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BEHOLD THE MAN, AGAIN: WHAT NIETZSCHE HOPES HIS READERS WILL SEE IN *ECCE HOMO*

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Abstract

The title of Nietzsche's autobiography, Ecce Homo, *repeats (and echoes) the famous directive issued by Pilate, the provincial governor of Judea, to the crowd assembled outside the pretorium. While we know, more or less, what Pilate intended the crowd to behold—viz. the unremarkable humanity of the innocent prisoner Jesus—it is not entirely clear what Nietzsche expects his readers to behold in his autobiography. Despite imploring his readers not to mistake him for another, Nietzsche presents himself in* Ecce Homo *as nearly indistinguishable from the "moralists" whom he identifies as the targets of his criticism. The key to understanding how "one becomes what one is" lies in Nietzsche's understanding that both he and Jesus have improbably emerged in excess of the disciplinary regimes that formed them. The defiance displayed by Jesus at John 19:5 thus alerts us to the corresponding emergence of Nietzsche—as the "first immoralist"—from the morality he has outgrown.*

Keywords: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *The Antichrist*, Jesus, Pilate, morality

> *When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." —John 19:5-6*
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> *I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something monstrous—a crisis such as the earth has never seen, the most profound collision of conscience…I am no human, I am dynamite. — Friedrich Nietzsche*

1. Introduction

The book *Ecce Homo* (1888/1908) is typically received and treated as the autobiography of its author, the German-born philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). At the same time, however, the book *Ecce Homo* is also a biography

of Nietzsche, and it is in fact the first product of an author's effort to account for the *bios* of Herr Nietzsche.[1] That these two offices are performed by a single individual is no doubt important to us as we approach *Ecce Homo*, but this realization need not distract us from the differences that separate the author from this subject. As the title suggests, the author and subject of the book *Ecce Homo* are as different from one another—and, at the same time, as closely linked to one another—as the more famous pairing referenced by the book's title: Jesus and Pilate.

The title of the book *Ecce Homo* thus announces a drama in which Nietzsche plays both leading roles: He is the author who, echoing Pilate, bids his readers to *behold the man* displayed in the pages of this book, guiding them to do so by means of the Dionysian prayer of gratitude that occupies the interleaf epigraph.[2] He is also the subject of the biography, who, like Jesus, is the (ostensibly) mere mortal whom the readers of *Ecce Homo* are directed to behold, whose life cannot be reduced, to or contained by, the single glorious moment memorialized in the interleaf epigraph.[3]

The author of *Ecce Homo* is made known to us from his signed, dated testimony, which is frozen in time by the written word. On the "perfect day" of October 15, 1888, one Friedrich Nietzsche surveyed his life of forty-four years and pronounced it worthy of his unalloyed gratitude. The subject of *Ecce Homo* is known to us not only from the author's idealized account of him, but also from the subject's previous books, to which the author of *Ecce Homo* repeatedly draws our attention. Based on this latter mode of acquaintance, readers of *Ecce Homo* are probably more familiar with the subject of *Ecce Homo*, even if they are intrigued by the author of *Ecce Homo*. Indeed, readers familiar with Nietzsche's life and books may be surprised by the depth of the gratitude expressed in the interleaf epigraph of *Ecce Homo*. They might be under the impression that the subject of

[1] In his excellent biography of the young Nietzsche, Daniel Blue draws welcome attention to Nietzsche's habit, established early on, of regularly writing and updating the story of his life (Blue 2016, 85-92).

[2] On the prayerful nature and message of the interleaf epigraph, see Benson 2008, 189-214; and Conway 2021, 18-24.

[3] For appreciations of the place and role of the interleaf epigraph in the overall economy of *Ecce Homo*, see Altieri 1985, 399-400; Derrida 1986, 11-15; Platt 1998, 219-20; Silverman 1985, 147-49; Strong 19, 316-17; Shapiro 1989, 162-64; and Steinbuch 1994, 12-15.

Ecce Homo resided more regularly in the quotidian world of fragmentation, anxiety, resentment, and disappointment. Indeed, they might believe that *this* Nietzsche cannot be faithfully represented by a single day, much less by the "perfect day" that is eternalized in the interleaf epigraph.[4]

As one might expect from the title of *Ecce Homo*, the theme of duality is present from the start. As we learn in Nietzsche's Foreword, for example, he is both someone his readers already "ought to know" and someone who "find[s] it imperative to say *who* [*he is*] (Nietzsche 2021, 212). After presenting himself (*qua* debtor) as his own "creditor,"[5] he reveals that "the pride of [his] instincts fundamentally revolts" against his "duty" to re-introduce himself (Nietzsche 2021, 212). When he finally performs this vexed "duty," by shouting "*Hear me!*," he identifies himself as "so-and-so" [*der und der*] i.e., a figural (and as yet unidentified) duality (Nietzsche 2021, 212).

Other dualities (and occasional pluralities) emerge as the promised biography unfolds. Nietzsche is "so wise," we learn, because he has managed to navigate (and exploit) the "dual descent" that renders him both a *décadent* and "the opposite of a *decadent*" (Nietzsche 2021, 220-21).[6] While charting the "dual descent" of his subject, the author of *Ecce Homo* observes that "as [his] father [he is] already dead, as [his] mother still alive and growing old" (Nietzsche 2021, 2180).[7] He is "so clever," he proceeds to explain, inasmuch as he claims as "the greatest benefactor of [his] life" the very Richard Wagner whose toxic patronage diminished and nearly ruined him (Nietzsche 2021, 240). By way of explaining why he writes "such good books," he begins by declaring that "I am one thing, my writings are another" (Nietzsche 2021, 247), even as he proceeds to account for these "good books" with reference to their serial reflection of their author's circumstances. If we include *Ecce Homo* among these "writings," in fact, we

[4] In a postscript added the next morning to a letter dated 14 October 1888, Nietzsche thanked his friend Heinrich Köselitz (aka Peter Gast) for the thoughtful birthday letter [*Gratulationsbrief*] he received that morning, on which occasion he dedicated the interleaf epigraph to *Ecce Homo*. On that very same "perfect day," Nietzsche confided to Köselitz that he had received no other birthday greetings (Nietzsche 1986, Band 8, 451; Middleton 1969, 313).

[5] On the topic of the debtor/creditor relationship in which Nietzsche stands to himself, see Derrida 1986, 8-11.

[6] Nietzsche elsewhere explains that although he is a "*décadent*," the "philosopher in [him] fought against it" (Nietzsche 2121, 3).

[7] Here I follow Strong 1985, 322-330; and Derrida 1986, 15-19.

might be inclined to conclude that the author of *Ecce Homo* is "one thing," while the subject of *Ecce Homo* is "another matter."[8]

By charting the dramatic interplay of author and subject, we may see that *Ecce Homo* both reveals and celebrates the potent complementarity of Jesus and Pilate. As such, the borrowed title of *Ecce Homo* is meant to suggest that Nietzsche himself bears witness to a similar complementarity, on the strength of which he promises to disseminate a truth that will break history in two. As we shall see, what Nietzsche implores his readers to discern as they "behold" the "man" who comes to life in the pages of *Ecce Homo* is that he has recently emerged in excess of the disciplinary regime—viz. Christian morality—that formed him. As an "immoralist"—and, in fact, the "first" of this kind—he is virtually indistinguishable from the "moralist" he used to be and the "moralists" he is now determined to discredit. As in the case of the Jesus who was scourged and humiliated by Pilate, there is more to the subject of *Ecce Homo* than meets the untrained eye. Much as Jesus became defiant of the imperial power that had marked him, so Nietzsche has emerged as the antithesis of the disciplinary regime he has improbably outgrown. In both cases, the readers of *Ecce Homo* are invited to "behold a man" whose "glad tidings" are embedded in the alternative way of life he exemplifies.[9]

2. Beholding Nietzsche

Nietzsche begins his Foreword to *Ecce Homo* by begging his readers not to mistake him for someone else. In particular, he insists, he should not be mistaken for a "bogeyman," a "moral monster," a "saint," an "improver" of humankind, or a herald of "new ideals" (which he helpfully reclassifies as "idols") (Nietzsche 2021, 212-13).[10] It would appear, however, that these potential cases of

[8] Alexander Nehamas thus observes that "In engaging with [Nietzsche's] works, we are not engaging with the miserable little man who wrote them but with the philosopher who emerges through them" (Nehamas 1985, 234).

