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# The Casuistry of the Little Things

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BRIAN DOMINO

He that despiseth little things shall perish little by little.

—Sirach 19:1

It is not difficult to understand why nearly a century of commentators have viewed *Ecce Homo* as the product of Nietzsche's incipient dementia: the book is profoundly schizophrenic. On the one hand, like a dethroned philosopher-king desperately trying to sell his wares in the democratic marketplace of ideas, Nietzsche advertises himself as a "*force majeure*" (EH WA 2 and "Destiny" 8) that has sundered the history of humankind in two, and who alone "know[s] the way out of this dead-end street" (EH WA 2) of sick, petty politics. Such exclamations suggest a preoccupation with the world historical, with the "big things." Yet, in the same book, Nietzsche more often describes the "little things" in his life, such as his aversion to coffee and to alcohol, and the various diets and climes with which he has experimented in his search for health. Indeed, the chapter "Why I am so Clever," with its rantings about cuisine and climate, reads more like a neurasthenic's guide to Europe than the reasoned discourse of a man who alone knows how to escape Western civilization's dead-end.

Nietzsche, however, is aware of the tension between the big and little things in *Ecce Homo*. Preempting those who would consign *Ecce Homo* to mere biographical fodder, Nietzsche concludes "Why I am so Clever" with yet another prefabricated interview audaciously designed to assist his less-than-insightful critics: "One will ask me why on earth I've been relating all these little things that are generally considered matters of complete indifference: I only harm myself, the more so if I am destined to represent great tasks. Answer: these small things—nutrition, place, climate, recreation, the whole casuistry of selfishness—are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far. Precisely here one must begin to *relearn*"

(EH “Clever” 10). Unfortunately, Nietzsche does not explain how to relate his seemingly disparate projects of presenting a politics of world-historical importance and an autobiography laden with minutiae. The movement from the personal to the political occurs primarily, but ostensibly inexplicably, in “Why I am so Clever.” In the preceding chapter, “Why I am so Wise,” Nietzsche catalogues his oscillation between health and sickness, his “dual descent” (EH “Wise” 1) as dubs it. By the end of this chapter, one wonders how Nietzsche could move from sickness to health. Nietzsche addresses the question of his convalescence in the next chapter, “Why I am so Clever.” These very chapter titles indicate a movement from theoretical knowledge or wisdom to practical knowledge or cleverness. Specifically, in “Why I am so Clever,” Nietzsche reports on his experiments with four important psycho-physiological registers, namely, nutrition (§1), place and climate (§2), recreation (§§3–7), and selfishness (§§8–9). This chapter becomes political when we realize that Nietzsche is here advocating a particular method for his readers’ revitalization. What warrants applying anything in this chapter to ourselves, I will argue, is that Nietzsche uses what I call the casuistry of the little things. Through his casuistry, Nietzsche hopes to improve “the big things” by improving the way in which individuals understand the “little things.”<sup>1</sup> Stated differently, I will argue that in “Why I am so Clever,” Nietzsche presents a program for ameliorating the ravages of decadence by undoing its damage to our internal dynamometers. I begin with a brief account of casuistry. I then examine the sections of “Why I am so Clever” in reverse order and grouped according to the four psycho-physiological registers Nietzsche uses. As I hope to make clear at the end, the order of presentation of these sections is the order of therapy. To demonstrate this, however, I must follow the order of logic and begin at the end, where Nietzsche justifies the project of the preceding sections, and where his use of casuistry is most clear.

### CASUISTRY

Casuistry proper is a Catholic invention born of the need to assist priests in dealing with novel situations brought to them in the confessional. It initially came about primarily because of the Fourth Lateran Council’s mandate requiring annual confessions. Later, casuistry had somewhat of a rebirth because of the radical changes in the world, such as the colonization of the New World. Books of casuistry were written to help Roman Catholic priests deal with novel cases. Among the more famous of these was John Peter Gury’s *Compendium Theologiae Moralis*, a work that Nietzsche lists in one notebook entry (KGW VIII: 5 [110]).

