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*Pli*, The Warwick Journal of Philosophy

Department of Philosophy

University of Warwick

Coventry CV4 7AL UK

Email: [plijournal@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:plijournal@warwick.ac.uk)

Website: [www.plijournal.com](http://www.plijournal.com)

## Epicurus Avenged?

DANIEL CONWAY

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[T]he 'after-death' no longer concerns us!—an unspeakable benefit, which would be felt as such far and wide if it were not so recent.—And Epicurus triumphs anew!  
—*Daybreak*, Section 72<sup>1</sup>

The will to *immortalize* also requires a dual interpretation. It can be prompted, first, by gratitude and love; art with this origin will always be an art of apotheoses, perhaps dithyrambic, ...spreading a Homeric light and glory over all things. But it can also be the tyrannical will of one who suffers deeply, who struggles, is tormented, and...revenge himself on all things by forcing his own image, the image of his torture, on them, branding them with it.  
—*The Gay Science*, Section 370<sup>2</sup>

One pays dearly for immortality: one has to die several times while still alive.  
—*Ecce Homo*, 'Good Books,' *Zarathustra* 5<sup>3</sup>

In the writings from his so-called 'middle' period, Nietzsche delivers consistently favourable reviews of Epicurus.<sup>4</sup> In *Human, All Too*

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1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Henceforth abbreviated as *D*.

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1974). Henceforth abbreviated as *GS*.

3 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1954). Henceforth abbreviated as *Z*.

4 Here I follow Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'True to the Earth: Nietzsche's Epicurean Care of Self and World', in *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching: For Individuals and*

*Human*,<sup>5</sup> for example, he not only associates 'the name of Epicurus' with 'wisdom in bodily form',<sup>6</sup> but also celebrates Epicurus as 'one of the greatest of men, the inventor of an heroic-Idyllic mode of philosophizing'.<sup>7</sup> In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche recounts the 'triumph' of Epicurus (via Lucretius) over the various 'secret cults' that prospered in the early years of the Roman Empire, while lamenting that this triumph 'came too early' to deflect the teachings of the apostle Paul.<sup>8</sup> In *The Gay Science*, finally, Nietzsche commends Epicurus for allowing him 'to enjoy the happiness of the afternoon of antiquity', even as he acknowledges that 'such happiness could be invented only by a man who was suffering continually'.<sup>9</sup> Keith Ansell-Pearson instructively summarizes Nietzsche's position as follows:

Epicurus is a figure who has liberated himself from the fear and anxiety of existence and is capable of spiritual joyfulness that consists, in part, in the serene contemplation of the beauty and sublimity of things and a cultivation of simple, modest pleasures...As Nietzsche astutely noted, never in the history of thought has such a voluptuous appreciation of existence been so modest.<sup>10</sup>

In the writings from the post-Zarathustran period of his career, however, Nietzsche offers a decidedly more skeptical appreciation of Epicurus.<sup>11</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he identifies Epicureanism as 'one of the most refined disguises' available to those who wish to conceal the extent of their suffering.<sup>12</sup> In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, he associates Epicurus with those 'Oriental' nihilists who understand (and

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*Culture*, eds. Horst Hutter and Eli Friedland. (Bloomsbury Academic: Reprint Edition, 2013), pp. 97-116. (pp. 101-09); and Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'Heroic-Idyllic Philosophizing: Nietzsche and the Epicurean Tradition', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 74, (2014), pp. 237-263 (pp. 253-59).

5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Henceforth abbreviated as HH.

6 HH II 224

7 HH II/2, 295. See also Ansell-Pearson, *Heroic-Idyllic Philosophizing*, pp. 246-49.

8 D 72

9 GS 45

10 Ansell-Pearson, *True to the Earth*, p. 101.

11 As Ansell-Pearson suggests, Epicurus becomes 'a more ambivalent figure' in Nietzsche's writings from this period (*Heroic-Idyllic Philosophizing*, p. 259).

12 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1989), §270. Henceforth abbreviated as *BGE*.

promote) 'redemption' in strictly privative terms, i.e., as 'the absence of suffering', which 'sufferers and those profoundly depressed will count... as the highest good, as the value of values'.<sup>13</sup> In *The Antichrist(ian)*,<sup>14</sup> finally, Nietzsche offers his controversial diagnosis of Epicurus as a 'typical *décadent*,' whose 'fear of pain, even of infinitely minute pain... can end in no other way than in a *religion of love*'.<sup>15</sup> Much like the Jesus whom Nietzsche also profiles in this book, though blessed with 'a generous admixture of Greek vitality and nervous energy',<sup>16</sup> Epicurus encouraged his followers to adopt 'love as the only, as the *last* possible, way of life'.<sup>17</sup>

While passages such as these may suggest that Nietzsche has broken decisively with Epicurus, as he has with so many other figures of formative influence, his writings from 1888 suggest a more nuanced position. What we find in these writings, I offer, is an attempt on Nietzsche's part to avenge Epicurus and, in so doing, to reinvigorate the pursuit of philosophy as a way of life.<sup>18</sup> Like Epicurus, in fact, Nietzsche promotes a way of life that delivers its adherents to a blessed state of tranquil self-enjoyment, free from the mental and spiritual perturbations incident to the fear of death.<sup>19</sup> Unlike Epicurus, however, Nietzsche links the achieve-

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13 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Genealogy of Morals', in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1989), III:17. Henceforth abbreviated as GM. See Raphael Woolf, 'Pleasure and Desire,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicurus*, ed. James Warren. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) pp. 158-78. (pp. 172-78.) For a defence of Epicurus against this general line of (Ciceronian) criticism, see Susan Sauvé Meyer, *Ancient Ethics: A Critical Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 97-102; and John Cooper (2012). *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 229-46.