[9] On the novel expository styles employed by Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*, see Nehamas 1985, 196; Doueihi 1988, 209-16; Faulkner 2010, 52-69; and Conway 2021, 9-13.

[10] In a letter to Heinrich Köselitz (aka Peter Gast) on 30 October 1888, Nietzsche similarly confides, "To be sure, I talk about myself with all possible psychological "cunning" and cheerfulness [*Heiterkeit*]—I do not want to present myself to people as a prophet, savage beast, or moral horror. In this sense, too, the book could be salutary: it will perhaps prevent

mistaken identity are relevant only (or primarily) to the *immediate* reception of *Ecce Homo*, which Nietzsche hoped would be sufficiently warm—or at least curious—as to stifle any calls for the censorship or confiscation of his *next* book, which is known to us as *The Antichrist.*[11] In any event, the mistaken identities against which he cautions his readers are largely privative in nature. He tells his readers who and what he is not, but he does not explain, in his Foreword at least, who and what he is and has become. (To be fair, he does introduce himself, *entre nous*, as "a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus" (Nietzsche 2021, 212),[12] though it is not entirely clear how this introduction will obviate the mistaken identities he fears.) Although he reminds the readers of *Ecce Homo* that he is the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which he immodestly describes as the "greatest gift [humankind] ever received" (Nietzsche 2021, 214), this presumably is not news to them, even if their interest is piqued by his grandiose estimation of this achievement.

A more enduring fear of mistaken identity, pertaining to a more important audience, surfaces in the final chapter of *Ecce Homo*, immodestly titled "Why I Am a Destiny," wherein Nietzsche discloses his fear that he will be mistaken for the "founder of a religion" or, even worse, for a "*holy*" man or "saint" (Nietzsche 2021, 305). He famously registers his preference to be known instead as a "clown," in part because he may *be* a "clown" (Nietzsche 2021, 305). *These* fears, I take it, make sense only if we presuppose the appearance and reception of his next book, known to us as *The Antichrist*, and its success in precipitating, as intended, the profound "crisis" with which Nietzsche's name will one day be associated (Nietzsche 2021, 305). In *that* event, I offer, it is vitally important to Nietzsche that he not be mistaken for one man in particular: Jesus of Nazareth, who *is* known as the "founder of a religion' and as a "holy" man, and who was made into a "clown" by Pilate and his soldiers (John 19:5). To be more precise: What Nietzsche fears most of all is that what happened to Jesus will happen to him, viz.

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people from confusing me with my opposite [*Gegensatz*]" (Nietzsche 1986, Band 8, 462; and Middleton 1969, 318-20).

[11] In his letter to Köselitz on 30 October 1888, explains his tactical aim in writing *Ecce Homo*: "Not only did I want to present myself *before* the entirely uncanny solitary act of *revaluation*, — I would also like to *test* what risks I can take with the German ideas of freedom of speech. My suspicion is that the first book of the revaluation will be confiscated on the spot—legally and in all justice" (Nietzsche 1986, Band 8, 462; and Middleton 1969, 318-20).

[12] For a critical evaluation of Nietzsche's supposed credentials as a disciple of Dionysus, see Benson 2008, 202-16.

that his name will be associated with a religion or movement that is absolutely antithetical to his life and work. According to Nietzsche, after all, "there was only one Christian, and he died on the cross" (Nietzsche 2021, 171). That Jesus died not for his alleged crimes, but for the sins and sinfulness of humankind, was a psychological innovation attributed by Nietzsche to Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Nietzsche 2021, 173-74).[13]

In this final chapter of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche finally delivers a positive account of who and what he has become. In doing so, he also explains why he is so concerned not to be mistaken for another. As it turns out, what he *has* become—namely, the first "immoralist" (Nietzsche 2021, 306)—is virtually indistinguishable from the "moralists" whom he is determined to discredit. This is the case, as we shall see, because the "immoralist" whom we meet in the final chapter of *Ecce Homo* is in fact a novel kind or species of "moralist," emergent via the mechanism of self-overcoming [*Selbstüberwindung*] (Nietzsche 2021, 307) in excess of the "morality"—identified by him as "Christian morality"—he has outgrown (Nietzsche 2014, 347). If Nietzsche is mistaken for yet another "moralist"—e.g., as Jesus was mistaken, first, by the crowd gathered outside the pretorium and again by the apostle to the Gentiles—the all-important recipe for "how one becomes what one is" will remain unknown and unappreciated. In that event, Nietzsche would surely be mistaken for another, and the cultural forces designated by the title "Dionysus" would be vanquished once again by the cultural forces associated with "The Crucified One."[14]

3. Beholding Jesus

In order to appreciate the depth of the anxiety expressed by Nietzsche in the final chapter of *Ecce Homo*, we would do well to consider his heterodox understanding of the life of Jesus. In *The Antichrist*, which is the book *Ecce Homo*

[13] For edifying discussions of Nietzsche's view of Paul (rather than Jesus) as the architect of what we now understand as Christianity, see Salaquarda 1998, 275-82; and Reginster, pp. 228-29, 242-51.

[14] For a critical assessment of Nietzsche's claim to be a "disciple of the philosopher Dionysus," see Benson 2008, 202-16.

was meant to precede,[15] Nietzsche insists that the accounts of Jesus in the Christian New Testament are unreliable. More important, however, is Nietzsche's attempt to explain why he will succeed, as an exemplary agent of affirmation, where Jesus failed. Having uncovered the real Jesus, whom he believes is importantly different from himself, he may prevent a similar violence from being done to him. As Nietzsche explains in *The Antichrist*, Jesus embodied a token of the "Redeemer type," which, he alleges, was unknown at that time in the Middle East and therefore was ripe for misinterpretation and misunderstanding (Nietzsche 2021, 160-65). After refusing Renan's misguided attempt to figure Jesus as a "genius" and "hero," Nietzsche proposes instead to treat Jesus as an omni-affirmative Dostoevskian "idiot" (Nietzsche 2021, 160-61).

As is his wont throughout the post-Zarathustran period of his career, moreover, Nietzsche quickly reduces this psychological type to its physiological preconditions. Owing to an "extreme capacity for suffering and irritability," he explains, the Redeemer type manifests an "*instinctive hatred of reality"*—"because it feels each touch too deeply"—and an "*instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all hostility, all boundaries and distances of feelings*," because ‘every compulsion to resist [is experienced] as an unbearable *displeasure* (Nietzsche 2021, 161). For this type, and for Jesus as its representative token, redemption lies not in an afterlife or afterworld, but in an earthly way of life, i.e., a set of worldly practices, wherein one finds blessedness in no longer offering resistance to anyone or anything.