Due largely to Pascal's lampooning of casuists in *The Provincial Letters* (1656), "casuistry" is often used derisively to describe moral rationalizing or ethical sophistry. Despite this entrenched connotation, Nietzsche's own usage of the term usually suggests the original meaning of decided ethical matters on a case-by-case basis. Historically, casuists addressed particular moral dilemmas by comparing them with paradigmatic cases whose ethical status was settled.<sup>2</sup> In an aphorism entitled "casuistical" in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche provides an example of the way a casuist might begin to think about a particular case, albeit a more political than moral one. Imagine that you are a passenger on a ship who "discover[s] that the captain and steersman are making dangerous mistakes and that one is their superior in nautical knowledge—and then [. . .] ask[s] oneself: how if you should incite a mutiny against them and have them both seized? Does your superiority not give you the right to do so? And would they not also be in the right if they locked you up for undermining discipline?" [*Daybreak* §436]. In straightforward, unproblematic situations, the maxims "the competent should rule over the incompetent" and "mutiny may be justly punished" are accepted as settled or paradigmatic principles (One feature of casuistry is the absence of the need to justify all claims in terms of some more basic principle.) To tackle the case Nietzsche presents, a casuist would attempt to discern which unproblematic case the present one most resembles and base a decision on the stronger analogy. As this illustration suggests, casuistry neither gives nor promises definitive answers. This feature of casuistry stems from its philosophical basis in the Aristotelian acknowledgment that ethics is more akin to medicine—where one must act without the safety net of certainty—than to mathematics.

This characteristic of casuistry means that it is not a moral theory in the way that utilitarianism or deontology are, but a way of going about addressing ethical problems. One can meaningfully ask what a Kantian or utilitarian would say about a certain ethical dilemma, but one cannot meaningfully pose the same question to a casuist in general, much less someone advocating the brand of casuistry Nietzsche employs. This is because Nietzsche presents no content. Rather, he presents an order to follow (from the physical body to the psyche) and a method, casuistry, which he both illustrates and hopes his readers will apply to themselves. This allows Nietzsche to present a strategy for ameliorating the ravages of decadence while adhering to his well-known aversion for being pronounced holy (EH *Destiny* 1), for becoming a moral leader who inadvertently leads his followers further into decadence.

Apart from Nietzsche's particular projects, in general casuistry is an approach to ethics that: (1) rejects absolutist ethics because circumstances matter, (2) relies on unchallenged maxims or first order principles, and (3) tends to think about ethical issues using the strategy of paradigm and analogy, which requires the amassing of evidence or similar cases. It is important

to make clear from the outset that in casuistry, “paradigm” denotes not a model of how things should be but rather a case whose moral status is settled and from which one might begin to reason. For example, the case of a person who borrows her neighbor’s hammer and returns it as soon as she is finished using it might be a paradigm with which to begin thinking about Socrates’ counterexample in the *Republic* of borrowing a sword and returning it to a neighbor while he is enraged. As Socrates’ refutation shows, casuistical paradigms are not intended to be models but entry points into ethical deliberation. In the last three sections of “Why I am so Clever,” Nietzsche modifies the second and third tenets to craft his own brand of casuistry. With the casuistical meaning of “paradigm” fresh in our minds, I begin with the third.

