

Art of Living as a Tragic Fate An autobiographical reading of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*

Roy Voragen¹ | Department of Philosophy
Parahyangan Catholic University,
Bandung, Indonesia

Art and nothing but art,
we have art in order not to die of the truth.

– Friedrich Nietzsche

If the world were clear,
art would not exist.

– Albert Camus

ABSTRACT

Writing, for Nietzsche, is a very personal endeavor. Nietzsche became Nietzsche through the acts of writing, reading what he has written and re-writing. For a decade or so I have struggled with Nietzsche; I read his books, I wrote essays and I taught on

Nietzsche. In this essay I try to answer a personal question: what does reading his books and writing and teaching on Nietzsche mean for who I am today? The second question this essay deals with is how my experiences with Nietzsche's work influence my view of art. Art is in this essay understood in two ways: first and foremost as the art of living, i.e. how to become what one is, and in the final part of the essay in the narrow sense, i.e. the fine arts.

Key Words:

•*Nietzsche* •*Ecce Homo* •*Amor Fati* •*Becoming What One Is* •*Art of Living* •*Fine Arts*.

In the beginning there is nothing.² I – as a writer – start with a blank sheet. As long as the paper in front of me remains empty, there is no meaning (the painter staring at a blank canvas deals with the same issue). Everything is important. And if everything is important, nothing is of significance. It requires choices, elaboration, skill, perseverance, patience, contextualization, a narrative and confidence to create meaning. Writing is for me the continuous reordering of words, words that never really fit (of course, it does not really help that I have to write in a language which is not my mother tongue, which is Dutch, for me Dutch is more supple, it has less secrets).

How to make sense of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*? How does *Ecce Homo* relate to Nietzsche's other writings? How does it relate to the life of the writer? What role does his idiosyncratic style play? And perhaps more importantly, how does it all relate to me, the reader, who writes these words on paper?

The word 'I' – without doubt the shortest word in any language and igniting the longest debate in the history of philosophy – is Nietzsche's target, in writing and in life. And he has a strong argument against the 'I' as an assumption, i.e. an *a priori* 'I'. The belief in the 'I' with an absolute will derives from the “false introspection which believes in 'thinking': first an act is imagined which simply does not occur, 'thinking', and secondly a subject-substratum in which every act of thinking, and nothing else, has its origin: that is to say, both the deed and the doer are fictions.”³ A self needs to be created through actual deeds.

Ecce Homo is Nietzsche's self-proclaimed intellectual autobiography. If we would write Nietzsche's biography we would have to deal with the difficulty that every writer or artist lives three lives: a public, a private and a secret life. If a writer or an artist uses his⁴ private and secret lives to create an oeuvre, then his public life gains mythical proportions and *Ecce Homo* is a good example at hand, which makes writing a biography in terms of truth an almost impossible enterprise. However, to blame the writer or artist of self-mystification is to misread the importance of his oeuvre, which is not built on logical truths. Of all genres, the autobiography is least likely to show the truth, for the reason that the author wants to defend his own myth, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* is another very good example.

Nietzsche's life cannot be summarized as: he was born (15 October 1844), he thought, he wrote and he died (25 August 1900). In the academic world it is frowned upon seeing the biography of a philosopher of immanent importance. What is generally an academic sin – the *ad hominem argument*⁵ – is an essential part of *Ecce Homo*, the writer is part of his text. *Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche attempt to become one with his body of writings. Philosophy is authenticated if it relates back to life. For Nietzsche philosophizing has not theory but life as its aim. He writes in the preface of *Ecce Homo*: “Philosophy [...] means [...] seeking out everything strange and questionable in existence, everything so far placed under a ban by morality.”⁶

Psychology is then indispensable for philosophy as a form of life. Friedrich Nietzsche is the philosopher that warned us that ontological uncertainty causes anxiety, and possibly violence. However, we have to deal with contingency, disagreement, indeterminacy, inconsistency, incoherence, incongruity, ambivalence, heterogeneity, multiplicity, opacity, paradoxy, risk and uncertainty. However, Nietzsche claims that “[n]ot doubt, *certainty* is what drives one insane.”⁷ And Albert Camus claims that anxiety can either lead to freedom or to suicide.

To comprehend Nietzsche, we need to look at how he integrated (or tried to integrate) life and work into one creation: his life and work can be considered his oeuvre with an over-arching narrative. Nietzsche's life is an artwork when seen from this perspective. Camus considers Nietzsche the ultimate artist who negates the otherworldly and deals playfully with the here and now.⁸ So, even if Nietzsche did not live according to his own writings and even if his body of texts amounts to fiction, it still has power in its performativity, i.e. words are deeds. Michel Foucault was influenced by Nietzsche when he said: “From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art [...]. Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?”⁹

What would have happened to Nietzsche's oeuvre if he was not born in Prussia (today in Germany) but in Persia (today's Iran), the birthplace of Zarathustra, or not in the nineteenth but in the twenty-first century, not as a Christian but as a Muslim (would he have battled with Mohamed? would he have considered 9/11 a work of art?)¹⁰, not as a man but as a woman (would he have been a feminist?)?

Nietzsche is very European, born elsewhere he would have written different books. Reading and writing are life-changing activities. And no reader can remain unmoved after having read a text of Nietzsche. How did

his oeuvre change our culture? This question, of course, assumes it did have an impact on us, but how? Or on a more personal note: how did reading his books change my life? A Dutch poet once mentioned that it would require a century to pass before we would start to comprehend Nietzsche's work, perhaps true. Just as living in Indonesia has changed me, so has reading Nietzsche. He has been my companion along this meandering road called life.

