

**Zarathustra and his Asinine Friends: Nietzsche on Post-modern, Post-liberal
Friendship***

Richard Avramenko

Department of Government
Georgetown University
Washington, DC

*Prepared for delivery at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science
Association, September 2 - September 5, 2004.
Copyright by the American Political Science Association.

Zarathustra and his Asinine Friends: Nietzsche on Post-modern, Post-liberal Friendship

§1. The Turn from Friendship

To ask of Nietzsche sage wisdom regarding friendship seems somewhat misguided—sort of like turning to Henry VIII for marriage advice or to Jean-Jacques Rousseau for parenting tips. By most accounts Nietzsche was something of a misanthrope, and his biography recounts a litany of failed friendships and long periods of loneliness.¹ In his thought, especially his later work, he repeatedly praises solitude and individualism and takes to calling himself a free spirit. These free spirits, he says, are “jealous friends of solitude, of our own deepest, most midnight, most midday solitude.”² But not only does he praise solitude, he goes so far as to disparage the company of others: “He who, when trafficking with men, does not occasionally glisten with all the shades of distress, green and grey with disgust, satiety, sympathy, gloom and loneliness, is certainly not a man of an elevated taste.”³ In an even more vitriolic moment, he remarks, “solitude is with us a virtue: it is a sublime urge and inclination for cleanliness which divines that all contact between man and man—‘in society’— must inevitably be unclean. All community makes somehow, somewhere, sometime —‘common.’”⁴

So what, then, does this misanthropic loner have to add to a discussion of friendship? According to Ruth Abbey, Nietzsche was not always so caustic with regard to friendship. In his middle period, she argues, the issue was a central concern and,

¹ For an excellent account of Nietzsche’s personal life as it develops with his thought, see Rüdiger Safranski’s *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, transl. Shelley Frisch (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002).

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, transl. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 73.

³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 214

though mostly neglected in the secondary literature, in these works “Nietzsche suggests that there is a close connection between friendship and selfhood, contending that an individual’s friendships reflect something about his or her identity.”⁵ Moreover, a careful look at these works also reveals that friendship lends itself nicely to self-knowledge,⁶ that it is not inimical to self-overcoming,⁷ that “friendship is a forum in which pity’s positive characteristics can manifest themselves,”⁸ and finally that “solitude need not exclude friendship.”⁹ Clearly, Nietzsche was not always so caustic in his appraisal of friendship.

While for the time being I will defer commenting on Abbey’s specific claims regarding Nietzsche’s middle work, it is worth pointing out that she is almost correct in claiming that “there is a gradual enervation of Nietzsche’s depiction of friendship and its importance for higher human beings.”¹⁰ There was certainly a departure from his view of optimistic view of friendship, but there was really nothing gradual about it. In fact, it is quite possible to argue that there is a clear and abrupt departure from his middle work to Zarathustra and beyond. One is hard-pressed to find anything praiseworthy said of friendship after his famous “*Incipit tragoedia*” at the end of the Book Four of *The Gay*

⁵ Ruth Abbey, “Circles, Ladders and Stars: Nietzsche on Friendship,” in *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*, eds., Preston King and Heather Devere (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 51. Nietzsche’s “middle period” is generally thought to include *Human, All too Human* (which includes *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* and *The Wanderer and His Shadow*), *Daybreak*, and the first four volumes of *The Gay Science*. In other words, everything after his fascination with Schopenhauer and Wagner up to the introduction of Zarathustra. Nietzsche himself divided his work into three periods, which he called “The Road to Wisdom.” See Eric Voegelin’s note, in *Collected Works*, vol. 25, p 251, where he also says “One cannot and should not dispense with it, but one should be aware that a too exclusive adherence to it is apt to obscure certain traits of Nietzsche’s thought that remain permanent throughout the three periods.”

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54-6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 56-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 60-1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

Science.¹¹ As it were, when Zarathustra left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains, so too did Nietzsche.

The problem with many commentators is that they almost invariably point to a thinker's personal life as the impetus for meditations on friendship. Jacques Derrida suggests this very thing when he claims that "the great canonical meditations on friendship... are linked to the experience of mourning, to the moment of loss—that of the friend or of friendship."¹² While this may be the case for Cicero, Montaigne and Blanchot, it simply cannot apply to Nietzsche. The claim is that the loss of a friend spurs the thinker to meditations on friendship. If, as Abbey claims, friendship is a central concern for Nietzsche during his middle period, then the moment of loss must have occurred at the end of the so-called first period, or at the beginning of the second. If there actually is any mourning or moments of loss in Nietzsche's personal life, these supposed ruptures begin either near the end of Nietzsche's second period or well into the third. For example, the death of Albert Brenner, the split with his old friend Carl von Gersdorff, the falling out with Richard Wagner, all take place in about 1879—and many of the middle period thoughts on friendship had been developed and written by this time.

Of the "moments of loss," as Derrida calls them, the most important to consider is Nietzsche's break with his friend Paul Rée and the woman to whom he twice proposed marriage, Lou Salomé. This episode had a profound effect on Nietzsche and occupies a central part of his biography. Readers with even a passing interest in Nietzsche are familiar with the photo of Nietzsche, Rée, and Salomé—Nietzsche and Rée are pulling a

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vantage Books, 1974), #342, 274.

¹² Jacques Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship," in *The Journal of Philosophy* (vol. 85: 1988), 643.

cart, in the cart is Salomé with a whip. The photo and the friendship between the three, however, was not a time of mourning for Nietzsche. Instead, it was when the friendships were very healthy that Nietzsche wrote *Human, All too Human*, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, and *The Wanderer and his Shadow*. But more importantly, it was while on very good terms with Rée and intimate terms with Salomé that Nietzsche introduced Zarathustra in *The Gay Science* and developed the plan for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In other words, both Nietzsche's praise of friendship and his so-called turn to solitude and misanthropy were written while he was on good terms with his friends.¹³

It is thus quite evident that Nietzsche's kind words, if we can call them that, regarding friendship therefore do not correspond with any particular "moment of loss" or period of mourning in his personal life. Similarly, his praise of solitude and more misanthropic writings were not begotten by any "moment of loss." Both periods, in fact, begin while he was still immersed in relatively happy friendships. As such, it is necessary to look elsewhere for Nietzsche's change of heart regarding friendship. I would like to suggest that rather than pointing to any biographical progenitor, we look at the great rupture in his thought that stands directly in the middle of these two positions on friendship.