### NIETZSCHEAN CASUISTRY (§§10–18)

Casuistry requires at least one paradigm, whose moral status is largely settled, from which to begin thinking about the particular case at hand using the method of analogies. Pre-Nietzschean casuists assumed that their inherited wisdom was largely sound, albeit culturally relative. Nietzsche, however, has no such luxury. Continuing the quotation from “Why I am so Clever” §10 above, Nietzsche writes: “What mankind has so far considered seriously have not even been realities but [. . .] *lies* prompted by the bad instincts of sick natures that were harmful in the most profound sense [. . .]. All the problems of politics, of social organization, and of education have been falsified through and through because one mistook the most harmful men for great men—because one learned to despise ‘little’ things, which means the basic concerns of life itself” (EH “Clever” 10). Here Nietzsche reformulates the doubts of Descartes from questions of metaphysics and physics to ethics and medicine, and projects the misunderstandings onto entire cultures. Like Descartes, Nietzsche turns to the self to meliorate the doubts:

When I now compare myself with the men who have so far been honored as the first, the difference is palpable. I do not even count these so-called “first” men among men in general: for me they are the refuse of humanity, monsters of sickness and vengeful instincts; they are inhuman, disastrous, at bottom incurable, and revenge themselves on life.

I want to be their opposite: it is my privilege to have the subtlest sensitivity for all signs of healthy instincts. There is no pathological trait in me; even in periods of severe sickness I never became pathological; in vain would one seek for a trait of fanaticism in my character. (EH “Clever” 10)

Since Nietzsche does not understand ethics to be like mathematics, he need not—indeed, cannot—present an argument with the logical necessity of

Descartes's *cogito*. Instead, he follows the traditional casuistic technique of amassing evidence. Because Nietzsche has diagnosed all previous paradigms as sick, he must first collect evidence in favor of his newly constructed paradigm. To do this, Nietzsche reminds the reader of his résumé given earlier in "Why I am so Wise" §§1–2. There Nietzsche positioned himself as an expert on decadence because he has experienced both decadence and health. His partial recovery from decadence, he avers, indicates his robust health, for decadents almost never recover. Indeed, in all of history Nietzsche can locate only one other decadent who recognized his own decadence, namely, Socrates. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Socrates was no physician. Unable to cure himself, Socrates—according to Nietzsche—forced Athens to execute him (GD "The Problem of Socrates" 12). All other potential paradigms, the "so-called 'first' men among men in general," are incurably decadent. If only by process of elimination, then, the paradigm against which things are to be measured as analogous to or not is Nietzsche himself. In setting Nietzsche up as a paradigm, I am not claiming that he suggests that we ought to be like him. Rather, I am making the weaker claim that he presents himself as one against whom we might usefully compare our lives to see to what extent our lives are analogous to Nietzsche's and, if they are sufficiently similar, to engage in some of the experiments he performed on the "little things" of his life.

The second aspect of casuistry is the holding of at least one first-order principle. Aristotle most famously places the doctrine of the mean as a first order principle. Less obviously, he also subscribes to the principle that the wise are never entirely wrong. Nietzsche clearly rejects this principle. His primary principle, at least in *Ecce Homo*, appears at the outset of section 9 of "Why I am so Clever," and might be stated as: one needs to become a virtuoso of the art of self-preservation. This art amounts to allowing "the organizing 'idea' that is destined to rule" the individual to grow, to marshal "single qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as means toward a whole." Doing this requires that one refrain from certain acts more than that one do anything in particular. The project of knowing thyself, for example, Nietzsche warns, can be "the recipe for ruin." To use an analogy whose accuracy hopefully compensates for its ostensible absurdity, the self for Nietzsche resembles a soufflé. One must let it cook uninterrupted; checking on it only exposes it to the deleterious effects of cooler air. More precisely, the psychology Nietzsche hints at in this section posits an organizing "idea" that ferments under the skein of consciousness. Left to itself, this "idea" wields its power, gradually organizing the other "ideas" and drives deep within the subconscious. Because decadence is a volitional disease lying on the surface of consciousness, one's organizing "idea" can go about its work nearly quarantined from the decadence of consciousness. As Nietzsche suggests in the remainder of this section, living this advice often means

following the course of events rather than subjecting them to unrelenting, and almost certainly decadent, introspection.