The first time I met 'Nietzsche' was in Israel where I was staying in the mid-nineties. A girl from Dresden introduced me to him. And I did not quite get it. As Ludwig Wittgenstein writes in his preface to *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Perhaps this book will be understood by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it – or at least similar thoughts."¹¹ I was not yet ready, I did not yet have similar thoughts. Some odd years later I returned to Nietzsche.

Reading Nietzsche's texts remains a struggle, writing on Nietzsche even more so. Nietzsche's books are without saying complex, because life is multifarious. If the 'I' is multifarious, as Nietzsche claims, then so are his writings. The inherent danger then is to reduce his texts to something simpler by reading in a selective manner, merely favoring a few aphorisms and ignoring others. Nietzsche himself already gave warnings: "Whoever thought he had understood something of me, had made up something out of me after his own image [...]."¹² And: "I *want* no 'believers' [...]. I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced *holy* [...]. I do not want to be a holy man; sooner even a buffoon."¹³

Nietzsche claims that "all evaluation is made from a definite perspective [...]."¹⁴ This includes the evaluation of his work. He writes: "I am one thing, my writings are another matter."¹⁵ Tracy B. Strong concludes: "The consequence is that the unity of the texts is to be found in the reader and that there is no authorial unity imposed on the text, any more than the subject might impose a unity on the world."¹⁶ However, this does not lead to

an infinite regression of interpretations. Even when interpretation is required, it cannot mean that anything goes, i.e. meaning finitism. (Subjectivism is impossible, for the 'subject' is *the* question.) An interpretation refers then to a peer group, as all comprehensive reading is contextual.

So could Elisabeth Nietzsche turn her brother into a proto-fascist. Nietzsche's sister was able, through a very selective reading, to revalue his work as nationalistic and anti-Semitic: the philosopher with a hammer who lives dangerously supposedly justifies the brutal actions of the Nazis.¹⁷ This overlooks the fact that Nietzsche condemns any herd mentality, and what is more servile than walking mindlessly behind the *Führer*? From *Blut und Boden* to *Lebensraum* to *Endlösung der Judenfrage*. This cannot be justified by Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's work has also been appropriated by pragmatism (Richard Rorty), postmodernism (Foucault and Jacques Derrida) and existentialism (Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre). Many of their interpretations are interesting. Less interesting is the interpretation of Nietzsche's work as espousing a romantic hedonist position. While Elisabeth Nietzsche's reading makes Nietzsche's oeuvre prone to justifying violence and pain for their own sakes, especially inflicted onto others, so makes romantic hedonism Nietzsche's work harmless, seeking pleasure for its own sake.

Self-help books on display – shelf after shelf, shop after shop. The self-professed gurus claim to be able to teach us how to be happy. Many purchase these books, in the vain hope to find the Holy Grail. Happiness is reduced to something easy, and all tragedy can be overcome, if only one really wants to. We should not ponder, though, on the question of happiness. On the other hand, we should care about this-worldly life, how to create meaning. To create a meaningful life is what counts. "Pleasure and displeasure are mere consequences [...]."¹⁸ Whether it be hedonism or pessimism or utilitarianism [J.S. Mill's theory that only consequences count

to increase the total sum of happiness] or eudaemonism [Aristotle's theory that happiness is the highest goal for us]: all these modes of thought which assess the value of things according to *pleasure* and *pain* [...] are foreground modes of thought and naiveties which anyone conscious of creative powers and an artist's conscience will look down on with derision, though not without pity. [...] In man, *creature* and *creator* are united [...]."¹⁹ Considering Nietzsche as a self-help guru makes his work harmless. We can see him, though, as an educator (just as Socrates was the educator – and corruptor – of the young).

Ten years ago I was knocked out in tram 14, at a stop next to the Portuguese synagogue in central Amsterdam (the synagogue from which Baruch de Spinoza was excommunicated). For no reason whatsoever. Not because I cannot figure out why that fist hit me, but because the perpetrator had probably no reason – good nor bad – for a hostile attack – against me or whoever else. And that was a shock. Trained in a Kantian worldview, I was acquainted with a world where everything – good as well as evil – happens for reasons. The world, though, is not rational. “Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature [...] and it was we who gave and bestowed it.”²⁰ We give reasons with hindsight. Meaning is created and it is not a characteristic of the things as such.

The uppercut broke my lower jaw at three spots. As a consequence I had to eat everything through a straw for weeks. A diet, one could remark, if I only needed one. I blended all food with full-fat milk, butter and sugar – McDonald's has the best straws for these sorts of things.

The other wake-up fright was the indifference I met in the tram – blood gushing while the perpetrator ran off – the hospital and the police station. Did I expect pity? Compassion? Understanding? After a few days, when I was released from the hospital, I temporarily broke off my studies to just wait and get better. Only after, I realized there were more scars. Fear and anxiety – Angst – when walking around the streets of Amsterdam. Fear and anxiety

only ebbed away slowly.