According to Nietzsche, the heavenly paradise or kingdom that contemporary followers of Jesus typically project into a metaphysical beyond is in fact available in *this* life to those among the dispossessed who follow the simple rules and guidelines prescribed by Jesus (Nietzsche 2021, 161). On this interpretation, for example, the "inheritance" that Jesus famously apportioned to the meek, the peacemakers, the poor in spirit, *et al*., was theirs for the taking *in real time*—they were well fed, after all—if they were simply to habituate themselves to the way

[15] In a letter to Georg Brandes on 20 November 1888, Nietzsche describes *Ecce Homo* "as the prelude to the *Revaluation of All Values*, of the work that lies finished before me [viz., *The Antichrist*]." He also describes the aim of *Ecce Homo* as continuous with (if not identical to) the aim of *The Antichrist*: "The book is called *Ecce Homo*, and it is an unrelenting attack on the Crucified; it ends with thunder and lightning bolts against everything that is Christian or infected by Christianity" (Nietzsche 1986, Band 8, 482; and Middleton 1969, 326-27).

of life recommended (and modeled) by Jesus himself. One's reward for peacemaking, for example, lies not in one's gleeful experience of revenge in a conjectured afterlife, nor in one's fantasy-fueled anticipation of this experience, but in "the blessedness of peace, in gentleness, in not-*being-able*-to-be [an] enemy," which one may enjoy as an immediately attainable condition of one's earthly existence (Nietzsche 2021, 161).

Nietzsche was apparently impressed by the aversion of *this* Jesus to the metaphysical sophistications and doctrinal trappings of the religion that came to bear his name. He observed, approvingly, that this Jesus was an "incarnate gospel of love, this 'redeemer' who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, sinners, and the sick" (Nietzsche 2014, 227). Jesus did so, according to Nietzsche, by preaching "a new way of life, *not* a new faith" (Nietzsche 2021, 166). The aim and accomplishment of this "new way of life" was to deliver the afflicted as quickly and painlessly as possible from the suffering they were otherwise unable (and increasingly unwilling) to bear. Inasmuch as imputations and confessions of sin, debt, obligation, blame, guilt, etc. would only exacerbate the suffering of the afflicted, this Jesus bade his followers to value (and, eventually, to consecrate) the simplicity and humility of their collective lot, which they were powerless to refuse in any event. So long as we bear in mind that the way of life of the "Redeemer type" is suitable only for decadents, we may note that Nietzsche has no objection to it. He in fact welcomes the advent of a European equivalent of Indian Buddhism (Nietzsche 2021, 174-77), wherein, he insists, (secular) redemption will be delivered on demand to all who seek it (Nietzsche 2021, 149-153).

According to Nietzsche, as we have seen, the Jesus who appears before the crowd at John 19:5 has been mistaken for another. As a token of the "Redeemer type," Jesus might have responded to Pilate's questions with statements rich in allusion, indirection, parable, allegory, and symbolism, but he would not have engaged in the defiant behavior attributed to him by the author of the Gospel of John. It is this mistake that Nietzsche fears most of all, for he is concerned that the emergent type *he* represents—that of the "immoralist"—is similarly ripe for misunderstanding and misappropriation. If the gentle, hypersensitive, evangelical Nazarene could be mistaken for a criminal, and subsequently transmogrified into "The Crucified One," there can be no assurance that the "immoralist" who reintroduces himself in *Ecce Homo* will not meet a similar fate. In that event, or so Nietzsche fears, his signal contribution to the "revaluation of all values"—which,

he claims, has become "flesh and genius in [him]"—would be in vain (Nietzsche 2021, 305).

Even if we limit ourselves to the context of the Gospel of John, however, we see that Jesus is mistaken for another. Pilate's famous utterance—*ecce homo*—is an unsubtle response to the crowd's failure thus far to "behold" Jesus as the innocent "man" Pilate takes him to be. Finding "no crime" in his prisoner, Pilate is clearly perplexed by the crowd's insistence on the guilt of Jesus and the severity of the recommended sentence. In a final effort to correct the crowd's mistake, Pilate endeavors to exaggerate the humanity of his prisoner by parading him in mock finery before the crowd. Failing yet again to "behold the man," the crowd demands that Jesus be crucified. Splitting the difference between acceding to the crowd's demand and formally declaring Jesus to be innocent, Pilate releases Jesus to the crowd. (Although Pilate takes his entitled place in the "judgment seat" (John 19:13), he issues no formal judgment that has been recorded.)[16] Here it may be interesting to note that the crowd initially acknowledged that it had no right to execute the criminal (John 18:31), which accounts for its decision to petition Pilate in the first place.

A further case of mistaken identity is of central relevance to Nietzsche's aims in *Ecce Homo*. What Nietzsche discerns, I offer, is that the extended interaction between Pilate and his prisoner activates in Jesus a measure of defiance that Pilate and the crowd may have failed to "behold" in the "man" who appears before them at John 19:5. As such, the "man" paraded before the crowd attests not only to the truth of imperial power, but also to its limits. By humiliating and mocking his prisoner, Pilate inadvertently provided Jesus with the impetus to exceed the disciplinary regime under which he had been apprehended and scourged. As a result, the "man" whom the crowd (and Nietzsche's readers) are urged to "behold" foretells the fall of the Empire and the triumph of the reactive forces that Nietzsche associates with "Judea" in its ongoing contest with the active forces associated with "Rome" (Nietzsche 2014, 242-44).

In support of his efforts to ensure that he will not be mistaken for another, Nietzsche feels compelled to link his case to that of Jesus and Pilate. The borrowed title of Nietzsche's autobiography thus serves a dual function: In order to

[16] To be sure, Pilate's subsequent provision of the notice to be displayed on the cross—INRI—may be interpreted and/or received as a tacit pronouncement of the prisoner's guilt (John 19:19).

behold the man who is on display in the pages of the book *Ecce Homo*, his readers are encouraged, once again, to *behold the man* whom Pilate presents to the crowd at John 19:5. On this occasion, Nietzsche's readers are urged to behold the scourged and humiliated Jesus so that they might be better prepared to behold Nietzsche as a newly reborn "immoralist," as a disciple of Dionysus, as a truth teller *par excellence*, and, finally, as an incarnate stick of dynamite (Nietzsche 2021, 305-06).

What Nietzsche (believes) he shares in common with Jesus, by virtue of which he is likely to be similarly mistaken for another, is his emergence in excess of the disciplinary regime that formed him. As an unintended product of Christian morality, the "immoralist" whom we encounter in the final chapter of *Ecce Homo* is virtually indistinguishable from the "moralists" whose authority he is determined to contest. If Nietzsche's readers are to discern and appreciate the subtle differences that set him (*qua* "immoralist) apart from (and at odds with) the "moralists" whom he confronts, they will need to understand the process—designated by Nietzsche as *self-overcoming* [*Selbstüberwindung*]—through which he became an "immoralist" (Nietzsche 2021, 307).

4. Beholding the passion narrative in *Ecce Homo*

In the Gospel of John, the utterance *ecce homo* is emblematic of the passion narrative, and it in fact announces the commencement of the physical abuse and humiliation that would culminate in the crucifixion of Jesus. Surely it is no coincidence that the book *Ecce Homo* also delivers a passion narrative, wherein Nietzsche's passion, which I prefer to call his *patiency*, is presented as the unlikely secret of his improbable success.[17] As it turns out, one may "become what one is" by enduring (and surviving) the full menu of burdens, assaults, pains, disappointments, grievances, humiliations, and reversals of fortune that the cosmos, in its monstrous indifference, sees fit to deliver to one's doorstep.

According to Nietzsche, however, endurance and survival will not suffice. In order to "become what one is," one also must affirm anything that befalls one as a non-negotiable condition of what one has become. After proposing *amor fati* as his "formula for greatness in humans" (Nietzsche 2021, 246), he confirms that

[17] I am indebted here to the "fatalistic" interpretation of *Ecce Homo* developed by Leiter 2002, 81-87.

