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***Nietzsche and «the Friend as a Cork».  
Classical Sources and Hermeneutical Perspectives.***

Abstract: In the section *On the Friend of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we find some metaphors which are really rare in Nietzsche. One of these is the friend as 'the cork': an interesting expression (1) for the peculiarity of the image, which usually is associated with a negative meaning rather than a positive one, (2) for the ancient roots of this metaphor, (3) finally for the light that, once understood, it can shed on the Nietzschean idea of friendship. In line with this three-fold articulation, we will divide our paper into three parts. In the first, we will verify the contexts in which the term 'Kork' appears in Nietzsche's work. In the second, we will try to understand which authors Nietzsche may have made reference to in coining this metaphor (Pindar, Aeschylus, Lucian of Samosata). Finally, we will try to demonstrate the light that the term 'friend as cork' can shed – in general – on the interpretation of the question of friendship in Nietzsche.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Friend, Cork, Greeks

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**1) Introduction**

*On the Friend*

'One is always too many around me' – thus thinks the hermit. 'Always one times one – in the long run that makes two!'

I and me are always too eager in conversation: how could I stand it if there were no friend?

For the hermit the friend is always a third: the third is the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths.

Oh, there are too many depths for all hermits. That is why they long so for a friend and his height.

Our faith in others betrays the areas in which we would like to have faith in ourselves. Our longing for a friend is our betrayer.

And often one uses love merely to leap over envy. And often one attacks and makes an enemy in order to conceal that one is open to attack<sup>1</sup>.

It is the beginning of Zarathustra's 14<sup>th</sup> *Discourse*. An apparently secondary theme, that of friendship, in Nietzsche's work. Yet just a quick search<sup>2</sup> is enough to make it clear that Nietzsche returned to this theme in at least thirty crucial passages and that the term 'friend' (and other related terms) appear in his writings more than 3000 times. It is no coincidence that several critics have dealt with the issue of friendship in Nietzsche recently<sup>3</sup>. It is not our intention to reconstruct this issue in its entirety. It is too extensive to

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z), trans. Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge 2006, 40.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Nietzschesource – Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe*: [www.nietzschesource.org](http://www.nietzschesource.org)

<sup>3</sup> Sheridan Hough, *Nietzsche's Noontide Friend: The Self as Metaphoric Double*, Pennsylvania State 1997; Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. by George Collins, London 1997; Ruth Abbey, "Circles, Ladders, and Stars: Nietzsche on Friendship", *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2 (1999), 50–73; Paul J.M. van Tongeren, "Politics, Friendship and Solitude in Nietzsche (Confronting Derrida's Reading on Nietzsche in *Politics of Friendship*)", *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 19/3 (2000), 209–221; Arno Böhler, *Unterwegs zu einer Sprache der Freundschaft. DisTanz: Nietzsche – Deleuze – Derrida*, Wien 2000; Klaus-Dieter Eichler, "In deinem Freund sollst du deinen besten Feind haben", in Rudiger Schmidt-Grepaly / Steffen Dietzsch (eds.), *Nietzsche im Exil*, Weimar 2001, 164–185; Babette E. Babich, "Nietzsche's Imperative As a Friend's Encomium: On Becoming the One You Are, Ethics, and Blessing", in *Nietzsche Studien* 32 (2003), 29–58; Joshua Foa Dienstag, "Nietzsche's Friends and Enemies", *The Review of Politics*, 62 (2000), 351–364; Dana Freibach-Heifetz, "Pure Air and Solitude and Bread and Medicine: Nietzsche's Conception of Friendship", *Philosophy Today* 49 (2005), 245–255; Paul J.M. van Tongeren, "On Friends in Nietzsche's Zarathustra", *New Nietzsche Studies* 5: 3/4 and 6: 1/2 (Winter 2003 / Spring 2004), 73–88; Niels Helsloot, "Gaya Scienza: Nietzsche as Friend", *New Nietzsche Studies*, 6: 1/2 (2005), 89–104; Richard Avramenko, "Zarathustra and His Asinine Friends: Nietzsche and Taste as the Groundless Ground of Friendship", in John von Heyking / Richard

be dealt with in the short space of a paper. Instead we have chosen a single aspect, i.e. the image of the cork.

It is not the only metaphor in *On the Friend*. In fact, we could easily see how this discourse is completely interwoven with unique and characteristic expressions: the friend as the third one (*der Dritte*), as a height (*Höhe*), as pure air (*reine Luft*), as bread (*Brod*), as medicine (*Arznei*), as redeemer (*Erlöser*), as the best enemy (*besten Feind*); and, in the speech *On Love of the Neighbor*, in which the theme of friendship returns: the friend as festival of the earth (*das Fest der Erde*), as overflowing heart (*überevolles Herzen*), as a sponge (*Schwamm*), as a bowl of goodness (*eine Schale des Guten*)<sup>4</sup>.

Nietzsche dedicated more metaphors to friendship in his other writings. However, even limiting ourselves to the pages of *Zarathustra*, we see that these images are, to some degree, *hapax* in the Nietzschean corpus: almost diamond-words, pearl-images, to be guarded and used sparingly. You cannot use them without scruple to talk about just anything. They can indicate only this specific experience, in its precious singularity. Consider the term «festival of the earth», which appears only in *On Love of the Neighbor*, to indicate the friend.

The friend shall be your festival of the earth and an anticipation of the overman.