I wrote dozens of poems. Starting off with a piece of poetry reworking the 'facts' as stated in the police report. However, there are things, to speak with Wittgenstein – whom I discovered at that time – that cannot be expressed. Fear and anxiety are perhaps too much of a personal nature. These poems became more and more stripped down, to arrive at a point where I started: staring at a blank sheet – the abyss. While white lines are part of the form that gives meaning to a poem, leaving a reader with only a blank sheet of paper is no poetry, let alone meaningful. Well, that was then. It made me whom I am now. So, it is good that it happened. The 'accident' is no longer accidental – not forgotten, not forgiven, no revenge, no resentment. It became a necessary part of what I am. I have accepted my fate and I do not wish myself to be different.²¹ (Nietzsche as psychologist.)

Just as a book can be appropriated, so can one's experience be appropriated – pity is a way to accomplish this. Foucault claims that Nietzsche's writing is merely a play on words. The German word for 'pity' is *Mitleid* – to suffer with, which signifies the doubling of suffering: the original and appropriated suffering. However, it is more than a play with the etymologic sources of a certain word. Nietzsche knows very well that meaning is not in a word. So he shows how over time a word has been used – the so-called genealogical method. We can use the same word in different ways in different contexts and the use in that context gives the word its meaning. Thus, “meaning is a practical affair.”²² Things are mere things and we give them meaning through a continuous process of (re-)interpretation and (re-)valuation. The practical affair of giving meaning is therefore not only a human, all too human thing to do, it is something that is done extrinsically. Values do not exist intrinsically, there are no essences to discover, and this is thus an anti-essentialist perspective.

Pity universalizes and trivializes pain, and, in turn, makes it merely accidental. “Our personal and profoundest suffering,” Nietzsche writes, “is

incomprehensible and inaccessible to almost everyone; [...] whenever people notice that we suffer, they interpret our suffering superficially. It is the very essence of the emotion of pity that it strips away from the suffering of whatever is distinctively personal. [...] When people try to benefit someone in distress, the intellectual frivolity with which those moved by pity assume the role of fate is for the most part outrageous; one simply knows nothing of the whole inner sequence and intricacies that are distress for *me* or for *you*. [...] They wish to *help* and have no thought of the personal necessity of distress [...]. It never occurs to them that, to put it mystically, the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell. [...] If you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, worthy of annihilation, and as a defect of existence, then it is clear that besides your religion of pity you also harbor another religion in your heart that is perhaps the mother of the religion of pity: the *religion of comfortableness*. How little you know of human happiness, [...] for happiness and unhappiness are sisters and even twins that either grow up together or, as in your case, *remain small together*.”²³ Pity is a form of appropriation. It is a lack of self-sufficiency to need the suffering of others. According to Nietzsche, it is a virtue to overcome pity.²⁴ So why did I need pity? Clearly a lack of self-mastery. However, to claim that my pain should not be appropriated cannot mean that I can go around and tell people to accept the horrors and cancers in their life.

• Pity is a form of appropriation. It is a lack of self-sufficiency to need the suffering of others. According to Nietzsche, it is a virtue to overcome pity. So why did I need pity? Clearly a lack of self-mastery. However, to claim that my pain should not be appropriated cannot mean that I can go around and tell people to accept the horrors and cancers in their life.

'I become what I am' – the subtitle of *Ecce Homo*²⁵ – not only because of the good things I did, but also because of my mistakes, failures and pains. Even blunders can become meaningful.²⁶ I, thus, cannot select randomly

whatever pleases me and leave out what hurts me. Tragedy shows the world as it is and not how it should be, the worldly reality is not confused with the illusionary ideal. We should, according to Nietzsche, devote ourselves to tragedy, because it teaches us the art of living through affirming all aspects of life, including our suffering. If one wants to escape nihilism one has to face the tragic and absurd beyond fear and revenge (however, to live beyond revenge might be considered, with an ironic twist of fate, the ultimate form of revenge).

Often we think of fate as having a negative connotation. However, just as we do not choose our accidents, we also have no say in when we get lucky. We believe too much in our autonomy. If the painter R.E. Hartanto would not have been my neighbor in Amsterdam, I would not have moved to Bandung. My fate, my lucky fate.

Amor fati, fatum brutum means for Nietzsche to accept reality so that freedom and necessity are reconciled. "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it [...] but *love* it."²⁷ We should not shy away from our tragic fate, but embrace it. Pain is an inevitable part of life, which does not mean that pain has value as such, therefore, there is no need to celebrate or even create it. We cannot only choose those bits and pieces of ourselves we like, we also have to embrace those parts of our life we did not – could not – choose.

Nietzsche rejects the claim of the fatalist that everything is fated. If fate rules everything then it is still fated if we resist fate. Nietzsche is then not saying that we can change whatever we want, but that we also do not have to accept life passively. Extreme fatalism is a form of laziness; Nietzsche urges to be this-worldly perfectionists (even if perfectionism is unattainable).

Nietzsche's *amor fati* is an unconditional affirmation of everything that makes what it is to become one self. Solitude should also be affirmed, which

does not mean an existence in isolation, but an encountering with oneself. Solitude and multitude coexist. While society or humanity could very well exist without my existence, I need to live to become what I am. “The uniqueness which makes the individual individual is a uniqueness of event, which is apprehended in a certain consciousness of eternity.”²⁸

And in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche writes: “the ideal of the most exuberant, most living and world-affirming man, who has not only learned to get on and treat with all that was and is but who wants to have it again *as it was and is* to all eternity [...]”²⁹ Self-becoming is a duty beyond the morality of good and evil, the individual that wants to become what one is cannot hide in a or behind institutions. There is a distinction between separate individuals, separate persons cannot be fused into one – a nation, or humanity – and separate individuals can have conflicts. For the separateness to exist, individuals must recognize their singularity.

