

ECCE HOMO



How One Becomes What One Is

merely say Venice. When I seek another word for music, I always find only the word Venice. I do not know how to distinguish between tears and music—I do not know how to think of happiness, of the *south*, without shudders of timidity.

*At the bridge I stood
late in the brown night.
From afar came a song:
As a golden drop it welled
over the quivering surface.
Gondolas, lights, and music—
drunken it swam out into the twilight.
My soul, a stringed instrument,
sang to itself, invisibly touched,
a secret gondola song,
quivering with iridescent happiness.
—Did anyone listen to it?*

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In all these matters—in the choice of nutrition, of place and climate, of recreation—an instinct of self-preservation issues its commandments, and it gains its most unambiguous expression as an instinct of *self-defense*. Not to see many things, not to hear many things, not to permit many things to come close—first imperative of prudence, first proof that one is no mere accident but a necessity. The usual word for this instinct of self-defense is *taste*. It commands us not only to say No when Yes would be “selfless” but also to say *No as rarely as possible*. To detach oneself, to separate oneself from anything that would make it necessary to keep saying No. The reason in this is that when defensive expenditures, be they ever so small, become the rule and a habit, they entail an extraordinary and entirely superfluous impoverishment. Our *great* expenses are composed of the most frequent small ones. Warding off, not letting things come close, involves an expenditure—let nobody deceive himself about this—energy *wasted* on negative ends. Merely through the constant need to ward off, one can become weak enough to be unable to defend oneself any longer.

Suppose I stepped out of my house and found, instead of quiet, aristocratic Turin, a small German town: my instinct would have to cast up a barrier to push back everything that would assail it from this pinched and flattened, cowardly world. Or I found a German big city—this built-up vice where nothing grows, where everything, good or bad, is imported. Wouldn’t this compel me to become a *hedgehog*?

But having quills is a waste, even a double luxury when one can choose not to have quills but *open hands*.

Another counsel of prudence and self-defense is to *react as rarely as possible*, and to avoid situations and relationships that would condemn one to suspend, as it were, one’s “freedom” and initiative and to become a mere reagent. As a parable I choose

association with books. Scholars who at bottom do little nowadays but thumb books—philologists, at a moderate estimate, about 200 a day—ultimately lose entirely their capacity to think for themselves. When they don’t thumb, they don’t think. They *respond* to a stimulus (a thought they have read) whenever they think—in the end, they do nothing but react. Scholars spend all of their energies on saying Yes and No, on criticism of what others have thought—they themselves no longer think.

The instinct of self-defense has become worn-out in them; otherwise they would resist books. The scholar—a decadent.

I have seen this with my own eyes: gifted natures with a generous and free disposition, “read to ruin” in their thirties—merely matches that one has to strike to make them emit sparks—

“thoughts.”

Early in the morning, when day breaks, when all is fresh, in the dawn of one’s strength—to *read a book* at such a time is simply depraved!

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At this point the real answer to the question, *how one becomes what one is*, can no longer be avoided. And thus I touch on the masterpiece of the art of self-preservation—of *selfishness*.

For let us assume that the task, the destiny, the fate of the task transcends the average very significantly: in that case, nothing

could be more dangerous than catching sight of oneself *with* this task. To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is. From this point of view even the *blunders* of life have their own meaning and value—the occasional side roads and wrong roads, the delays, “modesties,” seriousness wasted on tasks that are remote from *the* task. All this can express a great prudence, even the supreme prudence: where *nosce te ipsum*¹ would be the recipe for ruin,² forgetting oneself, *misunderstanding* oneself, making oneself smaller, narrower, mediocre, become reason itself. Morally speaking: neighbor love, living for others, and other things *can* be a protective measure for preserving the hardest self-concern. This is the exception where, against my wont and conviction, I side with the “selfless” drives: here they work in the service of *self-love*, of *self-discipline*.³

The whole surface of consciousness—consciousness *is* a surface⁴—must be kept clear of all great imperatives. Beware even of every great word, every great pose! So many dangers that the instinct comes too soon to “understand itself”——. Meanwhile the organizing “idea” that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down—it begins to command; slowly it leads us *back* from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares *single* qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as means toward a whole—one by one, it trains all *subservient* capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, “goal,” “aim,” or “meaning.”

Considered in this way, my life is simply wonderful. For the task of a *revaluation of all values* more capacities may have been needed than have ever dwelt together in a single individual—above all, even contrary capacities that had to be kept from disturbing, destroying one another. An order of rank among these capacities: distance; the art of separating without setting against one another; to mix nothing, to “reconcile” nothing; a tremendous variety that is nevertheless the opposite of chaos—this was the precondition, the long, secret work and artistry of my instinct. Its *higher protection*

¹ Know thyself.