¹³ For an excellent account of this "intellectual ménage à trios" see Safranski's chapter "Lou Salomé and the Quest for Intimacy" in op. cit., 221-75. An interesting account of the intellectual rift that developed between Nietzsche and Rée from the Salomé affair can be found in Brendan Donnellan's "Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul Rée: Cooperation and Conflict" in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* (vol. 43, no. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1982), 595-612. Irvin D. Yalom, in *When Nietzsche Wept* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), has written a fictive account of the psychological fallout Nietzsche suffered from the end of this friendship.

§2. The Eternal Recurrence and the End of Friendship

Nietzsche's middle period is also often referred to as his positivistic period. *The Dawn*, *Human, All too Human* and the first four books of *The Gay Science* are thought to be the central texts of this period. His late, mature works begin with the conception of Zarathustra. Let us therefore turn to what Nietzsche says about the turning point in his thought:

Now I shall relate the history of *Zarathustra*. The fundamental conception of this work, the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that is as all attainable, belongs in August 1881: it was penned on a sheet with the notation underneath, '6000 feet beyond man and time.' That day I was walking through the woods along the lake of Silvaplana; at a powerful pyramidal rock not far from Surlei I stopped. It was then this idea came to me.¹⁴

The turn to solitude therefore begins with the advent of Zarathustra, and Zarathustra is fundamentally about the Eternal Recurrence. It can be added here that this insight occurred to Nietzsche months before he even made his acquaintance with Lou Salomé.

In any case, as Safranski points out, the first three books of *The Gay Science* were written between August of 1881 and the early part of 1882—after the idea of the eternal recurrence had taken hold of him; after, as he reported to Peter Gast on August 14, 1881, he shed “tears of joy” in his “delight soared into ecstatic rapture” at having solved such a riddle.¹⁵ Thus, insofar as Nietzsche has two contrasting opinions of friendship, the divide between these two must therefore fall into the ideas presented in *The Gay Science*, but not just what falls after the introduction of Zarathustra at #342. What comes in the first 341 sections must also be regarded as part of Nietzsche's post-positivistic period and not only licit, but crucial to understanding his general thoughts on friendship.

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, transl. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 295.

¹⁵ As cited in Safranski, 235.

The Gay Science marks Nietzsche's turn from positivism to what we might call his post-rationalism. It is here that he makes the turn from reason to "taste." It is fairly widely agreed that Nietzsche was no great proponent of rationalism, but it is less common to couch his alternative in terms of taste. Moreover, even if we can talk about a contrast between rationalism and taste, it must also be kept in mind that for Nietzsche this turn is not for everyone. Taste, unlike rationalism, has no universal aspirations. In a section called "The greatest danger," Nietzsche suggests that it is only because the majority of mankind has considered their rationality, or "the discipline of their minds—their rationality" to be a matter of pride and virtue, that the human race has not perished. The greatest danger to mankind would be if there was ever "an eruption of madness—which means the eruption of arbitrariness in feeling, seeing, and hearing, the enjoyment of the mind's lack of discipline, the joy in human unreason."¹⁶ Whereas reason is non-arbitrary, taste is completely arbitrary. Taste resides in the abode of the particular, in the abode of what Nietzsche calls madness. Taste is dangerous, uncertain, unpredictable; intellect and reason are safe and, at bottom, aim at certainty and predictability. Nietzsche obviously prefers the former, but he is clear concerning the utility of the latter: "the virtuous intellects are needed—oh, let me use the most unambiguous word—what is needed is *virtuous stupidity*, stolid metronomes for the slow spirit, to make sure that the faithful of the great shared faith stay together and continue their dance."¹⁷ The madman, the one with a developed sense of taste, is the exception, and "there actually are things to be said in favor of the exception, *provided that it never becomes the rule.*"¹⁸ The

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #76, 130.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, #76, 131.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*.

exception is uncertain, unpredictable. The uncertain and unpredictable are good. One must have a taste for the exception. The exception is good. The exception is never common. The common is never good. The madman has a taste for the exception. The madman *is* the exception.

There is no reason, then, to give a rational account of the eternal recurrence. The eternal recurrence is a discovery that will be transmitted in a “tasteful” way, rather than a reasonable way. Consider the language Nietzsche invokes when he first presents the idea:

The greatest weight.— What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you in your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again—and you with it, speck of dust!"— Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine!" If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you; the question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more, and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? —¹⁹

The language of weight, of pain, of hearing, of moonlight, of gnashing teeth, of possession, is invoked. The idea is not presented as a proof, or as an argument. It is a story about a demon and a spider. It stimulates the imagination and the senses, not the rational mind.

In the same section of *Ecce Homo* that Nietzsche describes the irruptive idea of the eternal recurrence, he also describes a change in his taste: “If I reckon back a few months from this day, I find as an omen a sudden and profoundly decisive change in my

¹⁹ Ibid., #341, 273-74.

taste, especially in music. Perhaps the whole of *Zarathustra* may be reckoned as music; certainly a rebirth of the art of *hearing* was among its preconditions.”²⁰ But the change in taste at this time pertained not only to music. In Book Three of *The Gay Science*, in an aphorism called *Against Christianity*, Nietzsche declares another shift: “What is now decisive against Christianity is our taste, no longer our reasons.”²¹ The turn from his positivist period to his third period—from optimism regarding friendship to pessimism—therefore coincides with a shift from reason to taste. While he was always against Christianity and the old table of values, as he is wont to call it, his objection comes to be couched in the language of taste, rather than reason. The objection, then, must necessarily come from a madman, and this is precisely on whom Nietzsche calls to deliver his famous declaration of the death of God:

The madman.— Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the marketplace, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" —As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone away on a voyage? emigrated?—Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers."²²

What we know, then, is that Nietzsche’s opinion of friendship changed with his discovery of the eternal recurrence. Moreover, the eternal recurrence coincides with the madman’s “tasteful” murder of God. We also know that the eternal recurrence is not just a doctrine of affirmation that comes *ex nihilo*. In fact, it is no doctrine at all, as doctrines rely on

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 295.

²¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* #132, 186.

²² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* #125, 181. Book Three of *The Gay Science* opens with Nietzsche’s first iteration of this famous proclamation: “*New struggles.*— After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. —And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too” (#108, 167).

reason for their illumination. With the declaration of the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche is turning from all apperceived doctrines. He is introducing uncertainty and unpredictability. It would thus be better to refer to the eternal recurrence as a flavor. It is a flavor for which we must develop a taste. The eternal recurrence, as Nietzsche well-knows, is a tough pill to swallow and this is precisely why he calls it “the greatest weight.”

§3. The Eternal Recurrence and the End of Christianity

The eternal recurrence did not arise *ex nihilo*. Instead, it must be regarded as patently anti-Christian and part of an older debate. In his *City of God*, St. Augustine himself attacks the proponents of this understanding of time. There are those, Augustine argues, who suggest that humans might be happier if they opt out of the Christian vision of linear time—the vision of time that would have us born, live, then die a final death. As a way out of this worldly wretchedness, one might be tempted to repudiate time as process. That is, the unhappiness caused by the awareness of existence as merely a process toward diminution can be resolved by supposing “an infinite series of dissolutions and restorations at fixed periods in the course of ages.”²³ In short, one can propose a cyclical theory of time. With this theory one can say that although time may be a process toward death, there is consolation in the fact that one will return to the world in precisely the same manner, an infinite number of times. This alternative theory is therefore one in which time has neither beginning nor end. This position, of course, was

²³ Augustine, *City of God*, transl. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), Book XII, Section xii, p. 475.

the one held by Plato²⁴ and the Neo-Platonists and appears anew in Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same. Augustine calls proponents of this vision Physicists and says that in their postulates of periodic cycles,

they asserted that by those cycles all things in the universe have been continually renewed and repeated, in the same form, and thus there will be hereafter an unceasing sequence of ages, passing away and coming again in revolution. The cycles may take place in one continuing world, or it may be that at certain periods the world disappears and reappears, showing that same features, which appear as new, but which in fact have been in the past and will return in the future.²⁵

For Augustine this position is cause for even more unhappiness than what is supposed to arise from linear time. If the goal is happiness, and this goal is achieved through wisdom, then the cyclical theory of time would mean that one could never be happy in either this life or the next.

If we keep in mind that for Augustine happiness is found when certain desires are satisfied, then the reason for this rejection will be evident. In the Christian formulation, the desire of the soul is satisfied with Truth. Therefore the happy soul will be the soul with wisdom; one must keep in mind, however, that one can never be truly happy if one lives in fear of losing that which satisfies one's desires. One cannot live in fear, Augustine argues repeatedly, and be happy at the same time. Thus the wisdom that satisfies the soul must be eternal and eternally one's own. The problem with cyclical theories of time is that

they are utterly unable to rescue the immortal soul from this merry-go-round, even when it has attained wisdom; it must proceed on an unremitting alternation between false bliss and genuine misery. For how can there be true bliss, without any certainty of its eternal continuance, when the soul in its ignorance does not know of the misery to come or else unhappily fears its coming in the midst of its blessedness?²⁶

²⁴ Cf. *Timaeus*, 39d; *Laws*, 677a-680b.

²⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.xiv, p. 487.

²⁶ *Ibid.*.

Put otherwise, happiness is not true happiness if it is temporary happiness. This is either false bliss or deception and, according to Augustine, no man wants to be deceived. Thus to be happy, man requires wisdom that does not change and cannot be taken from him; he requires an eternal, singular, unification with eternal wisdom.

The problem with cyclical theories of time is that they “allow no room for the eternal liberation and felicity of the soul.”²⁷ Since liberation from the original corruption begins with the Incarnation, the intermingling of time and eternity and its concomitant promise of eternal felicity (life), cyclical theories of time must be refuted lest one also accept that Christ will die again and again—lest one accept that Christ himself is subject to eternal suffering. For this reason Augustine says that we must “escape from these false circuitous courses, whatever they may be, which have been devised by these misled and misleading sages, by keeping to the straight path in the right direction under the guidance of sound teaching.”²⁸ The straight path is, of course, the understanding of time characteristic of Christianity. In this view, humans must hold to a progressive movement of time, from a beginning point to a contemplated end, regardless of one’s happiness *en route*. For the sound teaching Augustine paraphrases Romans 6:9: “‘Christ died once for all for our sins’; and ‘in rising from the dead he is never to die again: he is no longer under the sway of death.’ After the resurrection ‘we shall be with the Lord forever.’”²⁹ In the Christian understanding, it is at the end of the process toward death that happiness

²⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.xv, p. 489.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, XII.xiv, p. 487-488.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XII.xiv, p. 488-489. A bit later Augustine re-iterates this point: “So let us keep to our straight way, which is Christ, let us take him as our guide and saviour, and turn our minds from the absurd futility of this circular route of the impious, and keep instead to the way of faith” (*City of God*, XII.xxi, p. 500)

is possible. In the Christian understanding, unpredictability and uncertainty are unacceptable.

§4. The Eternal Recurrence and the End of the Nation-state

That Nietzsche's declaration of the eternal recurrence is not just an alternative to, but a deep repudiation of, Christianity should be quite clear. Not only does he invert the very foundation of Christian theology, he has both the Madman and Zarathustra declare, "God is dead." His changed position regarding friendship therefore comes on the heels of this new turn from Christianity. The turn is new here, not because Nietzsche suddenly became anti-Christian, but because in his positivist period his opposition came from a more scientific vantage. With the eternal recurrence, however, Nietzsche also abandoned this vantage. This modern, positivist opposition, it occurred to him, was merely another sort of organic cosmology. In other words, the eternal recurrence rejects the Christian cosmic view but at the same time it is not a turn to the great "macrocosmic organism" of the modern rational world. In fact, the eternal recurrence also stands in direct opposition to this world. To be sure, the eternal recurrence presents a new experience on a cosmic level and with it, as Safranski states, Nietzsche is "establishing contact with the colossal vastness of which we are part, [but] it does not mean turning this vastness into a living organism, which would render it too pleasant, anthropomorphic, and reverent."³⁰ In his notebooks, just a few weeks after the discovery at Lake Silvaplana, Nietzsche wrote: "The modern scientific counterpart to the belief in God is belief in the universe as an organism: I find that revolting' (9,522)."³¹ His intention with the eternal recurrence is to

³⁰ Safranski, 226.

