Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*: Behold the Beast

Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* is not only an "act" (as Michael Ryan has ably discussed), but, I will argue, an animal act, a bestial gesture, intentionally subversive of its anthropocentric title. As subject and object, speaker and audience of this ontological interrogation of himself, Nietzsche both vindicates and emulates Pilate in his attempts to demythify the Messiah and clear away the ambiguity of the false doubles: "Hear me! I am such and such. Above all, do not confuse me with another!" (3, *EH*, 511). But the man thus revealed is not the spectacle of suffering, the exhibit of mortal vulnerability offered to arouse the pity of the rabble. Nietzsche, as ever, scorns the spectacle in the interest of penetrating the body's mysterious processes, to throb to the pulse and warm to the currents of the blood coursing into the mysterious heart of organic life. On his forty-fourth birthday, then, at the peak of his intellectual maturity and notoriety, Nietzsche offers us his physiological autobiography, his portrait—no, demonstration—of the philosopher as Naturwesen. This bestial gesture informs the mysterious rhetorical play of the work that destroys the conventional relationship between author and reader. If the animal is truly autotelic, living from and by and for itself in an oblivion of the "other," beyond the reach of the consciousness, recognition, and judgment of the "other," then Nietzsche as a creatural writer and philosopher must negate his audience and rehabilitate his own polemical motives to serve purely self-reflexive ends. "And so I tell my life to myself" (3, *EH*, 515). Like Pilate, who denied Messianic authority when he foreclosed an answer by posing, What is truth? as a purely rhetorical question, Nietzsche enforces a distinction between authority and power in his aggressive polemic. Authority has reference both to truth and to the "other"; power has reference only to itself. *Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche's anti-Messianic exercise of animal vigor.

In this enterprise Nietzsche must counter and reverse all the normal psychological and literary strategies of autobiography.
His animal “act” must have a spontaneity and unselfconsciousness that sets it apart from the self-dramatizations of confessional literature, as well as from their denial in sincere, “natural,” and self-effacing postures. Nietzsche, who argues that repression and censorship inevitably mark the site of truth (3, *EH*, 512), uses an exaggerated boastfulness to restore explicitness to the brutal self-interest behind much modest autobiographical self-examination: “Why I am so wise,” “Why I am so clever,” “Why I write such good books,” “Why I am a destiny.” To mistake this braggadocio for vanity would erroneously impute to Nietzsche a laughable rhetorical naïveté that overlooks his transparently mischievous intention. He knows that his tone will repel his readers and abort any possibility of aggrandizing his philosophical reputation. But oblivious to the response of the “other,” he discharges his high animal spirits in the very flamboyance of his expression, in the reckless transgression of good manners and modesty, in the exuberant childishness of the diction. Nietzsche calculates no return on his discourse; it is a deliberate throwing away of talent, a squandering of wit, like the style of *Zarathustra* itself (“Till then no one will grasp the artistry that was wasted here” [3, *EH*, 550]).

Whereas conventional biography treats the self as a cultural product, a nexus of genius and *Bildung*, Nietzsche’s exploration of the natural etiology of his being reduces even his parents to purely genetic prototypes, to proleptic models of his own biological fate. “I have, to express it in riddle, already died as my father; as my mother I am still alive and will grow old” (3, *EH*, 516). His negation of cultural influence, both received and exerted, guarantees his originality and individualism, a claim beyond egotism since it lodges his creativity in the blind, animal genius of his organism. This, then, is the fiction upon which *Ecce Homo* is founded: the fiction of Nietzsche as a child of Nature, discovering his body, his instincts, his physiology experimentally by creatively working through his illnesses and convalescences without benefit of book learning or scientific theorizing. That his physiological, vitalistic approach itself is inevitably derivative of Darwinian discoveries is a truth appropriated by another animal gesture—a kind of “forgetting”—that, unlike repression, does not turn truth into a pathogen but allows it to exert its effects naturally, instinctively, unconsciously. Yet we can find in Nietzsche’s early works the complex concatenation of influences (for example, idealistic appropriations of Darwinian

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theory) that he had to "overcome" in a kind of Zarathustran Überwindung.

Another version of his denial of cultural influence, and related to it, is Nietzsche's fear of being mistaken for another or confused with a false double. Unless its action of biological "overcoming" is perceived, this fear of misunderstanding might easily be misconstrued as an all too human concession to vanity and regard for public opinion. But Nietzsche seeks neither to protect the credulity of his disciples (as does Christ) nor to control the fidelity of his reputation. Rather, something ontological is at stake for him: the danger of attenuated being that comes with appropriation by an "other," akin to animal adaptation or domestication, a danger that must be countered offensively rather than defensively. His most dangerous "doubles" are controversial and notorious figures like himself, ostensible heretics who are, paradoxically, no more than sheep in wolves' (or apes') clothing: Charles Darwin, for example ("other academic oxen [Hornvieh] have suspected me of Darwinism," [3, EH, 547]), and even, implicitly, David Strauss, whose misappropriation of Darwin ("With a certain coarse contentment he cloaks himself in the hairy dress of our ape-genealogist and promotes Darwin as one of the greatest benefactors of mankind" [1, UM, 167]) he excoriates in Untimely Meditations. Nietzsche's attack on Strauss's disguised humanism obscures the genuinely iconoclastic impact of Strauss's mythopoeic New Testament criticism (Das Leben Jesu, which cost him his theological chair at the University of Zurich) as well as the proleptic relationship of Strauss's last confession (Der Alte und der Neue Glaube) to Ecce Homo. The physiologism of Nietzsche's autobiography could well be mistaken for the scientific materialism of Strauss's book.

Nietzsche's physiologism (the referral of all of his actions, attributes, and achievements to his living body) is perhaps sui generis, if we allow for its circular origin in his psychological appropriation of his own Bildung. He does conduct in Ecce Homo (as in his earlier works) a radical Darwinian critique in accordance with his own early exhortation of David Strauss ("His task should rather have been to draw out and seriously explain the phenomena of goodness, mercy, love, and self-abnegation, actually at hand, from his Darwinistic premises" [1, UM, 168]). But he does so in action, not in words, thereby correcting another Straussian fault: "He cannot muster an aggressive action, only aggressive words" (1, UM, 167). From his early
admiration in his letter of 4 August 1877 to Malwida von Mey­

senbug, in which Darwin, as contributor to *Mind*, is counted
among the "philosophical greats" and "authorities" of English
intellectual life (4, *PW*, 732), to the later insults of Darwin’s
exactitude and diligence as marks of intellectual mediocrity (3,
*BGE*, 165), Nietzsche’s critique of Darwin is governed by a
discernible logic: he consistently attacks the putative power of
the environment in Darwin’s theory. "The influence of 'external
conditions' is ridiculously overestimated by Darwin: the essence
of the life process is precisely the monstrously formative, from
the inside creative power, that uses and exploits 'external cir­
cumstances'" (4, *PW*, 481). This explains such apparent contra­
dictions as Nietzsche’s argument for the deep effects of adapta­
tion and the superficial effects of domestication, an argument
that makes sense only if adaptation is granted a genetic and
domestication an environmental origin. But even if, arguably,
Nietzsche is here guilty of a méconnaissance of Darwin’s quasi­
vitalistic premises, it permits him the act of appropriating to
himself the radical residue of Darwinian theory (the primacy of
irrational, unconscious power as the source of the organism’s
life, behavior, and knowledge) while extruding the optimistic,
progressive, humanistic, and utilitarian "Darwin." Nietzsche
thereby acts out his own will to power: his organism knows and
does what it is fated to know and do (with or without Darwinian
theory), creating from the inside, while Darwin is exploited and
discarded as a mere environmental factor.

