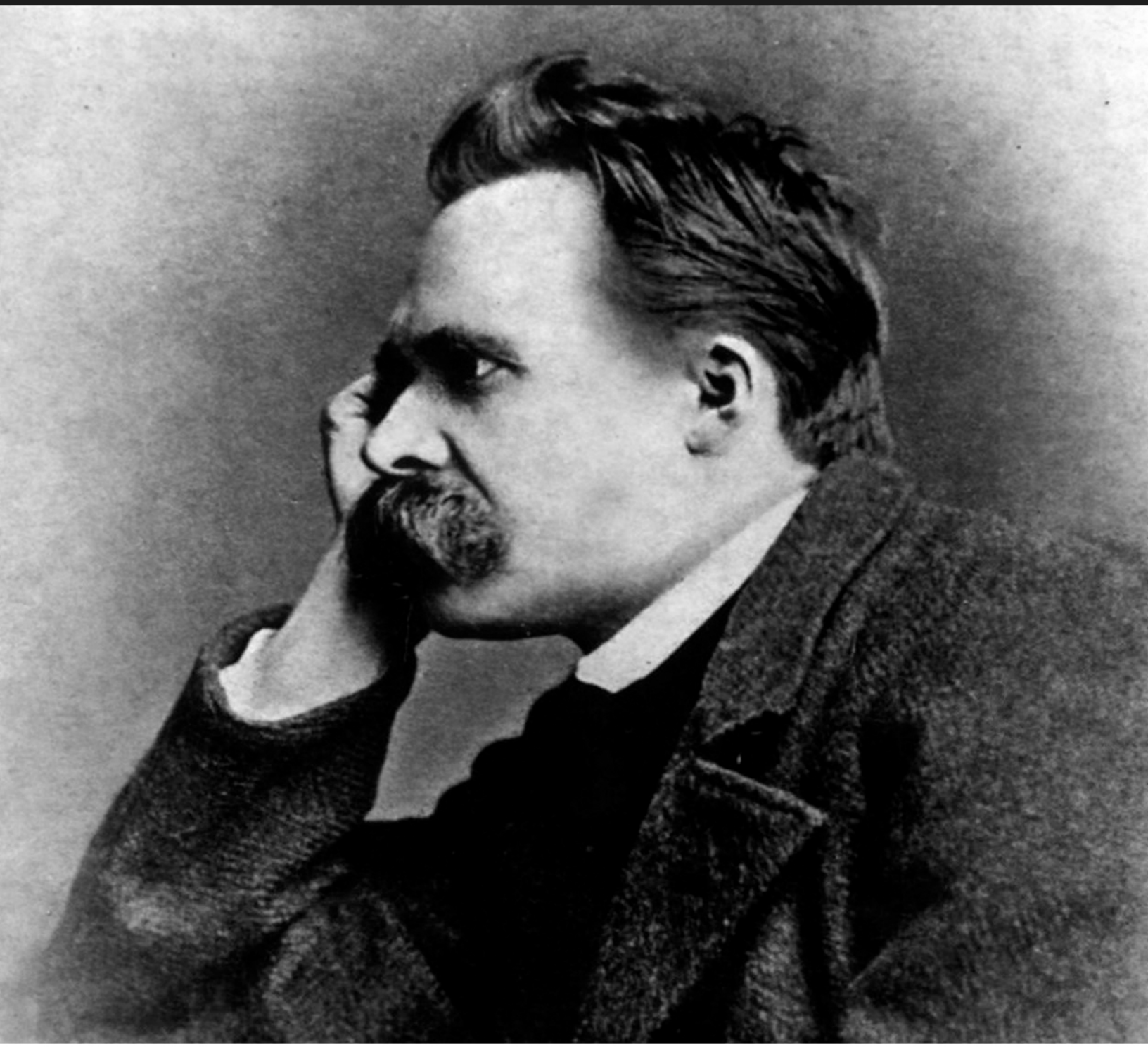
Ecce Homo



Friedrich Nietzsche

Ecce Homo

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FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

ECCE HOMO

(NIETZSCHES AUTOBIOGRAPHY)

