

Thesis Title: The Reality of Eternal Recurrence

Word Count: 29,962

Eleanor Smyth

This thesis presents a novel account of Nietzsche's idea of Eternal Recurrence of the Same (ER). I argue that ER should be understood neither as *theoretical cosmology*, nor *hypothetical thought-experiment*, but as *metaphysical interpretation* of reality.

The thesis is composed of four chapters. In chapter 1 I argue that certain motivations underlying the consensus views on how to interpret ER are unfounded assumptions that need not be made. I discuss these motivations and their discursive consequences with a view to opening the way for metaphysical, non-theoretical understandings of ER. Thus, I dispel possibilities that ER is not literal by removing the assumptions I believe ground them.

In chapter 2 I examine Nietzsche's attitude to science in order to show that his criticism for all theoretical science as an adherent of the ascetic ideal leads to the conclusion that ER could not be a theoretical account of the universe. Following from this, I argue that the unpublished "proofs" for ER and *zeitatomenlehre* note are not supporting a physical theory but are alternative experimental interpretations of reality set within a scientific paradigm.

In chapter 3 I move to an outline of Nietzsche's metaphysical and interpretative way of understanding reality, specifically in relation to his appropriation of Heraclitan ideology to describe the world metaphysically, and use of Dionysos through a particular interpretative lens. I show that the Heraclitan and Dionysian are linked and are linked in relation to ER, pointing towards the sense in which I argue one ought to understand ER: as a metaphysical interpretation of reality, graspable only through the Dionysian perspective.

In chapter 4 I turn to a close exegesis of the key passages on ER to show that they evidence a metaphysical ER, set within Dionysian interpretation of reality. I argue that close analysis is required to draw out the way Nietzsche expresses the Dionysian interpretative nature of ER in vividly depicting the experience of coming to realise it.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Being Charitable | 5 |
| 1.1. The Principle of Charity | 5 |
| 1.1.1. State of play..... | 5 |
| 1.1.2. Nietzsche as Anti-Metaphysics? | 8 |
| 1.1.3. Literal = Cosmological?..... | 10 |
| 1.1.4. Coherence with Other Notions | 12 |
| 1.2. Consequences..... | 17 |
| 1.2.1. Necessity of the Proofs?..... | 17 |
| 1.2.2. Separation of Literal Content and Practical Import | 19 |
| 1.2.3. Circular Time..... | 23 |
| 1.2.4. Narrow Selection of Textual Evidence..... | 27 |
| 1.2.5. Centrality of Affirmation | 30 |
| 2. Not Theory, Not Physical..... | 35 |
| 2.1 Science and the Ascetic Ideal | 36 |
| 2.1.1. “Metaphysics” Pejoratively Construed..... | 36 |
| 2.1.2 “Science” as Precursor to Dionysianism..... | 41 |
| 2.2. The “Proofs” and the <i>Zeitatomenlehre</i> | 43 |
| 2.2.1 The Proofs..... | 43 |
| 2.2.2 Time Atom Theory..... | 46 |
| 3. Heraclitan Metaphysics, Dionysian Interpretation | 49 |
| 3.1. Heraclitus..... | 50 |
| 3.2. Dionysos | 55 |
| 4. Exegesis..... | 62 |
| 4.1 <i>The Gay Science</i> – The Demon | 63 |
| 4.1.1 The Truth | 64 |
| 4.1.2 A First Glimpse at the Experience..... | 66 |
| 4.1.4 Necessity of the Dionysian Perspective..... | 69 |
| 4.2 (Heraclitan) Metaphysics | 71 |
| 4.2.1. Necessary Interconnection and Unity of Opposites | 71 |
| 4.2.2 Heraclitan Images..... | 73 |
| 4.2.3. Not circular | 75 |
| 4.3. Dionysian interpretation..... | 78 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| 4.2.1. The “Tremendous Moment” | 78 |
| 4.2.3 Transformation..... | 81 |
| 4.2.4. Love of Life | 83 |
| 4.3. Experience of ER..... | 84 |
| 1.3.1 Memory and Premonition..... | 85 |
| 4.3.2. Death | 88 |
| 4.4. Redemption | 92 |
| Conclusion | 97 |

Introduction

Eternal recurrence of the same (ER), is the idea that an identical series repeats to infinity. An elusive concept in Nietzsche's writings, it most obviously refers to the recurrence of the one series of events of the universe which runs its course and then begins again infinite times. The literature portrays ER as being a dichotomous choice between factual cosmology and mythical/metaphorical thought-experiment or tool for change. Taking ER "literally" is understood to mean thinking the universe actually recurs, while taking it non-literally means removing all reality from the idea and understanding it as a hypothetical idea.¹ In order to include all positions into ER, I sort them into the categories of "literal" and "non-literal". The literal side is almost entirely made up of cosmological views, the remainder (quasi-)metaphysical and abstract accounts of recurrence of moments or becoming.² The non-literal includes all other views, each a variation on the conception of ER as a thought-experiment that is in the service of the Nietzschean ideal of life affirmation.

I present a literal understanding of ER, but one which does not understand ER as cosmology, or *factual* at all. I call it ER as *real*. "Real" refers to existence and the character of the world and represents a dual contrast in its content and in its character. Its content is *metaphysical* and *not physical*; its character is *interpretation* rather than *theory*. This means that it does not

¹ There are some notable outliers, e.g. Laurence Hatab (*Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms With Eternal Recurrence*. London: Routledge. 2005; and "Shocking Time: Reading Eternal Recurrence Literally" in Dries (ed.) *Nietzsche on Time and History*. 2008. NY: Walter de Gruyter. 2008) whose "literal" account actually understands ER as a mythical concept and so according to my categorisation, his view is non-literal, with ER a tool. Also, Adrian Moore's (*The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 2012) metaphysical account where ER is the continual recurrence of moments bringing new perspectives. Such a view are undermined by my later positive case for metaphysical *interpretation*, rather than fact, which nonetheless refers to the eternal recurrence of *everything*, and not of the becoming moment.

² Deleuze *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, cited in J. Vanderheide, "A Standstill in Desire: Schelling, Nietzsche, Deleuze, and the Idea of Eternal Recurrence." *Symposium*. 19.1. 2015, pp15-17; and Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, ch15

present “fact” – as theories do - which implies verifiability or falsifiability according to some method of *proof*. ER, on my understanding, is not to be understood as strictly corresponding to an absolute truth but is an *interpretation of reality*. While theory purports to *explain* via approximation to an absolute truth through its “facts”, interpretation *describes reality* using images and ideas available to a certain perspective that make reality comprehensible. Theory’s factual explanation presents things statically, pulling apart “truth” and “falsity” as objective opposites based on empirical evidence. ER as interpretation is true in a sense other than the analytically factual; rather than manifesting a truth of *Being*, it presents truth of *becoming*³. This is a metaphysical difference and is aligned with the philosophy of the Pre-Socratic figure Heraclitus whose assertion of reality as becoming I argue influences and sheds light on the literality of ER.

Throughout, I will contrast “fact”, “theory”, and Being, with reality, interpretation, and becoming, arguing for Nietzsche’s prioritising of the latter over the former. “Fact” – objectively correct correspondence to an actual state of affairs – and “theory” – a system which purports to explain the way things actually are – both make reality static and impose Being on it. Being itself is anathema to Nietzsche since he views existence as characterised by becoming, and while Being is static, stable, permanent, and perfect, becoming is dynamic, changeable, sempiternal. Chaotic reality requires interpretation, meaning that anything professing to lay down absolute facts about the way things really are is a lie, reprehensible not *because* it is a lie, however, since *all* interpretation is to some extent a lie about chaotic reality, but because it is a lie *that pretends to be the truth*; “facts are precisely what there are

³ I continue to capitalise “Being” but not “becoming”, since the point is that the former is taken to name, in a more concrete sense, the ground of existence

not, only interpretations”⁴. In the realm of interpretation, lying and truth-telling are not opposed if it is acknowledged that the truths revealed are no absolute facts or presented as though they are. Such is ER, which expresses a truth of becoming, embodying the dynamic chaotic reality it describes and elevating those aspects of existence – such as suffering or transitoriness - which are maligned or deemed “unreal” under the paradigm of Being.

The interpretation that is ER belongs to a particular perspective which itself is a certain way of being, seeing and grasping: the Dionysian. This is a creative-destructive, childlike, joyful and playful way of being-in-the-world that does not cover over reality but embodies and magnifies it. Thus, the deceptive and playful nature of life⁵ that is magnified by the Dionysian is inherent to ER as a corollary of that perspective, and the lying, dynamic character of ER reveals truth. ER presents itself as the truth of becoming that can be embraced through Dionysian “intoxication”, a kind of artistic-philosophical madness that is life-affirming in a tragic wisdom that does not hide from the suffering essential to existence.

In the next chapter, I will discuss some presuppositions on how best to interpret Nietzsche in order to understand ER, and argue that they are unfounded, laying the grounds for an argument for the most charitable interpretation. I outline the motivations and standpoints from which the extant understandings of ER arise in order to cast doubt on these starting places and later argue against factual and theoretical construals of Nietzsche’s world-descriptions, and for metaphysical and interpretative ones. In chapter 2 I dispute the idea that literal ER is cosmology by showing Nietzsche’s less-than positive assessment of science due to its legacy in the ascetic ideal, and thus that the unpublished “proofs” and “time atom

⁴ WP 481

⁵ GS 344

theory” note are not physical justifications for a cosmological ER, but alternative experimental interpretations. Therein, I will define and distance from ER the notions of “theory” and “fact” which are tied to science, and will also demonstrate how these notions, and the ascetic ideal from which they stem, are being-centric and make reality static. In chapter 3 I examine the dual aspects of Heraclitan metaphysics and Dionysian interpretation to show how they are tied together in Nietzsche’s thought and constitute the content and character of ER, respectively. This involves a consideration of Nietzsche’s appropriation of Heraclitan ideology such as a prioritising of becoming over Being, and the notion of the world as playful chaos, in a metaphysical sense, and particular use of Dionysos to present a way of grasping reality that is experiential, raw, and ultimately interpretative. Both of these factors distance him from the Being-centric theory epitomised by science and cosmology. Finally, in chapter 4, I turn to exegesis of the key passages on ER in the published works to demonstrate how they evidence that doctrine as metaphysical interpretation of reality.

1. Being Charitable

“Those who thought they understood me have turned me into something else, in their own image.”⁶

I here consider certain assumptions that are made in the service of charitably interpreting Nietzsche, but which I argue are unfounded. My focus is on the motivations behind the non-literal accounts, since my view does ultimately lie on the literal side, and so a primary aim here is to show that these motivations are to some extent problematic, opening the way to understanding ER literally. I also indicate why the common understanding of literal ER as cosmology is grounded in the same suppositions motivating non-literal views, leaving the specific arguments against cosmology to later chapters.

1.1. The Principle of Charity

1.1.1. State of play

Tom Stern has argued that the so-called “principle of charity” sometimes results in misrepresentation of Nietzsche when the “most charitable” interpretation is construed as whatever the interpreter views as being the best philosophy.⁷ This latter is seen as being validated by whether or not something is “factually correct”, or simply matching the favoured view of the interpreter on the relevant issue. Both literal and non-literal accounts of ER

⁶ EH “Books” 1

⁷ Stern “‘Some Third Thing’: Nietzsche’s Words and the Principle of Charity.” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 47.2. 2016, pp287-302

depend on the notion that correct interpretation construes in favour of analytic, theoretical criteria, the difference being that the former take seriously the “theoretical” aspect of Nietzsche’s idea, while the latter dismiss it as inadequate. On the assumption that a charitable interpretation is one which shows Nietzsche’s position to be in line with a consensus in modern analytic philosophy or science, it is reasonable that commentators do not want to ascribe to Nietzsche an apparently dubious theory of time which is minimally explained, and therefore figure the idea as a thought-experiment instead. However, not only is ER far less obscure a view than is often perceived – as my later, positive argument lays out - but supposing that charity refers to adherence to analytic philosophy or science or even logic is itself an unfounded assumption. I leave open the question of what a “correct” understanding of “charity” would be, because it is enough to show how it is *not* definitely philosophical fit with the particular values that, in their ties to theory and fact, eliminate the possibility of non-cosmological literal ER. I aim to demonstrate the unfoundedness of the assumption that Nietzsche’s doctrine must adhere to these analytic or scientific strictures. Since it is the aim of the latter half of this thesis to show that ER can be literal but not cosmological, it falls first to cast doubt on the motivations for non-literal construal of ER.

It is evidently considered “better philosophy” by the majority that ER is a thought-experiment rather than a literal account, and an intersection of both good philosophy and apparent meaning that its import is life affirmation based on such a hypothesis. This is evident from the rapidity with which scholars reject a literal interpretation of ER to argue for a variation of a non-literal take, only cursorily considering the possibility that ER is literal. Later analyses of ER piggyback off older ones, and so take as common knowledge, virtually beyond dispute, the

non-literality of ER on the grounds that those earlier investigations have proved the literal (cosmological) version is untenable.⁸

In this way, Nietzsche's position is moulded to fit a particular narrative under the guise of "charity". Motivated by prior philosophical beliefs about time and the universe, commentators appeal to ER's bare implausibility – based on what contemporary physics suggests – as a reason to doubt that Nietzsche considered ER to be literal, indicating the general attitude of the scholarship that is loath to attribute an apparently anathematic idea to him.⁹ Scholars express their relief that Nietzsche was "wise" enough not to publish his cosmology¹⁰, and to "supress" it by leaving it in his notes without much elaboration¹¹. Thus, the tacit belief that literal ER is non-Nietzschean based on prior assumptions is manifested in praising Nietzsche for only clearly presenting it as a thought-experiment; whereas it is an entirely open question whether ER *is* presented only non-literally in the published works.¹² Paul Loeb makes a similar pointed criticism of non-literal interpreters who conclude that Nietzsche's doctrine must be hypothetical or instrumental, that it is their own *fear* of recurrence, or *desire* that the universe not recur, that leads them to interpret Nietzsche as making an incoherent or false claim.¹³

⁸ E.g. Clark *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1990, pp246-247 Magnus "Nietzsche's Eternalistic Counter-Myth" *The Review of Metaphysics*. 26.4. 1973, p606 – explicitly, they say it is not a cosmology, but, as I address below, cosmology is taken to be synonymous with literality almost universally in the literature.

⁹ J. Nolt "Why Nietzsche Embraced Eternal Recurrence" *History of European Ideas*. 34.3. 2008, pp311-312

¹⁰ Ridley "Nietzsche's Greatest Weight" *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 14. 1997, p19

¹¹ Magnus "Nietzsche's Eternalistic Counter-Myth", p605

¹² I contest it, as do Loeb - *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 2010, "Eternal Recurrence" in J. Richardson, K. Gemes (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*. Oxford: OUP. 2013; and Ulfers & Cohen - "Zarathustra, the Moment, and Eternal Recurrence of the Same: Nietzsche's Ontology of Time" in J. Luchte (ed.) *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Before Sunrise*. London: Continuum. 2008 - among others

¹³ Loeb "Eternal Recurrence" pp667-669

1.1.2. Nietzsche as Anti-Metaphysics?

A central presupposition is that Nietzsche was a staunch “anti-metaphysician”. ER taken as metaphysics would conflict for instance, with his supposed “naturalistic” tendencies that motivated him to make his philosophy consistent with science’s results and/or methods.¹⁴ Even though it is accepted that Nietzsche’s target in “metaphysics” is especially narrow, it is still common for it to be considered a mistake to take Nietzsche’s ideas metaphysically in a broader sense *because that sense runs against Nietzsche’s supposed adherence to empirical measures as “regulative”*.¹⁵ Thus, even where it is acknowledged that the inadequacy of the cosmological aspect of ER suggests Nietzsche’s metaphysical frame of mind in composing the “proofs”, this is itself considered another reason to move away from the literal construal of that idea.¹⁶

Nietzsche does, however, engage in metaphysics *qua* description of reality, even while rejecting a particular scheme of thought he called “metaphysics”, as outlined in his own characterisation of his philosophy at one point as “an anti-metaphysical view of the world – yes, but an artistic one”¹⁷. Before non-literal views dominated discussion on ER, and naturalism was the leading characterisation of his thought, Heidegger described Nietzsche as “the last metaphysician” forming an understanding of being and truth in a radically new way

¹⁴ One such advocate of the anti-metaphysician Nietzsche is Clark who also presents a non-literal ER whereby the doctrine is a test in the form of an imaginative game. (*Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*)

¹⁵ E.g. Clark in *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics*. New York: O.U.P. 2015, pp257-258 acknowledges that Nietzsche’s rejection of “two world metaphysics” may leave room for another kind of metaphysics, but quickly dismisses this because of Nietzsche’s alleged naturalism, and argues that the metaphysical ideas in late Nietzsche are normative and not actually metaphysical.

¹⁶ Clark (1990), p247 cites Heidegger in claiming that the considerations underlying the proofs ought be considered metaphysical, as part of an argument for extricating ER from the cosmological (literal)

¹⁷ WP 1048

and describing the nature of existence partially by means of ER¹⁸. Nietzsche rejects the “metaphysics” of creating “true world theories”, separating the absolute “truth” from the “apparent” world of experience.¹⁹ Something he sees as essential to these systems is the belief that reality is Being, which he rejects, instead upholding becoming as the nature of existence. He does not, however, merely reverse the priorities and reject all facets of Being as simply false and unreal as all the “metaphysicians” had denigrated becoming. Rather, Nietzsche’s emphasis on becoming over Being incorporates an acknowledgement that the categories of Being grow out of those of becoming by means of human reason, and that these categories of Being can be useful falsities that help us to understand and navigate reality.

In the project of so describing reality by means of ideas such as ER and the Will to Power – both of which have been seen by notable thinkers to constitute metaphysical thinking²⁰ - Nietzsche reveals the nature of existence (as he understands it), and through metaphysics elevates and magnifies those maligned aspects of the world. Seeking to describe being (existence) which for Nietzsche is becoming, he goes beyond physics and embodies something of what is reality in an interpretation of endless necessary recurrence. Citing Nietzsche’s supposed rejection of metaphysics as a reason to doubt a literal ER, then, is to fail to consider what Nietzsche himself considered metaphysics to consist of, and thereby to gloss over the arguably metaphysical aspects of his thought which are expressed demonstrably in ER.

¹⁸ Heidegger, cited in M. Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment*. Cambridge: Cambridge. U.P. 2011, pp226-240; and Magnus “Heidegger and Nietzsche’s Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence” PhD Thesis, Columbia University, New York, 1967, pp155-162

¹⁹ E.g. *HH*. 5, *WP*. 451

²⁰ For instance, Heidegger – in “Heidegger and Nietzsche’s Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence”, Deleuze – in “A Standstill in Desire” - Moore - *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, ch15

1.1.3. Literal = Cosmological?

Arguably the most prevalent assumption in the debate, is that in order for ER to be literal, it *has* to be a (physical) theory about the universe. The choice of interpretation of ER is frequently presented as a dichotomy between a cosmological theory entirely dependent on the proofs, or a metaphorically presented thought-experiment. It follows from this assumption that the *only* way that ER can be literal is if it is a cosmology. This is motivated jointly, by the notion that Nietzsche rejected metaphysics, and by the presence of (quasi-)scientific “proofs” of ER and strange theories of time in Nietzsche’s unpublished notes, which are taken as straightforwardly designed to support a cosmological ER.

The “proofs” apparently present a physical argument for the necessity of recurrence, appealing to scientific notions such as “the principle of the conservation of energy” to make a case for an eternally recurring universe of forces. The time-atom theory (*zeitatomenlehre*) note depicts a universe of entirely non-extended space and infinite discrete “time-points” onto which perceivers project continuous time and indeed, the entire world of objects.²¹ Such seemingly scientific notes have understandably lead to the idea that Nietzsche considered ER to be an actual feature of the universe – a fact – but opinion differs on whether this is confined to the notes or visible in his main writings. The former line is taken by defenders of non-literal understandings of ER, who take literal ER to be identical to the physical-cosmological theory that can be gleaned from the *Nachlass* fragments and abandon it. The latter is held by cosmological adherents who argue that the published doctrine is described and justified by

²¹ “Time Atom Theory” Trans. C. Diethe & Ansell-Pearson. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 20. 2000, pp2-3

the “proofs”, with varying degrees of explicit literality; or uphold the *zeitatomenlehre* as evidence that ER is a physical cosmology that Nietzsche formed in his early period²².

