long before, most spectacularly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and before and after that in aphorisms 125 and 343 of *The Gay Science*, without being sufficiently heard. It was and is his lot to be both an unheard and an unheard-of prophet, and he reveals this lot in the preliminary sections of *Ecce Homo* through a genealogy of his thought, from the random circumstances that came together to form his inevitable and necessary destiny, his destiny to be, with his “uncovering”, a “destiny of humanity”.

[2] “**One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous**”, Nietzsche continues, again with apparent certainty. But whether he will become a destiny in the future depends on whether *others* recognize him

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<sup>15</sup> The biblical prophets do not speak of destiny at all, but rather of the will of the people of God, which either fulfils or does not fulfil the will of God. See Bernfeld and Bamberger 1999 I, p.75.

as a destiny; his destiny is only “fulfilled” if others also make it their destiny. It is dependent upon their future “memory” of his “name”, upon whether individuals remember his name so that it lives on; the memory of others is his destiny.<sup>16</sup> A name, for its part, is a generally used sign for an individual; it is given by others before the individual himself can speak or say “I”. It is a foreign sign that he (for the most part) makes his own so that he can be identified to others. Even the name, then, is a destiny that one makes his own. Everything that happens to the “bearer” of a name crystallizes around that name, which becomes the “concept” that one has of him,<sup>17</sup> and it is this concept that outlives him – for as long as someone remembers him.<sup>18</sup> The memory of a name is thus the destiny of a destiny that others must will. For one only remembers that which one wants to remember or is compelled to remember. Nietzsche aims at such a compulsion: with the aphorism in question he wants to ensure that his name will be remembered, will have to be remembered, that we cannot forget what was written in this name.

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**16** In academic Nietzsche research as well as in the public perception, “a bewildering succession of ‘new Nietzsches’” has become attached to Nietzsche’s name (Ansell-Pearson and Caygill 1993, p. 1). These are always supposed to be different Nietzsches, and yet also the true, only justified Nietzsches – or, in Zarathustra’s language, the “last” Nietzsches. Nietzsche’s philosophy (and all “identities”, even that of the human being) is “mistaken” at the very moment one wants to “determine” it. Nietzsche opened EH with the adjuration: “*Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else*” (EH Preface 1); perhaps he also designed EH as a kind of test for his readers, that they should mistake him and thus compromise themselves – using the notorious “self-parody” that mocks all attempts to ascribe to him a true “self” (see Conway 1993). Conway’s pugnacious essay targets the idolatry that he believes Alexander Nehamas and Richard Rorty have committed with Nietzsche and especially with *Ecce Homo*, which he thoroughly excoriates. Of course, he himself ultimately insists upon one true Nietzsche, a “fragmented, resentful, closure-seeking buffoon” (Conway 1993, p. 68). His motto is Nietzsche’s statement from GM III 19: “Moral: what prudent man would write a single honest word about himself today? – he would have to be a member of the Order of Holy Foolhardiness to do so.” But Conway rather leaves aside the introductory word “Moral”: according to Nietzsche, it is the reigning morality that necessitates masks, and hinders “unabashed” self-presentation – which it thus demands of Nietzsche himself.

**17** See Stegmaier 2008a, p. 282–285 and p. 346–351.

**18** Derrida’s “Otobiographies” read *Ecce Homo* largely in the light of Nietzsche’s “Politics of the Proper Name”. Derrida says that Nietzsche was the first philosopher to treat, with such decisiveness, “philosophy and life, the science and the philosophy of life *with his name and in his name*” (Derrida 1986, p. 6), and that, in the sign of this name, he bound a “logic of the dead” to the “logic of the living” (p. 17). Names also die, but for the most part one dies “*before one’s name*” (p. 28). Derrida quotes EH IV 1 in its entirety – in the context of the extent to which the “*great politics*” with which the aphorism ends is implicated in the politics of the National Socialists who, fairly or not, invoked Nietzsche (p. 31f.).

[3] Since that time, one has indeed no longer been able to forget the name Nietzsche. Even or especially for his detractors, “something tremendous” has indeed been associated with it, **“a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up *against everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far*”**. Jürgen Habermas, among others, has understood Nietzsche's impact in this way.<sup>19</sup> Habermas judges Nietzsche to be just as dangerous as Nietzsche judged himself to be. And yet Nietzsche had only “uncovered” that the reason of European philosophy was a “counterfactual” justification that did not take the factual as its standard – that it was, in other words, the object of a belief that is now, as Habermas also notes, no longer self-evident. According to Nietzsche, one can either find such belief necessary or not. Whoever cannot get by without it will have to reject Nietzsche's impertinences; whoever engages with his enlightenment is in for “the most profound collision of conscience”. This is just what Nietzsche expected.

When Kant conceived his “Critique” of reason he was still very much certain that reason, though it had overstepped its bounds in the course of millennia and thus been merely “groping about” among unprovable metaphysical belief systems, could be brought to the “secure course of a science” through a secure measuring of its bounds (Kant 1998, p. 106). Here reason was still the authority for a critique of itself, and as such also above experience and thus capable of *a priori* knowledge independent of temporal or personal circumstances. Just this idea, however – that reason should be independent of temporal and personal circumstances, that there should even be a “pure” reason – had become increasingly questionable in the nineteenth century, had become ever less believable and reduced to the level of mere belief; Nietzsche recognized this acutely and articulated it most acutely, and was fearless before the “dangerous consequen-

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<sup>19</sup> Habermas calls Nietzsche the “turning point” that has turned the “discourse of modernity”, with the “goal of exploding modernity's husk of reason” (Habermas 1987, p. 86). He says that Nietzsche promoted a “heightening of the subjective to the point of utter self-oblivion”, that he “upset” “the categories of intelligent doing and thinking”, thus robbing modernity of its “emancipatory content” and “shov[ing] it into the realm of metaphysically transfigured irrationality” (p. 93f.). On this reading, Nietzsche carried out the “destruction of reason”, as Georg Lukács called it. Nietzsche critiqued the *metaphysical* concept of reason (see primarily TI III), but also developed a new, quite differentiated concept of reason, which has yet to be explored in its contexts by Nietzsche researchers. For a critique of Lukács's Nietzsche critique, see Ottmann 1984 and Ottmann 1999, p. 429–433. For a discussion of Habermas's Nietzsche critique, see Sedgwick 2007.

ces':<sup>20</sup> the critique of reason had arrived at a crisis and now demanded a reorientation from the ground up, especially in Europe, which had believed so firmly in one, timeless reason. But as Nietzsche noted in his *Lenzer Heide* note, this reorientation would lead initially to a massive disorientation, to the liberation of forces that can, in their desperation, only destroy and thus also want to destroy; and this "crisis" would erupt in a "paroxysm", a "blind raging" "of nihilism and delight in destruction".<sup>21</sup> The "dangerous consequences" became a prophecy: the world wars, totalitarianisms, genocides and terrorisms that characterized the twentieth century could be understood (at least in part) as the outcomes of the intellectual crisis that had befallen the fundamental convictions of European thought, in particular the conviction in the beneficial effects of a reason that was common to all. From that time on, we can never again be sure of European reason.