PREFACE

1

As it is my intention within a very short time to confront my fellow-men with the very greatest demand that has ever yet been made upon them, it seems to me above all necessary to declare here who and what I am. As a matter of fact, this ought to be pretty well known already, for I have not "held my tongue" about myself. But the disparity which obtains between the greatness of my task and the smallness of my contemporaries, is revealed by the fact that people have neither heard me nor yet seen me. I live on my own self-made credit, and it is probably only a prejudice to suppose that I am alive at all. I do but require to speak to any one of the scholars who come to the Ober-Engadine in the summer in order to convince myself that I am not alive.... Under these circumstances, it is a duty—and one against which my customary reserve, and to a still greater degree the pride of my instincts, rebel—to say: Listen! for I am such and such a person. For Heaven's sake do not confound me with any one else!

2

I am, for instance, in no wise a bogey man, or moral monster. On the contrary, I am the very opposite in nature to the kind of man that has

been honoured hitherto as virtuous. Between ourselves, it seems to me that this is precisely a matter on which I may feel proud. I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus, and I would prefer to be even a satyr than a saint. But just read this book! Maybe I have here succeeded in expressing this contrast in a cheerful and at the same time sympathetic manner—maybe this is the only purpose of the present work.

The very last thing I should promise to accomplish would be to "improve" mankind. I do not set up any new idols; may old idols only learn what it costs to have legs of clay. To overthrow idols (idols is the name I give to all ideals) is much more like my business. In proportion as an ideal world has been falsely assumed, reality has been robbed of its value, its meaning, and its truthfulness. . . . The "true world" and the "apparent world"—in plain English, the fictitious world and reality. . . . Hitherto the lie of the ideal has been the curse of reality; by means of it the very source of mankind's instincts has become mendacious and false; so much so that those values have come to be worshipped which are the exact opposite of the ones which would ensure man's prosperity, his future, and his great right to a future.

3

He who knows how to breathe in the air of my writings is conscious that it is the air of the heights, that it is bracing. A man must be built for it, otherwise the chances are that it will chill him. The ice is near, the loneliness is terrible—but how serenely everything lies in the

sunshine! how freely one can breathe! how much, one feels, lies beneath one! Philosophy, as I have understood it hitherto, is a voluntary retirement into regions of ice and mountain-peaks—the seeking—out of everything strange and questionable in existence, everything upon which, hitherto, morality has set its ban. Through long experience, derived from such wanderings in forbidden country, I acquired an opinion very different from that which may seem generally desirable, of the causes which hitherto have led to men's moralising and idealising. The secret history of philosophers, the psychology of their great names, was revealed to me. How much truth can a certain mind endure; how much truth can it dare?—these questions became for me ever more and more the actual test of values. Error (the belief in the ideal) is not blindness; error is cowardice.... Every conquest, every step forward in knowledge, is the outcome of courage, of hardness towards one's self, of cleanliness towards one's self. I do not refute ideals; all I do is to draw on my gloves in their presence.... Nitimur in vetitum; with this device my philosophy will one day be victorious; for that which has hitherto been most stringently forbidden is, without exception, Truth.

4

In my lifework, my Zarathustra holds a place apart. With it, I gave my fellow-men the greatest gift that has ever been bestowed upon them. This book, the voice of which speaks out across the ages, is not only the loftiest book on earth, literally the book of mountain air,—the

whole phenomenon, mankind, lies at an incalculable distance beneath it,—but it is also the deepest book, born of the inmost abundance of truth; an inexhaustible well, into which no pitcher can be lowered without coming up again laden with gold and with goodness. Here it is not a "prophet" who speaks, one of those gruesome hybrids of sickness and Will to Power, whom men call founders of religions. If a man would not do a sad wrong to his wisdom, he must, above all give proper heed to the tones—the halcyonic tones—that fall from the lips of Zarathustra:—

"The most silent words are harbingers of the storm; thoughts that come on dove's feet lead the world.

"The figs fall from the trees; they are good and sweet, and, when they fall, their red skins are rent.

"A north wind am I unto ripe figs.

"Thus, like figs, do these precepts drop down to you, my friends; now drink their juice and their sweet pulp.

"It is autumn all around, and clear sky, and afternoon."