In the next chapter I will discuss Nietzsche’s attitude towards science and the consequences of this for interpreting the “proofs” and *zeitatomenlehre*. Here however, I will merely pose the possibility that ER can be literal without being a cosmology and without presenting facts about the universe. Taking literal ER to be cosmological requires unquestioningly believing that Nietzsche is best understood as meaning things in a scientific way, and that when it *looks* like a cosmological interpretation of notes or a literal construal of recurrence is most obvious, then that is how one ought to understand them. Cosmology is the most straightforward way of understanding ER if one is to understand it literally, but only if one takes theoretical, scientific understandings of time and the universe to be more in line with Nietzsche’s thought than metaphysical understandings. Thus, the construal of literal ER as cosmology depends on this particular “scientistic” reading of Nietzsche, and that interpreting his ideas according to this framework is the most “charitable” way of understanding them. Since there *can* be disagreement here over the most “charitable” way to read Nietzsche, the notion that literal ER is *obviously* a cosmology is undermined. Charitable interpretation of ER needs to take into account what Nietzsche says in light of his attitude to science, to Being or becoming as the nature of existence, and to the notion of fact versus interpretation. These factors, I contend, point towards a metaphysical ER that is interpretation, and not theory.

²² Claudia Crawford defends this latter notion – “Nietzsche’s Overhuman: Creating on the Crest of the Timepoint” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 30.1. 2007

1.1.4. Coherence with Other Notions

Following from the interpretative preference for ideas congruent with analytic philosophy, are complaints of the incoherence of ER due to its apparently conflicting with other philosophical notions. On the one hand, there is the problem of sameness; that for the recurrence to actually be of the same, then everything about my life, and the whole series must be *identical*, and since this absolute identity requires numerical identity, there is therefore only *one* occurrence, no *recurrence*. Thus ER, the eternal recurrence of the same, is impossible, because anything that occurs later in time than something else, is not *the same* as that earlier thing. This is often taken as a conclusion in favour of a non-literal understanding, as with Magnus' view, that the sameness criterion indicates that ER is a hyperbolic, mythological doctrine emphasising the uniqueness and transitoriness of this one existence.²³ However, that this is a presumptive way of understanding ER is shown first by the fact that Nietzsche seems to present ER as repetitions through infinite time; and second, this understanding of "same" is needlessly precise, and a more natural reading would, rather than "numerically identical", be "qualitatively identical". Construing sameness as numerical identity and concluding with a doctrine that can't but be non-literal because a singular occurrence is not eternal recurrence does not show that ER is not literal, but only that understanding sameness in this way tends in that direction. Since there is no reason to think Nietzsche intended this numerical sense of "same", we do not need to see ER as non-literal from this consideration.

But even when "same" is understood to refer to qualitative sameness, there arises an apparent dilemma for ER. For ER seems to require *one* individual persisting through infinite

²³ Magnus (1973), pp613-615

time, undergoing infinite recurrences of their life. This entails an accrual of experience to infinity corresponding to the individual's reliving their life infinite times, which is supposedly what makes ER so horrifying and pressing. On the one hand, this is claimed to be incoherent because it violates the sameness of recurrences - because the individual will have gained experience from one life to the next. Yet on the other hand, without this accrual of experience, it is not *one* person who undergoes recurrence, since personal identity is presumed to require (at least) some kind of connected conscious experience or memory.²⁴ Thus, there seems to be a forced choice between preserving personal identity, and preserving the sameness of recurrences.

This dilemma rests on the understanding of personal identity that is most common in contemporary analytic philosophy, and the notion that ER must conform to "logical" rules. The failure of ER to accommodate the analytic concept of personal identity is seen as a reason to move to a non-literal understanding. This is partly what motivates approaches like Clark's and Huddleston's where the recurrence is only an unrealistically imagined scenario for the purpose of changing one's attitude to life,²⁵ and thereby the issue of illogicity is avoided because the recurrence doesn't really happen. Because thinkers believe that conforming to a consensus view on personal identity, and clearly logical contents is included in good philosophy, it is perceived as charitable to "save" Nietzsche from an incoherent position and maintain that he did not in fact hold ER to be any more than a thought-experiment. But demanding that ER must adhere to logic and modern analytic philosophy is already to suppose that it is a *theory*, something systematic, that it must be a factually realistic possibility, and so

²⁴ Soll (1973), pp339-342, argues that personal identity would need to be maintained but that this is impossible on literal ER.

²⁵ Clark (1990), p269-270; Huddleston (forthcoming), p26-31

that it must conform to perceived logical and philosophical rules of soundness. This hearkens back to Stern's point that a particular perception of what "best philosophy" dictates what commentators consider to be a charitable interpretation of Nietzsche.

Trying to apply models of personal identity which assume that a person has one unique life to the case of ER where a person has infinite lives is inherently going to cause problems. Assuming the salience of the consensus analytic conception apparently ignores that fact that Nietzsche rejects the idea of a unified subject. Nietzsche argues that there really is no "self" and no "will", at least not in the sense traditionally thought of as a singular autonomous entity; most thinking occurs unconsciously and there is no single governing core that chooses and directs thoughts.²⁶ There is no agent behind action.²⁷ "I" am a collection of drives jostling for dominance, not unified meaningfully into a "self"²⁸. Just as interpretations of the world are simplifications and systematisations, and some are necessary for life (e.g. assuming concrete objects and persistence through time²⁹), the "'intellect', *something which thinks*" is an unconscious creation, "an artificial arrangement introduced for the purpose of rendering inner processes intelligible..."³⁰ Ken Gemes suggests that Nietzsche considers the "unified self" to be an achievement only of exceptional individuals who "create themselves" out of their initial disunified multiplicity.³¹ This unification would be a process enacted by no subject, but the cumulative action of many combatting drives that end up drawing together. The

²⁶ WP 489, 490, D 115, GS 127, BGE 17, 19, A 14 TI "Four Great Errors" 3

²⁷ GM. I. 13

²⁸ Some disagree Nietzsche thinks this, e.g. P. Katsafanas - *The Nietzschean Self*. Oxford. OUP. 2016

²⁹ GS 110

³⁰ WP 477

³¹ K. Gemes "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 62.2. 2001, pp.337-360

resulting person therefore arises as a result of these prior actions, not because they were hidden there “all along”.

This casts doubt on the objection that “I” would not persist over infinite recurrences, and that people in future recurrence are not “me”, as though there were a single “me” that were precious. According to Nietzsche, what I think of as “me” is collective, and moreover, is created by a dynamic collection of drives and smaller parts producing a sequence of processes. So when the eternally repeating cycle ends and starts again, the same collections will come to be in the same ways, which means that “I” will come to be again. If I experience a revelation of the truth of ER at the same time in each of my lives, and if I have the same memories or pre-visions of my lives at the same moments, this constitutes evidence that “I” – the cumulative set – am enduring ER. These would be actual memories of earlier instances of myself, caused by the drives and physical parts constituting me being in the same particular arrangement and state as they were at the same point in all previous recurrences. This would not constitute accrual of experience if I do not keep the memories across the gap between death and birth, but the experience of revelation makes the truth evident to me.

The final complaint based on the demands of logic is that literal ER can still only inspire apathy, since whatever I do is entirely predetermined by what I did in previous recurrences and I am unable to change anything,³² yet ER is supposed to present a great weight, and bring despair or joy, not indifference. But ER would in fact not make me apathetic. It is indeed true that if I have lived my life infinite times before, then whatever I did those times I will do again; *however*, two important things must be understood here. First, due to the nature of infinity,

³² See Ridley (1997), p20; Wicks “The Eternal Recurrence: Nietzsche’s Ideology of the Lion” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*. 31.1. 1993, p99; Magnus (1973), p608

there is no first recurrence, and so was never a time when I *originally* decided to do x, thereby predetermining all my future lives. All recurrences are equal in terms of how “restrained” I am by actions in past lives. There is simply *only one thing* that I in fact do every time, *and I choose it. I choose* whatever it is, and in so doing *I make it the case* that it is the thing that happens every time. No-one *pre-determines* me, but there being only one series of events that happens repeatedly, there just is one thing that happens, which I choose.³³

Second, as Stern has noted³⁴, Nietzsche is not so much concerned with someone would do when faced with the revelation of ER, as with the idea that there are simply certain *types* of people who *can* and so do affirm ER, and others who do not because they cannot. The way in which individuals are determined in ER is no different from that which we might extract from Nietzsche’s writing outside of that doctrine. This is because if I am a certain kind of person, then I am bound to reject ER were it presented to me, and this fatedness depends on who I am. In ER, there being only one (repeating) series, with the same things coming into existence, I am always this same individual who cannot embrace ER, and my nature is the one that “determines” me to reject it, not the fact that I have done it in previous lives. The fact that I have done it before is not a determiner beyond the fact that that action forms a part of the whole single series of events that *just are* the only ones that do happen ever, in which I am necessarily bound to choose what I choose because of who I am.³⁵

If ER were a cosmology, a *theory*, everything it proposed *would* need to be logically if not physically possible, as a cosmology is supposed to be accurately factually explaining the

³³ Reginster (2006), p208 also makes a similar point to show that ER does not entail fatalism, since all ER implies is that whatever my life will turn out to be, an identical life has occurred infinite times before. This allows it to be up to me what life that is.

³⁴ T. Stern, “Back to the Future: Eternal Recurrence and the Death of Socrates.” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 41.1, pp78-79

universe. If ER were a thought-experiment, the personal identity of the individual and the sameness of recurrences need to at least conceivably cohere in order to motivate one to reconsider their attitude to life. But removal from an analytic philosophical or logical bias means that ER can be understood such that recurrence is *real* in a way that is not beholden to these strictures. A novel notion of “personal identity” can be accommodated, and the recurrence need not be laid out as theory presenting the facts of the universe. This interpretative understanding is a way of seeing that just is true of reality through that perspective, and is understood through experience of it, not theorisation.

1.2. Consequences

1.2.1. Necessity of the Proofs?

Following directly from the assumption that literal ER is cosmological, is that literal ER, being cosmology, is necessarily dependent on the “proofs” for its legitimacy.³⁶ This causes the dismissal of literal ER on the grounds that these proofs are at best flimsy and at worst, invalid, and that Nietzsche’s decision not to publish them indicates his own dissatisfaction with them. Writers such as Clark, Nehamas, Reginster, Ridley, and Huddleston, take the proofs to have been clearly refuted and *a fortiori* that ER is not literal.³⁷ But this chain of thought is infelicitous.³⁸ For while I wholeheartedly agree with an effort, cited by Clark to “free

³⁶ See Reginster (2008, pp205-206); Clark (1990, pp246-248); Nehamas (1980, pp332-333)

³⁷ Following G. Simmel’s influential critique of the literality of ER in *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*. (trans Helmut Loiskandl, Deena Weinstein & Michael Weinstein. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. 1986 – original: 1097) and is echoed by A. Danto – *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. Chichester: Columbia U.P. 1980, ch7. For the claim that Nietzsche’s omission of the proofs supports his meaning ER non-literally, see Nehamas (1980), p333; Clark (1990), pp246-247; Magnus (1973), p605; Ridley (1997), p19; Huddleston (forthcoming), p7.

³⁸ A minority have actually reconstructed and defended the “proofs” E.g. M Sterling, “Recent Discussion of Eternal Recurrence: Some Critical Comments” *Nietzsche-Studien*. 6.1. 1997, pp261-291

Nietzsche's doctrine from dependence on the *Nachlass* arguments", this liberation does not necessitate throwing out the baby of literal ER with the bathwater of cosmology. ER can be literal and yet not cosmological.

The proofs are dismissed on logical and mathematical grounds, as by Magnus who notes that Nietzsche's argument for cosmological ER is either logically inadequate or circular³⁹; and by Schacht who maintains that the supposed conclusion of a recurrence of things in identical order simply doesn't follow.⁴⁰ The evaluation is that ER is not or cannot be scientifically true; it does not or cannot accurately describe the universe as we currently believe it to be. But evaluating the proofs and *a fortiori* ER on the axis of truth versus falsity in the analytic, factual sense simply takes as given the salience of scientific or factual accuracy to the legitimacy of the idea. The only reason to assume that such criteria are important in a decision of whether or not to take ER literally, is if it is assumed that literal ER *means* physical cosmology that presents "*facts*". For it is certainly possible to reject the "proofs" *as* proofs, purporting to factually explain the universe, and yet not reject a literal ER, deciding instead to try to understand it in a metaphysical sense. One could consider this metaphysics not as presenting fact, but as interpretation, and thus not beholden to an empirical falsifiability test. This avenue is unexplored apparently because thinkers are convinced that Nietzsche rejected metaphysics, or at the very least, that it is simply more charitable to consider ER a thought experiment than a strange metaphysics.

³⁹ Magnus (1973), pp606-608

⁴⁰ R. Schacht *Nietzsche*. London: Routledge. 2002, p264

Nietzsche did not reject metaphysics but was immersed in it in interpreting reality via ER. In the next chapter I will argue that these “proofs” are lesser, experimental interpretations under the scientific paradigm, and not support for the legitimacy of literal ER.

1.2.2. Separation of Literal Content and Practical Import

Given the assumption that literal ER is necessarily cosmology, it is common for that literal aspect to be radically separated from the practical as though the doctrine is logically composed of two distinct aspects: literal and practical. This results, I argue, in an incredibly reductive understanding of ER’s content. The cosmological/literal aspect is commonly considered not only *unnecessary*, but also as *introducing incoherence* into a doctrine whose significance lies in its practical effects, since, as Magnus asks, if my life *will* recur eternally, what sense does an imperative make to live my life *as if* it will?⁴¹ Following from this, the practical elements of life-affirmation, revaluing values, attitudinal testing, etc. are completely separated from the cosmological as critics consider the literal side of ER to be self-contained and justified (or unjustified as is frequently believed) by physics.⁴² On the other hand, since they consider the importance of ER to lie in its challenge or ideal of radical affirmation, it is enough that ER is thought to be only a possibility⁴³, or imagined⁴⁴, or unrealistically

⁴¹ Magnus (1973), p608. The criticism began with Ivan Soll: “Reflections on Recurrence: A Re-examination of Nietzsche’s Doctrine” in R.C Solomon (ed.) *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*. NY: Doubleday. 1973, pp322-323

⁴² That this has become the prevailing strategy is noted by R. Wicks “The Eternal Recurrence”, p99

⁴³ Soll “Reflections on Recurrence...”,

⁴⁴ Wicks (1993), p111-114

conceived⁴⁵, or metaphorically understood to stand in for the significance of one's actions⁴⁶; so literal ER is disposable.

The perception that literal ER is cosmology, leads to its being located primarily or *only* in unpublished notes, giving rise to the argument that Nietzsche *always presents* ER without indicating its literality, and so it is best understood to be non-literal. Dovetailing with this argument from that initial perception is that the *way* Nietzsche (supposedly) *uses* ER makes literal (cosmological) ER superfluous and problematic.⁴⁷ Therefore, the two angles of the separability contention concern the alleged content and purpose of ER, respectively. "Alleged" because this contention comes from a place – as I have indicated – of presupposition about how to read Nietzsche, that literal ER is undesirable and so un-Nietzschean. Moreover, while the idea that ER in the published work is presented only hypothetically or as a thought-experiment is typically considered entirely established or obvious, the number of adherents of cosmological interpretations belie this claim. Reginster's claim that "the cosmological interpretation of the eternal recurrence that rests upon [the proofs], is strictly confined to his unpublished notes", is made at least slightly doubtful by the reconstructions of cosmological ER by Jenkins⁴⁸, Loeb⁴⁹, and Ulfers and Cohen⁵⁰, almost exclusively from Nietzsche's published work.

Further, when the literal is assumed to be cosmology and removed entirely from an understanding of ER, the question arises of why Nietzsche would have gone to the trouble of

⁴⁵ Clark (1990), pp251-254; Huddleston (draft), pp22-34

⁴⁶ Magnus (1973), pp614-616

⁴⁷ See e.g. Nehamas (1980), p337 and Huddleston (forthcoming), p7

⁴⁸ Jenkins, "Time and personal identity in Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence" *Philosophy Compass*. 7.3. 2012

⁴⁹ Loeb (2010), "Eternal Recurrence"

⁵⁰ Ulfers & Cohen "Zarathustra, the Moment, and Eternal Recurrence of the Same"

devising such an elaborate doctrine, even writing a book centred around it, if he created it simply for the practical imperative he defends elsewhere and could have done with far less extraneous detail. Destroying nihilistic value systems, emphasising the value of this life, and rejecting regret do not require that one imagines the recurrence of one's life, since Nietzsche argues effectively for these elsewhere. This is already a puzzle for non-literal accounts, which thereby seek to extricate the recurrence doctrine from the thought-experiment, interpreting ER as presented poetically in *Zarathustra* as an extended allegorical backdrop for the significance of this "thought" of recurrence.

Dichotomising cosmological and "practical" ER brings the problem that there is no pressing reason to entertain the thought experiment that is supposed to exhaust ER's content. Since a literal recurrence has been eradicated, the motivation to consider the scenario of recurrence is hard to find, for it is always possible for the reader of ER as thought-experiment to simply dismiss it. An exhortation to live one's life so as to will its eternal recurrence, loving it, redeeming by positive action the shortcomings of one's past, embracing the singularity of this one life, if only justified by a complicated metaphor about the recurrence of the universe, is weak. If ER does not describe reality and need not be acknowledged to thus be true, then there is nothing stopping someone from disregarding all these practical imperatives on the grounds that there is no need; I won't *really* live my life again. It's an interesting thought, but not one that could "crush" me. While affirmation and an ideal attitude can be and are argued for effectively by Nietzsche outside of presenting what is considered by these thinkers to be a thought-experiment, considering the scenario of life repetition is entirely separable from this, and not particularly pressing.

Though I do not defend it, the fact that potential evidence for cosmological ER can be located in *GS*⁵¹, *Z*⁵², and *EH*⁵³ undermines the first claim that Nietzsche shows no signs of presenting it outside of the *Nachlass*. The second claim, that ER does not need and even precludes a literal recurrence, I believe can be refuted only once one concedes that literal ER need not be (I contend *is not*) cosmological. If ER is conceived as theory, presenting a *factual* account, though this is the most obvious and literal understanding of Nietzsche's words, it can be logically separated from a practical exhortation of affirmation, because it is simply purporting to explain how the universe works. Practical consequences can arise, but these are based in the distinct sphere of personal concern, they do not *necessarily* follow from the fact that the universe recurs. In this way, both the literal cosmological accounts and the non-literal accounts which *both* perceive literal ER as cosmology and so separable from affirmation do not allow for an intimate connection between recurrence and the practical, experiential side that is affirmation. A connection, which to Nietzsche, was evident and vital.

In conceiving of the literal as obviously and exhaustively cosmological, as *theoretical*, and the practical as therefore necessarily based in imagination and hypothesis, ER's meaning and scope are restricted. Trying to force ER into these two dichotomised boxes and centring given facets of it such as *amor fati* and a push to revaluating values needlessly limits it. On the reading I present, ER is literal in a non-cosmological sense, and is interpretation rather than theory, and thus, the interconnectivity and *inseparability* of its being literal – *real* – and having powerful practical consequences can be appreciated. Virtually everything that non-literal interpretations have argued to be the essence of ER can be incorporated, because as an

⁵¹ E.g. in 109 & 341

⁵² E.g. III.13.2

⁵³ "BT" 3

interpretation of reality that defers not to absolute “true worlds” or verifiable fact, its immanent (not transcendent) truth of becoming necessarily involves revaluing values that have thrown veils of “being” over reality, rejecting Christianity that denies this world in favour of perfect heavenly existence, accepting with joy the changeable world of suffering. Reality and practicality are not mutually exclusive and therefore understandings of ER which treat them as though they are should be considered undermined.

1.2.3. Circular Time

Given the supposition that ER is cosmology, and a theory, it is taken by many to imply circular time.⁵⁴ This theory of time is either accepted by advocates of cosmological views or used to dismiss literal ER due to its strangeness. Nietzsche, however, does not portray ER as circular time, and so the idea that this is the evident meaning of ER seems to be based in the same assumptions of analyticity. Circular time itself is a static exemplification of Being, and a physical *theory*, thus firmly within the analytic, scientific paradigm. Here I cast doubt on the idea of circular time as constitutive of literal ER, leaving the positive argument against Being and theory to later chapters.