² *Untergang*.

³ *Selbstsucht, Selbstzucht*.

⁴ This anti-Cartesian epigram anticipates Freud.

manifested itself to such a high degree that I never even suspected what was growing in me—and one day all my capacities, suddenly ripe, *leaped forth* in their ultimate perfection.⁵ I cannot remember that I ever tried hard⁶—no trace of *struggle* can be demonstrated in my life; I am the opposite of a heroic nature. “Willing” something, “striving”⁷ for something, envisaging a “purpose,” a “wish”—I know none of this from experience. At this very moment I still look upon my future—an *ample* future!—as upon calm seas: there is no ripple of desire. I do not want in the least that anything should become different than it is; I myself do not want to become different.

But that is how I have always lived. I had no wishes. A man over forty-four who can say that he never strove⁸ for *honors*, for *women*, for *money*!

Thus it happened, for example, that one day I was a university professor—no such idea had ever entered my mind, for I was barely twenty-four years old. Thus it happened two years earlier that one day I was suddenly a philologist—insofar as my *first* philological essay, my beginning in every sense, was requested by my teacher, Ritschl, for publication in his *Rheinisches Museum*.⁹ (*Ritschl*—I say it with reverence—the only scholar of genius on whom I have laid eyes to this day. He was characterized by that agreeable corruption which distinguishes us Thuringians and which makes even Germans sympathetic: even to reach truth, we still prefer furtive paths. These words are not meant to underestimate my close compatriot, the *clever* Leopold von Ranke——.)¹⁰

⁵ An allusion to the birth of Pallas Athene who was said to have sprung, fully armed, from the head of Zeus.

⁶ *Dass ich mich je bemüht hätte*. Deliberately or not, Nietzsche pictures himself as the antithesis of Goethe's Faust who speaks of his ardent *Bemühn* in the first sentence of his first speech (line 357); and Faust's redemption after his death is explained by the angels in two of the most famous lines of German literature: “Who ever strives with all his power,/ We are allowed to save”; *Wer immer strebend sich bemüht,/ Den können wir erlösen* (lines 11936–37).

⁷ *Streben*: see the preceding note.

⁸ *Dass er sich nie . . . bemüht hat!*

⁹ One of the leading professional journals.

¹⁰ The great historian (1795–1886) was born in Wiehe, in Thuringia,

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One will ask me why on earth I've been relating all these small things which are generally considered matters of complete indifference: I only harm myself, the more so if I am destined to represent great tasks. Answer: these small things—nutrition, place, climate, recreation, the whole casuistry of selfishness—are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far. Precisely here one must begin to *relearn*. What mankind has so far considered seriously have not even been realities but mere imaginings—more strictly speaking, *lies* prompted by the bad instincts of sick natures that were harmful in the most profound sense—all these concepts, "God," "soul," "virtue," "sin," "beyond," "truth," "eternal life."—But the greatness of human nature, its "divinity," was sought in them.—All the problems of politics, of social organization, and of education have been falsified through and through because one mistook the most harmful men for great men—because one learned to despise "little" things, which means the basic concerns of life itself.¹

When I now compare myself with the men who have so far

roughly thirty miles west of Rößen (near Lützen), where Nietzsche was born. And Ranke, like Nietzsche, got his secondary school education at Schulfora.

¹ Podach (*Friedrich Nietzsches Werke*, 1961) reproduces a photograph of section 10 (plate XV) and points out that the spiral scribble used to delete the following passage at this point was characteristic of Nietzsche's sister and never employed by him (p. 408; cf. also pp. 245f.).

"Our present culture is ambiguous in the highest degree.—The German emperor making a pact with the pope, as if the pope were not the representative of deadly hostility to life!—What is being built today will no longer stand in three years.—When I measure myself against my *ability*, not to speak of what will come after me, a collapse, a construction without equal, then I more than any other mortal have a claim to the epithet of greatness."

In the first edition of *Ecce Homo* (1908) this paragraph was printed in a footnote in Raoul Richter's postscript (pp. 147f.) and introduced with the following comment: "There are only two passages of any length where the peculiarity of the crossing out and Peter Gast's testimony, based on his recollection, make it merely *probable* that the deletion was Nietzsche's own." The other passage will be found at the end of the discussion of "The Case of Wagner," below.

been honored as the *first*, the difference is palpable. I do not even count these so-called "first" men among men in general: for me they are the refuse of humanity, monsters of sickness and vengeful instincts; they are inhuman, disastrous, at bottom incurable, and revenge themselves on life.