"what is *necessary* does not harm [him]," for "*amor fati* is [his] innermost nature" (Nietzsche 2021, 304).[18] Indeed, he appears in the pages of *Ecce Homo* as *wise*, *clever*, the author of many *good books*, and a *destiny* because he no longer experiences as burdensome the various debts and obligations he has accumulated. Having affirmed his past, as well as his unique place within the chain of necessities that has delivered him to the "perfect day" commemorated in the interleaf epigraph to *Ecce Homo*, he now treats his debts and burdens, including his ineradicable share in the *décadence* he supposedly inherited from his father, [19] as essential elements of what he has become. Speaking as someone who has become involuntarily "*experienced* in questions of *décadence*," for example, he now beholds the world from the perspective of the invalid toward *healthier* concepts and values, and again, the other way round, looking down from the wealth and self-certainty of *rich* life into the secret work of the instinct of *décadence* (Nietzsche 2021, 219-20).

As a result, he boasts, he has become "handy at *transposing perspectives*: the prime reason why, perhaps for [him] alone, a 'revaluation of all values' is at all possible" (Nietzsche 2021, 220). So it is, moreover, that the "revaluation of all values" that became possible for him on the strength of his affirmation (and voluntary reception) of all that has befallen him, has become "flesh and genius" in him (Nietzsche 2021, 305). Like Jesus, who preached "*not* a new faith but a new way of life" (Nietzsche 2021, 166), Nietzsche now embodies (and, so, bodies forth) his preferred alternative to the mendacious way of life preached and practiced by the "moralists."

But how did Nietzsche arrive at the desired posture of affirmation, which, by his own account, eluded him for so much of his life? When he describes in *Ecce Homo* what is arguably his greatest achievement—the production of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—he takes as little credit as possible, emphasizing instead his endurance (and ultimately his survival) of what he describes as an uninvited takeover: "On these two pathways the whole first book of *Zarathustra* came to me [*fiel mir*], especially Zarathustra himself, as a type: more correctly, he *overcame me* [*er überfiel mich*] ..." (Nietzsche 2021, 280).

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[18] Here I follow Strong's interpretation of *Ecce Homo* as an effort to stage Nietzsche's presentation of himself as an "*übermenschlich"* hero (Strong 1985, 331-32).

[19] My treatment of Nietzsche's account of his familial inheritances is indebted to Strong 1985, 311-20; and Derrida, 1986, 15-19.

Further attesting to the sheer passivity (or patiency) of his role in the production of his *Zarathustra*, he describes a transformative experience, identified by him as "inspiration," over which he had no influence or control, but for which he is grateful beyond measure:

> With the merest trace of superstition in you, you would in fact scarcely know how to ward off the impression of being a mere incarnation, mere mouthpiece, mere medium of overpowering forces…You hear, you do not seek; you take, you do not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought lights up, inescapable, unhesitating as to its form—*I never had a choice*…All this takes place completely involuntarily, but as though in a tumult of feeling free, of being unrestricted, of power and divinity [*Göttlichkeit*]…(Nietzsche 2021, 282, emphasis added).

As this passage suggests, Nietzsche's choice of *Ecce Homo* as the title of his autobiography may reflect his understanding of the common bond that connects him to Jesus. Much as Jesus resolved in the garden of Gethsemane to welcome the "cup" (or destiny) that was not his to refuse in any event (Mark 26:39),[20] so Nietzsche became what he was—namely, a "destiny" [*Schicksal*]—by accommodating himself to (and thereby affirming) the adventitious forces of inspiration that had seized him (Nietzsche 2021, 281-82).[21]

Here we may aspire to greater precision: In order to affirm what one has become (and not merely bear the slights and indignities that have marred one's life), one may require the adventitious provocation of an unknown force or entity. Although Nietzsche describes his "inspiration" for the production of his *Zarathustra* as uninvited and perhaps terrifying, it entered his life, thereby disrupting an unpromising trajectory, under the sign of an unearned gift or dispensation. Much as the agony expressed by Jesus in the garden was allayed by the unrecorded response to the existential query he launched toward the heavens, so was Nietzsche's life transformed and redeemed by the "overpowering forces" that seized him. In other words: if granted an adventitious stimulus or provocation, one's passion (or patiency) may be activated as a novel expression of agency, wherein one comes to exemplify a previously unknown or neglected way of life.

[20] The "cup" from which Jesus will drink is directly referenced at John 18:11.

[21] For an instructive account of the "intensification of [Nietzsche's] self-image as a man of destiny," see Montinari 2003, 111. See also Stegmaier 2021, 389-408.

At first glance, of course, Nietzsche would appear to be in little danger of being mistaken for Jesus. Whereas (Nietzsche's) Jesus was omni-affirmative, physiologically averse to the stimulation and feeling involved in mustering even the slightest resistance, Nietzsche is well known for issuing summary pronouncements of denial, resistance, contradiction and negation. According to Nietzsche, in fact, he is the yea-sayer *par excellence* precisely because he allows himself two "negations" [*Verneinungen*]. As he explains in *Ecce Homo*, his emulation-worthy affirmative stance is predicated on his negation of a "type of human being who hitherto counted as the highest, the *good*, the *benevolent*, the *beneficent*" (Nietzsche 2021, 307), and his negation of "a form of morality that has gained respect and predominance as morality as such—*décadence* morality, or, to speak about it more plainly, *Christian* morality" (Nietzsche 2021, 307).

Nietzsche is an "immoralist," moreover, not simply because he undertakes these two negations, but also because he avails himself of the cultural authority vested in (what he identifies as) the recently ascendant disciplinary regime of "Christian truthfulness" (Nietzsche 2014, 347-48), wherein truth-seeking and truth-telling have been elevated to the status of cardinal virtues. (This is why he explains that "the self-overcoming [*Selbstüberwindung*] of morality" and of himself *qua* "moralist" was accomplished "through truthfulness" (Nietzsche 2021, 307). What this means, however, is that his negations, respectively, of the "good man" and of the morality that vouches for the "good man" are exceedingly difficult to distinguish from the signature negations of morality itself. When describing the typical activity of the "moralist," in fact, Nietzsche attributes to the "moralist" an activity and exclamation that immediately put us in mind of his autobiography:

> Reality presents us with a delightful array of types, the abundance of an extravagant play and change of forms: and some wretched loafer of a moralist comments: "No! the human should be *different*"? [...] He even knows what he should be like, this poor wretch of a bigot, he paints himself on the wall and then says "*ecce homo*!"… (Nietzsche 2021, 68; see also Conway 2014, 297-302).

If the "moralist" is identified by his recommendation of himself as the emulation-worthy ideal human type, and if the "moralist" punctuates his recommendation with an imperious "*ecce homo*," by what signs shall we distinguish Nietzsche, *qua* "immoralist," from the "moralist" whom he dismisses as a "wretched loafer" and a "poor wretch of a bigot"? Indeed, if the "immoralist" is a

particular (i.e., emergent) kind of "moralist," Nietzsche's readers should *expect* him not only to "paint himself on the wall," as he does in his autobiography, but also to seal his telltale graffito with a hearty—if somewhat confusing—"*ecce homo*." And if he expects his readers to distinguish his efforts from those of the "moralist" whom he ridicules, it is incumbent upon him to train them to discern the subtle differences that obtain between the *moralist* and the *immoralist*.[22]

The passion narrative that informs *Ecce Homo* thus reveals Nietzsche at his simultaneous best and worst. He may tell a silly, self-aggrandizing story in *Ecce Homo*, but this story is meant to drive home an important philosophical point. In birthing his *Zarathustra*, in struggling to cultivate a receptive audience, in living with the teachings of Zarathustra, and in suffering more generally from "the *rancune* of the great" (Nietzsche 2021, 284), Nietzsche has been remade—he would say *reborn*—in the image of the teachings for which he originally served as a medium or vessel. Although he is not (yet) the ideal recipient of Zarathustra's wisdom—that designation is apparently reserved for those "new" philosophers whom Nietzsche claims to spy on the horizon (Nietzsche 2014, 44-46)—he is sufficiently familiar with (and receptive to) Zarathustra's teachings that he now may assist in orchestrating (and hosting) the self-overcoming of morality. In this respect, the heavy hand he applies in *Ecce Homo* to his elaboration of Zarathustra's teachings—as if he and Zarathustra were collaborators or even co-authors—is meant to attest to his *worthiness* to do so, by dint of his progress thus far in making these teachings his own.

