

OVERTURE

Say hello to Mr. Dynamite

In 1888, just weeks before he was to collapse irrevocably into insanity, the 44-year-old Friedrich Nietzsche penned an outrageous autobiography. It is entitled *Ecce Homo* -- or "Behold the man!", which is what Pilate said when Jesus was brought to him. The chapters are entitled, "Why I am so Wise," "Why I am so Clever," "Why I Write Such Good Books," and "Why I am a Destiny." He predicts that someday the calendar will be divided into pre-him and post-him. He writes that he is by far the most terrible human being there has ever been (though at the same time the most beneficent), that he is the first *immoralist*, that he has been the one to unmask Christianity as a big swindle, that his *Zarathustra* is the greatest gift ever given to humanity, and that "only after me is it possible to hope again." Taking one of his books into your hands is the greatest honor you can confer upon yourself, he says. He believes that someday "there will be associated with my name the recollection of something frightful -- of a crisis like no other before on earth, of the profoundest collision of conscience, of a decision evoked against everything that until that time had been believed in, demanded, sanctified. I am not a man, I am dynamite."

Scattered among these fearsome boasts are the silliest asides -- that since his *Zarathustra* took 18 months to incubate, he must be a female elephant, that his genius is in his nostrils, that he is no ass but on the contrary has the smallest ears, and so is the *anti-ass par excellence*. As he recounts his published works, pointing out their daring

and their importance to the history of our species, Nietzsche is positively delirious with himself. In his own estimation, he has danced lightly throughout his works, brilliantly piercing all of the bloated ideals all the old philosophers have hidden behind, recognizing and praising the artists everyone else has neglected, and assembling words into a style that has never been equaled. But in the end he hopes he is never revered as a saint, and he denounces anyone who would be his disciple.

What can anyone make of all this? There's madness in it, to be sure. Nietzsche soon collapsed in the streets of Turin after sending out truly bizarre, maniacal postcards. He survived for yet another decade, nursed by his mother and sister, but was never able to put a coherent thought together. Almost certainly, in the few weeks before his collapse, he was driven into a kind of mania, manifesting delusions of grandeur, and some of these delusions may have fueled his autobiography. But -- still -- it would be wrong to dismiss *Ecce Homo* as the ravings of a madman, even if madness did play a part in its production. The work caps off a career and a life that are in some ways just as majestic and terrifying as Nietzsche thinks. Nietzsche was born into a difficult life, with a character and a temperament which made it even harder for him. He resolved to overcome it, transcend it, and affirm it, and his philosophy is the means by which he did it. He fought hard to make the conditions of his own life transparent to himself, tolerating no delusions or self-deceptions, and challenged himself to *welcome* his life, just as it actually was, even if he were fated to re-live it again and again forever. He saw this challenge in epic proportions, as heroic as anything done on the fields of Troy, and *Ecce Homo* can be read as the paean he sings in gratitude (to himself, of course) for his victory.

I will say it again: *Nietzsche's philosophy was the means by which he reconciled himself to his life.* But maybe that is all philosophers ever try to do, in the last analysis. We try to construct some sort of model of the world and of our experience, so that we feel as if we belong, and as if we know what we are doing. This is a point Nietzsche himself appreciated: "It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir" (*BGE* 1:6). Sometimes these memoirs make for very boring biographies and the philosophies in them nourish the intellect but ignore the heart. They seem to be statements produced by official agencies, not by individuals. Other philosophies, in their own way, describe richly troubled lives, and when we read them we know we are encountering living individuals, tangled and passionate and confused. Nietzsche belongs in this second group. He lived a hard life, and there are marks in his philosophy of every painful loss. And his work is drawn from the deep well of spiritual energy he drew upon in order to get through his hard life. This is what makes his philosophical prose so riveting. It packs the power of dynamite.

But that is not all. There is more reason to read Nietzsche than just the excitement of encountering such a volatile mind. The fundamental problems with which Nietzsche struggled -- mortality, insignificance, and loneliness -- are problems any human being faces, even if not in the exaggerated forms in which Nietzsche encountered them. By the time we turn to philosophy, we are aware that life will end, and that in the not-so-distant future we will be no more. Think about this. There awaits a place for you, even now, where you will draw your last breath, and take in the last things you will ever see. Then there will be nothing -- not a regret, not a memory, not a dream, not a new life to begin.