No fanatic speaks to you here; this is not a "sermon"; no faith is demanded in these pages. From out an infinite treasure of light and well of joy, drop by drop, my words fall out—a slow and gentle gait is the cadence of these discourses. Such things can reach only the most elect; it is a rare privilege to be a listener here; not every? one who likes can have ears to hear Zarathustra. I Is not Zarathustra, because of

these things, a seducer? ... But what, indeed, does he himself say, when for the first time he goes back to his solitude? Just the reverse of that which any "Sage," "Saint," "Saviour of the world," and other decadent would say.... Not only his words, but he himself is other than they.

"Alone do I now go, my disciples! Get ye also hence, and alone! Thus would I have it.

"Verily, I beseech you: take your leave of me and arm yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still, be ashamed of him! Maybe he hath deceived you.

"The knight of knowledge must be able not only to love his enemies, but also to hate his friends.

"The man who remaineth a pupil requiteth his teacher but ill. And why would ye not pluck at my wreath?

"Ye honour me; but what if your reverence should one day break down? Take heed, lest a statue crush you.

"Ye say ye believe in Zarathustra? But of; what account is Zarathustra? Ye are my believers: but of what account are all believers?

"Ye had not yet sought yourselves when ye found me. Thus do all believers; therefore is all believing worth so little.

"Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when ye have all denied me will I come back unto you."

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE.

On this perfect day, when everything is ripening, and not only the grapes are getting brown, a ray of sunshine has fallen on my life: I looked behind me, I looked before me, and never have I seen so many good things all at once. Not in vain have I buried my four-and-fortieth year to-day; I had the right to bury it—that in it which still had life, has been saved and is immortal. The first book of the Transvaluation of all Values, The Songs of Zarathustra, The Twilight of the Idols, my attempt, to philosophise with the hammer—all these things are the gift of this year, and even of its last quarter. How could I help being thankful to the whole of my life?

That is why I am now going to tell myself the story of my life.

ECCE HOMO

HOW ONE BECOMES WHAT ONE IS

WHY I AM SO WISE

1

The happiness of my existence, its unique character perhaps, consists in its fatefulness: to speak in a riddle, as my own father I am already dead, as my own mother I still live and grow old. This double origin, taken as it were from the highest and lowest rungs of the ladder of life, at once a decadent and a beginning, this, if anything, explains that neutrality, that freedom from partisanship in regard to the general problem of existence, which perhaps distinguishes me. To the first indications of ascending or of descending life my nostrils are more sensitive than those of any man that has yet lived. In this domain I am a master to my backbone—I know both sides, for I am both sides. My father died in his six-and-thirtieth year: he was delicate, lovable, and morbid, like one who is preordained to pay simply a flying visit—a gracious reminder of life rather than life itself. In the same year that his life declined mine also declined: in my six-and-thirtieth year I reached the lowest point in my vitality,—I still lived, but my eyes could distinguish nothing that lay three paces away from me. At that time—it was the year 1879—I resigned my professorship at Bâle, lived through the summer like a shadow in St. Moritz, and spent the following winter, the most sunless of my life, like a shadow in Naumburg. This was my lowest ebb. During this period I wrote The

Wanderer and His Shadow. Without a doubt I was conversant with shadows then. The winter that followed, my first winter in Genoa, brought forth that sweetness and spirituality which is almost inseparable from extreme poverty of blood and muscle, in the shape of The Dawn of Day, The perfect lucidity and cheerfulness, the intellectual exuberance even, that this work reflects, coincides, in my case, not only with the most profound physiological weakness, but also with an excess of suffering. In the midst of the agony of a headache which lasted three days, accompanied by violent nausea, I was possessed of most singular dialectical clearness, and in absolutely cold blood I then thought out things, for which, in my more healthy moments, I am not enough of a climber, not sufficiently subtle, not sufficiently cold. My readers perhaps know to what extent I consider dialectic a symptom of decadence, as, for instance, in the most famous of all cases—the case of Socrates. All the morbid disturbances of the intellect, even that semi-stupor which accompanies fever, have, unto this day, remained completely unknown to me; and for my first information concerning their nature and frequency, I was obliged to have recourse to the learned works which have been compiled on the subject. My circulation is slow. No one has ever been able to detect fever in me. A doctor who treated me for some time as a nerve patient finally declared: "No! there is nothing wrong with your nerves, it is simply I who am nervous." It has been absolutely impossible to ascertain any local degeneration in me, nor any organic stomach trouble, however much I may have suffered from profound weakness of the gastric system as the result of general exhaustion. Even my eye trouble, which sometimes approached so parlously near to blindness,