We are urged to be perfectionists while perfection is always out of reach, a lesson Nietzsche tries to teach us. Neither idealism (whether religious or philosophical) nor self-help books offer a way out of this tension. This makes Nietzsche's work hard to digest for the impatient reader. Self-creation is never finished. *Ecce Homo* was not supposed to have been Nietzsche final book. After a lifelong battle with migraine, he suffered a mental meltdown on January 3, 1889, from which he did not recover. As mortal beings, we have to create ourselves within finite horizons. We do not have the luxury of dreaming to leave our cave – Plato's famous metaphor to support his idealism.

It is the Platonic ideal to turn away from mortality, vulnerability, contingency and mutability of the worldly appearances, and to search for unchanging stability, clarity and preciseness. It is a move away from the multitude to the singular. “Plato is a coward before reality, consequently he flees into the ideal [...]”³⁰ And because of our mortality we must be able to justify self-becoming at any time in the present and not in a distant future

that might never arrive.³¹

Nietzsche is not only critical of Plato – or Christianity as a form of Platonism – but he is also critical of Immanuel Kant. Kant claims that we are all equipped with an essence of reason. Kant's motto is therefore *Sapere Aude!* (i.e. 'Dare to be wise!'). Kantian reason is just another translation of the beyond this world: the divine. Even if there is something beyond the empirical world, it remains of no value to us, because we have no access to it. Talking of a higher or better world is mere decadence. Nietzsche claims, on the other hand, that our drive is an embodied will to power in a worldly presence. We cannot separate rational thought from our instincts and desires in the sensory world.³² Instead of Kant's transcendentalism, Nietzsche calls for an ethics of difference. Nietzsche is critical of the Kantian free will because it exaggerates how conscious we are of our intentions and motives. "The subject: this is the term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling of reality."³³ And it is "our habit of regarding all our deeds as consequences of our will – so that the ego, as substance, does not vanish in the multiplicity of change."³⁴ He is also critical of the common dichotomy between good and evil, he claims that both are necessary. Moreover, he claims that we cannot apply abstract principles to concrete situations. Nietzsche replaces abstract moral theory with a focus on ethos, i.e. character, and the *Übermensch* must embody this.³⁵

The *Übermensch* is beyond the human but human because man creates it by overcoming man. To create is our fate. To face our fate we should be fearless. Bernhard Welte claims that "the image of the [*Übermensch*] appears at the point of the death of God."³⁶ The happening of the *Übermensch* is the happening of the truthful creation of the identity of the self. The *Übermensch* is beyond alienation through human autonomy. Identity is *the* question, therefore we need to interrogate ourselves and our (cultural) past, including religion.

Nietzsche criticizes the transcendent self, because the transcendental self requires an unchanging self, a self that already exists independent of the life that it lives. Nietzsche's critique of the transcendental self is a critique of the essentialist and unique self. Therefore, Nietzsche speaks of 'what' and not of 'who' becomes. Just as there is no single and final perspective on the world from which we can know the whole world, so is there no single and final perspective on the self. Nietzsche's perspectivism does not entail subjectivism, because, once again, that presupposes a subject, which is a created fiction. Nietzsche's self is thus not an unity but a multiplicity, this self is characterized by "continual transitoriness and fleetingness."³⁷ Perspectivism is needed as a horizon to create values, without such horizon life is not possible. For perspectivism to work, it requires the will to power as an operating principle.

Ecce Homo is clearly written from one perspective, that of Nietzsche. He, thus, does not use a universal perspective, as is common in academic philosophy (which he has in common with Søren Kierkegaard). *Ecce Homo* is a self-proclamation through self-examination. He says to himself – and who wants to hear it – 'Yes! I am a man. I made myself a man.' In *Ecce Homo*, the writer Nietzsche interacts with his previous published texts. Nietzsche "I is situated somewhere between the self and the text."³⁸ Nietzsche created himself in his texts. Nietzsche created a 'Nietzsche' as an artwork. And the artwork 'Nietzsche' is the ideal for Nietzsche himself. He styled himself through the act of writing. *Ecce Homo's* subtitle – *How One Becomes What One Is* – can be read as his life motto, his adagio, his personal imperative he should have lived by. And *Ecce Homo* is then an examination for Nietzsche to check if he indeed did. 'Who' refers to the autobiographical self, and the 'what' to the textual self, self-creation as an art of living.

Ecce Homo is Nietzsche's self-presentation in which he questions his destiny. *Ecce Homo* is thus a self-reflexive project: for Nietzsche, questioning his destiny functions as a way to create his own destiny. Nietzsche narrates

his own life to himself by reappropriating his earlier work. Self-becoming requires self-knowledge, however, too much self-knowledge is dangerous: "Knowledge kills action, action requires the veil of illusion – it is this lesson that Hamlet teaches, [...] from too much reflection, from a surplus of possibilities, never arrives at action at all."³⁹ That is why Nietzsche criticizes Socrates (it is no surprise that Socrates, the champion of reflection, did not write anything at all). Self-reflection can also make you into someone else than what you are.