[4] Nietzsche uses the metaphor of "dynamite": **"I am no man, I am dynamite."**<sup>22</sup> With this metaphor, which he first introduced in *Beyond Good and Evil*,<sup>23</sup>

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**20** See Nietzsche's self-presentation in NF 1888, 14[25]: KSA 13/230: "What distinguishes Nietzsche: the spontaneity of his psychological *vision*; a dizzying breadth in what he has surveyed, experienced, perceived, deduced; the will to consequence; the fearlessness in the face of severity and dangerous consequences."

**21** NF 1886/87, 5[71] 11 and 14, KSA 12/215 and 217.

**22** The dynamite metaphor, in opposition to the concept of a man, has held an extremely strong fascination for Nietzsche's interpreters – especially for Sarah Kofman, whose whole interpretation of *Ecce Homo* comes under the title "Explosion". She understands the Nietzsche revealed here precisely as a sudden explosion of long-accumulated forces, and she says herself Nietzsche's text explodes tenacious, forceful interpretations. This is how she justifies his outlandishness ("Bien compris, tout cela n'a vraiment rien de fou ...") (Kofman 1992, p. 21).

**23** A Swiss journalist, Dr. J. V. Widmann, found the metaphor appealing and translated it, in his discussion of *Beyond Good and Evil*, into the context of Swiss engineering: "The stocks of dynamite used in the building of the Gotthard Tunnel were marked by a black flag, indicating mortal danger. Exclusively in this sense do we speak of the new book by the philosopher Nietzsche as a dangerous book. This designation entails no trace of reproach against the author and his work, as that black flag likewise was not meant to reproach the explosives. Even less could we think of delivering the lonely thinker up to the crows of the lecture room and the rooks of the pulpit by pointing to the dangerousness of his book. Intellectual explosives, like the material sort, can serve very useful purposes; it is not necessary for them to be used for criminal ends. Only one does well to say clearly, where such explosive is stored, 'There is dynamite here!' ... Nietzsche is the first man to find a way out, but it is such a terrifying way that one is really frightened to see him walking the lonely and till now untrodden path!" (quoted in Nietzsche 1969b, p. 257). Widmann's article originally appeared in the *Berner Bund* of 16–17 September 1886, and is quoted in KSA 15/160f. Nietzsche happily took note of the article, as a number of his letters from 1886 attest, and took up the metaphor again and again – not only for his own philosophy, but also for the Christianity at which it aimed.



Nietzsche further dramatizes his revaluation – on the one hand. On the other hand, he is thinking of “a dynamite of the spirit, perhaps a newly discovered Russian *nihiline*” that remains inconspicuous for a long time and then suddenly makes an impact (BGE 208). In other words, ideas can develop explosive power. When opposed to other ideas, they can explode relationships between ideas – even those relationships in which the firmest belief has been held.<sup>24</sup> Even the idea of the “equality of souls before God” was, as Nietzsche says in *The Anti-christ*, an “explosive of a concept which eventually became revolution, modern idea, and the principle of decline of the whole order of society – [was] *Christian dynamite*” (AC 62).<sup>25</sup> And “dynamite”, without the addition of “of the spirit”, is what he also calls himself: “I am no man, I am dynamite”. The opposition between man and dynamite lies in the question of dangerousness: men are not dangerous as long as they are controlled by Christian morality; but they become dangerous as soon as they free themselves from it.

[5] Dynamite, however, does not always have a destructive function. If one has learned how to handle it, then one can use it to blast away obstacles and make a space for buildings, roads, railway lines etc., to destroy the old with aim and precision in order to make room for the new. The new thing for which Nietzsche wanted to clear a path was not to be another religion and morality to connect all people. He did not want to be the founder of a religion: **“Yet for all that, there is nothing in me of a founder of a religion”**. This statement appears both trivial and profoundly presumptuous at the same time. And yet it makes sense: the acute crises of orientation that accompany revaluations of values are also expected to awaken an even more acute need for religion. A revaluation of *all* values like the one Nietzsche proclaims had to trigger a strong impetus for new religions – an impetus that we are also experiencing today. For Nietzsche, religions respond to our hardship in being unable to cope with life. But they also sustain that hardship inasmuch as they protect us from the truth of life. Unlike other critics of religion, Nietzsche does not replace religion

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<sup>24</sup> Vanessa Lemm, like so many others, removes the dynamite metaphor from its context and finds in it “the explosive birth of Nietzsche’s manifold identities” (Lemm 2007, p. 197). Evidence against this line of interpretation (which Langer applies to *Ecce Homo* in Langer 2005) is found in the aphorism EH IV 1, where Nietzsche determinedly and repeatedly says “I want”, “I am”, “I speak”, “I contradict”. See Christof Windgätter’s review of Langer’s monograph (Windgätter 2006, p. 415f.).

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche repeated the metaphor on a number of occasions in his letters. See Nietzsche to Paul Deussen, 26 November 1888, KSB 8/492; to Georg Brandes, early December 1888, KSB 8/500f.; to Helen Zimmern, 8 December 1888, KSB 8/512; and to Heinrich Köselitz, 9 December 1888, KSB 8/513 (“highest superlative of dynamite”).



with truth; he was also the harshest critic of truth.<sup>26</sup> He understood truth, too, to be a kind of error to which one was compelled by the hardship of life,<sup>27</sup> and in cases where this error was purposely passed off as truth, to be a lie. Both religion and truth, then, are for most people errors that are necessary for life; but for those who found them, who deploy them to assuage the sufferings that make men sick and to gain power, they are lies. Founders of religion are thus “gruesome hybrids of sickness and will to power” (EH Preface 4); they too were and are revaluers of values and, world-historically, the most effective ones. Philosophers operate in dangerous proximity to founders of religion, only philosophers are less successful.<sup>28</sup>

[6] Founders of religions are able “to bestow on life an *interpretation* that makes it appear to be illuminated by the highest value so that this life becomes something for which one fights and under certain circumstances sacrifices one’s life” (GS 353). This is precisely what Nietzsche also wanted to do, and in this he was so close to a founder of a religion that we could easily take him for one (as Nietzsche perhaps took himself, as well). That is why the separation is difficult

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**26** See Stegmaier 1985.

