Abhandlung

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Nietzsche on the Poverty and Possibility of Human Love: Jesus, Dionysus, Zarathustra

Abstract: Nietzsche's portrait of Jesus as a lovesick knower of the heart in BGE 269 aligns the problems of Christian love with some of Nietzsche's critical remarks about erotic love in the Free Spirit works. In this paper, I will examine the nuances of Nietzsche's criticisms of erotic and of Christian love and demonstrate that in their failures, they also contain potential for forms of love that Nietzsche celebrates: self-love, friendship, and *amor fati*. Finally, I consider *Beyond Good and Evil* in the context of Book IX, arguing that the chapter does not resolve with Dionysus as Nietzsche's final response to Jesus, but instead that the duality between them marks different kinds of deficiencies regarding love, to which Nietzsche responds with his Zarathustra.

Keywords: Love, *Amor fati*, Friendship, Jesus, Dionysus, BGE 269

Nietzsche's varied and context-specific remarks on human love are not easily packaged into a comprehensive philosophy of love. For the most part, Nietzsche is cool toward what he describes as a fleeting and overwrought passion, skeptical of the claims it makes about itself in both erotic and agapic forms. Yet even this very general characterization of his attitude is limited by moments of enthusiasm, as, for example, when an analysis of love's "disguise and simulation" gives way to admiration for the "beautiful madness" of a spectacle "too subtle for human eyes" (D 532).[1] Moreover, a certain kind of love – *amor fati* – is importantly associated with an overarching theme of Nietzsche's work – life affirmation. While one might say that *amor fati* is too specific to bear on a conception of human interpersonal love, there are good reasons to think

1 In this paper, I use the following editions and translations of Nietzsche's writings: *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2005; *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2002; *Daybreak*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1997; *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York 1974; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York 1989; *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1986; *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2005; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge 2006; *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2005; and *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1997.

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that Nietzsche's general conceptions of love and the more specific *amor fati* might be mutually illuminating. Indeed, a number of commentators have taken *amor fati* as the crucial concept for interpreting Nietzsche's reflections on love *tout court*. Both Simon May and Frank Choraqui argue that *amor fati* is Nietzsche's understanding of what love in the fullest sense is. As the love of necessity, love properly so called does not attach itself to any particular object, but instead becomes a desire for the whole that is synonymous with life affirmation.[2] These accounts of *amor fati* also include a role for other forms of love that Nietzsche references positively – that of self-love and friendship. The literature covering the more interpersonal dimensions of Nietzsche's understanding of love focuses on these two positively oriented dimensions as they relate to one another.[3] The conversation surrounding Nietzsche's views on love, then, centers primarily around *amor fati*, self-love, and friendship, and the literature devoted to these positive phenomena draws a marked contrast between these forms, erotic love, and especially Christian love.[4] May notes that Nietzsche describes Christian love as the product of revenge and hatred, making it a radically different phenomenon from those forms of love that he affirms. Similarly, Lawrence Hatab notes Nietzsche's disdain for vengeful Christian neighbor love, which he contrasts with the agonistic affirmation of the whole, including the enemy.[5]

However, the complicated nature of Nietzsche's critique of love is not easily resolved by separating love's most offensive and stultifying manifestations from its more prom-

2 Choraqui shows that *amor fati* is a love *par excellence* insofar as it corresponds to an overcoming of judgment and objectivity. *Amor fati* is objectless – a love of self and love of a whole that elides any rigid distinction. See Frank Choraqui, "Nietzsche's Science of Love," *Nietzsche-Studien* 44 (2015), 267–90: 290. May also says that true self-love means loving the whole of which one is a part, and thus fate in general. See Simon May, "Nietzsche on Love and the Affirmation of Life," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (2015), 264–76: 274. It should also be noted that not everyone links *amor fati* with love more generally. Bernard Reginster, for instance, consistently refers to "love" of life in quotation marks, indicating a separation between love and the affirmation of life in his account of eternal recurrence. See Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, Cambridge, MA 2006, 209, 229. Others deny the centrality of love for Nietzsche altogether. Neil Durrant argues that Nietzsche's ethics privileges contest instead of love, and says that "great love" includes a number of different relational affects, several of which are antithetical to love as it is conventionally understood. See Neil Durrant, *Nietzsche's Renewal of Ancient Ethics*, London 2023, 30–3.

3 See David Owen, "Autonomy, Self-Respect, and Self-Love: Nietzsche on Ethical Agency," in Ken Gemes / Simon May (eds.), *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, Oxford 2009, 197–222, and Razvan Ioan, "Self-Love in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," *The European Legacy* 26/5 (2021), 505–18. Ioan emphasizes that self-love entails love for others, but specifies "friends" and "the future" as the particular others (515).

4 Beatrice Han-Pile offers a nuanced exception here, arguing that *amor fati* is best understood as *agape*, rather than erotically, as a "secularized version of grace." See Beatrice Han-Pile, "Nietzsche and Amor Fati," *European Journal of Philosophy* 19/2 (2009), 224–61: 242.

5 Lawrence J. Hatab, "Amor Agonis: Conflict and Love in Nietzsche and Homer," in Herman W. Siemens / James S. Pearson (eds.), *Conflict and Contest in Nietzsche's Philosophy*, London 2019, 105–21: 105–21.

ising ones. Despite scathing comments on Christian love, there are also suggestions of continuity between Christian love and the limited forms that Nietzsche praises. Numerous passages in which Nietzsche reduces Christian love to petty affects such as pity and revenge contribute to the sense that Christian love is not love properly so called. Rather than being unerotic in the sense of being better described as agapic, a love born of hatred would be thoroughly *anti*-erotic. Yet this anti-erotic sense of the Christian makes a passage like BGE 269 all the more interesting. Though still highly critical of Christianity, in this passage, the order of affects is reversed. Here Nietzsche does not diagnose Christian love as the final manifestation of a brew of bad affects, but instead, he describes an erotic and lovesick Jesus as the inventor of Christian metaphysics. The toxic brew that becomes Christianity is, in this vignette, rooted in passionate desire for union. While it is fairly well-established that Nietzsche finds potential in the psychological complexity of Christian decadence, he tends to describe Christian love primarily as a manifestation of decadence, rather than a site for potential growth in its own right.[6] This passage, however, suggests complexity in Nietzsche's understanding of Christian love.

In what follows, I prioritize BGE 269 in a reflection on love in Nietzsche, employing it to examine parts of the corpus where Nietzsche says more about love – the Free Spirit works and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85) specifically. The fatal flaw of Jesus's love for humanity in this passage, unlike Nietzsche's other descriptions of Christian love, is consistent with Nietzsche's critiques of erotic love. Erotic love, despite its problems, is developmentally important for forms of love that Nietzsche praises. As Robert Pippin has demonstrated, the desire in erotic love provides a crucial foundation for Nietzsche's other ethical goals.[7] In this paper, I will argue that erotic love and Christian love are not simply rejected forms of relationality, but instead they contain developmentally important features for the love that he affirms as friendship, self-love, and *amor fati*. More specifically, I will show: 1) that the failures of erotic love open avenues for self-development and friendship; 2) that through his heroic portrait of Jesus, Nietzsche shows that a certain potential in the Christian idea of loving humanity informs superior relational forms; and 3) that Nietzsche's response to this poverty and possibility in erotic and Christian love culminates in his Zarathustra.[8] Finally, I will conclude by considering

6 See, e. g., GM I 8 as well as Nietzsche's many remarks on pity.

7 Robert B. Pippin, "Love and Death in Nietzsche," in Mark A. Wrathall (ed.), *Religion After Metaphysics*, Cambridge, MA 2003, 7–28.