Nietzsche criticizes the authority of classic philosophy and its search for and need of transcendental objectivity. And its claim that a theoretical perspective can include everything and can therefore be final. He turns away from truth to truthfulness as his personal expression, and thinking and existence are in such writing connected. The truthfulness of *Ecce Homo's* autobiographical writing must be proven in the power to become what Nietzsche is. And this requires the avoidance of any form of idealism, because that would lead to self-delusion, the self has to correspond then to the ideal model. Avoiding idealism includes avoiding the traps of narcissism, because a narcissist avoids interactions with the world and he already has a fixed idea of himself. Nietzsche also acknowledges that no writing can ever be final.

In *Ecce Homo's* subtitle 'who' is replaced by 'what', because 'who' refers to abstract agency and 'what' refers to embodied selfhood. This change also reflects the emphasis on the process of self-becoming, i.e. 'how' instead of focusing on an end goal. Expressing the 'how' in writing is a sign of Nietzsche's own will to power, the will to become what he is. Nietzsche defines life as the will to power.⁴⁰ Self-creation depends on this-worldly power. Nietzsche's autobiography is then not his life but his writings. In his autobiography he voices his own multiplicity and in so doing he does not give it the chance to be utterly senseless chaos. Through writing about himself and his writings, he creates himself and gives this self meaning.

Nietzsche lives and writes in times of cultural changes and crises: industrialization, nation state-building, emerging sciences, colonialism and wars, and the birth of democracy, liberalism and communism. At the core of these crises is the death of God.⁴¹ 'God is dead' does not mean that an actual existing divinity died, but that the cultural belief in God died. Throughout his oeuvre, Nietzsche dealt with these crises: he does not only analyze, he offers ways out: from perspectivism to the will to power, from the will to power to the eternal recurrence of the same, which is actually an eternal affirmation of all differences. The death of God can be a disaster, i.e. nihilism, if we do not take up the challenge and duty to create new values and reevaluate old values. For Nietzsche the death of God signifies the death of man and the birth of the *Übermensch*. The death of God is the end of transcendence, the *Übermensch*, on the other hand, lives in this world.

Nihilism means “[t]hat the highest values devalue themselves.”⁴² Worse than nihilism is, according to Nietzsche, the man who rather wills nothing than not will.⁴³ For Nietzsche, creativity and nihilism are the two sides of the same coin: these are interpretive processes. Nihilism is the experience of nothingness and thus denies the existence of and the possibility to create meaning and values. “What the experience of nihility denies is not simply a meaningful life, but all that, creatively, makes life meaningful.”⁴⁴ Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity has not the intention to write Christianity out of history, which is impossible. He wants to create a space, so new values stand a chance – so he is not so much concerned with devaluation as he is with revaluation. His criticism is to show how unChristian he is, how new he is, which means that he has to emphasize what he is not.

Freedom is historical and not the quality of timeless, universal will (as in Kant's theory of the transcendental self). For Nietzsche, truth in particular and philosophy in general are practical affairs, i.e. historical contingent. God's death has consequences for how we deal with truth and how we

present ourselves. With God's death, metaphysical truths are no longer possible, because God was *the* truth. Therefore, a metaphysical understanding is no longer possible. We have to understand reality now as historical. This requires a new ethos, a new way of living. And this ethos requires that new values need to be created and that old values need to be revalued. We have to deal with the void, the nothingness the death of God left.

Man can no longer create himself in the eyes of God – God-like. Man is no longer subordinate to the supernatural. Nietzsche did not murder God, we did, we moderns. All Nietzsche did is “to think the age philosophically, that is, from the roots of the truth of the age.”⁴⁵ The modern Enlightenment project subjected the world to the power of technology, including our own body (from genetic manipulation to penis enlargement, from blood doping for athletes to Michael Jackson, from Viagra to silicon implants). We control and dominate earth. We try to colonize the future. And we can only comprehend this fully if we take God's death into account. The modern self can, therefore, not be reconciled with religion according to Nietzsche.

We create meaning from a void of meaninglessness. And for Nietzsche, meaning and will to power are the two sides of the same coin. Will to power is our own perspective on the world that makes the world into a meaningful place. Lacking the capability to create meaning indicates a lack of power. This lack of power can lead to resentment, which, in turn, leads to a vicious circle to blame others, which Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*, i.e. resentment.⁴⁶ *Ressentiment* can only regain some meaning by pitying others, but this is in fact a lack of self-mastery.⁴⁷

Power, of course, cannot exist in solitude; power is relational: “The properties of a thing are effects on other 'things': if one removes other 'things', then a thing has no properties, i.e., there is no thing without other things, i.e., there is no 'thing-in-itself.’”⁴⁸ Self-creation is only possible in a society where this goal is valued. Society offers the needed horizons to

become what one is. However, these horizons are never fixed and always historically contingent. The *Übermensch* will push the boundaries by all means, but that does not mean he can do without boundaries. One can only become different if there are contrasts.