³¹ Cited in Safranski, 226.

steer very clear of this syrupy, sappy, organic oneness. In Safranski's words, "he ruled out any desire to return to the womb. [He] had not gone to all the effort of liberating himself from a sheltering God just to crawl back into the godlike womb of the universe."³²

The eternal recurrence is therefore more than a rejection of the universal God of Christianity—it is also a rejection of universal rationalism and the artificial categories spilling therefrom. We have already seen Nietzsche's invocation of taste, rather than reason, against Christianity. In terms of the artificial categories, his taste therefore also rebels against that most pervasive manifestation of universal rationalism, the nation-state. In Nietzsche's understanding, the nation-state itself grew directly out Protestant Christianity, which he calls a "peasant rebellion of the spirit,"³³ with Martin Luther in the vanguard. It was Luther's rebellion, after all, that replaced the church with the state. At first glance, this makes it sound like Nietzsche laments the end of the Roman Catholic Church; and if we make clear what Nietzsche understands by "church," it turns out that this is so:

Let us not forget in the end what a church is, as opposed to any 'state.' A church is above all a structure for ruling that secures the highest rank for the *more spiritual* human beings and that *believes* in the power of spirituality to the extent of forbidding itself the use of all the cruder instruments of force; and on this score alone the church is under all circumstances a *nobler* institution than the state.³⁴

For Nietzsche, then, both the church and the state are apparatuses formed for the administration of power. The state, however, is the immanent manifestation of precisely those who have no taste—which is to say, no taste for the exception. The state is

³² Safranski, 226.

³³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #358, 310.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, #358, 313.

therefore necessarily the embodiment of the crudely violent application of modern rationalism.

The church's authority, on the other hand, rested on the spiritual superiority of the priestly caste, and this authority was largely derived of the awe and reverence they inspired in the common people. This awe and reverence was in large part thanks to the fact that the priesthood abstained from sexual intercourse. As Nietzsche puts it, "three quarters of the reverence of which the common people, especially the women among the common people, are capable, rests on the faith that a person who is an exception at this point will be an exception in other respects as well."³⁵ Luther, however, gave women to the Protestant priests, and in so doing removed their spiritual authority. As a result, he also had to take from the priest the confessional, and the confessional is that institution that is a shining example of human beings relating to another human being, not through their reason, but through their "taste." Of course, in the confession the connection is not based on "taste" *per se*, but rather hearing, and hearing is precisely the art Nietzsche explicitly claims to be reintroducing with Zarathustra: "Luther, having given the priest woman, had to *take* away from him auricular confession; that was right psychologically. With that development the Christian priest was, at bottom, abolished, for his most profound utility had always been that was a holy ear, a silent well, a grave for secrets."³⁶

Out of Luther's Reformation, Nietzsche claims, grew several phenomena. First, when the people lost their taste for the hieratic character of the church, the new formula became "Everyone his own priest." Whereas formerly the priest embodied the higher spiritual type, the everyman-priest became the norm and the practice of associating with

³⁵ *Ibid.*, #358, 311-12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 312.

others through hearing (which is to say, taste) waned. This he calls the “plebeianism of the spirit” and is marked by the reliance on reason, or “cunning.”³⁷

In addition to the erosion of the authority of the church and the atrophy of the art of hearing, Nietzsche points to two other phenomena emerging from Luther’s revolt. In general terms he calls them “modern science” and “modern ideas,” and the most important manifestation of these is the nation-state and its unholy spawn, nationalism. The attack on Luther and the resulting nationalism picks up steam in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Here, in contrast to the nobility of spirit he sees in many Asian, which is to say, hieratic, cultures, he says,

one should recall Luther... that "most eloquent" and presumptuous peasant Germany has ever produced, and the tone he preferred when conversing with God. Luther's attack on the mediating saints of the church (and especially on "the Devil's Sow, the pope") was, beyond any doubt, fundamentally the attack of a lout who could not stomach the *good etiquette* of the church, that reverential etiquette of the hieratic taste which permits only the more initiated and silent into the holy of holies and closes it to louts. Here of all places the louts were to be kept from raising their voices; but Luther, the peasant, wanted it altogether different: this arrangement was not *German* enough for him: he wanted above all to speak directly, to speak himself, to speak “informally” with his God. — Well, he did it.³⁸

And above all, he did it in German. In short, the Reformation led by Luther effaced the old order—the hieratic order predicated on taste and the “nobility of spirit”—and replaced it with a rational, state-based order. The new basis for divisions in Europe ended up in the Thirty Year War, concluded with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and directly led to the birth of the nation-state and what he repeated calls “petty politics”.³⁹ Luther, Nietzsche claims, was “calamitously myopic, superficial, and incautious.”⁴⁰

³⁷ *Ibid.*.

³⁸ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, transl. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 145.

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 138.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, XXX.

So with the discovery of the eternal recurrence and the pronouncement of the death of God, Nietzsche is also pronouncing the end of the nation-state. It is important to recognize that this pronouncement also amounts to a renouncement—a renouncement of nationalism in general, but especially German nationalism. The founders of nationalism, like Luther, are called “ambitious artists who like to pose as ascetics and priests but who are at bottom only tragic buffoons.”⁴¹ Worse than these buffoons, Nietzsche points to the “latest speculators in idealism, the anti-Semites, who today roll their eyes in a Christian-Aryan-bourgeois manner and exhaust one’s patience by trying to rouse up all the horned-beast elements in the people by a brazen abuse of the cheapest kind of all agitator’s tricks” which deliberately lead to “national constriction and vanity, the strong but narrow principle ‘*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*,’ and then the *paralysis agitans* of ‘modern ideas.’”⁴² The eternal recurrence is a therefore a boundary—it is a gateway that, once crossed through, closes the door to both Christianity and the nation-state as the basis for friendship.