I teach you the friend and his overflowing heart. But one must understand how to be a sponge, if one wants to be loved by overflowing hearts.

I teach you the friend in whom the world stands complete, a bowl of goodness – the creating friend who always has a completeworld to bestow.

Consider the idea of the world as a «a bowl of goodness» which is only found in two *Posthumous Fragments* from 1882<sup>5</sup>. Consider the expressions *Vorgefühl des Übermenschen* and *überevolles Herz* which appear only in these pages of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

One of these *hapax* metaphors that, in our opinion, is particularly attractive is that of the «Kork» (cork). We found it in the passage that we began with. It is an interesting expression:

- 1) for the peculiarity of the image, which usually is associated with a negative meaning rather than a positive one;
- 2) for the ancient roots of this metaphor (and, remember, for Nietzsche, «the Greeks alone often and repeatedly ventilated the subject of friendship, so that they

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Avramenko (eds.), *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, Notre Dame 2008, 287-314; Babette Babich, «Become the One You are: On Commandments and Prais – Among Friends», in Thomas E. Hart (ed.), *Nietzsche, Culture, and Education*, London 2009, 13-38; Robert C. Miner, «Nietzsche on Friendship», in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 40 (2010), 47-69; Graham M. Smith, *Friendship and the Political: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche*, New York 2011; Paul J.M. van Tongeren, «Kant, Nietzsche and the Idealization of Friendship into Nihilism», in *Kriterion: Revista de Filosofia*, 54 (128), 2013, 410-417; Willow Verkerk, «Nietzsche's Cruel Offerings Friendship, Solitude, and the Bestowing Virtue in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*», in Horst Hutter / Eli Friedland (eds.) *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching. For Individuals and Culture*, New York 2013, 61-72; Jonas Holst, «Ethik der Freundschaft. Über eine nachgelassene Idee im Werk Friedrich Nietzsches», *Nietzscheforschung* 20:1 (2013), 379-389; Willow Verkerk, «On Love, Women, and Friendship: Reading Nietzsche with Irigaray», *Nietzsche Studien* 46 (2017), 135-152; Ana Romero-Iribas / Graham M. Smith, «Friendship without Reciprocation? Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Blanchot», in *The Good Society* 27: 1-2 (2018), 1-28; Willow Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, London 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Z, 45.

<sup>5</sup> 1) Nachlass 1882, KSA 10, 4[174]: «Die Welt steht fertig da, eine goldene Schale des Guten — aber der schaffende Geist will auch das Geschaffene noch schaffen — der erfand die Zeit, und nun rollt die Welt auseinander und rollt wieder in großen Ringen in sich zusammen — als ein Werden des Guten durch das Böse».

2) Nachlass 1882, KSA 10, 5 [1] 266: «Die Welt steht fertig da — eine goldne Schale des Guten. Aber der schaffende Geist will auch das Fertige noch schaffen: da erfand er die Zeit — und nun rollte die Welt auseinander und rollt wieder in großen Ringen in sich zusammen, als das Werden des Guten durch das Böse, als die Gebärerin der Zwecke aus dem Zufalle».

were the first, and so far the last, to whom the friend has appeared a problem worth solving»<sup>6</sup>);

3) finally, for the light that, once understood, it can shed on the Nietzschean idea of friendship.

In line with this three-fold articulation, we will divide our paper into three parts.

1) In the first, we will verify the contexts in which the term «Kork» appears in Nietzsche's work;

2) in the second, we will try to understand which authors Nietzsche may have made reference to in coining this metaphor;

3) finally, we will try to demonstrate the light that the term 'friend as cork' can shed – in general – on the interpretation of the question of friendship in Nietzsche.

## 2) The term 'Kork' in Nietzsche's work

In the published texts, the word appears only three times: once in the passage already quoted from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, once in *Human, All Too Human (HH)*, and finally, in the *Dionysian-Dithyrambs (DD)*. Let's start with the first quote, in chronological order (*HH*, I, 627).

*Life and experience.* If one notices how some individuals know how to treat their experiences (their insignificant everyday experiences) so that these become a plot of ground that bears fruit three times a year; while others (and how many of them!) are driven through the waves of the most exciting turns of fate, of the most varied currents of their time or nation, and yet always stay lightly on the surface, like cork: then one is finally tempted to divide mankind into a minority (minimality) of those people who know how to make much out of little and a majority of those who know how to make a little out of much; indeed, one meets those perverse wizards who, instead of creating the world out of nothing, create nothing out of the world.

It is evident that Nietzsche uses the term *Kork* in a critical and derogatory sense here. Men who survive, instead of living, are like corks. They are held afloat by their many experiences, but they do not know how to dig into the earth to bear fruit. They live in a stimulating and varied way, but they cannot become a field, soil which generates. They are swept along by the 'majority' of the waves, by the currents of time and people, and therefore, they do not know how to take root in themselves<sup>7</sup>. They live on the surface and not in the depths, they are light and not heavy. They transform the great into the little and the world into nothingness, instead of turning the little into the great and nothingness into the world. They are corks of the sea and not fields that bear fruit.

However, in this aphorism, Nietzsche does nothing more than re-elaborate a classic image from the literary and philosophical tradition. We only need to remember what, in the *Third Ode (III, 9)*, Horace says about the unfaithful lover (associating him, in fact, with a cork, for his lightness in love). That is what Lydia accuses the poet of, while continuing to declare her love to him.