14 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Antichrist', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1954). Henceforth abbreviated as *A*.

15 A 30. See, for example, Ansell-Pearson, *Heroic-Idyllic Philosophizing*, pp. 259-63.

16 A 30

17 A 30

18 Here I follow Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. and intro. Arnold I Davidson, trans. Michael Chase. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), pp. 271-75. See also Ansell-Pearson, *True to the Earth*, pp. 101-09.

19 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Ecce Homo', in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1989), *Clever* 9. Henceforth abbreviated to EH.

ment of this blessed state to the affirmation of one's *immortal* existence—not as an indestructible soul, as the apostle Paul insisted, but as an eternally recurring participant in the ceaseless Dionysian flux of Life itself.

### Section I: Epicurus and Paul

In order to appreciate why Nietzsche believes that he is advantageously positioned to avenge Epicurus, let us consider his account of the role of Epicurean philosophy in the early years of the Roman Empire, prior to the appearance on the scene of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

As Nietzsche approaches the summary judgment with which he concludes *The Antichrist(ian)*, at which point he proudly pronounces 'the eternal indictment of Christianity',<sup>20</sup> he pauses to reckon the costs to us of the triumph of Christianity:

Christianity was the vampire of the *imperium Romanum*: overnight it undid the tremendous deed of the Romans—who had won the ground for a great culture *that would have had time*...This organization was firm enough to withstand bad emperors...But it was not firm enough against the most *corrupt* kind of corruption, against the *Christians*.<sup>21</sup>

Here Nietzsche rehearses an argument that he originally outlined in *Human, All Too Human* and later developed in *Daybreak* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In the last of these predecessor books, we know, he offers a similar account of the downfall of the noble morality.

Not unlike the doomed caste of knightly nobles, apparently, the Empire was vulnerable to an enemy whose 'corruption' it could not fathom, against which it was powerless to defend itself. Unfamiliar with the potency of accumulated *ressentiment*, the knightly nobles underestimated the tenacity with which the lowest orders, under the tutelage of the vengeful priests, would cling to their earthly misery.<sup>22</sup> Like the knightly caste of nobles, that is, the early Empire was simultaneously stronger *and* weaker than its most dangerous enemies. Lavish enough to indulge and 'withstand' the carnality of 'bad emperors', the Empire failed to recognize

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20 A 62

21 A 58

22 GM I 10

the threat gathering within its lowest strata. In particular, as we shall see, the Empire failed to acknowledge the threat posed by the teachings of Paul.

As Nietzsche goes on to explain, the threat presented by the Christians within the Empire was escalated by the *priests*, those haters *par excellence*, who weaponised the lowest orders of society and loosed them against their noble overlords:

The sneakiness of prigs, the conventicle secrecy, gloomy concepts like hell, like sacrifice of the guiltless, like *unio mystica* in drinking blood; above all the slowly fanned fire of revenge, of chandala revenge—all that is what became master over Rome, the same kind of religion against which, in its pre-existent form, Epicurus already had waged war. One should read Lucretius to comprehend what Epicurus fought: *not* paganism, but 'Christianity,' by which I mean the corruption of souls by the concepts of guilt, punishment, and immortality. He fought the *subterranean* cults which were exactly like a latent form of Christianity: to deny immortality [*Unsterblichkeit*] was then nothing less than real *salvation* [*Erlösung*].<sup>23</sup>

Here Nietzsche helps himself to a useful bit of revisionist history: Despite predating the founding of Christianity by several centuries, Epicurus in fact 'waged war' against Christianity, albeit in its 'latent', 'pre-existent form'. He did so, Nietzsche explains, inasmuch as the 'subterranean cults' he battled promoted a doctrine of immortality that anticipated in important respects the teaching that Paul later disseminated.<sup>24</sup> Inasmuch as these cults 'were exactly like a latent form of Christianity', moreover, we apparently are meant to understand that they affirmed the afterlife only at the expense of *this* life, which they valued only as a trial or test, i.e., as a lamentable means to a glorious end. (Although the Epicureans famously developed a 'fourfold remedy',<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche is concerned here only with

23 A 58; see Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) pp. 192-217.

24 See Henry Staten, *Nietzsche's Voice*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 145-50.

25 See Meyer, *Ancient Ethics*, pp. 102-08; and Jacques Brunschwig and David Sedley, 'Hellenistic Philosophy,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. David Sedley. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 151-83 (pp. 155-63). See also Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, pp. 232-38.

the success of their remedy for mental disturbances arising from the fear of death.)

Appealing to the authority of Lucretius (99 – 55 BCE), Nietzsche locates 'the concepts of guilt, punishment, and immortality' at the centre of the 'war' that was waged by Epicurus and his followers against the proto-Christian 'subterranean cults'.<sup>26</sup> According to Nietzsche, Epicurus and his followers correctly identified this set of concepts as a threat to the souls whom they laboured to 'save' from the fear of death. Under the sage guidance of the Epicureans, that is, a kind of 'salvation' was both promised *and* attained, i.e., as an earthly, this-worldly achievement, in the early years of the Empire. The Epicureans prevailed by designing therapies and spiritual exercises that provided their clients with a preferable alternative to the immortality promoted by these 'subterranean cults'. Liberated from the fear of the death, and positively attached to life itself, the architects and champions of Empire bravely looked to the future.<sup>27</sup>

According to Nietzsche, moreover, the Epicureans had this 'war' well in hand. So long as they continued to battle these proto-Christian 'cults' separately, they were likely not only to prevail, but also to infuse the Empire with a religious-moral sensibility that would further its designs on structural permanence and expansionary conquest.<sup>28</sup> In part, Nietzsche thus suggests, the Empire grew (and would have continued to grow) on the strength of its Epicurean attunement to the mortality, i.e., the 'definitive death',<sup>29</sup> of all human beings.<sup>30</sup>

The Epicureans suffered a reversal of fortune, however, when Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, appeared on the scene:

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26 See Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, pp. 251-59.