Introspection is not the only way to thwart, if not derail, the growth of the organizing “idea.” We have only finite psychic resources at our disposal. Apparently the organizing idea receives only the excess resources. So its growth can be stymied by wanton expenditures in other directions. To stem the flow of volitional resources, we might attempt to rethink or revalue our largest expenses, reasoning that, if successful, we could solve the problem in one fell swoop. This, however, would be misguided, for as Nietzsche warns, “our *great* expenditures are composed of the most frequent small ones” (§8). Instead, Nietzsche recommends that we follow two “commandments” that flow out of the art of self-preservation. The first is “not only to say No when Yes would be ‘selfless’ but also to say *No as rarely as possible*” (§8). That is, to detach oneself from situations that require the expenditure of volitional resources merely to ward off what is harmful. The second commandment is “to *react as rarely as possible*.” Stated negatively, to avoid becoming “a mere reagent [*ein blosses Reagens*].” Nietzsche illustrates the dangers of merely reacting through a parable of his contemporary philologists: “Scholars spend all of their energies on saying Yes and No, on criticism of what others have thought.” While this illustration supposedly should clarify Nietzsche’s meaning, it seems to be more of a jab at his book-thumbing former colleagues than part of a philosophical project. A better light can be cast on this example by placing it in the context of casuistical deliberation.

In this case, we can agree that it would be bad to be among the “gifted natures with a generous and free disposition” who are “‘read to ruin’ in their thirties” and now always merely react. Notice that in this brief parable—Nietzsche rightly does not call it an argument—we have two of the three signature techniques of casuistry. First, Nietzsche does not argue that these scholars have violated any transcendent moral rule. By way of contrast, Kant would certainly ground his critique of their actions in their failure to use what nature has given them. Second, Nietzsche’s approbation rests on the unchallenged maxim that always only reacting is, in some sense, a “bad” state in which to be. It is of course true that in *On the Genealogy of Morals* those who always react are the slaves, but there is no basis on which one can say it is better to follow slave morality than master morality. The absence of such a ground leads many commentators to describe the strategy of genealogy as antifoundational or parasitic.

At this point, Nietzsche has offered only a negative critique of mere reactors and used only two of the three hallmarks of casuistry. Casuistry itself, however, is not primarily a technique of criticism, but a strategy for dealing with ethical problems, one keenly aware of the frequent existential necessity for deciding which course of action to follow. To return to the case of the

reactive scholars: if it is bad to always react, it would be good not to react at least sometimes. But which times? Nietzsche answers this in the previous sections on recuperation, to which we now turn.

### RECUPERATION (§§3–7)

Early in section 3, Nietzsche separates times of spiritual pregnancy from times of recuperation. During pregnancy one needs to isolate oneself, to not read, to not react. To do so would be to allow “an *alien* thought to scale the wall secretly.” In contrast, postpartum, Nietzsche calls out “come to me, pleasant, brilliant, clever books!” The importance of the seemingly innocuous decision to read or not to read cannot be underestimated: “The choice of nutrition; the choice of climate and place: the third point at which one must not commit a blunder at any price is the choice of *one’s own kind of recuperation* [Erholung]. Here, too, depending on the degree to which a spirit is *sui generis*, the limits of what is permitted to him, that is, *advantageous* [Nützlich] for him, are narrow, quite narrow” (§3). The very next sentence begins “In my case . . . ,” and only once in these five sections does Nietzsche make anything like a general claim. Instead, he describes the kinds of books, friends, and music that assist him in recuperation or recreation. On the whole, the discussion is not about the ideas he gleans from reading, but how particular authors resonate within his spirit. For example, he “*love[s]* Pascal,” finds a kindred spirit in “Montaigne’s sportiveness [Muthwillen],” might be “envious of Stendhal” for his atheistic wit (all from §3), and knows of “no more heart-rending reading than Shakespeare” (§4). His discussion of his musical tastes follows a similar course. Music should be “cheerful and profound like an afternoon in October” and Nietzsche cannot “distinguish between tears and music” (§7). Not surprisingly, his relationship with Wagner is also described in affective terms (see §§5–6), rather than the political and aesthetic vocabulary employed in *The Case of Wagner*.