**27** See the pointed phrasing in NF 1885, 34[253]: KSA 11/506 / KGW IX 1, N VII 1, 4: “Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. The value for life is ultimately decisive.”

**28** See GS 149: “Pythagoras and Plato [...] had souls and talents that fitted them so obviously for the role of religious founders that one can scarcely marvel enough that they should have failed. Yet all they managed to found were sects”. See also Nietzsche 1995, 24: “Kant remarkable – knowledge and faith! Inherent kinship between *philosophers* and *founders of religions!*” (NF 1872/73, 19[62]: KSA 7/439). And there were “founders of sects” even among the students of Socrates (PTAG 2, KSA 1/810; see also Nietzsche 1995, 10 and 23 / NF 1872/73, 19[28]: KSA 7/425, and [60]: KSA 7/438). But: “None of the great Greek philosophers was a leader of the people: attempted most consistently by Empedocles (after Pythagoras), but also not with pure philosophy, but instead with a mythicized version of it. Others reject the people from the outset (Heraclitus). Others have a wholly refined circle of educated people as their public (Anaxagoras). Socrates displays the strongest democratic-demagogic tendency: the result is the establishment of sects, in other words, counterevidence. How could lesser philosophers ever be successful where philosophers of this sort were not? It is not possible to base a popular culture on philosophy. Thus, with regard to culture, philosophy never can have primary, but always only secondary, significance. How is it significant?” (Nietzsche 1995, p. 119; NF 1872/73, 23[14]: KSA 7/544). As is well known, Nietzsche himself harboured ambitions of founding a sect, first as a following of Richard Wagner (his art “is a sectarian art and will be a sectarian education: but with the highest striving to go beyond a sect”, NF 1875, 11[31]: KSA 8/220) and then for his own philosophy. See NF 1880/81, 10[B38]: KSA 9/421: “Seek out people to surround oneself with, with whom one can preserve and demonstrate one’s ideal humanity. First make the task easier for oneself, then gradually bring strangers into the circle. – But first build one’s circle, chase others away.” Nietzsche also has Zarathustra make an attempt with disciples – and fail.

also and especially for him. Thus he resorts to his most extreme means, a polemic: “**religions are affairs of the rabble**”. Only here does he use the formula “affairs of the rabble” (*Pöbel-Affairen*). No decent person wants to be the rabble – Nietzsche least of all. And yet the rabble is difficult to delimit from decent people. Zarathustra struggles constantly with this delimitation, opposing the rabble with the “noble”. But the scholar too is a “rabble man”, who because of his “faith in his superiority [...] treats the religious man as an inferior and lower type that he has outgrown, leaving it behind, *beneath* him” (BGE 58). And “the instinct of the rabble” is present in “the scholar’s declaration of independence, his emancipation from philosophy” (BGE 204) as Nietzsche understands it. In philosophy too there is the rabble, people who follow the prevailing truths and valuations in order to find approval and acclamation. The “genuine philosopher”, on the other hand, “feels the burden and the duty of a hundred attempts and temptations of life – he risks *himself* constantly, he plays the wicked game” (BGE 205), has the courage to “stand alone” (GM III 5) and evinces irony toward all teachable knowledge. Here Nietzsche ultimately doubts Socrates – and even himself. In 1885 he wrote to Köselitz: “In all my states of sickness I feel, with horror, a sort of downward pull toward the weakness of the rabble, the gentleness of the rabble, even the virtues of the rabble – do you understand this? You picture of health!” (Nietzsche 1969b, p. 243).<sup>29</sup>

[7] In the text of *Ecce Homo*, in the middle of his polemic, Nietzsche indicates that he is still in “contact with religious people” and does not avoid them: “**I find it necessary to wash my hands after I have come into contact with religious people**”. He finds it “necessary” to keep himself clean from “contact” with religious people, from the things for which they live as “rabble men” and maybe in a “noble” way too; he himself works at this and struggles with it. They “come into contact” with him because he, like everyone else, is not free from desires of a religious nature, particularly not when he is among people who find such things necessary. He must fight with himself in order not to be co-opted and overpowered by them, so as not to lose his critical distance.

[8] Nietzsche emphasizes the fact that he “wants”, apparently without always achieving what he wants. With his statements “**I want no ‘believers’**” and “I do not want to be a holy man” – which seem to make his presumption even more strident – Nietzsche wards off the religious desires that he himself can barely resist.<sup>30</sup> With this he points to qualities of his character and his writ-

<sup>29</sup> See also NF 1885, 35[76]: KSA 11/543–545.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Mirabile also advises that we take these words “for their face value” and impute to Nietzsche “no intention of feigning either prophet or god” (Mirabile 2004, p. 270).

ing, but qualities nonetheless of which he himself cannot be sure: **“I think I am too malicious to believe in myself; I never speak to masses.”** “Malicious” (*boshaft*) is not the same as “evil” (*böse*). To be evil is to do evil things to others, to do something that they believe harms them; to be malicious, on the other hand, is to remind others of what evil could be within them that they do not admit: a malicious person brings others to enlightenment about themselves. As Nietzsche learned primarily from Voltaire,<sup>31</sup> malice is a means of enlightenment and, when one succeeds in being malicious toward himself, a means of one’s own enlightenment.<sup>32</sup> However, Nietzsche begins with an “I think” that should not be ignored. On one hand we could take it to mean “I believe”. “I think” can easily indicate “I believe” in German; in this case Nietzsche’s sentence would mean: “I believe I am too malicious to believe in myself”. In reference to the self, belief becomes paradoxical: it assures the self to oneself and renders the self unsure at the same time. On the other hand, “I think” was precisely the signal for the modern Enlightenment, the call with which Descartes initiated it, so that no belief could go untested. If we read Nietzsche’s “I think” in this way, “I am too malicious to believe in myself” becomes a definition of “I think”, and enlightening philosophical thought consists of being too malicious to believe in oneself, too malicious to accept the certainties of which the “masses” want to make me certain and leave it at that – consists, in short, of thinking not with the masses, but rather for oneself (“I never speak to masses”). These two readings of “I think” are not mutually exclusive. “I think like an enlightener” and “I think for myself” can only be the same as “I believe that I myself, that I can think like an enlightener”. For an enlightener, there is no certainty beyond this belief. Nietzsche’s phrasing is malicious in that it ironically allows for both readings, and only both of them together allow us to see what Nietzsche “wants”: to believe in his powers of enlightenment without ever being able to be sure of them.