Your life will be over, and the sum total of your participation in the universe will have ended. That's it. Nothing. No more existence of any kind, ever. The thought might prompt someone to wonder, without the hope of a definitive answer, "Why?"

It gets worse. What is said of the individual can be said as well of the species. *Homo sapiens* will endure for a vanishingly small span of time in the life of the universe, and indeed life itself is surrounded in both space and time by vast oceans of nothing, doing nothing, forever. There are a tiny, *tiny* islands in this ocean, where we find matter and energy; and a tiny, *tiny* portion of those islands involves planets, and an even *tinier* portion involves living things, and an *unimaginably tiny* portion involves living things which, for a virtual instant of time, are actually capable of being aware of their own insignificance – and this lone truth they try desperately not to think about. The blink of an eye of a gnat crossing the Grand Canyon at midnight; even that is a bigger deal than the existence of conscious beings in the universe.

Throughout this inconsequential blink of an eye, we will be mostly alone. We will have friends and lovers, to be sure, but the business of living and ageing and dying will take them all away from us, sooner or later. Even while we are with them, we usually will not know their thoughts and their feelings, nor will they know ours. There is no greater distance than the one between two people in a crowd. Be grateful for the exceptions to this, those glorious times when we truly connect with another conscious being. Such moments are fleeting and rare. Most of the time, we are alone, until we and everything we have done fades into others' memories, then into nothing.

Reconciling ourselves to these cold, hard facts is the main task of philosophy. As the Roman philosopher Cicero said, studying philosophy means learning how to die --

which means learning to live on the above conditions. If this is our hardest and final lesson, then Nietzsche, whose life was so difficult, and whose honesty with himself was so severe, and who was finally able to face his death by so thoroughly embracing his life, might be able to teach us something.

This book is an attempt to gain wisdom from Nietzsche. Let us hope that none of us will face what he faced, and will really need the arsenal of proposals, theories, experiments, and revaluations he stockpiled. But we may need his general method of rooting out his deepest fears and finding ways to express them, think through them, and overcome them. This is perhaps the only true method we have for reconciling ourselves to the conditions of life -- if, that is, we do not want to delude ourselves with happy fantasies, or live in a kind of forgetful fog, or consign ourselves to utter despair. If we want to live -- really *live* it, and not live in fear of it -- then Nietzsche has something to offer us.

Each of the following “acts” focuses on a particular phase of Nietzsche’s life and the challenges he faced and the way he responded to them. This first chapter, though, provides a more general picture. We need an overture of the tragic themes in Nietzsche’s life, and a glimpse of how his philosophy reconciled him to them.

Living with pessimism. And a tumor.

Many of us, especially those of us in comfortable lifestyles, are optimists by default. This means we see life in itself as good. Of course, we know that bad things happen. People suffer from diseases, accidents, loss, and heartbreak. We know this all too well. But we view misfortune as a departure or an exception from the way life is supposed to go. *If*

nothing goes wrong, then life is good. It is rather like the idea of an inertial body in physics. A body continues in its path of motion *unless* it is interfered with by some other force. Similarly, in life, when someone near to us suffers, we look for what interfered. Perhaps they should not have trusted someone, or they should have been wearing seatbelts, or they should not have gone down that dark alley. We look for a mistake, or something that caused life to swerve from its natural course. The mere suggestion that someone could be living life as it ought to be lived, making no mistakes, and still suffer great misfortune, is deeply troubling. Consider how bothersome the story of Job is, with his persistent and perfectly legitimate demand for some explanation of why he suffers so. He gets no answer other than one from a whirlwind: “Who are you to even ask?” He has no court of higher appeal, so he offers a contrite apology and goes back to his life. We can only *hope* that such pointless and unwarranted suffering is very rare, and *hope* that, *probably* (that is, if we do not get caught in the middle of a God/Satan wager, or become the hapless target of the Bad Luck God), if we live right, we will live happily.

Another way of putting this notion is that the universe (many of us think) has an optimistic tilt. Lives tend toward happiness, unless something gets in the way. But the opposite assumption is also available. We could believe just as well in a pessimistic tilt, and believe that our lives generally roll toward misery unless, by some stroke of luck, something gets in the way and, contrary to all rational expectations, causes us to be happy. If this were our attitude – and why shouldn’t it be our attitude? -- then we would shake our heads in wonder at any life that is not miserable, and accept pointless, gratuitous suffering as what any rational person should expect.

