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“On The Love of All and None”

Jaime McCaffrey¹ and Tore Levander²

Abstract

Nietzsche’s Zarathustra—a book for all and none—champions a love of the world and an embrace of life. Zarathustra’s embrace of life and eternal becoming is, in German, Lust: taking pleasure in all that becomes—one’s own life and the entire world of existence—eternally. “[Lust] wants the eternity of all things” (Z “Drunken Song” §11). It is an overflowing sort of love, too grand to be directed toward one person.

In his love of all humans, all things, Zarathustra remains unable to acknowledge this Other. In order to love the Other as an equal, Zarathustra would have to forego his love of everyone. The other presents the Abgrund that can only be crossed with a tightrope. A love of everything and everyone is equally a love of no one: no one but oneself, but one’s own world. It is life on a mountain peak.

In its wanting eternity, Lust has no room to accommodate an Other. Is it possible, then, for Zarathustra to love another as an equal? Is there an Other that can exist for Zarathustra at all—or in order to love everything and everyone, must he remain alone? Drawing from a number of specific sections in Zarathustra, we will explore the possibility of loving the Other as an equal, considering the risks and dangers that a mutual love between Zarathustra and an Other might entail. Equal love—sharing in becoming—means relinquishing the solidity of one’s ground in order to experience the Other’s world.

Keywords: Nietzsche; Zarathustra; German; Lust

Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is, as the subtitle proclaims, “a book for all and none.” Maybe this subtitle is easily forgotten as the reader begins their under-going into the work, enmeshed in vivid details and beautiful meanders as they descend the mountain and into the complicated world of man. Yet, it is illuminating to always circle back to this contradiction, to stumble again and again over the question: *how can something be for everyone—and for no one?*

Zarathustra himself embodies this contradiction in his treatment of love and in his relationships with various figures throughout the work. Zarathustra claims often to love humans, to love the world, to love his animals, to love life, suffering, and eternity—but it is not a familiar, everyday sort of love of which he speaks. Zarathustra’s love is more akin to German *Lust*, a joyous embrace of eternity, a love of all. *Lust* seems to preclude Zarathustra

¹ Jaime McCaffrey, PhD student, University of Kentucky, Lexington, United States. E-mail: jlmc288@g.uky.edu

² Tore Levander, PhD student, Fordham University, United States. E-mail: tlevander@fordham.edu



from a more contemporary, ideal love between equals, that would define love between equals as a voluntarily relinquishing of the solidity of one's ground in order to experience the Other's world. *Lust* makes this relinquishing impossible, and in his love of *all*, Zarathustra is consigned to a love of *none* as well. In order to truly love all, Zarathustra must remain alone.

In his love of *all* humans, *all* things, Zarathustra remains unable to acknowledge this Other. In order to love the Other as an equal, Zarathustra would have to forego his love of *everyone*. It is easy to love the *idea* of "everything," because it cannot be encountered in the world. The Other presents the abyss, the *Abgrund* that seems as if it can only be crossed with a tightrope. To love another, Zarathustra would have to risk himself, to sacrifice his *everything*: the very completeness of experience which is that which he lovingly embraces. Drawing from several of Nietzsche's works and focusing specifically on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra's* "The Convalescent," we will explore the possibility of loving the Other as an equal, considering the risks and dangers that a mutual love between Zarathustra and an Other might entail.

Nietzsche has a variety of conceptions of love. There is the Christian love, love of one's neighbor, and the pity which he abhors. Love is at times sexual desire that desires not the Other as they are, but as the lover wants them to be. The lover's desire exaggerates certain aspects of the beloved and presents a false image of them. In "The things people call love," Nietzsche writes that although people often think of the terms avarice and love as being entirely opposed, they are actually quite similar. He describes how, for example, the pity taken on somebody who is suffering is seen as love, but, in reality, it is our desire "...to exploit this opportunity to take possession of him," which brings the one who pities a feeling of pleasure (GS §14)³. Nor is sexual love any different: the lover "...wants sole possession of the person for whom he longs," they want their lover entirely for themselves, and to incorporate the beloved into themselves (§14). However, possession—love and avarice at once—is really our attempt to maintain our pleasure in our worlds by "changing something new into ourselves" (§14). Thus, desire for possession is born out of a lack of satisfaction with oneself, a satisfaction which can never be filled by any possession because the act of possessing reduces the attraction of the possession. We become tired of our possession in possessing, meaning we become tired of ourselves, and thus we desire some other possession to fill this lack of satisfaction (§14). Therefore, for Nietzsche sexual love is always doomed to the same lack of dynamism because it is based on this possessive desire; it can be used-up.