Fair as a star is hi – and thoy  
Like tossing cork (*levior cortice*), or Adrian see  
So quickly Ruffled: yet I vow  
I'd love to live and die with thee<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> HH I, 354, trans. Reginald J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1996.

<sup>7</sup> On this topic see Annalisa Caputo, "The Untimely as *Intempestivum Tempus*. A Philological Reconstruction and a Critical Interpretation of the Nietzschean *Unzeitgemäss*", in Annalisa Caputo (ed.), *Rethinking the Nietzschean Concept of 'Untimely'*, Mimesis International, Udine, 2018, 61-103.

<sup>8</sup> Horace, *The Odes*, trans. W.S. Marris, Oxford 1912, 167.

He is a cork bark tossed about by the violent waves of the sea or better, lighter than this cork. The passage of *Human, All Too Human* that we read seems to recall the verses of Horace literally. Moreover, the expression ‘lighter than cork’ is proverbial, as already shown in the *Adagia* of Erasmus (n. 1307).

But it is not in this proverbial, critical sense which Nietzsche uses ‘Kork’ in the passage about friendship where we started, but rather, in a sense we could call ‘positive’. Where then does Nietzsche find this shade of meaning? A meaning similar to the one in the verses of *On the Friend* is found in a pair of *Posthumous Fragments of 1882-1883*, which then evidently flowed into *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

1882, 3[1] 14: The third person (*der Dritte*) is always the cork that keeps the conversation of two (*das Gespräch von Zweien*) from sinking into the depths (*Tiefe*): which in certain circumstances is an advantage.

1883, 15 [23]: My friend, you are like a cork, made for the light and for the surfaces of all seas - we called you fortunate (*Glücklichen*)<sup>9</sup>.

It is an advantage to have a friend/cork and it is fortunate to be a person (friend)/cork able to drink the light and ride the waves, without sinking. In a similar way, we also find the image of the cork in *Dionysian-Dithyrambs*, in *Of the Poverty of the Richest Man*, a *Lied* echoed in the ending of *Nietzsche contra Wagner*.

My soul,  
its tongue insatiable,  
has licked at every good and evil thing,  
dived down into every depth (*Tiefe*).  
But always, like a cork,  
always it comes bobbing up again (*immer schwimmt sie wieder obenauf*),  
it juggles (*gaukelt*) like oil on the brown surface of the sea:  
on account of this my soul they call me: the happy man (*Glücklichen*)<sup>10</sup>.

Here, the lucky, blessed man is Dionysus himself. Here, ‘oil’ takes the place of the ‘light’ (which appeared in an early draft of the poem<sup>11</sup>), maintaining the color, but doubling the idea of staying afloat. However, above all what is interesting, in our opinion, is the movement that is created in these lines: from top to bottom and back up. Here, twirling on the surface is not a superficial game, but the ability to return to the surface after having experienced the depths. In fact, the authentic surface, as we know, in Nietzsche is not the opposite of the deep, but its truth (which invites us to be «superficial – out of profundity»<sup>12</sup>). So maybe this is the decisive property of the cork (which Nietzsche wants to underline): unlike oil, cork can be plunged into the depths (if pushed down), but then it is inevitably driven back to the top. It can never sink. It is the unsinkable. Another famous expression of Horace’s comes to mind: «*adversis rerum immersabilis undis*» (*Epistulae* I, 2, 22): never sinking in the waves of adversity.

*Immersabilis* (unconquerable, unsinkable) is a word invented by Horace.

However the image is not ‘original’ to Horace, but comes from Pindar. Then, the game of references – from Nietzsche to Horace to Pindar – seems to have its first roots in the Greek world. So, to the Greek world we return, we land.

<sup>9</sup> Nachlass 1883/ 84, KSA 10, 3 [1] 14; 15 [23], trans. Paul S. Loeb and David F Tinsley, *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Summer 1882-Winter 1885/84)*, Stanford 2019, 44; 437.

<sup>10</sup> *DD*, trans. Reginald J. Hollingdale, London, 1984, 70.

<sup>11</sup> See Wolfram Groddeck, *F. Nietzsche. Dionysos Dithyramben*, Berlin 1991, 373.

<sup>12</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science (GS), Preface to the Second Edition*, 4:

### 3) The Greek roots of the Nietzschean image

Babette E. Babich<sup>13</sup> has tangentially touched on our theme, working on the Nietzschean reference to Pindar's motto «become the one you are»<sup>14</sup>. She believes that, in the metaphor of the friend/cork, there is a reference to the *Second Pythian* of Pindar (II, 79-80): «for while the rest of the tackle labors in the depths, I am unsinkable, like a cork above the surface of the salt sea (ἀβάπτιστος εἰμι ὡς φελλος ὑπ' ἔλμα)».

According to Babich,

there Nietzsche reflects on the relation the hermit bears for himself as the relation to the self's other<sup>15</sup>. The associative allusion to Pindar's *Pythian 2* recurs in this locus as well – for Pindar characterizes the poem he sends to Hieron (the so-called Castor song): This song is being sent like Phoenician merchandise across the grey sea (2, 68) and promises of it a buoyancy above untutored fancy, beyond both slander and flattery [...]. Thus the reflective voice, the transcendent balance of light feet, is the gift of friendship<sup>16</sup>.