27 On the influence of Epicureanism in the early Empire, see Michael Erler, 'Epicureanism in the Roman Empire,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicurus*, ed. James Warren. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) pp. 46-64. (pp. 48-59.)

28 For a positive account of the political influence of Epicureanism on the early Empire, see Jeffrey Fish, 'Not All Politicians are Sisyphus: What Roman Epicureans Were Taught About Politics,' in *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition*, eds. Jeffrey Fish and Kirk R. Sanders. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) pp. 72-104. (pp. 96-104)

29 D 72

30 See James Warren, 'Removing Fear,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicurus*, ed. James Warren. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) pp. 234-48 (pp. 242-48)

And Epicurus would have won; every respectable spirit in the Roman Empire was an Epicurean. Then Paul appeared—Paul, the *chandala* hatred against Rome, against 'the world,' become flesh, become genius, the Jew, *the eternal* Wandering Jew par excellence. What he guessed was how one could use the little sectarian Christian movement apart from Judaism to kindle a 'world fire'...Christianity as a formula with which to outbid the subterranean cults of all kinds, those of Osiris, of the Great Mother, of Mithras, for example—and to unite them: in this insight lies the genius of Paul.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to the appearance of Paul, Nietzsche asserts, an Epicurean attunement to mortality prevailed, as did, presumably, an appreciation for those Epicurean therapies and exercises that were understood to liberate mortals from the vexatious fear of death.

Had the conditions of this 'war' persisted, Nietzsche insists, 'Epicurus would have won', which means, among other things, that Europe would have reaped the bountiful 'harvest' the early Empire was poised to deliver.<sup>32</sup> Here Nietzsche suggests that the Epicureans were successful in the early years of the Empire not only because they were effective in allaying the fear of death, but also because the 'subterranean cults' they battled remained relatively insignificant in both size and influence. As the Empire prospered and expanded, however, its leaders (and the nobility more generally) became ever more prominent targets for the hatred and resentment accumulating throughout its lowest orders.<sup>33</sup>

According to Nietzsche, the 'subterranean cults' over which the Epicureans had prevailed were 'outbid' by the apostle Paul, who offered their adherents an alternative doctrine of immortality. By means of this ingenious doctrine, which promised immortality to *everyone*, Paul was able to unite the various enemies and victims of the Empire:

That everyone as an 'immortal soul' has equal rank with everyone else, that in the totality of living beings the 'salvation' of every single individual may claim eternal significance, that

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31 A 58

32 A 58

33 A 51

little prigs and three-quarter-madmen have the conceit that the laws of nature are broken for their sakes—such an intensification of every kind of selfishness into the infinite, into the *impertinent*, cannot be branded with too much contempt.<sup>34</sup>

As we know from Nietzsche's argument in GM, the key to Paul's triumph lay in his canny ability to redirect and enflame the resentment of the lowest orders.<sup>35</sup> The immortality of the soul became widely attractive (and politically potent) when Paul attached it to his ominous teaching of the 'judgment',<sup>36</sup> on the strength of which the irenic Jesus of Nazareth improbably assumed the form of the 'The Crucified One.' By virtue of this 'judgment,' Paul insisted, the favoured in *this* life—viz., the noble, well-born, successful, virtuous, and powerful—would endure an eternal after-life in which the tables would forever be turned on them. This means, of course, that the afterlife advertised by Paul would be ruled and enjoyed by those who were (and are) disfavoured in this life, i.e., those who either were or imagined themselves to be the victims of the Empire. In response to this particular promise of immortality, which they had neither anticipated nor imagined, the Epicureans had nothing new to offer. Dedicated to the reduction of pain and the elimination of discord, they did not think to develop arguments against, much less devise therapies for, a doctrine of immortality that would enjoin sufferers to embrace and compound their earthly misery.

By enflaming the resentment of the miserable and dispossessed, Paul succeeded where the proto-Christian 'subterranean cults' had separately failed. He did so, moreover, by outbidding each of these 'cults' and uniting them under a single banner and a single, encompassing doctrine of immortality. Owing to Paul's intervention, the doctrine of immortality acquired the universal (or democratic) formulation that Nietzsche identifies as a primary index of *ressentiment*:

The poison of the doctrine of 'equal rights for all'—it was Christianity that spread it most fundamentally...out of the *ressentiment* of the masses it forged its great weapons against

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34 A 43

35 GM III:21. See Daniel Conway. *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 194-206; and Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*. (London: Continuum Books, 2008), pp. 128-34.