5. Beholding Zarathustra's Nietzsche

As Nietzsche explains in *Ecce Homo*, his most important progress to date involves his critical confrontation with Christian morality. Edified and fortified by the teachings of Zarathustra, he introduces himself in *Ecce Homo* as the "first

[22] The complexity of Nietzsche's attempt to train his target readership on the fly, even as he articulates his philosophical insights, is noted and explored by Girard 1978, 62; Nehamas 1985, 230-34; Derrida 1986, 8-11, 32-37; Sloterdijk 1989, 31-32; Staten 1990, 36-39, 147-49; Faulkner 2010, 61-69; and Conway 2021, 9-13.

immoralist." This immodest *nom de guerre* is meant to draw attention to his success thus far in turning the authority of morality against itself.[23] As he goes on to explain, moreover, his emergence as the "first immoralist" serves to clarify the division of labor that now guides his efforts to assist (and not merely channel) Zarathustra:

> Zarathustra is the first to see [*hat zuerst…gesehn*] in the battle [*Kampf*] of good and evil the actual wheel that drives things—the translation of morality into the metaphysical, as force, cause, purpose in itself, is *his* doing…Zarathustra created this most disastrous of errors, morality: consequently, he must also be the first to *acknowledge* [*erkennt*] it (Nietzsche 2021, 307).

Here we note the parallel achievement that marks the outer boundary of Zarathustra's contribution to their collaborative enterprise. As the first to *see* the world as enmeshed in the oppositional struggle between good and evil, qq is obliged to *acknowledge* his (or his namesake's) mistake. Okay, fair enough. But who will actually *correct* this mistake?

This task falls, apparently, to none other than Nietzsche, who has been remade in the image of Zarathustra's acknowledgment and deputized to orchestrate the eradication of morality. When he finally reveals what the name of Zarathustra means in *his* mouth, he offers his readers the following:

The self-overcoming [*Selbstüberwindung*] of morality through truthfulness, the self-overcoming [*Selbstüberwindung*] of the moralist into his antithesis [*Gegensatz*]—into *myself*—this is what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth (Nietzsche 2021, 307).

Here we observe the significance that Nietzsche now attaches to what comes out of *his* mouth, and not only when he channels Zarathustra. He has named Zarathustra, and regardless of what this name once meant to him, it *now* means to him, and furthermore bears witness to, the emergence of the "immoralist" in his own person. In short, his naming of Zarathustra has catalyzed the changes in him that have earned him the *nom de guerre* under which he prosecutes his "immoral" assault on Christian morality.

By way of his "immoral" confrontation with the "moralists" whom he has outgrown, Nietzsche apparently intends to mount an irreducibly moral campaign

[23] On this point, I follow Ridley 1998, 124-126; May 1999, 90-92; and Owen 2007, 126-129. See also Conway 2014, 302-07.

against "Christian morality." Toward this end, he avails himself of the cultural authority vested in (what he identifies as) the recently ascendant disciplinary regime of "Christian truthfulness," wherein truth-seeking and truth-telling have been accorded the status of cardinal virtues. (This is what he means when he says, in the extracted passage above, that "the self-overcoming [*Selbstüberwindung*] of morality" and of himself *qua* "moralist" was accomplished "through truthfulness." (Nietzsche 2021, 307) Although Nietzsche himself is not categorically opposed to lies and lying, especially if the (noble) lies in question either maintain the stability of a healthy polity or promote the deepest interests of life, he is eager to align himself in this case with the ascendant disciplinary regime of "Christian truthfulness." Indeed, with respect to the fading disciplinary regime of "Christian morality," Nietzsche (*qua* "immoralist") finds common cause with those representatives of "Christian truthfulness" who feel obliged and compelled to expose and denounce mendacity wherever it occurs.

Nietzsche's tactical alignment with the ascendant disciplinary regime of "Christian truthfulness" helps to explain why the case he builds in *Ecce Homo* against the disciplinary regime of "Christian morality" trades on a recognizably moral argument. The fading disciplinary regime of "Christian morality" is to be negated and eventually retired, he explains, simply because it is fundamentally *and unacceptably* mendacious. Although the lies told in the service of this regime were at one time useful in promoting the ongoing development of humankind, their contributions to this development are no longer positive and no longer justifiable as such. Aware that his "lot dictates that [he] must be the first *decent* human being," and that he is destined, *qua* truth-teller, to "oppose the mendacity of millennia," Nietzsche acknowledges that his standing as "the first *immoralist*" qualifies him as "the *destroyer* [*Vernichter*] par excellence" (Nietzsche 2021, 306).

Nietzsche apparently has known or wished all along that Zarathustra would put right the calamitous metaphysical error committed by Zoroaster. Until recently, however, he has not known *how* this correction would be made, or by whom. Now, however, he understands that Zoroaster's mistake will be erased by those in whom Zarathustra's acknowledgment has become incarnate, e.g., those who turn the power and authority of morality against itself. We are thus meant to understand Nietzsche's critique of morality, culminating in his emergence as an "immoralist," as the *first* dividend—but only the first—to be reaped from the bounty bestowed on us by his *Zarathustra*.

If nothing else, that is, Nietzsche's "immoralism" may be received as a promise of what may come, an appetizer in advance of the sumptuous feast that awaits the children of Zarathustra. Finally, Nietzsche reminds us in this passage that Zarathustra's task involves the eradication of morality itself, which, as his reference to Zoroaster (c. 628 – c. 551 BCE) confirms, predates Christianity. This may help to explain why Nietzsche remains hopeful that his frontal assault on Christian morality may pave the way for a "revaluation of all values" on the part of European modernity. In short, we might say that Zarathustra's Nietzsche believes that he has acquired the obligation to *bear witness* to what he has become. This is in fact how he begins his preface to *Ecce Homo*, by introducing his obligation to introduce himself to his readers.

Of course, the *real* introduction to *Ecce Homo* is the provocative title that Nietzsche selects for his idealized autobiography. The reader is immediately confronted with one of the strangest references in the Nietzschean corpus: Why *Ecce Homo*? After all, Nietzsche despised the Gospels, and he regarded the Gospel of John as emblematic of the slave revolt in morality. In order to venture an answer to this question, let's have a closer look at the man whom we are urged to behold. Nietzsche's point, I take it, is that the prisoner Jesus was able to claim the attention of the provincial governor, who ordinarily would (and should) not have given the prisoner a second thought. When we behold Nietzsche, that is, we are meant to understand that the marks of divine inspiration he has sustained have allowed him to become the first "immoralist."

6. Beholding Nietzsche and Pilate

That Nietzsche identifies strongly with Pilate should come as no surprise. He generally admired the "grand style" attained by the Roman Empire (Nietzsche 2021, 94), and he was particularly impressed with Pilate's steadfast refusal "to take a Jewish affair *seriously*…One Jew more or less—what does it matter?" (Nietzsche 2021, 182).[24] He furthermore credits Pilate with "the only phrase *that has*

[24] Pilate's slogan "One Jew more or less" thus recalls Nietzsche's expression of admiration for "a freer, more grandly calculating, *more Roman* conception of justice that Rome's Twelve Tables legislation decreed it was a matter of indifference as to how much or how little the creditor carved away in such a case: "*si plus minusve secuerunt, ne fraude esto*" (Nietzsche 2014, 253).

value" in the whole of the New Testament (Nietzsche 2021, 182). When Jesus explained that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37), Pilate dismissively asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Nietzsche finds value in this rhetorical question inasmuch as it implies that any assertion of allegiance to the truth, in the context of the thoroughly falsified worldview to which Jesus laid claim, must be dismissed out of hand. Indeed, rather than counter Jesus with an endorsement of naïve relativism, Pilate expressed his unwillingness to take seriously the prisoner's claims to an alternative truth (and kingdom) of his own. We may assume with some confidence, in fact, that Nietzsche understands Pilate's subsequent words to the crowd—*ecce homo*—as dripping with scorn for Jesus and the alternative "truth" to which he supposedly bore witness.[25]

Here it bears noting, however, that the Pilate described at John 19:5 is neither indifferent to this odd prisoner nor immediately dismissive of the prisoner's pledge of allegiance to the truth. This means that the Pilate whom Nietzsche admires for his noble scorn and imperial diffidence is *not* the Pilate who utters *ecce homo* at John 19:5. There, as we know, Pilate presents Jesus in his exaggerated humanity but fails to persuade the crowd of his innocence. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche similarly presents himself by exposing the truth of Christian morality, despite his fears that he will similarly fail to convince his target audience.