This is true. However another aspect is also undeniable: the metaphor used by Pindar has an internal tension: not of positive synthesis, but rather of opposition. In the verses in which the marine metaphor appears, Pindar is not talking about friendship, but, on the contrary, he is talking about his enemies and slanderers. The cork/Pindar – with his poetry, with his light and truth<sup>17</sup>, with his sincerity and transparency – is opposed to that which drags down the net, i.e. the weight<sup>18</sup> of the talk of those who criticize him, stirring things up in the depths and operating behind his back.

Then, what stands out in this Pindaric image, the cork is 'yes' unsinkable, but it does 'not' carry the deepness upward. There is 'yes' superiority, being above (*hypèr/über*) – so that here the poet literally looks like a *Über-Mensch* comparison with the others, the little men, who remain at the bottom<sup>19</sup> –, but 'not' bliss (and even less gratitude<sup>20</sup>) which hovers between the waves, after having brought up treasures from the depths.

Therefore, Pindar is certainly at the root of the Nietzschean cork (especially in *DD*), but perhaps it is not the only reference. Whom may Nietzsche have drawn upon, then? In our opinion, another important source is Aeschylus, who in *Choephoroi* (vv. 505-507) takes up and changes the image of the *Second Pythian*, modulating it to the father/son relationship: «Children are memory's voices, and preserve (*sotéριοι*) / the dead from wholly dying: as a net / is ever by the buoyant corks (*phellòι*) upheld, / which save (*sòzontes*) the flax-mesh, in the depth submerged».

We know that Nietzsche held his first course as a professor in Basel on the *Choephoroi*, and returned to it several times. Although there are not specific instances where Nietzsche comments on this image of Aeschylus, he undoubtedly knew it well. Moreover, the close link between the image of Pindar and that of Aeschylus does not escape the commentators. It could not have escaped the philologist of Basel. However, as Jacques Péron shows

<sup>13</sup> Babich, "Nietzsche's Imperative As a Friend's Encomium", 41 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche's interpretation of Pindar is filtered through German-tradition. See Babette E. Babich, "Between Hölderlin and Heidegger: Nietzsche's Transfiguration of Philosophy", in *Nietzsche Studien* 29 (2000), 267-301; John Hamilton, "Ecce Philologus: Nietzsche and Pindar's *Second Pythian Ode*", in Paul Bishop (ed.), *Nietzsche and Antiquity. His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, New York 2004, 54-69.

<sup>15</sup> A different reading – as Babich herself writes – is that of von Tongeren, *Freundschaft, Selbsterkenntnis und Einsamkeit*, 5-20.

<sup>16</sup> Babich, *Nietzsche's Imperative As a Friend's Encomium*, 41 ff.

<sup>17</sup> See in particular Michel Fartzoff, "Pindare et Archiloque: *Pythique II, 72-86*", in Danièle Conso, Nicole Fick-Michel, Bruno Pouille (eds.) *Mélanges François Kerlouégan*, Paris 1994, 215-234: 225 ff.

<sup>18</sup> See Glenn W. Most, "Two Leaden Metaphors in Pindar P. 2", in *American Journal of Philology*, 108 (1987), 569-584.

<sup>19</sup> See Jacques Péron, *Les images maritimes de Pindare*, Paris 1974, 97 ff.; 157 ff (and, in general, chapter XIII).

<sup>20</sup> According to Hamilton, "Ecce Philologus: Nietzsche and Pindar's *Second Pythian Ode*", this is a central theme in this *Pythian*: the thankfulness (gratitude), *charis*: and this is also a Nietzschean theme.

clearly, the differences between the two authors are significant, so much so that the metaphor – in the two contexts – goes so far as to express an inverse meaning. In Aeschylus, the cork supports the net and the tension expresses an advantageous action, which is exercised from the bottom up. In Pindar, instead, as already mentioned, the net tries to drag the cork towards the bottom and the tension symbolizes a counter-action, which is exerted from top to bottom.

Therefore, in Aeschylus, the cork seems to evoke better not only the idea of the *DD* (in which there is positive complicity between the depths and the surface), but also the idea of the *PF 1882-’83* that we read, in which the cork is defined as ‘lucky’, and capable of bringing ‘benefits’. In Pindar the ‘weights’ are opposed to the ‘cork’ without any possible mutual benefit. In Aeschylus, instead, the unity of the net (cork and weights together) is what allows for salvation. «Although dead», we are «not wholly dead» as long as we live on in our children (v. 504)<sup>21</sup>. Children keep and hold high the ‘voices’, the ‘names’<sup>22</sup> and the lives of their fathers (almost with an *Auf-Hebung*), just as corks save the strings of the net from the depths of the sea<sup>23</sup>.

However, above all, it seems that Aeschylus’ image is more easily comparable to Nietzsche’s *On the Friend* (than to Pindar): the friend is the cork that prevents the ego/self from sinking into the abyss, and that salvages the lonely: nurturing his life, holding it up and saving it. It is useful, in this context, to review the Greek terms used by Aeschylus: corks (children) are the saviors (‘*sotérioi*’, v. 505; the ones who save (‘*sòzontes*’, σῶζοντες, v. 507); and just below (v. 509) the verb ‘save’ (*sòzein*) appears again<sup>24</sup>. The semantic context is that of salvation.

This is interesting, especially for the history of the effects that the terms ‘*soteria*’ and ‘*sozein*’ have had. Consider, in particular, Clement of Alexandria who, in *Stromata* (II, 23, 141, 3), speaking of marriage, quotes these very verses by Aeschylus, although mistakenly attributing them Sophocles.