[9] In the draft of this section Nietzsche had initially noted: “Yet for all that there is nothing in me of a fanatic; whoever knows me considers me a simple,

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31 Nietzsche pays homage in *Ecce Homo* to Voltaire’s noble manner of enlightenment, to his “war without powder and smoke, without warlike poses, without pathos and strained limbs. [...] One error after another is coolly placed on ice; the ideal is not refuted – it freezes to death. – Here, for example, ‘the genius’ freezes to death; at the next corner, ‘the saint’; under a huge icicle, ‘the hero’; in the end, ‘faith’, so-called ‘conviction’; ‘pity’ also cools down considerably – and almost everywhere ‘the thing in itself’ freezes to death” (EH III HAH 1). See also WS 237. 32 In EH III Z 6, Nietzsche characterizes “the type of Zarathustra” as “the omnipresence of malice and exuberance”. Kaufmann (1974, p. 408–409), who understands Nietzsche primarily as an adversary of Socrates, makes a connection here to Socrates’s irony, sarcasm and cynicism.

perhaps a slightly malicious scholar, who knows how to be cheerful with everyone. This book, I hope, presents a rather different picture than the picture of a prophet [...].” And later in the draft: “Calamitous and – god or buffoon – that is what is involuntary about me, that is what I am.”<sup>33</sup> In the published text, “fanatic” and “prophet” have been contracted to “founder of a religion”, and “holy man” replaces “god”: thus Nietzsche raises the “fanatic” to the level of a “founder of a religion” and pulls “god” back to the level of a “holy man”. In the text intended for publication, the presumption leads to a humbling – the humbling of an even more severe presumption. To be “holy” is meant to be inviolable and therefore also inviolably certain. Whoever founds or strengthens a religion is pronounced holy by those who confess it and want it to be considered inviolable. With his *Antichrist*, Nietzsche wanted to enlighten and thus to overcome the values of Christianity. So he had to be apprehensive that, if he were successful, he himself would be pronounced holy by those who can only abandon an old belief for a new one (“**I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced holy**”). This apprehension was by no means absurd. Indeed, Nietzsche’s fear was warranted: new Nietzsche cults sprang up until the end of the Third Reich.<sup>34</sup>

[10] Nietzsche often speaks of fear in his work, primarily of religious fear. But here he speaks only of his own fear. He faces it by placing the “buffoon” above the “holy man”: **“I do not want to be a holy man; sooner even a buffoon ... Perhaps I am a buffoon ...”** A buffoon is malicious without being taken seriously. His malice does not offend, but is enjoyed. Nietzsche does not say that he is a buffoon, rather that he is “perhaps” a buffoon, and that if one wants to assign a role to him, he would rather it be that of a buffoon than a holy man. He offers the alternatives from which his reader should decide, thus warning against a hastily

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<sup>33</sup> NF December 1888 – early January 1889, 25[6]1: KSA 13/639f.

<sup>34</sup> See Hoffmann 2000, including its bibliography. See also Barbera, D’Iorio and Ulbricht 2004; Hertl 2007; Hintz 2007. Heinrich Köselitz pronounced Nietzsche “holy” at his graveside; Alfred Kubin called Nietzsche “truly – our Christ”. Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche tried unsuccessfully to have a mausoleum in the shape of an Egyptian pyramid erected for her brother on the Chasté peninsula near Sils-Maria; she was successful in establishing the Nietzsche archive she founded in Weimar as a cultic site and a place of pilgrimage. Beside the archive a temple-like structure was erected, in which a larger than life-sized statue of Nietzsche was to be installed (a lack of money and the end of the Third Reich prevented this). Stefan George used Nietzsche as something of a standard for his own cult of a new poetic kingdom, which would in turn be a standard for the state. See Raschel 1984; Aschheim 1994, p. 71–78; and Karlauf 2007, p. 293–296. George’s disciple Ernst Bertram wanted to immortalize Nietzsche as a tragic hero (Bertram 1918). And countless half-moral, half-religious “movements” have invoked Nietzsche, including vegetarianism, feminism and Zionism. Indeed, this kind of thing has happened to no other philosopher to date.

formed belief. The holy man and the buffoon stand at opposing edges of thought: the holy man where thought becomes inviolable and passes over into belief; the buffoon where it passes over into unbelief, where it becomes unbelievable and absurd and loses all seriousness. One must either believe the holy man or deny his holiness; the holy man constrains one to an either-or. But one is free before the buffoon; one can believe him one time and then laugh at him another time. *This* is the freedom that is important to Nietzsche, given the seriousness of the “destiny” of the “task” that he has taken on as *his* destiny.

[11] Nevertheless, Nietzsche then speaks of truth as a holy man, but as a holy man who wants nothing to do with holy men: **“Yet in spite of that – or rather not in spite of it, because so far nobody has been more mendacious than holy men – the truth speaks out of me. –”** He pushes to the point of confusion the game that is meant to keep at bay any belief in him, that is meant to keep at bay belief in general. The tension of this text – the loftiest in Nietzsche’s oeuvre – is now heightened to the extreme, evincing the agitation, passion and anger of a great prophet and thereby calling into question all objectivity. Nietzsche is now writing, speaking, breathlessly: with ellipses (“...”), as if there were not enough time to utter the words; with insertions (parentheses), as if interrupting himself; with breaks marked by dashes (“–”), as if there were no space for logical conjunctions.<sup>35</sup> Clearly the uttered is interspersed with the unuttered; instinctively the reader himself takes responsibility for filling in the ellipses and the missing conjunctions. Without wanting to, the reader reads himself into the text, reads himself as well as the author.<sup>36</sup>

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35 See Fietz 1992, p. 380–382, and the chapters on “*Nietzsches schriftstellerische Methoden*” in Stegmaier 2012.