In order to further our appreciation of the scene described at John 19:5, let us note that *this* Pilate appears to commit a version of the mistake that Nietzsche elsewhere identifies as characteristic of (and potentially fatal to) the noble type:

When the noble manner of valuation errs and sins against reality, this happens relative to the sphere that is *not* sufficiently known to it, indeed, against any real knowledge of which it has rigidly defended itself: under certain circumstances it misjudges the sphere it despises, that of the common man, of the lowly people…Indeed, mixed into contempt are too much carelessness, too much taking-lightly, too much looking-away and impatience involved in contempt, even too much personal joyfulness…(Nietzsche 2014, 229).

[25] Nietzsche makes explicit reference to Pilate's rhetorical question in Section 8 of *The Antichrist*, where he explains that "As long as the priest, this denier, slanderer, poisoner of life by *profession*, continues to be seen as a *superior* kind of human, there will be no answer to the question: what *is* truth? We *have* already turned truth on its head if the conscious advocate of nothingness and denial is regarded as the representative of 'truth' […]" (Nietzsche 2021, 140).

Intentionally unfamiliar with the lowest strata of society, wherein resentment blooms and impotence begets creativity, the noble fails to protect himself adequately against the servile creatures with whom he comes into chance contact. Overly confident in his contempt for the lower orders, the noble underestimates the reactive psychological finesse that is born of the neglect, exclusion, and dispossession that define and delimit the lower orders of society.

This need to protect oneself is especially acute in the case of Pilate, whose role as provincial governor placed him in uncomfortable (and potentially dangerous) proximity to those whose psychological cunning he would be most likely to underestimate. Although Pilate's supposed "noble scorn" for the Jews in Judea should have insulated him from any extended involvement in their (merely local) affairs, he is described in the Gospel of John as unusually attentive to (and solicitous of) this particular prisoner.

Prior to the scene depicted at John 19:5, Pilate allows himself to be drawn into a multi-stage exchange with the prisoner. After initially insisting that the Jewish leaders "judge [Jesus] by [their] own laws" (John 18: 31), Pilate takes it upon himself to interview the prisoner (John 18:33), which he concludes by contesting the prisoner's claim to truth (John 18:38). After explaining to "the Jews gathered there" that he finds "no basis for a charge against [Jesus]," Pilate offers to release one prisoner in observance of the Passover custom (John 18:39). After the crowd registers its preference for the release of Barabbas (John 18:40), Pilate orders his soldiers to flog Jesus (John 19:1), whom they proceed to dress in a purple robe and a crown of thorns (John 19:4). Explaining once again that he finds no basis for a charge against Jesus, Pilate directs the crowd to "behold the man" he has presented for their re-consideration (John 19:5).

Contrary to his nature and station, Pilate took seriously a matter of strictly local import. Rather than conclude the matter immediately, e.g., by issuing a summary judgment, Pilate appears to stumble under the scrutiny and demands of multiple stakeholders. Temporarily disregarding the prophylactic measures that ordinarily insulate the higher from the lower orders of society, Pilate unwittingly acknowledged the standing of the prisoner and of the account he gave of himself as an agent of truth. Granting the prisoner what amounted to a private audience, Pilate inadvertently lent credence to the prisoner's claims. To borrow Nietzsche's words from the extracted passage above: Pilate's preoccupation with Jesus evinces "too much carelessness, too much taking-lightly, too much looking-away

and impatience involved in contempt, even too much personal joyfulness" (Nietzsche 2014, 229). As a result, the "man" whom Pilate bade the crowd to "behold" bore witness to both the extent *and* the limits of imperial power. Although the prisoner was humiliated, mocked, and paraded before the hostile crowd, he stood before his accusers in defiance of both the provincial governor and of those in the crowd who called for his crucifixion.

The chance meeting between Jesus and Pilate, culminating in the scene described at John 19:5, thus calls to mind Nietzsche's speculative reconstruction of the initial encounter between the ascetic priest and the formerly formidable "predatory" human beings:

> The priest […] will not be spared from waging war with the predators, a war of cunning [*List*] (of the "spirit") rather than of force [*Gewalt*], as goes without saying—and for this sometimes he will need to develop in himself almost a new type of predator, or at least *signify* one—a new animal terribleness in which the polar bear, the supple, cold, patient tiger cat, and not least the fox seem to be bound together in a unity that is just as attractive as fear-inspiring. Supposing that necessity compels him, he then steps forth among the other kinds of predator with bearish seriousness and feigned superiority, venerable, prudent, and cold, as the herald and mouthpiece of secret forces, determined to sow misery, conflict, and self-contradiction wherever he can in this soil and, only too certain of his art, always to be the master of those who *suffer* (Nietzsche 2014, 315).

Much like the ascetic priest in his initial meeting with the (real) "predators," Jesus responds to Pilate's provocations by presenting himself "as the herald and mouthpiece of secret forces." As described in the extracted passage, this opening gambit suffices to shift the balance of power. Much as the masquerading priest managed to secure the respect and recognition of the insufficiently wary "predators," so the prisoner succeeded in drawing and holding the attention of the provincial governor. And although Pilate succeeded in proving (to himself) that the prisoner was but a man, and not "the herald and mouthpiece of secret forces," he did so, unwittingly, at great expense to his authority and credibility.

In both cases, the captured gaze of the more powerful party was sufficient to grant a shimmer of validity to the (baseless) claims of the less powerful outsider. Even if the violence directed toward Jesus was a familiar expression of noble cruelty, it nevertheless marked its victim and granted him an identity and status he otherwise would not have possessed, much less displayed. That Jesus warranted the mockery and humiliation he received at the hands of the provincial

governor thus served to confirm his standing in the eyes of the Empire. When Jesus was presented to the sneering crowd for its re-consideration, or so we might conjecture, he managed "to develop in himself" something akin to "a new type of predator," for he was able on the strength of his display of defiance to insult both the governor and the crowd. Indeed, much like the priest in Nietzsche's just-so narrative, Jesus succeeded in converting a looming contest of "force," in which he most certainly would not have prevailed, into a contest of "cunning," in which Pilate found himself at a distinct and unfamiliar disadvantage. And just as the ascetic priest eventually exploited this initial encounter to prove himself a "tamer of beasts of prey" (Nietzsche 2014, 315), so the defiant prisoner dismissed Pilate's threat to assert his power, thereby exposing the provincial governor as weak and indecisive (John 19:11).