Yet, there is a kind of love that Nietzsche continues to uphold in various formulations: *amor fati*, Zarathustra's Joy (German *Lust*, meaning delight, pleasure, and desire), a will to power or saying yes to life. All of these loves want the recurrence of everything, everything renewed eternally in the process of eternal becoming. "Joy wants *all* things' eternity, *wants deepest, deep Eternity!*" (Z: 4 "The Drunken Song" §11).⁴ "*Amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it...but love it" (EH "Clever" §10).⁵ Zarathustra's *Lust* is a love

³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage books-Random House, New York, 1974.

⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Graham Parkes, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005.

⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books-Random House, New York, 1989.



beyond the petty individual constraints of interpersonal love and desire: it is a love of the world, of oneself as they are, not as one wants them. *Lust* is an embrace of—a taking pleasure in—everything, not just our happiness or goodness, but all things, as they will return eternally.

Maybe *Lust* is, rather, a love that cannot love any *particular* subject, or any *particular* thing, any *particular* becoming. *Lust* finds pleasure in the whole of the recurring of everything. The character of Zarathustra too does not love individual people. He says that he loves all humans, he seems to love his animals, and his sun, but never an individual *Other*. Zarathustra cares for the tightrope walker, but only in the final moments of his life and after his death in burying him. Zarathustra cares for the tightrope walker precisely because he embodies a dangerous crossing-over of the abyss, one of Zarathustra's ideals. Yet Zarathustra, like his sun, wants to give, to empty himself and to be received, to teach the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Other people are required for Zarathustra to pour himself out to, to teach, and to shine like the sun. But is it possible to embrace and receive the other within *Lust*, this kind of joyous love of all things? Within the embrace of saying yes to eternity, is there no longer room for an Other, an *equal*, someone with whom one can go under?

In his ideal of a loving embrace of all, does Zarathustra consign himself to an existence alone, in which it is impossible to share his world with one he could consider an equal?

Zarathustra, after his going-under, returns to his cave with his animals as a man sick with the world. In sickness the world quite literally *becomes bad*: once pleasant things become intolerable, tastes and smells are dull and nauseating, time passes unbearably slowly, and beauty is difficult to see. Sickness is inarticulate and muted, turning your body against you, turning your world grim and gray; in sickness one discovers easily the contingency of life and sensation, sensation and world. Before collapsing into a state of mute illness, Zarathustra declares:

Hail to me! You are coming—I hear you! My abyss is *speaking*, my ultimate depth
I have turned out into the light!

Hail to me! Come! Give me your hand—ha! Let go! Haha! — Disgust, disgust,
disgust! — — woe is me! (Z: 3 “The Convalescent” §1)

Zarathustra expresses his sickness here as a symptom of revealing, a vomiting-up of his abyss. He articulates later that his sickness, the contents of his abyss, was a “...great loathing for the human being” (§2). Zarathustra's great loathing is for both the evil of the human being—and how truly “small” even this seemingly great evil is. He is profoundly disgusted and repulsed by the world in which he has taken part, and he expresses in his convalescence,

“The great loathing for the human being—*that* is what choked me and had crawled
into my throat; and what the soothsayer foretold:

“All is the same, nothing is worthwhile, knowing chokes.”

“A long twilight limped ahead of me a death-weary, death-drunken mournfulness
that was talking with a yawning mouth.”

"Eternally it returns, the human being you are so weary of, the small human being"--thus yawned my mournfulness and dragged its feet and could not go to sleep.

'The humans' earth became for me a cave, its chest sank in, all that was alive became for me humans' decay and bones and moldering past.' (§2)

Zarathustra collapses and does not move, refusing food for seven days, attended only by his loyal animals, who pile him with fragrant plants and fruits (his eagle brings him two lambs--the eagle's favorite food). "At last, after seven days, Zarathustra raised himself up on his pallet, took a rose apple in his hand, smelled it, and found its fragrance delightful" (§2). Zarathustra's delight in the smell of the rose apple signals the progress of his convalescence: the state in which one's world begins to mend from sickness, appearing no longer repulsive and isolating. Zarathustra smells the fruit, delighting in sense, but does not eat it. Perhaps he is not yet ready to. An embrace of the world is the condition of possibility for eating: eating consigns one to material existence, and to enjoy food is to embrace the quiet facticity of one's life, to admit that body *is* world. The convalescent Zarathustra is not yet capable of eating, of such thorough acceptance and contingency. He remarks that the world outside of his cave is "like a garden" to him, but is not yet capable of venturing into it, finding small delights in discrete things: the fragrance of the fruit, the chatter of his animals, the very nature of language and tone. A loving return to the world would demand that Zarathustra step out of his cave, would demand that Zarathustra be capable of eating, of folding the world into himself through his loving embrace of it.