Self-becoming requires the creation of one's own narrative. Continuously and in retrospective we create all our accomplishments and failures into a narrative of the self, so to avoid arbitrariness. Meaning is thus created to direct and structure our narrative. One important source of instability is that each and every individual has to deal with tragedies in his life. Self-creation requires the affirmation of the tragic – a tragic ethos. Tragedy cannot be avoided, so it is then logical from the perspective of self-creation not to deny it. Pain is, therefore, an inevitable part of self-becoming. To become what we are we need to love life, including failures and coincidences to make our life necessary. We can only live life fully if we love every part of it. And we can become different in many ways. Nietzsche says that we can love life in many different ways, there are thus many different forms of life. And Wittgenstein writes: “the world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man.”⁴⁹

Nietzsche sees himself as the collection of all his actions and the effects onto the world of these actions (perhaps even his postmortem influences). Creation in general and self-creation in particular are characterized by constant change, i.e. there is only becoming. Becoming is, therefore, characterized by multiplicity. As Alexander Nehemas comments: “each subject is constituted not simply by the fact *that* it thinks, wants and acts but also by *what* it thinks, wants and does. And once we admit contents, we also admit conflicts.”⁵⁰ The self is a result of what it thinks, wants and does, and not the other way around. The body, on the other hand, gives a certain degree of coherence.⁵¹ The 'I' is thus a goal and not a starting point. Becoming an 'I' requires self-mastery, hardness and will to power. The goal of self-becoming is then to incorporate all the multiplicities into a coherent

narrative. This means, however, that becoming for Nietzsche cannot know a final state of being. Becoming is a continual process. And the past needs to be constantly reworked in the light of new experiences. Being is then merely a short-cut for referring at a certain point to what one is becoming.

Nietzsche theory of the eternal recurrence of the same is not a cosmological theory of the physical universe; it is, however, a psychological theory. All events are interconnected, and if one event is changed, it changes everything, so we have to accept everything or nothing, everything has to return or nothing returns. We should read the eternal recurrence of the same as an assertion, an 'as if'. If our life recurs, then everything should return in the same way. This is a total affirmation of life. After all, what I have become is due to all what I have thought, wanted and done. Alter these, and one becomes an entirely different person. And to become an entirely different person is to alter the world, since everything is interconnected. Thus the eternal recurrence of the same not only applies to the individual level but also to the world.

The eternal recurrence of the same is not only the ultimate affirmation of life, it makes a contingent life necessary. The past cannot be undone, but it can be reinterpreted, what is of significance has changed in relation to new experiences. The examination of the past goes on forever, a final interpretation is impossible (with the same 'facts' a different narrative can be constructed). Therefore, just as perfection is unattainable, so is the *Übermensch*.

And the real existing Nietzsche was no *Übermensch*. Charles Altieri points at the elements of pathos in *Ecce Homo*.⁵² Nietzsche depends on rhetoric to make his point, and at these moments his will to power fails. His overuse of irony seems at times self-evasive. Is he idealizing himself through his skilled use of rhetoric? Is irony not another way of evading responsibility for oneself? Nietzsche wants to be(come) different, and, on the other hand, he wants to be understood, that requires sameness.

Still, style is important. Style makes the man. Nietzsche rejects Plato's separation of poetry from philosophy – or style from content. Plato's style – philosophy through dialog – has perhaps had more influence than his actual ideas. Just as Nietzsche is critical of the Cartesian mind-body dualism, he claims it is impossible to separate content from style. We show meaning through styling it in certain ways and not in other ways. Susan Sontag writes: “By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art.”⁵³ Style, Sontag adds, is not decorative and she concludes: “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotic's of art.”⁵⁴ On the other hand, the use of a form or style without the will to show a perspective on one's world is nihilistic.

Do artists care about defining art? Or if they do, should they? Do art lovers care about the definition of art? Or if they do, should they? What does it say if we claim that art is about beauty or that something is art if it is put in a certain context (for example a museum)? I do not care too much for a definition of art.⁵⁵ I, on the other hand, think that art should not be overintellectualized. Now, it seems that philosophers have to come to rescue art, to justify it with fancy words and theories in curatorial essays. References to Foucault and Derrida in catalogs are the rule these days.

Art can say something philosophy cannot. Art can show what we cannot say in propositional language. We should engage with artworks. This is a physical engagement – to experience art in the stomach. As soon as we ask ourselves the question what the content is of a certain artwork we have to realize that the artwork did not succeed. If art needs exterior justification it did not succeed, it will now not be successful in becoming immortal. A good artwork does not make one ask the question 'why?'. Questions about brush strokes and camera standpoints are secondary. Looking primarily at details makes a physical engagement impossible. A great artwork is felt in the stomach.

The best times I experienced art was when I was too tired to think. The first time was in 1996 when I visited Louisiana Museum of Modern Art nearby Copenhagen, Denmark, where I arrived after a nonstop trip from Umeå, in the far north of Sweden.⁵⁶ A decade later, I saw – or better: experienced – after a sleepless night the work titled 'the heart is a lonely painter, chapter 13' by Chatchai Puipia (1964, Thailand) at the Singapore Biennale.⁵⁷ I experienced this piece of artwork physically, not intellectually. No need whatsoever to wonder about Puipia's technique, because this painting is magnificent, sublime.

And Nietzsche claims that we can learn from artists what we cannot learn from scholars. The artist can teach that life can be heroic: “only they [artists] have taught us to esteem the hero that is concealed in everyday characters; only they have taught us the art of viewing ourselves as heroes [...]”⁵⁸ Art is considered by Nietzsche as a counterforce to science with its ideology of honesty and truth, which can lead to suicide. Art is then a counterforce. “As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be *able* to turn ourselves in such phenomenon.”⁵⁹ What we can learn from art is that style is a necessity and not mere decoration;⁶⁰ we can learn from artists that we can “be poets of our life – first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters.”⁶¹ “As a poet,” Nietzsche continues, we “continually *fashion* something that had not been there before: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations.”⁶² The artist is the yes-saying spirit, he says yes to life. Artists “let a *harmony* sound forth from every conflict [...]: they express their innermost experience in the symbolism of every work of art they produce – their creativity is gratitude for their existence.”⁶³ And they “give a single form to the multifarious and disordered [...]”⁶⁴ When they create, “their reason pauses.”⁶⁵

