Eternal Recurrence: Nietzsche's Prediction

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text or footnotes. Nor does it contain material that has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma of a university or institute of higher learning.
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Abstract—Eternal Recurrence: Nietzsche’s Prediction—(80,000 words)

This dissertation is divided into two parts: the first suggests an interpretation of Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same; the second articulates the grounds for this interest. The Introduction sets the scene for these two parts by arguing that there are at least three essential dimensions to Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same: the question of its cosmological significance; the question of it being experienced as the “heaviest weight”; and, thirdly, the question of it being the “highest formula of affirmation”. Overall, this dissertation offers a reading of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that is consistent with each of these dimensions, and that, I believe, coheres unproblematically with all the references to eternal recurrence found in Nietzsche’s texts (both published and unpublished).

Part One: Nietzsche’s interest in recurrence: I argue that Nietzsche is interested in the possibility of an eternally recurring universe to the extent that he sees it as one day being the object of widespread belief. Nietzsche thinks that belief in a recurrence cosmology will have dire consequences for the “sick”. These consequences include depression and suicide. As a result of the “sick” becoming depressed and suicidal, their influence on European culture will, according to Nietzsche, wane, presumably thereby leaving Europe in the hands of the “strong” (i.e. healthy). According to Nietzsche, the ascendency of such strong, happy human beings is equivalent to “redemption” of the earth. At least one key advantage of this interpretation is that it explains Nietzsche’s interest in cosmological speculation, without committing him to belief in a recurrence cosmology; nor does it commit him to an epistemological position that accepts cosmological claims as necessarily pertaining to “truth”.

Part Two: Defending Nietzsche’s interest in recurrence: The three chapters that comprise Part Two each account for a different respective dimension of the idea’s significance. Thus, Chapter Four explains the basis of Nietzsche’s interest in the “cosmological” significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Chapter Five accounts for his interest in the possibility of belief in a recurrence cosmology actually leading to depression or suicide. Chapter Six accounts for Nietzsche’s view that belief in eternal recurrence could be experienced as a “formula of affirmation”.
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## Abbreviations

**Nietzsche**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Birth of Tragedy</td>
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<td>Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks</td>
<td>PTAG</td>
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<td>‘On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense’</td>
<td>TL</td>
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<td>Untimely Meditations</td>
<td>UM</td>
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<td>Human, All Too Human</td>
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<td>The Dawn</td>
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<td>The Gay Science</td>
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<td>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</td>
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<td>Beyond Good and Evil</td>
<td>BGE</td>
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<td>On the Genealogy of Morals</td>
<td>GM</td>
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<td>Twilight of the Idols</td>
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<td>The Anti-Christ</td>
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<td>Ecce Homo</td>
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<td>The Will to Power</td>
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**Schopenhauer**

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<tr>
<td>The World as Will and Representation Volume One</td>
<td>WWR, Vol. I</td>
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<td>The World as Will and Representation Volume Two</td>
<td>WWR, Vol. II</td>
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I am trying extremely hard to be dry. My heart thinks it has so much to say, but I try to keep it quiet. I am continually beset by the fear that I may have expressed only a sigh when I thought I was stating a truth. —Stendhal
Introduction

The world is for tyrants: live!
—Voltaire

—An introduction to an introduction

In his wonderful novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera introduces the narrative with the claim that Nietzsche's interest in the mysterious idea of the eternal recurrence of the same has long perplexed other philosophers. Indeed, even with the most cursory examination of the immense and varied body of secondary literature surrounding Nietzsche's life, work, and influence, one can confirm the veracity of Kundera's statement for oneself. One quickly sees that this matter has been the object of a more desultory array of interpretations than any other aspect of Nietzsche's thought. So, against this backdrop, which in my view testifies to the existence of ample room for work in this field of scholarship, this dissertation proffers yet another interpretation of the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. This Introduction fulfills three key functions, and is divided into three sections accordingly. Section One answers the question as to why there is no consensus in the secondary literature concerning Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Section Two comments on the secondary literature, and Section Three provides a succinct account of my own interpretation.

By examining and commenting upon references to eternal recurrence in Nietzsche's texts, I show, in Section One, that there is a very high degree of ambiguity surrounding Nietzsche's treatment of, and attitude towards, the idea. As such, it is little wonder that such a variety of interpretations are available. However, I argue further that, despite the high level of ambiguity surrounding Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal

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recurrence of the same, it is indubitable that this interest relates to at least three quite
distinct facets, or dimensions, of its significance. Briefly, these three dimensions are the
question of the idea's *cosmological* significance, its *nihilistic* significance, and its
*affirmative* significance.

In providing commentaries on excerpts from Nietzsche's texts that contain explicit
references to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same in the first section of the
Introduction, I have, for the most part, refrained from appealing to secondary readings.
There are two reasons for this. Firstly, I do not think that engagement with the
secondary literature is necessary at this point, because my commentary is devoted to a
straightforward reading of the *literal* sense of the passages in question. Whilst some
may argue that the nature of Nietzsche's style renders such an approach fruitless, it
seems to me to be a sensible place to start. Ultimately, the point that I seek to make in
doing this is a very simple one: the *prima facie* sense of explicit references to eternal
recurrence in Nietzsche's texts support a variety of different readings, none of which are
wholly convincing. Secondly, since most interpretations of the idea of the eternal
recurrence of the same are themselves dependent upon interpretations of other aspects
of Nietzsche's thought, for example his views about truth, appealing to such
interpretations in a context in which there is no room for complex accounts of
Nietzsche's epistemological position is unlikely to be helpful.

The point of Section Two is to provide a survey of the secondary literature in this field.
The body of scholarship surrounding Nietzsche's philosophy is immense – arguably too
immense for anyone to do justice to in the scope of a dissertation, let alone in one
chapter. My approach in this section is therefore to initially clarify, as much as possible,
my own orientation to the secondary literature. In doing so I indicate which
commentators and, indeed, schools of commentators, have been most influential on the
development of my own approach to interpreting Nietzsche's texts. I also provide a brief
account of my own general attitude towards Nietzsche's philosophy, which is
predominantly positive. The literature review itself is comprised of summaries and critical
reflections upon two interpretations of the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that between them, I believe, encompass many of the broad tendencies of interpreters in this area. The two commentators I have chosen to discuss in this context are Karl Löwith and Ted Sadler. Each offers a distinctive reading of the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, but, somewhat predictably, I argue that their respective interpretations, whilst interesting and thought-provoking, either lack plausibility or fail to convince.

Finally, drawing upon the results of my analysis of Nietzsche's textual references to eternal recurrence, and my survey of the secondary literature, the Section Three of this Introduction provides a succinct statement of my own account of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, and an outline of my overall argument. It should be noted here that the account of Nietzsche's interest in recurrence that I offer is developed with the primary aim of allowing Nietzsche's statements about eternal recurrence to be consistent, both with respect to each other, and with respect to what I understand to be Nietzsche's broader philosophical interests. That is to say, assuming, generously, that my interpretation does accurately reflect Nietzsche's intentions with respect to his treatment of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, I am not concerned to argue for or against the ultimate plausibility or veracity of his thinking in this area.

Section One—The ambiguity of recurrence
As I see it, the primary source of the confusion surrounding the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is the manner in which Nietzsche himself refers to the idea in his published works. For an idea to which he apparently attaches such enormous import, one of the most striking features of this whole issue is the relative silence about it that pervades Nietzsche's entire corpus of published works. There are literally only a handful of direct references to the eternal recurrence in texts that Nietzsche himself prepared for publication. For the purposes of this discussion, I have divided Nietzsche's texts into
three main categories, each of which contains passages that refer explicitly to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. These categories are: the published aphoristic texts, which include all of Nietzsche's published works except *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the style of which is so different to Nietzsche's other texts that it warrants its own category; and the Nachlass, by which I mean the unpublished material contained in Nietzsche's notebooks, some of which was published posthumously in *The Will to Power*. Each of these three categories will be treated separately.

It should become clear from my commentaries that minimal certainty regarding Nietzsche's interest in the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same can be derived from textual analysis of the few isolated passages in his corpus that refer explicitly to the idea. However, minimal certainty does indeed exist, and I will show that there are at least three considerations that are undeniably connected to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. The first of these, and the one which has perhaps led to the deepest divisions between commentators, is what I call the question of the "cosmological significance" of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. What is at stake here is the question of the extent to which Nietzsche intends it to be understood as a cosmological (i.e. scientific, ontological or metaphysical) theory. Such a theory apparently states that every possible event has already unfolded an infinite number of times, and will unfold again an infinite number of times — including, crucially, the precise sequence, down to the smallest detail, of every individual human life.

Now, if Nietzsche does intend this to be taken seriously as an actual description of the way the universe is, questions abound. To name a few: whence comes such a belief?; is it consistent with Nietzsche's various epistemological critiques?; is the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same itself even coherent?; and, why is there no straightforward statement to this effect in Nietzsche's published works? The answers to these questions are far from self-evident. Yet, if Nietzsche doesn't intend his references to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to be understood as pertaining to an
actual cosmology, then we have a set of questions that are, to my mind, even more confusing. Some of these questions are: why does Nietzsche refer to himself as the teacher of the eternal recurrence?; why does he devote so much space in his notebooks to developing argumentation that presumably pertains to a proof of a recurrence cosmology?; why does he testify in letters to a plan to study mathematics and physics in order to be in a better position to teach a recurrence cosmology?; and, why does he constantly ascribe the greatest significance to something that he doesn’t think is even true?

The second component that an interpreter must take into consideration is, I suggest, Nietzsche’s apparent belief that, if the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same were to “gain power” over an individual, then it could be expected to “crush” him or her. I refer to this dimension of Nietzsche’s thinking as the “nihilistic significance” of recurrence. In the notebooks there are frequent references to the potential of the idea to destroy people, and at one point Nietzsche even goes so far as to claim that, in connection with his teaching of eternal recurrence, “the races that cannot bear it stand condemned". Thirdly, and perhaps least controversially, Nietzsche describes the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as the “highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable". Whilst these second and third components are considerably less fraught for an interpreter than the first, this does not mean that they have not caused controversies of their own. Moreover, the way in which they are understood is to a very high degree dependent upon how one understands the cosmological significance (or lack thereof) of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.

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3 WP, §1053.
4 EH, Z, §1.
Only four of Nietzsche’s published aphoristic texts contain explicit discussions of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Two of the essays that comprise the Untimely Meditations contain critical (and dismissive) references to a Pythagorean recurrence cosmology. However, since both of these essays were written prior to Nietzsche’s own “conception” of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same in 1881, it is not necessary to discuss these in this context. The Gay Science contains what is presumably the most important account. Indeed the relevant passage is later described in Ecce Homo as containing the basic idea of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Twilight of the Idols ends with the claim that Nietzsche is the “teacher of the eternal recurrence”. Finally, Nietzsche’s autobiography Ecce Homo contains three passages in which the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is mentioned, two of which are in the context of a discussion of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, the other is in the context of a discussion of The Birth of Tragedy.

Chronologically, the first significant mention of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is the penultimate aphorism (§341) of the first edition of The Gay Science, which was published in 1882. Given that this is the single “independent” account (i.e. it is not a reference to another text) of the idea that Nietzsche published in his ostensibly discursive philosophical writings, it has been forced to bear the weight of the full range of varying interpretations. Here is the aphorism in question:

_The heaviest weight._ – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and again innumerable times again; and there is nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with

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5 ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’, §2; ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, §1.
it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this again and innumerable times again?' would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to long for nothing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

*Prima facie*, this aphorism depicts a scenario in which the reader is asked to imagine an experience of intense solitude during which he or she is visited by a demon. This demon then communicates to him or her some facts about life which presumably equate to a recurrence cosmology. The facts in question pertain to the reader having to live his or her life again innumerable times in identical fashion. Existence as a whole is described as an "hour glass" which, when it has run its course, is turned over again and again *ad infinitum*; in relation to this whole, the reader's own individual existence can be considered to be a mere "speck of dust".

On the basis of this depiction of the significance of the reader's existence in relation to the eternity of time, the magnitude of space, and the apparent irrevocability of its fatalism, the reader is asked whether he or she would not throw him or her self down and gnash his or her teeth and curse. This is obviously the expected reaction, although it is acknowledged that during "tremendous moments" the eternal recurrence of the same life might seem desirable, indeed "divine". The reader is then told that if the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same were to gain power over him or her, then it would lie on his or her actions as the "heaviest weight". This heaviness consists in the fact that his or her every decision and action would from now on be accompanied by the question "do you want this again and innumerable times again?" The final refrain of the aphorism, obviously its key question, asks how well disposed the reader would have to become to *life* and him or her *self* in order to "long for nothing more fervently" than the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as an "ultimate eternal confirmation and seal".
On a first reading, the above aphorism can be read as a kind of thought experiment that is designed to pose a quite specific question: i.e. granted that one would not find the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same desirable, how well disposed to life would one have to first become in order to will its eternal recurrence as its “eternal confirmation and seal”? On this reading, Nietzsche’s riskiest assumption concerns the negative reaction that he expects one to experience. One is expected to prostrate oneself, gnash one’s teeth, and curse. If the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same gains power over one then, unless one first becomes better disposed to oneself, it could “crush” one beneath the weight of its demands. Strictly speaking, there is little reason to conclude on the basis of this aphorism that Nietzsche is interested in advancing a “cosmological theory”, or seriously positing a hypothesis about the nature of the universe. Rather, the above aphorism can be read in a straightforward sense as a conditional question. It asks the reader to imagine a hypothetical situation on the basis of which it demands a certain kind of self-questioning response.

In sum, we can see clearly how the three considerations that I suggested are integral to Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same are represented in this key aphorism. Firstly, the cosmological significance is represented as being conditional. In other words, whilst Nietzsche himself makes no attempt to advance a cosmological theory per se, he is clearly interested in one’s reaction to the possibility of, or the consequences of one’s belief in, a recurrence cosmology. These consequences are represented as being of two general kinds. On the one hand, Nietzsche assumes that what I have called the nihilistic significance of the idea is the most likely to come to the fore. On the other hand, he apparently believes that one can experience the affirmative significance of the idea, provided one can first become better disposed to one’s life and the world.

The second significant mention of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that one finds in Nietzsche’s aphoristic texts is contained in the final passage of the 1888
text *Twilight of the Idols*. This book was intended by Nietzsche to serve as a short summary of his chief philosophical innovations. One would expect then that, considering the importance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, there would be some mention of it. Indeed there is: the passage in question concludes the fifth section of 'What I Owe to the Ancients' which, as the title suggests, summarizes Nietzsche's mature reflections upon Ancient Greek and Roman culture:

.... And with that I again return to the place from which I set out – *Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values: with that I again plant myself in the soil out of which I draw all that I will and can – I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysos, – I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence...

The difficulties of constructing a positive interpretation of the sense of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same based on this passage are tremendous. In it, Nietzsche describes himself as the “teacher of the eternal recurrence”. The obvious question to ask is: of what does the teaching consist? Presumably, the answer to this question is: “the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same”; but this is not specified, and many of Nietzsche's other comments in this passage (and in the one preceding it) actually undermine such a conclusion. For example, in the fourth section of 'What I Owe to the Ancients', we find the following passage:

For it is only in the Dionysian mysteries, in the psychology of the Dionysian condition, that the fundamental fact of the Hellenic instinct expresses itself – its ‘will to life’. What did the Hellene guarantee himself with these mysteries? *Eternal* life, the eternal recurrence of life; the future promised and consecrated in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; true life as collective continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality.... In the teachings of the mysteries, pain is sanctified: the ‘pains of childbirth’ sanctify pain in general – all becoming and growing, all that guarantees the future, postulates pain.... For the eternal joy in creating to exist, for the will to life eternally to affirm itself, the ‘torment of childbirth’ must also exist eternally.... All this is contained in the word Dionysos... The profoundest instinct
of life, the instinct for the future of life, for the eternity of life is in this word experienced religiously - ....

Here it is stated that, by participating in orgies (considered here presumably as primitive precursors to public performances of tragic poetry), the ancient Greeks guaranteed themselves the "eternal recurrence of life". However the sense of recurrence is certainly not to be taken as literal self-same repetition. Nietzsche is not saying that the Greeks celebrated their own individual recurrences. Rather, according to Nietzsche, the orgy was an affirmation of the endless coming-into-being and passing-away of life as such, with specific reference to the symbolic and literal role of procreation. This account of Greek "affirmation" is reinforced at the end of §4 by the contrasting claim that Christianity's views about sexuality (Nietzsche claims that Christians view sexuality as "impure") is evidence for its embodiment of a negative (or "negating") stance towards life. The fundamental issue here for Nietzsche concerns the contrast between the respective stances adopted [by Greeks and Christians] towards life. When considered in light of this the final words of section 5 ("I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysos, – I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence..."), could be read as simply saying that, as a disciple of Dionysos, and through his philosophical writings encouraging others to such discipleship, Nietzsche is supporting and propagating – and hence "teaching", the affirmation of the eternal recurrence of life.