§5. The Groundless Ground of Friendship

In February of 1869, after being appointed assistant professor at the university in Basel, Switzerland, Nietzsche renounced his Prussian citizenship. There is really no evidence to suggest that this was a precondition of the appointment, but rather that Nietzsche gave it up out of a sense of duty to his new university. A few months later (April 17), it was made permanent when the Prussian government officially canceled his citizenship. Presumably Nietzsche was going to take Swiss citizenship, but because he

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 158.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 158-9.

never met the residency requirements, he never received it. As a result, he was legally stateless for the rest of his life. When, just over a year later (July, 1870) the Franco-Prussian war broke out, Nietzsche was granted a leave of absence from the university to participate in the war. However, because of his association with Switzerland, and his lack of Prussian citizenship, he could only participate as a medical orderly. Nietzsche, the stateless philologist, could only work as a stretcher bearer for just over two months, until he fell ill with dysentery and diphtheria. Following this experience, his health deteriorated forcing him to take medical leaves from the university until finally, in 1879, he retired from the university and began what can best be described as his nomadic period.

It is thus from this vantage that Nietzsche writes about friendship. About the time that he discovers the eternal recurrence, he finds himself a stateless man wondering Europe. His best friend is Paul Rée, a Jewish psychologist, he has twice proposed marriage to the itinerant daughter of a Russian aristocrat of Huguenot descent, he has been basically excommunicated by the scholarly world for his *Birth of Tragedy*, and his former friend Richard Wagner has turned to Christianity and anti-Semitism. Prior to the advent of the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche looked at Germany, German music and German culture in general as nourishment for an elevated sort of friendship. After the experience of the Franco-Prussian war, this all changed. Rather than looking at “Germans” and Germany as the ground for friendships, he began to think of the nation-state as a moribund entity breeding the wrong sort of relationships between people. The new ground for friendship could not be limited by the artificial boundaries of the nation-state and thus Nietzsche began referring to himself as a “good European.” As he puts it:

European man and the abolition of nations. – Trade and industry, the post and the book-trade, the possession in common of all higher culture, rapid changing of home and scene, the nomadic life now lived by all who do not own land—these circumstances are necessarily bringing with them a weakening and finally an abolition of nations, at least the European: so that as a consequence of continually crossing a mixed race, that of European man, must come into being out of them. This goal is at present being worked against, consciously or unconsciously, by the separation of nations through the production of *national* hostilities.⁴³

This “artificial nationalism” as he calls it, is the product of certain princely dynasties and businesses that can profit from such artificial boundaries. Once the source of these hostilities and their artificiality are recognized, “one should not be afraid to proclaim oneself a *good European* and actively work for the amalgamation of nations.”⁴⁴

It is quite clear that for Nietzsche, then, the very category of the nation-state had ceased to be the ground from which friendship can grow. The proclamation of the eternal recurrence is therefore as much a declaration of the death of God as it is a declaration of the death of the nation-state. Killing God and the nation-state, however, does little to cultivate a new ground for friendship. Instead, it forced him to declare, as early as *Human, all-too-Human*, “how uncertain is the ground upon which all our alliances and friendships rest, how close at hand are icy downpours or stormy weather, how isolated each man is!”⁴⁵ Without the church as the ground for “tasteful” relationships between man and man, without the nation-state as the proving ground for friendship, Nietzsche is stymied as to where he can turn.

It is in this light that the second part of the madman’s declaration of the death of God becomes clearer. The madman, we will recall, says we have killed God, that all of

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Human, All to Human*, #475, 174.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* For more on “Good Europeans,” see *Beyond Good and Evil* #241, *The Gay Science* #357, and *Genealogy of Morals*, 161.

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Human, All to Human*, #376, 148.

us are his murderer. But by killing God we have poisoned the soil out of which the nation-state grew. With neither God nor the nation-state, we must ask:

how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.⁴⁶

Without God, without the nation-state, we are without our customary horizons.⁴⁷ We simply have no anchor, no fixed point around which our friendships can revolve. We are, quite plainly, homeless, and friendship is left to teeter on uncertainty and unpredictability.

One of the most important (and neglected) passages in *The Gay Science* is called “*We who are homeless*.” It is here that Nietzsche begins searching for an alternative ground for friendship. Nietzsche writes: “Among Europeans today there is no lack of those who are entitled to call themselves homeless in a distinctive and honorable sense: it is to them that I especially commend my secret wisdom and *gaya scienza*.”⁴⁸ These proud and homeless ones, he claims, must be content in their homelessness. They must reject the manifold tasteless ideas being flung from the marketplace. They must reject both the conservatives on the right and the leftist reformers:

We “conserve” nothing; neither do we want to return to any past periods; we are not by any means “liberal”; we do not work for “progress”; we do not need to plug up our ears

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 125, 181.

⁴⁷ In the section immediately preceding The Madman, Nietzsche discusses the “Horizon of the infinite.” Here he exhorts us to sail into the infinite sea of uncertainty, to leave the land, and thus the familiar horizon, behind us. Cf. *Daybreak* #117.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* #377, 338.

against the sirens who in the market place sing of the future: their song about "equal rights," "a free society," "no more masters and no servants" has no allure for us.⁴⁹

In other words, he knows well that the sort of friendship he can grow neither from the moribund past nor from the ground of equality. Those who talk in these terms are just vendors screaming the slogans of petty politics.