Circular time describes a closed loop, where events that are in the future relative to one point are simultaneously in the past of that point because time is “shaped” like a circle. If all time is circular, the whole universe exists within the loop and there is no time outside that could measure the duration of its existence. Being circular, time has no beginning or end, but is

⁵⁴ E.g. Loeb (2010) & (2013); Goldberg “Nietzsche’s Eternal Recurrence”; Rogers “Simmel’s Mistake: The Eternal Recurrence as a Riddle About the Structure of Time as a Whole” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 21. 2001’ Ulfers & Cohen (2008)

finite; because of these features, time cannot be “unrolled” into a straight line (like linear time) since there is no point of which it can be said that all others are in the future of it *and not also* in the past.⁵⁵ To unroll it would be to artificially decide that some moment is the very first one, but such a moment does not exist. Ordinary linear time has an objective past and an objective future direction, and even if infinite, one is able to take any point and correctly claim that events in the established future direction are all in the future of that point, and *only* in the future.

Crucially, because the circle is essentially “fixed” – since far future events are also the past, they cannot change – everything happens *only once*, the circle of time does not go around and around like a wheel with everything being repeated eternally. Every entity that exists in a universe of circular time experiences their life only once, as that life constitutes a small segment of this time circle.⁵⁶ Because circular time is finite and allows only the single occurrence of every event, it does not involve recurrence, let alone eternal recurrence. This is the first basic reason why ER ought not be construed as circular time. A common response to this tends to centre on the experience of entities within the time circle, whereby even though events only happen once according to an “objective” time, individuals *experience* the exact same events infinite times. However, individual experience of recurrence in circular time is either an illusion – hallucination or déjà vu – as Loeb advocates, calling it “recurrence-awareness”⁵⁷; or it is because individual timelines are themselves infinite and linear, though

⁵⁵ This is a Gödelian universe, where this violation of ordinary chronology is essential. See J. Earman, *Bangs, Crunches, Whimpers and Shrieks: Singularities and Acausalities in Relativistic Spacetimes*. Oxford: OUP. 1995, ch6

⁵⁶ The misconception that things do repeat in circular time has been coined “the second-time-around fallacy” by N.J.J. Smith – “Bananas Enough for Time Travel?” *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*. 48.3. 1997, p365, echoed and defended by R. Hanley – “No End in Sight: Causal Loops in Philosophy, Physics and Fiction” *Synthese*. 141.1. 2004, p215

⁵⁷ Loeb (2010), p15, pp70-71 (2013), pp652-655

following the circle of time, as Scott Jenkins proposes.⁵⁸ I set aside the option of illusion, since interpreting ER literally means we take it to involve actual recurrence, and if we do not interpret it literally, there is no need to consider circular time at all. That leaves the possibility of infinite individual timelines. Being infinite, these timelines would be able to measure the closed circle of events as going round and round infinite times because in following the “trajectory” of time the same exact events which *only happen once* according to the circular time occur infinite times at progressively later points on this infinite timeline.

Here we have another issue with circular time as the meaning of ER, which is that it requires a duality of times to be posited: an “objective” finite circular one, and an infinite subjective one which is time as experienced by individuals. Since it is only the individual infinite times which create ER under this system, one might ask what circular time is doing here other than constituting an easy backdrop for a necessary recurrence, since it sounds *prima facie* obvious that recurrence of the universe would take the form of circular time, the far future leading back to the beginning and starting again. Yet because circular time does not allow for repetition, everything happening only once, there can be no recurrence unless individuals live through infinite time and experience the events infinite times. But then these events happen infinite times on these infinite timelines, and regardless of the fact that time is “actually” a closed loop, all beings experience time as though it is infinite and a repeating series. Thus, there seems no need to bring circular time in at all. ER is surely meant to be a simpler

⁵⁸ S. Jenkins “Time and Personal Identity in Nietzsche’s Theory of Eternal Recurrence.” *Philosophy Compass*. 7.3. 2012, pp214-215. Ulfers and Cohen - (2008), pp.18-29 - defend a reading of ER as finite circular time with merely apparent recurrence from the perspectives of individuals; they do not address the logistical difficulties or fine details of this. Loeb (“Eternal Recurrence”, pp652-662; *The Death of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, ch1, 3) defends ER as circular time, where memories/premonitions serve as evidence that one is experiencing recurrence.

understanding of chaotic reality, not a more complex mechanism opposed to a relatively simple and stable reality such as circular time.

There is, moreover, little reason to consider Nietzsche to have endorsed any kind of temporal split. This is to use “objective” in a very non-Nietzschean sense, which entails removal from any particular perspective, outside of time or space, an absolute truth that holds eternally, uninfluenced by the perceptions of individuals synchronically or diachronically. This kind of “subject-less” “fact” Nietzsche considers to be completely meaningless. “Objective” for Nietzsche is rather a characteristic of a “truth” or idea which has been influenced by as many perspectives as possible.⁵⁹ Since the “objective” circular time is not the time experienced by individuals who instead experience infinite time, there is no way that circular time could be called objective in the Nietzschean sense.

If instead we suppose that the circular and the infinite times are equally real, a matter of perspective, then we need to answer the question of whose perspective circular time arises for. It would require seeing all of time at once, which might plausibly be considered possible at the extremes of a Dionysian total comprehension, and yet the entirely static and complete nature of circular time is totally antithetical to Dionysian perspective of the world. Thus, the final reason why circular time ought not be taken as the meaning of ER is its resemblance to the absolute, perfect, and stable truth that Nietzsche rejects. Circular time is static, fixed, and in this sense eternally the same. Time does not “become” if it is circular, it is the perfect example of a universe of *Being* that remains eternally stable and whole and unchanging. But Nietzsche emphasises becoming, and the wrongheadedness of separating the world into “True” – understood as stable, simple, unchanging, etc. – and “apparent” (what is

⁵⁹ GM.III.12

experienced) – complex, changeable, imperfect. Circular time is “already” completed, infinite linear time never reaches an end; circular time is static, infinite linear time is *dynamic*

This is an area that I will expand on in relation to Nietzsche’s texts, since the supposition that ER means circular time comes partially from misreadings of certain vital passages in *Zarathustra* where there is only an apparent tension between circular and linear conceptions of time. ER is not a *fact*, the world is not one of Being, not in any sense.

1.2.4. Narrow Selection of Textual Evidence

A vital interpretative indicator of assumptions that charitable interpretation centres around what analytic philosophy would consider “sensible” is the consensus in the literature is that ER is a thought-experiment, and the “problematic” cosmology (or literal understanding, the two terms being considered interchangeable) is disregarded. This bias towards the non-literal is manifested in the consideration of an extremely narrow selection of textual evidence that is best able to reflect this preconceived notion about ER. This is epitomised by the almost universal exclusive focus – by the majority, who defend a non-literal understanding - on aphorism 341 of *The Gay Science*.⁶⁰ It is more or less taken for granted as the best place to get an understanding of ER; that it is the doctrine’s central formulation⁶¹, and that it presents ER non-literally, frequently being cited as common knowledge.

GS 341 is often immediately understood as stating ER as thought-experiment, with many commentators beginning their accounts by quoting the aphorism, stating that it “clearly”

⁶⁰ Selective consideration of texts also occurs on the literal side of the debate, with some using the few mentions of a “circle” in *Zarathustra* to support the idea that ER presents circular time, e.g. Ulfers & Cohen (2008)

⁶¹ Reginster (2008), p201

presents the “thought” of ER as a test or thought experiment⁶², and then arguing for some variation on a non-literal understanding. This happens, however, with little to no textual exegesis, and is normally justified through focus on certain lines, such as the opening “What if [...]”, and the ending (rhetorical) question, “how well-disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life [...]?” The point of the aphorism, and by extension, ER, is then argued and defended to be to assess the attitude of the individual towards their life which is revealed by their reaction to the “thought” or “possibility” that their life might recur.

This is then broadened such that ER is construed as a tool in the service of an exhortation to life-affirmation, and writings on affirmation and *amor fati* are brought in to flesh out the doctrine. In this way, the consensus that interpretations use as a ground for their investigation and consider the most charitable and correct line of discussion, is that life affirmation is the alpha and omega of ER, meaning that the descriptions in *Zarathustra* merely illustrate this metaphorically and provide an allegorical backdrop. Almost unanimously agreed is that ER is simply an attitudinal test, or tool, that the important part happens in the mind of the (ideal) individual who reorients themselves to the world and “passes the test”. This entails the exegetical neglect of those presentations that seem literal, characterising them as poetic or hyperbolic, designed to dramatically reinforce the practical ideal or test, perhaps evidence of

⁶² It is so clear to Ridley “Nietzsche’s Greatest Weight”, p19; Clark (1990, p248); Kain (“Nietzsche, Eternal Recurrence, and the Horror of Existence”, p55); Reginster (2008, p201-202); Stern (“Nietzsche’s Ethics of Affirmation” in *The New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. 2019, pp362-363).

Nietzsche getting “carried away”⁶³. This fate all-too-often befalls the detailed accounts in *Zarathustra*⁶⁴, which according to Nietzsche is the primary text for ER.

I believe therefore that misreading of GS 341 leads to misrepresentation of the doctrine as a whole that then supports an argument for ER’s non-literality. While certainly an important source of insight, as the functional introduction to the doctrine, the focus on GS 341 tends to dominate discussions to the detriment of other vital passages, which develop the idea further. The aphorism is arguably placed and presented as a kind of prelude to the fuller exploration of the doctrine in *Zarathustra*. As Loeb has pointed out, due to its condensed form here in relation to the later more detailed and specific mentions, the reliance of scholars mainly on this aphorism is analogous to Kant scholars largely ignoring the first *Critique* in favour of the *Prolegomenon*.⁶⁵

I will later consider this aphorism in detail, in order to show that it does not present *ER itself* as a hypothetical, but the *experience of being struck with this Dionysian interpretation*, and that the doctrine is here introduced, in anticipation of its role in *Zarathustra*, as completely real.

⁶³ Examples of this manner of proceeding include Clark. 1990, pp254-266; Magnus “Nietzsche’s Eternalistic Counter-Myth” *The Review of Metaphysics*. 26.4. 1973, p615-616. Huddleston argues that the point of ER is to get so carried away in one’s love for life that one wishes momentarily to live it again: “Affirmation, Admirable Overvaluation and Eternal Recurrence” (2015) in *Nietzsche on Morality and Affirmation*, ed. Daniel Came (OUP, forthcoming, 2020), pp12-15

⁶⁴ For instance, Reginster’s (2008) lack of consideration of those crucial passages in *Z*, or even the references in *EH* or *TI*; and David Goldberg’s omission of the same, save the central “On the Vision and the Riddle” in *Z*. (“Nietzsche’s Eternal Recurrence”, pp29-45)

⁶⁵ Loeb (2013), p646

1.2.5. Centrality of Affirmation

Following from the preceding assumptions and arguments comes the majority view of affirmation in ER, that it is a personal or attitudinal matter, taken to refer to the ideal or possible affirmation of (one's own) life, such that one loves it enough to want to live it again (hypothetically speaking), or undertakes a reevaluation of values in order to elevate the value of life against the trend of world-denying value systems that currently prevail. This is frequently linked to the notion of *amor fati*, love of fate: "not wanting anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity."⁶⁶ Affirming the eternal recurrence of one's life, or the universe, means loving it and not wanting it to be different. This might be possible for the ordinary individual, if they are aware of the essentiality of every single event to the timeline; or maybe only in a moment of mad joy and love, or when putting oneself through an imaginative thought-experiment.⁶⁷ Alternatively, it might be an attitude only the strong can take, by projecting the possibility of ER to guide their every action, or perhaps even an ideal attitude that only an *Übermensch* would be capable of, one that people ought to keep in mind so as not to fall into a religious devaluing of this one life.⁶⁸

However it is construed, affirming life on non-literal ER involves an *evaluation*, a consideration of the universe and all its contents that judges them to be "good" based on *some* set of values. Thus it is to positively evaluate life, to look at everything that has happened, and decide that it is "worth it" or good because even awful things are necessarily causally connected to wonderful things, or generally consider life so wonderful that I would choose to live it again or prefer finitude and singularity over eternity in heaven. So non-literal ER, because there is

⁶⁶ EH. "Clever" 10

⁶⁷ Respectively: Nehamas (1980); Huddleston (draft); Clark (1990)

⁶⁸ Respectively: Wicks (1993); Magnus (1973)

no actual recurrence, relies on evaluation to have any content at all, whether this is an individual's assessment of their life or attitude, or immersion in a myth that gives the world the highest evaluation possible in defiance of devaluing religious ideology.

The problem is that Nietzsche is clear that evaluating life, judging its value, is impossible, for this would necessitate a perspective *outside* life where one could survey all of time with no bias as an entity that lives.⁶⁹ Even the few exceptional people who apparently are capable of such evaluation are still focusing only on those best aspects or great individuals whose achievements they consider validating the abysmal aspects of history. Nietzsche states explicitly that most are unable to consider life's value honestly. Crucially,

“whoever would be truly able to participate in [the sufferings of all beings] would have to despair about the value of life; if he were able to grasp and feel mankind's overall consciousness in himself, *he would collapse with a curse against existence...*”⁷⁰

This latter section bears a striking resemblance to *GS* 341 where Nietzsche asks whether we would not throw ourselves down and curse the demon who has told us of ER. If a similar despair is caused by the clear cognisance of life's value simpliciter (without ER in the picture), as it is in *Human, All Too Human*, then it seems as though Nietzsche's question in *The Gay Science* suggests that a negative reaction is *based* in evaluation. On the other hand, a positive, affirmatory reaction is based in real understanding, experience, as the alternative follows, “or have you ever *experienced* a tremendous moment in which you would answer [...] never have I heard anything so divine?”⁷¹ Nietzsche does not endorse this condemnation of suffering, but the point here is that most people *do*, which is in line with the title of the *HH* aphorism “Error

⁶⁹ *TI* “Morality as Anti-Nature” 5

⁷⁰ *HH* 1. 33

⁷¹ *GS* 341

about life necessary for life”, which begins with the assertion that beliefs about life’s value have been based on myopic and fallacious views of the world. This implies, as Reginster has aptly pointed out, that a revaluation of values is necessary and implicit in ER’s exhortation to affirm life, such that suffering, for instance, is not devalued and *this, the only* life can be seen as valuable.⁷²

Therefore, Reginster’s point that affirmation necessitates a revaluation in values tells against alternative non-literal interpretations of ER on which affirmation is all about the positive attitude, the way in which one is valuing life, rather than specifically *what* is being valued. For Clark, this means uncritically considering the question of whether I would go back and live my exact same life again, knowing what I know now; if I decide that I would, then I have the right kind of attitude towards my life: I affirm it and so pass the test.⁷³ For Huddleston, the affirmatory attitude is exemplified in a momentary passionate outburst where I feel like I would like to live again and again eternally because I love life so much generally, and at times get “carried away”⁷⁴. For Nehamas, I affirm life by accepting that my life could never have been different, and that everything is essential to it, and it is in my power to “redeem” my past by making something of my future, thereby eliminating regret.⁷⁵ All these, and others like them⁷⁶, operate under the assumption that affirmation needs to happen somehow in spite of the negative aspects of life – those aspects like suffering that Nietzsche wants to save from the condemnation of prior value systems and which are importantly devalued as lesser, “unreal” features of the apparent world in contrast to the “true world”. The problem that

⁷² See his (2006), pp219-227 where he argues that affirmation requires a revaluing in order to overcome nihilistic tendencies – becoming and transitoriness must be valued

⁷³ Clark (1990), pp268-271

⁷⁴ Huddleston (2015), pp22-32

⁷⁵ Nehamas (1980), pp341-350

⁷⁶ Ridley (1997); Wicks (1993)

these accounts perceive is how to prevent the possibility that someone is willing the atrocities of history for the sake of one's love for life, and therefore, one must either not actually want these things at all, or only want them because hypothetically were things to happen again, these atrocities would have to happen.⁷⁷ Construing affirmation as something that can only happen uncritically, or in a moment of madness, or out of necessity because everything is essentially linked together, are ways of avoiding the issue of affirming what seem to be bad aspects of life, because one doesn't really affirm it all willingly and consciously. But this problem disappears once we acknowledge that revaluation is necessary to affirm life, since such a revaluation involves valuing things like suffering, and so causes the "bad aspects" to be valued because of what they are, not in spite of themselves.

But even such an account takes for granted the idea that ER is primarily a tool in the service of life affirmation, which is not supported by any substantive textual evidence. While Nietzsche does refer to the doctrine as the "highest attainable formula of affirmation"⁷⁸, nowhere does he actually link ER with affirming or loving life. The assumption that this is the thrust of ER comes mainly, I contend, from the above noted reading of *GS* 341, which I will later dispel, and a desire to construe ER in non-literal terms, partially motivated by an understanding of Nietzsche as someone who just would not have offered a metaphysical doctrine like ER. Moreover, if affirmation is supposed to be tied to a kind of "longing" for the recurrence of (one's) life, when recurrence is in actuality not real, then it looks like the kind of narcissism Nietzsche attacks as being a hallmark of Christian eschatology where one's salvation is of supreme importance and makes all the horrors of the world "worth it."⁷⁹ If,

⁷⁷ Clark and Huddleston both note this problem

⁷⁸ *EH*. "Z". 1

⁷⁹ *A*. 43

however, recurrence *were* real, then a longing for it constitutes an embrace, rather than a wish for a fantasy to come true which would fulfil a personal desire to live forever.

I will later argue that affirmation in the context of ER refers simply to the affirmation of the truth of the doctrine, such that having come into the Dionysian perspective and seen reality as recurring, one embraces this as truth. In this way, a wholehearted love for and affirmation of life remains entirely compatible with my literal account. But not being the central defining aspect, this affirmation of life does not need to justify itself through being metaphorical or hyperbolic, or forced, and the revaluation of values which is required is inseparably tied to the interpretation, not reactionary consequence and not justified as a theory, by “fact”. ER as interpretation requires active participation to see the world in this way, a way that is most true as in line with reality, setting aside the dichotomy of “true” and “apparent”. The very ability to do this is also the capability to revalue and value the transience, suffering and hostility of life over any idea of a permanent state of perfection and bliss. I believe that affirmation of ER is linked crucially to the redemption Zarathustra speaks of where one “redeems” one’s past by the assertion “thus I willed it” to the “it was” of past events.⁸⁰ This is because both the affirmation of the doctrine’s truth and acting so as to redeem one’s past in this way are positive efforts that flow from the revelation one undergoes and the understanding that the doctrine has these practical consequences by being relatively all-encompassing. Affirming ER is action, not an exercise in thought. Hence it is “the greatest weight on all your acting”⁸¹.

⁸⁰ Z. 2.20; 3.12.3

⁸¹ GS 341

2. Not Theory, Not Physical

*“Do not come to me with science when I am looking for the natural antagonist of the ascetic ideal [...] These two, science and the ascetic ideal, share the same foundation [...] the same overestimation of the truth”.*⁸²

I here begin defending my position that ER is literal but a metaphysical *interpretation*, by first establishing that it is not a *theory*, presenting fact. I aim to do this by refuting the idea that Nietzsche would have intended a literal ER to be a physical cosmology that depends on the “proofs”, which I attempt through discussion of Nietzsche’s attitude towards science. My contention is that Nietzsche held a less-than approbatory attitude towards science insofar as it involves the pursuit of truth “at all costs” as a relic of the truth-idolising, Being-worshipping, ascetic ideal that also grounds everything else that Nietzsche himself pejoratively termed “metaphysics”. In this ascetic tradition come *theories*, systems that purport or aim to state “facts” about the world, imposing being on the becoming of reality. This strongly indicates that Nietzsche would not have presented a theory of the universe, a cosmology which carried on in the ascetic tradition of denying this world of becoming and reaching for the “true” world.

In light of this, I argue for the non-theoretical understanding of the unpublished arguments for ER and suggest rather that they be understood as experimental alternative interpretations of reality from the perspective of the particular physics that interested Nietzsche. They are not proofs, but forays into the scientific paradigm approaching the truth of ER from a different

⁸² GM. III. 25

angle. In a similar way, the time-atom theory fragment that might be taken as evidence for a theoretical cosmological ER ought also be understood as interpretations deliberately undergone in the perspective of the particular scientific perspective that interested Nietzsche.