8 If we regard Nietzsche's project in a strictly chronological way, it will seem absurd to say that Nietzsche's response to an issue outlined in *Beyond Good and Evil* culminates in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Yet Nietzsche continues to refer back to *Zarathustra* in later works as the work to which others, including later ones, lead. In this way, though chronologically prior to *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and the 1888 works, *Zarathustra* is treated by Nietzsche himself as a futural path orienting later works. This is clear in texts such as EH, Destiny 8; GM II 25; and BGE, Aftersong, on which I will comment later in the paper. Paul Loeb makes a particularly strong case for the centrality of *Zarathustra* and

how attention to love and to Nietzsche's portrait of this lovesick Jesus sheds light on interpretive issues concerning the figures of Dionysus and Zarathustra at the end of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886).

Jesus the Inventor[9]

BGE 269 is a long reflection on the psychologist's pity for higher people. Toward the end, Nietzsche complains of women's pity and their supposedly misguided faith in love, finally concluding the passage with an unusual account of Jesus:

> It is possible that one of the most painful cases of the martyrdom of *knowledge about love* lies hidden under the holy fable and disguise of the life of Jesus: the martyrdom of the most innocent and wishful of hearts, who never had enough of human love, who asked for nothing other than to love and be loved, but who asked it with harshness, with madness, with horrible outbursts against anyone refusing to love him; the story of a poor man who was unsatisfied and insatiable in love, who had to invent hell for there to be somewhere to send people who did not *want* to love him, – and who, in the end, having learned about human love, had to invent a God who was all love and all *ability* to love, – who had mercy on human love for being so desperately poor and ignorant! – Anyone who feels this way, anyone who *knows* this about love – will *look for* death (BGE 269).

Significantly, Jesus seems to be depicted here in the style of a romantic hero, and his love for humanity is described in erotic rather than agapic terms.[10] Tormented and trapped in an existence of insatiable cravings for something that he knows he cannot have because it does not exist, the burden of his knowledge prompts him to defiant creation. Originating in internal excess rather than fate or external conflict, his self-destructive madness is heroic in the sense of a Manfred, Werther, or Faust more than in the sense of a Greek hero like Prometheus or Oedipus.[11] Nietzsche presents Jesus with a despair born of the world's inability to provide that which the exceptional soul longs for and is able to contain.[12] We can understand the deeds authoring the worldview that

its disruption of straightforward chronology. See Paul S. Loeb, "Finding the *Übermensch* in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 30/1 (2005), 70–101.

9 The literature is relatively quiet on Nietzsche's treatment of Jesus, and what there is tends to focus on Nietzsche's extended reflections in *The Antichrist* (1888). Uwe Kühneweg shows a number of affinities between Jesus and the human of the future in Nietzsche's portrait of Jesus there. See Uwe Kühneweg, "Nietzsche und Jesus: Jesus bei Nietzsche," *Nietzsche-Studien* 15 (1986), 382–97: 389–97.

10 It is worth noting that this depiction of Jesus differs greatly from the portrait in A 29 of a thoroughly passive and anti-heroic Jesus. The odd and heroic nature of the image in BGE 269 has not been remarked upon in the literature.

11 For more on the relationship between the Promethean and the romantic, see Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, Stanford, CA 2001, 257, 298–302.

12 That Nietzsche perhaps has Faust in mind in a passage that omits Goethe from its list of romantic writers is strengthened by his inclusion in a repetition of the passage in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (1889)

Nietzsche consistently deems slavish, decadent, and life-denying as a result of something tragic within himself – an excess in his nature that made the world a torment to him.

The fact that this romantically heroic Jesus is *inventive*, creating both God and hell, aligns him not only with the romantic *hero*, but also with the romantic artist and what Nietzsche calls romanticism more generally. In GS 370, Nietzsche describes romantic pessimism as an expressive form grounded in need:

> The will to *immortalize* also requires a dual interpretation. It can be prompted, first, by gratitude and love [...]. But it can also be the tyrannic will of one who suffers deeply, who struggles, is tormented, and would like to turn what is most personal, singular, and narrow, the real idiosyncrasy of his suffering, into a binding law and compulsion – one who, as it were, revenges himself on all things by forcing his own image, the image of his torture, on them, branding them with it (GS 370).

Indeed, this description sounds almost exactly like the idiosyncratic Jesus of BGE 269. Moreover, just as Nietzsche sets up a contrast between Jesus and Dionysus there, he also contrasts romantic pessimism in GS 370 with the "pessimism of the future" that he calls Dionysian pessimism. On the one hand, it is unsurprising that Nietzsche would find Christian tendencies in romanticism. His primary artistic and philosophical examples of romanticism are Schopenhauer and Wagner, both of whom he charges in other places with lurking Christian tendencies.[13] On the other hand, to say that Christianity can be understood in romantic terms constitutes a significant difference in that it emphasizes the creative and expressive dimensions of Christianity. It is one thing to say that romanticism, "the last *great* event in our culture," ultimately succumbs to Christian impulses. It is another to say that Christianity, though decadent, can be interpreted in the fundamentally aesthetic terms of romanticism, thus giving Christianity a share of the last great event of culture, represented by Schopenhauer and Wagner.[14] Yet in framing Jesus as a lovesick inventor, this is precisely what Nietzsche does.

Nietzsche's various accounts of the invention of Christian values have decidedly fewer affinities with the creative and artistic than his account of Jesus here. Nietzsche often describes Christian morality as the reaction of a herd to danger (BGE 201–2), and when he eschews these more adaptive accounts of the origin of morality for more actively creative ones, as in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), the invention is rooted entirely in *ressentiment* targeted at a specific enemy group. It is "the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with imaginary revenge" (GM I 10). While the creative deed yields a comprehensive worldview, it does so as a response to a specific external problem: "Slaves want the

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the claim "I do not dare name greater names, but I mean them," following the list of romantic writers (NW, Psychologist 2).

13 See, e. g., GM III 2–8 and A 7. Nietzsche's critiques of Schopenhauer's moralism do not represent those tendencies as specifically Christian. See, for instance, BGE 56, 204

14 Nietzsche also refers to the "Christian-Romantic" in BGE 251.

unconditional; they understand only tyranny, even in morality. They love as they hate, without nuance, into the depths, to the point of pain and sickness – their copious, *hidden* suffering makes them furious at the noble taste that seems to *deny* suffering" (BGE 46). The creative dimensions of the invention of Christian morality are thus narrow in scope, and though their interpretations impose a framework on the whole, they remain fueled by revenge at nobles and nobility as a specific target.