In any case, it is clear from this discussion that there is no necessarily compelling reason to conclude from this passage that the content of Nietzsche's "teaching" is actually the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same in the sense of a description of the universe. On the other hand, it is very clear that Nietzsche's interest in eternal recurrence, and his view of himself as the teacher of eternal recurrence, is tied indelibly to the affirmative significance of the idea. However, consideration of this passage alone provides no basis for any firm conclusions about the content of Nietzsche's "teaching".
Ecce Homo (1888) contains three explicit references to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Two of them are located in the section dealing with Nietzsche’s work Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and the other is in the section on The Birth of Tragedy. Here is the latter:

The doctrine of the “eternal recurrence,” that is, of the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things – this doctrine of Zarathustra might in the end have already been taught by Heraclitus. At least the Stoa has traces of it, and the Stoics inherited almost all of their principle notions from Heraclitus.

Here we find the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same referred to clearly as a cosmology which depicts the “unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of things”. Furthermore, it is described as a “doctrine of Zarathustra”. The context for this remark is Nietzsche’s claim that in his writings he had transposed the phenomenon of the Dionysian into a “philosophical pathos” which he calls “tragic wisdom”. Nietzsche claims that he seeks such a pathos in vain, even in the great pre-Socratic Greek philosophers – although he “retained some doubts” in the case of Heraclitus, who, it turns out, “might” have taught the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Just as in the previously discussed passage from Twilight of the Idols, there is a clear indication of a relationship between the phenomenon of the Dionysian, and the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. The key difference in this case is that a much clearer link is established between the concept of a “teacher of eternal recurrence”, which Nietzsche has previously claimed to be, and a particular doctrine: “the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things”, which is described as a doctrine belonging to Zarathustra.

The foregoing passage certainly adds ambiguity to the question of whether or not the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is intended by Nietzsche to have “cosmological” significance. Whereas on the basis of the previously discussed passages, there has been no compelling reason to attribute any such significance to it,
prima facie, the above passage is clear evidence for the view that it indeed does have cosmological connotations. However, as we shall see, this evidence is not reinforced by the remaining two relevant passages in Ecce Homo. The next one, which is from the first aphorism of the section of Ecce Homo concerning the composition of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, describes it as a “formula of affirmation”:

The basic conception of this work, the idea of eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that can possibly be attained—, belongs to the August of the year 1881: it was jotted down on a sheet of paper with the inscription "6,000 feet beyond man and time." .... The "gaya scienza" belongs in the interval and contains a hundred signs of the proximity of something incomparable; in the end it even offers the beginning of Zarathustra, and in the penultimate section of the fourth book the basic idea of Zarathustra.

To be more precise, it is described as the “highest formula of affirmation (diese höchste Formel der Bejahung) that can possibly be attained”; but it is nonetheless described as a “formula”. More tellingly, it is claimed that the penultimate aphorism of The Gay Science, which we have already discussed, contains this “basic idea” (die Grundconception). On this basis we now have a passage (from The Gay Science) which it is reasonable to interpret primarily as a thought experiment, being described as the “basic idea” of a “formula of affirmation”. Putting these elements together gives one the strong impression that it is indeed some kind of thought experiment, the results of which testify to one’s capacity for “affirmation”. Furthermore, in this context we might expect that, as the “fundamental conception” of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, which is a fictional narrative, the protagonist, Zarathustra, might undergo, or confront, such an “experiment” in order to testify to his “affirmative stance” towards life.

The final passage that we will examine comes at the end of the sixth section of the discussion of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and it adds considerably to the general confusion:
The psychological problem in the type of Zarathustra is...how he that has the hardest, most terrible insight into reality, that has thought the "most abysmal idea," nevertheless does not consider it an objection to existence, not even to its eternal recurrence,—but rather one reason more for *being himself* the eternal Yes to all things, "the tremendous, unbounded saying Yes and Amen"—"Into all abysses I still carry the blessings of my saying Yes" ... *But this is the concept of Dionysus once again.*

If one were tempted by the above interpretation, which sees the basic conception of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the story of Zarathustra confronting the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, and affirming it, then it would make sense to construe Zarathustra's "most abysmal idea", in line with the penultimate aphorism of *The Gay Science*, which depicts its capacity to crush an individual, as being the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Yet this would lead to reading the above passage as saying that Zarathustra doesn't consider the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as an objection to the "eternal recurrence" of existence. Such a reading appears to make nonsense of this passage.®

Whatever one makes of this, it is clear then that on the basis of Nietzsche's aphoristic texts it is very difficult to make any decisive conclusions about the primary sense of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. The texts contain no clear elucidation of the "content" of the idea; neither do they give any clear indication of the grounds for Nietzsche's interest in the idea. Inasmuch as they contain any mention of "eternal recurrence" at all, they do so in such a way that a variety of possible interpretations seem reasonable. All that can be surmised is that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is, according to Nietzsche, associated with three ideas. In some cases it is associated with a cosmology that describes the "infinite circular course of all things". In some cases it is associated with the potential for belief in such a cosmology to "crush" a

® This is noted by Alexander Nehamas in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 147-148. Maudemarie Clark, in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 255-256, discusses the same passage and concurs with Nehamas that Zarathustra's "most abysmal idea" cannot be the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. I will deal with this passage in some detail in Chapter Five.
believer. Finally, in almost all cases it is associated with affirmation of life. However, granted that Nietzsche’s most unequivocal statements about the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same depict it as the heart of his poetic creation Thus Spoke Zarathustra, one can hardly have claimed to have attempted to interpret its sense without due consideration of this central text.

—Thus Spoke Zarathustra

So, if we are to take Nietzsche seriously at his word, and consider him to indeed be the “teacher of the eternal recurrence”, we must look for that teaching in the work of which it purported to be the “basic conception” and “basic idea”. This work is, of course, his 1883-4 publication Thus Spoke Zarathustra. However, even before we begin to examine the text, the basic difficulty of reading what is ostensibly “poetry” in the context of “philosophy” requires discussion.

For the composition of his most important text, Nietzsche adopted the style and language of the ancient philosophical fable. The four books depict the various adventures of the central protagonist Zarathustra who, at the age of forty, after ten years of solitude, “goes down” into the world of men to share his wisdom. During this “down-going” Zarathustra delivers sermons on a wide range of subjects, and converses with a variety of improbable characters, such as clowns, dwarves, and talking animals. In light of this, the relationship between “Zarathustra’s” views and “Nietzsche’s” views is obviously problematic. So, for example, if it were possible to convincingly show that the fictional character Zarathustra did indeed believe that the basic character of the universe was eternal recurrence, it would not follow necessarily that Nietzsche shared this belief, or that this belief constituted the content of Nietzsche’s own “teaching” (as opposed to Zarathustra’s teaching). As it turns out, and as I will demonstrate, there is little immediate evidence to support the view that even Zarathustra believes in a cosmological doctrine of an eternally recurring self-same universe. While Zarathustra has occasion to make insightful and interesting speeches about very many topics, he has very little (if anything) to say explicitly about a recurrence cosmology. There are,
however, two key episodes of the narrative in which the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same functions as a central motif. It is these which will now be examined.

The first key episode that obviously pertains to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is in the chapter ‘On the Vision and the Riddle’, which is situated near the beginning of the third book. In this chapter, Zarathustra relates the story of a vision (his “loneliest vision”) to the “bold attempters of the open sea” (Nietzsche’s codeword for “free-spirits”: those with an intellectual conscience and endowed with courage to live in accordance with the results of their truth-seeking) upon his departure from the blessed isles. In Zarathustra’s telling of his loneliest vision, he describes how during his ascent of the tallest peak, the “spirit of gravity”, his “devil” and “archenemy”, a creature, a half-dwarf, half-mole, accompanied him astride his shoulder. The dwarf-mole (henceforth simply “dwarf”) pours “leaden thoughts” into Zarathustra’s brain. Finally, Zarathustra challenges the dwarf and it jumps from Zarathustra’s shoulder and sits on a stone, at the same moment Zarathustra sees the “Gateway”. Upon it is inscribed “moment”. Of the two temporal paths that meet at the gateway, one runs back infinitely, and to that extent, “eternally” in a straight line back in time; the other runs, likewise, eternally forwards:

“But whoever would follow one of them, on and on, farther and farther: do you believe, dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?”—

“All that is straight lies,” murmured the dwarf contemptuously. “All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle.”

... [Zarathustra continues:] “From this gateway, Moment, a long eternal lane leads backward: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever can walk have walked this lane before? must not whatever can happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before? And if everything has been there before—what do you think, dwarf, of this moment? Must not this gateway too have been there before? And are not all things knotted together so firmly that this moment draws after it all that is to come? Therefore—itself too? For whatever can walk—in this long lane out there too, it must walk once more.
"And this slow spider, which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must not all of us have been there before? And return and walk in that other lane, out there, before us, in this long dreadful lane—must we not eternally return?"

Thus I spoke, more and more softly; for I was afraid of my own thoughts and the thoughts behind my thoughts.

Suddenly, Zarathustra hears a dog howl nearby which reminds him of an experience of his youth, and upon hearing it Zarathustra takes pity. Immediately the gateway and the dwarf and the spider are gone and before Zarathustra is a man: a young shepherd, the face of whom is leaden with nausea and pale dread. Hanging from the mouth of the shepherd is a heavy black snake, which has crawled into his throat and bit itself fast. Zarathustra tries but is unable to pull it out and instead yells “Bite! Bite its head off”. The shepherd eventually does so, spewing the head of the snake far away, and in doing so is “no longer shepherd, no longer human” but one changed, and laughs a laughter such that no human had ever laughed.

Of his audience of bold sailors, Zarathustra asks what he saw in the parable, who is it that must come one day, who is the shepherd, and who is the man into whose mouth all that is heaviest and blackest will crawl? This question constitutes the “riddle”. But what are we to make of this? Ostensibly, the idea of the eternal recurrence figures here as the highly stylized vision of a fictional character. One might argue that within his vision, Zarathustra infers the eternal recurrence of the same from the picture of time that has been shown to him. Indeed, he argues that if the past is infinite, then everything that can happen, must have already happened. In my view, and as will be demonstrated shortly, Nietzsche’s interest in the possibility of a recurrence cosmology is based primarily on this argument, which is used by Schopenhauer as a variation of Kant’s first antinomy of pure reason. However, with respect to its role in the narrative of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, it is unclear what the significance of this deduction is in this context. As Zarathustra says – it is a riddle. The imagery of the shepherd and the snake is very
obscure. One assumes that the snake, inasmuch as it is “coiled”, represents the “ring” of time/eternity: but this is by no means self-evident. Nor is it self-evident why biting the head off such a snake would be a transformative experience for the shepherd.

The fact that this episode is a riddle, which presumably admits of a solution, leads us to the second episode of Zarathustra’s journey in which the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is a key motif, because it is in this episode that the riddle is solved. This second episode is described in the chapter ‘The Convalescent’. In this chapter, the action of which takes place back in Zarathustra’s cave, Zarathustra finally confronts his “most abysmal thought”. Despite the apparent oddity of the related passage in Ecce Homo that I drew attention to in the previous section, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, it makes sense to assume that this “thought” is the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Upon summoning his abysmal thought from deep inside him, Zarathustra falls down as if dead. He doesn’t move, eat or drink for seven days. While he is prone like this his animals fetch fruit for him to eat. After the seventh day he awakes and eats an apple. This symbolic re-enactment of the Genesis account of creation, in which sexuality (and hence, as we saw in the passage from Twilight of the Idols, “the eternal recurrence of life”) is affirmed by Zarathustra’s freely eating of the apple, presumably implies that the world, or at least Zarathustra, has been, in some sense re-created or re-born. His animals speak to him:

“O Zarathustra,” the animals said, “to those who think as we do, all things themselves are dancing: they come and offer their hands and laugh and flee—and come back. Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of being is built. Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the ring of being remains faithful to itself. In every Now, being begins; round every Here rolls the sphere There. The centre is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity.

7 The relationship between sexuality and affirmation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.
It is notable that this account of being (or the "world") belongs to Zarathustra's animals. It is the way they experience being. While this certainly can be construed as a "doctrine" of eternal recurrence, it is one that doesn't, as yet, belong to Zarathustra. It is simply a statement of the way that animals experience life. Zarathustra replies to the animals' account of their experience of being by acknowledging that they knew all along the answer to his riddle:

"O you buffoons and barrel organs!" Zarathustra replied and smiled again. "How well you know what had to be fulfilled in seven days and how that monster crawled down my throat and suffocated me. But I bit off its head and spewed it out. And you have already made a hurdy-gurdy song of this? But now I lie here, still weary of this biting and spewing, still sick from my own redemption...

Here Zarathustra answers the riddle: the doctrine of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, his "most abysmal thought", was "choking" him. In coming to accept the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same Zarathustra is, apparently, redeemed. As I will argue in Chapter Three, the link between the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same and the idea of redemption is an important aspect of Nietzsche's overall interest in the idea, but for now, let us focus on the text at hand. So far, Zarathustra has redeemed himself by confronting his most abysmal thought – the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same; the animals have relayed their experience of existence to him which is strongly suggestive of this idea; and Zarathustra has accused them of, thereby, making a "hurdy-gurdy song" of his redemption. After some banter, the animals continue:

"... Sing and overflow, O Zarathustra; cure your soul with new songs that you may bear your great destiny. For your animals know well, O Zarathustra, who you are and must become: behold you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence—that is your destiny! That you as the first must teach this doctrine—how could this great destiny not be your greatest danger and sickness too?

Chapter Five contains a more detailed and directed account of this episode.
"Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally, and we ourselves too; and that we have already existed an eternal number of times, and all things with us. You teach that there is a great year of becoming, a monster of a great year, which must, like an hourglass, turn over again and again so that it may run down and run out again; and all these are alike in what is greatest as in what is smallest; and we ourselves are alike in every great year, in what is greatest as in what is smallest....

"Now I die and vanish," you would say, "and all at once I am nothing. The soul is as mortal as the body. But the knot of causes in which I am entangled recurs and will create me again. I myself belong to the causes of the eternal recurrence. I come again, with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent—not to a new life or a better life of a similar life: I come back eternally to this same, selfsame life... to teach again the eternal recurrence of all things... The hour has now come when he who goes under should bless himself. Thus ends Zarathustra's going under."

This is the longest and clearest account of cosmological significance of the eternal recurrence of the same found in Nietzsche's published works. It is from the mouths of Zarathustra's animals. But when they finish speaking Zarathustra remains silent and the animals leave. In fact it is notable that Zarathustra himself never proclaims an account of eternal recurrence. Even in the fourth book, in which Zarathustra redeems the "higher" men through his teaching he never speaks literally about the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. In 'The Drunken Song' he teaches the higher men to "love the earth" and, in doing so, say to death: "was that life? Well then! Once more!" In other words, Zarathustra teaches the higher men courage – as the epitome of courage has been previously described (in 'The Vision and the Riddle') as consisting in this precise questioning and affirmation. Zarathustra also teaches the higher men joy. Joy, according to Zarathustra, wants "eternity". Thus Zarathustra teaches:

Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you said Yes too to all woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamoured; if ever you want one thing twice, if ever you said, "You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!" then you wanted all back. All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamoured—oh, then you loved the world.
Eternal ones, love it eternally and evermore; to woe too, you say: go, but return! For all joy wants eternity.

But it is conspicuous that Zarathustra never attempts to tell the higher men that the universe will recur eternally as a matter of fact. He rather implies that the willing of the eternal recurrence of the same is the epitome of courage and the logical result of joy. This latter claim rests simply on the "vast interconnectedness of all things", but not on selfsame recurrence as such. In fact, the overall question as to the cosmological significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is completely ambiguous with respect to Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

One could argue that Zarathustra, as the "teacher of the eternal recurrence" teaches people to will the eternal recurrence of the same, as a means to redemption, and as a testament to their fidelity unto the earth. This teaching can be conveyed through his teachings about joy and courage – they do not necessarily rely on him "transmitting" a cosmological doctrine. On the other hand, one could argue quite reasonably that belief in such a cosmological doctrine is implicit in Zarathustra's own relationship to truth – and that without it the teaching lacks foundation and speaks merely to an idiosyncrasy of taste on the behalf of Zarathustra (i.e. that he finds such courage and joy desirable). However, what is clear is that different readings are possible on the basis of the general ambiguity inherent in the treatment of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Zarathustra himself never discusses the "doctrine of eternal recurrence" explicitly, he sees it in visions, and his animals discuss it, but his own rational relation to the idea remains obscure.