Nietzsche’s quarrel with Darwin is less over the "facts" of
natural selection than over their interpretation, a hermeneutical
dispute that, if cast into aesthetic categories as a conflict between
a tragic and a comic view of nature, helps not only to identify the
affective impetus behind Nietzsche’s anti-Darwinism, but also
"naturalizes" the cultural terms by exploring their biological
resonances. "Fundamental errors of biologists to date: it is not a
question of species, but of more strongly effective individuals.
(The many are only a means.) Life is not the adaptation of
internal needs to external ones, but a will to power, which from
the inside increasingly subjects and appropriates [einverleibt] the 'external'" (4, *PW*, 490). Nietzsche critiques Darwinian Na­
ture as imbued with a utilitarian bias, as a comic universe whose
survival and perpetual reintegration is effected by the expulsion
of the misfits and weaklings who dilute the strength and welfare
of the racial and social group. To Nietzsche, then, the environ­
ment, the species, numbers, the "other," are all mediating fac­

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tors ("die Vielen sind nur Mittel") in several senses of the term: they are inserted into the organism’s natural play of power and instinct and require it to behave reactively or defensively, and by obliging the organism to compromise its power and desire vis-à-vis the exigencies of environment, group, or “other,” they cause it to become average and mediocre. Nietzsche construes Darwin as interpreting this state of affairs optimistically, while he himself views it as the tragedy of the powerful individual, the hero, the passionate organism destroyed by its own greatest qualities (its aggressiveness, its libidinal excess, its wild courage, its lonesome pride) in order that the mediocre niveau might live. Like all hermeneutical disputes, this one hinges on a question of value, and Nietzsche leaves to Darwin the conservative values of comedy, with its preservation of the status quo, while arrogating to himself the dangerous profligacy of the tragic.

"Useful" [nützlich] in the sense of Darwinian biology means: to prove itself advantageous in the fight with others. But I would consider the feeling of excess [Mehrgfühl], the feeling of becoming stronger, quite apart from its usefulness in battle, as the actual progress: the will to fight originates in these feelings. 'Useful' in relation to accelerating the tempo of development is different from "useful" in relation to the greatest security and permanence of the developed organism. (4, PW, 487)

Although Darwin does not reckon with the mediation of lacks, gaps, and deficiencies as a producer of culture, Darwin and Nietzsche both believe in the vitalistic continuity of Nature and culture, a belief with inevitable self-reflexive implications for the irrational basis of their own intellectual endeavors. For Nietzsche, his research into the natural genesis of all forms of cultural life (note his titles, "The Birth of Tragedy," "The Genealogy of Morals") required a methodological innovation he called "backward inference" ("jene schwierigste und verfänglichste Form des Rückschlusses") "from the work to its creator, from the deed to the doer, from the ideal to the one who needs it, from every way of thinking and valuing to the governing desideratum behind it" (2, GS, 519). In exploring the intellectual heritage of learned individuals, Nietzsche argues that occupational and environmental conditions became internalized in those unfit to overcome them ("the form of the paternal occupation became their content" [2, GS, 488]) and were genetically transmitted to their scholarly progeny. Clerks and secretaries

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therefore produced scholars limited to a barren schematizing. But the best medical doctors are the sons of medical doctors, like Nietzsche’s personal physician, Dr. Eiser (“I have much regard for the born physicians” [Nietzsche to Malwida von Meysenbug, 4 August 1877, 4, PW, 732]). Along the same line, Nietzsche dismisses those aspects of Darwinian theory he most abjures—the Malthusian premise of scarce resources and the primacy of the ensuing struggle for survival—as the symptoms of an impoverished and plebeian ancestry. “All English Darwinism is enveloped in something like the suffocating air of overpopulation, like the smell of little people in need and tight straits” (2, GS, 489). Never mind that Charles Darwin, married to a Wedgwood pottery heiress from his own family, raised ten children on a spacious, airy estate in rural England. Nietzsche discounts present environmental factors in favor of genetic predisposition.

*Ecce Homo* is an application of Nietzsche’s “backward inference” to himself and his philosophizing, and both his motives and his methods are biocentric, giving biological play to his organism while explaining its biological and psychological constitution. He thereby fulfills the function of the “philosophical physician” he had called for years before, in *The Gay Science*, who dares to say, “All philosophizing to date has been a matter not at all of ‘truth,’ but of something else entirely, let us say health, future, growth, power, life” (2, GS, 286). It is, therefore, not his authority as a philosopher that he aims to establish in *Ecce Homo* but his fitness to philosophize, an ultimately medical fitness in a broad sense of the term: a demonstration of organic and instinctual soundness, of aggressiveness and courage, of vitalistic excess and exuberance. “In this one it is his deficiencies that philosophize, in another his riches and strengths” (2, GS, 284). A valid comprehension of the body can be guaranteed only by a fine biological condition, a health organically and instinctually won: not by the theoretical and abstract knowledge of the scientific doctor, but by the inner, experiential knowing of the animal, the affective, intuitive gay science that might heal the nearly fatal errors of the old philosophy. “And often enough I have asked myself if, taken in a broad sense, philosophy to date has only been an interpretation of the body, and a misunderstanding of the body” (2, GS, 285).¹

*Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche’s assertion of the health and power behind his “wisdom,” “cleverness,” and “ability to write such good books,” an assertion that in the aggressiveness of its impu-
dence transcends mere posturing to function as a living demonstration of a strong constitution. But in order for the human to "become what one is," namely, a robust Naturwesen, it must be governed by a comprehensive physiological, psychological, and cultural hygiene that insures that the organism's every action is stimulated from the inside and flows from its will to power. Nietzsche's task is to make this hygiene explicit, not as a kindness or help to his readers and followers but as a Zarathustran gift, which is to say, a self-reflexive gift motivated only by the giver's need to discharge his excess riches, his superfluous good health, his opulent happiness. Neither does Ecce Homo, therefore, function as a hygiene manual, because its example and advice are inimitable, cannot be copied or learned, and, therefore, function in neither an exemplary nor advisory fashion. Nonetheless it is offered, albeit for Nietzsche's, not our benefit: a comprehensive grounding in the physiological basis of Nietzschean philosophy, from diet, climate, and manners, to discourse, rhetoric, and style.

In exploring the bestial gesture of Ecce Homo, I hope to demonstrate the grammatical collapse of its title, in which the putative object, the human or "man" on exhibit, is the same as the one commanding our attention, the "man" in the act of exhibiting or displaying. Nietzsche's imperative rhetoric therefore resonates with a recursive syntax: "Look at me telling you to look at me telling you to look at me telling you. . . ." Interpreted further, to focus its circular activity more precisely, it might read as, "I want you to look at me not because I want to see myself reflected in your eyes, but because I enjoy the power in the activity of telling you to look at me. . . ." In this action is demonstrated the Übermensch, whom I interpret as a recuperated animal, an animal "recovered" in both related senses of the word: as a human creature cured of its pathogenic culture and vitally reclaimed by its instinctual nature. But this human "becoming what one is" requires a series of animal acts, that, for the writer, include such literary (or perhaps antiliterary) strategies as "forgetting" the figurative meanings of metaphors, allegories, and parables, and restoring to them their repressed, literal, or bodily sense and their exuberant dithyrambic affect. Nietzsche had already performed these acts in Thus Spake Zarathustra, a work with a privileged place in Ecce Homo and in the Nietzschean oeuvre ("Within my writings, my Zarathustra stands for itself" [3, EH, 512]), and attention to the interplay between the mythopoecia and demythification, the poetic and
critical practice of these works will shed further light on Nietzsche's biomorphic literary enterprise. "Have I been understood? I have finally uttered no word that I might not have already spoken five years ago through the mouth of Zarathustra" (3, EH, 604).