There are some subtle but important differences between these accounts of the slave's invention of Christian morality and Nietzsche's account of romantic creativity. The slave's internal state and the creative resentment arising from it are entirely defined by the hostility of his external circumstances, such that his creativity is a lashing out at what torments him: "in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world [...], its action is fundamentally reaction" (GM I 10). Nietzsche classifies the romantic artist or philosopher, though, as an artist or philosopher *first*: "Every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers" (GS 370). Distinguishing between those who suffer from overfullness and those who suffer from an impoverishment of life, he calls romanticism a creation of the latter. Yet unlike the slave whose struggle is defined by externalities, the romantic pessimist's predicament arises from within. He is restless and in a state of desire irrespective of any social and political contingencies. Though impoverished, he seeks excess. Moreover, Nietzsche describes his revenge as against *all* things, as he tries to project the image of his own torture onto what is. This desire is already metaphysical in a way that the revenge of the slave, lashing out primarily against what oppresses him, is not. Similarly, the Jesus of BGE 269 does not become who he is primarily through the oppression of external forces. The trouble for him begins in excessive love and excessive need. Though he lashes out against those that do not love him by inventing a hell, he also invents a God who can have mercy on human love. A craving that cannot be met drives him mad.

This constitutes a distinction between Christianity – comprised of multiple elements – and Christian morality. Nietzsche distinguishes between them, for instance, when he says that Christian morality is responsible for the overturning of Christianity as a dogma (GM III 27). In recognizing Nietzsche's sense of multiple features of Christianity with disparate origins, we are able to better identify the role that the critique of Christianity plays in his philosophy. While Christian morality is described in wholly reactive terms, Nietzsche aligns some elements of Christianity with romantic creativity, which he takes, in spite of its limitations, to be a more profound event than Christian morality. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, considering the "stupidity and abomination" in the idea of loving humanity for God's sake ("*Den Menschen zu lieben um Gottes Willen*"), Nietzsche adds that whoever first felt this is "forever holy and admirable to us as the man who has flown the highest so far and has got the most beautifully lost [*am schönsten sich verirrt hat*]!" (BGE 60). Such expressions of admiration are scattered throughout earlier works as well. In *Human, All Too Human* (1878–80), he says: "The

subtlest artifice Christianity has over other religions is a word: it spoke of *love*. Thus it became the *lyrical* religion" (HH II, VM 95). Earlier still, he refers to the "exaltedness" of Christianity's ideal, though it "proved unattainable" (UM III, SE 2). Furthermore, though he consistently scoffs at the notion of "neighbor love," Nietzsche finds unique potential in Christianity's ideal of loving humanity. Indeed, Zarathustra's "I love man" at the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* indicates that Zarathustra's alternatives to neighbor love will still retain a common root with it. Thus, despite a rejection of Christianity and mostly negative assessment of Christian love, we have adequate evidence that Nietzsche finds the Christian idea of loving humanity innovative in a way that is essential for his own philosophical project. In imagining Christian decadence as originating from a madness tied to the poverty of human love, Nietzsche also makes reflection on love central to its overturning.

Love as Poverty and Possibility

Though Nietzsche does not elaborate in BGE 269 on his claim that human love is "desperately poor and ignorant [*so armselig, so unwissend*]," some of his earlier accounts of love, particularly from the middle period works, allow us to imagine what he might mean. In a long passage on love in GS 14, for example, Nietzsche reduces love's loftiness to egoistic and pathological naturalized phenomena. There he writes that both agapic and erotic love are fundamentally expressions of a desire for possession,[15] whereby "the lover aims at the impoverishment and deprivation [*Verarmung und Entbehrung*] of all competitors," only to come up bored when the conquest is made (GS 14). Yet, even where Nietzsche seeks to disillusion us about the nature of most love, he often leaves room for our own mistaken notions of love to introduce and induce new capacities within ourselves. For instance, in *Daybreak* (1881), he says that while institutions founded upon love have "introduced a very great deal of hypocrisy and lying into the world," they have also "introduced a new *suprahuman* [*übermenschlicher*] concept which elevates mankind" (D 27). Furthermore, Nietzsche indicates that the passion in love is not necessarily an immediacy, but can instead be the work of a disciplined spirit. In GS 334, he says that love must be learned, requiring first toleration of something strange and other, followed by familiarity that progresses to an attachment, and finally, enchantment. Using the example of a piece of music, Nietzsche argues that many things which compel the sort of heightened emotional response in us that we call love must first have been handled with some patience and good will before we can begin to see them as beautiful and enchanting. One first needs the perspicacity to identify the object in question as a separate life, and then having distinguished it, one needs the forbearance

15 See also HH I 401 and GS 363.

to tolerate the separate thing. Only in following this labor does one become used to it, and this familiarity gradually grows into love. "That is," Nietzsche suggests, "how we have *learned to love* all things that we now love" (GS 334).

This idea of love as a learned discipline would seem to be at odds with Nietzsche's critical portrayal of love in GS 14.[16] There, love is an initial heat cooling to boredom after a series of failures, whereas love is a heat gradually cultivated from coolness in GS 334. Calling it the "most ingenuous expression of egoism" (GS 14), Nietzsche shows that the frenzy of love is a desire to possess. While this is clearest in the case of sexual love, Nietzsche extends it to the love of neighbor, of knowledge, and of truth as well. In understanding love in its manifold forms as tantamount to a desire for possession, Nietzsche describes the course by which boredom with the possession follows predictably from its attainment. However, these two passages describe multi-step processes that are different, but can be understood to coincide. In reading them together, we are able to see love as a complex dynamic of banal egoism and aspirational possibility.

When Nietzsche says in GS 14 that we quickly tire of our possessions, he adds that this means that we become bored with ourselves, and when he says in GS 334 that all love must be learned in the plodding way he describes, he adds: "Even those who love themselves will have learned it in this way" (GS 334).[17] If self-love must be learned, it seems that the possessive love described in GS 14 provides encounters in which the self becomes a problem for itself in the first place. The centrality of love to the project of self-cultivation is established as early as the third *Untimely Meditation* (1874), where Nietzsche writes that "it is love alone that can bestow on the soul, not only a clear, discriminating and self-contemptuous view of itself, but also the desire to look beyond itself and to seek with all its might for a higher self as yet still concealed from it" (UM III, SE 6).[18] While Nietzsche's tone is more straightforwardly positive in this early passage, even in his more skeptical accounts, love remains central to self-development, and self-development determines the possible courses that love may take.[19] Nietzsche writes that possession means that "our pleasure in ourselves tries to maintain itself

16 May, "Nietzsche on Love and the Affirmation of Life," for instance, quotes GS 14 as an example of possession and pity.

17 Ruth Abbey argues for a "subtraction story" in the middle period works, whereby self-love is *not* learned, but a natural state that returns when we eliminate Christian self-abasement. Abbey cites GS 334 as a passage that challenges her view. See Ruth Abbey, "Swanton and Nietzsche on Self-Love," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 49 (2015), 387–403: 397–9.

18 For more on love and "becoming what you are," see Tracy B. Strong, "The Obstinance of Voice: Rousseau and Nietzsche on Music, Language, and Human Association," in Mark T. Conard (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Philosophers*, New York 2017, 258–85: 269–79.