2.1 Science and the Ascetic Ideal

The ascetic ideal is the root of all “metaphysics” in the pejorative sense for Nietzsche, and science, and more broadly, *theory*, is ancestor of this ideal. Thus, precisely through being scientific and theoretical, cosmological ER would be anathema to Nietzsche, and this strongly implies that he would not have intended ER as a cosmology. Given his criticism of the principle behind the ascetic ideal, ER should not be viewed scientifically – and so not cosmologically.

2.1.1. “Metaphysics” Pejoratively Construed

Science, for Nietzsche depends on a fundamental belief in the supreme value of truth that is to be sought “at all costs”, which ultimately stems from a moral principle “I will not deceive, not even myself”⁸³. This obsession is life-denying, and in this very sense, is *metaphysical*, in the sense that Nietzsche separates his philosophy from:

“[T]he man whose truthfulness is presupposed by science *thereby affirms another world* [...] insofar as he affirms this ‘other world’ – what? Does he not have to *negate* its counterpart, this world, our world? [...] it is still a *metaphysical faith* on which our faith in science rests [...]

⁸³ GS.344

even we knowledge-seekers of the present day, we godless anti-metaphysicians, light *our* fire from the flames enkindled by a faith which goes back thousands of years, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is truth, that truth is divine..."⁸⁴

"Metaphysics" pejoratively construed, is thus the idolisation of "truth" as something opposed to "appearance", the notion that there is a "true world" or real reality beyond what we experience; this inherently denigrates the world we live in in favour of the "real" world that we can access through spiritual reflection, reason, or approach through empirical science. The unquestioned belief in the supreme value of truth, which is a "metaphysical" belief, is embodied by the ascetic ideal, which "shares a foundation" with science. The ascetic ideal's centralisation of truth stems from a projection of certain concepts which were originally used by humans to organise and interpret the world – Being, identity, persistence – as being what is *actually real*. These qualities, which are *not* real, are supposed to be the absolute truth, "hidden" behind, or beyond this world where the opposite qualities seem to dominate: becoming, difference, transitoriness. Thus, the "truth" in things, or about reality, is supposed to be whatever in them is stable and permanent (evidencing *Being*).⁸⁵

Science follows this pattern in its claim to be getting closer to "the truth", building fact upon fact to end up with a complete picture of the universe. But it is chasing in actuality after a lie that was created out of a human desire to cover over the painful aspects of life, taking its supposition of the ultimacy of truth and the true reality of Being from the ascetic ideal.⁸⁶ Thus, science's appeal to truth in its efforts to understand more about how the universe actually works is a broad "true world theory" based on the narrative that science can really explain

⁸⁴ GS 344

⁸⁵ See *TI* "Reason" 2; *WP* 584

⁸⁶ See *GM* III.28

the way things are, and approximate and uncover the absolute of the world.⁸⁷ But this “true” world is a lie, there is only one world.⁸⁸ Just like all “true-world-theories”, the sciences in principle idolise absolute truth as a stable, perfect end goal of rigorous investigation, and while superficially different to the metaphysics of religion or philosophy, it remains at heart insidiously devoted to this world-denying ideal that places truth “behind” appearance. As Nietzsche explicitly tells us, “[a] depreciation of the ascetic ideal inevitably entails a depreciation of science [...] both presuppose a certain *impoverishment of life*.”⁸⁹

This does not apply only to a caricature of science, a particularly “mechanistic” or “positivistic” school that Nietzsche disdained apart from the rest of science. While Nietzsche does explicitly criticise thinkers whom he variously terms “mechanists”, “positivists”, “materialists” and “naturalists”, considering them naïve and clumsy, the vital grounding in the ascetic will to truth, and the consequences of this, are common to all science.⁹⁰ We can see this initially from the lack of scare quotes when Nietzsche delineates science’s piety to the idol of truth and its prejudice for the true world in *GS* 344, and in *GM* 24 and 25 when he asserts its allegiance to the ascetic ideal. These most egregious examples of scientific fanaticism seem to be caricatures emphasising the ascetic nature of science that manifests in rigorous systematisation and assertion of fact through reason. This may cast doubt on the “naturalism” that many are keen to attribute to Nietzsche in one way or another, that Nietzsche was concerned with constructing theories that methodologically or otherwise cohere with the projects of certain fields of science. This is typically said to show up in his alleged use of causal

⁸⁷ See *WP* 583; -

⁸⁸ *TI*. “How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth”

⁸⁹ *GM*. III. 25

⁹⁰ E.g. *TI* “Four Great Errors” 3: “*messieurs* mechanists and physicists, how much error, how much rudimentary psychology, still remains in your atom!” Nietzsche might be using pejorative terms like “mechanist”, but atoms are a fundamental entity for physical scientists, so the name-calling seems to express distaste for this whole paradigm of science generally.

explanation and a prioritising of the “natural” – biological – processes that give rise to phenomena of mind, morality and culture.⁹¹ His professed aim to “translate humanity back into nature”⁹² is often cited as evidence of, if not reductive, then at least explanatory aims that are based in natural processes.⁹³

Without entering fully into this debate, I note that Nietzsche presents concerns against such systematic theorisation, warning that we must not “divest existence of its *ambiguous* character”⁹⁴ by ordering everything into a neat system where laws such as cause and effect, and objects such as atoms are “concretised” into actual aspects of reality.⁹⁵ Nietzsche also cautions against thinking the world to possess any of the “aesthetically attractive human qualities” which include “order”, “structure”, and “form”, arguing instead that the nature of existence is chaos⁹⁶, and becoming, not Being. Science is loyal to the ascetic ideal’s idolisation of truth, rigidly opposing truth and falsity, whereas Nietzsche points to the “degrees of apparency”⁹⁷ and the necessity for life of “error” and “deception” such that a desire for truth “might well be a concealed desire for death...”⁹⁸. Nietzsche draws attention to the idea that every field of science is merely one interpretation of reality - albeit one which he concedes is useful and moreover, often supported by our sensory experience⁹⁹. Consequently, the artefacts and entities that science makes use of ought to be seen as the descriptive devices they really are. Science does not *explain*, it describes:

⁹¹ Varied takes on Nietzsche’s naturalism include Clark (1990), Leiter (2013), Kail (2015)

⁹² BGE 230

⁹³ E.g. by P.J.E Kail who asserts that it is a project to show humanity as continuous with animal nature. (2015)

⁹⁴ GS 373

⁹⁵ BGE 21

⁹⁶ GS 109

⁹⁷ BGE 34

⁹⁸ GS 344

⁹⁹ BGE 14

“[h]ow could we explain anything! We operate only with things which do not exist [...] we start by making everything into an *image*, into our image!”¹⁰⁰

While science can only interpret and describe reality, and never explain, it has so far almost exclusively been *taken as theory* that presents absolute fact, and to this extent it actively perpetuates the ascetic denial of this world in favour of absolute truth behind. Not only does Nietzsche defame science via the ascetic ideal, but also argues that such scientific pursuits which rest their faith in truth are *not even science*:

“We possess scientific knowledge today to precisely the extent that we have decided to *accept* the evidence of the senses [...] to sharpen and arm them and to think them through to their conclusions. The rest is abortion and not-yet-science: which is to say **metaphysics**, theology, psychology, epistemology. *Or* science of formulae, sign-systems: such as logic and that applied logic, mathematics. In these reality does not appear at all”¹⁰¹.

This suggests that he advocates a novel conception of “science” which is freed from the ascetic ideal and “metaphysics” pejoratively construed. All science which is *theoretical*, aiming to *explain* via *facts*, is tied to this ideal, and therefore it seems that Nietzsche does not straightforwardly consider his ideas to rest in the paradigms of such fields of science¹⁰². Because of this, insofar as Nietzsche does praise science, it is not insofar as it presents “fact” because it is necessarily pure invention that uses imaginary entities, but as helpful interpretation. In this way, Nietzsche never attempts to actually *explain* the world, but to interpret and describe. Description itself is not a problem, because humans need it to live in

¹⁰⁰ GS 112

¹⁰¹ TI. “Reason...” 3 (Bold emphasis mine)

¹⁰² While I concede that Nietzsche often focuses on the psychology behind many moral and philosophical positions, his meaning of “psychology” is evidently different from the recognised field of psychology even at his time of writing. See S. Gardner “Nietzsche on the Arts and Sciences” in *The New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, p310.

this chaotic world, but insofar as science purports to be actually uncovering the true reality, reaching the objective truth bit by bit through the use of “square little human reason”, it should be discarded.¹⁰³ All such efforts are “abortions”, “metaphysics” in the pejorative sense; they are relics of a faith in the supremacy of static absolute truth. Characterising Nietzsche as a “naturalist” who aims to align his results or methods with those of science in *explaining* things thus directly contradicts Nietzsche’s own sentiments that science cannot explain, and that any science which does purport to so explain, presenting facts, is *lying* and ascetic.

When it comes to ER, we ought therefore not see it as aligned with any kind of cosmology which would be physical and systematic and claiming to delineate the *facts* about the universe, to actually explain them. Because scientific in this ascetic sense, cosmology would lie order and structure onto the world, denying or playing down those aspects which are essential to life and which evidence the dynamic nature of existence.

2.1.2 “Science” as Precursor to Dionysianism

Nietzsche’s positive feelings towards science are therefore to be seen in the novel sense which is a certain kind of orientation to reality, rather than condoning science as it has been generally practised. This is an attitude of active ongoing honesty to life and this world, based on what he considers to be the spirit of science that is distorted by truth idolisation. This is largely constituted by credence for the evidence of the senses. He characterises this method as “quiet, cautious, mistrustful”¹⁰⁴ and science as “the sound conception of cause and effect”¹⁰⁵, and that he allies the latter with his understanding of science is clear from his

¹⁰³ GS 373

¹⁰⁴ A 13

¹⁰⁵ A 49

implication that there can be unsound conceptions of cause and effect, which are embodied by all those above-maligned forms of “science”. It is not only religion that assumes agency and the real existence of cause and effects, but science too, which additionally views cause and effect as really explaining the truth of how the universe works. A scientific attitude, in Nietzsche’s terms, while embodying something of the “good” scientific spirit in its healthy scepticism, openness to experience, and honesty, is nonetheless distinguished from scientific practice generally because the latter’s sceptical and honest appearance is a façade hiding an ultimate unquestioned credence in the supremacy of an absolute truth that can be gradually reached.¹⁰⁶

Nietzsche’s conception of nature seems, like his conception of proper science, to be different from the standard biological understanding, and has a non-theoretical, experiential, primitive sense. Nietzsche’s self-ascribed meaning of returning humanity to nature is “not really a going-back but a *going-up* – up into a high, free, even frightful nature and naturalness, such as plays with great tasks”¹⁰⁷ and so the escape from the “metaphysical bird-catchers” who tell humans “you are of a different origin”¹⁰⁸ is not straightforwardly an appeal to the priority of natural science in accounting for humanity. Since Nietzsche does not consider science as *explanatory*, but descriptive like all interpretation, to call him a “naturalist” would mean that he favours natural interpretations in a non-theoretic, standardly scientific sense. This would present no barrier to his understanding ER literally in a non-cosmological sense. The “metaphysics” of those bird-catchers can be construed as that form of ascetic “metaphysics”

¹⁰⁶ See *HH* 635

¹⁰⁷ *TJ* “Ancients” 48

¹⁰⁸ *BGE* 230

that Nietzsche repudiates. In the next chapter, I argue positively for the metaphysics that Nietzsche does engage in, which, in being Dionysian, is natural in this living, dynamic sense.

2.2. The “Proofs” and the *Zeitatomenlehre*

As was earlier indicated, the fact that Nietzsche apparently attempted to prove ER and experimented with theories of time in his notes is often taken as evidence that literal ER is cosmological. Given the above discussion of his disdain for ascetic theory and science that proceeds in this tradition, this might be perceived as highlighting a tension in Nietzsche’s thought. Here I refute this option by arguing that the notes present alternative interpretations, and not theories.

2.2.1 The Proofs

Following from Nietzsche’s assertion that science does not explain, but describes, the proofs should not be viewed as support or justification for any theory, since this would place their claims in the realm of absolute fact, assertions claiming to approach the Truth about the universe. They are nonetheless helpful, as Nietzsche considers science to be helpful, and in the case of ER I contend that they provide an alternate take on the idea. The undeniable influence of particular scientists on his thought is clear from the content of the proofs but given his emphasis on the solely interpretive nature of science, it is more prudent to consider them as *experimental* interpretations that he engaged in after he had already, or was separately coming to the metaphysical Dionysian interpretation of ER that can be seen in the published text. The fact that Nietzsche did not publish these proofs would therefore possibly

be due to fear that including them would cause the doctrine to be misunderstood by those of a scientific bent who would reduce his profound vision to physics in a way that we have seen above he abhors.

Since ER cannot be a scientific theory, these being relics of the ascetic ideal and ways to make static the necessarily dynamic world, the “proofs” do not prove it, but are alternative interpretations in the scientific paradigm, flawed insofar as they are theoretical and to a greater degree impose Being on the universe of becoming. The sense in which ER is “demonstrated” by them is itself inextricable from the scientific paradigm that Nietzsche steps into in composing them, part and parcel of a scientific interpretation of his doctrine. Their existence is conceptually separate from the actual inception of ER however, since in all respects the proofs differ in character from the other presentations, in particular, their ascetic-scientific nature in the sense that Nietzsche considered “metaphysics” pejoratively construed. So, while the arguments purport to be deducing ER from empirical or *a priori* facts, this is a deliberate appeal to the realm of scientific inquiry, an attempt to see from that perspective in order to better “objectify” ER. This follows from Nietzsche’s novel conception of “objective” not as detached and impersonal, but as the accumulation of different perspectives on a thing: “the *more* feelings” and “the *more* eyes, different eyes” that we bring to bear on a thing, “the greater our ‘objectivity’ will be.”¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche tells us that “[t]he two most extreme ways of thinking, the mechanistic and the Platonic, are reconciled as ideals in the *eternal recurrence*.”¹¹⁰ This looks like a bringing-together of incredibly different

¹⁰⁹ GM III. 12

¹¹⁰ WP 1061

perspectives, both of which Nietzsche maligns, and yet which can be combined in a kind of harmony through the lens of these interpretation-proofs.

Hence, Nietzsche's "proof" for ER in these notes is appealing to these scientific ideas, for instance the note that, "[t]he *eternal recurrence* is an inevitable consequence of the principle of the conservation of energy."¹¹¹ We can infer that this is a conditional, based on the ways that scientific theories conceive of the world: "If it is *possible* to think of the world as a determinate magnitude of force [...] then it follows [...]" The premises and the conclusion are therefore not to be taken as straightforwardly believed by Nietzsche, they are part of a scientific interpretation that broadens a range of perspectives. The rough argument, that in infinite time, the finite number of combinations of the universe must have been realised infinite times rests on factors concretised into assumptions to fit the scientific narrative, and so appear weak. However, such "assumptions" are also corollaries of the Dionysian interpretation of reality that I defend later, and so for the sake of a scientific interpretation of ER, are simply "given". These elements appear to some degree in the key *Zarathustra* passage "On the Vision and the Riddle" where Zarathustra appears to deduce ER from the two infinite lanes. Here, with the scientific and systematic framework absent, a very similar "argument" for the notion that everything must have already happened infinite times and will happen infinite times more is quite different, since it is in the tone of interpretation, rather than a scientific perspective (taken as theory). As I will argue when undertaking an exegesis of these critical passages, the quality of immersive revelation, vitally linked to a kind of intoxication embodied by feelings of love, awe and power that characterises this and the other key texts on ER is absolutely essential to understanding what ER actually is. Not a

¹¹¹ WP 1063

theory, seen from a dispassionate “objective” (subject-less) viewpoint, but realistic interpretation.¹¹²

2.2.2 Time Atom Theory

Though much less discussed, Nietzsche’s *zeitatomenlehre* is also cited as evidence that ER is a cosmological theory, by, for instance, Claudia Crawford who argues that the later doctrine is exactly modelled on this theory of time.¹¹³ I argue against this possibility by showing that if taken *prima facie*, the note is an instance of explicitly scientific theory which Nietzsche distances himself from. Moreover, its particular features also betray its Being-centric slant – again, if construed literally. Therefore, and given the above analysis of the “proofs” I contend that a similar understanding should be applied to this note, that it is an experimental foray into the mechanisms and language of science inspired by the physics Nietzsche was reading at the time.

The time atom theory (TAT)’s depiction of the universe of discrete time-points recalls the atomistic physics of Boscovich whose magnum opus Nietzsche read not long before this note was composed, suggesting the note was directly influenced by that work and was an attempt to apply his ideas.¹¹⁴ If this is intended as physical theory, however, then it presumably presents supposed “facts” about the world, and as has been argued, is a relic of the ascetic ideal. This is in fact even more evident from the very nature of the “theory” itself, which is

¹¹² Nietzsche’s referring to ER as “the *most scientific* of all possible hypotheses” does not refute my claims, since it is arguable that the context suggests he is speaking of the *nihilistic conception* of ER. This takes the “meaninglessness” of the world and magnifies it into a recurrence of meaninglessness that never ends. See *WP* 55 for the full context.

¹¹³ Crawford “Nietzsche’s Overhuman: Creating on the Crest of the Timepoint” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 30.1. 2007, pp22-48

¹¹⁴ Boscovich has been noted as a central stimulus for the *zeitatomenlehre* by Ansell-Pearson – “Nietzsche’s Brave New World of Force: On Nietzsche’s ‘Time Atom Theory’ Fragment and the Matter of Boscovich’s Influence on Nietzsche.” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 20. 2000; and Crawford, “Nietzsche’s Overhuman”, pp30-34

idealistic in that the world of things – the world that perceiving beings experience and believe to be real – is *an illusion* created by the perception of those beings. In this way, there is a split between “real” and “apparent”, where the “real” is static and eternally unchanging, even undivided as the “point” of unextended space is “one” and the same; and the “apparent” is dynamic, continuous time, innumerable entities, constantly changing. Thus, TAT very obviously presents a world of Being, starkly contrasted with Nietzsche’s descriptions of the world and existence as Becoming, but also which explicitly fall under the rubric of the “bad” “metaphysics” which stems from the ascetic ideal. Thus, it seems unlikely that such a theory would have been defended by Nietzsche *as* a theory – as presenting facts about what the universe is actually like.

Nietzsche never links TAT with ER. In order to construe TAT as depicting ER at all, one has to effectively draw on the later arguments in the “proofs” by believing that the finite nature of the spacepoint means that it can only be configured a finite number of ways, a different way at each timepoint. Then, once it has been configured in every one of the possible manners, at the next timepoint it will be configured in the first way again, and so on through the series. As has been pointed out in response to the “proofs” by those aiming to refute literal ER, it just doesn’t follow that finite space would lead to the procession of an identical series of configurations repeating. If the note is taken to present an actual physical theory, this is problematic because a theory would need to be logically and factually supported or demonstrable, yet a recurrence based on TAT is not. The problems of ER’s invalidity based on TAT, and the scientific, ascetic bent of the note dissolve if, as with the “proofs”, the note is understood to be an example of Nietzsche forming an experimental interpretation of reality. TAT taken as factual theory is evidently scientific, and thereby subject to Nietzsche’s hostility towards theorisation, systematisation, and imposition of being, all of which make the world

static. TAT understood as another interpretation prevents it from conflicting with Nietzsche's view of the dynamic nature of reality which I argue ER as interpretation reveals.

3. Heraclitan Metaphysics, Dionysian Interpretation

“Life itself, life’s eternal fruitfulness and recurrence requires agony, destruction and the will to annihilation...”¹¹⁵

Having argued against the conception of (literal) ER as a cosmology, I must now present my contention that in being literal, ER is a *metaphysical interpretation* of reality. This here centres on what I perceive to be ER’s Heraclitan metaphysical content, and its Dionysian interpretative character. Both the notion that ER is metaphysical, and that this metaphysics is Heraclitan, are revealed by Nietzsche’s praise and appropriation of Heraclitan ideology, linking those ideas to ER. Most prominent is the idea of the nature of existence as becoming, something Nietzsche explicitly defends, and which is vitally present in descriptions of ER. Thus, ER expresses Heraclitan metaphysics on Nietzsche’s terms, based in what Nietzsche himself thought of Heraclitus and his ideas. The interpretative essence of ER comes directly from the very way in which the Heraclitan ideas which Nietzsche uses are expressed and described in ways that connect with the Dionysian – a particular way of seeing and being in the world. Linking the Heraclitan and the Dionysian together is the emphasis on play and the inextricable duality of creation and destruction that are perceived not as opposites, but two sides of the same coin, the one arising out of the other. Nietzsche’s language suggests strongly that the Heraclitan playful world of becoming can only be seen from the Dionysian perspective, and so the metaphysical interpretation of reality that is ER is essentially Dionysian.