I will proceed to explore the five sections of *Ecce Homo* (Preface, "Why I Am So Wise," "Why I Am So Clever," "Why I Write Such Good Books," "Why I Am a Destiny") in order, albeit with occasional reference to Zarathustra, because they do represent an elaboration of Nietzschean physiology into increasingly complex forms of behavior, social relations, and cultural problems. I will take the content of the work seriously, and literally, while treating it as the production of the ontological and stylistic gestures that are my major interest. I hope to show in this exploration, as throughout this work, that the textual expressions of the animal and its physiology are as varied, interesting, and instructive as the literature of the spiritual life of cultural man. And, finally, I will remain mindful of my own negated position as a critic, confronting a text beyond interpretation, whose yield of "meaning" remains irrelevant to the "act" that constitutes it. Reading *Ecce Homo* is like listening to a lion roaring in the wilderness.

The preface of *Ecce Homo* mirrors the crisis shaping Nietzsche's soul in the three months preceding his complete collapse in the Piazza Carlo Alberto in Turin. I am not thereby taking sides in the fierce, expert debate over the etiology and timing of Nietzsche's illness and its implication for the philosophical validity of the indisputably brilliant 1888 productions: *Der Fall Wagner, Der Anti-Christ, Dionyson-Dithyramben, Götzendämmerung, Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, and *Ecce Homo*. The preface (which actually consists of two prefaces or distinct sections, and which functions, synecdochically, as a preface to a preface, since *Ecce Homo* is itself treated as a prologue to a greater work) is of a divided and doubled nature, which I find symptomatic of Nietzsche's strategy for protecting the integrity of his enterprise by dealing physiologically with his increasingly complex role (real or imagined) as a cultural phenomenon. In the first preface he announces the misunderstandings threatened by his growing impact, influence, and fame; in the second he neutralizes these problems by treating his personal and literary success as a natural, organic ripening ("Not only the grape is turning brown" [3, EH, 515]), a physiological fulfillment ("I am now the most grateful man in the world—of an autumnal *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*
mind [herbstlich gesinnt] in every good sense of the word: it is my great harvest time” [Letter to Franz Overbeck, 18 October 1888, 4, PW, 915].

The two prefaces reflect the most conspicuous emotional features of Nietzsche’s correspondence during that fateful Turin autumn: his megalomania on the one hand (“In two years we shall have the whole earth in convulsions. . . . In two months I shall be the first name on earth. . . . I will from now on rule the world” [4, PW, 926–38]), and his exuberant health and happiness on the other. There are indisputable somatic links between them, regardless of the diagnosis, since both delusions of grandeur and a delirium of manic well-being could be symptomatic of all three major contenders: tertiary syphilis, schizophrenia, and cannabis addiction. However, they function as perfectly plausible expressions of an ilimitable will to power, provided that the egotism of the first does not betray Nietzsche to the social mediations that enthrall him to the power of the “other” and deliver him to the insidious hypocrisies of a Messianic role. Nietzsche’s resistance to the blandishments of vanity was not perfect; stung by his sister’s brutal insult that he was famous only among riffraff and Jews (“like Georg Brandes” [4, PW, 937]), he exaggerated Brandes’s list of Nietzschean disciples into an admiring cortege of select aristocrats and geniuses. But even in this childishly boastful letter to his mother (written at Turin 21 December 1888, shortly before his collapse) he begins to neutralize his vain enthrallment by erasing all mediations of his success (“You see, that is the masterstroke: without name, without rank, without riches, I am here treated like a little prince” [4, PW, 935]) and by claiming the real or imagined homage he receives not for his philosophy, his books, or his ideas but for himself, as a person, as a distinctly noble creature. In his correspondence with Peter Gast, to whom Schlechta attributes responsibility for the markedly scientific bent of the late Nietzschean output (5, Appendix, 97), Nietzsche transforms the homage of underlings from recognition and respect into something almost like the spoils of the hunt and the battle offered to the ruling lion by his pride. “Without question, I receive in my trattoria the best-tasting bites [die besten Bissen] they have: they are always recommending the most successful dishes. Between us, I have never known until today what it means to eat with a hearty appetite, likewise what I need to maintain my powers” (Nietzsche to Peter Gast, 30 October 1888, 4, PW, 918). Where earlier he had playfully wondered if someone was

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bribing service personnel to treat him well, he now implicitly refuses to attribute the excellent service to his excessive tipping; conversely, he tips not for better service, but because his largesse flows from his bounteous nature. The economic reciprocities are repressed in favor of maintaining the fiction of a natural homage tendered to a natural aristocrat.

The prefatory function both of the Vorwort and of Ecce Homo as a whole is in no sense a mere formality or convention. As the word before his own word, the words that precede his utterance, the Nietzschean preface is deliberately tautological, superfluous, excessive, an excrescence or lagniappe, like the tips dispersed to the waiters and vendors of Turin. His preface fills no gap in his writing and augments no lack of explanation or defect of clarity. In relation to his own work, past and future, Ecce Homo represents a doubling, a kind of spontaneous repetition motivated more by the pleasure of the activity that by any hermeneutical necessity. Nietzsche will argue in “Why I Write Such Good Books” for the interchangeability of his works and concepts. “In every psychologically decisive place the text deals only with me: one may carelessly substitute my name, or the word Zarathustra there where the text gives the word Wagner” (3, EH, 558). But the Nietzschean preface functions as Vorwort also in a second sense, not only as word before Nietzsche’s own word, but also as the word before the word of “others,” for example, the readers of various sympathies and self-interest who will respond to his word. In this sense, the temporal component of the preface, its precedence or coming before, defines Nietzsche’s gesture as appropriative, as he preempts or takes the critical ground as his own and thereby banishes the “other” (readers, critics, disciples) before they arrive on the scene and in advance of their utterance. Timing is crucial in Nietzschean conduct, in which the only genuine act is the preemptive act, the action “before the action of the other”; Nietzsche acts rather than reacts, fends rather than defends, and moves spontaneously rather than mimetically.

Both prefaces of Ecce Homo function to banish the “other” as object, recipient, beneficiary, or target of the work, and of Nietzsche’s philosophy as a whole. The first preface does so by stating its denial explicitly. “No ‘prophet’ speaks here . . . . No fanatic speaks here. . . . No one ‘preaches’ here, no ‘faith’ is demanded here” (3, 513); the “other” is evoked only in the context of its revocation. The second preface demonstrates its denial by simply omitting all reference to the “other.”
terms of cultural relations and exchanges that emerge in both prefaces—obligation (Pflicht), gratitude ("How could I not be thankful to my entire life?" [3, 515]), the gift—are all emptied of their function in social reciprocity or symbolic exchange and are instead endowed with circular, self-reflexive, physiological functions. Nietzsche’s Pflicht dramatizes, according to Michael Ryan, “the necessity of affirming, by submitting oneself to, the power of fate, instinct, physiology.” Nietzsche’s gratitude to his life is merely an unmotivated discharge of excessive gladness, an emotional overflow without a recipient or a purpose beyond achieving affective relief. And the gift of Nietzsche’s thought, particularly Zarathustra ("With it I made humankind the greatest gift that has ever been made to it") is a gift stripped of all reciprocal function, of all economic motive, of all meditative power and social utility. Nietzsche restores his word to Nature by transforming it, like Zarathustra’s teaching, into a fated, inevitable, organic poison, a wild autumnal harvest shed indiscriminately upon the unembarrassed and ungrateful creatures of the wild.

Figs fall from the trees, they are good and sweet; and as they fall, their red skin tears open. I am an arctic wind to ripe figs.