Every time I write on Nietzsche I hope it will be the very last time. As Wittgenstein writes: the reader “must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.”⁶⁶ Is it already time to throw away this ladder? A style is one's perspective on the world. Style, therefore, depends on the contingencies of one's life. Style is a voice of a particular life. That is why most scholarly writing is utterly boring. Under the pretense of neutrality, of objectivity, for the sake of the greater good – the TRUTH – the author must be silenced and the reader sedated. However, reading is part of the art of living. Without reading voraciously – a funny coincidence: Voragen, my surname, means 'to eat a lot' – one's own voice cannot be developed. I cannot forever remain a student. Tomorrow – my voice.

End Notes:

- ¹ Roy Voragen can be contacted at fatumbrutum.blogspot.com. This essay was first published as “Takdir Tragis Sebagai Sebuah Mahakarya Keagungan Hidup,” *Ecce Homo*, exhibition catalogue (Semarang: Semarang Contemporary Art Gallery, 2010): 12-25. The essay was translated by Mardohar B.B. Simanjuntak, and the exhibition was curated by Heru Hikayat. See also Roy Voragen, “In the Face of Fatality: Amor Fati, Fatum Brutum,” in: *Amor Fati*, exhibition catalogue (Bandung: Selasar Senaryo ArtSpace, 2007); this essay can be downloaded from my blog.
- ² See also *Genesis* 1.2.
- ³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), section 477, 264.
- ⁴ I realize I am gender insensitive here, as a justification: Nietzsche wants to go beyond any dualism, which is difficult to express in language. I do hope that my feminist readers will not call me a male chauvinist pig, and if they do, well, what the hell.
- ⁵ Of course, the *ad hominem* argument can be a fallacy. For example: 'I disagree with Michel Foucault's *The Order of things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, because Foucault was homosexual, it is well known that homosexuals cannot be good philosophers since they are immoral and irrational. AIDS, of which Foucault died, is an example of this.' Not only is this an example of the *ad hominem* fallacy, it is also discriminatory against homosexuals. This example appeals to prejudice.

- However, I agree with Nietzsche that when the writer disappears from the text that then the reader can be sedated to believe in an universal valid truth.
- ⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo, How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), preface, section 3, 218.
- ⁷ Nietzsche, "Why I am so clever," section 4, 246.
- ⁸ Albert Camus, *The Myth of the Sisyphus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 123.
- ⁹ Quoted in Alexander Nehemas, *The Art of Living, Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 177.
- ¹⁰ Susan Sontag writes: "Where is the acknowledgement that this was not a 'cowardly' attack on 'civilization' or 'liberty' or 'humanity' or 'the free world' but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions? [...] In the matter of courage (a neutral virtue): Whatever may be said of the perpetrators [...], they were not cowards." Susan Sontag, "Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker*, 24-9-2001. It is questionable whether courage is a neutral virtue. Aristotle claims in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the deficiency of courage is cowardice and that the excess is rashness, i.e. a display of too much courage at the wrong place in the wrong time directed at the wrong people using the wrong means (bombs instead of words). It is also problematic that Sontag puts the responsibility of the attack on the side of the people working in those WTC towers.
- ¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, intro. Bertrand Russell, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.
- ¹² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I write such good books," section 1, 261.
- ¹³ Nietzsche, "Why I am a destiny," section 1, 326.
- ¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 259, 149.
- ¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I write such good books," section 1, 259.
- ¹⁶ Tracy B. Strong, "Texts and Pretexts: Reflections on Prespectivism in Nietzsche," in *The Self and the Political Order*, ed. Tracy B. Strong (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 174.
- ¹⁷ So writes Nietzsche: "the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is – to *live dangerously!*" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), book 4, section 283, 228 (see also section 154).
- ¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 702, 373.
- ¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil, Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), section 225, 135-6.
- ²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, book 4, section 331, 242.
- ²¹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so wise," section 1, 223, and section 6, 231.
- ²² M.J. Bowles, "The practice of meaning in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 26 (2003), 12.
- ²³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, book 4, section 338, 269-70.
- ²⁴ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so wise," section 4, 228.
- ²⁵ In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes 'who' instead of 'what': "We [...] *want to become those we are* – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves." Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, book 4, section 335, 266 (Nietzsche refers here to Pindar).