36 This is the point around which Wolfgang Iser has formulated his theory of literary reception in Iser 1974 and Iser 1980. He assumes that the reader “discovers” himself in the meaning of the novel and experiences “esthetic pleasure” (Iser 1974, p. xiii). According to Iser, the nineteenth-century novel assigned to the reader an ever less explicit role and thus compelled him to find it himself – or, in Nietzschean terms, to create it. In the twentieth century this then became a kind of method: to let the reader become entangled “in ‘home-made’ illusions and fictions” (Iser 1974, p. xiv) and compel him to an explicit reflection on this entanglement. Clearly Nietzsche (who is not in Iser’s purview) initiates an epochal turn here as well. In his texts, too, “the implied reader [...] embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect – predispositions laid down [...] by the text itself”. The text is thus a kind of mould: “standpoint and convergence of textual perspectives are closely interrelated, although neither of them is actually represented in the text”, on which the reader must find his own perspective (Iser 1980, p. 34–35). Heinz Schlaffer interprets this as a fascistic temptation: “He [the reader] waits longingly for the *Führer*, who can read the signs correctly because he himself has laid them out” (Schlaffer 2007, p. 38). According to Schlaffer, a literary scholar, Nietzsche’s style is responsible for the unfettering of German prose and, consequently, of German history: “Such an energy of

[12] What truth can speak out of the harshest critic of truth, who would sooner be a buffoon than a holy man? Surely not a metaphysical truth adequate to a being outside of it, and surely not a truth that can be believed religiously. Nietzsche speaks of *his* truth (“**my truth**”), which he *creates*. It is to be the truth of those truths, the “uncovering” of that which has “mendaciously” posed as truth. He does not utter this truth (“–”) but rather makes his reader responsible to deduce it, too – especially it: the *truth as freedom of decision about the truth* or the *truth as freedom*.<sup>37</sup> But the freedom of decision about the truth is “**terrible**”: because it lacks stability in anything else, can lead to mistakes, bitter hardship, and complete disorientation – to a disorientation that then must be borne without religion, without belief. In John’s Gospel (14:6) Christ said of himself: “I am the way and the truth and the life”. Nietzsche does not say “I *am* the truth” but rather “the truth *speaks* out of me”: if the truth *speaks*, then it speaks in distinctions, and in every distinction the other side of the distinction – the always possible alternative – always speaks as well. The other side of the truth is either the unintentional error or the intentional lie. The unintentional or intentional “mendaciousness” of a holy man – or of a man who is believed to be holy, even if he is a philosopher – lies in the exclusion of the alternative that is always possible. The truth of the decidability of the truth means, then, that a claim of one single truth, which excludes the possibility that it could also be an error or a lie, is itself the lie: “**for so far one has called lies truth.**”

[13] The “uncovering” of the truth that seems to have no alternative, of the highest value of Western metaphysics, morality and religion, the value that underlies all their other values as a lie is the “**revaluation of all values**”. This revaluation cannot itself be a truth in the traditional sense, but rather only a “formula”. It is Nietzsche’s “**formula for an act of supreme self-examination on the part of humanity**”, which affects everyone, inasmuch as everyone, in the hardships of life, believes in values to which they can hold fast. Because everyone is compelled to share in belief in the truth, truth has become self-evident, and because it has become self-evident it is difficult to break open. Whoever has the freedom to do that, Nietzsche says, must have faced the exceptional hardships in life that make such freedom possible. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche explores the conditions of *his* freedom (“Why I Am So Wise”, “Why I Am So Clev-

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language and style intensified the meaning of German literature at the beginning of the modernist period, but also intensified the confusion of German intelligence and the catastrophe of German politics” (Schlaffer 2007, p. 12f.). What must the condition of intelligence and politics have been, that they were so confused by a literary style?

37 On the historical background and the systematic preconditions of this truth as freedom, see Simon 1978.

er”...) in order to work out why *he* should be capable of that revaluation of all values. (In this sense *Ecce Homo* is not an autobiography but a genealogy of his thought.<sup>38</sup>)

[14] “Genius” (“**become flesh and genius in me**”) has been with us since the eighteenth century as an established term for individuals who create new standards for everyone in a way that defies explanation. Nietzsche focused throughout his life on “genius” – the word appears hundreds of times in his work – but also spoke out sharply against “belief in one’s own genius” (D 542), against “superstition about genius” (HAH I 164) as the “superstition of our century” (NF 1887, 9[170]: KSA 12/436). He stripped our talk of genius of “any mythological or religious flavour” and even of the myth of originality. A genius is simply someone who, in his own hardship, rather randomly finds new and far-reaching possibilities for others (see HAH I 231). Nietzsche ultimately brings the dynamite metaphor into his conception of genius, as well: “Great men, like great ages, are explosives in which a tremendous force is stored up; their precondition is always, historically and physiologically, that for a long time much has been gathered, stored up, saved up, and conserved for them –

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38 With his formula “and so I tell my life to myself” (EH: KSA 6/263), Nietzsche himself tempted us to read EH as an autobiography, if not as an “autohagiography” (see Sommer 2000, p. 46). But in this formula Nietzsche quotes his Zarathustra (“Nobody tells me anything new: so I tell myself – myself”, Z III “On Old and New Tablets” 1), who certainly was not thinking of an autobiography. Richard Samuel raises this question and comes to the conclusion: “*Ecce Homo* is rather an analysis of Nietzsche’s self and a self-interpretation of his work” (Samuel 1973, p. 222). In Gasché, too, “autobiography” appears in quotation marks (Gasché 1985, p. 275). Even the subtitle of EH, “How One Becomes What One Is” – which Samuel thinks speaks for EH as an autobiography – points toward a conjecturing, deductive genealogy rather than a chronicling autobiography. Indeed Nietzsche insinuates autobiographical material more than he narrates it, and the little that he does narrate (which Samuel compiles on the basis of a control text that Montinari has rendered obsolete) he also pointedly stylizes and puts into riddles: “I am, to express it in the form of a riddle, already dead as my father, while as my mother I am still living and becoming old” (EH I 1; see also Krell 1988). Derrida, who also speaks initially of “autobiography”, upon closer inspection arrives at “allo- and thanatography” (1986, p. 19). Following Derrida, Gary Shapiro leaves the question open by calling EH “a narrative account of [Nietzsche’s] own life [...] demanding attention” (Shapiro 1989, p. 142). He writes that EH intends to show how the revaluation of all values was first accomplished in Nietzsche himself (Shapiro 1989, p. 148); EH II 9 in particular supports this interpretation. If EH is an autobiography, then it is, as Sarah Kofman notes in her interpretation, one that radically subverts the “genre’ autobiographique”, including the self (“*autos*”), life (“*bios*”) and writing (“*graphein*”), as well as their alleged simple unity (see Kofman 1992, p. 22, 29 f.). Walter Kaufmann wrote of EH as “Nietzsche’s *Apology*”, comparable to that of Socrates (1974, p. 408–409). The concept of “self-genealogy” or “autogenealogy” was laid out in Stegmaier 1992, p. 168. It was then adopted by Enrico Müller and Andreas Urs Sommer in their introduction to a series of essays on *Ecce Homo* (2005, p. 128, p. 130).



that there has been no explosion for a long time.” Thus genius is more a matter of destiny than of merit. The genius does not even hold in his hands the impact of the forces that are stored up in him; it is rather circumstances and the age that set off this impact (see TI IX 44). Thus even the presumptuousness with which Nietzsche speaks of himself as a genius collapses into a certain humility.