In addition, just as these homeless must reject the "religion of pity" and humanitarianism, they must, in no uncertain terms, reject the growing tide of nationalism and petty politics of the most tasteless sort:

No, we do not love humanity; but on the other hand we are not nearly "German" enough...to advocate nationalism and race hatred and to be able to take pleasure in the national scabies of the heart and blood poisoning that now leads the nations of Europe to delimit and barricade themselves against each other as if it were a matter of quarantine. For that we are too openminded, too malicious, too spoiled, also too well informed, too "traveled": we far prefer to live on mountains, apart, "untimely," in past or future centuries, merely in order to keep ourselves from experiencing the silent rage to which we know we should be condemned as eyewitnesses of politics that are desolating the German spirit by making it vain and that is, moreover, petty politics.⁵⁰

And finally, these homeless must also reject the Christian alternative:

We have also outgrown Christianity and are averse to it -- precisely because we have grown out of it, because our ancestors were Christians who in their Christianity were uncompromisingly upright: for their faith they willingly sacrificed possessions and position, blood and fatherland. We -- do the same. For what? For our unbelief? For every kind of unbelief? No, you know better than that, friends! The hidden Yes in you is stronger than all Nos and Maybes that afflict you and your age like a disease; and when you have to embark on the sea, you emigrants, you, too, are compelled to this by -- a faith!⁵¹

The secret wisdom in *The Gay Science* is therefore a declaration of a new ground for friendship. It commends a yes-saying type of statelessness. It praises the type of man who, without Christianity, with a state, maintains his spirit and spiritedness. As Nietzsche puts it, "we are, in one word—and let this be our word of honor—good Europeans, the heirs of Europe, the rich, the oversupplied, but also overly obligated heirs

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 339-40.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 340.

of thousands of years of European spirit.”⁵² The secret wisdom Nietzsche is sharing in *The Gay Science* is his Yes-saying wanderer, Zarathustra.

§6. Zarathustra’s Teaching of Friendship

With Zarathustra, Nietzsche gives us the teacher of the eternal recurrence.⁵³ He gives us the figure who both gives an emphatic Yes to The Greatest Weight and shows others how to do the same. He gives us a figure who epitomizes the hidden Yes—the Yes to the ring of existence. He is the quintessential example of a man freed from the tastelessness of (Lutheran) Christianity and who has overcome such “modern ideas” as universal rationalism. However, in giving us this figure, Nietzsche also presents us with a “fugitive from all fatherlands and forefatherlands.”⁵⁴ Zarathustra, because he says Yes to the eternal recurrence, must also be saying no to the nation-state and Christianity. The whole of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I would like to argue, can be understood as Zarathustra’s quest for a type friendship that can grow out of this groundless ground—that can grow after the discovery of the eternal recurrence, the death of the Christian God, and the eclipse of the nation-state. Zarathustra the Godless is friendless, uprooted wanderer; the words his shadow might well be spoken by himself: “I am a wanderer, who has already walked far at your heels: always going but without a goal and without a home: so that, truly, I am almost the eternal Wandering Jew, except that I am neither eternal nor a Jew.”⁵⁵ Zarathustra, even more than he is the teacher of the eternal

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, transl. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 237.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 284. Shadows can never be eternal—at noon, or at “the great noontide” as Nietzsche is fond of saying, the man stands in the bright light of the day but he loses his erstwhile friend, his shadow.

recurrence, is the wandering teacher of post-modern friendship. As Zarathustra puts it, “I do not teach you the neighbor but the friend.”⁵⁶

In this vein, some insight might be had from considering Jacques Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche on friendship. According to Derrida, no one has “broken more radically than Nietzsche with the Greek or Christian canon of friendship”⁵⁷ According to Derrida, both the Greek and Christian canon associate friendship with the hearth, or the household, and thus there is always an underlying theme of brotherhood, or fraternity. For Derrida, this ground necessarily leads to an exclusionary type of friendship. It means that while it may be open and friendly to anyone who falls inside this range of fraternity, it is particularly hostile to those outside it. It is hostile to the “other,” and this includes the linguistically different, the racially different, the ethnically different, and, importantly, women. Thus in appropriating Nietzsche and his Zarathustra, Derrida thinks he has found a ground for “a friendship without hearth, of a *philía* without *oikeiôtes*. Ultimately without presence, without resemblance, without affinity, without analogy. Along with presence, truth itself would start to tremble. ...Is an *aneconomic* friendship possible?”⁵⁸ For Derrida, like Zarathustra, the task is to find a groundless ground for friendship.

Where Derrida departs from Zarathustra, and we should be very clear on this, where he departs from Nietzsche in general, is in his search for a universal and all-inclusive friendship. Derrida would like to construe friendship in *Zarathustra* as a

friendship to come and friendship for the future. For to love friendship, it is not enough to know how to bear the other in mourning; one must love the future. And there is no

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, transl. George Collins (New York: Verso, 1997), 34.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

more just category for the future than that of the ‘perhaps’. Such a thought conjoins friendship, the future, and the *perhaps* to open on to the coming of what comes—that is to say, necessarily in the regime of a possible whose possibilization must prevail over the impossible.⁵⁹

The friendship of the future is grounded on contingency and uncertainty. With this, Nietzsche would agree. The major departure is this: Derrida contends that because of this contingent uncertainty, we must be open to whatever may come. Derrida’s friendship of the future includes being open to any mendicant wanderer who may knock at our door. Like his post-modern brethren, he seeks to destroy all boundaries, to deconstruct all barriers. Nietzsche, on the contrary, seeks to destroy only the tasteless boundaries.⁶⁰

Moreover, in this description of friendship of the future, of a ‘perhaps’ friendship, one detects a sort of enthusiasm, in its most literal sense. In it, one almost hears parousiastic whispers. One would almost think that Derrida’s “friendship to come” is imbued with messianic undertones. If we look to the concluding line of Derrida’s original essay on friendship, this suggestion becomes less of a suggestion. Here he says that Nietzsche calls “the friend by a name that is no longer that of a neighbor, perhaps no longer that of a man.”⁶¹ John Caputo also reads Derrida in this way, stating that “the Nietzsche we find in *Politics and Friendship*... is a very *messianic*, somewhat Jewish Zarathustra... a Dionysian rabbi, a kind of ‘Abraham of Paris,’ a very heteromorphic figure of a Dionysus wrapped in a tallith unfurling a sacred scroll.”⁶² Friendship as being

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁰ As Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science* #204: “*Beggars and courtesy*. — ‘There is no lack of courtesy in using a stone to knock on a door when there is no bell’; that is how beggars feel and all who suffer some sort of distress; but nobody agrees with them.”