In fact, it is far from crazy to believe that the wide experience of human life, taken soberly and objectively, provides stronger evidence for pessimism than for optimism.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), the great German pessimist, offered this generalization upon human life:

If, finally, we were to bring to the sight of everyone the terrible sufferings and afflictions to which his life is constantly exposed, he would be seized with horror. If we were to conduct the most hardened and callous optimist through hospitals, infirmaries, operating theatres, through prisons, torture chambers, and slave-hovels, over battlefields, and to places of execution; if we were to open to him all the dark abodes of misery, where it shuns the gaze of cold curiosity, and finally were to allow him to glance into the dungeon of Ugolino where prisoners starved to death, he too would see in the end what kind of world is this “best of all possible worlds.” For whence did Dante get the material for his hell, if not from this actual world of ours? (WWR, I, 325)

Schopenhauer, to be sure, lived in a time before modern medicine brought about the many reliefs and cures we now enjoy. But still: what conclusion would “the most hardened and callous optimist” reach today, even with modern medicine at his side, when shown the killing fields, the sex trade, the cancer wards, the shanty towns, and the prisons? Taking an actual story from today’s newspaper: what would the optimist say as he watched a man throw his three children into a river from a bridge, even as he saw the terror in their eyes and heard their helpless screams? Can we imagine that the optimist

would shake his head but insist, “Still, the good things in this world make up for that”? Is there any response more absurd than that?

It is easy to be an optimist so long as we are not confronted with the sort of suffering Schopenhauer describes, or so long as we avoid the newspaper. The true challenge is to find something – *anything* – to embrace in this life while keeping one’s gaze steady upon the recurring tragedies life offers. Schopenhauer, finally, gave up. He found nothing in life to embrace, except music, which has the magical power to quiet the miseries of life, and allow us to transcend the problem of being alive.

Okay, on to Nietzsche. Nietzsche first encountered Schopenhauer’s philosophy when he was in college, and by that time he was already acutely aware of life’s tragedy. His father, Karl Ludwig Nietzsche, died in 1849, when Nietzsche was only four. His death was preceded by headaches, blindness, and madness. The cause is anybody’s guess; the attending physician diagnosed “liquefaction of the brain.” Nietzsche, though only a child, was old enough to remember his father and the illness, along with the fear, despair, and grief that filled the house. Eight months later, Nietzsche’s younger brother, Ludwig Josef, died after experiencing severe abdominal cramps. Josef was two years old. Karl Ludwig’s body was then dug up and the young Josef was laid in his father’s arms and buried with him.

That’s not the sort of experience a little boy would ever forget.

One of his schoolmates later recalled that, as a young teenager, Nietzsche’s “basic trait of character was a certain melancholy, which expressed itself in his whole being. From earliest childhood he loved solitude, in which he gave free play to his thoughts, to some extent avoiding human company and seeking out regions endowed by nature with

sublime beauty. He had a very pious, tender temperament and even as a child reflected upon matters, with which other boys his age do not concern themselves” (*Conversations*, p. 5). Little wonder.

It is not hard to imagine, then, what the young Nietzsche must have felt when at nine years old he himself began experiencing painful migraines, abdominal pains, and eye troubles. He must have felt that he was about to follow his father and brother into the grave. He probably wondered if he would get his own place. Well, he didn't die then, of course, but the headaches, pains, and eye problems kept recurring for the rest of his life. On average they would lay him out, groaning and vomiting, for two or three days every three weeks or so. At his lowest point, he estimated that he was sick 118 days in a single year. Here is a cheery observation he sent to a friend in 1887: “In July I had only three big attacks of my headache with vomiting all day, which, compared with the previous month, is real progress.”

He traveled incessantly, believing that the right altitude, temperature, and air pressure would reduce his pain. He usually spent winters in Italy or France and summers in the Alps. He experimented with diets and cures at health spas and opium. Nothing worked. Occasionally the bouts were so markedly miserable that he believed death would come, and then was sorry when it didn't. And during these times he worried as well about inheriting his father's madness. As he neared forty, he described to a friend the strange patterns and shapes he saw when he closed his eyes, and asked anxiously, “Don't you believe that this condition is a symptom of incipient madness? My father died of a brain disease” (*Conversations*, p. 164). A vision of oncoming tragedy must have floated in his field of vision no matter where he looked.