¹¹⁵ WP. 1052

Thus, in contrast to the former possibility of viewing ER as *physical theory* of the universe, onto which is tacked a personally affective exhortation to affirmation, these vital figures – the one historical influence, the other mythical typology - show ER to be *metaphysical interpretation* of reality.

3.1. Heraclitus

From the start of Nietzsche philosophical writings to the end, Heraclitus is mentioned with approval and distinguished for his assertions that Nietzsche praises for their perceptiveness. Nietzsche's Heraclitan metaphysics is most prominently understood in his characterisation of existence as *becoming* and not *Being*. According to Nietzsche, unlike other thinkers, Heraclitus alone recognised that existence is *Becoming*, and it is for this reason that Nietzsche distinguishes him "with high reverence"; "Heraclitus will always be right in this, that being is an empty fiction"¹¹⁶. He is characterised as criticising other thinkers for "[using] names for things as though they rigidly, persistently endured"¹¹⁷, which is reflected in Nietzsche's own dismissal of the "errors" of science to think that there are "enduring things", "identical things" and "material bodies"¹¹⁸, and more broadly by Nietzsche's campaign against the "true world theories" that make reality static in the faith in an absolute unchanging Truth that is "really" real. This will lead to a clear way of understanding Nietzsche's language in describing ER in terms of becoming, that ER as interpretation is vitally linked to a true understanding of reality.

¹¹⁶ *TJ* "Reason" 2

¹¹⁷ *PTAG* 5

¹¹⁸ *GS* 110

It is because ER embodies becoming rather than exemplifying and imposing Being that makes it true and real.¹¹⁹

The Heraclitan ideology that Nietzsche uses is deeply Dionysian, and so it is difficult to examine the aspects separately, but I here focus on that metaphysical side while noting the close connection between the Dionysian perspective and the Heraclitan metaphysics of ER. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche explicitly ties the two:

“The affirmation of transience and destruction, the decisive feature of any Dionysian philosophy, saying ‘yes’ to opposition and war, *becoming*, with a radical rejection of even the concept of ‘being’ [...] the ‘eternal recurrence’ [...] the unconditional and infinitely repeated circulation of all things [...] *could* have been taught already by Heraclitus.”¹²⁰

Nietzsche is not only straightforwardly suggesting that Heraclitus did actually believe in a form of ER – which is also made clear by his characterisation of Heraclitus in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, as having believed in “a periodically repeated end of the world, and in an ever renewed rise of another world out of the all-destroying cosmic fire.”¹²¹ This recurrence is different to Nietzsche’s because it implies novelty, but the basic principle and its metaphysical nature are in line with Nietzsche’s later description of ER. Nietzsche is also emphasising that crucial elements such as the prioritising of becoming as the nature of existence, which Nietzsche sees Heraclitus as having evidenced, are tied into ER. The fact that Nietzsche praises and connects Heraclitus to ER further implies that its content lies in

¹¹⁹ Cox writes of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* that although an early (unpublished) work, it reveals a Nietzsche “very much in accord with the Nietzsche we find in the “mature” work.” – “Nietzsche’s Heraclitus and the Doctrine of Becoming”, p52

¹²⁰ *EH* III. “BT” 3

¹²¹ *PTAG* 6

metaphysics rather than physics.¹²² Moreover, Nietzsche hints early on that this metaphysics is not factual: “Heraclitus gazes but does not peer, knows but does not calculate”¹²³, which suggests a *non-theoretical, interpretative* seeing and knowing, not cosmology, but interpretation.

Nietzsche’s cry for the abolition of the dichotomised “real” and “apparent” worlds can also be traced to Heraclitus, whom Nietzsche credits for having “denied the duality of totally diverse worlds”, not splitting things into a “physical” and a “metaphysical” world.¹²⁴ Thus, Nietzsche follows Heraclitus in his rejection of “metaphysics” in the pejorative sense that looks to a “true world”, *and yet construes reality metaphysically*. In a tone of agreement, Nietzsche describes reality as seen by Heraclitus, “the everlasting and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual, which constantly acts and comes to be but never is” and acknowledges that it is a terrible, paralysing vision¹²⁵. In this way, he prefigures his later assertions that humans cover up the indecipherable and terrifying chaos of becoming with invented Being, which they later transfigure into the absolute Truth. That seeing reality metaphysically as ceaseless becoming is compatible with a non-dichotomisation of worlds means that this metaphysical insight is not supposed to be *factual*, asserting what is the “real” truth over the “illusion”.

There is no dichotomy between a “noumenal” and a “perceived” world since the distinction that does exist is between the chaos that characterises all existence and all interpretation,

¹²² C. Cox considers the notion of becoming that Nietzsche and Heraclitus share to be a “naturalistic” one that rejects metaphysics and describes only this world. He does also, however conceive of it as constitutive of Nietzsche’s perspectivism under which the world of becoming (the only world) is only ever seen through interpretations which are constantly at war. See his “Nietzsche’s Heraclitus and the Doctrine of Becoming” *International Studies in Philosophy*. 30.3. 1998

¹²³ PTAG 9

¹²⁴ PTAG 5. This is “metaphysical” in the narrow, pejorative sense

¹²⁵ PTAG 8

which is all understanding. This belies accounts that present Nietzsche as supplementing his Heraclitan ideas with Boscovichian physics in order to explain the necessary becoming in ways that did not resort to “mythical metaphor”. For instance, Tones and Mandalios have argued that the Kantian problems that Heraclitus’ metaphysics raises – that there is an absolute reality of becoming, and the world which “irrational man” perceives distinct from one another – led Nietzsche to science for solutions that maintained existence as constant becoming without these metaphysical issues.¹²⁶ The chaotic universe is not a thing-in-itself with no perceivable qualities, it is the characteristic quality of existence and is itself the *rejection* of the dualistic “real” and “apparent” worlds

Nietzsche’s alignment with Heraclitus is also visible in the way in which he views Heraclitus’ understanding of the character of the becoming reality – as both chaotic and necessary, seeing “*law in becoming*” and “*play in necessity*”, and conceiving of reality as a dynamic transformational “*game*”. This exactly mirrors Nietzsche’s assertion that the world is “chaos, *not in the sense of a lack of necessity*” but in its lack of order and structure.¹²⁷ Vital is the image used for this “game” and the union of necessity and chaos, the child:

“as children and artists play, so plays the ever-living fire. It constructs and destroys, all in innocence. Such is the game that the aeon plays with itself [...] the ever self-renewing impulse to play calls new worlds into being. The child throws its toys away from time to time - and starts again, in innocent caprice.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ M. Tones, J. Mandalios “Nietzsche’s Actuality: Boscovich and the Extremities of Becoming” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 46.3. 2015, pp308-327

¹²⁷ GS 109

¹²⁸ PTAG 7

This metaphor of an innocent child playing has other deep associations in Nietzsche's presentation of reality as becoming, which he ties to ER. Nietzsche criticises moral worldviews – and “true-world theories” are all fundamentally supported by morality – because in ascribing moral values to the world, “the *innocence of becoming* is corrupted”¹²⁹. Likewise, Nietzsche writes of abolishing all notion of “purpose”, “first cause”, recognising that “*nothing exists apart from the whole*”, for “thus alone is the *innocence of becoming* restored”¹³⁰.

Nietzsche uses the image of the child not only as the symbol for the constantly creating, chaotic universe, borrowing Heraclitus' concept of the “great child” whose “unexpected and exciting lucky throws of the dice” humankind are subject to¹³¹, but also as archetype of the creator, which can be linked to the emphasis on Dionysian and artistic creation in affirming ER as interpretation. “Innocence the child is, and forgetting, a beginning anew, a play, a self-propelling wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yea-saying.”¹³² In this way, the child represents both the type of one who can see from the perspective of ER, and the nature of that reality itself of which ER is a faithful interpretation. This reflects the way in which ER as an interpretation of reality that reveals the truth of becoming *both* represents reality and embodies it in its dynamic, non-theoretical nature. It can bring to light truth of the “child” by being childlike and by the one who sees through it being childlike - creative, innocent, honest, loving life. Nietzsche does actually link the two; “‘Play’ [...] is the ideal of him who is lavish with his strength, is ‘childlike’. The ‘childlikeness’ of God, *παις παίζων*.”¹³³ So the childlike individual, the artistic type is subtly connected to the childlikeness of the creative essence of reality that is destroying and creating eternally. The ending Greek is a paraphrase of

¹²⁹ WP 552

¹³⁰ TI “Four Great Errors” 8

¹³¹ GM II. 16

¹³² Z. I. 1

¹³³ “Playing child” WP 797

Heraclitus' "playing child" who symbolises the game of time. Again, the dynamic, playful, chaotic reality is seen to be importantly connected to Heraclitus, the proclaimer of becoming, whose metaphysics of time and eternal return Nietzsche was evidently gripped by from the start of his writing to the end.

3.2. Dionysos

The Dionysian element to ER comprises its character as an interpretation, which constitutes the way in which ER is grasped and understood. The Dionysian perspective is an entirely non-theoretical, non-analytic kind of epistemological perspective: an all-encompassing, destructive and creative, alive, "tragic wisdom"¹³⁴ that comes from seeing into the paralysing chaos of existence, "thinking down to the depths of pessimism"¹³⁵ but affirming everything in a "*superabundance of life*"¹³⁶. It is a recognition of reality that is characterised by being *alive*, by embodying reality in lifting up all aspects that are essential to life as eternal turbulent chaos and becoming. The Dionysian is the instinct of vivacity that embodies the chaotic play of becoming and the dynamism and creation/destruction of life. It describes in this way both the state of being of one who can affirm ER, characterising the manner in which one grasps the interpretation, and is also embodied by ER itself which is a Dionysian depiction of reality. Nietzsche writes that with Dionysian mysteries, the Greeks guaranteed to themselves "*Eternal life, the eternal recurrence of life*"¹³⁷, and he appropriates their mythological figure, drawing out those elements which he saw as essential to viewing reality as this eternally

¹³⁴ *EH* "BT" 3

¹³⁵ *BGE* 56

¹³⁶ *GS* 370

¹³⁷ *TJ* "Greeks" 4

recurring cycle. Central to this is the creative and destructive core of the Dionysian, which directly reflects Nietzsche's Heraclitan conception of the creating-destroying universe. As a symbol of vivacity, the destructive-creative character of the Dionysian is linked to life, Nietzsche using procreation as the metaphor for the eternally creative Dionysian will to life – the creation and affirmation is not only in praise of life, but literally constitutive of living and creating life.¹³⁸ Nietzsche sees all creation - and this embodiment of creation therefore most of all – as inherently destructive, for in creation something is destroyed through being eliminated and replaced; “whoever must be a creator always annihilates.”¹³⁹ The fundamental archetype of creation is the child, who, as outlined above, is “innocence”, “beginning anew” and “Yea-saying”; “for the play of creating [...] a sacred Yea-saying is needed”¹⁴⁰. When addressing would-be creators, Zarathustra asks, “[a]re you [...] A first movement? A self-propelling wheel?”¹⁴¹ This exactly echoes the description of the child, reinforcing the connection between childlikeness and Dionysian creation. The fact that, as we have seen, Nietzsche also uses the child in the Heraclitan sense to depict time and the chaotic universe suggests that he understood these things – creation, playing, innocence – to be importantly bound-up such that reality's innocent “playing” is reflected by the person who creates.

Nietzsche's conception of the universe as destroying and creating in this way must be distinguished from the idea that the universe is *actually* creating what is new, which he criticises as a “shadow of God”¹⁴². The Dionysian childlike creating/destroying universe is an interpretation, real, true, but not a fact, reality itself being chaotic and elusive, and that this

¹³⁸ *TJ*. “Greeks” 4

¹³⁹ *Z*. I. 15

¹⁴⁰ *Z*. I. 1

¹⁴¹ *Z*. I. 17

¹⁴² *GS* 109, *WP* 1062

is inextricable from ER can be seen from Nietzsche's seamless linking of the Dionysian-Heraclitan vision of reality both in the above-cited *EH* passage, and his dramatic depiction of the world: Reality "forever blessing itself as that which eternally recurs, a becoming which knows no satiety, disgust, or weariness [...] my *Dionysian* world of eternal self-creation, of eternal self-destruction"¹⁴³. The description "my" emphasises the interpretative nature of ER, not some absolute true reality, not a true world, but the world, truly described (in the sense of becoming).

The Dionysian perspective is reflective of reality and the embodiment of reality and life through creativity because this perspective is one which sees reality in this particular dynamic way, catalysed by intoxication. In the revelation of reality, and growth in knowledge of the chaos, "only Dionysian rapture suffices."¹⁴⁴ Just like Heraclitus' gaze into the chaotic becoming of reality, the Dionysian is also constituted by such deep perception of reality, "A tempting courage of the most intense gaze, which yearns for the fearful as for the [...] worthy enemy, on whom it can test its strength"¹⁴⁵. The perspective is thus bound up with "rapture", "intoxication" and "madness" where one "bubble[s] over with life", experiences intense visions, and is overcome. This madness comes from joy and overflowing strength. Intoxication is this very fullness of life, "a superior sense of *power*" and it allows one to perceive things in a true but transformative way.

"Perceptions of space and time are altered; tremendous distances are surveyed, and first become *perceivable* [...] the *refinement of the faculty* for the perception of the smallest and

¹⁴³ *WP* 1067

¹⁴⁴ *WP* 1029

¹⁴⁵ *BT* "Attempt at Self-Criticism" 1

most transitory things; *divination*, the power of understanding at the slightest hint or suggestion”¹⁴⁶.

I believe that this immersive scheme of perception is inherently tied to the Dionysian perspective itself, the creative-destructive attitude which sees reality as so creative and destructive. The fact that Dionysian vision is so frequently linked to recurrence suggests therefore, that the interpretation of reality seen by the Dionysian is ER. This will be further defended in the next chapter but can initially be supported by looking to the Dionysian love for and affirmation of life.

The madness of the Dionysian, which brings about the great changes and endings to dogma¹⁴⁷, is a clarity of seeing and desire to see and affirm all that comes from an abundance of life. The insight is bound up with a love for life because of the life-filled nature of this manner of being-in-the-world, and so a powerful affirmation of life necessarily follows. This affirmation is not a personal issue concerning one’s own specific attitude towards their life or the world¹⁴⁸, and it is not a passive acceptance of a cosmic order¹⁴⁹, or a motivation to embrace one’s only life with an emphasis on its unique and finite nature.¹⁵⁰ Affirmation here means saying yes to all of life by participating in this exaltation knowingly through a manner of being alive which does not subdue those instincts of life that have been maligned; the non-theoretical revaluation of all those “negative” aspects of the world such as suffering and impermanence, and the condemned living body being reasserted as good, as true and real.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ WP 800

¹⁴⁷ D 14

¹⁴⁸ Clark (1990)

¹⁴⁹ Loeb (2010, 2015)

¹⁵⁰ Magnus (1973, 1978), Wicks (1993), Reginster (2008)

¹⁵¹ As in any thought-experiment understanding of ER and affirmation, encapsulated by Stern’s characterisation: “to separate the affirmative sheep from the nay-saying goats.” (“Nietzsche’s Ethics of Affirmation”, p362)

Through knowledge that the Dionysian is this creative and destructive fulness and glorification of life we can understand specifically what affirmation means, and can see how this links to ER:

“a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without deduction, exception or selection; it wants the eternal cycle: the same things, the same logical or illogical connections. The supreme condition a philosopher can attain is a Dionysian attitude towards life; my formula for this is *amor fati*...”¹⁵²

Wanting the eternal cycle is not a placeholder for a general attitude of joy about (one’s) life, having decided to reassert the value of the suffering and becoming of existence¹⁵³, it is an actual desire for destruction, which is bound to the life-filled, childlike Dionysian way of being. The “eternal cycle” is thus to be understood as the interpretation seen through the Dionysian perspective, the perspective which sees reality and transfigures it to the extent that can be understood, while remaining true to that chaos. This is an immortalisation out of love, an artistic one, a kind of lying that uncovers truth and which is fundamentally opposed to asceticism and true-world-theorising. “[A]rt, in which the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deceive* has good conscience on its side, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than science.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, it differs greatly from an eternalisation of Being, epitomised by religion or even science, which makes static, permanently-the-same.¹⁵⁵ Rather it sees eternity

¹⁵² WP 1041

¹⁵³ Huddleston (forthcoming), Reginster (2008)

¹⁵⁴ GM. III. 25

¹⁵⁵ GS 370. Reginster makes a distinction between desiring eternity in the sense of permanence and timelessness, and desiring an eternity of becoming, which is eternal recurrence (though Reginster himself takes this latter desire to be conceptual only and referring only to an assertion of the transitory nature of existence characterised by becoming. See his 2008, pp224-227

as *sempiternality*, infinite but not a permanent timelessness; it is time and becoming going on forever without beginning or end.

Therefore, only with a truly Dionysian attitude that inherently asserts the eternal recurrence does an individual show *amor fati*, for this is “not wanting anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just enduring what is necessary, still less concealing it [...] but *loving* it...”¹⁵⁶ In this way, it can be seen that ER as pertains to affirmation is primarily a non-cognitive and non-evaluative attitude, because it does not come from a theoretical revaluation¹⁵⁷, a judgement of the world and life based on some ideals. It is a valuing of life and everything essential to it *because one is alive*, not because one philosophically reconciles their mind to their life and erases all wish for an afterlife.¹⁵⁸ The Dionysian represents a power overflowing because full of life, that desires destruction¹⁵⁹, reflective of the way reality “plays” innocently forever – the cycles of ER are the endless process of becoming that means endless destruction and creation.

ER, as exemplification of Dionysian interpretation, emphasises the necessity and the inexorability of the incessantly destroying, creating reality and so the one who affirms it affirms life. They thereby affirm the necessity in the chaos, and the innocence of becoming that has no directing purpose and that is “redeemed” through recognition that there is only the whole, that to live through the interpretation of ER is to create with the universe, “reality *once more* [...] strengthened, corrected.”¹⁶⁰ They “stand in the midst of the universe with a

¹⁵⁶ *EH* “Clever” 10

¹⁵⁷ As in Reginster (2008)

¹⁵⁸ See those non-literal approaches which construe ER as primarily having this therapeutic effect, or psychological slant that homes in on certain types of people – Wicks (1993), Clark (1990), Dries, “Metaphysician, Philosopher, Psychologist.”

¹⁵⁹ *GS* 370

¹⁶⁰ *TI* “Reason” 6

joyful and trusting fatalism [...] that in the totality everything is redeemed and affirmed – *he no longer denies.*”¹⁶¹

ER is real as an interpretation can be by its encompassing of the totality of perspectives and magnifying description of reality; the eternal recurrence is real; this is simply the only way the truth can be comprehended. But it does not proclaim its postulation of an eternally reliable process as “the Truth”, but in lifting up the aspects of reality - becoming, dynamism, suffering, the sempiternally infinite – it represents reality with only a minimum of falsification, and is not a static depiction, like those of prior philosophy that impose being rigidly over the world, and “mummify” it¹⁶², but an exemplification of dynamic becoming, continually being asserted through Dionysian eyes.

But it is not only the truth of the interpretation which is essential here, but the character, which is that of lifting up life, saying yes, an embrace of the chaos. It is not a myth or a hypothetical, for these would entail a hiding or deliberate *defamatory* lying about reality to suit a narrative – the upshot being that ER is only a “what if”, or a principle for instruction. If ER is in any sense a myth, it is a myth that is true, by which I mean the language of ER as presented and the Dionysian attitude are quite mythological; but this is simply a part of affirming and glorifying life and its cycling creative, destroying chaos. “Dionysos cut into pieces is a *promise* to life; that it will be eternally born anew, that it will return from its destruction.”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ *TI* “Expeditions of an Untimely Man” 49. Nietzsche is discussing Goethe’s ideal type that he (Nietzsche) christens Dionysian

¹⁶² See *TI*. “Reason in Philosophy” 1

¹⁶³ *WP* 1052

4. Exegesis

“All truth is simple’ – Is that not a compound lie?”¹⁶⁴

So far I have aimed to establish that considering ER as a non-literal thought experiment relies on assumptions which limit Nietzsche’s thought to the analytic and scientific; that Nietzsche’s attitude towards science dispels the possibility of ER being a cosmology; and that Nietzsche uses Heraclitan ideology to maintain a metaphysical understanding of reality, and presents the way to this understanding as coming through the Dionysian perspective. Now I turn to the main published texts on ER in order to ground my claims more firmly in the actual written descriptions, aiming to show how they are best understood as presenting a literal-real ER that is interpretation, not a theory. This requires a close reading of the text for a number of reasons: First, I believe that close reading alone can draw out the important details in Nietzsche’s dense and mysterious descriptions of ER. Second, when the texts are considered by advocates of alternative views, this is done through the lens of previously discussed assumptions, and there are several consensus opinions on the interpreting of certain passages that I here refute based on my prior considerations. Lastly, because I believe that the way Nietzsche writes about ER in *The Gay Science and Zarathustra* is illustrative of the experiential, all-encompassing nature of grasping the interpretation of reality from within the Dionysian perspective.