19 While many scholars (e. g., May, "Nietzsche on Love and the Affirmation of Life"; Willow Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, London 2019; Robert C. Miner, "Nietzsche on Friendship," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 40 (2010), 47–69; and Abbey, "Swanton and Nietzsche on Self-Love") have reflected on the effect of self-love or the lack thereof on other-oriented relations for Nietzsche, there is less addressing the role of love of others on the possibility of self-love.

by again and again changing something new *into ourselves*" (GS 14). This form of love, then, originates in a self-pleasure that feels itself quickly becoming extinguished. Experiencing the other as fuel for its own consumptive enjoyment, it tires of the possessed other, and since its boredom with the other is also boredom with itself, we see that what is called a self in this mode is only a pleasure seeking to expand itself by enlarging its territory. Nietzsche describes the act of possession as an attempt "to live and rule in the other soul as supreme and supremely desirable" (GS 14). In this way, possession is only successful to the extent that it also paradoxically effaces the egoistic self, converting the active possessor into a desired object that feels its success only in having itself reflected back as a thing desired by the one that it set out to possess. The self of possession then bores of itself easily because it is a self in a limited sense, existing only to be returned to itself by the other as object. If love of this sort is, as Nietzsche says, "the most ingenuous expression of egoism" (GS 14), the ego in question seems to have engaged very little in the sort of self-fashioning that Nietzsche emphasizes later in the book.[20]

Yet GS 14 contains a much-discussed twist when Nietzsche says that in some instances, love continues when the possessive craving of two people for one another gives way to a desire for an ideal shared between them.[21] This is friendship. Friends relate to one another through a third, the ideal, and since the ideal is above them, it is neither easily exhausted, nor do the two parties look to consume one another.[22] The relational triad achieves stability insofar as it allows a way for the two to relate to one another with a degree of detachment. Thus, while Nietzsche describes a process of learning necessary for allowing one to love in the first place, it would seem that something is learned in loving as well. On the one hand, one learns that love is a bait and switch or dead end, but occasionally one learns of another path – that the luxurious feeling might be redirected and thereby sustained. Yet Nietzsche describes this learning as a simple giving way or yielding (*weichen*), an eruption based upon pressure by certain forces rather than a steady process of education. Here we might remember that Zarathustra teaches friendship in opposition to both erotic and neighbor love as a superior way of relating to the other. Whereas Zarathustra calls love of the neighbor "your bad love of yourselves," he admonishes his friends to "create your friend and his overflowing heart out of yourself" (Z I, Neighbor-Love), adding that the love of the

20 See, e. g., GS 290.

21 Durrant thinks that only the higher thirst (*höheren Durst*) and not the ideal itself is shared, supporting his view of friendship as agonism without some higher purpose. Although this is plausible, there is not a great deal to suggest that the ideal itself is not also shared, particularly given that it is above them (*einem über ihnen stehenden Ideale*). See Durrant, *Nietzsche's Renewal of Ancient Ethics*, 133.

22 Miner, "Nietzsche on Friendship," argues that the aim of friendship is truth, while Verkerk makes the case that the ideal of GS 14 is *Redlichkeit*. See Willow Verkerk, "Nietzsche's Goal of Friendship," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 45/3 (2014), 279–91: 285–90, and Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, 52–61. For a more deflationary view of friendship, see Paul van Tongeren, "Kant, Nietzsche, and the Idealization of Friendship into Nihilism," *Kriterion* 128 (2013), 401–17.

friend can also be love of the overhuman.[23] The giving way of possession would seem to require a cultivation of self that is not yet present in the more possessive kind of love. In locating the origins of friendship in the giving way of possession, though, Nietzsche indicates that the move from more possessive forms of love to friendship is not a simple opposition, as the latter is a superior path opening out of the failures of the former. The self that becomes capable of friendship is born of the failure of love.[24]

Willow Verkerk has argued that Nietzsche finds erotic love and friendship to be incompatible, a position which she develops by considering Nietzsche's remarks on the role of women in heterosexual relationships. Nietzsche tends to associate women with the relation of love, and Verkerk adds that Nietzsche thinks that "female conceptions of self and value make it unlikely for them to form friendships."[25] While Verkerk correctly notes numerous ways in which love is fraught by gendered power dynamics as well as Nietzsche's limited imagination concerning relational possibilities for women, these do not entail a straightforward incompatibility between love and friendship. The relationship described in GS 14 would instead make love a necessary prerequisite for friendship. The implications are limited here. We cannot conclude that Nietzsche thinks that the two are positively compatible, but only that love can be understood to do important preparatory work for other kinds of relationality, thus retaining an essential role in Nietzsche's understanding of ethical goals.[26] Nietzsche does not indicate that the development of friendship from love is straightforward or necessary. His claim that even love of oneself must be learned through a process by which an individual is distinguished as a separate being and then patiently tolerated before it might inspire any frenzy of feeling entails the possibility that one might *not* distinguish oneself as a separate being in any rigorous way and might not patiently habituate oneself to that separate being.

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23 For more on this point, see Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, 58–61, and Durrant, *Nietzsche's Renewal of Ancient Ethics*, 141.

24 This has consequences for how we characterize different sorts of human relationships. May, for instance, claims that Nietzsche regards any love for others not based on self-love as based in hate. See May, "Nietzsche on Love and the Affirmation of Life," 271. This opposition is too rigid to appreciate the co-development of self and other relations argued for here. Miner limits his remarks on the relationship between self-love and the love of others to the claim that self-love is required for "superior friendship." See Miner, "Nietzsche on Friendship," 53. Abbey notes that the idea that we can be seduced into self-love in *Daybreak* makes it a project for the community. See Abbey, "Swanton and Nietzsche on Self-Love," 398.

25 Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, 135.

26 May argues that erotic love is consistent with loving the whole, but that it interests Nietzsche less than friendship. See May, "Nietzsche on Love and the Affirmation of Life," 272. Though Durrant deemphasizes love, he thinks that higher friendship can "incorporate every imaginable human experience." See Durrant, *Nietzsche's Renewal of Ancient Ethics*, 130. Abbey notes the ephemerality of romantic love, but says that marriage can be a form of friendship. See Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period*, Oxford 2000, 126–9. Lorenzo Serini argues for a positive role for romantic love, compatible with friendship, distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic love. See Lorenzo Serini, "Stendhal, Nietzsche, and Beauvoir on Romantic Love," in Michael J. McNeal (ed.), *Nietzsche on Women and the Eternal Feminine: A Critique of Truth and Values*, London 2023, 161–74: 173.

Indeed, the one who learns to love others in the way that Nietzsche suggests has only distinguished the desired possession in a way that does not require self-reflection. Yet the boredom resulting from being returned to oneself as the desired object presents an opportunity for the distinction to be made and the self to become the patiently tolerated object that Nietzsche describes in GS 334. One who has then been still with oneself, who has come to love oneself or at least completed some of the preparatory work of self-love, would then presumably re-enter that egoistic realm of desire differently, namely because the ego itself would be experienced differently by the one who has engaged in the kind of self-reflection required for self-love.[27] Indeed, unlike the asymmetrical relationship that Nietzsche describes for the person involved in simple possession, the possession that gives way does so on both sides for the two. We can surmise that those who have cultivated some sense of self or self-love desire others with the same sense, making such a yielding of desire to an ideal possible.