Yet--do we love another like we love a *fruit*? Of course not--we want to say: a fruit is something pleurably consumed. It is food. But here we find ourselves stuck. If to come into health from convalescence is to re-embrace the whole of the world, to *eat*, then how can we love another person simultaneously? To love the whole of the world, must one love the other as one loves a fruit: love as a pleasant integration *into* one's world? True love of another, according to Zarathustra, might be simply consumption: to appropriate the Other into one's world, as one consumes some fruit. While eating is in a way the ultimate act of acceptance of the world--to join the bodies of the world into one's own, to feed on that which is outside oneself--it is fundamentally an act of destruction, of digestion--one which might popularly be seen as antithetical to love. Eating marks our acceptance and love the world--the world cannot be that which makes one sick if one is capable of eating. We love the world by consuming, by integration. When we try to love the other, we end up loving our seeming-connected. The convalescent Zarathustra proposes another option: an attempt to bridge the "cleft" between one and another:

'How lovely it is that there are words and tones: are words and tones not rainbows and seeming-bridges between what is eternally separated?

'To every soul belongs another world; for every soul every other soul is a world behind [*Hinterwelt*].

'Between just what is similar does seeming deceive most beautifully: for the smallest cleft is the hardest to bridge.



‘For me—how could there be an outside-me? There is no outside!

‘But with all tones we forget that; how lovely it is that we forget!’ (§2)

The tragedy of loving is that we are never able to cross the bridge into the other’s *Hinterwelt*, something always remains hidden and even our basis for connection (our words and tones) is the illusion of connection. We oscillate between acceptance (or forgetfulness) of this ontological separation and the realization that no, this gap is unbreachable, and that the other forever remains insolubly apart—even if by hair’s breadth. In the latter realization, our love can only take the form of consumption: we try to take in what we cannot merge with, we bridge the abyss between us and the other from which our nausea arises—with that consumption. Neither does Zarathustra remain in his sickness and nausea nor does he live in forgetting of that which deceives. Instead, he insists upon his separation from the world in order to love it. Even in eating we are forgetting.

Forgetting—not an ignorance of an underlying truth, something true regardless of whether one realizes it or not; rather, forgetting changes the facticity of the situation. If we recall that “...there is no ‘being’ behind doing...the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything,” then, what constitutes a forgetting of those seeming-bridges other than a real difference in our being as intersubjective (GM I §13)? That is, we are no longer actually separate, but we are becoming with and through an Other. Yet, Zarathustra insists on his separateness being ontologically prior to the very crossing over to another, which he thinks cannot be breached—what an assumption: that there is a ‘within and without’ which I am capable of attempting to bring into relations, which is capable even of *failing to relate*. Forgetting is the foundation of what constitutes relating.

If this “smallest cleft” is the one between souls, bridged by language which does not stand up to interrogation, does *Lust* inevitably lead to a sort of inescapable, but pacified solipsism where one must consume the other in order to be together with them? Must the other become a part of one’s world to be loved at all? And yet, it is Zarathustra’s love of people that sickens him, that makes him vomit his abyss into the light. *This* is his sickness, and his convalescence from it leads him into conversation with his soul, until he eventually speaks with Life. Here, it seems, is the pinnacle of Zarathustra’s convalescence: a quiet moment alone with Life, who herself seems very much alive and present there with him as another person would be. Life accuses Zarathustra of not being true enough to her, she laments, “You have long not loved me as much as you say you do; I know you are thinking you want to leave me soon” (*Z*: 3 “The Other Dance-Song” §2). Life and Zarathustra then share a moment of silent, non-sexual intimacy: “And we looked at each other and gazed upon the soft green meadow, over which the cool evening was just then spreading, and wept with one another. —But just then Life was dearer to me than all my Wisdom had ever been”(§2).

Though he admits that his love of Life—personified as a woman—is more important even than his Wisdom, Zarathustra, fully healed from sickness, declares his ultimate love of *Eternity*, not Life. Life is the one who he embraces, and yet *Eternity* is the one for whom Zarathustra declares his love: Eternity that is beyond birth, beyond becoming, beyond Life, somehow grander, more ideological—

Perhaps safer.

To love Eternity is to triumph over it. Zarathustra's love and embrace of suffering is perhaps what makes it bearable for him to live at all. To love Eternity is to force oneself to love that which shimmers and changes, that which causes great suffering and always slips out of one's grasp: it is to equate Eternity and Being. To love eternity is to love the circle itself. This conquering love is one which consumes. Like eating a fruit, to love eternity is to consume it. It is to escape the circle. This loving embrace of *Eternity*—this return to a joyful embrace of all that Nietzsche terms *Lust*—signals that Zarathustra's convalescence is complete. The end of Zarathustra's convalescence allows him to return to the world, to his teaching.