In both cases, the sudden and unprecedented transformation of the weaker party is catalyzed by a fateful grant of recognition on the part of the stronger party. According to Nietzsche's just-so story, the priest was able to summon a plausibly ferocious incarnation of himself, but only as a result and consequence of his initial meeting with the genuinely predatory human beings. Had this meeting never occurred, or had the predators wisely kept their distance and/or withheld their gaze and recognition, the priest would not have gained access to the "cunning" that enabled him to avenge himself against the predatory (=noble) human beings whom he encountered. So, too, in the case of Pilate and Jesus: Had Pilate not lingered with his prisoner and subjected him to the humiliation he was prepared to endure, he would not have gained access to the defiance he displayed at John 19:5 toward Pilate and those in the crowd who called for his crucifixion. Had this meeting never occurred, or had Pilate summoned a full measure of the "noble scorn" for which Nietzsche admired him, the fateful scene captured at John 19:5 would never have taken place.

That Jesus has grown defiant is evident in his insolence toward Pilate, which is recorded at John 19:11. Although the point of Pilate's re-presentation of the prisoner was to capture the attention (and change the judgment) of the crowd, Pilate also (and unwittingly) afforded Jesus the opportunity to hear the calls for his crucifixion and to understand that the crowd would not relent. Aware that he would be crucified in any event, as ordained by the "cup" that was not taken from him in Gethsemane, Jesus turned the tables on Pilate. Upon hearing yet again from

"the Jewish leaders" in the crowd, a fearful Pilate renewed his private interrogation of the prisoner. Jesus initially refused to respond (John 19:9), which led Pilate to remind Jesus of the power he held over him (John 19:10). Despite the prisoner's observation that the power Pilate wields is strictly derivative (John 19:11), and his suggestion that the governor is but a stooge of Caiaphas, Pilate attempted once again to free his prisoner, only to be accused by the crowd of disloyalty to Caesar (John 19:12).

According to Nietzsche, of course, the historical accuracy of this depiction of Pilate is extremely dubious. The author of the Gospel of John clearly wishes to identify the Jewish crowd—and not the Roman occupiers of Judea—as the true enemies of Jesus (Pagels, 1996, 104-11). Toward this end, the author of the Gospel of John depicts a Pilate who is uncharacteristically fearful, solicitous, and weak, so that the role of villain in this narrative may be filled instead by the persistently bloodthirsty Jewish crowd.

Still, it was Nietzsche who directed our attention to the scene and the drama depicted at John 19:5. Had he wished to cleave to a more historically defensible portrait of Pilate—namely, as a brutal, scornful, uncompromising provincial governor—he could have relied on other sources. For example, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (20 BCE – 50 CE) describes Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn, and cruel disposition," prone to "greed, violence, robbery, assault, abusive behavior, frequent executions without trial, and endless savage ferocity" (Philo 1962, 301-02; cited by Pagels 1996, 29-30). According to Pagels, another contemporary of Pilate, Flavius Josephus (37 – 100 CE), cites numerous examples of Pilate's contempt for Jewish religious sensibilities, e.g., displaying pagan (imperial) images within the holy city, appropriating money from the Temple treasury, and so on (Pagels 1996, 30-31).

This scene interests Nietzsche, perhaps, because it depicts a Jesus who, despite being scourged and humiliated, does not yet belong to the mob, either literally or figuratively. This Jesus has not yet been fatally mistaken for another. The crowd gathered outside the pretorium may yet revise its perception of him, just as Pilate intended. Having urged the crowd to behold this man, this mere mortal who is demonstrably neither king nor criminal, Pilate expected the crowd to withdraw its demand that Jesus be crucified. In the scene depicted at John 19:5, in other words, Jesus is not yet on the path to becoming "The Crucified One," and the Roman Empire has not yet ingested the "poison" that eventually would cause

it to rot from within (Nietzsche 2014, 227). At this particular moment, *another* history might have unfolded, a counter-history in which European modernity would not have been "cheated out of the harvests," respectively, "of antique culture" and "of *Islamic* culture" (Nietzsche 2021, 204).

As it turns out, however, this tantalizing possibility is but a wishful illusion. If we follow Pilate's directive and behold this man, we will see what Pilate does not. By attempting to disclose the truth of this victim, precisely so that the crowd might change its mind, Pilate unwittingly empowered the prisoner to access and display his defiance, i.e., his capacity to endure Pilate's expression of imperial power without capitulating to it. In other words, the passion of the Christ has begun.

7. Beholding the man, again

When we "behold the man," as directed by Pilate and seconded by Nietzsche, what do we see? In particular, what do we see that Pilate himself may not have seen? The mere mortal whom Pilate urges the crowd to behold is dressed in mock finery, crowned with thorns, perhaps bearing outward signs—e.g., cuts, bruises, bleeding—of the beating he has received. As such, the "man" whom Pilate urges the crowd to "behold" is presented to the crowd as both innocent and harmless, and he is paraded before the crowd in an effort to focus their attention on his unremarkable humanity. When we "behold the man" presented to the crowd, in other words, we cannot help but detect the handiwork of Pilate himself.

The marking and inscribing of the human body is a theme of great interest to Nietzsche, especially in Essay II of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, where he traces the origins of punishment to the pain-inducing mnemotechnics that compelled the weakling human animal to acquire a memory for the "promises" that were made on its behalf (Nietzsche 2014, 252-54). As Nietzsche demonstrates there, the cruelty dispensed by the lordly "creditor" had (and has) the unintended effect of prompting the "debtors" in question to improve their efforts to remember what is expected of them. As they do so, however, the pure delight that is enjoyed by the cruelty-dispensing "creditor" is progressively adulterated and diminished. As the notion of *desert* gains currency, the "creditor" is bound (by conscience, custom, or law) to mete out only the cruelty—now known and codified as "punishment"—that the delinquent "debtors" actually *deserve*.

Nietzsche's account of the origins of punishment positions us to revisit the man whom we are urged to behold at John 19:5. While it is true that Jesus did not resist Pilate's cruelty in any way that would be considered consistent with the otherworldly powers at his supposed disposal, his *endurance* of the cruelty and mockery visited upon him may be considered dispositive of the power he now possesses. That he stands before the crowd, marked by the empire but defiant to the end, refusing to grovel, beg, or apologize, may be understood to signify his access to a modality of power that bears noting in its own right. While beholding the man, that is, Pilate (and the crowd) may have failed to see that the man in question *voluntarily* bore involuntary witness to the reach and limits of imperial power. Hence the unintended irony of Pilate's utterance at John 19:5: *nothing* is more human, more all-too-human, than to weaponize one's resentment and thereby convert one's impotence into a display of hardened defiance. Just as Nietzsche indicated while explaining the vulnerability of the "noble manner of valuation," Pilate allowed his contempt for the prisoner to cloud his judgment.

When directed by Nietzsche to "behold the man," what we see and understand is that Pilate has overplayed his hand. He apparently failed to realize that he held ultimate power over the prisoner only in the event that the prisoner preferred life to death, pleasure to pain, or capitulation to defiance. The prisoner in question, however, evinces none of these preferences, and he apparently has affirmed the "cup" of his earthly destiny. He neither resists the humiliation visited upon him nor begs the governor for mercy. Leaning into the spectacle unfolding around him, the prisoner *bears* his suffering, *endures* his humiliation, and thereby *defies* the imperial power that has marked him. He does so, moreover, in full view of the assembled crowd, which is an audience he now shares with the governor. When we behold the prisoner, as Nietzsche redundantly bids us to do, we behold not only an expression of imperial power, but also its limits in this particular case. Pilate has inadvertently succeeded in making an improved "debtor" of Jesus while weakening his own position as alpha "creditor."

In the end, of course, Pilate delivers Jesus to the crowd. Before doing so, however, he lingers with the prisoner, and not simply to visit upon him the gratuitous cruelty that was his gubernatorial prerogative. Whatever his motivation might have been, Pilate extended his recognition to the prisoner, treating him as if he merited the time and attention of the provincial governor. If only for this

moment, as Pilate fell under the spell of the prisoner, the efficient, well-oiled machinery of the Empire ground to a halt. Perhaps this is why Pilate neither enforced his judgment of the prisoner nor recommended a particular sentence. As he is depicted in the Gospel of John, he effectively delegates these tasks to the crowd, thereby deputizing the Jews of Judea to carry out the will, or at least the forbearance, of the Empire.