The tragedy finally came when he was 44. After a few weeks of high-pitched euphoria in late 1888 and early 1889 (during which he wrote that outrageous autobiography), Nietzsche lost most of his sense of reality and sent out messages like this:

I have ordered a convocation of princes in Rome – I mean to have the young emperor shot. (*Corres.*, p. 344)

And this:

I have had Caiaphas put in chains; I too was crucified at great length last year by the German doctors. Wilhelm Bismarck and all anti-Semites done away with. (*Corres.*, p. 348)

Nietzsche's prose was never flat-footed, but these messages were weird enough to cause one of his oldest friends, Franz Overbeck, to rush to Turin and get Nietzsche to a doctor. He was admitted to a sanatorium, and then released to the care of his mother. In the beginning, she was able to elicit various memories from him, along with poems he had memorized, but his philosophy had left him entirely, along with any of the logic that we expect to link together one thought with the next. He deteriorated steadily over the next eleven years, moving into a stage where there was very little memory left, then little recognition of family and friends, and finally very little response at all. It is as if his mind gradually shed all of the layers of his personality, losing first the philosophical persona he

had crafted in his mature years, then all of the things familiar to him from childhood, and then finally awareness itself. After a couple of strokes, he died in 1900 of pneumonia.

Medicine in 1889 was not what we would call medicine today, and no one at the time made a good diagnosis of the cause of Nietzsche's insanity. He had some symptoms of parietic syphilis, a very common ailment at the time, often untreated and deadly. His right pupil was larger than his left one and slow to respond to light, and he surely was exhibiting signs of bizarre ideas and dementia. So that is what was generally assumed. But we know now that syphilis was not the culprit. Syphilitics at this time rarely survived for more than two years, while Nietzsche survived for eleven. He lacked several key symptoms of syphilis, such as a trembling tongue, slurred speech, and impaired handwriting. Various neurologists and psychologists have re-examined Nietzsche's medical records, and they have come to the conclusion, more or less, that that Nietzsche had a slow-growing brain tumor behind his right eye which eventually cut off the blood supply to his frontal lobes and gave him a *de facto* frontal lobotomy. If this is so, then in all likelihood Nietzsche was born into a condition that led to his collapse; and it is possible that this condition was related to the ones which killed his father and brother, just as he had always feared.

All this is just to say that when the twenty-two-year-old Nietzsche first encountered Schopenhauer's philosophy, he really did not need to be told that the world might have a pessimistic tilt. What was new and exciting for him was Schopenhauer's advice regarding how to live with that fact. More about that in Act I.

6,000 feet beyond man and time

Nietzsche started out as a university professor, teaching classical literature and languages until his health issues forced him to resign. He then lived on a small pension, writing philosophical works aimed at changing the face of human culture forever.

In the early and middle 1880s, after resigning his professorship, Nietzsche had every reason to retreat far from humanity. Humanity on the whole had not been kind to him. No one showed any interest whatsoever in reading his books. His friendship with Richard and Cosima Wagner -- a friendship so filled with familial affection and common spirit that it needs to be called a "soulship" -- had ruptured; and Wagner had died, closing off forever any possible repair. He had made two extremely close friends, Paul Rée and Lou Salomé, but they then abandoned him for reasons anyone could appreciate: he expected them to be willing to devote their lives to his grand cultural and philosophical visions, and they found the price too steep. (Not to mention the fact that there had been a jealous rivalry between Rée and Nietzsche in competition for Salomé's attention, which she invested selectively and strategically.) Nietzsche had been the target of vicious and sordid rumors spreading in Wagnerian circles, rumors saying that he frequented brothels, had syphilis, had sex with boys, and was going blind from excessive masturbation (Magee, 334-8). His sicknesses continued to torment him without relent. His relations with his sister and mother had soured.

So Nietzsche felt truly alone. He sought to find some way to reconcile himself to that loneliness, and he wrote his most famous work, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, to that end.