The poverty and ignorance that Nietzsche diagnoses in human love, then, is at least in part a poverty and ignorance of self. Given the ability to love in this avaricious way before one has come to distinguish, tolerate, and care for a self with any depth, it appears that it is precisely in the failures of this avaricious love that pathways to a love that promotes self-cultivation and new ideals might be opened up. The self that has become capable of friendship then exists within a relational structure that engenders creation beyond itself: "The friend shall be your festival of the earth and an anticipation of the overman" (Z I, Neighbor-Love).

Zarathustra's Exhortation: "*Learn* to Love!"

While the case of friendship shows a determinate path out of failed love and toward the overhuman, Nietzsche does not treat love merely as a route to the higher path of friendship. Love itself remains a crucial relation beyond its development into friendship. Zarathustra provides a direct link between love and the overhuman when he exhorts

27 The importance of friendship for self-development and self-overcoming is well-established. See, for example, Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period*, 73–86; Miner, "Nietzsche on Friendship," 53–6; Daniel I. Harris, "Nietzsche and Aristotle on Friendship and Self-Knowledge," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 48/2 (2017), 245–60; Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, 30–65; and Durrant, *Nietzsche's Renewal of Ancient Ethics*, 137–43. I am making the more contentious claim that less desirable affects can become honed relationally such that a self capable of friendship is formed in failed projects of love. Such a claim would likely be rejected by scholars like Durrant, who argues that higher friendship is only available to higher types, constituted by an already existing capacity to order drives within oneself. The self, on his account, is not itself constituted by social relations. See Durrant, *Nietzsche's Renewal of Ancient Ethics*, 103–24. While a theory of the self is beyond the scope of this paper, I am in agreement with more relational accounts, as this reading suggests. The passages under consideration here give us reason to think that whether one becomes capable of what is higher is a question that gets worked out relationally.

his friends to "*learn* first to love." Since the context here is a speech on child and marriage, we can infer that he is exhorting them to learn a love that is still subordinate to friendship, having said a few sections earlier, "woman is not yet capable of friendship: she knows only love" (Z I, Friend).[28] This imperative echoes back to GS 334's claim that love must be learned. Given that context, we can hear in Zarathustra's command the exhortation to master the rudimentary steps of distance and tolerance specified there. Moreover, Zarathustra's friends are to learn to love precisely so that they can experience something lacking in it, tasting "the bitterness in the cup of even the best love" (Z I, Child and Marriage). Love, it seems, necessarily breeds dissatisfaction, and from the dissatisfaction in love arises "a longing for the overman" (Z I, Friend).

All of this underscores a point made by Robert Pippin in his analysis of the problem of nihilism, which, he says, "does not consist in a failure of knowledge or failure of will, but a *failure of desire*, the flickering out of some erotic flame."[29] Pippin shows that Nietzsche esteems precisely those desires that, as manifestations of a self-induced dissatisfaction, *cannot* be satisfied, and in doing so, he illuminates a priority of eros over will in the overcoming of nihilism.[30] The overhuman cannot be willed without first being *longed* for, and Zarathustra seems to locate the seeds of this longing in a dissatisfaction endemic to love. But why is it necessary to feel the dissatisfaction of the best love, described by Nietzsche in these distinctly erotic and possessive terms, in order to long for the overhuman, particularly when Nietzsche has already provided the friend as the more productive path originating out of love?

Zarathustra tells his disciples: "But even your best love is merely an ecstatic parable and a painful smolder. It is a torch that should light you to higher ways. Over and beyond yourselves you must someday love!" (Z I, Child and Marriage). We have already seen that the accomplishment of possessive love is at the same time a failure that brings one back to oneself as a boredom-inducing object. But here, rather than boredom, Zarathustra describes the failure as both painful and pointing to an as-yet-unrealized possibility of loving over and beyond oneself. I would suggest that the bitterness and disappointment as Nietzsche sees it is that one does not actually love beyond oneself in erotic love, though the experience of erotic love contains the promise that such a loving was indeed possible. This is why it is an ecstatic parable pointing beyond its own experience, and why Nietzsche notes in GS 14 that erotic love is the most ingenuous expression of egoism that nonetheless understands itself to be the opposite. All of these passages highlight the way in which human love routinely involves a return to the self, though something in the experience led the lover to understand that they had somehow escaped the ego in

28 I cite this here only to note a hierarchical distinction between love and friendship. The passage also raises numerous questions about gender and misogyny in Nietzsche. Verkerk elaborates on the passage with attention to gender. See Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, 125–51. See also Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period*, 123–39.

29 Pippin, "Love and Death in Nietzsche," 13.

30 Pippin, "Love and Death in Nietzsche," 18.

loving. There is thus a dual experience in this return to oneself. As Nietzsche describes it in GS 14, one experiences a boredom that might lead either to further conquests or to the sort of self-distancing reflection that enables a self to emerge as a distinct phenomenon. Self-distancing reflection would also allow for the eros that gives way to friendship. The passage in *Zarathustra*, though, in presenting a possibility of love that even in its success (as the *best* love) is painful and bitter and productive of further longing, indicates another degree of reflection: on the distance between the promise of love and its actuality. If Nietzsche thinks that love only enacts egoism, he also thinks that love can engender the ability to be dissatisfied by that egoism, which in turn creates the potential for loving beyond ourselves. Out of this dissatisfied love, Zarathustra suggests that we might become creators of the overhuman (Z I, Child and Marriage).[31] But first we must become the sort of self capable of longing to create, and love is the site for such a longing to emerge. Thus, while friendship might be a refining of love and ultimately a higher form of relationality,[32] the unrefined desire of love plays its own distinct role in the pursuit of the overhuman. This suggests that the forms of eros of which Nietzsche is critical can be honed and transformed in ways that enable self-development and revaluation. The open-endedness of the painful smolder further suggests that love does not have a linear relationship with other kinds of goals, but it is instead a risky site of possibilities both affirmative and dangerous.[33]

31 A full interpretation of this concept is beyond the scope of this paper. However, two insights guide my understanding of the overhuman: 1) Nietzsche is not naming an individual, a new species (pace Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Cambridge 2010) or even ideal so much as a transformation in humanity's relational being, brought about by lived embodied revaluation. 2) I think (contra Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Cambridge 1990, 271–7; Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra"*, New Haven, CT 1986, 258; Tom Stern, "Nietzsche on Context and the Individual," *Nietzscheforschung* 15 (2008), 299–315: 301–15; and Matthew Meyer, *Nietzsche's Free Spirit Works: A Dialectical Reading*, Cambridge 2019, 237) that Nietzsche does not abandon the idea in favor of eternal recurrence. A number of scholars have upheld the idea of the *Übermensch*, noting the problem eternal recurrence poses. See T. K. Seung, *Nietzsche's Epic of the Soul*, Lanham, MD 2005, for an account of eternal recurrence revising rather than overriding the idea of *Übermensch*. Meyer also supports such a view in a more recent work. See Matthew Meyer, *The Routledge Guidebook to Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra"*, New York 2025.