Having attracted and held Pilate's attention, Jesus proceeds to dispense the counter-punishment that his defiance empowers him to deliver. What Nietzsche's readers are meant to behold in this scene is the *complementarity* of Jesus and Pilate. The Jesus who appears in this scene is not simply a hapless victim marked by imperial power, but a man transformed by his success in compelling the provincial governor to take him seriously as the representative of an unknown, alternative truth. Although Jesus appears before the crowd in the dress and finery of a buffoon, it is Pilate who plays the fool in this scene, for he has been goaded by the prisoner into validating his seemingly baseless demand for recognition. Similarly, the Pilate who appears in this scene is not simply a ruthless, scornful arbiter of imperial truth and power. He is also a provincial governor just barely off his game, vulnerable for a brief but fateful moment to the psychological mischief wrought by the prisoner. Each has activated in the other a heretofore unknown (or at least unfamiliar) relationship to power. As the powerless prisoner seizes the opportunity to express his defiance, the powerful governor unwittingly reveals that he has taken seriously, ever-so-briefly, the claims of his victim.

What this scene depicts, then, is not the possibility of a counter-history, but the impossibility of a counter-history. By the time Pilate shouts *ecce homo* to the crowd, it is already too late for Pilate, too late for Rome, too late for the noble ideal of antiquity. The scene described at John 19:5 thus depicts the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire. The passion of the Christ is now underway, leading inexorably on Nietzsche's view to his transformation into "The Crucified One," who died not for his supposed crimes but for the sins of humankind.

8. Conclusion

Although the author of the Gospel of John is not a credible historian of the first century of the Common Era, he warrants Nietzsche's attention—and, by ex-

tension, our own—as a faithful witness to the psychological mechanism that accounts for what Nietzsche calls *the slave revolt in morality*, wherein "*ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values" (Nietzsche 2014, 228-31). The Jesus whom this author presents for our consideration succeeds in goading Pilate into a war of "cunning," for which Pilate is utterly unprepared. As a result, the scourged, crowned prisoner succeeds in alerting all who behold him to the potential limits of imperial power and to the susceptibility of a noble Roman to the pollution of the formerly good conscience in which he is accustomed to finding enjoyment in venting his cruelty.

Thus, we see how it might have happened that Rome ingested the poisoned bait dangled before it, as Nietzsche insists, by the Jews. According to Nietzsche, the Jews only *pretended* to disown Jesus, gambling that he and his teachings might then become palatable to the unsuspecting peoples and nations of the Empire:

> This Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnate gospel of love, this "redeemer" who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, sinners, and the sick—was he not precisely seduction in its most uncanny and irresistible form, seduction and a detour to precisely those *Jewish* values and revisions of their ideal? Did Israel not achieve the final goal of its sublime revenge using the very detour of the "redeemer," this apparent adversary and disintegrator of Israel? Is it not part of the secret black art of a truly *grand* politics of revenge, a far-sighted, subterranean, slow-working and pre-calculating revenge that in front of the whole world Israel itself had to repudiate as its mortal enemy and nail to the cross the actual instrument of its revenge, so that "the whole world," namely all opponents of Israel could unhesitatingly bite into this very bait? (Nietzsche 2014, 227).

The architect of this grand plan is not named, but we may infer from the identification of "the whole world" as comprising "all opponents of Israel" that Nietzsche has in mind Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, whom he consistently blames/credits for mobilizing the crucifixion of Jesus in the service of his own political and geo-political aims.[26]

As conspiracy theories go, this one is out there. Nietzsche apparently acknowledges as much, for he couches his version of this theory in the form of an extended series of rhetorical questions. As he concludes, however, this much is "certain": "that *sub hoc signo* Israel with its revenge and revaluation of all values

[26] Paul also goes unnamed in a related discussion in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Nietzsche 2014, 331-32). See also Conway 2008, 131-34.

has so far triumphed again and again over all other ideals, over all *nobler* ideals" (Nietzsche 2014, 227).[27]

According to Nietzsche, Rome was done in by its unwitting ingestion and incorporation of "Jewish ideals," a calamity which is prefigured in Pilate's presentation of Jesus at John 19:5. This scene thus marks the beginning of the end of Nietzsche's beloved Roman Empire. In this simple gesture of momentary accommodation, Pilate displays the vulnerability that is unique (and often fatal) to the noble manner of evaluation. A slight hesitation on the part of the provincial governor, a momentary fascination that fatefully stretches to a second and third moment, a simple gesture of momentary accommodation marks the beginning of the end for Rome.

Why would this be important to our understanding of Nietzsche? Like Pilate, Nietzsche utters *ecce homo*. Like Pilate, moreover, he does so by way of announcing that he has exposed his other, known to us as the "moralist," thereby overruling the mob in the process. Like Pilate, in fact, he does so by way of installing himself as the arbiter of truth, which certifies his claims vis-à-vis the claims asserted by the "moralists" and supported by "the mendacity of millennia" (Nietzsche 2021, 305). What is different here, what *must* be different, is that Nietzsche stands on the other side of history. Whereas Pilate represented the established order of an expansionary empire, Nietzsche represents an insurrection in open rebellion against an established (albeit newly vulnerable) disciplinary regime. As an "immoralist," as we know, he is both obliged and entitled to negate the "good man" *and* the morality that props up the "good man" at the expense of a bountiful proliferation of diverse human types. His truth is "*dreadful*," as he acknowledges, precisely because "the *lie* has hitherto been called the truth" (Nietzsche 2021, 305).

Finally, this particular scene interests Nietzsche because it depicts the complementarity of Pilate and Jesus. The imperial power exerted by Pilate activates in the prisoner his latent capacity for defiance. In turn, the prisoner's passion has the effect of tempering Pilate's intended display of power and diluting the pleasure he ordinarily derived from visiting cruelty upon those whom he despises.

[27] Unless Nietzsche is involved here in a complex rhetorical operation that eludes my powers of discernment, this section of *On the Genealogy of Morality*—as well as the narrative arc to which it contributes—would appear to manifest the anti-Semitic prejudices that inform (and degrade) Nietzsche's preferred understanding of the role of the Jews in European history.

According to Nietzsche's preferred shorthand for the calculus of suffering, we are obliged to conclude that Pilate, having refrained from executing Jesus, only made him stronger. When we "behold the man" presented to the crowd, we also behold the limits of the imperial power that has marked him. In short, we behold the mutual implication of Jesus *and* Pilate, which Nietzsche apparently means to reproduce in the pages of *Ecce Homo*.

As we have seen, Nietzsche's aims in *Ecce Homo* included the cultivation of a discerning readership for *The Antichrist*, wherein he pronounces his summary "curse" on Christianity. The readership that he believed *The Antichrist* deserved, and which he needed in any event, would be attuned by their reading of *Ecce Homo* not only to the complementarity of Jesus and Pilate at John 19:5, but also to the unique efforts of the "first immoralist" as he denounces the pathological mendacity of Christian morality. Having first encountered *Ecce Homo*, the discerning readers Nietzsche has in mind would be prepared to receive *The Antichrist* as a by-product of the self-overcoming of Christian morality. In particular, they would be likely to understand why Nietzsche insists that it is now *indecent* to be or remain a Christian (Nietzsche 2021, 169-70). In both cases, as we have seen, these discerning readers would be expected to behold an unanticipated emergence in excess of the authority of a prevailing disciplinary regime. Much as Pilate's humiliation of Jesus inadvertently activated the prisoner's capacity for defiance, so the disciplinary regime of Christian morality has produced in the person of Friedrich Nietzsche an "immoralist" who will expose the lies on which Christian morality trades.

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