was only an effect and not a cause; for, whenever my general vital condition improved, my power of vision also increased. Having admitted all this, do I need to say that I am experienced in questions of decadence? I know them inside and out. Even that filigree art of prehension and comprehension in general, that feeling for delicate shades of difference, that psychology of "seeing through brick walls," and whatever else I may be able to do, was first learnt then, and is the specific gift of that period during which everything in me was subtilised,—observation itself, together with all the organs of observation. To look upon healthier concepts and values from the standpoint of the sick, and conversely to look down upon the secret work of the instincts of decadence from the standpoint of him who is laden and self-reliant with the richness of life—this has been my longest exercise, my principal experience. If in anything at all, it was in this that I became a master. To-day my hand knows the trick, I now have the knack of reversing perspectives: the first reason perhaps why a Transvaluation of all Values has been possible to me alone.

2

For, apart from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the reverse of such a creature. Among other things my proof of this is, that I always instinctively select the proper remedy when my spiritual or bodily health is low; whereas the decadent, as such, invariably chooses those remedies which are bad for him. As a whole I was sound, but in certain details I was a decadent. That energy with which I sentenced myself to

absolute solitude, and to a severance from all those conditions in life to which I had grown accustomed; my discipline of myself, and my refusal to allow myself to be pampered, to be tended hand and foot, and to be doctored—all this betrays the absolute certainty of my instincts respecting what at that time was most needful to me. I placed myself in my own hands, I restored myself to health: the first condition of success in such an undertaking, as every physiologist will admit, is that at bottom a man should be sound. An intrinsically morbid nature cannot become healthy. On the other hand, to an intrinsically sound nature, illness may even constitute a powerful stimulus to life, to a surplus of life. It is in this light that I now regard the long period of illness that I endured: it seemed as if I had discovered life afresh, my own self included. I tasted all good things and even trifles in a way in which it was not easy for others to taste them—out of my Will to Health and to Life I made my philosophy.... For this should be thoroughly understood; it was during those years in which my vitality reached its lowest point that I ceased from being a pessimist: the instinct of self-recovery forbade my holding to a philosophy of poverty and desperation. Now, by what signs are Nature's lucky strokes recognised among men? They are recognised by the fact that any such lucky stroke gladdens our senses; that he is carved from one integral block, which is hard, sweet, and fragrant as well. He enjoys that only which is good for him; his pleasure, his desire, ceases when the limits of that which is good for him are overstepped. He divines remedies for injuries; he knows how to turn serious accidents to his own advantage; that which does not kill him makes him stronger. He instinctively gathers his material from all he

sees, hears, and experiences. He is a selective principle; he rejects much. He is always in his own company, whether his intercourse be with books, with men, or with natural scenery; he honours the things he chooses, the things he acknowledges, the things he trusts. He reacts slowly to all kinds of stimuli, with that tardiness which long caution and deliberate pride have bred in him—he tests the approaching stimulus; he would not dream of meeting it half-way. He believes neither in "ill-luck" nor "guilt"; he can digest himself and others; he knows how to forget—he is strong enough to make everything turn to his own advantage.

Lo then! I am the very reverse of a decadent, for he whom I have just described is none other than myself.