What is important here is not the particular authors that Nietzsche lauds but the shift away from the cognitive toward the affective. In sections 8–10, Nietzsche focused on cognitive elements, like the individual’s controlling “idea,” and decision making (e.g., whether to say “no”). Now the focus moves deeper within the self, toward the more animalistic. Similarly, the kind of casuistry shifts to thinking of analogs in affective terms. While the paradigm, namely, Nietzsche, remains the same, the kinds of similarities sought has changed to the affective. As I hope to explain below, the affective level is not “deep” enough in the human soul to be the original site of recovery from decadence. Nietzsche, as a therapist, needs to go below the affects.



## PLACE AND CLIMATE (§2)

Burrowing ever deeper into the soul, Nietzsche moves away from the more human affective responses to the more organic responses to climate. For Nietzsche, climate plays no small role in one's life. One's metabolism is accelerated or retarded by the climate in which one lives. Cold, humid climes retard the metabolism so much that one "destined for greatness" can become merely "a peevish specialist" incapable of accomplishing one's tasks. In contrast, warm, dry climates increase one's metabolism rate, and thereby foster the ability to accomplish great tasks.

While Nietzsche's lauding of Mediterranean climates may stem from an unchecked romanticism, the reasoning behind his claims accords with his antidecadence strategy. Specifically, his recommendations—indeed, his entire discussion of climate—omit any discussion of an individual's psychological response to climate. In contrast to the interweaving of the meteorological and psychological in *The Case of Wagner* (see especially §§2–3), here the climate is correlated to metabolism only and not to its secondary effects. Indeed, Nietzsche reports that he has learned to "take readings from myself as from a very subtle and reliable instrument," noting in particular that his body reacts to the minutest change in humidity, like some precise hygrometer. Through long experience he has learned under which atmospheric conditions he flourishes and under which he atrophies. Place and climate are the external stimuli that remain external. There is also the external that becomes internalized through digestion. Because the analysis of climate and nutrition are much the same, I have combined the two in the next section.

## NUTRITION (§1)

Early in this section, Nietzsche explains his focus on nutrition: "I am much more interested in a question on which the 'salvation of humanity' depends far more than on any theologians' curio: the question of *nutrition*. For ordinary use, one may formulate it thus: 'how do *you*, among all people, have to eat to attain your maximum of strength, of virtù in the Renaissance style, of moraline-free virtue?'" (EH "Clever" 1). Again we see a clear rejection of absolutist ethics because circumstances matter. That is, Nietzsche explicitly notes that the individual ("you") differs from humanity ("all people"). Again, too, we see Nietzsche positioning himself as the paradigm since he is, apparently, the only one who thought to ask this question, much less put his own dietary habits under the microscope.

Here Nietzsche's trademark brevity obscures the vastness of the project of regaining virtù, and the role that a little thing like nutrition plays in that proj-

ect. Recall that earlier in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche diagnosed us as so weak that “we may not place ourselves in Renaissance conditions, not even by an act of thought: our nerves would not endure that reality, not to speak of our muscles” (GD “Skirmishes” 37). What separates decadent late modernity from the robust Italian Renaissance, then, is not merely a cognitive difference (“by an act of thought”), not merely an affective one since our nerves could not stand the change either, but most fundamentally muscular atrophy. Any attempt to ameliorate the decadence of the present must begin, not with a genealogical critique, but with a bodily strengthening. Yet Nietzsche cannot recommend merely a particular calisthenics or diet. Because we are almost certainly afflicted with decadence, we are apt to confuse strengthening and weakening, and thus would likely choose exactly the wrong regimen. Nietzsche notes that until recently, even he himself “always ate badly” (EH “Clever” 1). Eerily prescient, Nietzsche notes that coffee, snacks, and sitting—now the hallmarks of the postmodern lifestyle—negatively effect him, although it took some time for him to recognize this.