[15] The only thing the genius does hold in his hands is to become “*decent*” again: “It is my fate that I have to be the first *decent* human being; that I know myself to stand in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia ...”. Nietzsche’s use of the term “decency”, like that of “destiny”, “rabble”, and “fear”, is shot through with an astonishing revaluation, which I cannot trace here. Again the revaluation is directed toward himself, toward that which he calls “intellectual integrity” and does not find to a similar degree in anyone else.

[16] This sheer intellectual decency (or honesty or integrity) is the moral standard of *his* thought, on account of which he knows himself to be “**in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia**”. He has nothing more than this opposition, his personal opposition to the moral opposition of truth and lie that has reigned in European thought for millennia. Millennia are Nietzsche’s philosophical measure of time: he has in mind primarily the two millennia that have passed since the founding of philosophy and Christianity, but also the fact that Europe must “cast its goals millennia hence”, that it stands under the “*compulsion* to great politics” (BGE 208). This is the measure of time that measures up to his revaluation.

[17] Nietzsche says no more than that he “knows” himself to be “in opposition” to the old values and the supposed lack of alternatives to them. Two sentences later he says that he *is* an opposition. Clearly, “opposition” is in this case not a *conceptual* opposition like truth and lie, but rather an *existential* opposition precisely to such supposedly self-evident conceptual oppositions. One does not bother to contradict them anymore,<sup>39</sup> but rather stumbles into opposition to them by living differently, experiencing differently, thinking differently. Nietzsche approaches metaphysical oppositions from the place that their millennia-old cult has most staunchly excluded: experience. And he proceeds from those experiences that are most difficult to grasp conceptually and are thus considered the most shapeless and unstable: experiences of taste and smell: he “**experienced – smelled ...**” lies.

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<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche also advises in HAH II WS 211 that one not bother to refute the ideas of others, “that which you want to do away with for good”, but rather seek to “respectfully *lay it on ice*”; and, in as much as ideas are very tenacious of life, do so again and again.” See also Wotling 2008, p. 2f.



[18] Reason that is committed to metaphysical oppositions cannot be refuted by that same reason. Instead one needs a feel for concepts and for the hardships of life to which they respond: “**My genius is in my nostrils ...**”. To Zarathustra Nietzsche ascribed “blessed nostrils”, to himself “sensitive nostrils” in the use of concepts (Z III “The Return Home”; BGE 252).<sup>40</sup> Nostrils are the olfactory organs of horses: Nietzsche is likely alluding to Plato’s famous myth of the soul as a chariot (*Phaedrus*, 246a–b), in which reason directs the horses but is also dragged along by them.<sup>41</sup>

[19] In the final third of the aphorism, Nietzsche further intensifies his expressions: “fate” becomes “calamity”; “crisis on earth” becomes “upheavals” and “earthquakes”; “collision” becomes “war of spirits”, “dynamite” becomes “exploded into the air”. The opposition which he is, he now formulates as a riddle: “**I contradict as has never been contradicted before and am nevertheless the opposite of a No-saying spirit.**” In an existential opposition, a double negative does not yield a simple affirmative. A habitually “No-saying spirit” would be a “spirit of *ressentiment*” (GM II 11); thus a “Yes-saying spirit” must be free of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche dares to declare his “[f]reedom from *ressentiment*”, since he has been downright forced into it: his “protracted sickness” – itself “a kind of *ressentiment*” that could have driven him into deepest *ressentiment* against his life and against life itself – has compelled him, he says, in order simply to survive, to “enlightenment about *ressentiment*” (EH I 6). Saying No to *ressentiment* is hard to differentiate, however, from the No-saying of *ressentiment*; thus it is a “contradiction as has never been contradicted before”, a being differently and thinking differently than *ressentiment* would generally have it. Nietzsche called it a “doing No”, which is not to be brought back to gen-

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**40** See also Z IV “Among Daughters of the Wilderness”, and EH III D 1. He also noted to himself (presumably as an addendum to *Ecce Homo*): “I will dare to suggest a proprium of my nature, particularly as it is almost the proprium. I have something that I call my inner nostrils. In each encounter with people, the first thing that reveals itself to me is the degree of inner cleanliness [– –] – It is precisely the ‘beautiful souls’ who smell particularly uncleanly to me. Where someone stands in relation to himself, how someone deceives himself, whether he persists in dealing with himself unequivocally, – whether he can bear himself or finds it necessary to have an ‘ideal’ ... The idealist smells bad to me...” (NF 1888, 21[8]; KSA 13/581f. / KGW IX 3: N VII 4, 32f.).

**41** He noted that thinkers should learn to break in horses: “One must work out his drives. [...] One could, as a thinker, also break in horses very well. Or command them.” (NF 1881, 11[31]; KSA 9/453). In D 201 he used the image for “noble culture”, and in BGE 284 he established skilful horse-riding as a sign of nobility itself. Nietzsche himself learned horse-riding as a student.

eral concepts and conceptual oppositions, but rather only to be demonstrated. And Nietzsche demonstrated it in his “type” Zarathustra.<sup>42</sup>

[20] The “*bringer of glad tidings*” Christ, however, of whom Nietzsche spoke as the “type of Jesus”, was also the “opposite of a No-saying spirit”, as Nietzsche had recognized in *The Antichrist*: he too was characterized by “the freedom, the superiority over any feeling of *ressentiment*” (AC 40), even though his “evangelical practice” (AC 33) was dogmatized, in a later “*world-historical irony*” (AC 36), into a religion of *ressentiment* (AC 43). To that Nietzsche responds with a new, “fifth gospel”, as he called *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (KSB 6/327).<sup>43</sup> He then says of himself here: “**I am a bringer of glad tidings like no one before me**”, a bringer of glad tidings who would liberate the glad tidings from the *ressentiment*-laden thinking that has settled over it through the millennia. For the moment that can mean only “**tasks**” and “**hopes**”, but then also “**upheavals**” and, as Nietzsche adds in the following aphorism, “**destructions**”.<sup>44</sup> The existential affirmation of a new orientation from the ground up necessitates a dissolution of the old orientation.