3

This double thread of experiences, this means of access to two worlds that seem so far asunder, finds in every detail its counterpart in my own nature—I am my own complement: I have a "second" sight, as well as a first. And perhaps I also have a third sight. By the very nature of my origin I was allowed an outlook beyond all merely local, merely national and limited horizons; it required no effort on my part to be a "good European." On the other hand, I am perhaps more German than modern Germans—mere Imperial Germans—can hope to be,—I, the last anti-political German. Be this as it may, my ancestors were Polish noblemen: it is owing to them that I have so much race instinct in my blood—who knows? perhaps even the liberum veto[1] When I think of

the number of times in my travels that I have been accosted as a Pole, even by Poles themselves, and how seldom I have been taken for a German, it seems to me as if I belonged to those only who have a sprinkling of German in them. But my mother, Franziska Oehler, is at any rate something very German; as is also my paternal grandmother, Erdmuthe Krause. The latter spent the whole of her youth in good old Weimar, not without coming into contact with Goethe's circle. Her brother, Krause, the Professor of Theology in Königsberg, was called to the post of General Superintendent at Weimar after Herder's death. It is not unlikely that her mother, my great grandmother, is mentioned in young Goethe's diary under the name of "Muthgen." She married twice, and her second husband was Superintendent Nietzsche of Eilenburg. In 1813, the year of the great war, when Napoleon with his general staff entered Eilenburg on the 10th of October, she gave birth to a son. As a daughter of Saxony she was a great admirer of Napoleon, and maybe I am so still. My father, born in 1813, died in 1849. Previous to taking over the pastorship of the parish of Röcken, not far from Lützen, he lived for some years at the Castle of Altenburg, where he had charge of the education of the four princesses. His pupils are the Queen of Hanover, the Grand-Duchess Constantine, the Grand-Duchess of Oldenburg, and the Princess Theresa of Saxe-Altenburg. He was full of loyal respect for the Prussian King, Frederick William the Fourth, from whom he obtained his living at Röcken; the events of 1848 saddened him extremely. As I was born on the 15 th of October, the birthday of the king above mentioned, I naturally received the Hohenzollern names of Frederick William. There was at all events one advantage in the choice of this

day: my birthday throughout the whole of my childhood was a day of public rejoicing. I regard it as a great privilege to have had such a father: it even seems to me that this embraces all that I can claim in the matter of privileges—life, the great yea to life, excepted. What I owe to him above all is this, that I do not need any special intention, but merely a little patience, in order involuntarily to enter a world of higher and more delicate things. There I am at home, there alone does my inmost passion become free. The fact that I had to pay for this privilege almost with my life, certainly does not make it a bad bargain. In order to understand even a little of my Zarathustra, perhaps a man must be situated and constituted very much as I am myself—with one foot beyond the realm of the living.

4

I have never understood the art of arousing ill-feeling against myself, —this is also something for which I have to thank my incomparable father,—even when it seemed to me highly desirable to do so. However un-Christian it may seem, I do not even bear any ill-feeling towards myself. Turn my life about as you may, you will find but seldom—perhaps indeed only once—any trace of some one's having shown me ill-will. You might perhaps discover, however, too many traces of goodwill. . . . My experiences even with those on whom every other man has burnt his fingers, speak without exception in their favour; I tame every bear, I can make even clowns behave decently. During the seven years in which I taught Greek to the sixth form of the

College at Bâle, I never had occasion to administer a punishment; the laziest youths were diligent in my class. The unexpected has always found me equal to it; I must be unprepared in order to keep my self-command. Whatever the instrument was, even if it were as out of tune as the instrument "man" can possibly be,—it was only when I was ill that I could not succeed in making it express something that was worth hearing. And how often have I not been told by the "instruments" themselves, that they had never before heard their voices express such beautiful things.... This was said to me most delightfully perhaps by that young fellow Heinrich von Stein, who died at such an unpardonably early age, and who, after having considerately asked leave to do so, once appeared in Sils-Maria for a three days' sojourn, telling everybody there that it was not for the Engadine that he had come. This excellent person, who with all the impetuous simplicity of a young Prussian nobleman, had waded deep into the swamp of Wagnerism (and into that of Dübringism[2] into the bargain!), seemed almost transformed during these three days by a hurricane of freedom, like one who has been suddenly raised to his full height and given wings. Again and again I said to him that this was all owing to the splendid air; everybody felt the same,—one could not stand 6000 feet above Bayreuth for nothing,—but he would not believe me.... Be this as it may, if I have been the victim of many a small or even great offence, it was not "will," and least of all ill-will that actuated the offenders; but rather, as I have already suggested, it was goodwill, the cause of no small amount of mischief in f my life, about which I had to complain. My experience gave me a right to feel suspicious in regard to all so-called "unselfish" instincts, in regard to