This is a work that he regarded in his autobiography as virtually unparalleled in history (even if he does say so himself): "Leaving aside the poets: perhaps nothing has ever been done from an equal excess in strength" (*EH, Z, 6*). As we will see in more

detail in Act III, *Zarathustra* portrays Nietzsche's fully-evolved alter ego – the man Nietzsche wants to grow up to be, and the man who he will be if he succeeds in “becoming who he is.” Zarathustra comes from high up in the frozen mountains, “6000 feet beyond man and time,” descending from his solitude to impart his wisdom to human beings. He is divine in an ancient way, standing apart from all others, possessing a cold, clear vision of what humans really are and what they are capable of becoming. “I preach to you the *übermensch*,” he says, meaning the being who has transcended his own humanity. His audience is bewildered by his message, and everything Zarathustra says falls upon stone ears.

Zarathustra, as Nietzsche later recounts in his autobiography, “has seen further, willed further, been *capable* further than any other human being. In every word he contradicts, this most Yes-saying of all spirits; in him all opposites are blended into a new unity. The highest and the lowest energies of human nature, what is sweetest, most frivolous, and most terrible wells forth from one fount with immortal assurance.” And yet, as superior and unfathomable as he is, “how Zarathustra descends and says to everyone what is most good-natured! How gently he handles even his antagonists, the priests, and suffers of them *with* them!” (*EH, Z, 6*). The great distance separating him from humanity allows him to feel no threat from them and feel no obligation toward them. He treats humanity with an elegant kindness, though he is capable of terrible power, and channels his resources into acts that are meant to uplift and encourage the lesser beings around him. Nietzsche's higher self commands him to return to the world, but wrapped in the seven skins of solitude: “nothing penetrates them anymore.” His kindness is distant, untouchable, and unflappable.

The iceman cometh.

It took a philosophers' stone – that is to say, one whopper of an idea, impossible either to pass or to pass up -- to transform a human being into the iceman. In 1881, along the lake of Silvaplana, high in the Alps, Nietzsche stopped at a powerful, pyramidal rock, and just such an idea came to him. *What if our lives are to be relived again and again, just as they have been lived, without a single variation?* What if the universe repeats itself endlessly, like a snake with its tail in its mouth? What if all we have to look forward to is the prospect of doing again what we have already done? The idea seized Nietzsche with fascination and horror. He realized that the idea could be embraced only if one was truly *grateful* for life – life just as it is, not life as a means to something else. For Nietzsche, to embrace this idea of the eternal recurrence would mean welcoming a thousand times over each and every headache, along with the death of his father and brother, the friendship with the Wagners, along with the loss of that friendship, the excitement of his many ideas, along with the toil and humiliation of writing books no one reads. It would be the ultimate affirmation of his own life, loving it just as it is without conditions or any further expectations. It was a dare that he could not resist. It was the dare that created Zarathustra, and at the same time liberated Nietzsche from his loneliness.

That is the trick, isn't it? How do you get yourself to take ownership of all your shortcomings, your failures, your stupid mistakes, and your bad luck? The usual answer we stumble upon is that we simply deny ownership. We try not to think of these things, or dwell on them. It is as if they happened to someone else. And we are all usually happy to oblige one another in this collective amnesia. What's done is done, we tell ourselves; time to move on to the next thing – which, in all likelihood, will be another batch of

mistakes and failures. Who on earth could survey their own sad history and say, “Was that life? Well then – once more!”? Who could shake hands, so to speak, with every humiliating episode and say “thank you, my friend”? Not you, that’s for sure. Someone above you, who is immune to all pity and appreciative for every embarrassing failing. That’s who.

If you could transform yourself into that person, your troubles would be over. Not that you wouldn’t still have failings and bad luck and humiliations and so on. You are stuck with these things. But they would not be troubling. They would be opportunities for new strength and growth as you recovered from them. Even being left alone in the Alps, more than a mile above the rest of humanity, and beyond anyone’s expectation to be back by a certain time, would be something to be grateful for. For there are some thoughts that surface only when the waters have been left alone for a long time; strange hidden lunkers that can’t be seen by anyone but a lone angler. Pulling up these monsters for all to see gives your solitude a purpose, a meaning.

That’s how you make it your own choice to have been abandoned by everyone else.