As with the published aphoristic texts, there is very little that can be positively concluded, on the basis of references to it in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, about the precise nature of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Nevertheless, as with the other published works, it is clear that there are three issues connected to his interest. Firstly, there is the cosmological dimension, which in this text
is for some reason only explicated by Zarathustra's animals, although they say that it is Zarathustra's destiny to teach the cosmological theory as a doctrine. Zarathustra himself, however, is apparently more interested in effect of the idea on people. There is strong evidence for the view that the "most abysmal idea" that he eventually faces in the narrative is precisely the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. This accounts for its nihilistic significance. Finally, after Zarathustra is redeemed and re-born he experiences the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same in a positive and 

affirmative manner.

—The Nachlass

There is one more major source of relevant material for the question of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. This source is Nietzsche's unpublished notebooks. Within these notebooks, which contain material spanning the length of Nietzsche's active philosophical life, there are two primary sources: the notebooks from 1881, during which Nietzsche was writing The Gay Science, and the notes relating to eternal recurrence which Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth eventually published in The Will to Power. The latter notes, a small collection published under the heading 'The Eternal Recurrence' at the end of the fourth and final book, span the period 1883-1888, with the most famous having been penned in 1888.

The major ambiguity engendered by these notebook entries is the very fact that Nietzsche never actually published them, or anything like them. Moreover, nowhere in the Nachlass does he explain his decision not to publish them. At various times it appears that he did hope to publish a proof of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same, but at other times he appeared to have decided against such plans. Indeed his motives for and against such plans remain obscure. On the basis of this it can be reasonably inferred that Nietzsche's reasons for not publishing or attempting to publish a cosmological proof of the eternal recurrence of the same were of three types: he either felt that it was unnecessary from the perspective of his philosophical ambitions (i.e. that its nihilistic and affirmative significance was not reliant on cosmological fact), or that he was not confident about the integrity of the arguments, or that they were being withheld.
for future publications. Predictably, each of these conclusions is well represented in the secondary literature, alongside Heidegger's striking claim that only the Nachlass contains the "true matter" of Nietzsche's thought, in opposition to the published texts which Heidegger sees as mere "foreground". I do not see how it is in principle possible to decide here, given that Nietzsche did not specify his intentions or rationale. Thus this major ambiguity must simply be recognized as irresolvable.

With respect to the cosmological significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, the straightforward nature of these notes is in stark contrast to the ambiguity of the published texts. In these notes Nietzsche presents clear arguments for a cosmological doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same, without any recourse to demons, fictional persona or talking animals. The arguments adopt the basic concepts and conventions of the natural sciences; they are discursive and to the point. Let us examine three of these arguments, two from the 1881 notebooks and the well known one from 1888. In the case of the 1881 notes I am relying on translations by Bernd Magnus. Here is the first argument:

The amount of total energy is limited and not infinite. Let us beware of such conceptual vagaries! Consequently, the number of states, changes, combinations and developments of this energy is incredibly large and practically immeasurable, but nonetheless limited and not infinite. However, time, in which the totality exerts its energy, is infinite. That is, energy is eternally equal and eternally active. Up to this moment an infinity has passed, i.e. all possible developments must have already come to pass. Consequently, the present development must be a repetition and also the one which bore it and the one which will originate from it, and so on forward and backward! Everything has come to pass in so far as the total configuration of energy eternally recurs. Whether, quite aside from that, anything identical has come to pass is entirely indemonstrable. It would appear that the configuration structures attributes anew in the greatest detail, so that two different configurations cannot contain anything identical.

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Whether anything identical can exist within a configuration, for example two leaves—I doubt it...

*Prima facie* this is a straightforward cosmological argument for the eternal recurrence of the same. It claims that if the number of energy states is finite, and time is infinite, then eventual repetition is entailed. Furthermore, it is claimed that this can only be known *a priori*, since it does not admit of empirical verification. It has been extensively argued that this otherwise quite elegant argument is ultimately not cogent.¹¹ There are conceptual problems with some of the premises and, on the basis of these premises, the conclusions that Nietzsche draws do not necessarily follow. In my opinion, insofar as I am seeking to clarify the nature of Nietzsche’s *interest* in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, the question of the ultimate cogency of his argumentation is actually beside the point. My view on this is that, whilst I agree that there are some conceptual problems with Nietzsche’s argument, and whilst I do not personally find it convincing, I do however think that it is significantly less ridiculous than some commentators suggest.¹²

In any case, I am concerned here to highlight what I believe is Nietzsche’s central premise. This premise, it goes without saying, is not at all ridiculous, and, as I will show, troubled both Kant and Schopenhauer (the latter invoked it as an indirect argument for transcendental idealism).¹³ This is the argument: “Because up to this moment an infinite amount of time has already passed, therefore all possible developments must have already come to pass.” As was noted, this argument featured in Zarathustra’s “vision” in the third book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Moreover, this argument, or variations of it, can be found in all of the so-called cosmological arguments in the Nachlass. For

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¹¹ Magnus is a good place to start. He provides commentaries on refutations by Simmel and Danto, as well as his own refutation. Cf. Magnus, ibid., 89-110.
¹² Nehamas, for example, accuses Nietzsche of deliberately “tearing at the fabric of commonsense” in this regard. I think this is an overstatement. Cf. Nehamas Op. Cit., 141-142.
example, let us consider the second of the significant notes from 1881, which is based on the same premise:

If an equilibrium of energy had ever been reached it would still exist. Thus, it never occurred. The present state contradicts such an assumption. (However,) if one assumes that a state has existed absolutely the same as the present one, this assumption would not be contradicted by the present state. But, among the infinite possibilities this must have been the case, because an eternity has already passed until now.... And, if the present state has already occurred, then also has the one which bore it and the one which preceded it and so on, backward. From this there emerges the fact that it has already occurred a second and third time; also, that it will occur a second and third time—innumerable times, backward and forward. That is, all becoming moves in a fixed number of entirely identical states.... Assuming an incredible number of cases, arriving accidentally at the identical condition is more probable than (arriving at) the absolutely never identical.

This argument infers the eternal recurrence of the same from the fact that the present state of the universe (i.e. the fact that it is currently in motion) contradicts the possibility of a “final state” (equilibrium). In other words, if an “eternity” of time has passed, then, because everything that can happen must have already happened, this seems to entail that if the universe were to reach a final state, it would have done so already. The argument denies the possibility of the universe ever reaching a final state. In my view, this argument is the key to understanding Nietzsche’s interest in the possibility of the idea of eternal recurrence of the same, because Schopenhauer defended his own Kantian idealism and repudiated so-called “historical philosophy” with an analogous argument. Further evidence for this reading is Nietzsche’s reference to the object of repetition (i.e. the universe) in toto as “all becoming”, which is in line with Schopenhauer’s distinction between Being and Becoming. This will be explained further in Chapter Four.

14 See previous note.
As I have already suggested, it is unclear why Nietzsche did not attempt to publish any of this argumentation. This is an especially interesting question when one considers the following observation. Whilst Nietzsche did continue to sketch proofs in his notebooks for a cosmological account of the eternal recurrence of the same until late 1888, the nature of these proofs hardly changed at all between the first sketches of 1881 and the notes of the final years. For example, the final passage from the Nachlass that will be discussed here is a famous note from 1888 that was published in book four of The Will to Power. It is a case in point.

If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centres of force—and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless—it follows that, in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time, every possible combination would at some time or another be realized; more: it would be realized an infinite number of times. And since between every combination and its next recurrence all other possible combinations would have to take place, and each of these combinations conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a circular movement of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated: the world as a circular movement that has already repeated itself infinitely often and plays its game in infinitum.

This conception is not simply a mechanistic conception; for if it were that, it would not condition an infinite recurrence of identical cases, but a final state. Because the world has not reached this, mechanistic theory must be considered an imperfect and merely provisional hypothesis.

So while this note does not contain any ideas, or arguments, that are not found in principle in the 1881 notes, it is for precisely this reason that it is interesting. It quite simply consists of a restatement of the basic arguments that I have cited from the 1881 notebooks. Once again, the central premise (the one found in Thus Spoke Zarathustra and Schopenhauer) is the argument that, if time is infinite, everything that can happen, must have already happened. In other words, in seven years of solid philosophical work,
during which he produced his most important texts, and during which he spoke of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as his most important idea, Nietzsche had not, it seems, made any conceptual advances with respect to its content, other than the caveat that a “mechanistic conception” of the universe had limitations. At the very least, this quite extraordinary fact provides supporting evidence for Nietzsche’s assertion that his later works contained nothing that had not previously been said in principle in Thus Spoke Zarathustra.¹⁵

What then, can be concluded about the cosmological significance of the eternal recurrence of the same on the basis of the sketches for proofs found in the Nachlass? The answer is: aside from the fact that Nietzsche was evidently interested in sketching potential proofs of a recurrence cosmology, very little. The cosmological proofs that Nietzsche toyed with show no signs of having been subject to any conceptual development throughout Nietzsche’s most productive period, and, in the final analysis, it is impossible to decide whether Nietzsche himself thought that they did constitute any kind of convincing proof for a recurrence cosmology. The most striking feature of the Nachlass argumentation, in my view, is Nietzsche’s constant appeal to the argument that, if time is infinite, everything that can happen, must have already happened. In Chapter Four I suggest that Nietzsche predicts that philosophers will be more or less forced to confront this argument as a result of the overcoming of Idealism. As such, I argue that Nietzsche’s interest in it can be explained as a function of his interest in the future trajectory of European thought. I will have a lot more to say about this shortly.

The Nachlass material relating to the nihilistic and affirmative significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is a different story. As with the published texts, it is manifestly clear that Nietzsche is interested in the potential of the doctrine to cause

¹⁵ This is a claim often dismissed by interpreters (including Heidegger) who see Nietzsche’s later works (i.e. post Thus Spoke Zarathustra) as containing his more mature and interesting ideas. I, however, see no grounds for this dismissal. For further discussions of this point that support my view see Löwith, op. cit. pp21-25 and Stanley Rosen, The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche’s Zarathustra (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xiv-xv.
great harm, as well as its potential to be the basis of superlative affirmation. However, to these considerations he adds some others. For example, he describes it as: “the triumphant idea of which all other modes of thought will perish”; and a “selective principle”. These introduce arguably quite different considerations, and have quite striking evolutionary connotations. At this stage, however, all I will say is that the interpretation that I offer in Part One of this dissertation coheres unproblematically with these passages, and others like them.

In sum, with respect to all of the explicit references to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that one finds in Nietzsche’s published and unpublished texts, it is little wonder that, as Milan Kundera suggests, other philosophers have found Nietzsche’s interest in it a source of great perplexity. On the basis of the published aphoristic texts, one might reasonably conclude that Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same was primarily concerned with its nihilistic and affirmative connotations. However the precise nature of this concern is itself ambiguous. Thus Spoke Zarathustra poses many problems for an interpreter, not the least of which is the fact that Zarathustra himself maintains an ambiguous relationship to the “doctrine” of the eternal recurrence of the same, leaving it unclear whether or not it is to be read as a cosmology. Finally, the Nachlass, as well as containing some confusing references to a variety of possible implications for the idea (such as it being a “selective principle”), contains several clear attempts at cosmological argumentation, the primary ambiguity of which is the fact that these attempts were never published.

Given this situation, it is, as I have said, simply impossible to come to any watertight conclusion regarding the relationship between the cosmological connotations of the idea, and its nihilistic and affirmative significance. Do these latter connotations of the idea only function on the basis of it being a cosmology, or can they function simply on the basis of it as a hypothetical scenario? It is very difficult to see how to answer this

16 WP§, 1053.
17 WP, §1058.
question based on the explicit material that I have discussed. Of course, one might argue at this point that I have neglected to mention a great many veiled references and allusions to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same in Nietzsche's later works, and this is certainly true. In fact, it is obvious that in order to develop a coherent interpretation of the sense of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same we need to look beyond the explicit references and attempt to understand it in relation to its situation vis à vis the larger body of Nietzsche's thought. This is effectively what this dissertation offers. However, before I attempt to clarify all this perplexity by offering my own interpretation of Nietzsche's interest, which situates it in line with his essentially historical account of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal, let us first examine the interpretations of some renowned commentators.

Section Two—A look at the literature
In Section One I identified what I consider to be the three principal features of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. I argued that Nietzsche is obviously interested in the possibility of a recurrence cosmology; he is obviously interested in the nihilistic consequences of belief in a recurrence cosmology; and he is obviously interested in the potential for the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to be a formula of affirmation. In arguing thus I do not by any means intend to suggest that these are the only three issues that trouble commentators in this area, nor does my suggestion attempt to encompass the vast array of interpretations that have been offered in the years since Nietzsche's death.

There are a variety of other considerations that are frequently invoked in order to try to make sense of this aspect of Nietzsche's thought. For example, some commentators have suggested that the point of Nietzsche's teaching is to convey a quasi— or actual—categorical imperative, which stipulates that one should only act in such a way as one would want to act if one was to live one's life an infinite number of times again.18


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Another notable commentator suggests that Nietzsche teaches the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as a heuristic device that conveys insights about self-hood.\(^\text{19}\) Another suggests that Nietzsche is attempting to articulate the “being-in-the-world” of the Übermensch.\(^\text{20}\) Yet another argues that it is a synthesis of Heraclitean becoming and Dionysian affirmation.\(^\text{21}\) And yet another recent commentator interprets hypothetical affirmation of the idea of the eternal recurrence as a “counter-ideal” to the ascetic ideal.\(^\text{22}\) Indeed, the very great extent to which interpretations of this aspect of Nietzsche’s thought vary is clearly evinced by this list.

I suggest that this variance testifies not only to there being both interest and room in this field for another interpretation, but also indirectly to the ambiguity of the material that I suggested in the previous section of this introductory chapter. However, before I offer my interpretation of Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, it is important to clarify the nature of my approach to reading Nietzsche. It seems to me that one of the clearest ways of doing this is to comment briefly on my own relationship to the vast secondary literature. In a field of this size, and one which is characterized by scholarly approaches that are sometimes completely at odds with one another, it is more or less inevitable that one must “take sides” eventually, and understand one’s own approach in terms of the affinities it bears with those of other scholars.

There are two principal “schools” of Nietzsche scholarship, both of which are interesting in their own right, but which diverge on fundamental matters to an extent such that they are, for the practical purposes of scholarship, irreconcilable. I refer to these schools, for the sake of argument, as the “French” school and the “German” school respectively, and I consider my own dissertation to be primarily in dialogue with the latter. As far as I can tell, the most crucial difference between these schools consists of which particular

\(^{19}\) Cf. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature.*  
\(^{22}\) Cf. Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy.*
aspect of Nietzsche's work they find philosophically interesting. The "French" school is primarily interested in Nietzsche's approach to language, the epistemological implications of this approach, and, particularly, the implications for philosophical conceptions of selfhood. In line with this, Nietzsche is primarily considered to be an "anti-metaphysical" thinker who rejects the possibility of "objective truth" and employs his considerable literary talent in the service of philosophical gestures, rather than literal truth claims. It is clear that there is some textual support for this interest; at the very least, Nietzsche's comments on these matters are highly suggestive. However, the "French" approach frequently contains two distinctive tendencies that I believe are incompatible with my interests.

Firstly, it tends to subordinate most of Nietzsche's ideas to an imputed epistemology, "perspectivism". This means that Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is usually interpreted as an after thought to be "fitted" into this epistemology. Because perspectivism typically rejects the possibility of Nietzsche making bona fide cosmological claims, this avenue of investigation into the nature of his interest in eternal recurrence is often barred from the outset, despite the prima facie case for it being an integral dimension of this interest. Secondly, proponents of the French-school tend to be more interested in "employing" or "thinking" Nietzsche's ideas in the context of what they see as contemporary political problems than seeking to understand his ideas on their own terms. Now, of course, neither of these tendencies is necessarily intrinsically problematic, and many philosophers legitimately see these approaches as pertaining to a more worthwhile philosophical praxis, as opposed to straightforward historical interpretation or rational reconstruction of a long-dead

philosopher's arguments. However, since my interest is in simply seeking to reconstruct Nietzsche's interest in eternal recurrence in his own terms, I have typically found that both of the aforementioned tendencies of the "French" approach run tangentially to my requirements.