- ²⁶ Nietzsche, "Why I am so clever," section 9, 253-4.
- ²⁷ Nietzsche, section 10, 258. Also Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, book 4, section 276, 233: "I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati* [love of fate]: let that be my love henceforth! [...] And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer."
- ²⁸ Raymond Duval, "The Uniqueness of the Individual and the Solitude of Self Becoming," in *Nietzsche and Christianity*, eds. Claude Geffré and Jean-Pierre Jossua (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 26.
- ²⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 56, 64. Also Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 341, 273-4.
- ³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), "What I owe to the ancients," section 2, 558-9. And in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche writes: "It is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than appearance; it is even the worst-proved assumption that exists. [...] here would be no life at all if not on the basis of perspective evaluations and appearances; and if [...] one wanted to abolish the 'apparent world' altogether [...] nothing would remain of your 'truth' either." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 34, 47.
- ³¹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 708, 377.
- ³² Peter Fritzsims, "The 'End' of Kant-in-Himself: Nietzschean difference," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39, no.5 (2007), 566.
- ³³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 485, 268-9.
- ³⁴ Nietzsche, section 488, 270.
- ³⁵ I do not translate *Übermensch*, available translations are either comical ('superman') or just sound too academic ('overman').
- ³⁶ Bernhard Welte, "The Ambiguity of Nietzsche's Superman," in *Nietzsche and Christianity*, 54.
- ³⁷ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 490, 270-1.
- ³⁸ Hugh J. Silverman, "The Autobiographical Textuality of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*," *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature* 9, no.3 and Vol. 10, no.1 (Spring-Fall 1982), 143.
- ³⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Dover, 1995), section 7, 23.
- ⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 254, 148.
- ⁴¹ It certainly requires another essay on how Nietzsche deals with God in general and Christianity in particular.
- ⁴² Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 2, 9, see also sections 1 and 55.
- ⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Holingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), third essay, section 28, 163.
- ⁴⁴ Alessandro Tomasi, "Nihilism and Creativity in the Philosophy of Nietzsche," *Minerva, an Internet Journal of Philosophy* 11 (2007), 153-4, <<http://www.mic.ulie/stephen/vol11/nietzsche.pdf>> (25 March 2009).
- ⁴⁵ Javier A. Ibanez-Noe, "Truth and ethos, The philosophical foundations of Nietzsche," *Philosophy Today* 38, no.1 (Spring 1994), 76.
- ⁴⁶ For an elaboration on Nietzsche's use of *ressentiment* see Walter Kaufman, "Editor's Introduction," in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche

- (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 5-10.
- ⁴⁷ Walter Kaufmann writes: "Anyone lacking that [self-sufficiency] tends to project into other needs and conditions of distress that he can then exert himself to alleviate. Having no project of his own, he can thus give his life some purpose." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, n48, 118.
- ⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 557, 302.
- ⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, section 6.43, 72.
- ⁵⁰ Alexander Nehemas, "How One Becomes What One Is," *The Philosophical Review* 92, no.3 (July 1983), 398.
- ⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, sections 492, 271, and 518, 281; and Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, preface, section 3, 35-6.
- ⁵² Charles Altieri, "Ecce Homo: Narcissism, Power, Pathos, and the Status of Autobiographical Representation," *Boundary 2*, no.9 and 10 (1981), 402.
- ⁵³ Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 1994), 8.
- ⁵⁴ Sontag, 14.
- ⁵⁵ However, if you do, here is a good essay: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/art-definition/#Oth>.
- ⁵⁶ See <http://www.louisiana.dk/>.
- ⁵⁷ See <http://www.singaporebiennale.org/> and see here for the painting: <http://fatumbrutum.blogspot.com/2007/01/heart-is-lonely-painter.html>.
- ⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, book two, section 78, 132-3.
- ⁵⁹ Nietzsche, book two, section 107, 163-4.
- ⁶⁰ Nietzsche, book 4, section 290, 232.
- ⁶¹ Nietzsche, book 4, section 299, 239-40.
- ⁶² Nietzsche, book 4, section 331, 241-2.
- ⁶³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, section 852, 450-1.
- ⁶⁴ Nietzsche, section 964, 506.
- ⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, book one, section 3, 77-8.
- ⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, section 6.54, 74.

Bibliography:

- Charles Altieri, "Ecce Homo: Narcissism, Power, Pathos, and the Status of Autobiographical Representation," *Boundary 2*, no.9 and 10 (1981).
- M.J. Bowles, "The practice of meaning in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 26 (2003).
- Albert Camus, *The Myth of the Sisyphus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).

Raymond Duval, "The Uniqueness of the Individual and the Solitude of Self Becoming," in *Nietzsche and Christianity*, eds. Claude Geffré and Jean-Pierre Jossua (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981).

Peter Fritzsims, "The 'End' of Kant-in-Himself: Nietzschean difference," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39, no.5 (2007).

Javier A. Ibanez-Noe, "Truth and ethos, The philosophical foundations of Nietzsche," *Philosophy Today* 38, no.1 (Spring 1994).

Alexander Nehemas, "How One Becomes What One Is," *The Philosophical Review* 92, no.3 (July 1983).

Alexander Nehemas, *The Art of Living, Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo, How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil, Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Dover, 1995).

Alessandro Tomasi, "Nihilism and Creativity in the Philosophy of Nietzsche," *Minerva, an Internet Journal of Philosophy* 11 (2007), 153-4, <<http://www.mic.ul.ie/stephen/vol11/nietzsche.pdf>> (25 March 2009).

Hugh J. Silverman, "The Autobiographical Textuality of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*," *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature* 9, no.3 and Vol. 10, no.1 (Spring-Fall 1982).

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 1994).

Susan Sontag, "Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker*, 24-9-2001.

Tracy B. Strong, "Texts and Pretexts: Reflections on Prespectivism in Nietzsche," in *The Self and the Political Order*, ed. Tracy B. Strong (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

Roy Voragen, "In the Face of Fatality: Amor Fati, Fatum Brutum," in: *Amor Fati*, exhibition catalogue (Bandung: Selasar Senaryo ArtSpace, 2007).

Bernhard Welte, "The Ambiguity of Nietzsche's Superman," in *Nietzsche and Christianity*, eds. Claude Geffré and Jean-Pierre Jossua (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981).

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, intro. Bertrand Russell, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1999).