So, like figs, these teachings fall to you, my friends; now drink their juice and eat their sweet flesh! It is autumn hereabouts and pure sky and afternoon. (3, EH, 513)

Nietzschean rhetoric, then, is also emptied of its social, instrumental, and strategic function. Ecce Homo is delivered in the rhetoric of bounty; it is a harvest celebration, a thanksgiving prayer, a blessing that, like Zarathustra’s curse (with its violent eruption of thunder and lightning)" is nontriangular and non-reciproc. It is not a Te Deum, a spiritual discourse with God or with a personified Nature, in which organic gifts and the speech of thanks function as symbolic gestures of mediation. “How could I not be grateful to my entire life? And so I tell my life to myself” (3, EH, 515). Here, as in Zarathustra, the soliloquy fulfills less a psychological than an ontological function, of defining the speaker as a self-generating organism. The genesis of discourse in Nietzschean thought is therefore grounded not only in the metaphor of the gift but also in specifically natural metaphors and analogies of self-generation, fertility, and overflowing. Zarathustra, in his aubadelike opening, squanders his blessing on a sun that is fated only to give, never to receive, and

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whose perpetual self-generation stands for him in ontological contrast to the reflective, mediated moon with its borrowed light (as it later does for D. H. Lawrence).

For ten years you've come up here to my cave: you would have become glutted with your light and tired of your path but for me, my eagle, and my snake.

But we awaited you every morning, relieved you of your excess and blessed you for it. See! I am glutted with my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need hands stretched out to me. (2, Z, 551)

In Ecce Homo Nietzsche likewise presents himself as a producer of harvest (not a reaper), that is, as a Nature. The perpetual wellspring and the eternal waterfall serve as other Nietzschean metaphors of the self-generating discourse. "I have become mouth entirely and totally, and the rushing of a brook from tall cliffs: I want to crash my speech down into the valleys" (2, Z, 616). Elsewhere the need to discharge his excess is given the particularly physiological exigency of fertility ("But his wisdom grew and caused him pain with its fulness" [2, Z, 615]) although the implicit bovine metaphor of swollen udders is suppressed.11

Nietzsche, aware that metaphors themselves function as media of exchange in the cultural economy of meaning and communication, strips his metaphors as much as possible of their symbolic value. "Autumn," in Ecce Homo, is such a one, its layers of abstract significance peeled back to a primary reference, a literal residue, a "fact," a biological truth. The preface to Ecce Homo was written in autumn of 1888, and its "now" was the fall of the year. It was written on Nietzsche's birthday, 15 October, making the biological Nietzsche himself an autumnal product, brought forth at the time of organic ripening and fruition, harvested with the wheat. In refutation of the conservative significance of the birthday as a symbolic event—a celebration of survival, of longevity, of the quantitative accumulation of years—Nietzsche celebrates the vitality of his perpetual "now." "Not in vain did I today bury my forty-fourth year; I could bury it: what was life in it is saved, is immortal" (3, EH, 515). But that this indestructible residue of his life must not be construed as the immortality of fame is attested by Nietzsche's Dionysian dithyramb, "Ruhm und Ewigkeit," written in the same autumn as Ecce Homo.
This coin, with which  
The whole world pays,  
Fame;  
I grasp this coin with gloves  
And trample it in disgust.  
(3, 707)

Nietzsche implicitly contrasts the reciproccal and triangular economy of prestige ("You invite a witness when you want to speak well of yourselves; and when you have seduced him into thinking well of you, then you think well of yourselves" [2, Z, 598]) with the direct and unilinear economy of nonaltruistic giving, the highest "virtue." For that, Nietzsche invokes a complex metaphor of gold stripped of its symbolic, anthropomorphic, endowed value to stand as an unappropriated natural object, "rare, useless, with a shining and mild glow; it gives itself" (2, Z, 610). The "value" of Ecce Homo, too, I believe, is meant to be that of gold found in Nature, self-radiating whether read or unread.

In his first investigation, "Why I Am So Wise," we see how neatly Nietzsche's argumentative strategy outstrips his explanations to serve as demonstration or dramatization of his "wisdom." By rights, that is, by any conventional logic, Nietzsche's chronic, debilitating ill health, which forced him on pension at the age of thirty-five, should be an excruciating embarrassment for someone who believes that wisdom is the organism's successful struggle for physiological and instinctual health. But it is precisely Nietzsche's refusal to be embarrassed, along with his refusal to deny, minimize, circumvent, or defend the problem, that dramatizes his triumph, his appropriation and exploitation of his illness. Nietzsche thereby enacts his complex and consistent theory of the automedical process and its epistemological consequence, his Kranken-Optik, a short-lived tour de force that succumbed to the impending ravages of his physical and mental breakdown but nonetheless withstands the denigrating psychoanalysis of such clinicians as Max Kesselring, who patronizingly puts Nietzsche, with his entire philosophy, in his psychotic place in an anthropocentric, moralistic, rationalistic medical model. "The mistrust against everything that he formerly revered in himself and in others, this mixture of scorn, jaundice, disgust, shame, wilfulness and relish in wilfulness, the aimless quest in a desert and, simultaneously, the effort, amplified by a powerful ambition, to reverse all values—are these 'drives' toward the

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'establishment' of a new philosophy not in themselves proof of a 'Diseased-Optic' at work, even if Nietzsche had not expressly confirmed this?" Nietzsche's theory of health in Ecce Homo is consistent with the remaining oeuvre in positing, as wellspring of life, the will to power, that primal appropriative instinct that turns every biological factor and environmental event to its own advantage. Health is the animal's organic work. Rhetorically, Nietzsche begins by appropriating his own genetic history—combining and incarnating the contradictory constitutions of both his parents to become them both genetically, and to recapitulate in his own body their organic histories. He therefore relives his father's morbidity, reaching an acute medical crisis during his thirty-sixth year, the year of his father's death. "In the same year his life declined, mine declined too: in my thirty-sixth year I reached the lowest point of my vitality; I survived, but without being able to see three steps in front of me. At that time—it was 1879—I gave up my Basel professorship" (3, EH, 516). But Nietzsche's medical model, which reflects a precise, modern grasp of the physiological principles of inoculation, treats the mother's sturdy constitution as his legacy of a fundamental soundness that exploits the father's debility like an immunological serum, becoming strengthened and enriched by it. "From 1882 on, things moved, very slowly, of course, upward once more: the crisis was overcome (my father died very young, exactly in the year in which I myself came closest to death)" (4, PW, 879). Strategically, also, Nietzsche has transformed the inauspicious paternal legacy into a triumph worthy of a boast rather than an apology.

Since Nietzschean wisdom is experiential and instinctual, it is a matter of ontology, a knowing equated with being. His double parental heritage therefore makes him doubly wise. "I have a keener nose [eine feinere Witterung] for the signs of ascent and descent than anyone else. . . . I know both, I am both" (3, EH, 516). Nietzsche's Doppelgänger role (3, EH, 519) is racial as well as genetic, although the racial and genetic advantages are complementary rather than analogous. He proudly claims Polish (noble Polish, even, in his Vita sent to Georg Brandes [Nietzsche to Brandes, 10 April 1888, 4, PW, 877]) ancestry on his father's side and German on his mother's (albeit only as angesprenkelter, that is, spotted, or polka-dotted, German): another antithetical legacy that leaves him wiser as a quasi-foreign critic of German culture who knows, racially, of what he speaks. But Nietzsche is only too sensitive to the paradoxical danger of this

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doubling: his multiplicity of experience, the reversals of perspective created by his Kranken-Optik, his decadent epistemology, all share the drawbacks (as well as the advantages) of the dialectical imagination. In addition to repressing the instinctual in favor of the intellectual, and resulting in conciliatory rather than aggressive argument, Nietzsche fears in dialectic the debilitating effect of yielding advantage in the interest of ethical fairness and some notions of Socratic truth. He himself escapes these dangers by exploiting his morbid insights and experiences in the intuitive pursuit of his physiological advantage. In praxis, this meant a growing retreat from physicians and conventional medicine, from letting himself be doctored (beärzten): "I act like a sick animal in the wild and hide myself in my 'cave'" (4, PW, 828). Medicine becomes for him a wholly intuitive and internal "science," a matter of instinctively choosing the correct means, of guessing the right remedies, of developing accurate, intuitive principles of selecting a healthy environment, including a healthy cultural environment, society, books, landscape, etc. Strategically, Nietzsche once again claims success: "I took myself in hand, I made myself well again" (3, EH, 518).