36 A 42

*us*, against all that is noble, gay, high-minded on earth, against our happiness on earth. 'Immortality' conceded to every Peter and Paul has so far been the greatest, the most malignant, attempt to assassinate *noble* humanity.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas immortality previously had been reserved for individuals of exceedingly rare distinction—e.g., sages, saints, heroes, and kings—Paul's teaching awarded immortality to *every* soul, irrespective of birth, valour, character, possessions, or virtue. That this teaching was utterly ludicrous on its face, pandering to the delusional fantasies of those hopeless souls who occupied the lowest strata of society, spoke not only to the depths of Paul's cynicism, but also to the heights of his psychological genius, of which Nietzsche often (if not happily) took note. In short, Paul dared to assert precisely what the lowest orders wished to hear, regardless of its truth or credibility, in order to secure his larger objective:

His need was for power; in Paul the priest wanted power once again—he could use only concepts, doctrines, symbols with which one tyrannizes masses and forms herds.<sup>38</sup>

In adopting this goal and implementing the strategies that would ensure its attainment, Paul thus developed what amounted to a *political* doctrine of immortality. So great was his need for power, in fact, that he promulgated this doctrine with no concern for the collateral damage it would cause:

The great lie of personal immortality destroys all reason, everything natural in the instincts—whatever in the instincts is beneficent and life-promoting or guarantees a future now arouses mistrust.<sup>39</sup>

Much like the knightly caste of nobles described in Essay I of GM, the Empire failed to anticipate, much less counter, the unified political opposition mustered by its seemingly harmless enemies and victims. As in the case of the knightly caste of nobles, moreover, the Empire fell because its leaders failed to identify the deadly enemy in their midst—namely, the priestly element or caste, which surreptitiously weaponised the *ressenti-*

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37 A 43

38 A 42

39 A 43

ment that it stirred up within the lowest orders of society.<sup>40</sup> In light of this more general failure, we should not be surprised to learn that the Epicureans were no match for the doctrine of immortality that was disseminated by Paul and his followers. Notwithstanding their success in contesting the appeal of the proto-Christian 'subterranean cults', the Epicureans were powerless to deflect the unifying teachings of Paul.

## Section II: Nietzsche and Paul

The rest, as they say, is history. The pagan Empire became thoroughly and officially Christianised,<sup>41</sup> and Europe was obliged to forego the cultural 'harvest' the early Empire was poised (but not destined) to deliver. As Christian morality became increasingly universal and monocultural in its dominion, the few remaining 'blonde beasts' who roamed the Empire were 'hunted down', sickened, and domesticated.<sup>42</sup> Widespread cultural decay set in, and the spectre of European nihilism appeared on the horizon. News of the 'death of God' began to spread, and doomsayers warned of a similar fate for humankind.<sup>43</sup>

All was lost, or so it seemed, until Nietzsche himself appeared on the scene in his final and most potent incarnation. Prepared to do battle with Paul for the soul and future of European civilization, Nietzsche presents himself as the author and instigator of the terrible and hopeful 'revaluation of all values'.<sup>44</sup> In the person of Nietzsche, or so we apparently are meant to understand, Christian morality has inadvertently produced its *other*, viz., the 'first immoralist',<sup>45</sup> in whom Christian morality has vested the authority to legislate its destruction.<sup>46</sup> As it turns out, in fact, Paul effectively sowed the seeds of his eventual undoing.<sup>47</sup> In

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40 GM I: 10-11

41 GM I: 8

42 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1954), *Improvers* 2. Henceforth abbreviated as TI.

43 GS 125

44 EH, *Preface* 1

45 EH, *Destiny* 3

46 See Daniel Conway, 'Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Advent of 'Great Politics', in *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) pp. 197-217. (pp. 202-09)

47 I am indebted here to Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) pp. 112-22.

brokering the decisive triumph of 'Christian instincts',<sup>48</sup> Paul inadvertently set in motion the chain of events that produced Nietzsche in his final (and supposedly lethal) incarnation. Nor should we be surprised by this seemingly improbable reversal of fortune: Thus decrees the 'law of life', which Nietzsche identifies as 'the law of the necessity of 'self-overcoming' [„Selbstüberwindung'] in the nature of life'.<sup>49</sup>

How might this newborn Nietzsche propose to 'outbid' Paul? First of all, a mere teaching or doctrine will not do. Paul's most successful teachings have become second nature to us, and they have either generated or reinforced some of the most enduring of our moral prejudices. If Nietzsche is to help his readers to unlearn what Paul has so successfully taught, he must provide them with an actual, concrete alternative, and not simply a wishful ideal. That is, he must acquaint them with what he earlier called an *example*, i.e., a philosopher whose 'outward life' bears witness to a demonstrably superior orientation to existence.<sup>50</sup> If the proof of truth is *incorporation*, as Nietzsche occasionally suggests, he will succeed in promulgating his 'terrible' new truth<sup>51</sup> only in the event that he initiates his best readers into a newly established practice and a novel mode of embodiment.<sup>52</sup> In short, he must inaugurate a viable new way of life, a 'visible philosophical life',<sup>53</sup> which, as Ansell-Pearson reminds us, is a point of common emphasis for Epicurus and Nietzsche.<sup>54</sup>

The irony here is that Nietzsche will 'outbid' Paul only if he is able

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48 A 51

49 GM III: 27

50 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3. Henceforth abbreviated as *SE*. Here I follow Robert Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great 'Immoralist' Has to Teach Us*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) pp. 140-44.

51 EH, *Destiny* 1

52 I am indebted here to Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 230-34; Gary Shapiro, *Nietzschean Narratives*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 160-65; and Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 117-31.

53 SE 3

54 Ansell-Pearson, *Heroic-Idyllic Philosophising*, pp. 253-59. See also Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 82-89; and Michael Ure, 'Nietzsche's Political Therapy,' in *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) pp. 161-78 (pp. 161-66)

to reproduce the achievement he attributes to Jesus, who, he insists, bodied forth 'a new way of life, *not* a new faith'.<sup>55</sup> *His* Jesus, *pace* Paul, cared not a whit for the postulated afterlife into which Paul's doctrine of immortality was meant, in the name of The Crucified One, to catapult all those who suffer in (and from) this life. *His* Jesus 'died as he had lived, as he had taught—*not* to 'redeem men,' but to show how one must live'.<sup>56</sup> The further irony, of course, is that Nietzsche forwards a similar interpretation of Epicurus, who, despite being a '*typical décadent*',<sup>57</sup> also offered his followers a 'way of life' in which a kind of 'redemption' was not simply promised, but attained.