Now marriage is a help in the case of those advanced in years, by furnishing a spouse to take care of one, and by rearing children of her to nourish one’s old age.

For to a man after death his children bring renown,

Just as corks bear the net,

Saving the fishing-line from the deep.

according to the tragic poet Sophocles.

It is known how Clement represents the theme of salvation (*sozein*): it is Jesus/Logos, it is the God/Father who saves. The fisherman/Jesus becomes, if we may superimpose the images, the cork which draws the fish from the sea/evil of sin<sup>25</sup>... and lifts them up to the light. Nietzsche undoubtedly knew the texts of Clement. The Alexandrian is one of Nietzsche’s main sources regarding the ancient philosophers (as shown on the Course on Pre-Platonic Philosophers, where the quotations of fragments of the Greek thinkers are often taken from Clement)<sup>26</sup>. This is not to say that the Nietzschean image of the *cork-friend-who-saves* is ‘definitely’ connected to Clement; but we are emphasizing that

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<sup>21</sup> See Véronique Anglard, *La Justice: Eschyle, Pascal, Steinbeck*, Paris 2011, in particular chapter: *La prière au père* (306-513).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Name’ here means ‘person’, ‘glory’: see James C. Hogan, *A Commentary on the Complete Greek Tragedies – Aeschylus*, Chicago 1984.

<sup>23</sup> See Jean Alaux, *Le liège et le filet - Filiation et lien familial dans la tragédie athénienne du Ve siècle*, Paris 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Listen, this wail of ours doth rise for thee, / And as thou heedest it thyself art saved.

<sup>25</sup> See Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogus* III, XII, 101, 3 (vv. 23-24); also I, IX, 75, 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Clement is also the source of Nietzsche’s knowledge of the Dionysian mysteries. Clement tells of the myth of the Dionysus child, torn to pieces by the Titans; and again it is Clement who recalls the Dionysian toys, including the mirror; and who relates the myth of Baubo, mentioned in the preface of *The Gay Science* in the same aphorism in which Greeks are exalted as ‘superficial – out of profundity’.

‘evidently’ the patristic understanding of this image could not have been unknown to Nietzsche. And there is an interesting indicator of this, i.e. a passage that shows how Nietzsche himself linked, to some extent, the figure of the «net-that-saves» with the divine.

In a variation (later discarded) of the aphorism 143 of *The Gay Science* (M III, 5, 68), an aphorism in which Nietzsche emphasizes the metaphysical ‘need’ (the ‘instinct’) ‘originally’ to «invent gods, heroes and overmen», we read: «The gods and the saints were, so to speak, the cork that kept humanity afloat on the sea. [...] Their task was to not let mankind fall below a mid-point that had been reached».

Certainly it is an illusory net, that in the age of the death of God can only be refused, but the quote is still interesting for our purposes, because it once again connects (albeit in reverse perspective, almost like a photographic negative) the image of the cork to that of salvation.

So: Pindar, Aeschylus, Clement.

None of the three authors, however, links this *soteria* to friends. In the case of Pindar, the cork is salvation from enemies; in the case of Aeschylus it is salvation thanks to one’s children; in the case of the metaphysical-theological tradition, it is the salvation given by God. There is, however, another ‘Greek writer’ who mentions the cork in connection with salvation: Lucian of Samosata. Again, it goes without saying that this is an author well known by Nietzsche, an author who was considered by various critics (again see, e.g., Babette E. Babich) to be a source for numerous Nietzschean terms and suggestions (including ‘superman’, *hyperanthropos*)<sup>27</sup>.

Well, if we examine *Toxaris: a Dialogue of Friendship*<sup>28</sup> – a dialogue in which a Scythian and a Greek vie with each other, each challenging the other to tell exemplary stories of friends – we find the story of Euthydicus, who jumps into the sea in a storm to save his friend, Damon. He had fallen from the ship and «barely kept afloat.» His friend then takes hold of him up and «helps him to swim and keep his head above water.» The situation is dramatic. At this point, the people still on the ship have an idea: «they throw them many corks and ropes,» to help them stay above water; and also a ladder. Luciano comments:

Now only think: could any man give a surer proof of affection, than by throwing himself into a furious sea like that to share the death of his friend? Picture to yourself the surging billows, the roar of crashing waters, the hissing foam, the darkness, the hopeless prospect: look at Damon,--he is at his last gasp, he barely keeps himself up, he holds out his hands imploringly to his friend: and lastly look at Euthydicus, as he leaps into the water, and swims by his side, with only one thought in his mind,--Damon must not be the first to perish;--and you will see that Euthydicus too was no bad friend.

The two – the narrator concludes – «supported themselves on the corks», they then reached the ladder and, grabbing it, «were saved and now they are both in Athens and they study philosophy». In this case, we do not have a friend/cork, but a friend who saves another friend ‘thanks’ to cork: cork thrown from ‘third’ parties.

Therefore, the metaphor of Nietzsche remains ‘original’ in his synthesis, a synthesis that (more or less consciously) is rooted in the Greek literary tradition, but complexifies it. It is a synthesis that probably takes the tension between high and low, the contrast/unification between friend and foe, from Pindar; probably takes the dynamics of the lifting from the deep to the surface and the idea of salvation (an idea later developed, in Patristics, in a metaphysical direction) from Aeschylus; and, finally, probably takes the image of the

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<sup>27</sup> See Babette E. Babich, “Nietzsche’s Zarathustra and Parodic Style: On Lucian’s Hyperanthropos and Nietzsche’s Übermensch”, in *Diogenes*” 58: 4 (2011), 58-74.