The action of taking charge of his health, of taking a kind of physiological responsibility for both the causes and cures of his illness, solves Nietzsche's crucial rhetorical problem of devising a way of speaking of his ill health without making an appeal for sympathy and pity. This task is made the more difficult by his determination not to deny or evade the problem of his infirmity, which obliges him to produce graphic, clinical descriptions. "An extremely painful and stubborn headache emerged, which exhausted all my powers. It accelerated over long years to a peak of habitual painfulness, so that that particular year contained for me 200 days of pain . . . . My specialty was to endure extreme pain cru, vert [presumably without narcotics] with total clarity, for two or three days in a row, under conditions of prolonged vomica" (Lettet to Georg Brandes, 10 April 1888, 4, PW, 878). Nietzsche's antidote to self-pity and the pity of others is his animal fatalism about his body, which serves several important functions: it gives him an active, rather than a passive, invalid role and thereby certifies the continued efficacy of his powers, and it denies the lack or weakness that invites the appropriation of the "other" (doctors, relatives, friends). His autotherapy therefore repulses the well-meaning meddling of the "other," thereby not only giving his own remedial instincts a chance to work but actually conserving his strength by preventing its sur-

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render to the "other." He exhibits this strategy in practice by imploring Overbeck (Nietzsche to Overbeck, 22 February 1883) not to betray the address of his lair in Genoa, presumably to escape the solicitous clutches of his sister. "I will seek for my health in the greatest reclusiveness, on the previously tried paths. My mistake, last year, was to give up my solitude" (4, PW, 794).

The ontological wisdom governing his medical hygiene extends to other potentially embarrassing spheres of Nietzsche's life, particularly his social and professional relationship to others. After years as a controversial figure, during which, if he was recognized at all, it was at best as enfant terrible, at worst as madman, Nietzsche was a ripe candidate for ressentiment, the debilitating, rancorous enthrallment to an ill-disposed "other" that would not only distort and invalidate his judgments but, more seriously, also undermine his own physiological and temperamental health. Once again he acts out his therapy in his rhetorical strategy. He instinctively produces a social innocence that virtually preempts the effect of the "other" altogether by recognizing little ill will toward himself ("One can turn my life this way and that; one will seldom find, and then only traces, that anyone has ever had 'ill will' [bösen Wollen] toward me" (3, EH, 520), and he thereby pulls out from under himself the ground of a defensive posture. This strategy is so successful that it inadvertently lays a trap for the reader: the tone of mellow equanimity that animates these passages has, to the untrained ear, strong resonances of Christian (which he denies) and Buddhist (which he admits) philosophy. To disentangle these false doubles of Nietzschean fatalism and Christian self-abnegation, one must follow the clew of the motive: when Nietzsche sends good after bad, "a pot of marmalade to get rid of a sour business," (3, EH, 522), as he puts it, it is neither altruism nor forgiveness but an act of sheer self-serving appropriation.

Nietzsche relates to other people as organism to organism, thereby negating them as the "other," that is, as another consciousness that relates to oneself intersubjectively, as subject with the power to bestow or withhold recognition. He does this with a physiologically appropriate metaphor, by smelling and pawing the other organism to determine whether it is clean enough, wholesome enough, healthy enough, to remain in his company. "I possess a perfectly uncanny irritability of the cleanliness instinct so that I perceive physiologically—smell—the proximity—what am I saying?—the innermost parts, the

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'entrails' of every soul' (3, EH, 526). These acutely sensitive instincts preserve him from the pathological contamination of unclean humans, riffraff, Gesindel. In the event that he is touched or attacked ("in cases where a little or a very great nonsense is started with me"), Nietzsche forecloses all conventional reciprocities, allowing himself neither retaliation, protection, defense, nor justification, all actions that would proceed from a position of disadvantage. Instead, he eschews reaction altogether, if possible, not only in order to retain the initiative, to maintain his freedom of original action, but in order physiologically to preserve the strength of the organism from fruitless erosion by the vexations of revenge. Above all, he avoids a mimetic response, a tit-for-tat reprisal, which would signal a surrender of his activity to the "other's" determination of its form and its nature. This is the rationale of Nietzsche's unconventional satisfactions: the "thanks" or the "request" in response to a mischief, for example.

Nietzsche's most extreme remedy against the disease of resentment, whose affects "burn" one out, is "Russian fatalism, that fatalism without revolt, with which the Russian soldier, for whom the forced march has become unbearable, finally lies down in the snow. . . . The great logic of this fatalism, which is not always the courage to die, as life-preserving under the most life-endangering circumstances, is the reduction of metabolism, its deceleration, a kind of will to hibernation" (3, EH, 523). Its oriental counterparts, the catatonia of the eastern fakir and the Buddhist's great inner tranquility ("This is not morality speaking; here speaks physiology") are merely variations of the same hygiene: to avoid the ravages of the self-consuming responsive emotions (anger, hypersensitivity) that cause the rapid depletion of nervous energy, the accelerated secretions of excessive bile, and other bodily damage. Nietzsche is careful to distinguish this particular kind of genuine, inner passivity in the face of attack from its false double, the "silent treatment," a mere strategy of feigned indifference and equanimity whose cost to the individual is a painful introjection of rage that upsets the stomach and causes dyspepsia.

Finally, Nietzsche advocates as a healthy and normal mode of human relationship the condition of warfare, but a curious metaphorical warfare reduced to an almost pure animal aggression with all cultural and social content cancelled. Nietzsche's warfare is effectively unmotivated, and with neither ideological nor personal agenda: no cause to promote, no imperiled honor to
defend, no grudge to settle, no personal animus to express. It is
without hostility, a sort of joyful exercise of creatural power. To
that end his _Kriegs-Praxis_ reflects a set of conditions that appear
deceptively like rules of fair play, until one notes their perfect
self-reflexivity. Since Nietzsche's object is not victory but the
exercise of power, he spurns cohorts and consensus in favor of
the solo match. Since a true test of strength requires strong,
equally matched fighters, he disdains the inferior opponent,
who would provide an insufficient challenge; the despised oppo-
nent, for fear of _ressentiment_; and the _ad hominem_ attack or
insult, which is aimed at the "other" and therefore retrieves the
"other" from its ontological exile beyond Nietzsche's arena. His
opponents are inevitably somewhat abstracted, since it is
strength and power that he attacks: the success of David Strauss's
book, for example, or the hypocrisies of Wagner as Bayreuth idol
rather than as erstwhile Tribschen friend. "On the contrary,
attack by me is proof of good will, and, in certain cases, grati-
tude. I honor, I distinguish by associating my name with a mat-
ter or a person: pro or contra makes no difference to me" (3, _EH_,
525).