As I hope to show, the unchallenged maxim at work in this section is that humans have an unerring dynamometer at this lowest level, what Aristotle would call the nutritive soul. In following the order of logic in “Why I am so Clever,” we have gradually come to a better understanding of the nature of decadence. Yet, we still have no universal method or technique for determining who is and who is not decadent, much less the extent to which any particular afflicted individual is decadent. Differentiating health from sickness is no easy task. Today, medical practitioners often define health as the functioning of all of a person’s organs within measurable ranges. Nietzsche’s discussion of his own physical and psychological condition in *Ecce Homo* points to an obvious shortcoming of that “objective” definition of health, namely, that it is possible to flourish, to lead a healthy life in the broadest sense of the term, while physically sick. To take but one such instance: “The perfect brightness and cheerfulness, even exuberance of the spirit, reflected in this work [sc. *Dawn*], is compatible in my case not only with the most profound physiological weakness, but even with an excess of pain” (EH “Wise” 1). To correct J. S. Mill: It is better to be Nietzsche sick than a pig healthy. The other extreme, namely, defining health solely on the individual’s perceptions of his or her health, fares no better. Because decadence inverts the afflicted’s understanding of health and sickness, a decadent, no more than a drug addict, cannot gauge his or her own health. Given these problems, it is not surprising that Nietzsche never hit upon a clear, even quasi-objective, definition of decadence.

Nonetheless, an attempt to describe decadence more clinically can be developed from Nietzsche’s claim that the ugly deprives one of strength, and that this loss could be measured by a dynamometer (GD “Skirmishes” 20).<sup>3</sup> While Nietzsche may have been inspired to suggest a dynamometer by the then

nascent use of diagnostic instruments in medicine,<sup>4</sup> it also points to his attempt to define sickness and health in a way that accords value to a person's own projects while avoiding solipsism. If such a dynamometer existed, it would provide a means of differentiating mere claims of health from true health.

While no external Nietzschean psychic dynamometer exists, all living organisms have an internal, "natural" dynamometer. Nietzsche's understanding of the world as will to power, of life as the struggle to amass psychic resources, requires that all organisms have some means of "knowing" whether they are acquiring or losing quanta of will to power. Without a means of separating actions that increase from those that decrease an organism's will to power, life is merely the haphazard expenditure and acquisition of will to power, with success due merely to chance—a view Nietzsche rejects.

While nonhuman organisms have incorruptible dynamometers, humans can override their fundamental instincts. It is precisely this ability that makes humans susceptible to decadence. We can now give a more "objective" definition of decadence than those with which Nietzsche explicitly provides us: namely, decadence supplants one's natural "dynamometer," one's innate ability to determine whether one is gaining or losing volitional resources, with an inverted one. The first step in combating decadence, then, is not to make humanity stronger, but to get individuals to recognize when they are truly getting stronger.

### CONCLUSION: THE ORDER OF THERAPY

Returning "Why I am So Clever" to its rightful order, the therapeutic order that must be followed to ameliorate the damages caused by decadence, we can see a progression from the initial concern with the physical body, to the realm of the affects or invisible body, and finally to the thin membrane that separates the consciousness from the unconsciousness. There are two reasons that Nietzsche starts the therapeutic program with the visible body. First and most obviously, because it is where we are free of decadence. That is, decadence inhabits the invisible body, the realm of affects and cognition.<sup>5</sup> It affects how we interpret the condition of our visible bodies, but not their actual condition. By experimenting with our own lives at this most basic level, Nietzsche hopes that we can relearn what being healthy feels like, and that we can then move on to improve our more complex invisible bodies.