32 Daniel I. Harris, among the scholars who see continuity between love and friendship, argues that the feature that makes friendship higher is an openness to the world that is lacking in the more myopic form of love. See Daniel I. Harris, "Friendship as Shared Joy in Nietzsche," *Symposium* 19/1 (2015), 199–221: 214.

33 Leslie Paul Thiele writes: "Nietzsche held love to be the greatest of life's affirmative forces. But it is always accompanied by the greatest dangers, its decadent forms." See Leslie Paul Thiele, "Love and Judgment: Nietzsche's Dilemma," *Nietzsche-Studien* 20 (1991), 88–108: 92.

Love of Humanity, Love of the Whole

The Christian command to love the neighbor, obviously misguided for Nietzsche, is nevertheless a radical form of the desire to transcend egoism that we have identified above. Nietzsche's portrayal of Jesus as a lover in BGE 269 indicates his recognition of something more substantive than mere *ressentiment* at work in Christian love. Though nihilistic, it is also heroic. The first problematic yet pregnant dimension of Jesus is the craving to love and be loved by human beings in an indiscriminate way. All noble forms of human love are highly discriminating for Nietzsche[34] – a conviction following largely from his naturalistic interpretations of human psychology. Given that we are not universally loving creatures, our aspirations to love human beings universally deteriorate into petty forms of power-seeking such as pity. A more honest assessment of who we are concentrates the circle of our concern, more honestly affirming the being that we are. However, Nietzsche portrays Jesus in this passage as genuinely overwhelmed by his own love of humanity. Neither dishonest nor petty, this Jesus is simply an excessive and extraordinary nature, as is his impulse of such universal love.[35] Against the threat of the omni-satisfied last man, a love that extends and spends itself universally appears radical and mad, and Nietzsche seems to want to give some degree of credit to the Christian passion. Though he rejects neighbor love, Nietzsche finds something heroic in the rigor with which Christianity expresses the impulse to love beyond self-seeking possession.[36]

The heroic dimensions of the impulse nevertheless succumb to a nihilistic despair. Jesus's invention of the eternal realm of God and hell is also, Nietzsche suggests, a desire for death – a theme also explored in *Zarathustra*. In a passage resembling what he says about Jesus in BGE 269, Zarathustra notes that Jesus had some nobility to him, and that he only desired death because he was too young.[37] Had he lived to be older, Zarathustra says, he might have recanted and loved the earth (Z I, Voluntary Death). This suggests that Jesus's longing for death is an immature and inadequate reaction to his knowledge concerning the poverty of human love. Similarly, Nietzsche's tormented, heroic Jesus in BGE retrieves something of the impulse in Christian love without endorsing it. In *Zarathustra* IV, Jesus is described as having overwhelming pity that breaks down barriers between self and other (Z IV, Ugliest Man). There, as in other places, Nietzsche depicts

34 See BGE 260; Z I, Tree on the Hill; and Z I, War and Warriors.

35 That certain expressions of decadence are also signs of extraordinary natures is clear from the way in which Zarathustra experiences pity (Z IV, Sign). See David Cartwright, "The Last Temptation of Zarathustra," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31/1 (1993), 49–69.

36 Greek *eros* as it appears in Plato also moves beyond possession. But Christian *agape*, neither for a particular, nor for an unchanging ideal, but some hybrid of the two that does not fulfill itself in greater abstraction, ultimately is un-Platonic.

37 The emphasis on Jesus's youthful desire for death further links Nietzsche's Jesus to a more modern romanticism. In addition to Werther, we might think of Novalis's *Hymns of the Night* (1800).

Jesus's love of humanity as an extraordinary capacity of the heart gone awry. Unable to square a humanity he wants to love with humanity as he finds it, his creative act is a punitive negation and death instinct. This failure, however, brings to the fore a challenge that Nietzsche takes up in *Zarathustra:* how to embody the longing for a transformed humanity while also loving the world and the human beings within it. Nietzsche finds Jesus's response to this challenge, in its death-seeking absolutism, deficient.

Zarathustra's foundational idea of eternal recurrence combines this tragic irreconcilability – the longing for a higher human being and the love of humanity as it is given – making it the object of eternal longing. Importantly, the work begins with a version of Christian love in Zarathustra's assertion "I love humanity." Later, Zarathustra takes up the noble impulse that the young Jesus could not deliver on by willing the eternal recurrence of the same, embodying a love that I would argue is for Nietzsche the mark of a transformed and "overhuman" humanity.[38] That the teacher of the overhuman is also the one tasked with the willing of eternal recurrence indicates that in order to embody the transformative capacity, one must long for life in its selfsame form. When Zarathustra finally affirms the greatest weight of the return of his selfsame life, he does so by addressing eternity as a lover (Z III, Seven Seals), and his embrace of eternity directly follows an intimate conversation between Zarathustra and life in which they address one another as playful lovers (Z III, Second Dance-Song).[39]

This shift to eternity as the beloved other does indicate, as Choraqui argues, that Nietzsche's idea of the fullest love is one that takes on no particular object, but instead affirms the whole, incorporating "my fate with fate in general."[40] I have made the case, though, that Nietzsche's remarks on love throughout the corpus link the self who would make such an affirmation to more banal and frustrating forms of interpersonal love. Furthermore, we can see a developmental affinity between the Christian idea of loving humanity and the comprehensive love of the whole that Nietzsche imagines for Zarathustra.[41] In loving eternity as recurrence, Zarathustra wills perpetual striving for the humanity that is not yet. He thus embraces a tragic incommensurability between

38 In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says that man cannot be for Zarathustra an object of love, but only an "unform, a material, an ugly stone that needs sculpting" (EH, Z 8).

39 I agree with Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 262, and Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge, MA 1985, 148, that the small man's return is part of what must be craved in the longing for eternity, denied by Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, New York 1962; Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*; and Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*.

40 Choraqui, "Nietzsche's Science of Love," 288.

41 While some nuanced distinctions might be drawn out between *amor fati* and eternal recurrence (see Han-Pile, "Nietzsche and Amor Fati," 246–7), I agree with the overwhelming tendency in the literature to slide between the two as ways of naming the same idea. See, e. g., Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 282; Hatab, "Amor Agonis," 110; Simon May, "Why Nietzsche is Still in the Morality Game," in Simon May (ed.), *Nietzsche's "On the Genealogy of Morality": A Critical Guide*, Cambridge 2011, 78–100: 95; and May, "Nietzsche on Love and the Affirmation of Life," 274–5.

humanity as he finds it and his own vision of what humanity could be by confronting the idea of life's eternal recurrence with joy and longing.[42] Moreover, longing for the eternal recurrence of the same would mean loving one's own life and self in its temporality unashamedly, thus responding to the anxiety about the poverty of love in its inability to escape love of self. Rather than despairing over that poverty, the one who wills eternal recurrence confronts this interest in the self with a love and longing that is self-transforming. The desire for possession that makes love so disappointing is nevertheless a site at which the boundaries of the self begin to shift, and where such shifting takes place, there is potential for the ground to give way to a new form of relationality. This offers an alternative to the absolutist distinction between self and other, as Zarathustra shows that the poverty in human love is not primarily an issue of being unable to love others in a way that disregards the self, but is instead an issue of not being the sort of self that is able to love generously. Rather than demanding that human beings live up to an idea of love that breaks their natural dispositions, he exhorts them to learn that ordinary and disappointing love that in its discontents might open possibilities for new selves, and in new selves, new loves. This affirms love as the way that a self becomes, and self-development as the way that relationality becomes. This is not the same as a simple affirmation of human nature becoming comfortable with itself,[43] but it is rather a call to something more difficult: a joy in perpetual dissatisfaction. As Pippin argues, Nietzsche emphasizes eros and its discontents as a resistance to the last man's complacency toward the human situation.[44] Love in its poverty thus remains the path to human and overhuman possibility.