What I consider to be the "German school" sees Nietzsche's fundamental philosophical innovations arising primarily in response to the transcendental idealism of Kant and, in particular, Schopenhauer. Within this school the two accounts of Nietzsche's philosophy that I have found to be of most use are those offered by Karl Löwith and Ted Sadler. Both of these commentators seek to understand and articulate Nietzsche's concerns and intentions in his own terms, and both offer interesting critical appraisals of aspects of Nietzsche's thought that grow out of their obvious respect for his approach to philosophy. As will shortly be discussed, I do not agree with either of their accounts of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. However, in developing my own account, I have sought to emulate a basic feature of their approaches. This feature is that, in seeking to reconstruct Nietzsche's thought in a historical perspective, they seek to articulate his philosophy as a continuation of, and response to, the broad traditions of nineteenth century German Idealism.

One of the most distinctive features of their approaches, which I share, is that, wherever possible, they take Nietzsche at his word. That is to say, they do not look for hidden meanings in his texts, and they rely on the literal sense of passages, rather than trying to interpret passages as affects of his "style". My own application of this approach will be most evident in Chapter One, in which I provide an account of the ascetic ideal by

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summarizing the three essays of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In doing this I am in tacit agreement with Ted Sadler's argument in *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption*, that what is truly radical about Nietzsche's thought is not a politically-correct epistemology ("perspectivism") that supports democratic pluralism, but the actual content of his ideas about all manner of things, including philosophical truth.\(^{25}\) While I do not have any problem with political correctness *per se*, much less with democratic pluralism, it does seem obvious to me that Nietzsche is very far from being politically palatable. He is clearly anti-democratic; he clearly and frequently advocates war and violence; he heaps scorn on the notion of equality between the sexes; and he openly denigrates compassion for the poor and sick. However abhorrent these aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy may be, in my view they are necessary and vital components of his thought, rather than incidental idiosyncrasies of his personality, and I believe that one cannot understand Nietzsche's interest in central ideas, such as the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, without genuine engagement with these aspects of his thought.

Despite these latter considerations, my own attitude towards Nietzsche remains predominantly positive. Like Karl Löwith, I think that Nietzsche is a genuine friend of truth and wisdom, who devoted his life to philosophy.\(^{26}\) Moreover I also believe that the unattractive aspects of his thought spring, not from any spite or megalomania, but rather from a genuine, if perhaps overly idealistic, love of humanity. Indeed, my positive attitude towards Nietzsche as a thinker effectively constitutes another constraint to the scope of my own interpretation of the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. This constraint is the fact that, irrespective of whether or not I agree with Nietzsche, and I often don't, I *assume* that his interest in eternal recurrence is based upon reasonable, rational and intelligible philosophical concerns that are, in the final analysis, motivated by a genuine philosophical desire for truth. The result of this

\(^{25}\) Cf. Sadler, *Op. Cit.*, 1-115. According to Sadler, Nietzsche is a "perspectivist" with respect to "knowledge" but not with respect to "philosophical truth". This is the central thesis of Sadler's book. In Chapter Five I outline my own account, which owes much to Sadler's, of Nietzsche's epistemology and his relation to truth.

\(^{26}\) Cf. Löwith, *Op. Cit.*, 8: "But in the depths and in the background, Nietzsche is nevertheless a true lover of wisdom, who as such sought the everlasting or eternal..."
assumption is that I am not interested in theories that ascribe Nietzsche's interest in recurrence predominantly to either a quasi-mystical experience that defies rational analysis, or to a pathology that results from the illness that eventually incapacitates him. Admittedly, such theories are not represented strongly in the scholarly literature on the subject, but since they belong to the popular mythology surrounding Nietzsche it seems apposite to note them in this context.

So, having introduced my own basic approach to Nietzsche, I now turn to a survey of the two most important interpretations for me: Karl Löwith's *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (2nd Edition, 1956) and Ted Sadler's *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption* (1995). In my view these monographs are the two most useful and interesting contributions to this field. Moreover, they offer distinctively different interpretations and, between them are broadly representative of key elements in this area of scholarship. Löwith adopts a very straightforward approach to reading Nietzsche, which is in many ways similar to my own. However, as I will demonstrate, his interpretation of Nietzsche's interest in teaching a recurrence cosmology, in my view, entails foisting a position onto Nietzsche that is simply untenable. Sadler comes from a more explicitly Heideggerian perspective. I have a lot of respect for Sadler's reading, and I am in general agreement with much of his account of Nietzsche's philosophy, especially his account of the Schopenhauerian influence on the development of Nietzsche's thought. However, with respect to his interpretation of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, I think that Sadler errs in not fully pursuing the influence of Schopenhauer on the development of Nietzsche's thought in this area far enough.

—Recurrence as cosmology

Karl Löwith, in his book *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, argues that, as Nietzsche's "teaching", the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is

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27 It should be noted too that in Chapter Three I will present a detailed account of, and analyze, Maudemarie Clark's interpretation of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same from her important 1990 book *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. 

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to be understood literally as a description of the basic character of the universe. This cosmology provides the basis for the "anthropological connotations" which, Löwith argues, can be understood in relation to the "problem of nihilism". Moreover, for Löwith, the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is the "unifying fundamental idea" of Nietzsche's philosophy. Löwith cites Nietzsche's description of himself as the "teacher of the eternal recurrence", and argues that the teaching of the eternal recurrence of the same is the central organizing concept of Nietzsche's "system of aphorisms".

Löwith believes that none of Nietzsche's [other] published works or posthumously published notes contain anything new in principle to what Nietzsche attempted to communicate in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Thus Löwith's overall interpretation of Nietzsche is developed from a close reading of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. On Löwith's reading, the key to understanding Thus Spoke Zarathustra is an understanding of the connection between nihilism and the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. This connection is interpreted by Löwith in the following manner: the story of Zarathustra is that of the self-overcoming of nihilism, in which "he who overcomes" and "what is overcome" are one and the same. Zarathustra overcomes "himself"; that is, Zarathustra (described by Löwith as the embodiment of the "will to nothing" that has become free) over-turns himself into the willing of the eternal recurrence of all that is. Correspondingly, the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is simultaneously the most extreme form of nihilism and the self-overcoming of nihilism. As such it is the "peak" of nihilism, and also its

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28 Löwith, Nietzsche's Idea of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, 196.
29 Löwith, ibid., 60. – As has already been noted, this is in accordance with Nietzsche's own explicit descriptions of his philosophical work. Nietzsche himself described Beyond Good and Evil, and On the Genealogy of Morals as a "a kind of preliminary glossary in which the most important innovations of concepts and values [of that book] occur... at some time and are provided with names". Similarly, The Antichrist, as the first part of the conceived four-part Revaluation of All Values, is characterized as a book that belongs only to those who understand Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and the idea of eternal recurrence, which (according to Löwith) is the 'fundamental idea' of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, is repeatedly described as the principle of the revaluation of all values. Even Ecce Homo, Nietzsche claims, contains no word that has not already been said through Zarathustra's mouth.
"completion/perfection". Moreover, according to Löwith, belief in the eternal recurrence of the same is intended to give man “the new gravity”, after the old gravity that was characteristic of Christian faith dissipated upon the death of God. Like Christianity before it, belief in the eternal recurrence would act as a “counter-weight” against the will-to-nothing (nihilism). This nothing is, according to Löwith, simply the logical expression of godlessness. The paradoxical goal, that Zarathustra is thereby to restore to the will, is “goallessness as such”. Finally, Zarathustra’s teaching gives the weak a “Thou Shalt”, the strong an “I will” and, to those liberated even from willing, it gives the “Yes and Amen” to the simple necessity of the way things are.

The big problem with Nietzsche’s teaching, according to Löwith, is the fatalism inherent in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Thus, having given his account of the significance of the eternal recurrence of the same, Löwith poses the following question:

But how, with the freedom of the will that has sprung from the Christian understanding of existence, can one will again the necessity of simple being-thus-and-not-different, except through a willing of what must be—which as a double will denies both?

In other words: how can a will, which takes itself to be free, choose to will a cosmological necessity which would deny (or preclude the possibility of) its freedom to will in the first place? Whilst Löwith thinks that Nietzsche’s teaching can deal with this problem as long as it remains in the realm of poetic thinking (i.e. the narrative of Thus Spoke Zarathustra), he argues that the teaching breaks into two irreconcilable halves as soon as the poetic power of allegorizing leaves Nietzsche. Thus when Nietzsche does

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30 Löwith, ibid., 55. Voll-endung, literally, “fully ending”; note: Vollendung has the double meaning of both “completion” and “perfection”. See Translator’s note, 261.
31 Löwith, ibid., 56. C.f. This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from what was bound to grow out of it, from the great nausea, from the will to nothing, from nihilism; this bell stroke of noon and of great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man; this Antichrist and antinihilist, this conqueror of God and the nothing—he must come one day. Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals. Essay II, §24, cited in Löwith, 57; see also The Gay Science §124 and §125 and numerous other passages.
32 Löwith, ibid., 74.
attempt to explain the "metaphor" of the eternal recurrence as the overcoming of nihilism, the whole decomposes into two contradictory parts. These two parts are, according to Löwith: an "ethical gravity" by means of which human existence that has become goalless obtains a goal again beyond itself; and a "natural scientific fact" (a cosmology) – the goalless, self-contained existence of the world of forces.

Finally, according to Löwith, Nietzsche’s teaching of the eternal recurrence of the same constitutes an attempt to find a way back to the pre-Socratic experience of the world ("the exit out of whole millennia of labyrinth"). Thus Löwith describes Nietzsche’s aversion to Christianity as causing him to want a world that was the foundation for heathen thought both in Greece and in the East. He points out that many philologists and philosophers were familiar with the doctrine of the eternal recurrence as handed down by Heraclitus, Empedocles, Plato, Aristotle, Eudemeus and the Stoics, but that only Nietzsche conceived it as a new source of the future. Nietzsche’s own contra Christianos was, according to Löwith, merely a repetition of the contra gentiles of the church fathers with reversed valences. Both the teaching of the eternal recurrence, as debated by Justin, Origen and Augustine, but also the main anti-Christian arguments of Celsus and Porphyry are revived in Nietzsche’s work with little addition, except for what Löwith sees as Nietzsche’s “Christian pathos”.

In sum, Löwith interprets Nietzsche as wanting to rescue Europeans from nihilism by teaching them to see the world as the ancient Greeks did. The problem that Löwith identifies with this approach is that there is a fundamental contradiction involved in simultaneously teaching a scientific fatalism, and attempting to provide a "goal" for

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33 Löwith, ibid., 83.
34 Löwith, ibid., 83.
35 A. §1.
36 Schopenhauer is good example of this – see particularly ‘On Affirmation and Denial of the Will to Live’ in Arthur Schopenhauer, Essays and Aphorisms, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (UK: Penguin Books, 1970), 61-65. Schopenhauer argues that there is a "value antithesis" that exists between Christian morality and Greco-Roman paganism that is cashed out in terms of the affirmation versus the denial of the ‘will to life’.
37 Löwith, Nietzsche’s Idea of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, 119.
38 Löwith, ibid., 119.
“willing”. While, according to Löwith, this contradiction is resolved poetically in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, it cannot be resolved discursively. Löwith’s reading of Thus Spoke Zarathustra is very sensitive and is generally exemplary. I think that the main feature of his reading, which interprets the principal story of Thus Spoke Zarathustra as the self-overcoming of nihilism, is correct. However, in other respects Löwith’s interpretation of Nietzsche is less satisfactory. To begin with, Löwith is content to argue that Nietzsche’s conception of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same was the product of a “religious experience”. This experience was, according to Löwith, identified by Nietzsche as pertaining to the pre-Socratic world. And on the basis of this, Nietzsche attempted to “teach” it.

The problem with this reading, however, is that there is very little evidence to back it up. The only pieces of evidence that Löwith adduces are: that the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same was a feature of some pre-Socratic philosophies, and a feature of the ancient experience of the world which the early Christians repudiated; and that Nietzsche admired Heraclites. Both of these observations are certainly true, but neither of them can properly be adduced to support the conclusion that Nietzsche conceived himself as a Heraclites redivivus in order to return European culture to an experience of the world held by a previous epoch. Löwith goes as far as to say that Nietzsche’s concern for the future of mankind undermined his pretension to a pre-Socratic worldview (which did not, according to Löwith, “move in the horizon of the future”). However, one could argue that this very concern for the future is stronger evidence for the fact that Nietzsche never entertained the idea of teaching an “ancient” world-view in the first place.

39 For an interesting response to Löwith (albeit one that engages primarily with Löwith’s criticism of Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche), see Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 499-500: “Löwith himself does not get past establishing the unresolved conflict in Nietzsche. But must we not, in view of this, ask the further question how it was possible to get caught thus in a blind alley—i.e., why was it not for Nietzsche himself an imprisonment and a failure but the great discovery and liberation?”
In my view, there is no question of Nietzsche having the intentions ascribed to him by Löwith. His interpretation flies in the face of Nietzsche's extremely nuanced histori
cist and genealogical conception of the problem of nihilism in the first place; which problem, according to Löwith, Nietzsche's teaching of the eternal recurrence of the same purports to solve. Conceived by Nietzsche as a complex product of history, and of the development of the human species, it would hardly make sense for him to attempt to simply turn the clock back in Europe by two and half thousand years in the naïve sense which Löwith argues Nietzsche's teaching amounts to.

Löwith, for all his strengths as an interpreter of Nietzsche, is led to this reading by his acceptance of the view that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same was fundamentally the product of a religious experience, which was rationalized ex post facto, and taught with religious fervor in contravention to the capabilities of Nietzsche's rational intellect. Yet the evidence for this view is very thin; it relies primarily on the following claim from Ecce Homo, which I have already discussed in the previous chapter:

> The basic conception of this work, the idea of eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that can possibly be attained—, belongs to the August of the year 1881: it was jotted down on a sheet of paper with the inscription “6,000 feet beyond man and time.”

There is no mention of a “revelation” or of a “religious experience”. Strictly speaking, this passage simply states that Nietzsche conceived the basic conception of Thus Spoke Zarathustra at a certain time and place. Furthermore, we know, and Löwith concedes this, that, as a classical philologist, Nietzsche was well aware of the doctrine of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as it had been discussed by classical authors. It is mentioned in two of his early works ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ and ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, and in both of these is rejected explicitly. Thus, there is reason to think that what Nietzsche conceived in August of 1881 as the basic
conception of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, was not so much the truth of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as a bolt from the blue, but rather some kind of nuanced revision of his earlier rejection.

In sum, Löwith, in my view, while offering an elegant and interesting interpretation of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, ultimately charges Nietzsche with falling victim to a religious "experience" that involved a basic error of logic, and which drove him to attempt to return Europe to a pre-Socratic experience of the world. Moreover, according to Löwith, this erroneous and naïve teaching is the unifying fundamental idea of Nietzsche's philosophy, which, in principle, does not think anything beyond the scope of the conceptual boundaries established therein. If Löwith is correct, it is hard to see why anyone would take Nietzsche seriously as a philosopher. In any case, I have suggested that there are several problems with Löwith's reading, and, whilst I support Löwith's straightforward inclusion of the cosmological dimension of recurrence, I hope to ultimately provide an interpretation of Nietzsche's interest in eternal recurrence that is more philosophically defensible.

—*Recurrence as the synthesis of Heraclitean becoming and Dionysian affirmation*

Ted Sadler, in his 1995 book *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption*, argues that Nietzsche is interested in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to the extent that he sees it as a synthesis of Heraclitean and Dionysian motifs. Accordingly, the Heraclitean part of the synthesis provides the "reality" that is to be affirmed, and the Dionysian provides the desired "attitude" (i.e. Dionysian affirmation) towards reality. As such, according to Sadler, the idea of the eternal recurrence provides the "ultimate test of strength" in the face of "life". This is borne out, according to Sadler, by Zarathustra's difficulty in facing his most abysmal thought.

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Sadler's account of Nietzsche's "Heracliteanism" is based in part on a particular passage from Nietzsche's early, unpublished fragment 'Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks' (1873):

Eternal and exclusive Becoming, the impermanence of everything actual, which constantly acts and comes-to-be but never is, as Heraclitus teaches it, is a terrible paralyzing thought...It takes astonishing strength to transform this reaction into its opposite, into sublimity and the feeling of blessed astonishment.\(^4\)

According to Sadler, Nietzsche characterizes himself as Heraclitean, inasmuch as he thinks that the basic character of reality is Becoming and impermanence, rather than Being. This is, in Sadler's view, the nature of Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical stance.\(^4\) It is notable that, in the above passage, what I have already described loosely as the nihilistic and affirmative dimensions of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same are here associated with a straightforward doctrine of Becoming, a doctrine that is not obviously suggestive of recurrence. Sadler's interpretation of Nietzsche's interest in eternal recurrence is structured as a response to the question of what this transition, from eternal Becoming in 1873 to eternal recurrence in 1881, signifies. It should be noted too that, for Sadler (and I agree with this), "Becoming" is used interchangeably by Nietzsche throughout his career with the terms "World", "Life" and "earth".