[21] Therefore Nietzsche must also be “**the man of calamity**”. He had already ascribed to his Zarathustra “the heaviest fate, a fatality of a task”. Even “he that has the hardest, most terrible insight into reality, that has thought the ‘most abysmal idea,’” the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, “nevertheless does not consider it an objection to existence, not even to its eternal re-

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42 See EH III Z 6: “The psychological problem in the type of Zarathustra is how he that says No and *does* No to an unheard-of degree, to everything to which one has so far said Yes, can nevertheless be the opposite of a No-saying spirit”. The difference between “saying No” and “doing No”, for its part, is not contradictory. Nietzsche links these concepts, too: see above EH III Z 6 and EH III BGE 1; NF 1887/88, 11[228]: KSA 13/90 / KGW VII, W II 3, 110, and 11[327]: KSA 13/139f. / KGW VII, W II 3, 54; NF 1888, 14[15]: KSA 13/225 / KGW VIII, W II 5, 183. “Doing No” can issue from “saying Yes” and vice versa, and in order to reach the point of “doing No”, to reach “the certainty of value standards, the deliberate employment of a unity of method, a shrewd courage, the ability to stand alone and give an account of oneself”, one must take “pleasure in saying No and in taking things apart” and have “a certain levelheaded cruelty that knows how to handle a knife surely and subtly, even when the heart bleeds” (BGE 210). On the turn from the adversative “against”, from saying No, to the Dionysian saying Yes that includes oppositions, see Schank 1993, p. 119.

43 Nietzsche to Ernst Schmeitzner, 13 February 1883. See Blondel 1980.

44 See EH IV 2: “I am by far the most terrible human being that has existed so far; this does not preclude the possibility that I shall be the most beneficial. I know the pleasure in destroying to a degree that accords with my powers to destroy – in both respects I obey my Dionysian nature which does not know how to separate doing No from saying Yes. I am the first immoralist: that makes me the annihilator *par excellence*.”

currence – but rather one reason more for being himself the eternal Yes to all things, ‘the tremendous, unbounded saying Yes and Amen’” (EH III Z 6).

[22] Finally, Nietzsche returns to the “crisis” with which he began. With the intensification of dynamite (which he has purposely introduced) to an inevitable earthquake, the blasting metaphor itself explodes:<sup>45</sup> “[W]hen truth enters into a fight with the lies of millennia, we shall have upheavals, a convulsion of earthquakes, a moving of mountains and valleys, the like of which has never been dreamed of.” The formulas “as has never been contradicted before”, “like no one before me”, “the like of which has never been dreamed of” were inserted last.<sup>46</sup> The event of the “revaluation of all values” will surpass everything that has been; the painful struggle in philosophy, science, morality and religion will transcend those realms and shock even the common orientation from the ground up. In this crisis Christian morality, as dogmatized by Greek concepts, will manifest its deep rootedness in the thought of Europeans and will thus determine the politics whose most extreme means is war. But wars over values will no longer be mere struggles for power, which can be ended by dynasties or nations as easily as they were incited, but rather “war[s] of spirits” with and over truths, morals, religions – in short, ideologies,<sup>47</sup> which creep and spread for a long time and then suddenly make an explosive impact. They are, as the twentieth century sufficiently demonstrated, the most dangerous dy-

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45 Heinrich Köselitz had encouraged Nietzsche in this. The title that Nietzsche initially considered for *Twilight of the Idols*, “Idleness of a Psychologist”, seemed to Köselitz “too modest”. He desired “a more resplendent, more dazzling title”, and offered the following rationale: “You have taken your artillery to the highest peaks; you have ordnance such as never existed and need only to shoot blindly to frighten your surroundings. The gait of a giant, which causes the mountains to tremble in their very foundations, is not idleness.” (Heinrich Köselitz to Nietzsche, 20 September 1888, KGB III/6, 309). David S. Thatcher has shown how Nietzsche then expands this metaphor in subsequent letters (1985, p. 252–257).

46 See NF 1888/89, 25[6]: KSA 13/640. See also the draft of the letter to Kaiser Wilhelm II from early December 1888, KSB 8/503f., which largely corresponds to the text of the note.

47 See GS 283: there Nietzsche anticipates an “age that will carry heroism into the search for knowledge and that will wage wars for the sake of ideas and their consequences”, for which are necessary “more endangered human beings, more fruitful human beings, happier beings” – in short, free spirits in the Nietzschean sense, who live according to the imperative: “Live at war with your peers and yourselves!” Nietzsche has Zarathustra say something similar: “And if you cannot be saints of knowledge, at least be its warriors” (Z I “On War and Warriors”). See also Kofman 1993, p. 346f. The word “ideology” does appear in Nietzsche, though he seldom uses it. See BGE 44 and NF 1888, 15[113]: KSA 13/473 / KGW IX 9, W II 6, 28.

namite, further and literally employed by terrorism in the twenty-first century, as well.<sup>48</sup>

Nietzsche used the phrase “**great politics**” early on, at first (and ironically) for the new German Empire.<sup>49</sup> In his later work “great” means not that which towers over other things, but rather that which is not negated by its opposition, does not perish by it, but rather can make it fruitful for himself and grow from it. In this way the “great reason of the body” makes the “little reason”, pure reason, its “instrument and toy” (Z I “On the Despisers of the Body”); a “great health” can “give itself up” to grave sickness and thus become more robust (GS 382); “the *great* life” itself lives off war (TI V 3); “great tolerance” can, with “*magnanimous* self-mastery”, tolerate intolerance and grow from it (AC 38); and “*great* style” can unite the highest pathos with sobriety and cheer (EH III 4). In this sense, “great politics” is a politics that includes that which is usually opposed to it: spirit, in the form of morality, religion, science, philosophy, or “a war of spirits”. In his alarming “promemoria” to “great politics”, written at the turn from 1888 to 1889, Nietzsche is still concerned with a politics of war “not between nation and nation” and “not between classes”, but rather “straight through all absurd accidents of nation, class, race, profession, upbringing, education: a war as between rise and fall, between the will to life and vengefulness

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**48** As his notes in the margin of EH show, Nietzsche does not take sides with peoples or nations, estates or classes, even less with races. Instead he wants to “found a party of life, strong enough for great politics” (NF December 1888 – early January 1889, 25[1]: KSA 13/637f.). It is “madness”, for Nietzsche, that wars among dynasties or nations would “put elites of strength and youth and power before the cannon” (NF 25[15]: KSA 13/645). Nietzsche wrote to the Paris journalist Jean Bourdeau, to whom he sent his “proclamation” against the Hohenzollern dynasty: “I honestly think it possible to bring order to the whole absurd situation of Europe by means of a kind of world-historical laughter, without even a drop of blood having to flow. In other words: the *Journal des Débats* is enough ...” (Nietzsche to Jean Bourdeau, presumably 1 January 1889, KSB 8/570). Friedrich Balke (2003, p. 198–205) follows through to Nietzsche’s final notes his talk of war and a war of spirits, which gave even Giorgio Colli such a fright that he believed one could see here already the onset of madness (though without any indication in the texts themselves). According to Balke, Nietzsche is only drawing the consequences from that which Michel Foucault would call “biopolitics”, and which had been immanent in European politics for ages, as Peter Sloterdijk then pointed out (Sloterdijk 2001b; see p. 323–330 on Nietzsche). Now wars “are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone” (Foucault 1990, p. 137).