<sup>28</sup> See Giuliano Campioni (ed.), *Nietzsche persönliche Bibliothek*, Berlin / New York 2003, 366. We know that Nietzsche had consulted: Lukianos aus Samosata, *Sämtliche Werke. Übersetzt von C.M. Wieland, IV Theil*, Leipzig 1789. The book also includes *Toxaris, oder die Freundschaft*, 3-76.

friend who dives into the water to save his friend on corks thrown out by third parties, from Lucian.

So, with this we have concluded the second point: the search for the occurrence of the word 'cork' in Nietzsche's texts and the analysis of possible sources. Then, we can move on to the final step: interpretation and conclusion.

#### 4) «But tell me, you men, who then among you is capable of friendship?»

##### *On the Friend*

'One is always too many around me' – thus thinks the hermit. 'Always one times one – in the long run that makes two!'

I and me are always too eager in conversation: how could I stand it if there were no friend?

For the hermit the friend is always a third: the third is the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths.

So, we begin again from the cork. Cork is the third party in fishing with a net. Third, on the surface,

- compared to the first (below, in the sea): the weight, the weights;
- and compared to the second (in the middle, vertical): the meshes of linen.

The friend is the third party,

- compared to the gravity of the self (i.e. of the 'me');
- and compared to the net of the ego (i.e. of the 'I').

Here is *'Ich und mich'*: two, inevitably struggling and in contrast. One the one hand, we have the profound (*die Tiefe*), the weight that drags into the abyss '*das Unheimliches*' that inhabits 'me', that I am: and that I do not recognize as 'I'. On the other hand, we have the fragility of my meshes of existence, the subtle network of needs, dreams, desires for fishing, for life, for light..., the 'I' that I do not recognize as 'me'. *Oneself as Another* (Paul Ricoeur).

We are two, and yet always one, always too one, always too alone, because, after all, that one is still me. It is a mirrored conversation that swallows, as in the myth of Narcissus. At times the Self swallows the Ego, when 'I' go down into the faultlines of my incomprehensible 'me'. Sometimes the Ego swallows the Self, when 'I' come back up through the mesh of conscience and lose 'myself' in the spectral net-work of concepts and reason<sup>29</sup>.

«Oh, there are too many depths for all hermits»... and the more one discovers the depths of his own loneliness, the more the abyss grows and the greater the desire for light, because peaks arise from the depths and the depths bring the momentum of the peaks to the light.

«That is why they long so for a friend and his height». That is why the «solitary» desire so ardently a friend and his summit. They want the peak that comes from the seaquake, and leaves a vacuum on the ocean floor. They want the crest of the wave, made for the light, made for «bobbing up and juggling on the surface» (DD, 70).

This is the spark of a chance, a glimmer in the «brown sea» (*braune Meere*): a third one, 'between' myself and I, an otherness that is truly, absolutely other, beyond the mirror of the interview/reflective consciousness, an otherness more than the Socratic one/two, more than a voiceless dialogue '*heme emautò*' (Plato, *Theaetetus* 189e; *Sophist*, 263e). In fact, harmony with myself is only a utopia and friendship with oneself is always the most difficult thing.

«Our faith (*Glaube*) in others betrays the areas in which we would like to have faith (*glauben*) in ourselves». We would like to believe – in the words of the DD, 70 – in our

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<sup>29</sup> «Consciousness is properly only a connecting network between man and man, - it is only as such that it has had to develop»: GS, 354.



soul (*Seele*), in its ability to ‘savor’ everything, to immerse itself in every depth and then to return upwards (*obenauf*)<sup>30</sup>. We would like to believe that we can be corks and - in ‘*Gaukeln*’, in the «sleight of hand» of our existence – that we can juggle clubs and fish, be jugglers of ourselves... downward, upward, everything without throwing anything away, grateful for everything and so happy and blessed (*Glücklichen*), although we are not ‘*immersabilis*’ like an unsinkable battleship, but fragile corks (that inevitably sink every time, but then ‘fortunately’ resurface).

We would like it...., but we do not succeed, because the weight drags on us and the net is entangled and loneliness kills, revealing us to be «executioners and victims of ourselves» (Charles Baudelaire).

Hence the Nietzschean intuition! To paraphrase Aeschylus, «the salvation of a mortal man is in the voice of his friends». It is an ‘earthly’ *soteria*, of mortals for mortals, which – in his *philia* – absorbs and sublimates all the ancient *eros* and the entire Christian *agape*. In this sense, the image of the friend (savior/lover) is superimposed onto the Greek *erotes* (often symbols of fishing for love) and the Christian God («fisher of mortals»<sup>31</sup>). It is reminiscent of ‘the action of advantage’ that the cork, in the tension of unity with the weights, has with the net and it is reminiscent of the pearl hunter, who dives into the depths to save lost treasures; and the ‘gratitude’ of those who are brought to the surface. It is reminiscent of the story of Lucian and the (human, all too human) *kenosis* of Euthydicus, who dives ‘naked’ into the underworld of the storm, while Damon, who is «already drowning,» still «stretches his hand out to his friend».

«Our longing for a friend is our betrayer» (*unsre Sehnsucht nach einem Freunde ist unser Verräther*). It is a paradoxical rethinking of the Christological event, because here it is the ego that betrays the self, betrays it for its friend and this is a betrayal that saves.