The Genius of the Heart

The above analysis has highlighted the Jesus of BGE 269 in order to demonstrate the ways in which Zarathustra is Nietzsche's response to a poverty and a possibility in the Christian idea of love for humanity. While one could object that this makes a great deal hinge on one somewhat cryptic passage, in fact, there are a number of reasons to weigh BGE 269 as having greater than average significance for the interpretation of *Beyond Good and Evil* and other important themes throughout Nietzsche's corpus. On the one hand, the passage offers an original, if enigmatic, lens for considering the relationship

42 Hatab argues that an agonistic conception of love applied to eternal recurrence means that "the recurrence of something one opposes includes one's recurring opposition to it." See Hatab, "Amor Agonis," 110.

43 May makes a similar point, noting that *amor fati* means learning to see the world as beautiful. See Simon May, *Love: A History*, New Haven, CT 2011, 197.

44 Pippin, "Love and Death in Nietzsche," 20–1. Verkerk also notes the importance of human relationality in avoiding the last man's orientation to life, but in regard to goal-oriented friendship. See Verkerk, "Nietzsche's Goal of Friendship," 289.

between Christian love and nihilism. More importantly, though, Nietzsche situates BGE 269 so as to put it into conversation with another arguably climactic aphorism in Book IX. As Laurence Lampert has noted, Nietzsche's description of Jesus's insatiable love for humanity is countered in the penultimate section of *Beyond Good and Evil* by Dionysus's qualified love for humanity in the figure of Ariadne,[45] and Martin Kornberger has bolstered the importance of reading these two passages together by observing that Jesus appears as the *knower* of the heart in BGE 269 while Dionysus is presented in BGE 295 as the *genius* of the heart.[46] Book IX is then followed by an afterword in the form of a poem, *From High Mountains*, that invokes Zarathustra. Thus, in order to complete this analysis counterposing Jesus and Zarathustra, we must return to the more immediate relationship between Jesus and Dionysus in the text. In this final section, I will show that attending to the heroic dimensions of Jesus's love has consequences for interpreting the end of *Beyond Good and Evil* and sheds light on how Nietzsche understands the figures of Dionysus and Zarathustra. Specifically, attention to these heroic dimensions in Nietzsche's portrayal of Jesus allows us to see the ways in which the superior Dionysus is still limited in relation to his figure of Zarathustra.

There is some justification for assuming that Dionysus and Zarathustra name basically the same idea for Nietzsche,[47] in which case the opposition between Jesus and Zarathustra and between Jesus and Dionysus might be interpreted as an uncomplicated development of a final conceptual opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified. Kornberger, for instance, argues that the pair of knower and genius of the heart develops into the opposition of *Dionysus versus the Crucified* in *Ecce Homo* (1888), where Nietzsche realizes a Dionysian apotheosis.[48] However, Nietzsche's reservations concerning the figure of Dionysus in BGE 295 both complicate the identification of Zarathustra with Dionysus and raise further questions about his aim in pairing Jesus with Dionysus in Book IX.

Nietzsche writes the penultimate section of *Beyond Good and Evil* as "the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus" – one whose path has been crossed by Dionysus "again and again" (BGE 295). Out of this intimate familiarity, Nietzsche relays a conversation in which Dionysus reveals a number of things that appear to give Nietzsche pause:

> You can guess: this type of divinity and philosopher is, perhaps, lacking in shame? – He once said: "I love humans under certain circumstances" – meaning Ariadne, who was present –: "I think humans are pleasant, brave, inventive animals that have no equal on earth, they find their way

45 Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil*, New Haven, CT 2001, 276.

46 Martin Kornberger, "Zur Genealogie des '*Ecce homo*'," *Nietzsche-Studien* 27 (1998), 319–38. See also Matthew Meyer, "Review of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*: A Reader's Guide," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 45/2 (2014), 210–2.

47 See EH, Z 6.

48 Kornberger, "Zur Genealogie des '*Ecce homo*'," 329.

> around any labyrinth. I am very fond of them: I think about how I can help them advance and make them stronger, more evil, and more profound than they are." – "Stronger, more evil, and more profound?" I asked, startled. – "Yes," he said again, "stronger, more evil, and more profound; and more beautiful" – and at that, the tempter god smiled his halcyon smile, as if he had just paid a charming compliment. You can see: this divinity lacks more than just shame –; but you can also see that there are good reasons for supposing that the gods could learn a thing or two from humans. We humans are – more human [*menschlicher*] (BGE 295).[49]

As Kornberger notes, Ariadne enters the passage suddenly, just as Jesus enters BGE 269 suddenly toward the end, and her sole function seems to be in serving as an illustration of the "certain circumstances" under which this genius of the heart loves humans. Yet the only description that Nietzsche gives of her – that she was present ("*die zugegen war*") – offers additional context through which we might consider his reflections on the god here. The claim concerning Ariadne's presence, somewhat highlighted by the surrounding m-dashes, echoes a moment in Plutarch referring specifically to Ariadne's presence at Minos's yearly games for his son Androgeus. In this story, Plutarch says: "Ariadne, who was present, was struck with admiration of the manly beauty of Theseus, and the vigour and address which he showed in the combat, overcoming all that encountered with him [Ἀριάδνη παροῦσα πρός τε τὴν ὄψιν ἐξεπλάγη τοῦ Θησέως καὶ τὴν ἄθλησιν ἐθαύμασε πάντων κρατήσαντος]."[50]

Dionysus regards Ariadne in BGE 295, but we can surmise that she is not looking back at him. Instead, Nietzsche has captured a moment in which Ariadne is admiring Theseus, smitten with his appearance and filled with wonder at his deeds – deeds which originate in his having been moved by the sufferings of his fellow citizens. Nietzsche gives no account of what in Dionysus's expressed aim of making human beings stronger, more evil, and more profound causes him to be "startled [*erschreckt*]," but the tone shifts when Dionysus adds "more beautiful," and Nietzsche moves from startled to dismissive. His addition of "as if he had just paid a charming compliment [*wie als ob er eben eine bezaubernde Artigkeit gesagt habe*]" and subsequent assertion that gods could learn a thing or two from human beings indicates that in invoking beauty, Dionysus's statement has advanced from merely startling to misguided.