the whole of "neighbourly love" which is ever ready and waiting with deeds or with advice. To me it seems that these instincts are a sign of weakness, they are an example of the inability to withstand a stimulus —it is only among decadents that this pity is called a virtue. What I reproach the pitiful with is, that they are too ready to forget shame, reverence, and the delicacy of feeling which knows how to keep at a distance; they do not remember that this gushing pity stinks of the mob, and that it is next of kin to bad manners—that pitiful hands may be thrust with results fatally destructive into a great destiny, into a lonely and wounded retirement, and into the privileges with which great guilt endows one. The overcoming of pity I reckon among the noble virtues; In the "Temptation of Zarathustra" I have imagined a case, in which a great cry of distress reaches his ears, in which pity swoops down upon him like a last sin, and would make him break faith with himself. To remain one's own master in such circumstances, to keep the sublimity of one's mission pure in such cases,—pure from the many ignoble and more short-sighted impulses which come into play in so-called unselfish actions,—this is the rub, the last test perhaps which a Zarathustra has to undergo—the actual proof of his power.

5

In yet another respect I am no more than my father over again, and as it were the continuation of his life after an all-too-early death. Like every man who has never been able to meet his equal, and unto whom

the concept "retaliation" is just as incomprehensible as the notion of "equal rights," I have forbidden myself the use of any sort of measure of security or protection—and also, of course, of defence and "justification"—in all cases in which I have been made the victim either of trifling or even very great foolishness. My form of retaliation consists in this: as soon as possible to set a piece of cleverness at the heels of an act of stupidity; by this means perhaps it may still be possible to overtake it. To speak in a parable: I dispatch a pot of jam in order to get rid of a bitter experience.... Let anybody only give me offence, I shall "retaliate," he can be quite sure of that: before long I discover an opportunity of expressing my thanks to the "offender" (among other things even for the offence)—or of asking him for something, which can be more courteous even than giving. It also seems to me that the rudest word, the rudest letter, is more good-natured, more straightforward, than silence. Those—who keep silent are almost always lacking in subtlety and refinement of heart; silence is an objection, to swallow a grievance must necessarily produce a bad temper—it even upsets the stomach. All silent people are dyspeptic. You perceive that I should not like to see rudeness undervalued; it is by far the most humane form of contradiction, and, in the midst of modern effeminacy, it is one of our first virtues; If one is sufficiently rich for it, it may even be a joy to be wrong. If a god were to descend to this earth, he would have to do nothing but wrong—to take guilt not punishment, on one's shoulders, is the first proof of divinity.

6

Freedom from resentment and the understanding of the nature of resentment—who knows how very much after all I am indebted to my long illness for these two things? The problem is not exactly simple: a man must have experienced both through his strength and through his weakness, If illness and weakness are to be charged with anything at all, it is with the fact that when they prevail, the very instinct of recovery, which is the instinct of defence and of war in man, becomes decayed. He knows not how to get rid of anything, how to come to terms with anything, and how to cast anything behind him. Everything wounds him. People and things draw importunately near, all experiences strike deep, memory is a gathering wound. To be ill is a sort of resentment in itself. Against this resentment the invalid has only one great remedy—I call it Russian fatalism, that fatalism which is free from revolt, and with which the Russian soldier, to whom a campaign proves unbearable, ultimately lays himself down in the snow. To accept nothing more, to undertake nothing more, to absorb nothing more—to cease entirely from reacting.... The tremendous sagacity of this fatalism, which does not always imply merely the courage for death, but which in the most dangerous cases may actually constitute a self-preservative measure, amounts to a reduction of activity in the vital functions, the slackening down of which is like a sort of will to hibernate. A few steps farther in this direction we find the fakir, who will sleep for weeks in a tomb.... Owing to the fact that one would be used up too quickly if one reacted, one no longer reacts at all: this is the principle. And nothing on earth consumes a man more quickly than the passion of resentment. Mortification, morbid susceptibility, the inability to wreak revenge, the desire and thirst for