In the next section, "Why I Am So Clever," Nietzsche reveals
"how one becomes what one is" only at the end, in a brilliant
tour de force of paradoxical wit that serves as praxis at the very
moment it claims to offer theory. His answer requires shifting the
ground of _Klugheit_ (cleverness, acumen) into the realm of the
unconscious and the irrational, thereby transforming it into its
antonym while preserving its connotations of obliquity and dou-
bling. This move is both anti-Socratic and proto-Freudian, as
one becomes what one is through error and ignorance, by not
"knowing" oneself at all, thereby casting one's cleverness into
the form of its own negation as "self-forgetfulness, self-
misunderstanding, self-diminution, -narrowing, -levelling" (3, _EH_,
541). The logic of this argument is that only by erasing the
consciousness, wiping it clean not only of "ideas," like a tabula
rasa, but also of desire ("One must keep the entire surface of
consciousness—consciousness is a surface—clean of any great
imperative" [3, 541]) can all of the manifold and contradictory
drives and instincts of the organism flourish in uninhibited
oblivion. Human desire, in the Hegelian sense, is the great
enemy of fatality, of "becoming what one is." Instead of letting
oneself be, instead of waiting to see what kind of "self" will
emerge from one's gestating and proliferating instincts, human
desire propels the individual to conform to phantasms of the self

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modeled upon the alien image of the desire of some "other." It is as combatants to human desire that Nietzsche paradoxically embraces selflessness and altruism in this section. But one must not lose sight of his "greater cleverness" here, his appropriative gesture of exploiting those Christian virtues as useful diversions from the specular images of desire while the subterranean consolidation of the beast progresses. Nietzsche claims just such an organic and chthonic etiology even for his cultural self, endowing his talents and capabilities with the spontaneous generation of biological excrescences that, presumably like Athena from the brain of Zeus, sprang forth one day without benefit of education, training, cultivation, or discipline. In another gesture of cultural innocence that transforms all of his achievements into spontaneous fulfillments of destiny ("So, for example, I found myself one day as University professor, having never remotely considered anything like it, since I was barely 24 years old" [3, \textit{EH}, 542]), he divests himself of all desire, exonerates himself of all ambition, and denies all straining after achievement. "I lack any recollection of ever having exerted myself; there is no trace of struggle [\textit{Ringen}] in evidence in my life; I am the antithesis of a heroic nature. To 'want' something, to 'strive' for something, to have a 'purpose' or 'wish' in sight—I don't know any of this from experience" (3, \textit{EH}, 542). Through these gestures, this act, Nietzsche embraces himself as a destiny, appropriates himself as an animal, a plenum, a creature driven by no lacks or gaps or unfulfilled chasms in its being. "I don't in the least wish that anything should be different from what it is; I myself don't want to become different. . . . But I have always lived like this" (3, \textit{EH}, 542). "My formula for greatness in human beings is \textit{amor fati}: that one wants nothing different, not ahead, not behind, not in all eternity" (3, \textit{EH}, 544).

Because of its wily, shrewd, self-preserving connotations (cf. Odysseus as classical prototype of the clever man), Nietzschean \textit{Klugheit} is difficult to reconcile with his disdain for defensive measures unless one makes a crucial distinction between self-preservation as the protection and conservation of meager and diminished resources, and self-preservation as the protection of great strength from erosion by undermining influences. It is in this second sense that Nietzschean cleverness is effective. But as the instinct that governs external influences upon the organism, the first "cleverness of cleverness" is to protect itself, by functioning as little as possible, only when necessary, and then only by concerning itself with influences that matter, that are real,
elemental, "literal," the things that "flow into" the body or impinge upon it such as nutrition, place, climate, and such cultural elements as books that contribute to the body's recreation. Nietzsche preempts the accusation that he demeans his philosophical enterprise with such trivial questions as the proper choice of beverage by arguing that it is the traditional figments of the imagination ("'God', 'soul', 'virtue', 'sin', 'beyond,' 'truth,' 'eternal life'" [3, EH, 543]), not the so called little things that determine the fundamental conditions of biological organisms, that are beneath his notice. His analysis culminates in sets of racial profiles (for example, German "'heaviness': starchy cuisine, beery muzziness, overcast skies, ponderous realism) whose playfulness is lodged in the delicate tilt between the physiological and the metaphorical nuances of the description.

"The bad habit of an ever so slight intestinal sluggishness suffices to transform a genius into something mediocre, something 'German'; the German climate alone is enough to discourage strong, even heroic bowels" (3, EH, 531).

Nietzschean cleverness is the instinctive selection of influences beneficial to the organism. Since the process of refusal and rejection, like that of self-defense, is itself debilitating ("'Warding things off, not letting them come near, is an expenditure—one should not be deceived on this point—a squandering of power to negative purpose" [3, EH, 539]), the individual requires a kind of automatic or instinctual filter against the environment. He calls this instinct "'taste'" (Geschmack), and he restores it to its literal sense of intuitively "'knowing'" through one's perceptual organs, one's palate, one's gorge, what the organism may safely ingest and tolerate. Nietzsche, particularly sensitive to the ideological and semiological functions of food since his early brush with Schopenhauerian and Wagnerian vegetarianism (4, PW, 606) is a militant carnivore in the interest of both physical and mental health: "'spiritually productive and emotionally intensive natures must have meat'" (Letter to Carl von Gersdorff, 28 September 1869, 4, PW, 606). In Zarathustra, he likewise invokes the literal residue in the eucharistic notion of spiritual nourishment, by transforming the symbolic and sacrificial lamb (the Passover lamb, the Lamb of God) into a delicious Middle Eastern dish (in a parody of Jesus' words whose humor springs from substituting more food for spirit): "'But man does not live by bread alone, but also from the meat of good lambs of which I have two. These should be quickly slaughtered and prepared, spiced with sage: that's how I like them'" (2, Z, 795).
Nietzsche’s nutritional advice often preserves this metaphoric interplay of the spiritual and the comestible, for example, his tongue-in-cheek, yet practical, antiidealistic rejection of alcohol or “spirits” (“gegen jedweges ‘geistige’ Getränk”), but with an instinct, even a kind of etymological insistence, for the priority and primacy of the food and drink of the body.

Geography is for Nietzsche identical with atmospheric conditions, and the “influence” of place is therefore a matter of its most sensuous aspects (such as brightness, humidity, and temperature) not as they gratify the senses but as they modify the metabolism, the *Stoffwechsel*, the tempo, range, and thoroughness of the internal chemical appropriations of the body. Since his own body eventually becomes as sensitive as a living barometer, the question of where to live is an obsessional matter fraught with fatality for the itinerant Nietzsche. “I still need to be extremely cautious even today,” he writes in the Brandes *Vita*.

“A few climatic and meteorological conditions are indispensable. It is not by choice, but by necessity, that I spend the summer in the Upper Engadine, the winter on the Riviera” (4, *PW*, 879). He strips all European cities to their elemental components, sweeping aside the very cultural and historical conditions of artistic Meccas with his own inverted argument. “If one collects all the places that have or have had brilliant people, where wit, sophistication, malice happily belonged, where genius made itself indigenous almost of necessity: they all have an exceptional dry air. Paris, Provence, Florence, Jerusalem, Athens: these names prove that genius is *conditioned* by dry air and a clear sky—that is, through rapid metabolism, through the possibility of continually furnishing an enormous, even monstrous, amount of power” (3, *EH*, 531). In antithesis to the Romantics, Nietzsche also strips landscape of its aesthetic features in favor of a purely prophylactic assessment. He is utterly blind to the ravishing beauty of the Engadine but persuaded of the therapeutic powers that reside in the pure mountain air and the elevation above pestilential cities. His favorite demonstration is his friend Heinrich von Stein’s magical, if temporary, transformation from Wagnerian enthusiast to free spirit during a three-day visit to Sils Maria. “I have always told him that this is the effect of the good air up here; everyone experiences the same thing; one is not for nothing 6,000 feet above Bayreuth” (3, *EH*, 521). Nietzsche’s prevalent Alpine metaphors, especially in and in relation to *Zarathustra*—“This book, with its voice beyond the millennia, is not only the highest book there is, the genuine mountain air

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[Höhenluft] book” (3, EH, 513)—are rooted in his faith in the atmospheric etiology of spiritual health.