¹⁶⁴ *TJ* “Maxims & Arrows” 4

4.1 *The Gay Science* – The Demon

I begin with the famous GS 341, the first explicit description of ER in Nietzsche's published work¹⁶⁵. The aphorism is worth quoting in full in order to enable thorough investigation of what Nietzsche means here, particularly given its near ubiquitous dominance of discussions on ER, underpinning the consensus that it proves ER to be a thought experiment.

The Greatest Weight

What if some day or night a demon came to you in your most solitary solitude and said to you: 'This life, as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live again and innumerable times again, and there will be nothing new in it; but rather every pain and joy, every thought and sigh, and all the unutterably trivial or great things in your life will have to happen to you again, with everything in the same series and sequence – and likewise this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and likewise this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence will be turned over again and again, and you with it you speck of dust!'

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke to you thus? Or was there one time when you experienced a tremendous moment in which you would answer him: 'You are a god, and I have never heard anything so divine!' If that thought took hold of you as you are it would transform you and perhaps crush you; the question with regard to each and every thing, 'Do you want this again, innumerable times again?' would weigh upon your actions with the greatest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life, that you might *long for nothing more* than this final eternal confirmation and seal?

¹⁶⁵ It is alluded to in 109 and 285

4.1.1 The Truth

The majority understanding of this aphorism is that it presents ER as thought-experiment, the key cited evidence for this being the opening “what if”, as exemplified by Magnus’ assertion: “the demon presents us with a hypothetical state of affairs. ‘*What if...recurrence were true*’”¹⁶⁶. This then becomes reason to construe the entirety of ER as thought-experiment based on possibility. But against this majority, I contend that the aphorism *does not* present ER as a hypothetical. What *is* hypothetical, what the “what if” refers to, is not ER itself, but *the event of realising ER’s reality*. The demon, through whom Nietzsche here outlines ER, unequivocally *tells* you that you will live again and again. Their tone is not suggestive or coy, but almost condemnatory, sentencing you to your fate, “‘you speck of dust!’”

That the demon speaks truth can be seen more clearly by considering the fact that the preceding aphorism describes the dying Socrates who tells someone to sacrifice a rooster to Asclepius, the god of medicine, an interaction that Nietzsche interprets as Socrates’ feeling that “‘*life is a disease*”” because he “‘*suffered from life!*””¹⁶⁷ Socrates thus expresses his gratitude to be “cured” of life, revealing his hatred of it – he would not want to live again just as one would not want to be sick again. While on trial, Socrates describes his *daimonion*, a divine something, which warns or guides him in the form of a voice, and though this is not literally a demon, the notion of its forewarning, and spiritual guise is echoed strongly by the

¹⁶⁶ Magnus (1978), p40, pp74-75

¹⁶⁷ GS 340

demon who announces ER. There is an implicit suggestion that just as the demon spoke to Socrates, so the demon of GS 341 speaks to you, telling you about ER¹⁶⁸.

The role of demon as voice of truth or insight might be supported by Nietzsche speaking elsewhere of the notion of “*inspiring* spirits (or demons or goblins)” as a metaphor for the guises that instincts take in imparting philosophical insight, suggesting that a way in which instincts can provide ideas, opinions or knowledge is by being an inspirational demon.¹⁶⁹ Thus the list Nietzsche gives “death, or poison, or piety, or sheer malice” as potential reasons for Socrates’ outburst can be seen as instincts of which one took the dominant role and spoke to him as demon. This might also be supported by the fact that an *agathadaimon* – a good divine spirit – was honoured with a libation most notably at sanctuaries of the god Dionysos, with whose name Nietzsche baptises his ideal attitude, and world-conception, including as I contend, ER. These points suggest that Nietzsche intends GS 341 to depict an inspiring demon that represents Dionysian instinct telling you the truth from that honest, life-filled, ecstatic perspective.

The tone of the opening to that aphorism might then be more along the lines of, “Well then, what if one day or night a demon came to *you*, when you were completely alone, and told you that you will have to live your identical life infinitely more times?” Thus, the conjecture is directed at the possibility that *you* might be faced with a realisation that ER is real, as you are struck with the Dionysian interpretation of reality, and whether this spirit of inspiration is heavenly or chthonic depends on one’s orientation towards this perspective and its interpretation.

¹⁶⁸ Loeb even suggests that Socrates’ *daimonion* tells him of ER at the moment of death, provoking despair – (2013), pp649-650

¹⁶⁹ BGE 6

4.1.2 A First Glimpse at the Experience

I believe that *GS 341* can be understood as an abridged depiction, overview-style, of the experience of being first confronted with the reality of ER. This is evidenced first by the use of the images of the “spider”, the “moonlight” and the “moment” which return in the vital “On the Vision and the Riddle” where Zarathustra faces the reality of ER for the first time; and of the “hourglass” which is developed by Zarathustra’s animals proclaiming his teaching. The emphasis on the necessity of recurrence – that you “will **have to** live again”, everything in your life “will **have to happen** to you again” in the same order; the hourglass of existence “**will be turned over** again and again, and you with it” – also prefigures the later descriptions of ER’s nature. Thus, the suggestion is that the demon’s pronouncement acts as a foreshadowing and preview for a deeper and fuller presentation.

But more substantially, this is evidenced by the aphorism’s *revelatory* and *raw experiential* tone, as “*you*” are presented with the Dionysian interpretation, occurring in this initial stage as the imparting of knowledge by a “demon”, an inspiring spirit. The scene of intense solitude broken suddenly by a voice of insight, followed by a strong reaction of despair or elation is echoed by Nietzsche’s description of his own experience of inspiration in *Ecce Homo* when discussing *Zarathustra*. This he describes as a “flash of lightning” that “suddenly” strikes and shakes you “to your core” as with “ineffable assuredness and subtlety, something becomes *visible, audible*”, and that you are powerless to resist¹⁷⁰. This suggests that the “demon” is a personification for the mechanism by which the “something” of the Dionysian interpretation of reality becomes perceptible – suddenly you can see and hear it as though the spirit is really

¹⁷⁰ *EH* “Z” 3

telling you about it. We can even suppose that Nietzsche's personal encounter with the Dionysian is partially responsible for the character of this aphorism, given his evident experience with this kind of powerful revelation. Thus, the infusion of his own feelings, and the way the aphorism seems to induce this experience of being so confronted with the Dionysian by placing "you", the reader in this scenario lend a greater profundity to the aphorism.

I contend that this immersion of experience is behind the extreme responses to the demon's message: either you are "crushed" with despair as you "throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon"; or you tell them in ecstasy, "[y]ou are a god [...] I have never heard anything so divine!" While Nehamas has argued that these exclusive extremes are evidence that ER is not literal, because literal ER could induce indifference¹⁷¹, I believe that this argument rests on assumptions equating literal ER with cosmology, and the thought that ER must adhere to analytic philosophical strictures. I contend instead that the lack of intermediate response seems to reinforce the notion that the aphorism is an immersive presentation of the flash of inspiration, brought by the Dionysian spirit, since this kind of insight cannot be ignored. To one who is not capable of seeing through the life-affirming, creative-destructive, joyful perspective of this god, the demon's proclamation reads like an (un-)death sentence, condemning you to your own life-hatred for eternity as you relive over and over the life that you see as to some degree inherently reprehensible. Alternatively, to the one who *can* see through the Dionysian lens, the demon is like the voice of the "god" himself, letting them in on the "divine" truth of becoming of the endless, meaningless, chaotic world that destroys and creates over and over again, repeating itself.

¹⁷¹ Nehamas (1980), pp341-345.

This emphasis on the experiential is also reinforced and clarified by the condition on the second, positive response: “was there one time when you **experienced a tremendous moment** in which you would answer [...]”. The implication is that one only expresses joy at the revelation of ER *within* one such moment; but also, that such a moment can occur at any time. Nietzsche’s use of “*would answer*” (implying *possible* action) instead of “*would have answered*” (implying *alternative past* action) further supports the idea that this moment is not just a past instance of joy in one’s life, but a certain particular moment, which itself can occur at any time. In this way, the aphorism subtly expresses the nature of ER, that an event in one’s past will happen again, in which one could embrace the truth of recurrence.

I believe that Nietzsche is suggesting that the “demon’s” arrival might itself *constitute* a “tremendous moment” in which one is oriented to the Dionysian perspective and so can see ER truly and respond positively. Thus, the notion of a “tremendous moment” is reinterpreted from simply an instance of pure joy or awe, to being rather the very orientation of one’s perspective to the Dionysian. The terrifying, invigorating, intoxicating feeling of understanding things in this way would be a moment in which the truth of ER would be embraced as a culmination of the awareness of the ever-destroying, ever-creating world. While the ordinary, perhaps inevitable reaction to the demon’s message is despair, if the demon’s message were a “tremendous moment” for you, that ignited the fire of Dionysian intoxication, you would welcome it. This might also be evocative of the reality of ER, as in the moment of realisation of that interpretation through Dionysian eyes, one sees the chaotic totality endlessly repeating itself, and all the infinite times they have their moment of inspiration. The “tremendous moment” is reiterated and the awareness of these, and of the powerful feeling of embracing ER each time, then constitutes the yes-saying and blessing the demon who tells you this time. The importance of the “tremendous moment” will return in

Zarathustra as the tone of the experience that Zarathustra himself undergoes in coming to understand ER.

4.1.4 Necessity of the Dionysian Perspective

The idea that one *must* in this sense experience a “tremendous moment” and orient to the Dionysian perspective in order to be able to actually see ER as interpretation of reality, is also evidenced by the final few lines of the aphorism. Nietzsche’s assertion that the question “with regard to each and every thing” of whether you want it infinitely more times “would weigh upon your actions with the greatest weight” receives a great deal of attention from interpreters who construe it as the import of the aphorism and ER in general. That is, that the weight of the hypothetical that one might repeat one’s actions into eternity induces you to question whether you would choose your actions every time, infinite times. However, I contend that this “weight” is not a summary of the aphorism, let alone ER. Rather, it presents the *default, un-Dionysian* response of one who thus cannot *see* ER as truth of reality, and so understands the demon’s message only as a burden on every decision, the necessity of thinking upon every action “do I want this again [...]?” They are therefore paralysed, feeling that they must evaluate every choice in the fear that they might have to relive their life. This would “transform” you in the most negative sense, or perhaps draw out the pessimistic tendency that was dormant all along.

The exclusivity of ER as truth of reality to the Dionysian perspective remains right to the end of the aphorism, *contra* the majority belief that the final question is a challenge, presenting the ideal form of life-affirmation. Nietzsche’s question “how well-disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life, that you might *long for nothing more* than this final eternal

confirmation and seal?" I contend is *not* an expression of the ideal Dionysian attitude and an embrace of ER. This possibility remains firmly in the un-Dionysian stance, with its un-Dionysian, anti-literal "solution" to the perceived inevitable despair and paralysis. The person who cannot perceive ER, because they cannot properly embody the Dionysian perspective and its interpretation, sees ER as primarily a question of their own actions and decisions – as mentioned above. Therefore, the optimal solution for one such person, is to learn to lose all their pessimism and world-hatred, in order that, while believing that ER is *not* true because they do not see that interpretation, they *wish* that it were. However, there inevitably remains an aspect of the old adherence to Being, which is part of why they are unable to perceive through the Dionysian lens that reveals ER. This is evidenced in Nietzsche's description of a "final eternal confirmation and seal" which is far closer to the static, perfect, permanent ideal of the world of Being in its evocation of an eschatological promise of an end state of unchanging bliss. "Final" and "eternal" here seem to suggest timeless perfection, which is diametrically opposed to the sempiternal endlessness of recurrence. The "well-disposed" person thus longs for the same old "true world", even while trying to love all of life, what they wish for is an idealisation of the truth; they turn the interpretation of ER into a belief in Being.

I now turn to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Here in particular, a close and careful reading is necessary to draw out the nature of ER, because *Zarathustra's* very style as a mythological story is often appealed to as reason not to take its contents as representative of Nietzsche's own thoughts. I contend that this vivid style is necessary to express the experience of coming to grasp ER as an all-encompassing Dionysian interpretation of reality, and in this way, is inextricable from the content of the descriptions. In *Zarathustra*, the experience that is hinted at in GS 341 is dived into and expanded as we are given a dramatic and profound account of what this might be like. I split my exegesis into the different aspects of ER that are exposed:

a Heraclitan metaphysics; Dionysian interpretation of reality; experienced as real; and of which the practical consequences are described and described as inseparable from this metaphysical interpretation of reality

4.2 (Heraclitan) Metaphysics

I argue that the depiction of ER in *Zarathustra* is evidently metaphysical and that its elements are to a considerable degree Heraclitan, in ways which distance it from cosmological understandings.

4.2.1. Necessary Interconnection and Unity of Opposites

In the central passage “On the Vision and the Riddle”, Zarathustra articulates ER by extrapolating it from his mysterious surroundings. He and a “dwarf” – the Spirit of Heaviness - are confronted with a gateway called “Moment” where two paths meet: “This long lane back here: it goes on for an eternity. And that long lane out there – that is another eternity.”

Zarathustra’s assertion draws out the necessity of ER, as in *GS 341*, through repetition of the word “must” which is reminiscent of the demon’s telling you what will “have to” happen. Zarathustra realises that whatever can happen has happened and has “walked” the lane behind them, and will happen again, walking out on the eternal lane leading away from the gateway. This applies no less to the moment, the gateway itself, which also has already been. “And are not all things knotted together so tightly that this moment draws after it *all* things

that are to come? *Thus – itself as well?*” This indicates an interconnection between everything, that the occurrence of this one moment brings about all other moments¹⁷².

This notion of necessary interconnection is Heraclitan in its construal of the totality of the world as a creative tangled knot, emphasised by the repetition of this image in “The Convalescent” when Zarathustra’s animals assert what he would say upon dying, that “the knot of causes in which I am entwined returns - it will create me again!”¹⁷³ This more developed version of the metaphor makes clear that the necessary connection of things “knotted together” means that all existence and the causality that links them *is a knot*. This is closer to the chaotic nature of reality as represented by Nietzsche elsewhere, that it is without order or beauty or form or law, like a tangled knot, but everything within the knot is necessary as a part of the totality. Given this evocative language also, the “causes” are not meant in a rigidly scientific manner, it is not a law of nature that draws things one after the other, but a holistic necessary interdependence, everything essential in the whole that is existence, and this is a Heraclitan construal of the world. Moreover, the knot “creates” and so is a refiguring of the image of the chaotic core essence of reality, the elusive playful becoming, creating after first destroying; everything ends, and through the entanglement of the knot, comes to be again. Again, this recalls the Heraclitan image that Nietzsche borrows, of the playful creative universe.

Another strikingly Heraclitan aspect to ER in *Zarathustra* which leads directly from this interconnection, as it does in Heraclitus’ own metaphysics as Nietzsche construes it, is the identity of opposites. Opposing states are in fact one because all things are inherently

¹⁷² Here “moment” does not refer to a piece of time, but the event that happens, the thing(s) that exist then, in this case, the confrontation with the truth of becoming, ER.

¹⁷³ Z.III.16.2

entwined. This is most evocatively expressed in “The Drunken Song” where Zarathustra proclaims to the higher men,

“Midnight is also midday – Pain is also a joy, curse is also a blessing, night is also a sun [...] Did you ever say Yes to a single joy? Oh, my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe as well. All things are chained together, entwined, in love [...] you wanted it *all* back! – All anew, all eternally, all chained together, entwined, in love”¹⁷⁴.

The idea that each state or moment calls its opposite, and indeed, everything else in existence, as Zarathustra initially deduced, is thus down to a deep connection between all things and all events. It does not arise from a form of super-essentialism in individual things¹⁷⁵, but quite clearly that the “knot” of reality is made up of all things that just *do* exist, for everything that can happen, has happened, and walked the eternal lanes. In this way, everything is “entwined”, and is seen to be “in love” in the Dionysian interpretation of reality that views this necessity as a beautiful and joyful expression of a clearly Heraclitan unity.

4.2.2 Heraclitan Images

In addition to the Heraclitan concept of interconnection, Nietzsche also uses a great deal of Heraclitan imagery when describing ER in *Zarathustra*. One such is the notion of the “Great Year”, as outlined by Zarathustra’s animals who proclaim his teaching of, “a Great Year of Becoming, a monster of a Great Year, which must like an hour-glass turn itself over anew, again and again, that it may run down and run out ever anew”¹⁷⁶. As well as reiterating the

¹⁷⁴ Z.IV.19.10

¹⁷⁵ As Nehamas seems to believe – see his 1980, pp344-347

¹⁷⁶ Z.III.13.2

hourglass metaphor of GS 341, this appropriates Heraclitus' "great year", a long stretch of time over which the universe gradually returns to the state it was at the beginning of the "year". This announcement also shows the prominence of becoming in ER, here tied to the Heraclitan "great Year" that describes the recurring cycle, and which we have seen was central to Nietzsche's understanding of reality against the supposition of the prioritising of Being.

References to becoming are scattered through *Zarathustra* and frequently connected to other Heraclitan and Dionysian images which reinforce the idea that the nature of reality as becoming is tied to its interpretation as eternally recurring. Zarathustra describes how in an insight in "sun-drunken rapture" – evocative both of midday clarity and Dionysian intoxication –

–
"all Becoming seemed to me a Gods'-dancing and Gods' wilfulness, and the world released [...] fleeing back to itself [...] all time seemed to me a blissful mockery of moments, where necessity was freedom itself"¹⁷⁷.

Here, the becoming that characterises reality is identified with the playful, deceitful dance of a "god", contradictory in that necessity is freedom, so invoking a Heraclitan identity of opposites, while the idea that time "plays" with freedom is reminiscent of the Heraclitan playing universe. This is also reinforced by the presence of the Heraclitan image of the child playing dice in connection with ER, such as in Zarathustra's song "The Seven Seals" where he reconciles himself to ER and professes his love for Eternity. He sings of "[playing] dice with Gods at the Gods' table of the earth [...] for the earth is a Gods' table and trembles with

¹⁷⁷ Z.III.12.2

creative new words and Gods' dice-throws"¹⁷⁸. In this way, Heraclitan images are implicitly tied to descriptions or expressions of joy at embracing ER.