But why does it save? How does it save? As a ‘third one’, which preventeth the conversation (*Gespräch*) of the two sinking into the depth (*in die Tiefe sinkt*), i.e. mediating the dialogue between the I and the self, breaking the reflection of the reflective consciousness and offering a ‘different’ mirror<sup>32</sup>.

«What after all is the face (*das Gesicht*) of your friend? It is your own face, in a rough and imperfect mirror (*rauh und unvollkommenen Spiegel*)» (*Z, On the Friend*, 41). However, here it is the roughness and imperfection of otherness that becomes crucial, because it is opposed to false and illusory self-transparency.

*From the self as other, to the other of the self*: this is the legacy of Nietzsche in the hermeneutics of the dialogue and recognition. To put it in Ricoeurian terms<sup>33</sup>, the friend saves by «narrating differently», because he sees in ‘me’ what ‘I’ do not recognize and, therefore, he knows and can say it (sometimes even without words) and can donate it. It is the mirror of the face of the other, that tells ‘me’: ‘you’. It gives me to myself, in my possibilities, those which I cannot see, because they are left stranded at the bottom, but the other, yes, he sees them («the friend should be a master of guessing and keeping silent»<sup>34</sup>), and, seeing them, can recall them to the surface.

<sup>30</sup> See W. Groddeck, *F. Nietzsche. ‘Dionysos – Dithyramben’*, 373 ff

<sup>31</sup> See Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogus* III, XII, 101, 3 (vv. 23-24)

<sup>32</sup> Abbey, *Circles, Ladders, and Stars: Nietzsche on Friendship*, 51: «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». See F. Nietzsche, *HH II*, 241: «*A good friendship*: A good friendship originates when one party has a great respect for the other, more indeed than for himself, when one party likewise loves the other, though not so much as he does himself, and when, finally, one party knows how to facilitate the association by adding to it a delicate *tinge* of intimacy while at the same time prudently withholding actual and genuine intimacy and the confounding of I and Thou».

<sup>33</sup> See Annalisa Caputo, “A Second Copernican Revolution. Phenomenology of the Mutuality and Poetics of the Gift in the last Ricoeur”, in *Studia phaenomenologica* 13 (2013), 231-256.

<sup>34</sup> *Z, On the Friend*, 41.

The ‘third party’ is the awakening of the Possible. Soul of the soul, keeping weight and mesh together, he makes me ‘endur-able’ to myself («how could I stand it», how could it be endured, if there were not a friend?). So, he makes me grateful to life, because I could never understand and enjoy what I am, if there were not someone to hold in tension and unity my contradictions and lacerations<sup>35</sup>.

If we may transliterate the metaphor, it is

like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn. [...] Our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our sea*, lies open again; *perhaps (my italics)* there has never yet been such an ‘open sea’ (GS, 343).

*Perhaps, Viellleicht*<sup>36</sup>. Indeed waking up is only ever *possible*. Friendship is never certain, but only possibility... and it is often impossibility. Life teaches this: not only the life of Nietzsche, who, at the end of his existence, in *Ecce Homo* observed ... the lack of fish in his net<sup>37</sup>.

So, it seems to return, from the Greeks, as an infinite echo, the fatherless saying – quotation of a quotation (as Derrida teaches in *Politics of Friendship*) – «Friends, there are no friends!»<sup>38</sup>.

Then, the burning desire (*das Sehnen*) for «a friend and his height» plummets, recognizing the risk that the ‘you’ is just a projection of the self, of one’s own need, one’s own desire, that love for the other is only love of self (Narcissus taking revenge on Narcissus), that behind every cork there is only the hand of compassion, pity, subtle arrogance, superiority (which crushes and humiliates: appropriating the possibilities and not releasing them), false ‘love of neighbor’, which in reality is only ‘bad self-love’.

Is this why the metaphor of cork in DD is no longer linked to the third party, is no longer bound to the friend, but shifted to the soul?

Perhaps, as noted by some interpreters<sup>39</sup>, Nietzsche’s final legacy is precisely this loss of otherness; the invitation to become not only «fathers and mothers of ourselves», but also,

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<sup>35</sup> R. C. Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche. What the great ‘immoralist’ has to teach us*, Oxford Univ. Pr., New York, 2003; pp 95; 157: friendship as ‘ultimate ideal’ of love and ‘a kind of ideal being-with-others’. As we know Nietzsche says that friendship is «the wonder of wonders, beyond the intellect»; is «the choicest experience, which few are privileged to enjoy» (from a letter to Erwin Rohde: 10-1-1869).

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 29: «a *perhaps-friendship*»; 55: «a friendship without hearth, of a *philia* without *oikeiotes*. Ultimately without presence, without resemblance, without affinity, without analogy. Along with presence, truth itself would start to tremble. ...Is an aneconomic friendship possible?»