I want to be their opposite: it is my privilege to have the subtlest sensitivity for all signs of healthy instincts. There is no pathological trait in me; even in periods of severe sickness I never became pathological; in vain would one seek for a trait of fanaticism in my character. There is not a moment in my life to which one could point to convict me of a presumptuous and pathetic² posture. The pathos of poses does *not* belong to greatness; whoever needs poses at all is *false*.—Beware of all picturesque men!

Life was easy for me—easiest when it made the hardest demands on me. Whoever saw me during the seventy days this fall when, without interruption, I did several things of the first rank the like of which nobody will do after me—or impose on me³—with a

² *Pathetisch* in German is closer in meaning to bombastic than it is to pitiful. The word is readily associated with an actor's style and with highly idealistic passages in drama—in Schiller's plays, for example—where big words are used freely and a laugh would puncture the whole effect. The same consideration applies to *Pathos* in the next sentence.

One may wonder whether this whole paragraph is starkly ironical or, on the contrary, totally lacking in self-awareness. Without denying that both alternatives contain a grain of truth, one may insist that Nietzsche's central point is important. He never lost the ability to laugh, and his self-image was the very antithesis of his sister's later image of him which, at her bidding, was translated into pictures and sculptures that she commissioned and for which she posed her brother who was by then a helpless invalid.

Finally, if we take seriously Nietzsche's words, "not a moment in my life"—as distinguished from "not a line in this book"—he is incontestably right. Consider how Dr. Paneth, one of Freud's friends, described Nietzsche of whom he saw a great deal in Nizza from December 26, 1883, until March 26, 1884: "There is not a trace of false pathos or the prophet's pose in him, as I had rather feared after his last work. Instead his manner is completely inoffensive and natural. . . . He told me, but without the least affectation or conceit, that he always felt himself to have a task. . . ." For further quotations from his letters and some discussion, see Walter Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday Anchor Books, 1960) pp. 323f.

³ *Die kein Mensch mir nachmacht—oder vormacht* . . . If Nietzsche meant—and this possibility cannot be ruled out—"or has done before me," the text ought to read: *oder mir vorgemacht hat*.

responsibility for all millennia after me, will not have noticed any trace of tension in me; but rather an overflowing freshness and cheerfulness. I never ate with more pleasant feelings; I never slept better.

I do not know any other way of associating with great tasks than *play*: as a sign of greatness, this is an essential presupposition. The least compulsion, a gloomy mien, or any harsh tone in the throat are all objections to a man; how much more against his work!—One must not have any nerves.—*Suffering* from solitude is also an objection—I have suffered only from “multitudes.”

At an absurdly early age, at seven, I already knew that no human word would ever reach me: has anyone ever seen me saddened on that account?

To this day I still have the same affability for everyone; I even treat with special respect those who are lowliest: in all of this there is not one grain of arrogance or secret contempt. If I despise a man, he *guesses* that I despise him: by my mere existence I outrage everything that has bad blood in its veins.

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*;⁴ that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but *love* it.

⁴ Love of fate. It should be noted how *Ecce Homo* exemplifies this attitude. As long as one overlooks this, as well as the fact that Nietzsche's life for the preceding decade, and more, had been troubled by continued ill health and excruciating physical pain, and that his books were, without exception, totally “unsuccessful,” one does not begin to understand *Ecce Homo*.

Why I Write Such Good Books

1

I am one thing, my writings are another matter.— Before I discuss them, one by one, let me touch on the question of their being understood or *not* understood. I'll do it as casually as decency permits; for the time for this question certainly hasn't come yet. The time for me hasn't come yet: some are born posthumously.

Some day institutions will be needed in which men live and teach as I conceive of living and teaching; it might even happen that a few chairs will then be set aside for the interpretation of *Zarathustra*. But it would contradict my character entirely if I expected ears and hands for my truths today: that today one doesn't hear me and doesn't accept my ideas is not only understandable, it even seems right to me. I don't want to be confounded with others—not even by myself.

To repeat, one cannot find many traces of ill will in my life; and of literary ill will, too, I could scarcely relate a single case. But only too many of pure foolishness!

To me it seems one of the rarest distinctions that a man can accord himself if he takes one of my books into his hands—I even suppose that he first takes off his shoes,¹ not to speak of boots.

When Dr. Heinrich von Stein once complained very honestly that he didn't understand a word of my *Zarathustra*, I told him that this was perfectly in order: having understood six sentences from it—that is, to have really experienced them—would raise one to a higher level of existence than “modern” men could attain. Given this feeling of distance, how could I possibly wish to be read by those “moderns” whom I know!

My triumph is precisely the opposite of Schopenhauer's: I say, “*non legor, non legar*.”²

¹ Allusion to Exodus 3:5.

² I am not read, I will not be read.