To be sure, however, Nietzsche's point here is not to recommend the precise example set by Jesus, whom he diagnosed as an '*idiot*',<sup>58</sup> i.e., as suffering from an '*instinctive hatred of reality*'.<sup>59</sup> Whereas Jesus instinctively eschewed opposition and resistance in all of its forms,<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche claims to have 'become what he is' by actively opposing and resisting his share in *décadence*.<sup>61</sup> As he explains, in fact, his engagement in sustained, self-directed opposition has endowed him with the stereoscopic perspective that accounts for his copious wisdom and uniquely positions him to undertake a 'revaluation of values'.<sup>62</sup> Still, Nietzsche nevertheless wishes to reproduce the particular emphasis that Jesus and Epicurus placed on the importance of preaching what one actually practices, of promising a salvation that one already has attained. In other words, he intends to join them in recommending philosophy as a way of life, and he means to do so, again like them, by presenting his readers with a concrete example of the particular way of life he extols.

In recommending his profile of the historical Jesus, in fact, Nietzsche also means to recommend *himself*, as the bold, unconventional author of this interpretation. Indeed, he offers this profile not simply as a rival interpretation, but also as an index of his freedom from the falsify-

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55 A 33. 'Such a faith', Nietzsche explains, 'at every moment...is its own miracle, its own reward, its own proof, its own 'kingdom of God.' Nor does this faith formulate itself: it *lives*, it resists all formulas' (A 32).

56 A 35

57 A 30

58 A 29

59 A 30

60 A 30

61 EH, *Wise* 2. Reference for *The Case of Wagner* P. Henceforth abbreviated as *CW*.

62 EH, *Wise* 1.

ing influence of Pauline Christianity. This is why he so proudly announces that he (and he alone) understands

something that nineteen centuries have misunderstood: that integrity which, having become instinct and passion, wages war against the 'holy lie' even more than against any other lie.<sup>63</sup>

That Nietzsche is able to recover the historical Jesus as a representative of the 'redeemer type', i.e., as a *décadent*, hypersensitive prince of peace, *means* that he has gained an unprecedented measure of independence from the Pauline orthodoxy. In other words, he is sufficiently healthy and strong that he may refuse the civilisation-shaping influence of Paul's teachings and, as a result, approach Jesus in the context in which he actually lived and taught. Owing to his renewed standing, moreover, Nietzsche is now prepared to challenge Paul on an equal footing, and to do so as an unexpected outgrowth of Pauline Christianity itself. In short, Nietzsche has *become* the exemplary philosopher whom he formerly admired from afar.

Hence the distinctly Epicurean resonance of the title he affixes to his bristling autobiography: *Ecce homo*, he writes, exhorting his readers to behold the man who, *finally*, has managed to behold the man whom Pilate urged the crowd to behold as *just* a man, in whom no crime was (or is) to be found. In retrieving the historical Jesus, Nietzsche thus confirms (and displays) his access to a pre-Pauline imperial milieu in which, he insists, 'every respectable spirit...was an Epicurean'.<sup>64</sup> If Nietzsche means for this claim to apply to the Roman province of Judea, moreover, then he also may mean to suggest that the milieu in which the words *ecce homo* were originally uttered was an *Epicurean* milieu. In that event, the imperial governor might have expected the 'respectable spirits' among his auditors to be amenable to his judgment,<sup>65</sup> which, according to Nietzsche's interpretation, may have been replete with Epicurean resonance. For example, Pilate's mockery of the prisoner may have been intended, at least in part, to administer an admittedly severe application of Epicurean therapy. In his efforts to humiliate the prisoner before the assembled mob,

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63 A 36. See Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game*, pp. 223-25.

64 A 58

65 Speaking of Pilate, Nietzsche observes, 'The noble scorn of a Roman, confronted with an impudent abuse of the word 'truth,' has enriched the New Testament with the only saying *that has value*—one which is its criticism, even its *annihilation*: 'What is truth?'" (A 46).

exposing his boasts and taunts as baseless, Pilate may have meant to rid the prisoner of his fear of death and/or the gods.

Nietzsche's appreciation of the need to acquaint his readers with an alternative way of life, and to do so by guiding their initiation into a fresh configuration of worldly practices, may explain his unusual approach to the project of self-introduction that occupies him in *Ecce Homo*. As we know, Nietzsche describes Paul as 'the *chandala* hatred against Rome, against 'the world,' *become flesh, become genius*'.<sup>66</sup> Prior to Paul's intervention, apparently, '*chandala* hatred' of the Empire was too widely dispersed and too loosely aggregated to pose a genuine threat to the nobility. In order for the ambient hatred of the Empire to become fully potentiated, it needed to 'become flesh, become genius'. It did so, Nietzsche allows, in the person of Paul:

On the very heels of the 'glad tidings' came the very *worst*: those of Paul. In Paul was embodied the opposite type to that of the 'bringer of glad tidings': the genius in hatred, in the vision of hatred, in the inexorable logic of hatred.<sup>67</sup>

By dint of this unprecedented embodiment of hatred, Paul managed to enflame the fantasies of all those in whom hatred had only ever been inert, impotent, and self-destructive. Much as the Redeemer exemplified for his followers an alternative, irenic way of life, in which salvation was not merely promised but attained, so Paul founded an alternative way of life in which hatred is not merely a transient mood or affect, but the permanent, volcanic core (and justification) of one's existence. Here, too, we may borrow productively from Nietzsche's profile of the ascetic priest, who both redirected the *ressentiment* of the slaves and, eventually, recruited them into the service of his political agenda.<sup>68</sup> So it was, according to Nietzsche, in the early years of the Empire: Paul united the motley foes of the Empire not only by imparting to them a new, appealing doctrine of immortality, but also by showing them how to bring hatred to life and imbue it with meaning.