The second reason that Nietzsche's program for the amelioration of decadence starts with the visible body is that it is there that we expend the most volitional resources, and thus it is there that we have the best chance of stemming the loss. Recall Nietzsche's claim that our greatest expenditures are not the largest ones, but the small but frequently repeated ones. And those are at

the level of bodily habits, the little things. Any improvement at this level, no matter how small, is apt to reap large savings because of the frequency of repetition of such actions. This energy will later be needed to attempt to improve the more complex “higher” levels of the human soul, and ultimately to the “big things” of world historical politics. We can now see why Nietzsche, in the same book, warns us not to drink coffee because it “spreads darkness” (Clever 1) and asserts, “It is only beginning with me that the earth knows *great politics*” (Destiny 1)—and hopefully now understand both utterances to be part of the same project.

### *Miami University–Middletown*

Throughout I quote from Walter Kaufmann’s and R. J. Hollingdale’s translations with minor emendations. Citations refer to sections and not pages. The following key explains the abbreviations used: GT = *The Birth of Tragedy*; UB = *Untimely Meditations*; MA (I & II) = *Human, All-Too-Human*; WS = *The Wanderer and his Shadow*; VM = *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*; M = *Dawn*; FW = *The Gay Science*; Z = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; JGB = *Beyond Good and Evil*; GM = *On the Genealogy of Morals*; WA = *The Case of Wagner*; GD = *Twilight of the Idols*; AC = *The Antichrist(ian)*; EH = *Ecce Homo*; WM = *The Will to Power*.

1. This claim seems to run afoul of Nietzsche’s declaration that “the last thing I should promise would be to ‘improve’ humankind [die Menschheit zu ‘verbessern’]” (EH V 2). Nietzsche’s use of scare quotes warns us not to interpret this assertion literally. (For a detailed account of Nietzsche’s use of quotation marks, see Eric Blondel’s *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*, trans. Seán Hand [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991].) Rather, Nietzsche is here claiming not to belong among those who believed they were improving humankind when they only made it more sick.

For a more robust account of what Nietzsche means, we must turn to the chapter in *Twilight* to which this passage alludes, namely, “The ‘Improvers’ of Humankind [Die ‘Verbesserer’ der Menschheit].” Nietzsche begins this chapter with the demand that his kind of philosophers emigrate with him beyond good and evil, and therefore do not engage in traditional discussions of what is moral or immoral, but rather understand moral systems symptomatically. Viewed from the perspective of a philosophical physician, Nietzsche repeatedly tells us, all attempts to improve humankind have merely made it sick. Thus, an interpretation that claims that *Ecce Homo* presents a moral system, in some traditional understanding of that phrase, would certainly be misguided. Yet it does not follow that Nietzsche makes no attempt to improve—without the scare quotes—humankind. Precisely because he decisively turns to medicine, whether as a physician of culture or a symptomatologist, Nietzsche wishes to improve the condition of humankind. Put simply, we cannot understand his medicinal claims without recourse to some notion of improving humanity. To do otherwise would be to ignore his claims to be a physician of any kind, and to reduce his forays into symptomatology to a merely academic exercise in nosography.

For a more detailed account of Nietzsche as a philosopher who intends to change individuals, see Richard J. White’s excellent *Nietzsche and the Problem of Sovereignty* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

2. My understanding of casuistry owes much to *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning*, Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

3. For a fuller account of what Nietzsche means by “decadence,” see Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche’s Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially chap. 1.

4. GD “Skirmishes” 20; WM 851; Nietzsche’s letter to Brandes, 10 April 1888. Although it might seem that this dynamometer is another of Nietzsche’s jests, perhaps we will take it seriously if we remember that Carl Wunderlich’s ground-breaking *Das Verhalten der Eigenwärme in Krankheiten*, in which he established the consistency of bodily temperature in healthy people and thereby paved the way for the clinical use of the thermometer, was first published in 1868. More generally, it was during Nietzsche’s lifetime that medicine began to employ diagnostic instruments. Lacking today’s panoply of medical instruments, Nietzsche turns to himself, reporting: “I take readings from myself as from a very subtle and reliable instrument” (EH “Clever” 2).

5. See Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9, and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (London: Routledge, 1993), chap. 9 “The Visible Invisible,” 149–73.