Sadler's suggested answer is that Nietzsche becomes interested in a recurrence cosmology insofar as he begins to more closely consider how Becoming is actually to be affirmed. The primary question here is: what, precisely, will be the object of affirmation? According to Nietzsche's Heracliteanism, which stipulates impermanence and eternal flux as comprising the basic character of reality, there are, strictly speaking, no objects

\(^4\) PTAG, cited in Sadler, ibid., 145.

\(^4\) Whether one thinks of Heracliteanism as a "metaphysical" or "anti-metaphysical" position is very much dependent upon what one understands by the term "metaphysics". Sadler's point here is that Nietzsche understands "metaphysics" to signify a belief in the "ultimate reality of things" ("things" can in this case refer to Platonic "Ideas" or to empirically observable "objects"). As such, Nietzsche, according to Sadler, understands his own Heracliteanism to amount to a denial of the "reality of self-identical objects". Cf. Sadler, ibid., 153.
or “things” that can be affirmed. Sadler argues that Nietzsche solves this problem by adopting a recurrence cosmology, because Nietzsche thereby provides an object for affirmation by guaranteeing the identity of the flux (as a whole) by its cyclical character. This object is a strictly immanent this-worldly object, and Nietzsche thereby, according to Sadler, attempts to avoid all recourse to “another world” or to a “transcendental ground” in articulating the object of affirmation.

The problem, according to Sadler, is that Nietzsche maintains his Heraclitean rejection of thingliness (in favour of constant flux) for the duration of his philosophical life. At the same time, in his account of the affirmation of the eternal recurrence of the same (particularly in GS§341, in which he refers to “this moon”, “this spider”, “this moment” etc.), Nietzsche actually invokes things. There is irresolvable tension between these two views. In Sadler’s view, Nietzsche has got himself into a mess here because of his tacit treatment of time. This is understood as follows: when one affirms a “moment” (such as is invoked by the Demon in GS§341), what is invoked is what Sadler calls a “thingly-event-in-time.” Time is not affirmed as such, but is instead treated as inexorably fastened to the events which occur in it. Nietzsche often refers in this context to a “moment of joy”. Hence time is, in Sadler’s view, thereby treated as a “thing”. But, according to Nietzsche’s so-called Heracliteanism, “things” are precisely what do not exist. In sum, in Sadler’s reading, the idea of the eternal recurrence contradicts and actually sacrifices Nietzsche’s core metaphysical (or anti-metaphysical) position.

43 Sadler, ibid., 147.
44 Sadler, ibid., 152.
45 It should be noted that this is essentially Heidegger’s argument for why Nietzsche’s philosophy is “metaphysical”. According to Heidegger, in a nutshell, Nietzsche did not succeed in thinking being in the horizon of “primordial temporality”, but rather persisted in thinking it in the horizon of “nature” (for Heidegger, nature = “substance”). Because the horizon of nature, according to Heidegger, corresponds to a derivative concept of temporality (as opposed to an originary one), one that can be easily conceptualized in terms of discreet moments, Nietzsche, in Heidegger’s view, has not successfully broken away from “metaphysical” thinking. Note, this is my interpretation of Heidegger. Cf. Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), H24-25: “...it becomes evident that the ancient interpretation of the being of beings is orientated toward the “world” or “nature” in the broadest sense and that it gains its understanding of being from “time”. The outward evidence of this... is the determination of the meaning of being as parousia or ousia, which ontologically and temporally means “presence”. Beings are grasped in their being as “presence”; that is to say, they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time, the present.”
such, Sadler declares that the reason why the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same exerts such fascination over the later Nietzsche remains unclear, since, in propounding such a cosmology, Nietzsche throws his "whole ontology into confusion".46

In many respects I am in agreement with Sadler's reading. Where I differ is in not thinking that Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, as a cosmology, as a "hard" thought, and as a potential object of affirmation, contradicts his Heracliteanism.47 I can really only explain this clearly by giving my own interpretation of Nietzsche's interest, which I will do shortly. However, by way of commenting on Sadler's reading, I will raise one consideration that, in my view, undermines a key aspect of Sadler's account. This is the fact that, even though Sadler apparently believes that constant Becoming doesn't entail eternal recurrence, it is not clear that Nietzsche would agree with him on this point. It would seem that, following Schopenhauer, who argued that anyone who wished to adopt a metaphysic of "constant Becoming" must face the fact that, in infinite time, everything that can happen, must have already happened, Nietzsche may indeed believe that Becoming does entail recurrence, or could at least be reasonably believed to entail it.48

It may be that a "true" Heracliteanism, in Sadler's sense, which looks suspiciously like Heidegger's position in Sadler's own interpretation of Being and Time,49 may avoid this paradox insofar as it deigns to treat time as a "thing", but it is not clear that Nietzsche himself thought through the temporal implications of a metaphysic of Becoming in a Heideggerian manner. As we have seen, Schopenhauer's line of reasoning appears to be absolutely central to Nietzsche's interest in a recurrence cosmology, thus indicating that Nietzsche's interest in such a cosmology is not necessarily the result of his attempt to conceive of an "object" for Dionysian affirmation, but rather arises quite naturally from

46 Sadler, ibid., 153.
47 Once again, Chapter Four contains a more detailed account of Nietzsche's own metaphysical position.
48 Cf. Schopenhauer, loc. cit.
49 I obviously do not have room to explain this connection. It will suffice to say that Sadler does not attempt to disguise this. For further information see Ted Sadler, Heidegger and Aristotle: The Question of Being (London: Athlone Press, 1996).
his consideration of the cosmological implications of a Heraclitean ontology. In any case, as I have already suggested, whether Nietzsche is right or wrong with respect to the coherence of his own metaphysical position (i.e. whether he erred in not adopting a Heideggerian account of temporality) is beside the point insofar as the nature of his interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is not necessarily dependent upon such coherence.

**Section Three—My interpretation**

So having thus demonstrated that there is room in the secondary literature for a consideration of Nietzsche’s original conception of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, and the terms thereof, it is time to turn now to the task of presenting my own contribution to this area of scholarship. My thesis is that Nietzsche is interested in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to the extent that he sees it as a probable object of widespread belief among Europeans. In other words, Nietzsche is himself agnostic about the possibility of a recurrence cosmology, but he has reason to think, in line with his accounts of the past trajectory and future direction of European thought, that it will be believed by others. As such, as a result of his hopes for the future of humanity, Nietzsche is keenly interested in the effects that belief in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same will have upon its adherents. Indeed, Nietzsche believes that so pronounced will be the effects of such adherence, that widespread belief in a recurrence cosmology in Europe will have epochal significance for European culture. Nietzsche’s interest in the nihilistic significance of the idea is predicated upon his view that belief in a recurrence cosmology will lead to depression and suicide of what Nietzsche refers to as the “sick”. In contrast to this, the “healthy” cannot only be expected to survive belief in recurrence, but such belief will reflect their naturally affirmative attitudes towards life. The result of all this will be that the influence of the sick on European culture will wane, allowing the influence of the strong to preponderate. The earth thereby will be, in Nietzsche’s view, redeemed.
Part One of this dissertation is devoted to elucidating this interpretation. It is divided into three chapters. Chapter One consists of an account of the ascetic ideal. The point I make here is that Nietzsche’s analysis of the ascetic ideal is indicative of his interest in what I call the “trajectory” of European, as well as human, history in general. Indeed, I argue that, in many respects, Nietzsche sees the development of European culture, and European morality, as being coeval with the development of the ascetic ideal. Chapter Two is an analysis of what Nietzsche calls the “will-to-truth”. Since Nietzsche describes the will-to-truth as the “kernel” of the ascetic ideal, I explain how the two concepts are related, particularly with respect to what Nietzsche describes as the “self-overcoming” of the ascetic ideal, which in his view is a process that is coeval with the “will-to-truth” becoming aware of itself as a problem. Chapter Three shows how this account of the trajectory of European culture is the basis of Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. I argue that, Nietzsche predicts that, as a result of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal, Europeans will come to believe in a recurrence cosmology.

In the terms of this Introduction, we can see that this overall interpretation corresponds clearly to the three components that I have suggested are integral to an understanding of Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. With respect to the question of the cosmological significance of recurrence, one of the great strengths of the interpretation that I offer is that it explains Nietzsche’s interest in a recurrence cosmology, as evinced by the argumentation developed in the Nachlass, without committing Nietzsche to an ontological claim or belief that is undermined by the views he states elsewhere about the limits of human knowledge. With respect to the question of the nihilistic significance of eternal recurrence, according to my interpretation, the pathos of Zarathustra is justified by Nietzsche’s view that belief in a recurrence cosmology could actually be the cause of depression and suicide. Finally, in the case of the affirmative significance of recurrence, the fact that the idea, according to my account, is experienced positively by the “healthy” explains this facet of Nietzsche’s interest in the potential of the idea.
Part Two reconstructs Nietzsche's reasoning with respect to the three essential dimensions of his interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Thus Chapter Four is an account of Nietzsche's philosophical reasons for predicting that a recurrence cosmology is likely to be an object of widespread belief. I argue that, in his view, such belief was the likely result of the demise of philosophical Idealism. Chapter Five argues that Nietzsche's account of the nihilistic consequences of belief in a recurrence cosmology is consistent with his agreement with Schopenhauer about the extent to which suffering was essentially constitutive of human existence. Finally, in Chapter Six I argue that the affirmative significance of recurrence can be understood in line with Nietzsche's reading of Schopenhauer's account of "affirmation of the will-to-live". I also demonstrate that Nietzsche's account of what he calls "noble qualities" assigns a kind of structural resemblance to recurrence to such qualities.
Part One: Nietzsche's interest in recurrence

God is dead... and we – we must still defeat his shadow as well!
—Nietzsche

Part One accounts for Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. I argue that Nietzsche’s interest in it is predicated upon his view that, as a cosmology, it will, in time, come to be an object of belief for Europeans. That is to say, I do not argue that Nietzsche himself thought that such a cosmology was “true”. In arguing that the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same consists in Nietzsche predicting that it would come to be believed in by others, I am suggesting that Nietzsche is engaging in prophesying. This is the level at which his thought is operating with respect to eternal recurrence. However, this is not to say that the basis of this prophesy is unphilosophical or unscientific. It is rather based upon his observation and analysis of the trajectory of European culture, which Nietzsche considers to be the embodiment of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche considers the history of Europe to consist of the unfolding of the logic of the ascetic ideal, and he understands the “kernel” of the ascetic ideal to be the will to truth. Under the auspices of the ascetic ideal, the scientific pursuit of truth will, according to Nietzsche, eventually forbid Europeans the lie involved in the belief in the Christian God, and likewise any kind of philosophical or metaphysical idealism, and ultimately culminate in the belief that the universe (conceived of as endless Becoming) recurs identically for all eternity.

According to Nietzsche, the inception of widespread belief in an eternally recurring universe effectively constitutes what he describes as the “self-overcoming” of the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal, of which Chapter One provides an account, is, according to Nietzsche, an expedient, employed by priests, to prolong the life of a sick organism. Nietzsche hypothesizes that the transition from the wild to society left the vast majority of early humans suffering from a “sickness”; the sickness consisted of this early human having his or her instincts in discord. According to Nietzsche’s crude model, the fact of the instincts being turned against one another effectively made something like a
consciousness possible, and thus allowed insight into the scale and inherent meaninglessness of suffering. At the prospect of this meaninglessness the early humans should have contracted “suicidal nihilism” and died out. However, the “priests” saw this sickness as an opportunity to augment their own power and, by teaching the ascetic ideal, managed to keep these sick humans alive. The priests did not attempt to “cure” the sick humans, however, but merely palliated them and distracted them from the true cause of their suffering. As a result the sickness has continued to spread and its nature has become deeper.\(^{50}\)

One of the results of the priests’ teaching was the increasing power and effectiveness of the human intellect, and the growth of a moral compulsion for truthfulness. Nietzsche calls this the “will-to-truth”, and claims that it will eventually lead to the point whereby Europeans will no longer find it acceptable to believe in God, or indeed, in Christian morality. The unfolding of this event, the “death of God”, which Nietzsche predicts will continue over the two centuries following his lifetime, is coeval with what he describes as the “self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal”. He describes this variously as a “monstrous logic of horror”, a “crisis” and a “calamity”, but also as “the most hopeful of all spectacles”. My thesis is that the cosmology that will replace the Christian world view, and thereby facilitate this “crisis”, is the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. According to Nietzsche, the fact of an eternally recurring universe will signify that life has no “goal”, and is hence “meaningless”. It will further signify that the suffering which constitutes much of life is therefore to recur senselessly, and there will be no escape or redemption from it.

On the other hand, Nietzsche’s enthusiasm for the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same consists in it marking what he sees as a fundamentally epochal moment in the history of humanity. This moment (signified by the symbol of noon in much of Nietzsche’s writing) is the point at which the sickness, which Nietzsche believes had

\(^{50}\) Cf. A, §62: “To abolish any state of distress whatever has been profoundly inexpedient to it: it has lived on states of distress, it has created states of distress in order to eternalize itself…”
hitherto been coeval with the history of humanity, will be reverted as a result of widespread belief in the eternal recurrence of the same. This reversion will happen presumably (Nietzsche does not go into specifics with regard to this) because the healthy and "well-constituted" will not only survive this belief, but will experience it as a stimulus, and an affirmation of life. The sick, on the other hand (which, according to Nietzsche, constitute the majority of humanity), will literally die off from depression and suicide, and their influence upon the trajectory of the development of the human being as a "type" will wane, hence making the "Übermensch" possible. In other words, the ascetic ideal, understood as originally being an expedient designed to prolong the life of a sick organism, will end by killing this organism while simultaneously providing a stimulus for healthy organisms. It will thereby overcome itself; and thus "man" qua the ascetic ideal, will overcome himself. In line with this overall picture, Nietzsche considers his destined philosophical task to be to facilitate the onset of belief in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same by helping to destroy the "shadows of God".

In order to account for this broad picture, Part One is divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents an account of the ascetic ideal. It consists largely of a summary of, and commentary on, On the Genealogy of Morals. Chapter Two presents Nietzsche's account of the will to truth, and briefly examines Nietzsche's argument for the relationship between the will-to-truth and the ascetic ideal. Chapter Three ties the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same into the logic of the trajectory of the ascetic ideal and its self-overcoming.
Chapter One: The ascetic ideal

Introduction

On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic was published in 1887. It comprises three essays and a preface. The third of these essays is titled ‘What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?’ and, indeed, develops an answer to this question. The answer that Nietzsche suggests is the following: “because man would rather will nothing than not will”. Assuming that it is not self-evident that this phrase fits the question it is designed to answer, this chapter explains how this equation works. It aims to thereby provide a clear and workable account of the ascetic ideal which will be used in subsequent chapters to explain the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. My approach is to present a summary and discussion of each of the three essays, beginning with the first one. The reason I have chosen to do this, rather than just focusing on the third essay, is that the essays are very closely related, and the third one builds upon the preceding two.

Before turning to the text proper in order to examine Nietzsche’s account of the meaning of the ascetic ideal in his own terms, it is necessary to first present the philosophical context of Nietzsche’s argument. The three essays that comprise On the Genealogy of Morals address such topics as the origin of the human experience of guilt and the history of punishment; they highlight the importance for the moral historian of the etymologies of moral concepts; and they speculate about the pre-historic nature of humanity. Despite the immense intrinsic interest of the topics themselves, they are designed by Nietzsche as parts of a broader philosophical problematic. As he explains in the preface, the philosophical problem that underpins the conception of the three essays is the problem of the “value of morality”.

51 In the body of this chapter I will refer to the three essays as GM:1, GM:II, and GM:III.
The term value here is problematic because Nietzsche invests substantial significance in it on numerous occasions. He often refers to the problem of the "value of morality", just as he often refers to the problem of the "value of truth". However, he also sometimes refers to the philosophical task of "revaluing all values", and of determining the "order of rank among values", and he describes nihilism as the "devaluation of the highest values". The sense of the word "value" in the latter three cases is obviously not identical to that of the former two. In the case of the "value of morality" Nietzsche means something like a measure of its appropriateness relative to a given end. In particular, the polemical problem that On the Genealogy of Morals is primarily concerned with is the problem of whether what Nietzsche refers to as the morality of pity is a precondition of humanity attaining the "highest power and splendour possible", or whether, as Nietzsche in fact ultimately contends, the morality of pity might instead actively undermine such a possibility.

For Nietzsche, the morality of pity basically denotes any morality that propounds the moral superiority of unegoistic actions and accords high esteem to pity and self-renunciation. Christianity and Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism are two such moral systems. In questioning the desirability of the morality of pity, Nietzsche understands his own approach to be novel. In the preface he writes:

... one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing "the good man" to be of greater value than "the evil man", of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of man in general (the future of man included). But what if the reverse were true? What if a symptom of regression were inherent in the "good"...?