It is no coincidence, I offer, that Nietzsche employs this very

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66 A 58. Own emphasis

67 A 42

68 GM III: 19-21. Here I follow Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the Genealogy*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 15-22, 41-44. See also Conway, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 126-34.

description to announce *himself*, in *Ecce Homo*, as the world-historical counterpart to the apostle Paul. Nietzsche is prepared to outbid Paul, apparently, because *he* has 'become flesh and genius' in his own right:

*Revaluation of all values*: that is my formula for the highest act of self-reflection on the part of humanity, which has become flesh and genius in me [*der in mir Fleisch und Genie geworden ist*]. My lot wills it that I must be the first *decent* human being, that I know I stand in opposition to the hypocrisy of millennia...I was the first to discover the truth, by being the first to sense—*smell*—the lie as a lie...<sup>69</sup>

Having completed with respect to himself 'the highest act of self-reflection', Nietzsche has acquired the right to demand the same of humanity as a whole. His challenge to Christian morality, no longer merely abstract or notional, has yielded a viable way of life, which attests in turn to the successful incorporation [*Einverleibung*] of the new truth he offers.<sup>70</sup> As evidence of his success in reforming the relationship in which he stands to his own embodiment, he proudly announces that his 'genius' now resides where it formerly was lacking—namely, in his newly rehabilitated senses, most notably his 'nostrils'.<sup>71</sup> Much like Epicurus, that is, he now (or once again) pursues philosophy as a way of life and offers its this-worldly fruits—*behold the man!*—as proof against his enemies and critics.

### Section III: Dionysian Immortality

Although Nietzsche presents his case against Paul in the form of a complaint, he does not mean to recommend a reversion or return to the purity of the Epicurean moment that preceded (and was spoiled by) Paul's arrival. In Nietzsche's judgment, the Epicurean option, whose passing he laments, is now historically unavailable. Those among his readers who wish to avail themselves of the wisdom of Epicurus are obliged in particular to acknowledge that they are heirs to nearly two millennia of Pauline acculturation. If these readers wish to act on their enthusiasm for the wisdom of Epicurus, they will need to do so in a way that accommodates the non-negotiable influence of Pauline Christianity. In short, Paul must be outbid in turn, which is precisely what Nietzsche aims to do.

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69 EH, *Destiny* 1

70 EH, *Destiny* 1

71 EH, *Destiny* 1

Although his counter-proposal incorporates elements of the teachings of Epicurus, most notably the pursuit of philosophy as a way of life, it also affirms, and bears witness to, its Pauline heritage. Toward this end, Nietzsche is concerned to recommend an alternative model of immortality, which is a teaching that Epicurus expressly rejected. As we shall see, in fact, Nietzsche means to outbid Paul by supplanting the Pauline-Christian doctrine of immortality (i.e., of the soul) with a Dionysian doctrine of immortality (i.e., of Life itself). Having grown accustomed to the concept of immortality, or so he apparently means to suggest, we are now in a position to sample—and perhaps affirm—the real thing. Indeed, we receive a potentially appealing preview of this Dionysian doctrine of immortality in Nietzsche's interleaf epigraph to *Ecce Homo*, where he expresses his gratitude for his 'whole life'.<sup>72</sup> On the particular day in question, he explains, he has 'buried' his forty-fourth year, but only after ensuring that 'whatever was life in it has been saved, is immortal'.<sup>73</sup>

If Nietzsche is to play the signal role he reserves for himself in the elaboration of a viable Dionysian alternative, he will do so only as a product of the dominant Pauline-Christian lineage of acculturation. Whatever he may intend by the opposition with which he closes *Ecce Homo*—'Dionysus vs. [gegen] The Crucified One'—he cannot mean to present himself as anything other than an outgrowth of the lineage he also claims to oppose. If Dionysus is to be steered into opposition with 'The Crucified One', that is, this opposition must be transacted within a historical lineage to which Paul was and remains a potent contributor.

While Nietzsche provides us with precious few clues as to what this concluding opposition might entail, his discussion of Epicurus may point us in a promising direction. According to Nietzsche, as we have seen, Epicurus prevailed over the subterranean, proto-Christian cults that struggled for traction in the early days of the Roman Empire. By denouncing the odious concepts of 'guilt, punishment, and immortality',<sup>74</sup> he and his followers succeeded in promoting an affirmation of mortality, which suited the 'respectable spirits' of the early Empire. Had it not been for the intervention of Paul, Nietzsche suggests, Epicurus would have continued to prevail well into the Common Era, which, we may presume, would

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72 EH, E

73 EH, E

74 A 58

have vouchsafed the bountiful 'harvest' that Europe was poised (but never able) to reap.<sup>75</sup> Nietzsche thus identifies Paul as the mastermind responsible for the transformation of Jesus into 'The Crucified One', whose death was (and is) said to have repaid the debts incurred by humankind:

*How much* this dysangelist sacrificed to hatred. Above all, the Redeemer: he nailed him to *his own* cross. The life, the example, the doctrine, the death, the meaning and the right of the entire evangel—nothing remained once this hate-inspired counterfeiter what alone he could use.<sup>76</sup>

This transformation paved the way for the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, belief in which enabled Paul to 'deprive 'the world' of value'.<sup>77</sup> With this doctrine in place, Paul was able to best the Epicureans and discredit their teaching of the mortal soul.