Getting over the whole good/evil “thing”

Newly strengthened by completing *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche pulled up a ridiculously monstrous lunker: *the revaluation of all values*. The idea had been in some ways an old one for him. Back in his student days he saw that what made a Greek heroic was not the same as what made a Christian saintly. The ancients distinguished good from bad men in the way we might distinguish a good opera from a bad one. The distinction is not a moral

one at all, but one based on a host of other factors, like profundity, complexity, creativity, and harmony. But today we prize the moral distinction, valuing good people and shunning evil ones, while trying to ignore the fact that, in some ways, some moral monsters are awe-inspiring human beings. Nietzsche's project was to revalue our values – that is, to recover what makes a human being awe-inspiring and value that, rather than valuing their moral standing. In short: more Achilles, less Jesus.

Consider what this really means. Set aside Jesus' reputed divinity, and think about the sort of life he lived and recommended to us. It is a life of giving to others. Feed the hungry, care for the sick, help the poor. You are blessed when you do these things, and even blessed when you are persecuted for doing them. You must not do them for the sake of any reward. You do them purely out of deep love for others. You must give up your life, give up your concern for yourself, in order to gain your life, or gain the meaning that comes with loving others as Jesus did. But now consider Achilles. He gives nothing and shows no mercy. The meaning in his life consists in the full expression of his nobility, strength, skill, beauty, and arrogance. He murders Hector, exults in the kill, and drags the corpse around Troy under the anguished gaze of Hector's parents. We are supposed to understand that he had the right to do so, because although Hector was a great warrior, he was no Achilles, who is like a lion among men, with the natural right to kill whomever he pleases. Are we really supposed to admire the murderous prowess of Achilles more than we admire the love of Jesus?

Well, *no; not exactly*, Nietzsche would say. Things are a bit more complicated than this particular either/or. There is indeed an admirable simplicity in Achilles – he is nothing but raw animal power and noble rage – but human beings are capable of

cultivating and harnessing richer and more interesting drives. We have Christianity to thank for this lesson. In the *Antichrist*, Nietzsche offers a sketch of Jesus's psychological profile. He theorized that Jesus was a man who suffered from an oversensitivity to the pains and suffering our world can inflict. He was a softy. So, as a result, Jesus made for himself a kind of protective psychological shell. The shell not only shielded from what others said and did to him, but led him to believe that his life grew even more blessed and valuable in proportion to how he was punished and persecuted. This led him to his death, since he believed that his greatest triumph was one of the world's most painful and ignoble deaths: crucifixion. Now Jesus's followers did not all have this same psychological oversensitivity, but they found that by preaching his values, they were able to gain a kind of moral (and then political) higher ground over everyone else. The good human beings are not the strong and powerful ones, they preached; no, the good humans are the weaker ones, the ones who suffer humiliation. "So, Achilles," they might say, "if you really want to become powerful -- become a slave!" Thus were the masters conquered by the slaves, and thus did Christianity eventually gain dominance throughout the western hemisphere.

This is a bad thing, according to Nietzsche, because Christianity forces people to turn against the drives and values that life itself carves into us. Christianity, as a doctrine, believes that the pleasures and attractions and joys of life ultimately must be renounced, for they are of no real spiritual value. If you are strong and vibrant in life, then you had better master that strength and devote it to the task of serving others and become a slave to their well-being. Otherwise you are selfish, and that is bad. And note well: you should not be serving others merely for the sake of any joyous feeling you may get from doing

so. If slavery is done right, it is to be done purely out of single-minded obedience to an other-worldly master, a shining “Thou shalt” that comes from beyond time and space. Now this may sound like “extreme Christianity,” but it is an accurate description of the heart of Christian values: they are rooted not in this world, but in obedience to something out of this world.

Nietzsche claimed that it is a perverse sickness to adopt a set of values that is not rooted life, in this world, and so we need to heal ourselves from the sickness of Christianity. The healthy values are the ones that are rooted in the perspective of life. Life has one command: *grow*. Each human being can be seen as a garden of plants, with each plant representing a different drive or desire. Life urges us to cultivate those many different plants, to aid and strengthen their growth, and to become a teeming jungle. We need to discover what we are capable of growing in ourselves, and grow it, without being afraid of what we might become. That is the only healthy approach to life. Christianity is sick because it uproots many fascinating human drives and supplants them with a single variety of noxious weed: the appetite for being superior to others under the guise of being their servant.