The final influence subject to Nietzschean cleverness is reading, which is lumped, under the rubric of recreation, with the other physiological influences of nutrition, place, and climate. This deliberate blurring together of nature and culture in the realm of “influences” creates a playful and complicated reversion of values. If it seems a trivialization of literature and music to give them the function of a good cut of meat, then we are reminded that in Nietzschean hygiene a good cut of meat is no trivial matter. If Nietzsche insists that he does only recreational reading, then, logically, the great range of literature he cites, from Pascal to Heinrich Heine, all become “light” reading, reading not to be taken seriously: “Reading gives me release precisely from my seriousness” (3, EH, 533). And so it does, because, following the same precautions established for diet and locale, he refuses to read defensively, as a critic, or to treat literature as an “other” in the sense of granting it authority or meaning, yielding to its demands, or honoring it with imitation. These measures have the salutary effect of totally separating Nietzsche’s reading from his writing, a necessity if his originality, his spirit sui generis is to be preserved. Reading, finally, robs the scholar of the ability to think for himself and transforms him into a friction-match “that must be rubbed in order to give sparks—‘thoughts’” (3, EH, 540).

By denying literature the status of “other” as authoritative or superior consciousness, Nietzsche preempts both models and rivals and saves himself utterly from any “anxiety of influence.” But by preserving literature’s “otherness,” its strangeness and unfamiliarity, he preserves the recreational value of reading as a form of spiritual travel “that allows me to promenade [spazierengehen] in foreign sciences and souls” (3, EH, 533). Nietzsche uses the metaphor of the “foreign” with care, to preserve his sense of reading as an appropriative activity. He therefore maintains some xenophobia toward books, especially new, untried ones, fearing if not invasion then infiltration. This is why he bans books and sequesters himself during periods of writing: “Would I permit a foreign thought to climb secretly over the wall?” (3, EH, 533). But inviting himself to stroll in foreign parts of knowledge leaves Nietzsche free to appropriate them: to love Pascal, to appreciate de Maupassant, even to envy (playfully) Stendhal. As usual, Nietzsche’s metaphor of the “foreign” with respect to books has a literal residue: his favorite

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books are foreign ones, predominantly French, some English (Byron's Manfred, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar). He admires few Germans, and then it is for their foreignness, as he admired Wagner, for example, for his alienation from the German, for Cosima's French influence upon him. "I perceived, I honored him as foreign territory [Ausland], as antithesis, as incarnate protest against all 'German virtues'" (3, EH, 536).

Nietzsche opens his next section, "Why I Write Such Good Books," with a statement that requires the ambiguity and play of Derridean différence to prevent it from cancelling the entire performance of Ecce Homo: "I am one thing, my writings are another" (3, EH, 545). This distinction might appear capriciously contradictory to the interpreter of Ecce Homo as Nietzsche's act, his ontological gesture, to which he himself points the way ("I am, namely, myself this homo, reckoning in the ecce" [Nietzsche to Meta von Salis, 14 November 1888, 4, PW, 924]), unless one remembers to test ever for the literal residue of his language. Nietzsche, the body, the living organism, the animal, is not (of course) our "Nietzsche," the books, the oeuvre, the philosophy. But it is with the implications of this obvious state of affairs, particularly for the future, when this cleavage will have become absolute (and when the Derridean deferral of difference, différence, will have taken effect) that Nietzsche is concerned. "I myself am not yet in my time; some are born posthumously" (3, EH, 545), he writes, against a time when he will cease to be premature and untimely, and when his works will be read and understood only because people have learned to read and understand themselves. But at that future time, when his works speak without him, posthumously, when his disembodied voice comes into fulfillment, Nietzsche's creaturely existence, his living body, his animal life, will have become mere excess, a useless superfluity, a ridiculous excrescence. "I am one thing, my writings are another." Here, in Ecce Homo, he resists his proleptic ontological extrusion by restoring, at least literally, the excess of himself to his writing.

In this section Nietzsche confronts a problem seemingly even more embarrassing than his illness. Looked at naïvely, this chapter begins with a confession of professional failure: a history of popular neglect and critical abuse of his literary output, of the coldly polite encouragement of his acquaintances, and of the candid incomprehension of his friends ("Doktor Heinrich von Stein honestly deplored not understanding one word of my Zarathustra" [3, EH, 545]), that mocks the bravado of his title.

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But once again, in a rhetorical master stroke whose ontological inversions constitute a "bestial gesture," Nietzsche trumpets his lack of cultural success as a personal triumph, by stripping it of all traces of *ressentiment*, rendering it free of pathos, rancor, defensiveness, appeal or even challenge. His animal gesture, as he crow the greatness of his books with no more desire to impress or persuade than a cock crowing at daybreak, is the foreclosure of the "other." He withdraws his works from cultural circulation, as it were, making them independent of public reception, frustrating hermeneutical attempts upon them by making them inaccessible to interpretation, and restoring them to Nature by restoring himself to them, in the fatality of his sickness and health, his travelogues and weather reports, his moods and affects—the whole living, creatural, experiential excess that he knows will die with him yet is responsible for the greatness of his books. This is the tautological answer dispersed throughout each of his critical commentaries on his works: he writes such good books because he is what he is.

Because the reading and understanding of his works is ontologically determined, Nietzsche depends upon readers who are healthy and rich in themselves, and who already have everything that he has to give them so that his writings will be to them a gift, a superfluity. The fitness to understand Nietzsche is therefore a natural endowment, a matter of physiology ("Any spiritual brittleness disqualifies one, once and for all, even dyspepsia: one requires steady nerves and a merry lower anatomy [*fröhlichen Unterleib*]" [3, *EH*, 549]) that bars him from deploying the rhetorical arsenal with which writers normally overcome the difficulties or resistance of their readers. Because he cannot control their physiologies, Nietzsche cannot control his readers. That is why he must be fatalistic about them, why he defers them to the future and speaks of them proleptically. He can do nothing else. Nature alone can provide him with readers. In the meantime, he counts himself fortunate in his nonreaders and his uncomprehending readers, who serve as guarantors of his radicality, originality, and "prematurity." They prove that he has made no concessions to a deficient public and that he has not contrived an inauthentic readership by wooing and manipulating weak spirits. Nietzsche is therefore vastly amused by the "innocence" of a Berlin University professor, who in well-meaning helpfulness "gave me to understand I should use a different form: no one reads anything like this" (3, *EH*, 546). The advice that he should pander to the consumerism of the

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intellectual marketplace, and that he adapt his incomparable, multiplicitous style to the vulgarity of philistine palates, is no less wonderful in the absurdity of its professional "common sense" than in its demonstration of the success of Nietzsche's *Umwertung*. Nietzsche is no more offended than if his critic had been a flea.