What Nietzsche has in mind, apparently, is this: As a consequence of the decisive triumph of Paul and 'The Crucified One', whereby 'the concept of 'hell' [became] master over Rome',<sup>78</sup> we late moderns find that we have acquired an involuntary proclivity for the idea of personal immortality. Whether or not we believe in immortality, or even wish to do so, is irrelevant. Our sense of ourselves, as possessors and curators of individuated souls, is the ongoing production of a moral tradition that has been shaped by the Pauline doctrine of personal immortality. Much to Nietzsche's provisional chagrin, this acquired proclivity has become second nature to us; it is now, and has been for some time, an entrenched trait of our all-too-human nature.<sup>79</sup> As such, this acquired proclivity is either constitutive or supportive of some of our most enduring moral prejudices. Many of these prejudices—e.g., in favour of neighbour-love, self-surveillance, self-castigation, etc.—are predicated on the acquired (and now deeply embedded) notion that our immortal souls will be judged on the basis of what we have and have not done. As a result, we live our lives not as heroic, daring mortals, for whom *ecce homo* would be a fitting rallying cry or epitaph, but as timid, judgment-fearing immortals, for whom suffering is the primary index of our goodness and of the redemption that awaits us.

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75 A 58

76 A 41

77 A 58

78 A 58

79 BGE 12

Nietzsche's objective in avenging Epicurus is not to eradicate our acquired proclivity for immortality, as if such a thing were even possible, but to hijack and supervise its ongoing role in shaping our sense of who we are and have become. Building on two thousand years of Christian discipline and acculturation, Nietzsche is now in a position to trump Paul's doctrine of personal immortality with his alternative doctrine of Dionysian immortality, which, he insists, neither requires nor allows us to denigrate the value of our mortal existence. Whereas the teachings of Paul have inured us to an understanding of ourselves as the possessors of immortal souls, the teachings of Nietzsche will accustom us to an understanding of ourselves as partaking of the ceaseless flux of eternal Life.

Here, too, Nietzsche appeals to the unique historical conditions of his challenge to the apostle Paul. It is not simply the case, after all, that we have accustomed ourselves to our share in an immortal existence. Owing to the influence of Paul, we have grown accustomed to an understanding of ourselves as the possessors of immortal *souls*. At the same time, however, the particular kind of soul to which we have learned to attach our supposed immortality—namely, 'the soul as something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an *atomon*<sup>80</sup>—no longer resides comfortably beyond doubt, question, suspicion, and reproach. Indeed, no less an authority than science itself now demands that we consider more promising (and more dignified) alternatives:

But the way is open for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as 'mortal soul,' and 'soul as subjective multiplicity,' and 'soul as social structure of the drives and affects,' want henceforth to have citizens' rights in science.<sup>81</sup>

Elaborating on this appeal to the distinctly normative force of contemporary science, Nietzsche elsewhere explains that the '*good* Europeans' among his readers now possess a 'scientific conscience', which, inasmuch as it strictly demands 'intellectual cleanliness at any price', forbids their recourse to those versions of the soul-hypothesis that fail to meet the newly elevated standard of scientific 'truthfulness [*Wahrhaftigkeit*]'.<sup>82</sup>

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80 BGE 12

81 BGE 12

82 GS 357. Here I follow Randall Havas, *Nietzsche's Genealogy: Nihilism and the Will to Knowledge*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995) pp. 166-73; and

As this analysis suggests, Nietzsche develops his critique of 'soul atomism' against the familiar backdrop of his post-Zarathustran philosophical project. While he bids us to revisit the 'soul-hypothesis', for example, he also expects us to do so in light of our growing awareness of 'the greatest recent event—that 'God is dead,' that belief in the Christian God has become 'unbelievable' [*unglaublich*]'.<sup>83</sup> Inasmuch as the death of God 'is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe',<sup>84</sup> should we not regard the death (or 'death') of the immortal soul as imminent, and as inevitable in any event? In anticipation of this particular after-shock, and as potential recruits into the ranks of Nietzsche's 'new psychologists',<sup>85</sup> should we not welcome the opportunity to probe and explore the human soul, unconstrained by folk prejudices, religious pieties, and outdated beliefs? If we belong among those intrepid truth-seekers whom Nietzsche indirectly addresses,<sup>86</sup> moreover, are we not *bound* to do so, even at our own expense?<sup>87</sup>

In nudging his best readers along this path, Nietzsche appears to reprise the cheerful positivism and bold experimentalism of his so-called 'middle' period. In *Daybreak*, we recall, he concluded a similarly buoyant paean to science—noting in particular its restoration of 'the idea of *definitive death*'—by proclaiming that 'Epicurus triumphs anew'.<sup>88</sup> Here, emboldened by his 'cheerful' reception thus far of the 'event' of the 'death of God',<sup>89</sup> he renews his allegiance to science and doubles down on the revitalized science of psychology, whose practitioners are now free to map the mortal soul.<sup>90</sup>

In his writings from 1888, however, Nietzsche wishes to go further still. While generally sympathetic to any number of 'new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis',<sup>91</sup> he also wishes to leverage the taste

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Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience*, pp. 135-42.