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52 Nietzsche, Preface to GM. A measure of the radicalness of this view is attested to by Tolstoy's response to Nietzsche in his essay 'What is Religion and Of What Does Its Essence Consist?': "Everyone knows, for instance, that water is wet, and someone suddenly says, very seriously, that water is dry... and the conviction with which this is stated attracts attention... the whole world knows that virtue consists in the subjugation of one's passions, or in self-renunciation... And suddenly a man appears who declares that he is convinced that self-renunciation, meekness, submissiveness and love are all vices that destroy humanity... One can understand why such a declaration baffled people at first. But after giving it a little thought and failing to find any proof of the strange propositions, any rational person ought to throw the
The radicalness of this position in my view justifies the tag “polemic”. And it is the structure of this polemical argument that binds the three essays that comprise *On the Genealogy of Morals* together. Nietzsche's approach to arguing for this position is to provide a condensed history of mankind. Within this history, Nietzsche identifies a key trajectory along the path of which he thinks European culture is moving. This trajectory is one that highlights the increasing sickness of humans. Although not responsible for this sickness *per se*, Nietzsche blames priests for exploiting this sickness for their own ends and thus cultivating further sickness. The priests exploit and cultivate this sickness by teaching the ascetic ideal. Because he argues that the ascetic ideal is coeval with the morality of pity, Nietzsche can argue that the morality of pity is therefore making people sick, and contributing to the decline of European “man”.

As a history, this is a very basic affair, and Nietzsche is well aware of this. He describes his account here as consisting of “provisional hypotheses”, and describes aspects of these hypotheses as “extravagant conjecture”. With this in mind, my concern is simply to highlight the principal features of Nietzsche’s account. I make no attempt to analyze it critically, nor am I concerned to agree or disagree with Nietzsche's claims. In connection with my overall argument that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same functions at the level of *prediction*, I am concerned merely to shed light upon the basic structure of the trajectory along which Nietzsche thought that European culture was travelling, such that it would make sense for him to predict that the idea of the eternal recurrence would have a future role in such a trajectory.

It should be noted that, in pursuance of a reading that highlights Nietzsche's interest in developing a history, my approach to the text is in this instance very straightforward. I am well aware that this is itself controversial, and that these texts have provided fertile ground for a large number of interesting deconstructive readings, in particular with books aside and wonder if there is any kind of rubbish that would not find a publisher today. But this has not happened with Nietzsche's books.” Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, trans. Jane Kentish (UK: Penguin Books, 1987), 111.
respect to Nietzsche’s account of the political, and with respect to interest in Nietzsche’s moral philosophy. I defend my approach here by suggesting simply that it is appropriate for my ends, and I in no way claim that this chapter represents a comprehensive account of the texts in question.

1.1 Good and bad versus good and evil
The structure of GM:I is reasonably straightforward. Nietzsche argues that over millennia the preponderance of the morality of pity has been the cause of the “diminution and levelling of European man” (GM:I, §2). The picture that Nietzsche develops to support this thesis is that the history of Europe is the history of a conflict between two different moralities, the victor of which (the morality of pity) incorporates a kind of anti-naturalism that deliberately undermines the potential of humanity to attain its highest possible splendour. The two moralities that Nietzsche discusses in this context are the “master” morality and the “slave” morality; the latter is considered by Nietzsche to be synonymous with the morality of pity. The master morality, which employs the value pair good/bad, is created by the warrior-caste and aristocratic knights. The slave morality, which employs the value-pair good/evil, is the creation of the priestly-caste. Crucially, the respective creative processes that give birth to the different moralities are also fundamentally different. According to Nietzsche, the aristocratic knight creates values actively, whereas the priest creates values reactively.

The evidence that Nietzsche adduces to support this broad picture is predominantly etymological. His significant finding is that the major European languages can trace the word “good” back to a basic concept that denotes high political station. This originary meaning is in stark contrast to what Nietzsche sees as the contemporary meaning of “goodness”, which, inasmuch as it is used as a moral concept, is normally used to denote ostensibly un-egoistic, self-less actions (i.e. charity). This is a significant

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53 In particular see: Mark Warren, Nietzsche and Political Thought.
54 For example, see John Bernstein, Nietzsche’s Moral Philosophy (Associated University Presses, 1987).
conceptual transformation, and Nietzsche's basic account is intended as a hypothetical explanation for why and how it has come about.

In accordance with the originary sense of the concept of goodness as a term that denoted high political station, its conceptual opposite, the designation "bad", simply referred to low political station, and hence signified something like "common" or "plebeian". According to Nietzsche's etymological studies, this crude conceptual opposition between good and bad is ubiquitous amongst ancient cultures. However, since political station was not the exclusive domain of a particular "type" of person, or caste, as societies and language became increasingly sophisticated over time, the basic sense of the terms good and bad evolved in different conceptual directions in accordance with nature of the political elite. Nietzsche identifies two basic types of political elite: the warrior caste and the priestly-caste.

On this account, in societies in which the "warrior caste" is the dominant one, a conceptual transformation takes place whereby the original positive basic concept (good), which simply testifies to high political rank, comes to mean something like "nobility of soul". According to Nietzsche, the qualities of a noble soul were considered to be such things as courage, truthfulness and honourableness. This basic conceptual transformation, from a concept denoting political superiority, to one denoting an intrinsic quality (goodness/nobility of soul), is, according to Nietzsche, an instance of a "creation of values", albeit a crude and simplistic one, and marks the creation of the so-called master morality. This master morality, on Nietzsche's analysis, develops from what he describes as a "triumphant affirmation of itself" (GM.I,§10 – my italics).

The process by which this happens is described quite simply. In Nietzsche's terms, the noble soul simply says "Yes" to itself, and this "Yes-saying" constitutes its creative act. Nietzsche describes its creation of the designations "low", "common", "bad" (its "No-saying") as "subsequently invented pale, contrasting image[s] in relation to its positive basic concept" (GM.I,§10). This creation of values is described by Nietzsche as being a
very crude process. The member of the warrior caste, who is portrayed throughout the essay as being strong and violent (sometimes as the “blonde beast”), instinctively feels himself to be superior to his “slaves” (those weaker, poorer, etc. than himself) and this instinctive, unreflective experience of superiority (Nietzsche calls it the “pathos of distance”) is the basis of its creation of values.

On the other hand, Nietzsche argues that in cultures wherein the most politically successful caste is a “priestly caste” (the example he uses of such a culture is Judaism) a different conceptual transformation takes place. Instead of transforming “good” as a signifier of high political station to a concept that referred to “nobility of soul”, the concept denoting political supremacy becomes something like “purity of soul” (GM:I.§6). For Nietzsche this crude, ancient notion of purity is explicated primarily in terms of dietary and sanitary habits, such as sexual abstinence, fasting and an aversion to blood. One of the obvious contrasts here is that the morality engendered by this creation of values esteemed quite radically different activities from that of the aristocratic knights. Whereas the latter, according to Nietzsche, value hunting, war, adventure, dancing, etc. and therefore presuppose a vigorous, healthy physicality, the priestly caste values sexual continence, fasting, cleanliness, etc. – and therefore presupposes something quite different. Nietzsche refers to this something as “impotence” (GM:I.§7) – and claims that this impotence is a great disadvantage to the priestly caste when conflict arises between the two different castes.

This disadvantage, as one might expect, is that when it comes to war the priestly caste is unable to compete physically against the aristocratic knights. Nietzsche argues that, as a consequence, the priestly caste nurtures a “poisonous hatred” for its enemies and eventually takes what Nietzsche describes as “spiritual revenge”. This revenge consists in it “revaluating its enemies’ values”. The priestly caste inverts the aristocratic value-equation “good = noble” (beautiful, happy, proud etc.):
...the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the
suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, blessedness
is for them alone—and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the
cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity; and you shall be in all
eternity the unblessed, accursed, and damned!

Nietzsche coins this act of revaluating the noble values as the “slave revolt in morality”.
The basic picture is that, in making such pronouncements, the priests seductively enlist
the masses of poor and disadvantaged, who are numerically superior to the aristocratic
knights, to fight alongside them in this war of values. The key point here for Nietzsche is
precisely the fact that the origin of this particular morality, which he equates with the
morality of pity expounded by Schopenhauer and Christianity, is said to be impotent
vengefulness. Nietzsche’s technical term for this is “ressentiment”. The creative process
whereby ressentiment creates values is fundamentally different from the process that
creates noble values. Nietzsche claims that the creativity of ressentiment is constituted
by it being a reactive “no”-saying to external stimuli. The priestly caste creates values in
a fundamentally opposed manner to the aristocratic knight. Whereas the latter’s basic
concept is a “Yes” to itself (Good), the former’s basic concept is a “No” to everything
outside itself (Evil)). Rather than starting with itself, the priest’s “value positing eye” looks
outwards and reacts negatively to external stimuli. It arrives at the concept of good
subsequently, only from the contradistinction to everything outside itself. Nietzsche
expands this point broadly to suggest that “everything outside itself” amounts to the
“world” and “nature”. In sum, the basis of the “morality of pity” is a kind of anti-
naturalism, a hatred of life, nature, and the world.

Nietzsche gives a clear metaphorical example of his conception of this process,
designed particularly to illustrate the creation of the concept “good” from the perspective
of ressentiment. He claims that lambs (i.e. the priestly caste) dislike birds of prey (i.e.
aristocratic knights), and, given that birds of prey are wont to carry off and devour lambs,
it is certainly not surprising that the lambs should resent them. According to Nietzsche it
is easy to imagine these lambs saying to themselves: "these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?" (GM:I,§13) As Nietzsche says, there is absolutely nothing wrong with this institution of an ideal; it is understandable and rational. However, and this constitutes one of the main points of the essay, he questions whether the fact that the lambs dislike the birds of prey gives any grounds for a scientist or philosopher to reproach the birds of prey for carrying off lambs. Wouldn’t it be absurd to demand of a bird of prey that it cease to behave like a bird of prey? Nietzsche’s point then is quite obvious: there is no reason to accord the priestly morality any more philosophical legitimacy than the master morality; both can be reduced to the product and expression of circumstance, a certain kind of instinctive attitude towards themselves and the world on the behalf of differently constituted types of organism.

Now, to return to the basic structure of the argument, Nietzsche claims that, over millennia, the morality of pity, which is ultimately based upon ressentiment, has come to be the dominant all-pervasive morality in Europe. He argues that the fact that philosophers see it as self-evident that the un-egoistic actions are more valuable than their opposites is evidence of this. This would explain why the contemporary meaning of goodness has deviated so far from its originary meaning. But, more importantly, Nietzsche asserts that the preponderance of this ideal is harmful, and that it sickens and wearies (GM:I,§12):

For this is how things are: the diminution and levelling of European man constitutes our greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary.—We can see nothing today that wants to grow greater, we suspect that things will continue to go down, down, to become thinner, more good-natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian—there is no doubt that man is getting “better” all the time.
Here precisely is what has become a fatality for Europe—together with the fear of man we have also lost our love of him, our reverence for him, our hopes for him, even the
will to him. The sight of man now makes us weary—what is nihilism today if it is not 
that?—We are weary of man.

Why it might be considered harmful is also easy to understand, once one appreciates Nietzsche's own perspective. As has already been noted, in the preface Nietzsche outlines his desire for the "the highest power and splendour actually possible to the type man". His description of such splendour on the behalf of man is: "...something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty, triumphant, something still capable of arousing fear! Of a man who justifies man..." (GM:Preface,§6). Somewhat obviously, the predicates "happy", "mighty", "triumphant" are predicates that Nietzsche has associated with the healthy physicality that is presupposed by the master morality. More importantly, precisely because they correspond to the presuppositions of a master morality, these predicates correspond to ideals which are judged by the priestly caste to be evil. This being so, the morality of pity which Nietzsche believes to reign supreme in Europe, and which, according to him has its origin in ressentiment, is obviously not equipped to be the basis of man's "highest power and splendour", being essentially opposed to Nietzsche's ideal of splendour. Thus the basic framework of Nietzsche's argument, that the morality of pity actually causes the diminution of European man, is understandable.

As I have stated, the question of the plausibility of Nietzsche's account is not of primary interest to my project; rather I am concerned to highlight those notable features of it that are in accordance with an understanding of the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as a kind of prophecy. Most notably, while the account of the origin of the morality of pity in GM:I is ostensibly historical, it is motivated by a concern for the future. Indeed, the primary motivation for Nietzsche's interest in the murky origins of morality is his concern for the future of Europe and the possibility of the future splendour of mankind. In hypothesizing that the current state of affairs can be accounted for as the result of a protracted war between two types of value systems, Nietzsche is seeking to articulate the key to a pattern or "logic" of the history of European culture which he can use to explain the present and predict or anticipate the future.
The account of the origin of morality that Nietzsche develops fits the conceptual transformations of moral concepts that he alludes to, and does so in a way that is, at the very least, *psychologically* plausible. It goes without saying, however, that a hypothesis that purports to explain both the origin and current status of a few particular moral concepts (such as good and evil) constitutes only a tiny part of an account of the origins and nature of morality. For those who accept a moral world view, against whom Nietzsche’s polemic is directed, perhaps the strongest and most immediately convincing evidence for an extra-natural account of morality is the fact that, as a matter of course, people actually *experience* such things as “guilt” and “sin”, which do not necessarily admit readily of simplistic naturalistic reductions. Thus, in the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche offers a “psychology of the conscience” which builds on his account of the origin of certain moral designations by offering a psychologically plausible naturalistic/historical explanation for the existence of moral *experiences*.

### 1.2 Guilt, bad conscience, and the like

The second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* ostensibly treats the question of the origin of the “bad conscience”. Like the first essay, its overall structure is quite straightforward. It simply offers a hypothesis for the origin of the “bad conscience”, the origin of which is the internalization of pre-historic man’s “savage” instincts as a consequence of the formation of the state. At the most basic level, Nietzsche means by the bad conscience the broadly generalized notion that there are aspects of humanity that people find repugnant: certain desires, actions and bodily functions. If, as Nietzsche assumes, we are fundamentally animals (*albeit* “clever animals”), and have certain instincts that serve biological or evolutionary ends, how could it have ever come about that we deem some of these instincts to be evil and actually experience such powerful emotions as guilt or shame in connection with them? In order to answer this question, Nietzsche hypothesizes that the bad conscience is an “illness” which humanity
...the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and
pregnant with a future that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered. Indeed divine spectators were needed to do justice to the spectacle that thus began and the end of which is not yet in sight—a spectacle too subtle, too marvellous, too paradoxical to be played senselessly unobserved on some ludicrous planet! (GM:II,§16)

In order to clarify the hypothesized origin of the bad conscience, Nietzsche enumerates two of its key presuppositions. Firstly, he claims that the change referred to, the transition from life in the wild to life in society, must have been neither gradual nor voluntary. Secondly, he claims that it was an inherently violent process, describing the oldest state as a "fearful tyranny... an oppressive and remorseless machine" (GM:II,§17). Indeed Nietzsche’s account of the formation of the state is an important part of his overall philosophical concern with the value of morality, and goes some way to clarifying his attitude towards the master morality. In GM:II,§17 he asserts that, in line with the aforementioned presuppositions for the origin of the bad conscience, the formation of the state basically consisted in "some pack of blonde beasts of prey" violently enslaving and oppressing some formless, nomadic, though perhaps numerically superior, populace. The enslaved populace is hence unable to discharge its “instinct for freedom” outwardly, and so vents it upon itself.

Nietzsche describes the process of the creation of the state by the “conqueror and master race” as instinctive and unconscious. According to Nietzsche the blonde beast knows no guilt or consideration. It is simply driven by its “terrible artists’ egoism”. This is clearly analogous to Nietzsche’s account of the creation of the master morality, described in GM:I. However, it is notable that there is no direct analogy to be drawn between the creation of the slave morality and the inception of the bad conscience. Instead, Nietzsche claims that the same active force which drives the blonde beast to enslave, drives the slave “on a smaller and pettier scale” to turn on himself (GM:II,§18). The difference is that whereas the blonde beast can vent this instinct on other men, the slave can only vent it upon himself. This venting, which Nietzsche calls the “dreadfully
joyous labour of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself, is claimed to be the "womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena" (GM:II, §18).