At this point what everyone wants to know is what a healthy Nietzschean would really look like. Would it be Genghis Khan? Goethe? Napoleon? Beethoven? Hannibal Lector? But Nietzsche doesn't lay out a specific set of qualifications. If anything, he seems content to leave the vision quite open-ended, leaving it to individuals to discover for themselves what they can become by encouraging this great spiritual health. Some may become great musicians and artists, while others become warriors or philosophers or (who knows?) fishermen. His main concern is to become who he is; it is up to you to

become who you are. “I am a law only for my own kind, I am no law for all,” says Zarathustra.

At one point, though, Nietzsche does describe the kind of person we need to help us to become who we are – the “genius of the heart.” Nietzsche is clearly intoxicated by this vision, probing it through his own writing, trying to grasp all the dimensions folded into his inspiration:

The genius of the heart --

As it is possessed by that great hidden one, the tempter god and born piper of consciences whose voice knows how to descend into the underworld of every soul, who says no word and gives no glance in which there lies no touch of enticement, to whose mastery belongs knowing how to seem – not what he is but what to those who follow him is one constraint *more* to press ever closer to him, to follow him ever more inwardly and thoroughly –

The genius of the heart –

Who makes everything loud and self-satisfied fall silent and teaches it to listen, who smooths rough souls and gives them a new desire to savour – the desire to lie still as a mirror, that the deep sky may mirror itself in them --;

The genius of the heart –

Who teaches the stupid and hasty hand to hesitate and grasp more delicately; who divines the hidden and forgotten treasure, the drop of

goodness and sweet spirituality under thick and opaque ice, and is a divining-rod for every grain of gold which has lain long in the prison of much mud and sand;

The genius of the heart –

From whose touch everyone goes away richer, not favoured and surprised, not as if blessed and oppressed with the goods of others, but richer in himself, newer to himself than before, broken open, blown upon and sounded out by a thawing wind, more uncertain perhaps, more delicate, more fragile, more broken, but full of hopes that as yet have no names, full of new will and current, full of new ill will and counter-current.... (BGE 295)

Nietzsche goes on to identify the genius of the heart as the ancient god *Dionysus*, the god of wild and natural growth. Nietzsche claims to be his initiate. The genius of the heart is the perfect spiritual gardener, or the philosophical teacher Nietzsche aspired to be. He knows how to enter our souls and tempt us and entice us into new directions; he teaches us how to observe, and grasp what is profound and valuable; and he shows us how to become both richer and more delicate, more fragile and yet more hopeful, awake to all of our potentialities, and ashamed of nothing.

Anyone nourished by such a genius of the heart may have full health, in the Nietzschean sense, though perhaps no two “manjungles” will look alike. What they all have in common is a full embracing of their lives, their histories, and their experiences, and the power to transform these things into a purpose: “A Yes, a No, a straight line, a

goal” (TI, 1, 44). Nothing can harm them, since they accept even the harshest experiences as opportunities for growth and self-mastery. They are thankful for their enemies and for the attacks they suffer, since these will only serve to make them stronger. They have the strength and knowledge to see that the good vs. evil distinction has arisen through psychological failings of humans over time, and they are capable of living beyond good and evil. What dictates their actions is a sense of their own nobility, along with a wisdom about what human beings most deeply need and what makes them stronger. They exist beyond men, and yet alongside them as their cultivators. They are, in short, a superior race living among us.

Nietzsche knew that the prospect of such human beings would be terrifying. After all, they lack any sense of obligation to traditional morality, and they are capable of *anything* -- from cultivating roses to raping children. Their own genius of the heart and their sense of *noblesse oblige* may keep them from wanton acts of cruelty, but beneath their polite exterior lies a beast capable of the most un-Christian atrocities. If we find this unsettling, and wish that we could somehow cage these beasts and tame them, then that (Nietzsche would say) reveals our own slavish morality and our fundamental distrust of human nature. “What do you want?” he would ask. “Do you want to live in Disneyland, where nothing can harm you? Do you yearn for the soft pleasures, the safe and predictable tedium of a retirement community, where we only wait to die? Or do you seek life? Do you wish to know what you really are, and *become who you are*? If the first, then go; there are already places waiting for you. But if the second, then come here; I want to teach you something.”