⁶¹ Derrida, “The Politics of Friendship,” 644.

⁶² John D. Caputo, “Who is Derrida’s Zarathustra? Of Fraternity, Friendship, and Democracy to Come,” in *Research in Phenomenology* (vol. 29: 1999), 192.

open to any mendicant wanderer who may knock at our door is thus bound up with both the Greek and Jewish tradition of hospitality. In the Greek tradition, one must be hospitable to the stranger because it might actually be a god in disguise. In the Jewish tradition, at Passover seders the door is opened and a cup of wine is poured for Elijah for similar reasons. In this tradition, or at least in the folklore tradition, there are tales of poor strangers coming to Passover seders who turn out to be angels, or messengers of God. Thus in the course of the proscribed seder, Jews state that anyone who is hungry should join them that night, not just for the sake of offering hospitality to any stranger sent by God, but because every visitor, particularly on Passover, may be godly or God-sent.⁶³

That Zarathustra wanders statelessly (like Nietzsche) with his shadow is clear. That Zarathustra is rejecting the neighbor (which is to say, Christianity) as the source of friendship is clear. That Zarathustra is seeking a groundless ground for friendship is also clear. But it is not so clear that Zarathustra is either seeking or waiting for a messiah. The messianic vision, like the Christian Parousiastic vision, contradicts the cyclical understanding of time found in the eternal recurrence. Soteriology, be it Christian or Hebraic, entails an End Time, which is precisely the closed, limited ground from which Nietzsche is departing. These messianic practices (if they can both be called that), may

⁶³ This Jewish tradition, commonly referred to as Elijah's Cup, is part of the Haggaddah that constitutes the set order and sayings in the Passover seder: "This cup of Elijah we have set aside. Why? On this night of our ancient deliverance from Egypt, the barriers to redemption are at their weakest. While any season may see the arrival of Elijah the Prophet, to help us find lasting reconciliation and peace, tonight his arrival is imminent. So in addition to the four cups we drink tonight, to recall the four promises fulfilled in our past liberation, we have a fifth cup made ready. When Elijah arrives, we will drink it to celebrate the fulfillment of a fifth promise, the promise of a world returned and healed. Century after century we have prepared this cup and left it untasted, yet tonight we have filled it again. Stubbornly, we continue to bear witness to the promise of a Day when all oppression and war shall cease, as it's written (Isaiah 19): 'None shall hurt, and none shall do harm, in all My holy mountain; For the land shall be as full of the knowledge of God, As the waters cover the sea.'"

appeal to Derrida, but they also depend on a virtue—namely pity—from which Nietzsche is departing.⁶⁴ Closedness and pity are not to Zarathustra's taste.

§7. Zarathustra's Asinine Friends

In saying that the future friend is perhaps no longer a man, Derrida might well be onto something else—one might also consider Zarathustra's animals. Zarathustra, we know, left his fatherland when he was thirty and went to live in solitude in the mountains. There he lived with his friends, the eagle and the serpent, for ten years until his cup began to overflow with wisdom. As Zarathustra says, "Behold! This cup wants to be empty again, and Zarathustra wants to be man again."⁶⁵ While his friendship with animals is salubrious for a time, it comes to pass that the wise man will need to be amidst those who will listen to him. The animals, it would seem, are not capable of eating the honey he has to offer; they cannot drink from the cup he has filled. The eagle and the serpent do not share his taste and it is precisely this—a friendship based on taste—that Zarathustra

⁶⁴ According to Ruth Abbey, attention to Nietzsche's ideas about friendship in his middle period will necessitate "a revision of the common interpretation that he is unremittingly skeptical about pity and other forms of fellow-feeling" ("Circles, Ladders, and Starts: Nietzsche on Friendship," 51). Attention to *Daybreak* #132-142 and *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* #68, both middle period works, might disabuse Abbey of this position. In this regard, Paul van Tongerán is perhaps more accurate when he rejects this sort of view, along with Derrida's "utopian reading of Nietzsche," in favor of the more tradition reading. For van Tongerán, "Nietzsche sees not only politics, but human beings themselves as being constituted by a violent act of submission, and characterized by an ongoing struggle for power" ("Politics, Friendship and Solitude in Nietzsche (Confronting Derrida's Reading of Nietzsche in *Politics of Friendship*), in *South African Journal of Philosophy* (vol 19, no. 3:2000), 209). For example, Zarathustra teaches that "Pity is importunate—be it the pity of a god, be it human pity: pity is contrary to modesty. And unwillingness to help may be nobler than that virtue which comes running to help" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 277). Nietzsche goes even so far as to say that God himself choked to death on pity (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 272).

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 39.

seeks. As he puts it a little later, “one day solitude will make you weary, one day your pride will bend and your courage will break. One day you will cry: “I am alone!”⁶⁶

When this happens to Zarathustra, he wanders down from his mountain looking for friends. On his way to the nearest town (called The Pied Cow—not coincidentally, a herd animal), he crosses paths with the holy hermit. The hermit, who also lives apart from other humans, has not heard the news that God is dead. That he is still clinging to this moribund category disqualifies him from being Zarathustra’s friend. So Zarathustra moves on to The Pied Cow where he finds a marketplace full of potential friends. Here he declares himself to be the teacher not of the eternal recurrence, but of the Superman: “*I teach you the Superman. Man is something to be overcome.*”⁶⁷ The scene resembles closely the Madman’s declaration in *The Gay Science*. There, however, the madman goes into the marketplace and declares the death of God. Here, Zarathustra goes into the marketplace and declares the Superman. The usual way of reading this is that Zarathustra is teaching that the current consciousness of mankind needs to be overcome; that should the people in the marketplace heed his advice, the human race will catapult into a new era of more highly evolved individuals. This is not altogether inaccurate, but there is another way to understand this teaching. When Zarathustra announces the Superman, he is actually teaching the way to a new mode of friendship. He is teaching the people a different way to be connected to one another.