Apart from the account of the origin of the bad conscience, the other important features of GM:II are Nietzsche’s accounts of the origin of guilt, the development of punishment, and the human propensity for, and enjoyment of, cruelty. Concerning the major moral concept of guilt, Nietzsche argues that it has its origin in the material concept of debt (GM:II, §4), and simply consisted of the feeling of indebtedness, and the fear of the punishment one would probably incur from breaking a contract. In line with this thesis, Nietzsche argues that the origin of punishment did not presuppose any kind of moral culpability (i.e. the freedom of will of the perpetrator of a crime), but rather that its origin is instead rooted in the basic contractual relationship between creditor and debtor. He claims that punishment originated prior to the distinctions between an "intentional", "negligent", or "accidental" action (GM:II, §4), and that, in the case of a broken contract, at the most fundamental level it consisted of requiting the injury suffered by the creditor by allowing him to violate the debtor. The "equivalence" between the loss suffered by the creditor and his being allowed to freely harm the debtor consists in the pleasure that this act of violation affords the creditor. In Nietzsche’s words: "...the injured party exchanged for the loss he had sustained, including the displeasure caused by the loss, an extraordinary counterbalancing pleasure: that of making suffer..." (GM:II, §6).

The presupposition of this account is that "making suffer" is (or at least was, for primitive humans) a pleasurable activity. Nietzsche acknowledges that, for a modern sensibility, it is difficult to comprehend the degree to which cruelty could have constituted a "great festival of pleasure", but argues that, nevertheless, it was a fundamental ingredient of all ancient festivals, and a basic fact of the human psyche. The essential point to take out of this extremely truncated account is that the joy of making suffer constitutes one of the ancient instincts which Nietzsche believed was internalized as part of the creation of the

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55 Nietzsche’s account of the history and development of punishment is immensely interesting. However, since it is not of crucial import to the overall argument of this chapter I have left it out.
bad conscience. At the same time, this basic instinct also belonged to the basic impetus for this internalization, since the internalization was in accord with one of man's fundamental instincts, and it afforded him a certain degree of pleasure to commit cruelty against himself. Indeed, this reinforces Nietzsche's claim that the creation of the bad conscience was the result of an instinctive, active (as opposed to reactive) act of creation.

This latter point intersects with Nietzsche's overarching concern with the value of morality at several levels. Firstly, it provides the basis for a plausible (albeit rudimentary) account of the origin of morality, which origin is, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, "human, all too human". Secondly, the origin of morality, predicated as Nietzsche argues it to be on the instinctive pleasurability of making suffer, turns out, ironically, to be (by the criteria of the morality of pity) "evil". That is, by the moral standards of Nietzsche's (and our own) time, it is thoroughly immoral. While, for Nietzsche, this does not constitute grounds for an objection to the morality of pity as such, it does provide him with certain ammunition against moral philosophers who see un-egoistic actions as self-evidently good, by allowing him to claim that, at least by their own standards, the historical origins and biological presuppositions of such moral values are far from laudable.

I have suggested that Nietzsche's key task in GM:II is to provide a plausible explanation for the possibility of the major moral experiences (such as guilt) within predominantly, or even exclusively, biological/historical parameters. By hypothesizing that the majority of early humans were forced to discharge many of their "natural" instincts against themselves as a result of being enslaved within the walls of society, Nietzsche has, I think, fulfilled this task. The main question that arises from GM:II, with respect to Nietzsche's overall concern with the value of the morality of pity, is: in what way does

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56 The plausibility of this basic scenario is I think attested to by the extraordinary interest shown by twentieth century psychologists in the psychological mechanism of repression.
the historical hypothesis he puts forward accord with the historical hypothesis he developed in GM:I?

This is the basic picture so far: GM:I is the story of a war between two ruling castes; one caste is victorious as a result of it successfully inverting its enemy's values; this, according to Nietzsche does not bode well for the future splendour of humanity. GM:II is the story of the political subjects of these ruling castes; these subjects, as a consequence of becoming subjects (of being forced to undergo the transition from life in nature to life in society) have contracted a "sickness" called the "bad conscience". Now, one presumes that the priestly caste was ultimately victorious in the war simply because it managed to garner the support of its own subjects, as well as eventually the subjects belonging to the aristocratic knights (in Nietzsche's terms it initiated a "slave revolt"). However, neither GM:I nor GM:II offer any explanation as to how or why this occurred. In simplistic terms, how did the priests gain the support of the masses? Granted that the broad picture offered so far by Nietzsche is that the values created by the priests are anti-life, it is not immediately clear why they should be so readily and widely supported by actual living beings. Thus, the task of GM:III is to explain this puzzle.

1.3 The meaning of the ascetic ideal
Of the three essays that comprise On the Genealogy of Morals, GM:III is by far the most complex and is also the most crucial for my purposes. The essay is titled 'What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?' If one wishes to claim that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is intended as a "counter-ideal" to the ascetic ideal, then, somewhat obviously, a clear understanding of Nietzsche's account of the meaning of the ascetic ideal is paramount. As I suggested at the end of the previous section, although it is not stated explicitly in the essay itself, GM:III is designed as an attempt to explain the success of the priests in their war against the nobles. The fact that this is the basic

57 Nietzsche speaks about "ascetic ideals" and "the ascetic ideal" interchangeably, with the latter being referred to much more frequently. I would suggest that they are absolutely synonymous in most cases, unless Nietzsche is referring to a number of specific ascetic practices such as chastity and fasting, in which case the plural is obviously appropriate.
problem is corroborated by Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo* wherein, reflecting upon the publication of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he writes the following:

The third inquiry offers the answer to the question whence the ascetic ideal, the priests' ideal, derives its enormous power although it is the *harmful* idea *par excellence*, a will to an end, an ideal of decadence. Answer: not, as people may believe, because God is at work behind the priests but *faute de mieux*—because it was the only ideal so far, because it had no rival. "For man would rather even will nothingness than *not* will"—Above all, a counter ideal was lacking—*until Zarathustra*.

Nietzsche's answer to the problem is that, despite the reservations he has expressed about the ascetic ideal, the priests simply had no viable rival. There has never been an alternative "ideal". This would appear to imply that the nobles did not have an ideal in the same sense that the priests did. How is this to be understood? First, what does ideal mean in this context? For Nietzsche, an ideal provides a goal for the human will (or simply 'the will').\(^6\) The ascetic ideal is simply that goal (taught by the priests) which is implicit in ascetic practices such as fasting and chastity. In other words then, the values held by the aristocratic knights did not provide a goal for the human will. This seems odd given that, according to Nietzsche's analysis, the priests' values were created *reactively* and, as such, are merely the inverse of the noble values. In any case, it is clearly Nietzsche's basic claim that the only goal the human will has actually had has been provided by the ascetic ideal. Moreover, taking my cue from his claim that this goal was successful because "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will", the actual goal that the ascetic ideal has provided is *nothingness*.

It can be seen that there are at least two aspects to Nietzsche's account of the meaning of the ascetic ideal that need to be clarified in this section: firstly, the claim that the ascetic ideal has no rival ideal (until Zarathustra, and possibly the idea of the eternal

\(^6\) The meaning of this is straightforward: Cf. *TI*, 'Maxims and Arrows', §12: "If we possess our *why* of life we can put up with almost any *how*. – Man does not strive after happiness; only the Englishman does that."
recurrence of the same), which seems to imply that the nobles against whom the priests
were warring, did not provide humanity with an ideal; secondly, the claim that the goal
for the human will provided by the ascetic ideal is equivalent to nothingness. In order to
begin, let us turn to the essay itself.

In sections §2-10 Nietzsche discusses what he sees as the fairly typical asceticism of
artists and philosophers. In the case of artists (Nietzsche uses Richard Wagner’s
propounding of chastity as his example) Nietzsche argues that ascetic ideals have no
particular value. His reason for this is his thesis that artists are not
creators of values. According to Nietzsche they are always the “valets of some morality’ (GM:III,§5). In
other words, he thinks that the moral parameters within which an artist creates (whether
religious or philosophical) works of art can always be traced to some established
authority. Seen like this, an artist’s works are an expression of particular moral and/or
philosophical values. They are not values as such. In the case of philosophers,
Nietzsche believes that a certain level of asceticism is a precondition of philosophy. His
argument here is slightly different. He claims that philosophers were a relatively late
addition to the human race, but that when such “philosophic spirits” arrived, they had to
use the “previously established” types of “contemplative men” (priest, soothsayer etc.)
as their “mask and cocoon” (GM:III,§10).

In GM:III,§11 Nietzsche says that only in the case of the ascetic priest does the problem
become serious. At this point we might well ask: what is essentially different about the
ascetic priest? In order to answer this, we need to recall the description of the priest
GM:I. The point is that the priest is essentially reactive. He creates values out of
ressentiment. In the case of the artist and the philosopher, this is not necessarily so.
They might practise asceticism, they might pay lip-service to it, they might believe in it -
but according to Nietzsche, if they do so, it is because it facilitates their respective
creativity, which creativity is essentially active. The ascetic priest, someone who
advocates chastity, moderation, self-denial etc., is understood by Nietzsche as the
archetypal proponent of the ascetic ideal: “The ascetic priest possessed in this ideal not
only his faith but also his will, his power, his interest. His right to exist stands or falls with that ideal..." (GM:III, §11) In other words, the ascetic priest does not adopt asceticism because it facilitates his instinctive creation of something else (art, philosophy etc); his distinctive creativity consists in creating ascetic values as such.

The main issue for Nietzsche is the valuation that, in the propounding of this ideal, the ascetic priest places on “life” (also: “nature”, “world”). Nietzsche asks: what is the implied stance towards life as such taken by the ascetic priest inasmuch as he propounds ascetic ideals? Nietzsche’s answer is that the ascetic priest stands against life. Nietzsche argues that in propounding ascetic ideals, the ascetic priest thereby treats life as a “mistake”, a “wrong road”, something that needs to be “put right”. Accordingly the priest juxtaposes life (the “whole sphere of becoming and transitoriness”) with its opposite (eternity, Being, permanence.... i.e. The Kingdom of Heaven), and thereby reduces life to being merely a “bridge” to that opposing mode of existence. So, for example, a priest teaching a young man that sexual desire is sinful or impure (unless contained within specific boundaries such as Christian marriage), is denigrating what is presumably one of life’s most fundamental and natural instincts. In justifying this teaching by the prospect of eternal life after death, the priest implies that this life is of lesser value.

Assuming that eternal life is not an actual possibility, Nietzsche describes the valuation implied by such asceticism as “monstrous” and “self-contradictory”. Yet, he argues, such is the universal and widespread regularity with which the ascetic priest appears in

59 Lest one think that Nietzsche is overstating this equation, consider the example of the father of monasticism, St. Antony. Cf. ‘Life of Antony by Athanasius’, trans. Caroline White in Early Christian Lives (UK: Penguin Books, 1998), 36: “When his human condition forced him to allow his poor body some food or sleep or any other necessities of nature, he was overcome by an extraordinary sense of shame because the physical limitations of his poor body restricted his spiritual freedom.” The point is not so much that Antony himself felt this shame, but that, in so doing, he was widely considered (by Luther, among others) as a role model, and as an embodiment of a true Christian life.

60 In A, §56, Nietzsche cites Corinthians vii, 2 and 9 as an example of the attitude he despises: “How can anyone actually put into the hands of women and children a book containing the low-minded saying: ‘To avoid fornication let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband... for it is better to marry than to burn.’”
human history (the priest is described as belonging to no race, prospering everywhere, and emerging in every class of society) that it must, paradoxically, be in the interest of life that such a self-contradictory species exist. In *GM:III,* §13 Nietzsche claims that, upon reflection, the formula "life against life", with which he had formerly depicted the valuation of the ascetic priest, is a simple absurdity. It must, he claims, therefore be only an apparent formulation, the result of a "psychological misunderstanding". Nietzsche therefore suggests an alternative formulation, which is effectively his provisional account of the meaning of the ascetic ideal: "the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life" (*GM:III,* §13). In line with this, he claims that the ascetic ideal is actually an "artifice for the preservation of life". Ultimately, Nietzsche argues, that the ascetic priest, as a denier of life is, paradoxically, "among the greatest conserving forces and yes-creating forces of life" (*GM:III,* §13).

In clarifying how and why this is the case, we can understand why Nietzsche thinks that the ascetic ideal has been the only ideal in human history. It rests on the presupposition that the vast majority of humanity is sick. This sickness, as was argued in *GM:II,* consists in man having a bad conscience – the result of having to discharge many of his most fundamental instincts against himself in order to facilitate communal life. In *GM:II* Nietzsche equivocates about his attitude towards this sickness; for example, he describes it as "an illness as pregnancy is an illness" (*GM:II,* §19), suggesting that it is both necessary and potentially positive. Also, as I argued, because the bad conscience was described as being the result of an essentially active creativity, it did not follow that it was to be condemned *per se* in line with Nietzsche's overarching concern for the value of morality. I would suggest that Nietzsche is more or less ambivalent about sickness as such, seeing it as an inevitable precondition of culture. However, he is not ambivalent about the prospect of sickness becoming all pervasive. His position is summed up in the following passage (*GM:III,* §14):

> The more normal sickliness becomes among men—and we cannot deny its normality—the higher should be the honour accorded the rare cases of great power of soul and
body, man’s lucky hits; the more we should protect the well-constituted from the worst kind of air, the air of the sickroom... it is not fear of man that we should desire to see diminished; for this fear compels the strong to be strong, and occasionally be terrible—it maintains the well-constituted type of man. What is to be feared, what has a more calamitous effect than any other calamity, is that man should inspire not profound fear, but profound nausea; also not great fear but great pity.

In other words, Nietzsche seems to be arguing that the “terrible blonde beasts”, or at least their modern equivalents (Nietzsche often implies that Napoleon constituted such an equivalence), are desirable because the fear they engender is the stimulus of strength. Nietzsche’s reasoning here is more clearly expressed in an earlier text (GS,§1):

Even the most harmful person may actually be the most useful when it comes to the preservation of the species; for he nurtures in himself or through his effects on others drives without which humanity would long since have become feeble or rotten. Hatred, delight in the misfortunes of others, the lust to rob and rule, and whatever else is called evil: all belong to the amazing economy of the preservation of the species, an economy which is certainly costly, wasteful, and on the whole most foolish – but still proven to have preserved our race so far.

In this form, the argument simply states that, from a perspective that concerns itself with the logic of human evolution, there are good reasons to think that many of the qualities of human beings that we typically admire (intrepidity, courage in the face of adversity, perseverance, etc.), which arguably facilitated our evolutionary success, and which continue to inspire us, may well depend for their existence upon the resistance constituted by the presence of so-called evil people. Thus, Nietzsche’s position might be more accurately considered as being the fear that, in the long run, this evolutionary logic (which has already proven its effectiveness) will be undermined by the preponderance of so-called goodness.
However, to return to my explanation of the significance for the ascetic ideal, despite the fact that Nietzsche has ambivalent feelings towards the bad conscience as such, and acknowledges its positive implications, he still uses the term sickness in the strict sense as constituting a real threat to the organism in question. The threat in this case is that engendered by the creation of a reflective consciousness (a soul) which, on Nietzsche's account, attends the creation of the bad conscience. Coupled with this is the development of the intellect which, according to Nietzsche, was coeval with the inception of trading and bartering, and which was therefore also necessary for communal life. Together, these two new emerging faculties of man confronted for the first time the basic fact of the senselessness and apparent arbitrariness of human life and suffering. Nietzsche's thesis is, essentially, that if it had not been for the advent of the ascetic ideal, the result of this confrontation would have been large-scale depression and, ultimately, "suicidal nihilism".

The basic picture that Nietzsche outlines is that the ascetic priest interpreted the forced asceticism of early enslaved man (i.e. the internalization of some of his instincts) as pertaining to the spiritual machinations of the universe, and thereby provided him with a justification for what he was already doing (being compelled by the political rulers and his own natural delight in cruelty), and thereby, gave meaning to his suffering. Just as the initial forced asceticism of early enslaved man made him sick, so the subsequent asceticism encouraged by the priest made him sicker. The particular innovation of the priest, according to Nietzsche, is his teaching ancient humanity that the individual is to blame for his or her suffering. Nietzsche argues that every suffering organism instinctively seeks the cause of its suffering in order to "vent its affects" upon it (GM:III,§15). By "affect" Nietzsche means any violent emotion (malice, vengefulness, mistrustfulness, hope). The logic here is that one deadens, or drowns out the actual pain that one is experiencing by creating such an emotion, which then drives from one's consciousness the experience of pain. By teaching ancient man that he alone is to blame for his suffering, and inventing the concepts of "sin", "depravity" and "damnation" 

61 Nietzsche's account of the creation of the intellect will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Two.
in order to justify this teaching, the priest creates such ‘affects’ and thereby *palliates* the suffering of early man. That is to say, the priest does not, according to Nietzsche, attempt to *cure* the sick, or *remedy* the cause of the sickness, but merely attempts to alleviate the symptoms (depression, nihilism) of the illness. Thus, we can now understand Nietzsche’s description of the ascetic ideal as “among the greatest *conserving* forces and yes-creating forces of life”. The priest creates the means by which a sick organism can continue to cling to life.