<sup>37</sup> *Ecce Homo: Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, Cambridge 2005, 134. «All my writings from this point on have been fish hooks: perhaps I know how to fish as well as anyone? ...It was not my fault if nothing was caught. *There weren’t any fish...*»

<sup>38</sup> See HH, 376: *Of friends*: «[...] When one realizes this, and realizes in addition that all the opinions of one’s fellow men, of whatever kind they are and with whatever intensity they are held, are just as necessary and unaccountable as their actions; if one comes to understand this inner necessity of opinions originating in the inextricable interweaving of character, occupation, talent, environment — perhaps one will then get free of the bitterness of feeling with which the sage cried: ‘Friends, there are no friends!’ One will, rather, avow to oneself: Yes, there are friends, but it is error and deception regarding yourself that led them to you; and they must have learned how to keep silent in order to remain your friend; for such human relationships almost always depend upon the fact that two or three things are never said or even so much as touched upon: if these little boulders do start to roll, however, friendship follows after them and shatters. [...] And so, since we can endure ourself, let us also endure other people; and perhaps to each of us there will come the more joyful hour when we exclaim: ‘Friends, there are no friends!’ thus said the dying sage; ‘Foes, there are no foes!’ say I, the living fool».

<sup>39</sup> Again see, e.g., Babich, *Nietzsche’s Imperative As a Friend’s Encomium: On Becoming the One You Are, Ethics, and Blessing*, 42; Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, cap. 3: *On Becoming What One Is: Nietzsche’s Therapeutic Concept of the Self*, 67-98

it could be argued, friends of ourselves. Indeed only the 'I' (and not the 'you') allows the cork to call itself happy and blessed. *Perhaps, Vielleicht.*

The yearning of *Zarathustra*, however, remains, as a trace, and it invites us to think.

I do not teach you the neighbor, but the friend. [...] I teach you the friend and his overflowing heart. [...] I teach you the friend in whom the world stands complete, a bowl of goodness – the creating friend who always has a completeworld to bestow. [...] My brothers, I do not recommend love of the neighbor to you: I recommend<sup>40</sup>.

'I teach you', 'I recommend you'<sup>41</sup>. The discourse on friendship, like the entire journey of the Prophet, is revealed, then, as a parable: *if you want to have a friend, become a friend!*

«Are you a slave? Then you cannot be a friend. Are you a tyrant? Then you cannot have friends»<sup>42</sup>. If you want to be able to have friends, you must become capable of being a friend, not slave nor tyrant, not employee nor employer, neither hungry nor compassionate: free.

«Are you pure air and solitude and bread and medicine to your friend?»<sup>43</sup>. The summit calls the summit. The abyss calls the abyss. To be a liberator it is necessary to be free. To become free it is necessary «to break your own chains,» even those of dependence on the other.

Friendship does not eliminate loneliness: it simply brings it to the light, prevents it from 'sinking'. It is the ancient ideal, peaks that speak to each other through the «desolate intervals of time»<sup>44</sup> and spaces to leave the other his loneliness, leaving me with my own loneliness, uplifting both of them («for you should be his arrow and longing for the overman»<sup>45</sup>), not projecting myself onto the other, but help the other to achieve his purpose: higher, beyond myself, on his peaks; not «fleeing to your neighbor to escape yourself»<sup>46</sup>, but becoming an «overflowing heart», a cup that gives... itself to the other, without asking nothing, without depriving the other of his love-of-self, of his ego/self (friend/enemy) conversation<sup>47</sup>.

We are two ships, each of which has its goal and its course; we may, to be sure, cross one another in our paths, and celebrate a feast together as we did before - and then the gallant ships lay quietly in one harbour and in one sunshine, so that it might have been thought they were already at their goal, and that they had had one goal. But then the almighty strength of our tasks forced us apart once more into different seas and into different zones, and perhaps we shall never see one another again. [...] That we had to become strangers to one another is the law to which we are subject: just by that shall we become more sacred to one another! [...] There is probably some immense, invisible curve and stellar orbit in which our courses and goals, so widely different, may be comprehended as small stages of the way - let us raise ourselves to this thought! (GS, 279)

But tell me, you men, who then among you is capable of friendship? (Z, *On the Friend*, 42)

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<sup>40</sup> Z, *On Love of the Neighbor*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> See David B. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, United States 2001, vii: «Nietzsche writes exclusively for you. Not at you, but for you. For you, the reader. Only you».

<sup>42</sup> Z, *On the Friend*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Z, *On the Friend*, 41. On this topic see Freibach-Heifetz, *Pure Air and Solitude and Bread and Medicine: Nietzsche's Conception of Friendship*.

<sup>44</sup> *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan, Washington 1998, 32

<sup>45</sup> Z, *On the Friend*, 41.

<sup>46</sup> Z, *On Love of the Neighbor*, 44.

<sup>47</sup> Miner, *Nietzsche on Friendship*, 56: «The highest friendships are difficult to maintain. This is true because they require their participants to hold at least three pairs of opposed qualities in a delicate balance. These are love of self, along with dissatisfaction with self; candor toward the friend, along with appropriate reserve and perhaps even the occasional deception; and solitude and companionship». See also Abbey, *Circles, Ladders, and Stars: Nietzsche on Friendship*, 59: «acknowledging, tolerating, and relishing difference is a vital characteristic of robust friendship».

But our life is too short, and our power of vision too limited for us to be more than friends in the sense of that sublime possibility (GS, 279)

Yet! Yet we «believe» in that possibility<sup>48</sup>. And why do we believe in it? Because «our faith in others betrays the areas in which we would like to have faith in ourselves»<sup>49</sup>.

So, the circle closes. The friend-cork is not what we seek, but what we yearn to be (*unsre Sehnsucht*). Then, Pindar turns out to be right. The only possible invitation remains the one that it always ancient and always new: «*Ghénoi' oìos essi*», *Become the one you are! Werde, der Du bist!*

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<sup>48</sup> GS, 279.

<sup>49</sup> Z, *On the Freund*, 41.