**49** Ottmann has given a thorough presentation of the meaning of “great politics” in all its facets in Nietzsche (1999, p. 232–92).

against life, between integrity and treacherous mendacity...’ (NF 1888/89, 25[1]: KSA 13/637).<sup>50</sup>

### 3 The Decidability of Truth as the Destiny of Humanity

In sum, then, this aphorism draws the consequences from Nietzsche’s “uncovering” of Christian morality as articulated by means of Greek philosophy and as has shaped Europe for millennia. The exposure and enlightenment of this morality had become possible through the conscience that it itself had cultivated. In Nietzsche’s time, the absolute (i. e., detached from life and its fortunes) value of an absolute truth – which was supposed to recognize adequately, and moreover give meaning to, all of life’s sufferings<sup>51</sup> – had plainly become unbelievable. Since, in the European tradition, all other values were based on this value, a “re-valuation of all values” was inevitably called for. According to Nietzsche, it was

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**50** Here Nietzsche also noted his most dreadful sentences (from the perspective of the experience of the twentieth century): great politics “wants to create a power that is strong enough to cultivate humanity as something complete and higher, with ruthless hardness against the degenerative and parasitic in life, – against that which corrupts, poisons, denigrates, ruins ... and sees in the destruction of life the sign of a higher kind of soul” (NF 1888/89, 25[1]: KSA 13/638). But this is not a manifesto for the killing of the disabled and certainly not for the murder of European Jews. The National Socialists, with their nationalism, socialism and anti-Semitism, would have been an abomination to Nietzsche, whose writings they found “too anti-nationalistic, too anti-German, too anti-philistine, too anti-revanchist, too anti-collectivist, too anti-militaristic, too anti-anti-rational, too anti-anti-Semitic, [...] too irreconcilable with all politics of *ressentiment*” (Sloterdijk 2001a, p. 59), so that they could not have invoked those writings without falsifying them. It was the National Socialists who first used the concepts of the degenerate and the parasitic in this manner. And Nietzsche did not publish these notes, which he composed at the same time as the drafts for the introductory aphorism of EH IV. In the notes to EH IV 1, there follows another paragraph which he likewise did not publish: “I know nothing that would be more opposed to the noble meaning of my task than this execrable incitement to the egoism of a nation [*Volk*] or a race that now lays claim to the name ‘great politics’; I have no words to express my contempt for the intellectual standard that now, in the form of the German Reich Chancellor and with the Prussian officer-attitudes of the Hohenzollern house, believes itself called to be the ruler of the history of humanity [...]. There is more dynamite between heaven and earth than is dreamt of by these bloodstained idiots...” (NF 1888/89, 25[6]2: KSA 13/640f.). On the aphorism that Nazi physicians liked to invoke – TI IX 36 – and other notorious “passages”, see the concluding remark in Stegmaier 2006, p. 38–41.

**51** See NF 1886/87, 5[7]1: KSA 12/211 / KGW IX 3, N VII 4, 14 (Lenzer Heide note on “European Nihilism”).

his “lot” and “calamity” to have to see that unmistakably, to have to articulate it with incorruptible decency, and thus to have to become the “destiny” of European humanity and, to the extent that all the world falls under European influence, the destiny of all humanity. The “event” of the revaluation responds, according to Nietzsche, to world-historical events from past millennia: Socrates’s push for a super-personal truth in the name of Apollo, the god of Delphi, although Socrates admitted no example of that truth; Jesus’s witness to a truth of love, of which he alone was an example. Both personas lent authority to a truth that transcended them, and both vouched for that truth with their lives.<sup>52</sup> Both were followed by others who took up their truth as super-personal and universal, as the truth of something universal. Paul supported the Christian truth of love, so that he could spread it around the world, through the Greek truth of the universal; Paul’s successors retained the Greek truth in the name of the Christian truth, so that both truths, despite their very different origins, found stability in each other for millennia. If the absolute value of this Greek-Christian truth has now become unbelievable, then the “tasks” of giving to humanity new values and the “hopes” that rest upon them fall, according to Nietzsche, back to individuals with the power to do so, a power that must match or even exceed that of Socrates and Jesus of Nazareth. Nietzsche tried to give form to such power in his Zarathustra, the figure of an individual person with a proven “courage to stand alone” and to be “lonely” even and especially in his thought. Moreover, Nietzsche placed his philosophy under the “concept of Dionysus”, the god who unites in himself all oppositions in which humans arrange their world and thus brings

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52 Nietzsche’s title *Ecce Homo*, which appears three times in his work (see below) might also recall the traditional ceremony of the “Ecce” in Schulpforta, the memorial ceremony for deceased professors and alumni on the day before the final Sunday of the liturgical year, which clearly had a deep impact on its participants. Pupils and teachers sang “*Ecce quomodo moritur justus*” (The righteous perish). According to numerous reports, the ceremony made such an impression on the students that they automatically connected the “Ecce” to their own deaths. Even the National Socialists preserved the “Ecce” ceremony when they turned Schulpforta into a “National Political Institute of Education” in 1935. See Bohley 2007, p. 135–138. Nietzsche experienced five general and seven special “Ecce” ceremonies, which he mentions primarily in his letters: see, for example, Nietzsche to Franziska Nietzsche, 20 August 1860, KSB 1/120. Thus, with his *Ecce Homo*, he could have been (again, ironically?) singing his own death song. In “Joke, Cunning, and Revenge”, the “Prelude in German Rhymes” to *The Gay Science*, he included a poem, modelled after Goethe, called “Ecce homo”: “Yes! I know from where I came! / Ever hungry like a flame, / I consume myself and glow. / Light grows all that I conceive, / Ashes everything I leave: / Flame I am assuredly” (no. 62). But he also knows that “some wretched loafer of a moralist” can “paint himself on the wall” as the image of the human “and comment, ‘*Ecce homo!*’” (TI V 6). Ultimately he titled the genealogy of his “destiny” *Ecce Homo* – which earns him the charge of “duplicity” and “resentment” from Conway (1993, p. 63–66).

them into motion ever anew, against the desire to solidify them as much as possible so as to achieve a lasting stability. Therefore, those who had tied themselves to the truth of a timeless universal, a truth that had now become “lie”, were now to become free again for a life in which everything has its time, even truth, and for the new truth of decision about truth from time to time. In this way truth too becomes the object of politics, of “great politics” of spirits that have the power to make decisions about the truth. Thus can one take even this unheard-of aphorism philosophically seriously and at its word.

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