4.2.3. Not circular

Zarathustra settles the question about the nature of time within ER. "On the Vision and the Riddle" is the most telling here, dispelling the common notion that ER involves circular time. In response to Zarathustra's detailing of the two lanes and the gateway, the dwarf replies "contemptuously": "All that is straight lies [...] All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle." An explicit depiction of circular time, but it is not ER. This can be seen from the fact that it is the Spirit of Heaviness, token of nihilism, world-denial and everything antithetical to Dionysos, who asserts this, speaking spitefully, in a hatred of Zarathustra, his notion of eternal straight lanes, scorning what to him perhaps seems a lesser theory of time in favour of the circle. Moreover, in an earlier speech, Zarathustra says that "God is a thought that **makes all that is straight crooked** [...] What? Time should be gone and all impermanence a mere lie?"¹⁷⁹ The Spirit of Heaviness is the embodiment of life-denying morality, the one who puts values on our backs and tells us life is a burden¹⁸⁰, fostering a belief in (true) "worlds behind".¹⁸¹ "God" does not stand only for the religious deity, but the idea of an unmoved and perfect ground to existence, the absolutely True behind "appearance". Therefore, the dwarf – the Spirit of Heaviness – is simply speaking from the perspective of truth-idolisation, an interpretation twisted by "God" that makes the straight lanes of eternity "crooked". The underlying faith of

¹⁷⁸ Z.III.16.3

¹⁷⁹ Z.II.2

¹⁸⁰ Z.III.11.2

¹⁸¹ Z.III.12.2, Z. I.3

this perspective, as seen in earlier discussion, is in the primacy of Being – perfection, stability, permanence, certainty – and so the dwarf sees the circle, the symbol of eternal complete perfection. As we saw in chapter 1, circular time is static, everything happens once, and so while the circle might possibly be construed as “eternal”, this is only in an atemporal sense, because time itself, that makes up the circle, is finite, not infinite. The dwarf’s input here is therefore a theorisation of time that makes existence static by imposing Being onto existence. This is why Zarathustra immediately rebukes him: “‘You Spirit of Heaviness! [...] Do not make it too light and easy for yourself!’” He sees the nihilistic spirit speaking through the dwarf in the clear imposition of Being onto becoming, an assertion that what is real is perfect and permanent, a circle, and the straight infinity is only the appearance, it “lies”. A world of Being, and circular time as the nature of ER is “easy” because it removes the temporal, the aspect of endlessness, the pain of living a material, changeable existence. The eternal circle is the symbol of timeless bliss and the nothingness that gets called “‘the Beyond’; or ‘God’; or ‘true life’; or Nirvana”¹⁸² – a *lifeless* realm of Being, ascension from this “lesser” world of temporality, becoming and suffering. So, the circle is the Being-laden *misunderstanding* of ER, not the real one, that must be seen through the Dionysian perspective. Zarathustra’s later characterisation of himself as “the advocate of the circle” does not contradict this, since that latter is preceded by “the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering”, which suggests that his advocacy of these things is connected, life is inherently full of suffering, and the circle represents the cycle of repetition of life and of suffering. This is a metaphorical emblem, and not an accurate depiction of ER itself, clear from the non-circular presentation of ER everywhere else, and the fact that when Zarathustra calls himself this, he is yet to come to

¹⁸² A. 7

terms properly with the Dionysian interpretation of becoming, ER. Though he has witnessed the vision of the lanes and the gateway, he does not properly see its import in the right way, which occurs after he has convalesced, having summoned his abyssal thought with his proclamation of advocacy for life and suffering.

Another piece of evidence against circular time comes in the first assertion of ER by Zarathustra's animals. Their language is provocatively repetitive: "Everything [...] Everything [...] Everything"; "eternally runs the year of Being [...] eternally is built the same house of Being [...] eternally true to itself remains the ring of Being." They also continuously use words associated with circles – the "wheel", the "ring", the "ball" – and phrasing suggesting the destruction and creation that characterise Dionysian understanding of life – "dies [...] blooms again", "breaks [...] is joined anew", "separates [...] greets itself again". Crucial to note, is their emphasis on "Being", which, as we have seen, is the idol of those who think reality is ultimately grounded in this static, perfect, wholeness. They seem to make a similar mistake to the dwarf who construed eternity as circular time with their repetition of Being as the nature of existence and by their assertion, "'The centre is everywhere. Crooked is the path of eternity'", which suggests a circle, eternity being bent back on itself, rather than a straight line. It also recalls the earlier notion that God makes what is straight crooked, obscuring proper understanding.

To the extent that they *are* advocating an eternity characterised by Being, they are wrong, as is shown by Zarathustra's gentle chastisement of them that they have turned his struggle with his most abyssal thought into a "hurdy-gurdy song". This, in contrast to Zarathustra's peaceful acceptance of their words when they later characterise ER as a recurring "year of Becoming",

suggests that it is the circular world of being that is the mockery of the Dionysian interpretation, which is a magnification rather of becoming and not circular at all.

4.3. Dionysian interpretation

The Dionysian aspect to the presentation of ER in *Zarathustra* is arguably even more crucial, because not only does it show that ER is grasped through participation in the Dionysian perspective, but in characterising much of the dramatic, immersive, vivid style of writing Nietzsche uses here, it is evidence for the fact that presenting ER as an interpretation of reality is only possible through construction of a poetic narrative. ER is real, though *Zarathustra* is fiction, because ER's reality is accessible only within an interpretation. Thus, the nature of ER is not *explained* to us, but *described* to us, and we can come to understand how we might begin to grasp it through the recounted experience of an imagined character who does.

4.2.1. The "Tremendous Moment"

In "On the Vision and the Riddle", Zarathustra seems to briefly come to a Dionysian way of seeing as he experiences a strange series of visions that seem to show ER's truth. Notable is the sense in which this scene evokes the notion of a "tremendous moment" in which one is oriented to the Dionysian perspective and ER is embraced. Zarathustra stands before a gateway called "Moment" which intersects two infinite paths and thus time seems "frozen" as "Moment" slices infinite time, creating a surreal sense of drama. This point at which Zarathustra stands represents the edge of realisation, the point where one is faced with the interpretation of ER, the Dionysian vision. Just prior to this vision, Zarathustra was climbing a

mountain path, and the confrontation with the gateway “Moment” echoes the sense of being on a precipice over a dark chasm, for which Zarathustra calls up courage which “strikes dead the dizziness one feels at the abyss”. Coming face to face with the gateway is Zarathustra confronting the truth, a “tremendous moment” when the Dionysian interpretation of ER is revealed.

Zarathustra does not rationally deduce ER from contemplating the eternal lanes, but already seems to *know*, and speaks almost as though falling into a kind of trance, as he recalls of himself upon reaching the final step, “Thus, I was talking, and ever more softly: for I was afraid of my own thoughts and the motives behind them.” Zarathustra seems to feel drawn to speak by something deeper than reason, as he reaches a conclusion he is not ready to accept. The inspiring demon spirit of GS 341 comes in one’s “most solitary solitude”, and just before entering into this vision, speaking of the silence between himself and the dwarf the “Spirit of Heaviness” that weighed him down, Zarathustra says how “being two in such a way is truly more lonely than being one”. He is also climbing a mountain path over an abyss, anticipating a great challenge where he must “descend [...] deeper into pain than I have ever descended”¹⁸³ and consoles his “sore” heart. Thus, Nietzsche hints that the “demon” of inspiration, courage that prompts Zarathustra to look into the “abyss”, stop at the gateway and look at the lanes of eternity¹⁸⁴, is likewise coming to him in his “solitude”, as he in fact prefaces this tale of the vision as the “vision of the loneliest”¹⁸⁵. His slight hesitancy, suggested by his fear at his own words, and speaking everything as a (rhetorical) question – “must we not eternally come back again?” -evidences his position on the edge of true realisation and

¹⁸³ Z.III.1

¹⁸⁴ The dwarf should *not* be identified with the demon, since the former figure represents everything anti-Dionysian that Zarathustra, and Nietzsche despises, and so would not provide inspiration

¹⁸⁵ Z.III.2.1

recognition of ER as Dionysian interpretation of reality, as he is only partially within that perspective.

This coming “tremendous moment” is prefigured earlier in *Zarathustra* by a dream recounted by Zarathustra to his friends in which his “*Stillest Hour*” itself speaks to him at this time of solitude and silence. “The hand moved forward, the clock of my life drew breath – never have I heard such stillness around me: so that my heart was terrified.”¹⁸⁶ This dramatic description is evocative of a profound, dark, and frightening moment, akin to the “most solitary solitude” in which the demon comes in *GS* 341. The hour speaks to him “without voice” – implying that it penetrates inside his head like a spirit – and challenges him; “You know it, Zarathustra, but you do not say it!” It tells him that he “must yet become a child” in order to “lead the way” as “a shadow of that which must come”. The reference to becoming a child suggests the creative child who exemplifies the Dionysian spirit of play as described in “The Three Transformations”¹⁸⁷ where the spirit becomes a camel, then a lion, and finally a child. Indeed, in “The Stillest Hour” Zarathustra also protests that he “[lacks] the lion’s voice for commanding” that he later calls upon to summon his abyssal thought that prevents him from embracing ER; “one day I shall yet find the strength and the lion’s voice to summon you up!”¹⁸⁸ Zarathustra’s dream ends with his flat refusal – “I will not” to accomplish what his stillest hour tells him he will do, and she mocks him: “Then laughter erupted around me. Alas, how this laughter tore at my entrails and slashed open my heart!”¹⁸⁹ This reaction to his answer suggests that Zarathustra denies what is simply necessary, as his stillest hour tells him what will be, how he will come into the Dionysian perspective, become a child, and embrace ER.

¹⁸⁶ Z.II.22

¹⁸⁷ Z.I.1

¹⁸⁸ Z.III.3

¹⁸⁹ Z.II.22

The Stillest Hour which represents the profound solitary moment of clarity, where Zarathustra is frightened by the truth that he sees, is haunting to him because he is not yet able to see things from the right perspective and is overwhelmed. At this time, he is yet to be confronted with the vision-riddle where he sees ER for the first time, and has not yet gained the lion's strength and courage to destroy his abyssal thought, nor the reconciliation with his soul and Life which prefigures his embrace of ER and marriage to Eternity. Therefore, the presence of this truth of fate is terrifying.

4.2.3 Transformation

Zarathustra's pivotal vision in "On the Vision and the Riddle" ends with the dramatic transformation of the previously struggling shepherd: "no longer human [...] illumined, who *laughed!*" This laughter is "no human laughter", and in being so inhuman it calls to mind the figure of Dionysos, the mysterious divine figure characterised by playful joy, who reveals reality and the truth of ER. In conquering the disgust and hatred for what must recur, the Dionysian vision can be embraced, and one becomes Dionysian, like the god in their wholehearted welcome of life, and its sempiternal repetition of suffering and all else essential to life.¹⁹⁰

Zarathustra predicts for himself that "Once I have overcome myself in [summoning his abyssal thought], then will I overcome myself in something even greater; and a victory shall be the

¹⁹⁰ Potentially epitomised by Zarathustra's animals who proclaim ER – close to nature and pure joy at life in being animals: "for those who think as we do all things are already dancing [...]" Z.III.16.2

seal of my perfection!”¹⁹¹ In this way he predicts his later ecstatic dance with Life and final song to eternity in full affirmation of ER and immersion in a Dionysian joy at life.

On the assumption that the shepherd is the future Zarathustra, this transformation prefigures his eventual embrace of ER as he sings his love for eternity in “The Seven Seals”. There, he repeats the refrain,

“How could I not lust after Eternity and after the nuptial ring of all rings – the ring of recurrence? Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, except for this woman whom I love: for I love you, O Eternity!”¹⁹²

This is worded as a romantic and procreative love, rather than simply an enjoyment of an experience, a generalised joy at the concept of eternity, and in this way it is a Dionysian love, for as we have seen, the Dionysian is life-affirming in its literal embodiment of life and the creation of life. The implication that he longs to be wedded with Eternity I believe is the main reason for the use of the “ring” image, since willingly diving into infinite recurrences of his life is the “ring” that marries him to Eternity, the symbol that he is hers and she is his. The ring does, of course, also carry connotations of circularity, but I would argue that given this context and the depiction of the metaphysical nature of ER elsewhere, its metaphorical power is only intended to suggest repetition, and not that ER is itself a circle of time.

¹⁹¹ Z.III.3

¹⁹² Z.III.16

4.2.4. Love of Life

Zarathustra's intimacy and love for Life deepens as he approaches his final embrace of ER, intimating that he is moving more and more fully into a Dionysian way of being. Though first Life's gaze causes him to sink "into the unfathomable", when he meets with her one last time, he sees "gold" in her eyes, and they dance with and chase after one another, exemplifying the playful, joyful nature of the Dionysian that moves to the rhythm of Life – she literally makes him dance – following her as she continually evades and entices, and teases him.¹⁹³

This love for Life, however, is presided over in the moment of joy by a love for Eternity, who he longs to be wedded to, and in so doing, *return* to Life again and again to continue the endless dance. Thus, Life's concern that "[y]ou have long not loved me as much as you say you do; I know you are thinking that you want to leave me soon" betrays her misunderstanding. Even though Zarathustra will leave her and be wedded to Eternity, this itself means that he does love her and will return. I believe that this explains their sadness after Zarathustra replies to this accusation of hers (that he wants to leave her):

"'Yes,' I answered hesitantly, 'but you also know that-' And I said something into her ear, right through her tangled yellow crazy locks of hair.

'You *know* that, O Zarathustra? No-one knows that.'

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."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Z.III.15.1

¹⁹⁴ Z.III.15.2

Life who jealously loves Zarathustra the Dionysian, all the more fervently because he seems to love his Dionysian *tragic* Wisdom more, is upset because Zarathustra is leaving her and thus implicitly holding fast to this *tragic wisdom* about ER in marrying himself to Eternity. Clark has argued that their crying means he cannot have told her he will return, because they become sad¹⁹⁵, but this is to ignore Life's melancholy reply that reminds Zarathustra he does not really *know* (he will return). I contend therefore that Zarathustra tells her that in dying and marrying Eternity, he will come back to her again and again, and in this way, *does really* love her more than anything. But she, coy and contradictory, tells him that that is unknowable, hurting him in her jealousy, and this is why they weep. This demonstration of love for Life and his implied return to her in marriage to Eternity, is not only a weird myth implying Dionysian divinity that can converse with Life herself, but also is expressive of Dionysian life-filled mystic wisdom and longing to fall into Eternity's embrace in love of life.

4.3. Experience of ER

Following directly from the Dionysian tone of *Zarathustra*, comes the evidence for ER's reality within that narrative, deepening the depiction of the experience of coming to grasp recurrence. The fictional nature of the book does not make this any less significant, since this immersive narrative mode is simply the only way in which the interpretative bent of ER can be expressed without becoming instead the laying out of a theory. Through Zarathustra's experience, and the structure of the narrative, Nietzsche shows something of what recurrence is glimpsed as.

¹⁹⁵ Clark (1990), p264

1.3.1 Memory and Premonition

As a depiction of one coming to the brink of the Dionysian perspective and seeing ER, “On the Vision and the Riddle” actually evidences the phenomenon of recurrence itself. Just after Zarathustra has run through his thoughts and said ““must we not eternally come back again?”” he hears a howling dog, and realises that “When I was a child, in the most distant childhood [...] I heard a dog howl like that.” This might simply be considered a memory, but the fact that it occurs immediately following his initial comprehension of ER, and that he experiences now exactly what occurred before, points to its being a *pre-vision* of his next recurrence, an event very close to the beginning of his life, as a small child, perhaps his earliest memory. This is supported by the fact that Zarathustra repeats himself, as recalling the event, he says that he was “moved to compassion” at the sound, and now, “when again I heard that howling, I was moved to compassion once again.” More telling is the vivid language that depicts total immersion in this memory vision, and the paragraph break as Zarathustra gets lost in it:

“[in childhood] I saw [the dog]; bristling, with his head stretched up, trembling, in stillest midnight, when even dogs believe in ghosts:

- so that I was moved to compassion. For just then the full moon was passing, silent as death, over the house: just then it stood still, a rounded glow – still upon the flat roof, as if upon alien property”.

The descriptions are evocative of fear - the deathlike moon, the mention of ghosts and the alien, and the clearly terrified dog howling. Moreover, the close details of the dog and the movement of the moon all give the impression of a powerful experience of not only sight and sound, but also emotion as the fear and compassion that he felt that first time resurface. That

this is an immersive vision of a future recurrence is also confirmed by his being consumed and taken away from his setting in re-experiencing this childhood event:

“Where had the dwarf gone now? And the gateway? And the spider? And all the whispering? Had I been dreaming? Had I woken up? Between wild cliffs I stood all at once, alone, desolate, in the most desolate moonlight.”

Thus, he is no longer where he was before, and he is alone because only *he* experiences his life again. It could be that Zarathustra’s deduction of ER in a sense summoned this reality and the veil between his current life and his next became thin; the gateway and the dwarf, and the place he was before then fade away. Even after the memory-vision has ended, and he is back on the mountain path, they have gone, he has gone the first step towards ER, reality looks different, and in initially immersing himself in the experience of repeating his life he banishes the dwarf who “dripped lead” lies into his ear, who drags Zarathustra down, away from realising the truth of ER. But his being alone among the cliffs is also the precursor to his next vision, a premonition of an event later in his same life as the pre-vision itself transforms around him.

“*a man was lying there!* And there! The dog, jumping about, bristling, whimpering. Now it saw me coming – then it howled again, then it *cried*; - had I ever heard a dog cry for help like that?”

Zarathustra is no longer in his childhood, since the dog is aware of him, his older self, and he hears him cry in a way not like before, not the howling of his memory. That it is entirely new is emphasised by Zarathustra’s assertion that “what I then saw, I have never seen the like”. His vision is of a shepherd “writhing, choking, convulsing, his face distorted, and a heavy black snake hanging out of his mouth [...] then the snake crawled into his throat – and there it bit

fast.” The level of detail here again suggests an encompassing experience, and the event and what happens next is significantly akin to Zarathustra’s own struggle later, heavily implying that the shepherd is him at a later time. For later Zarathustra tells of his struggle that led to his lying “pale and trembling” for seven days, how a “monster crawled into my throat and choked me! But I bit its head off and spat it forth from me.”¹⁹⁶ This exactly mirrors the next part of the vision:

“Then it cried out of me: ‘Bite off! [...] Bite the head off! Bite it off!’ – thus it cried out of me, my horror, my hate, my disgust, my compassion, all my good and bad cried out of me with a single cry.”

The snake, it seems, is Zarathustra’s major barrier to embracing ER, his “abyssal thought” that begins to rise as he climbs the mountain; “my abyss stirred itself and my thought bit me.”¹⁹⁷ It is his denial, fear, disgust, resentment, and all other negative feelings that prevent him from welcoming the truth of the Dionysian interpretation. Afterwards, Zarathustra says that it was disgust at the smallest human, and the realisation that in the recurrence of everything, the totality of becoming, means the recurrence of the least, the smallest human, whom he despises. But it seems that this is only an instance of the “abyssal” thought that chokes him, since his analysis of disgust is accompanied with his saying that the “soothsayer”, the pessimist, was right that “all is the same, nothing is worthwhile, knowing chokes.”¹⁹⁸ This disgust then is simply the *pessimistic understanding* of the abyssal thought, and indeed one aspect of what Zarathustra struggles with.

¹⁹⁶ Z. III.13.2

¹⁹⁷ Z.III.3

¹⁹⁸ Z.III.13.2

The implication here is that Zarathustra is seeing his own future, calling to himself, almost involuntarily, since “it cried out of me” implies a force he cannot entirely control. He is compelled to cry out, possibly due to his call being what influences his future self, and so *himself* in the future, and in every recurrence, to bite; so, every time Zarathustra calls in aid of his future self, and every time the struggling Zarathustra hears and bites. Zarathustra does not view this as a memory, but just as the childhood memory can be understood as a vision of a future recurrence of his life, so this future event can be understood as a premonition brought about by the latent awareness that this has happened to him before, in previous recurrences. That is, his growing comprehension that he has “been here before” manifests in a presentiment of a future struggle he has experienced infinite times but is only now vaguely aware of. The above argued notion that here Zarathustra is coming to the Dionysian way of seeing in perceiving ER would support and legitimise the idea that these two visions come as a result of this new comprehension. The “tremendous moment” of fully grasping the Dionysian vision looms over Zarathustra and enables him to briefly glimpse the reality of ER. The several emotions that flow out of Zarathustra in his cry to bite suggest that it is the expulsion of the culmination of these feelings which supposedly constitute the abyssal thought which enable him to let it go. Zarathustra lets disgust, hate and horror leave him and so kills the suffocating snake that precludes the Dionysian orientation.