Although Nietzsche playfully fantasizes about future university chairs for the interpretation of *Zarathustra*, he recognizes that, strictly speaking, his works cannot be taught. "In the end, no one can hear more in things, including books, than one already knows. For that which is inaccessible through experience, one lacks an ear" (3, *EH*, 546). This distinction between knowledge and recognition brings to light the crucial excess that experience, or the living of knowledge, brings to the understanding of Nietzsche's work. He provides us, as a marvelous illustration, the criticism of a Swiss commentator who "expressed his respect for the courage with which I work for the abolition of all decent feelings" (3, *EH*, 546). Nietzsche remarks that, by a curious quirk of the sarcastic and mocking rhetoric, everything this Dr. Widmann says is true about him if you turn it on its head, if you shift the values around, if you take his words literally without their sarcastic distortion of meaning. "One would basically need only to 'revalue all values' in order, in a truly remarkable way, to hit the nail on the head about me—instead of hitting my head with the nail" (3, *EH*, 546). But his naysaying critics pose no threat to Nietzsche, as his admirers do: "Whoever thinks he has understood me has manufactured something for himself out of me, according to his image, not infrequently my antithesis: for example, an 'idealist'" (3, *EH*, 546). If he were weak or foolish enough to be gratified by their flattering construction (as he believed Wagner to have been) he would incur the risk of deluding himself ("I don't want to be confused with another; that includes not confusing myself" (3, *EH*, 545). For this reason, the ideal critical stance toward himself, the one that he urges even upon his friends, is "a dose of curiosity, as though before a strange plant, with an ironical resistance" (Letter to Carl Fuchs, 29 July 1888, 4, *PW*, 900).

As Nietzsche goes on to review each of his books in turn, the superfluity of his gesture affirms the fatality of his works. He retracts nothing, he changes nothing, he revises nothing, he does not reinterpret, because his books could have been only what they are, no more, no less, no different. He demonstrates by the very redundancy of his performance ("I have finally
uttered no word that I might not have already spoken five years ago through the mouth of Zarathustra” [3, EH, 604]) that it is essentially unmotivated, propelled by no lack. But if Zarathustra was inspired, if the entire first part “came to” him ("fie mir . . . ein") on his wanderings in Rapallo, if he was one day “over­come” or ambushed by the type of Zarathustra (“er über­fiel mich”), then the "ways" this happened (“Auf diesen beiden Wegen”) are here retrieved from the metaphorical land of visit­ing spirits and restored to the fatality of the local geography, to roads, streets, and pathways: the morning walks on the splendid road to Zoagli overlooking an immense expanse of sea, and the afternoon strolls along the coastal promontory from Santa Margherita to Portofino. To this extent, Nietzsche offers a demythification in Ecce Homo: that if, in Zarathustra, meta­phors, images, and parables came to him involuntarily, crowding around and offering their services, he now restores himself as their source. Perhaps the dance was a metaphor, but it was also the experience of climbing the walled cliffs above Nice, feeling his muscles made flexible by the creative effusion. “The body is enraptured: let’s leave the ‘soul’ out of it . . . . One could often see me dance; in those days I could be underway for seven or eight hours in the mountains without any concept of fatigue. I slept well, I laughed a lot” (3, EH, 579).

Nature was never entirely alienated in Nietzsche’s tropes, as it prevailed in the literal residues of his topographies, personifica­tions, and calendars. But now, in Ecce Homo, the masks (styl­ized masks never intended to fool anyone) are removed from the mythical figures, and Nietzsche reveals himself behind them all. He was Wagner, as early as The Birth of Tragedy (“Even psycholog­ically all the distinctive features of my nature were inscribed in Wagner’s’”); used Wagner and Schopenhauer both as semiotic devices for himself in Untimely Meditations; circumvented in Human, All Too Human, “the little word ‘I’ although this time not with Schopenhauer or Wagner but with one of my friends, the excellent Dr. Paul Ree” (3, EH, 568); and in Dawn, even emerges from the metaphorlic hide of a sea creature sunning itself on the rocks (“Finally it was myself, this marine animal” [3, EH, 570]). Nietzsche everywhere reveals himself as a “tragic actor” behind these figures, one who “acts” spontaneously, like a participant in a festival, rather than mimetically. And he restores to his mise en scène the fugitive light, wind, and tem­perature that eluded even the Impressionists. His restoration of Nature to symbolic time is perhaps the most satisfying of his

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demythifications. He quotes, in *Ecce Homo*, the little verse that introduces into the fourth book of *The Gay Science* (entitled *Sanctus Januarius*) the theme of the great thaw symbolized by the miracle of the saint’s liquifying blood: “You who with your spear and flame / fragment my soul’s ice” (2, *GS*, 435; 3, *EH*, 573). In *Ecce Homo* he reduces the complicated tropological exfoliation of this figure (St. Januarius, the liquifying blood, Janus, the god of beginnings, of portals and entries, of the new year, and so forth) to its blessed, natural occasion: “a verse, that expresses my gratitude for the most wonderful month of January that I have ever experienced” (3, *EH*, 573).

The last section of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche’s great prophetic finale, is as tautological, paradoxical, and excessive in its rhetoric as in the rhetoric of its title, “Warum ich ein Schicksal bin.” Nietzsche invests himself with both the frightful enormity and the perfect naturalness implicit in *Schicksal*: he is necessity, ungovernable fate, unholy providence, driving force, because he is Nature, creature, organic life, living being. He prophesies, with his revaluation of all values, a repeal of culture as we know it and a reaffirmation of Nature, a message of catastrophe from an anthropocentric perspective but good news, *frohe Botschaft*, gospel, from a biocentric perspective. This parallax view creates the apparent contradictions in his rhetoric: the apocalyptic foreboding neutralized by the abiding fatality, the warnings of ultimate rupture cancelled by the promise of eternal recurrence, the glee of destruction founded upon the affirmation of yea-saying. The end of the world he trumpets is merely the *Götzendämmerung* that will free humans from the enthrallment of the “other” (to ideals and idealism, and to the mediations of morality) and therefore release a new play of natural power, “the great politics” (“Only after me is a great politics possible on earth” [3, *EH*, 599]) to replace the petty local politics of human striving for prestige.

Nietzsche closes *Ecce Homo* with a burst of apocalyptic rhetoric that delivers no threat, extorts no repentance, urges no conversion, and, consistent with his animalistic comportment throughout the work, demands nothing from the “other.” He escapes a Messianic role in other ways as well, by probing, like Pilate or Zarathustra, into the origins of good and evil, premises of truth and falsehood, and by “smelling” the difference between them (“My genius is in my nostrils” [3, *EH*, 598]). He explicitly rejects sainthood with its orientation toward the “other” as model and object of imitation (“I don’t want to be a
holy man, even a clown would be better. . . . Maybe I am a
cloven’ [3, 598]) in order to appropriate the irrepressible ani-
malism of the buffoon, the Hanswurst, whose feats are physical,
spontaneous, libidinal, playful, self-generated, acted to repel
and insult rather than inspire and enthral the ‘other.’ Ecce
Homo ends in the rhetoric of the Zarathustrian curse like that
expressed in his dithyrambs.

Now thunder rolls over the vaults,
What is frame and wall, now trembles
Now lightning and sulphurous truths dart about
Zarathustra curses. . . .
(3, 706)

His curse is like his gift, his malediction like his blessing, a
vigorou s discharge of excessive aggression emptied of all cultural
motives (punishment, revenge, hatred), which is harmless to life
itself (‘O Zarathustra! Don’t clap your whip about so fear-
somely! You know perfectly well that noise murders thought’
[2, Z, 745]) while it is explosively destructive to ideals, morality,
and all abstractions that denigrate and debilitate life (‘The con-
cept ‘soul’, ‘spirit,’ finally even ‘eternal soul,’ discovered to
ridicule the body, to make it sick—‘holy’—in order to bring an
appalling fcklessness to all things, that deserve seriousness in
life: the question of nutrition, dwelling, spiritual diet, medi-
cine, hygiene, weather’ [3, EH, 605]). We, too, as readers of
Ecce Homo are rebuffed as disciples, as believers, and negated as
critics, judges, and witnesses. But we are restored and affirmed
as living creatures, as reading organisms, who apprehend
Nietzsche intuitively and respond in our entrails, who will never
believe him (‘I want no believers, I think I am too malicious to
believe in myself’ [3, EH, 598]) or imitate him, who will negate
him and thereby escape his domestication and appropriation to
become, ourselves, wild beasts of the modern imagination.

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