A passage in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) in which Nietzsche likewise invokes Dionysus in a discussion of beauty might help to explain why. There Nietzsche writes:

> People think that the world itself is overflowing with beauty, – they *forget* that they are its cause. They themselves have given the world its beauty – but oh! Only a very human, all too human

49 Much of the material in BGE 295 is found in an 1885 notebook passage, but seems to have been an early preface to *Human, All Too Human*. In that entry, "We are *more humane*" is followed by: "And herewith we have arrived and are at the right place: namely at the end. For by now one will have abundantly grasped what it is supposed to be called: 'Human, All Too Human.' And why this book is 'a book for *free spirits*'" (Nachlass 1885, 41[9], KSA 11.686).

50 Plutarch, *Theseus*, in *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Arthur Hugh Clough, trans. John Dryden, New York 1975, 11.

> beauty … Fundamentally, humanity is reflected in all things, people find beauty in everything that throws their image back at them: the judgment "beautiful" is the *vanity of their species* … (TI, Skirmishes 19).

Beauty as Nietzsche describes it here is a strictly human evaluation and experience, centered on auto-erotic satisfaction and delight. Nietzsche adds that one might respond with skepticism concerning whether such a vanity actually does anything substantive: "does the world really become beautiful just because it is seen this way by human beings?" (TI, Skirmishes 19). In lieu of a definitive answer, he wonders what a "higher arbiter of taste" might think of the human being, speculating that the judgment might range from "daring [*gewagt*]" to amusing to "arbitrary." He then ends the passage by imagining Dionysus questioning Ariadne concerning her "amusing" ears (TI, Skirmishes 19).

Beauty, Nietzsche argues, is that which increases one's feeling of power, and ugliness is any sign of degeneration and decline, which brings about hatred precisely because people hate the decline of their type. "Art is *profound* for the sake of this hatred" (TI, Skirmishes 20), he says, and one may assume here that art is the impulse to create beauty and to cover the ugly. Since beauty is tied to a feeling of power against the inevitable threat of decay and decline, it is defined by its opposition to the ugly – any sign that power is becoming exhausted. Thus, when Nietzsche entertains the skeptic's objection in TI, Skirmishes 19 by imagining what a Dionysus might think of a human being, he drops the language of beauty altogether. The god has no opinion on beauty because beauty is not a concept that a god can entertain. Beauty is defined by its opposition to ugliness, not in any abstract sense, but rather by the threat of decline as belonging to oneself. These sections indicate the experience of beauty is only possible for a being who can experience decline within themselves. Importantly for Nietzsche's reaction to Dionysus in BGE 295, the dependence of beauty on an anxiety about decay and decline ties it to the desire to cover such manifestations in oneself. The experience of beauty is then necessarily linked to shame. As inventive projections of what human beings celebrate in themselves, gods are beautiful, but insofar as an immortal being cannot dread the ugly as a possibility affecting it, the perspective of such a being could not include a concept of beauty resembling the human one. Hence, when Dionysus the tempter dangles the possibility of greater beauty before him, Nietzsche is taken aback. A god, lacking shame, cannot see the beauty that Ariadne sees in the *menschlicher* hero; yet he proposes to remake human beings, according to a standard of which he cannot himself have a concept.

This genius of the heart clearly has more appeal for Nietzsche than the lovesick knower of the heart. In his "smoothing of rough souls" and instilling of new desire, Dionysus seems to offer what the knower of the heart sought in vain from love: the transcendence of self. But the loveless genius of the heart also turns out to be something of a seducer. Nietzsche sobers up at the point at which the god makes this suspicious offer, and we see why Dionysus is "not unthreatening," insofar as he promises human-

ity a transformation masquerading as divine while appealing to fully human concepts. Nietzsche must realize at this point in his reverie that his encounter with this spirit has reached a limit. Thus, in the next section, he says: "We only immortalize things that cannot live and fly much longer, only tired and worn-out things" (BGE 296). Indeed, this describes the Dionysus of his encounter, who has developed from an intoxicating experience to a full-blown deity, promising undeliverable possibilities. On the verge of believing in the transformation offered to humans by this new god, Nietzsche stops himself in order to reassert the priority of the human.[51] Just as Ariadne and Theseus find their way through the labyrinth together, so too must the task of transforming humanity fall to human beings themselves in relation to one another. Thus, *Beyond Good and Evil* concludes with *From High Mountains*, an aftersong culminating in the arrival of Zarathustra. Experiencing alienation from his friends due to a change in himself, the poem's speaker finally welcomes "Friend Zarathustra, the guest of all guests" (BGE, Aftersong). The introduction of Zarathustra following skepticism toward Dionysus's propositions suggests that human transformation must come from an action within the human condition itself: the willing of eternal recurrence and creation of the overhuman. The foregoing analysis has shown the ways in which love and friendship are central to these tasks. Nietzsche accepts the genius of the heart as the inspiration toward a post-romantic Dionysian art, but interrupts his discipleship, turning back toward the human. In returning to his human hero, Zarathustra, Nietzsche reminds us that the Dionysian task cannot be performed by a god, but belongs to the human will alone.

Conclusion

Though interpersonal love, either of specific others or human beings generally, is far from being a straightforward ethical goal for Nietzsche, I have tried to demonstrate that Nietzsche invests human love and its inevitable failures with ethical importance. Nietzsche's enigmatic portrait of Jesus in BGE 269 reflects some of the complexities of

51 That the role of gods in a heroic conception of life is an ongoing question for Nietzsche is evident in a notebook entry from 1888: "Zarathustra goes so far to confess: 'I would only believe in a god who could *dance*' – To repeat: how many new gods are still possible! – Zarathustra himself, to be sure, is merely an old atheist: he believes neither in old nor in new gods. Zarathustra says he *would*; but Zarathustra *will* not" (Nachlass 1888, 17[4], KSA 13.526). Julian Young argues that Nietzsche makes a sharp distinction between himself as the god's disciple and the atheists of his day when he says in BGE 295 "I am told you do not like believing in God and gods these days." See Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*, Cambridge 2006, 141. I do not see evidence for any sharp distinction. Nietzsche addresses the claim to "*euch, meinen Freunden*." For comparison, consider GM III 24, where Nietzsche discusses "those rarer cases [...], the unbelievers." That Nietzsche marks his distance by referring to them constantly in the third person is highlighted by the fact that he switches back to "*wir Erkennenden*" when he contrasts his own position with that of the heroically spirited atheists.

Nietzsche's views on love – the erotic dimensions of the agapic impulse and the heroic tendencies of its failure. Nietzsche's Zarathustra picks up and completes some of the more promising features of Jesus and Christian love, indicating that Nietzsche does not make an absolute distinction between decadent and noble forms of love, but rather maintains a sense of fluidity between problematic and more aspirational forms. Finally, attention to the issue of love allows us to make more finely-tuned distinctions concerning how Nietzsche uses Dionysus, the Dionysian, and Zarathustra. The figure of Dionysus as the genius of the heart should not be understood straightforwardly as Nietzsche's response to Jesus the knower of the heart. Rather, the heroic dimensions of the god-man are brought into conversation with the tempter-god in a way that shapes Nietzsche's own Zarathustra – not a new god, but humanity transformed through a new love and a new will.

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