83 GS 343

84 GS 343

85 BGE 12

86 GM III: 24

87 See Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience*, pp. 115-20; and Conway, *Nietzsche's on the Genealogy of Morals*, (2008), pp. 137-47.

88 D 72

89 GS 343

90 See Robert B. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 52-65.

91 BGE 12. Here I follow Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 346-62.

and habit for immortality that have become ours by virtue of our long training in Pauline Christianity. (The 'atomism which Christianity has taught best and longest', he explains, is none other than the '*soul atomism*'.<sup>92</sup>) Indeed, a promising experiment within this new articulation of psychology is Nietzsche's own attempt, in *Ecce Homo*, to present the soul as an achievement, i.e., as something made or won over the course of a lifetime, by virtue of which one becomes what one is and affirms oneself as such.<sup>93</sup> One pursues this achievement, moreover, not in denial of one's mortality, but in joyful anticipation of the destruction of the highest forms and types of Life, including one's own eventual return to the undifferentiated Dionysian flux.<sup>94</sup>

Epicurus will be avenged, that is, not by a return to the halcyon days prior to the appearance of Paul, but by Nietzsche's counter-promise of Dionysian immortality. The problem, we are now in a position to understand, lies not with the concept of immortality itself, which Epicurus was right at the time to combat, but with the denigration of life from which this particular concept of immortality was derived. As Nietzsche explains,

The will to *immortalize* also requires a dual interpretation. It can be prompted, first, by gratitude and love ... But it can also be the tyrannical will of one who suffers deeply, who struggles, [and] is tormented ...<sup>95</sup>

Detecting the latter interpretation at the heart of Paul's influential teaching of immortality, Nietzsche offers the following diagnosis:

If you distract from the seriousness of the self-preservation [*Selbsterhaltung*], the energy increase of the body, *in other words of life*, if you construct an ideal out of anaemia, 'the salvation of the soul' out of contempt for the body, what else is

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92 BGE 212

93 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, pp. 59-62.

94 I am indebted here to Henry Staten, *Nietzsche's Voice*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 150-56; Adrian Del Caro, 'Nietzschean Self-transformation and the Transformation of the Dionysian,' in *Nietzsche, Philosophy and the Arts*, eds. Salim Kemal, Ivan Gaskell, and Daniel Conway. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 75-89; and James I. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 21-33, 110-19.

95 GS 370

that if not a *recipe* for *décadence*?...<sup>96</sup>

As we have seen, however, this 'recipe for *décadence*' has yielded an unexpected outcome, most notably in the person of Nietzsche himself. Despite being a *décadent*, just as the 'recipe' in question specifies, Nietzsche is also, and simultaneously, the 'opposite' [*Gegensatz/ Gegenstück*] of a *décadent*.<sup>97</sup> As such, moreover, he qualifies as the 'first immoralist', which is also why he claims to be a 'destiny'.<sup>98</sup>

For an apt characterization of Nietzsche's model of Dionysian immortality, we need look no further than the concluding section of *Twilight of the Idols*:

Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, *that* is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* in order to be liberated from terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge—Aristotle understood it that way—but in order to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity—that joy which included even joy in destroying.<sup>99</sup>

It is on the strength of this statement, we should note, that Nietzsche re-introduces himself as 'the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus' and, accepting the 'destiny' offered to the convalescent Zarathustra by his animal companions,<sup>100</sup> as 'the teacher of eternal recurrence'.<sup>101</sup>

Repeating the former (but not the latter) self-avowal in the Preface to *Ecce Homo*,<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche implores his readers not to '*mistake [him] for someone else*'.<sup>103</sup> This is important, as he explains, for the success of his 'revaluation of all values', which is the 'demand' with which he soon 'must

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96 EH, *Daybreak* 2

97 EH, *Wise* 2

98 EH, *Destiny* 2

99 TI, *Greeks* 5

100 Z III 13, 2

101 TI, *Greeks* 5. Here I follow Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 208-13.

102 EH P 2

103 EH P 1

confront humanity',<sup>104</sup> depends in part on our reception of him as the author of this 'demand'. If we receive him as a 'disciple of the philosopher Dionysus', apparently, we are perhaps more likely to respond as hoped to the demand he soon will press. The crucial point here is that Nietzsche readily acknowledges the need to convince his readers of his *bona fides* as a disciple of Dionysus. One way to do this, as we have seen, is to recommend and enact a doctrine of Dionysian immortality.

The opposition with which Nietzsche concludes *Ecce Homo*—Dionysus vs. the Crucified One—thus announces a contrast between two competing models of immortality: *Dionysian* immortality, which is born of affirmation, superfluity, and *amor fati*; and *Christian* immortality, which is born of revenge, resentment, and self-contempt. In light of this contrast, it would appear that Paul is to be affirmed for cultivating in us the taste and habit for immortality that Nietzsche means to exploit. Having ingested and survived Paul's poisonous teachings, Nietzsche and his fellow 'immoralists' are now in a position to promulgate a Dionysian model of immortality, which Nietzsche regards as a worthy complement to the teachings of Epicurus.

By way of closing, let us help ourselves to one of Nietzsche's most quotable epigrams: The teachings of Paul did not kill us; *therefore*, they made us stronger. Strong enough, evidently, that we now may aspire to the Dionysian discipleship to which Nietzsche invites his best readers, the proof of which he displays in his writings from 1888.<sup>105</sup>

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104 EH P1

105This essay owes its provenance to a lively series of discussions following a lecture presented by Keith Ansell-Pearson at Texas A&M University in 2014. I am grateful to Keith for encouraging me to re-acquaint myself with Epicurus and for leading the way with his own research.