Perhaps Zarathustra cannot love Life: because she is like him. She is perhaps the *most* like him out of any others that Zarathustra encounters on his journey, if we take their encounter as a literal one. She can speak with him, embrace him, and weep with him. Yet it is impossible for him to love her as he loves his world, through *Lust*, because he cannot consume her: she would compromise the self-sustaining integrity of his world. In the existence of another human, *an* equal with which Zarathustra can look upon the world, Zarathustra is confronted with something that would compromise the hermetically-sealed integrity of his convalescence. The world he must love is *his* world. Life—or the shared presence of another—presents to Zarathustra a *Hintervelt*, a world behind, which he cannot control. In loving Life, another, a *woman* (god forbid!), Zarathustra would have to accept that he did not have access to the everything, to the *all*. Eternity though—

Eternity cannot converse.

Lust is a love born out of the incapacity to love only one person, one state of being, and requires an embrace of everything; "Joy wants *all* things' eternity..." (Z: 4 "The Drunken Song" §11). *Lust*, in desiring eternity, ends up sacrificing any space for an Other: it is necessarily an embrace of all that is. *Lust*, as located within the individual, is a pleasurable embrace of all of becoming—of one's own life and the entire world of existence—eternally. It is a loving embrace of everything as it is and as it will be in its eternal becoming, and in so doing it is an embrace of oneself and life as such. Alone, *Lust* is life-affirming and triumphant, embracing all facets of a life that is messy, painful, beautiful, and always becoming. But alongside another, *Lust* is a smothering, consumptive sort of love. It declares to the other: either become *me* or stay out.

It feels anachronistic to turn to Nietzsche, of all people, for some sort of cohesive explanation of love. But what about our failure to love? Like Zarathustra's knowledge, every love begins as the cup overflowing, wanting to be only for the Other, pouring out everything you are. Every love ends when, having lost yourself, your nausea for the other sends you up to great heights, alone. But when you come down, wanting to overflow for others, are you not smothering the other? Instead of wanting what they are, you drown them in yourself. Yet, in seeking the Other to fill up one's cup, one is utilizing their love in order to fill a lack, a lack that, when sated, will no longer need the Other to fill it. It will no longer need the Other at all.

As a society, it seems we've sidelined the question communally and left it up the discretion of the individual: whether people are or are not in love is up to those involved, and no one else can certify their love but them. It is possible, also, that we collectively have suspended



the question of love altogether, favoring the investigation of the practical and psychological dimensions of human romance and relationships to a more philosophical examination of love. We are invested in learning how to be better partners, for instance, but not in reflecting on the nature of our love conceptually. Saying, ‘I love you,’ then, takes on the meaning of the highest and fullest expression of the bond of that relationship, but it is, in itself, empty, when we realize we are often utterly inarticulate in the face of it. ‘I love you’ signifies something else: the seriousness of the relation, the overwhelming strength of a feeling, one’s commitment, trust, or vulnerability, but it tells us nothing about how we are relating to one another in our love, it tells us nothing about what our love is doing to ourselves or to the beloved. Why not do away with it altogether—it is, after all, just another word that Zarathustra might call rainbow or “seeming bridge,” reinforcing a fiction—why not express and live through our actions, what our words can only gesture toward without meeting?

Maybe it’s possible, even, to find the very ground of romantic love between equals in the *Hinterwelt*—not as an obstacle or a source of skepticism, but as a necessary condition *for* relating. Love that *consumes*, like Zarathustra’s *Last*, will eventually have eaten and digested its fruit, destroyed the pleasant striving which drove him to eat in the first place. The unknown, the mystery, the *Hinterwelt* in all souls, can never be dragged out into the light, neither fully mapped nor fully consumed. To love another as an equal, then, could mean a knowing embrace of the *Hinterwelt*: both the unknowable and the not-yet-known about the Other. One can choose to be skeptical, to feel defeated by that which cannot be apprehended or fully known. But, with the right comportment, the *Hinterwelt* can serve as a horizon, a destination that pushes itself eternally back, never fading, but always changing form—and therefore as a source of dynamism in love. There is power and a humble, vulnerable embrace in saying ‘I love you in spite of what we cannot hope to comprehend about each other.’ Further: ‘I love you, because I do not fear what I cannot know of you.’ The best we can do is intertwine ourselves, to be together in intimacy, to *converse* with respect—not fear—of the unknown. We must respect that the act of loving can undo us, and perhaps that is for the best. To truly love another as an equal—to attempt to share a perspective, a life, a world—is to love this “smallest cleft,” and to attempt to cross it, while fully embracing that it is the hardest to bridge-over (Z: 3 “The Convalescent” §2).

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