4.3.2. Death

There are suggestions in the text that Zarathustra dies at the close of part III. He speaks with Life about leaving her soon, the clock strikes twelve, as she foretold it would before he died, and he ends by singing his love for Eternity and marriage to her with the “nuptial ring of

recurrence.” This means that Part IV in fact occurs before the end of Part III, thereby manifesting an aspect of recurrence within the story.¹⁹⁹ This final part was added after the first three were published together, and in this sense serves as a “prequel” to the final events of part III, adding in detail, and building on and clarifying some ideas. The most definite evidence for this chronological ordering and indication of where part IV is intended to be inserted, comes from Zarathustra’s speech “On Old and New Tablets”, at the beginning of which Zarathustra says,

“Here I sit and wait [...] when will my hour come? [...] first the signs must come to me, that it be *my* hour – namely **the laughing lion with the flock of doves.**”²⁰⁰

The doves and the lion appear in the final section of Part IV (“The Sign”), and after stepping away from them, he says ““The lion came [...] my hour has come [...] *rise up, you Great Midday!*””²⁰¹ In part III, he speaks of his abyssal thought (about ER), and how he is not yet “strong enough for the ultimate lion’s exuberance and wilfulness [...] one day I shall yet find the strength and the lion’s voice to summon [his abyssal thought] up!”²⁰² The encounter with the doves and the lion ends with Zarathustra leaving his cave “glowing and strong”, and the implication is that he is inspired by or perhaps literally infused with the lion’s strength after he banishes those superior humans. Therefore, the implication is that *now* he is strong enough to face the abyssal thought and to embrace ER. Zarathustra also reaches an epiphany as he realises that the “ultimate sin”, test, that he faced was his pity for the superior humans. In “The Convalescent”, recounting his fight with the snake of disgust, he recalls his realisation that “[humankind’s] best is so very small [...] All-too-small the greatest! – That was my

¹⁹⁹ Loeb also defends a more elaborate version of this hypothesis in his 2010

²⁰⁰ Z.III.12.1

²⁰¹ Z.IV.20

²⁰² Z.III.3

loathing for the human!”²⁰³ Thus, he is beyond pity, which he mocks just before this as describing one “with his tongue hanging out”, and he had to eliminate finally his disgust and hatred for the smallness even of those whom he had pitied, who must recur.

All of this suggests that Part IV comes between “On Old and New Tablets” and “The Convalescent”. This also best ties together, for instance, the “Drunken Song” with the striking of the clock after Zarathustra speaks with Life, since the verses of that song correspond to the words at each numbered strike. In the Drunken song, there are eleven lines, each of which is preceded first by a verse as Zarathustra sings of death, eternity and joy; only after all verses have been run through does Zarathustra combine these final lines into a song of its own. If this scene actually comes before Zarathustra’s talking to Life, the twelve strokes, and his song to Eternity, this makes sense as the import of these lines is known to Zarathustra. This is fitting at the moment of his death, as he leaves Life ““between the strokes of one and twelve””²⁰⁴ If, on the other hand, the elaboration of this song, effectively *its creation*, comes after this scene, it is unclear why Life would tell him he will leave her (and die) between those twelve strokes, and what sense it makes to suppose that Zarathustra would be speaking to Life and singing to Eternity when he has yet to find, converse with and dismiss the superior humans, after which he is fortified for his final “going-under”, which we might reasonably suppose involves his confrontation with his abyssal thought and reconciliation with ER.

The song itself also seems to reflect a death/rebirth series that reflects the Dionysian interpretation nature of ER. For instance, ““Three! ‘I sleep, I sleep – Four! ‘From deepest dream I rise for air”” suggests the speaker dying and beginning the next recurrence of their

²⁰³ Z.III.13.2

²⁰⁴ Z.III.15.2

life from the “deep dream” of the unexperienced time between death and being born again. The next two lines then seem to describe the reality of ER; “*Five!* ‘The world is deep, *Six!* ‘Deeper than day had been aware.’” The world looks “deep” in the Dionysian interpretation that sees ER – the endless destruction and creation of recurrences, characterised by becoming, which during the daylight of ordinary life is not visible, but can be seen in the tremendous moment, the “Stillest Hour” at Midnight, referenced at the start of the song: “What does Deep Midnight now declare?” The “joy” that is “deeper still than misery” which “wants Eternity [...] deepest, deep Eternity” I contend is the joy of embracing ER only accessible through this Dionysian perspective and manifested only by this Dionysian way of being.

Given the presentation of Zarathustra as coming into the Dionysian way of seeing, redeeming himself from fear and disgust at the recurrence of the least, understanding ER, the song accompanied by the twelve strokes of the bell which Life says will precede his death seems like the hymn of one lovingly accepting the interpretation and dying in willing bliss to return again. Though generally taken to express the idea that a moment of joy involves a wish for it to last forever²⁰⁵, the phrase “joy wants eternity” I contend is a reference to the honest love of life that embraces the real recurrence. Joy wants eternity, therefore, because it is this true seeing of reality, exemplified by Zarathustra’s immediately following singing of his desire to marry Eternity in his all-encompassing love.

²⁰⁵ As in e.g. Reginster (2008), pp225-227

4.4. Redemption

Zarathustra's teaching of redemption is an expansion on the individual consequences of standing in the Dionysian perspective and living with the understanding of ER's reality. This is a radically active and metaphysical form of redemption that goes beyond an attitude towards one's past and future and involves actual determination of the choices which recur eternally.

Zarathustra mocks the preaching of "madness" that sees the suffering in life as "punishment"; "Everything passes away, therefore everything deserves to pass away". This arises from the will's resentment towards time, due to its impotence to "will backwards": "It was': that is the will's gnashing of teeth and loneliest sorrow. Powerless with respect to what has been done – it is an angry spectator of all that is past."²⁰⁶ This resentment turns to the desire for revenge, but the will can only direct its rage against the innocent world and itself, thus figuring all suffering as punishment.²⁰⁷

This is a misguided pessimism and weakness, because Zarathustra says that "the will is a creator" and through creating, it can redeem everything: "To redeem that which has passed away and to re-create all 'It was' into a 'Thus I willed it!' – that alone should I call redemption!" The will redeems the past and repairs its relationship with time by actively willing what is in the past; but this is not a straightforward backwards willing, or choosing to accept the past, but a (re-)creation. This is seen from the fact that what was is not refigured into something "I will", that I *now* want to have happened, because I have eliminated regret, but something

²⁰⁶ Z.II.20

²⁰⁷ Zarathustra speaks of the will as though it were a separate entity, perhaps deliberately appealing to the Schopenhauerian construal, and whose philosophy he is definitely referencing in this section. Without entering a debate on the status of the will, it seems appropriate to consider this a metaphorical guise either for the actual will to power in individuals, or the culmination of their inner drives

that “I *willed*”, so something that, in the past, I wanted to happen. This is exactly what banishes the desire for revenge because the will no longer feels bound by the strict forward nature of time and does not rage against the “unfair” occurrences that were out of its control, or that it no longer wants. The will in the role of creator can liberate itself and remove any guilt from the past, therefore redeeming it by returning its innocence and placing all responsibility in the decision made *now* to will.

“All ‘It was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a cruel coincidence – until the creating will says to it: ‘But thus I willed it!’ – Until the creating will says to it: ‘But thus do I will it! Thus shall I will it!’”

But how does the will do this? Several commentators have suggested that the will’s redemption here comes through making something of one’s past and “it was”, creating good things now and for one’s future which are only possible because of what happened prior, turning regretful past experiences into positive outcomes. Another similar understanding is that redemption is the creative activity of giving the past (events) a new sense by revaluing values that enable them to be seen in a new light and reclaimed as the individuals own - *appropriation*.²⁰⁸ However, outside of the previously discussed anti-literal, analytic assumptions, I contend that these non-literal interpretations do not do justice to the powerful sense that this redemption is given, and that redemption here is a consequence of the reality of ER being already affirmed through the Dionysian perspective of the world.

Dionysos is the spirit of creation and destruction, and so the “creating will” that is able to break free of the bonds of “it was” is a will acting in the Dionysian spirit, the same spirit which enables one to see the reality of ER. Given also, that the creating will re-creates the past into

²⁰⁸ S. Jenkins “The Pessimistic Origin of Nietzsche’s Thought of Eternal Recurrence.” *Inquiry*. 63.1. 2020, pp32-34

“I willed”, “I will”, “I shall will”, this change encompasses all of time and implies multiple events of willing and re-willing. If a Dionysian individual thus sees ER as true, and says to the things that were “I willed it, and I will it now, and I shall will it again”, they are saying that *actually, when it happened*, they did will it, and, when it happens again, in the next recurrences, they shall will it then. This can happen because the creative will is so creative (partly) because it is an active embodiment of creating-destroying reality, and this is also manifested in affirming ER, finding joy in the recurrence. Thus, they know they have lived infinite times, and will do so again, and those elements of their past that they may have felt regret or resentment towards, they now also know *they willed to happen*. And they know, because in embracing the Dionysian interpretation, they *choose* to make it so.

The nature of infinity means that there is no first recurrence, and no first decision or chain of events that iterations are “copies” of, and at the same time, that individuals do not accrue experience as they continue to remember the infinite lives behind them. Therefore, *every* series, every decision, becomes infinitely important, because whatever decision one makes is *the* decision that they repeat infinite times. Zarathustra asks, “who has taught [the will] reconciliation with time, and something higher than any reconciliation?”²⁰⁹ The hint at something “higher” than only removing the resentment towards time, suggests almost a power over time, which the creative Dionysian would have by making it so that they always have and always will desire not only the eternal recurrence of everything in general, but those specific things in their own past they previously or might otherwise have regretted. In seeing the reality of recurrence, they can see that their actions now are repeated into eternity, and, looking into their future recurrences, they can actively will to do everything they know they

²⁰⁹ Z.II.20

will do (that they already have chosen in their past within that recurrence), therefore, when these things occur in the next cycle, it is because they *willed it*. This happens in *every* cycle. So, they always willed their past. This is only possible through their stance of Dionysian perspective, interpreting reality through ER, thus acting on time, rather than being prisoner to it. In this way one is reconciled and more than reconciled to time.

This is importantly linked to affirmation. Affirmation, as it has been seen, is frequently construed as the embrace and acceptance of everything that has happened in one's life, and the reconfiguring of the "negative" aspects of life into positive, based on a reevaluation of values. This would reconcile an individual to time in general and their own past in particular because they are perceiving them in a different light, valuing suffering and the temporary nature of (things in) their life. The consequences of this are the individual's being able to move forward, owning one's actions and making the most of one's circumstances without regret, as outlined above. On a standard non-literal understanding of ER, this is exhaustive of redemption and affirmation, together forming the background of the notion of *amor fati* – love of one's fate – which is thus understood as regret-less contentment towards one's past, and optimistic practicality towards one's future.

However, given the interpretation of redemption I have just put forward, a different understanding of the role of affirmation and *amor fati* is open. Affirmation on the view I propose is an affirmation of life *through* the interpretive lens of ER, which is itself an outgrowth of the Dionysian perspective. One must first stand in this Dionysian perspective in order to be capable of this kind of affirmation. Affirmation of life expressed by the Dionysian is itself *manifested through* the affirmation of ER, for while it is possible to consider ER outside of the Dionysian perspective, in this case it can only appear horrific, terrifying, and crushing.

But if an individual inhabits this supreme perspective, they can see reality in this creative-destructive repeating way, as eternally recurring, and the essential character of this interpretation is joyful. In embracing this interpretation of reality, they are affirming reality itself and everything in it. Since the Dionysian is itself a celebration and embodiment of life as the playing child who creates and destroys, the one who sees reality from this perspective and so sees ER positively, is further actively saying “Yes” to life, just as the child represents the “sacred Yea-saying”. Moreover, the “power” over time discussed above, whereby one can make it so that they willed and shall will everything in their life (which they repeat eternally according to ER) means that they actively affirm everything that happens to them because they choose it.

Conclusion

I have presented an alternative understanding of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, whereby it is real, a metaphysics that describes reality as interpretation, visible from the Dionysian perspective.

In chapter 1 I examined the assumptions that I perceive as underlying the consensus views on ER and suggested that these assumptions are unnecessary and that therefore there are ways to understand ER outside pure hypothetical, or pure theory (cosmology).

In chapter 2 I attempted to show that Nietzsche was critical of theoretical science which is a relic of the ascetic ideal that idolises truth and construes the "real" reality as characterised by Being. Nietzsche repudiates this attitude to understanding reality, and given this, I argued that ER ought not be understood as cosmology, thus dispelling the possibility that the unpublished "proofs" and *zeitatomenlehre* note are evidence of theoretical cosmological ER.

In chapter 3 I discussed Nietzsche's appropriation of Heraclitan ideology to show that he incorporates it into his own metaphysical understanding of reality, and that this is intimately linked to ER, suggesting ER's metaphysical nature. I then moved to Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian which I show to be importantly linked to Heraclitan imagery, to show how Dionysos as concept and ideal type is used to present a perspective through which ER can be grasped.

In chapter 4 I turned to an exegesis of key passages on ER in the published text to demonstrate how the understanding of ER as metaphysical interpretation of reality, visible only through the Dionysian perspective, is evidenced in these descriptions. I attempted to draw out through close examination the immersive and metaphysical nature of ER as is presented by

Nietzsche, in a way which vividly depicts the experience of coming to the realisation of the reality of ER.

Understanding Nietzsche's ER as literal, and not a thought experiment, and yet not a cosmology, or any factual theory about the universe, requires meeting Nietzsche in the realm of the Dionysian - something he could express only through these mysterious narratives and bizarre mythological scenes and poetic depictions. Coming to ER with the desire to "redeem" it from obscure metaphysics or unscientific understandings of time, or unphilosophical construals of personal identity, will render the idea perhaps absurd, and cause one to cling to cosmology, or throw it out entirely in favour of construing the whole thing as a deep question of one's attitude to life. But coming to ER without these prior projects will enable the rich reality of ER that Nietzsche presents to be seen and fully appreciated.

Bibliography:

Works by Nietzsche:

Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks tr. Cowan, M. Regnery Publishing.
Washington. 1998

The Birth of Tragedy tr. Smith, D. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2000

Human, All Too Human tr. Faber, M. Penguin Books. London. 1994

*The Joyous Science** (*The Gay Science*), tr. R. Hill, K. Penguin Random House.
London. 2018

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, tr. Parkes, G. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2008

Beyond Good and Evil, tr. Faber, M. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2008

On the Genealogy of Morals, tr. Smith, D. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2008

Twilight of the Idols and *The Antichrist*, tr. Hollingdale, R.J. Penguin Books.
London. 2003

Ecce Homo, tr. Large, D. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2009

The Will to Power, tr. R. Hill, K & Scarpitti, M. A. Penguin Random House. 2017

Other Works:

Ansell-Pearson, K, "Nietzsche's Brave New World of Force: On Nietzsche's 1873 "Time Atom Theory" Fragment and the Matter of Boscovich's Influence on Nietzsche" *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 20.1 2000, pp.5-33. [JSTOR. Accessed 1st May 2020]

Clark, M. *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1990. [Cambridge Core. Accessed 9th June 2019]

Cox, C. "Nietzsche's Heraclitus and the Doctrine of Becoming." *International Studies in Philosophy*. 30.3, pp.49-63. [Philosophy Documentation Centre. Accessed 5th May 2020]

Crawford, C. "Nietzsche's Overhuman: Creating on the Crest of the Timepoint." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 30.1 2005, pp.22-48. [Project Muse. Accessed 4th June 2019]

Dibrell, W. "The Dionysian Significance of Eternal Return." *Historical Reflections*. 21.3. 1995, pp.451-470. [JSTOR. Accessed 27th February 2020]

Dries, M. "Metaphysician, Philosopher, Psychologist? – Making Sense of Nietzsche's Sense-Making." *Philosophical Topics*. 43.1&2. 2015, pp1-50. [JSTOR. Accessed 23rd February 2020]

Gardner, S “Nietzsche on the Arts and Sciences” in Stern, T (ed.) *The New Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2019. [Cambridge Core. Accessed 20th February 2020]

Gemes, K “Postmodernism’s Use and Abuse of Nietzsche” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 62.2. 2001, pp. 337-360 [JSTOR. Accessed 2nd May 2020]

Goldberg, D “Nietzsche’s Eternal recurrence: The Question of the What of Return.” *Arhe*. 8.15. 2011, pp29-44.

Hatab, L. *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence*. Routledge. London. 2005. [ProQuest Ebook Central. Accessed 8th April 2020]

- “Shocking Time: Reading Eternal Recurrence Literally” in Dries, M (ed.) *Nietzsche on Time and History*. De Gruyter. Boston. 2008. [ProQuest Ebook Central. Accessed 13th April 2020]

Huddleston, A. “Affirmation, Admirable Overvaluation, and the Eternal Recurrence.” (forthcoming)

Janaway, C. *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche’s Genealogy*. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 2007. [EBSCO. Accessed 20th February 2020]

Jenkins, S. "Time and Personal Identity in Nietzsche's Thought of Eternal Recurrence." *Philosophy Compass*. 7.3. 2012, pp. 208-217. [Wiley. Accessed 14th May 2019]

- "The Pessimistic Origin of Nietzsche's Thought of Eternal Recurrence." *Proceedings of the International Society for Nietzsche Studies*. 63.1. 2020, pp.20-41. [Taylor & Francis. Accessed 13th February 2020]

Kail, P.J.E. "Nietzsche and Naturalism." In Dries, M & Kail, P.J.E (eds.) *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2015. [Oxford Scholarship Online. Accessed 27th March 2020]

Kain, P, J. "Nietzsche, Scepticism, and Eternal Recurrence." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. 13.3. 1983, pp.365-387 [JSTOR. Accessed 28th May 2019]

- "Nietzsche, Eternal recurrence, and the Horror of Existence." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 33.1 2007, pp.49-63 [JSTOR. Accessed 9th October 2019]

Loeb, P. *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2010. [ProQuest Ebook Central. Accessed 3rd June 2019]

- "The Eternal Recurrence" in Richardson, J & Gemes, K (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2013.
[Oxford Scholarship Online. Accessed 19th June 2019]

Moore, A. *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2012. [ProQuest Ebook Central. Accessed 7th June 2019]

Nehamas, A, "The Eternal Recurrence." *The Philosophical Review*. 89.3. 1980, pp.331-356. [JSTOR. Accessed 21st February 2020]

Nolt, J. "Why Nietzsche Embraced Eternal Recurrence." *History of European Ideas*. 34.3. 2008, pp.310-323. [Routledge Online. Accessed 21st August 2019]

Poellner, P. *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1995.[Oxford Scholarship Online. Accessed 20th April 2020]

Reginster, B. *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Mass. 2008. [ProQuest Ebook Central. Accessed 26th February 2020]

Richardson, J. *Nietzsche's System*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2002 [EBSCO. Accessed 18th March 2020]

Ridley, A. "Nietzsche's Greatest Weight." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 14.1, pp.19-25 [JSTOR. Accessed 27th February 2020]

Rogers, P. "Simmel's Mistake: The Eternal Recurrence as a Riddle About the Intelligible Form of Time as a Whole." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 21.1, pp.77-95 [JSTOR. Accessed 2nd March 2020]

Sadler, T. *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption: Critique of the Postmodernist Nietzsche*. The Athlone Press. London. 1995. [Bloomsbury Collections. Accessed 26th April 2020]

Schacht, R. *Nietzsche*. Routledge. London. 2002. [EBSCO. Accessed 6th January 2020]

Sterling, M.C. "Recent Discussions of Eternal Recurrence: Some Critical Comments." *Nietzsche-Studien*. 6. 1977, pp.261-291 [De Gruyter. Accessed 4th April 2020]

Stern, T. "Back to the Future: Eternal Recurrence and the Death of Socrates." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 41. 2011, pp.73-82 [JSTOR. Accessed 18th June 2019]

- "Some Third Thing': Nietzsche's Words and the Principle of Charity." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. 47.2. 2016, pp.287-302 [JSTOR. 28th May 2020]

Ulfers, F & Cohen, M.D. "Zarathustra, the Moment, and Eternal Recurrence of the Same: Nietzsche's Ontology of Time" in Luchte, J (ed.) *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke*

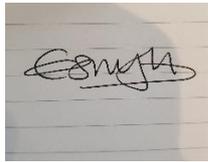
Zarathustra: Before Sunrise. Continuum. London. 2008 [ProQuest Ebook Central.

Accessed 21st January 2020]

Wicks, R, "The Eternal Recurrence: Nietzsche's Ideology of the Lion." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*. 31.1. 1993, pp.97-118

**Declaration of Originality of Authorship of a thesis submitted for examination in the BPhil in
Philosophy in the academic year 2019-2020**

I, Eleanor Smyth, affirm that my submitted thesis entitled "The Reality of Eternal Recurrence" is my own original work, except where otherwise stated, and that I have only shown drafts of it to my supervisor, Prof Alexander Prescott-Couch, in approximately eight hours of supervision, and that I have received help in its preparation from Dr/Prof ...N/A..... *(please list all Oxford Philosophy Faculty members you received help from and specify the sort of help received, or write "N/A")*.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on lined paper. The signature appears to be 'E. Smyth'.

Signed:

Date: 30/06/2020