We know that after the discovery of the eternal recurrence, the nation-state and Christianity no longer suffice as the ground for friendship—that the sort of friendship Nietzsche is seeking cannot be predicated on reason or Christian virtue (pity). Instead, he

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

suggests that taste is the best way to describe the groundless ground for friendship. We also know that taste is arbitrary, that taste resides in the abode of the madman, that the madman has a taste for the exception, that the madman is the exception. Now, listen to what Zarathustra says: “Behold, I teach you the Superman: he is this lightening, he is this madness!”⁶⁸ When Zarathustra enters the marketplace in *The Pied Cow*, he is teaching taste! He is asking them to “hear” him. He is teaching friendship not based on reason, not based on virtue, but rather on taste, that most dangerous, uncertain, and unpredictable mode of human articulation:

What is the greatest thing you can experience? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness grows loathsome to you, and your reason and your virtue also.

The hour when you say: ‘What good is my happiness? It is poverty and dirt and a miserable ease. But my happiness should justify existence itself!’

The hour when you say: ‘What good is my reason? Does it long for knowledge as the lion for its food? It is poverty and dirt and a miserable ease!’

The hour when you say: ‘what good is my virtue? It has not yet driven me mad! How tired I am of my good and my evil! It is all poverty and dirt and miserable ease!’⁶⁹

The people in the marketplace, of course, do not understand and his failure forces him to announce “the most contemptible man: and that is the *Ultimate Man*.”⁷⁰

Tracy Strong suggests that Zarathustra fails in the marketplace because the crowd does not share the same experiences. Teaching, he claims, “is an activity that can only meet with success when there is already a community of experience. One can’t teach or tell someone something unless the other person would be in a position to ask for that particular thing. Unless there were a preexistent community (of the unquestioned), telling something to someone, or trying to teach him virtue, is likely to be an expedition on the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 43. One is also here reminded of the light that comes to Paul on the road to Damascus; or, as at John 1:4, “the light that shines in the darkness.”

⁶⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 45.

wrong path.”⁷¹ If Strong is right, Zarathustra’s failure is problem of epistemology; to say that the crowd does not have the experience to understand is to say that they lack data. To experience is, at bottom, to gather data, and data provides the grist for comparing and contrasting what is known to what is unknown. To learn via experience is therefore to employ controls. It is, in modern parlance, to be empirical and it betrays a particular epistemological relation to one’s world and one’s community.

If we keep in mind that experience, empirical, empire, and imperial all grow from the same Greek root, this will be clearer. The Greek root is *peras*, which means end, or limit, or boundary. What Zarathustra, the teacher of the eternal recurrence, the teacher of the “madness” is teaching, is a friendship that defies these limits. It resides outside the artificial boundaries begotten of pity and reason. The problem in the market place, contrary to what Strong would have us think, is not one of epistemology. The problem is that the crowd lacks taste. They lack taste for the exception, for what is different. They yearn for certainty and predictability. As Zarathustra puts it, they are they herd, and “everyone wants the same thing, everyone is the same: whoever thinks otherwise goes voluntarily into the madhouse.”⁷²

The herd of Ultimate Men cannot have had the same experience as Zarathustra. They simply do not have an ear for Zarathustra’s song. They look, but cannot hear, prompting Zarathustra to say, “There they stand (he said to his heart), there they laugh: they do not understand me, I am not the mouth for these ears.”⁷³ He knows they have ears. He knows they can hear. But they look at him and can only blink. To found the

⁷¹ Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 174.

⁷² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 46.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 45. The line is repeated almost *verbatim* at 49.

friendship Zarathustra is seeking they must hear with their eyes. They can only relate to him as a friend if they somehow invert their senses. They must elongate their ears. They need to open their eyes and hear him. The traditional association of knowing with seeing must be shattered. As Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science*, their senses must work vicariously: “‘Our eyes are also intended for hearing,’ said an old father confessor who had become deaf; ‘and among the blind he that has the longest ears is king.’”⁷⁴

So Zarathustra finds himself in The Pied Cow amidst a herd of Ultimate Men. For him, the people are like animals, but not like the proud and wise animals he left at his cave.⁷⁵ Zarathustra leaves his solitude to teach a new type of friendship. He comes into the marketplace to teach the crowd how to hear the “hidden Yes” that lies in them. He comes to teach them to say Yea to the eternal recurrence. Instead, they say yea to the Ultimate Man: “‘Give us this Ultimate Man, O Zarathustra’ — so they cried — make us into this Ultimate Man! You can have the Superman!”⁷⁶ They say yea, but do it like the animal with the longest ears, the jackass.

In what is perhaps the funniest joke in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche invokes the ass. In German, the Yes Zarathustra’s teaching is supposed to invoke is Ja. The braying of an ass is rendered I-A, a virtual homonym. In the Hollingdale translation Ja is Yea, and I-A is ye-a. The herd of Ultimate Men are portrayed as a mostly contented lot, happy with their “miserable ease.” Their capacity for friendship with Zarathustra comes more fully to light when he states:

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* #223, 211.

⁷⁵ When Zarathustra sends the Ugliest Man to his cave, he says, “And first of all and above all speak with my animals! The proudest animal and the wisest animal—they may well be the proper counselors for both of us!” (279).

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 47.

Truly, I dislike also those who call everything good and this world the best of all. I call such people the all-contented.

All-contentedness that knows how to taste everything: that is not the best taste! I honour the obstinate, fastidious tongues and stomachs that have learned to say 'I' and 'Yea' and 'No'.

But to chew and digest everything—that is to have a really swinish nature! Always to say Ye-a—only the ass and those like him have learned that.⁷⁷

The herd at The Pied Cow is neither bovine nor porcine. They are Zarathustra's asinine friends. They are animals, but not like the proud and wise animals waiting for him at his cave. They have tongues, but they have no taste. They have long, asinine ears, but they hear nothing. They may have left Christian virtue behind, they may have abandoned the nation-state as the ground for their friendships, but they do not hear the Dionysian song of Zarathustra. We are reminded of a tale Nietzsche recounts elsewhere:

'O Dionysus, divine one, why do you pull me by my ears?' Ariadne once asked her philosophic lover during one of those famous dialogues on Naxos. 'I find a kind of humor in your ears, Ariadne: why are they not even longer?'

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.