Nietzsche describes the various means which he thinks the ascetic priest has developed in order to palliate the sick. These include: the general muting of feeling of life; mechanical activity; “love of one’s neighbour”; “herd organization” (i.e. democratic instinct); and the awakening of the communal feeling of power through which the individual’s discontent with himself is drowned in pleasure in the prosperity of the community (i.e. nationalism, socialism) (*GM:III, §19*). However, the chief trick of the ascetic priest was, as aforesaid, the “exploitation of the sense of guilt” (making the individual responsible for his or her own suffering). Nietzsche describes sin as “the priestly name for the bad conscience” (*GM:III, §20*). He describes its creation, on the behalf of the priest, as the “greatest event in the history of the sick soul” (*GM:III, §20*). According to this picture, ancient man is taught by the priest that he must seek the cause of his suffering not in nature but in some “guilt”, in some “piece of the past” – and that he must understand his suffering as a “punishment” (*GM:III, §20*). Indeed, according to Nietzsche, “guilt” is henceforth understood as the source of suffering. In Nietzsche’s view, this teaching encouraged people to interrogate their own consciences further and further and commit more and more cruelty against themselves (“conscience vivisection”), thus making an already sick organism sicker. In sum, the ascetic ideal taught by the priests allowed man to survive in the face of the prospect of suicidal nihilism, but this survival came at what Nietzsche sees as a significant cost - it furthered the degeneration of the human animal; it made it sicker.
The statement that the ascetic ideal has been the only ideal so far can therefore be understood in relation to the fact that Nietzsche considered the sickness constituted by the creation of a bad conscience to be a widespread and ever expanding phenomenon. According to this picture, the bad conscience, which in many respects differentiates humanity essentially from the rest of the animal kingdom, and which allowed people powerful insight into the senselessness of suffering, ought thereby to have caused the demise of the affected organisms. This demise was prevented by the priests’ invention and teaching of the ascetic ideal inasmuch as it distracted people from the meaninglessness of human suffering by encouraging them to (erroneously, according to Nietzsche) place the blame for all suffering upon themselves. According to Nietzsche’s account, the priests exploited the illness that humanity contracted from its transition from the wilderness to life within the relative confines of society in order to increase their own power. In other words, the priests taught the ascetic ideal to people not primarily in order to save them, but rather in order to garner their support in their war against the aristocratic knights. This rather grand conspiracy theory is described further in *The Anti-Christ*.\(^\text{62}\) §24:

Considered psychologically, the Jewish nation is a nation of the toughest vital energy which, placed in impossible circumstances, voluntarily, from the profoundest shrewdness in self-preservation, took the side of all décadence instincts – *not* as being dominated by them but because it divined in them a power by means of which one can prevail against ‘the world’. The Jews are the counterparts of décadents: they have been compelled to act as décadents to the point of illusion, they have known, with a non plus ultra of histrionic genius, how to place themselves at the head of all décadence movements (– as the Christianity of *Paul* –) so as to make of them something stronger than any party affirmative of life. For the kind of man who desires to attain power through Judaism and Christianity, the priestly kind, décadence is only a means: this

\(^{62}\) In my view, *The Anti-Christ* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* can be considered as parallel or companion texts. *The Anti-Christ* fills in the broad picture developed in *On the Genealogy of Morals* with concrete reference to Christianity. *The Anti-Christ* also adds further complexity to the distinction between the ‘warrior’ and ‘priestly’ castes by referring to various grades of “spiritual strength” as being of fundamental import to the creation of values.
The term "décadence" that Nietzsche employs in this later text refers to the person who is sick with the bad conscience. The point that Nietzsche clearly iterates is that the priests' priority is power. It is power that motivates the priest to teach the ascetic ideal, and it is in the interest of the priest to maintain or increase the sickness of humanity, because he or she thereby guarantees further demand for him or her self in order that he or she might palliate the sickness. The ascetic ideal, being the priests' ideal, did not have a rival simply by virtue of what it is. The noble valuation that Nietzsche describes in GM:1 consisted primarily of an instinctive, unreflective sense of superiority. According to this crude picture, the aristocratic knights, as instinctive rulers, did not experience the meaninglessness of suffering, but simply delighted in their own selves. They sought no justification for existence, and created no extrinsic goal for their wills to work towards. I will have much more to say about this in subsequent chapters, but it seems apposite to anticipate my argument by suggesting that the idea of an eternally recurring self-same universe, depicting goallessness as such, as it does, is in natural accordance with the instinctive attitude (or stance) towards life of the aristocratic knight. They did not posit it as an ideal, because, being in accord with nature, they had no need for any ideal or goal. They did not even need to know about it. Moreover, the picture Nietzsche creates of them is of simple, perhaps incredibly naïve, warriors. Being physically stronger than their adversaries, there was no reason for them to develop the traits of cunning, dissimulation and contrivance which ultimately allowed the priests to prevail by peddling an ideal to others.

The second aspect of the meaning of the ascetic ideal that requires explanation is that the goal it contains is equivalent to nothingness. Or, to put it another way, that it is an expression of a "will-to-nothingness". What Nietzsche means by this is actually strikingly simple. The basic point is that the goal for the will stipulated by the ascetic ideal (of
eternal life, the Kingdom of Heaven, etc.) is actually fictional, and therefore non-actual i.e. it amounts to nothingness. The best way of explaining what Nietzsche means here is to appeal to a summary of some of his philosophical insights in *Twilight of the Idols* (‘Reason in Philosophy’, §6):

*Second proposition.* The characteristics which have been assigned to the ‘real being’ of things are the characteristics of non-being, of nothingness – the ‘real world’ has been constructed out of the contradiction to the actual world: an apparent world indeed, insofar as it is no more than a moral-optical illusion.

*Third proposition.* To talk about another world than this one is quite pointless, provided that an instinct for slandering, disparaging and accusing life is not strong within us: in the latter case we revenge ourselves on life by means of the phantasmagoria of ‘another’, a ‘better’ life.

Here we have a very clear summary of Nietzsche’s position. In the second proposition, when Nietzsche refers to the “real world” he is referring to the ideal world of the priest. According to Nietzsche, in the priests’ language, “God”, “the Kingdom of Heaven”, “eternal life”, etc. constitute the “real world”, they constitute the true, underlying and fundamental reality of the universe. Nietzsche simply believes that Heaven, God, etc. are “fictions”, and, granted that the defining attributes of them are qualities that are not applicable to objects found in the empirical world (which are neither eternal nor immutable), then it follows that these qualities are more accurately considered as qualities of “non-being”, i.e. nothingness.

Moreover, to Nietzsche, as I have already discussed, this judgment on the behalf of the priests implies a negative stance towards life, because the defining qualities of these ‘real’ things (eternal, immutable), not being the product of experience, must have been

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63 Nietzsche sees metaphysical systems such as Plato’s (which he tends to simplify) as being fundamentally analogous to Christianity in this respect.

64 For further clarification, see A, §7: “One does not say ‘nothingness’: one says ‘the Beyond’; or ‘God’; or ‘true life’; or Nirvana, redemption, blessedness…. This innocent rhetoric from the domain of religio-moral idiosyncrasy at once appears much less innocent when one grasps which tendency is here draping the mantle of sublime words about itself: the tendency hostile to life.”
'invented' in contradistinction to the defining qualities of the actual world. Thus, by interpreting the universe in such a way in order to blame man for his own suffering (in order to fundamentally distract him from the meaninglessness of all suffering, and thereby avert 'suicidal nihilism'), the priest directs the will towards a fictional goal (eternal life), which, strictly speaking, amounts to 'nothingness'.

In sum, the two key aspects of the ascetic ideal that add up to its meaning are, as I have outlined, the fact that it has been the only ideal so far, and the fact that it is an expression of a will-to-nothingness. In providing its two-fold account of this meaning, GM:III is successful with respect to the overall polemical goal of On The Genealogy of Morals, because it thereby provides a plausible explanation as to how and why the priests were successful in gaining power over humanity, and, secondly, as to why it is that their expedient (the ascetic ideal, and its associated morality) is potentially or actually harmful.

Conclusion
The main point of bringing together this account of the ascetic ideal has been to provide an account of it which I can refer to in later chapters when I come to discuss the relationship between the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same and the ascetic ideal. It seems to me that the absolute key point to take away from the account provided by Nietzsche in On the Genealogy of Morals is that it is a broad history. In this history there are three principal agents, or groups of agents, each of which has distinctive characteristics such that the interactions of the three groups account for the trajectory and underlying machinations of this history as a whole. The first two groups of agents are the aristocratic knights and the priests. These two groups are opposed to each other. Between them lies the rest of humanity, which comprises the third group of agents. This third group started out being tyrannized by either one group or the other, and developing a dangerous sickness as a result (the bad conscience). However, Nietzsche's argument is that the priests were so successful in manipulating and
exploiting this third group for their own ends, by teaching the ascetic ideal, that they have virtually won their war against the aristocratic nobles.

In connection with this history, Nietzsche advances a polemical argument to the effect that the morality of pity, which for him is synonymous with Christianity, and is coeval with the ascetic ideal, is actively contributing to the decline of humankind as a species. It goes without saying that Nietzsche’s history, as a history, is broad conjecture. It rests on a few etymologies as well as a small number of innovative psychological insights. It is not, however, incoherent, nor is it terribly implausible. It is certainly no less plausible than the Christian account of creation. It is worth noting that subsequent texts, such as *The Anti-Christ*, whilst not adding any new principles to the story, do add considerable concrete detail, subtlety and complexity to some of its basic elements. In any case, the question of the ultimate accuracy of this story as a historical account is not a concern of this dissertation. I am interested in the connection between the ascetic ideal and the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. For that purpose, of paramount importance is the fact that, according to Nietzsche, the history of Europe was moving in a particular direction in relation to the ascetic ideal. This particular direction is articulated by Nietzsche in relation to what he calls the “will-to-truth”.
Chapter Two: The self overcoming of the ascetic ideal

Introduction
In the final part of his autobiography *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes: “I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous—a crisis without equal on earth…” The crisis of which Nietzsche writes is the subject of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Explaining his choice of the ancient Iranian prophet as the central protagonist of his poetic creation, Nietzsche continues:

The self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness; the self-overcoming of the moralist, into his opposite—into me—that is what the name Zarathustra means in my mouth.

The crisis that Nietzsche believes will one day be associated with his name is this self-overcoming of morality. Another name for this crisis, a better one for my purposes, is the “self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal”. The key to understanding the nature of this crisis, or at least the formal character of what Nietzsche means by “self-overcoming”, is the phrase “out of truthfulness”. What overcomes the ascetic ideal is *truthfulness*. This is a self-overcoming because truthfulness, according to Nietzsche, actually presupposes the ascetic ideal – indeed he describes truthfulness as the “kernel of the ascetic ideal”.

The previous chapter outlined a very crude history, the central figure of which was the ascetic ideal. In it, I explained how the ascetic ideal was structured as a will-to-nothingness. The purpose of the ascetic ideal was described as being to prolong the existence of a degenerating life. It did this by providing a meaning for man’s suffering, and hence a goal and purpose for his will. This goal, taught by priests, consisted of a fictional, eternal realm (immortality, Heaven), which, according to Nietzsche, entailed a slandering of the real world. However, Nietzsche’s overall philosophical concerns, particularly with respect to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, and the
Thus, in this chapter, I outline the relationship between the ascetic ideal and what Nietzsche refers to as the will-to-truth. The will-to-truth is Nietzsche's term for the human drive for knowledge. It is sometimes used as synonymous for the "intellectual conscience", and is the driving force of science. The basic picture that Nietzsche develops here is that, whereas one might expect that science is the natural antagonist of the ascetic ideal (i.e. presupposing that it is founded on *atheism* and empiricism), it is actually rather the "kernel" of the ascetic ideal. As the kernel of the ascetic ideal, it too expresses a will-to-nothingness. However, the crucial point of this analysis is Nietzsche's belief that, in coming to question its own value, the will-to-truth will overcome the ascetic idea. Thus, the story of the *self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal* is the story of the apotheosis of truthfulness, because it is this truthfulness and "intellectual cleanliness" which will abolish morality and the Christian concept of God.

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65 This is a simplification. As the reader will see, this entire chapter is more or less devoted to drawing out the complexities in what Nietzsche means by 'the will to truth'. This initial definition should be understood as a starting point.
I have divided this chapter into two sections. In the first section I examine Nietzsche's account of the human intellect. In the most basic sense, Nietzsche assumes that the intellect is the human drive that makes something like knowledge possible. It is a complex biological process that, among other things, abstracts from experience and produces concepts. Nietzsche's position on both the nature and origin of the intellect varied quite considerably in some respects over his career, and the first section of this chapter deals with what I see as the basic transition that governs this variation. As I see it, and as I demonstrate in this chapter, by the time Nietzsche wrote the first edition of *The Gay Science*, he had assimilated his views about the nature and origin of the intellect into the picture of the basic historical trajectory that he later articulates with respect to the ascetic ideal.

After giving an account of the basic biological presuppositions of knowledge (and hence of science) in the first section, in the section which follows I present Nietzsche's account of the relationship between science and the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche articulates several different versions of this relationship, in the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and in *Twilight of the Idols*, each couched in different terms. I focus primarily on the accounts in the former two texts, rather than the latter. Nietzsche's argument for the view that science presupposes the ascetic ideal has two principal premises. Firstly, Nietzsche argues that there is no such thing as a presuppositionless science. Because it is not self-evident that science - the drive for truth at any price - is in the biological interest of humans, it must therefore derive its legitimacy from the belief that truth is necessary, which belief Nietzsche characterizes as "metaphysical" and presupposing of a will-to-nothingness. Secondly, Nietzsche argues that abstract knowledge came about because humans were no longer able to simply rely on their instincts. In other words, according to Nietzsche, the same sickness described in *GM:II*, consisting of the early human turning its instincts upon itself, is here described as the basis of the need for rationality and knowledge. Hence the same conditions that proved a fertile ground for the growth of the ascetic ideal facilitated the growth of science.
2.1 The origin and nature of the intellect

The "will to truth" is Nietzsche's name for the human drive for knowledge. Just as in the previous chapter, I showed how Nietzsche sought to explain the origins and nature of some aspects of morality within a naturalistic framework, so in this section I present Nietzsche's account of the origin and nature of the human intellect. However, unlike the accounts of the origins of moral experiences and moral concepts offered in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, no single text of Nietzsche's is devoted to such an account and one has to piece together aphorisms from across Nietzsche's *corpus*. I have identified two discussions of the intellect that, considered together, seem to me to amount to a reasonably comprehensive picture of its origin, development and nature. These are found in the unfinished and posthumously published 1873 essay 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense', in Book III *The Gay Science* (published in 1882).

These two accounts span much of Nietzsche's career as a philosophical author. As a result, they reflect certain aspects of the development of his thought, and therefore contain differences both in specific details and in emphasis. However, the basic picture that I am concerned to highlight is one of broad consistency. I would argue that, while Nietzsche's conception of the origin and nature of the intellect certainly developed in line with the development of his philosophical interests, it stayed true to a very basic presupposition that he inherited from Schopenhauer. This position is the view that the intellect is simply a tool designed to serve no more than the biological interests of the organism it is part of (i.e. the human being). In other words, its value is its utility. Assuming that this is the case, the puzzle that Nietzsche sets about trying to solve is the puzzle of how and why humans eventually came to concern themselves with something like 'pure truth'. This is a puzzle because if we assume that humans have survived and flourished previously upon the basis of what we now recognize as errors (e.g. beliefs such as geocentrism, various forms of theism etc.), by what rational principle do we assume that possession of the actual truth about the nature of reality and our place in the universe will necessarily be beneficial?
This line of questioning is what Nietzsche refers to when he discusses the question of the value of truth. Understood in relation to the parallel concerns for morality outlined in the *On the Genealogy of Morals*, we can see that Nietzsche is also concerned about the implications that knowledge of the truth might have for the future splendour of mankind. In particular, Nietzsche is interested in the question of whether the possession of truth about the world is actually better at facilitating the survival and flourishing of human beings, or whether certain errors may in fact turn out to be more “species preserving”. Once again, I would suggest that, with respect to the precise details of the accounts he develops of the evolution of the intellect, Nietzsche does not take himself to be too seriously engaged in developing a proper history of this development *per se*, but rather with thinking through the question of what might be at stake for an organism which engages in truth-seeking, and sketching plausible hypotheses that have explanatory value.

The basic question that the unpublished essay ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’, sets out to answer is: given the nature of the intellect, how could a [moral] drive for ‘pure truth’ ever have arisen? The interest in this question lies in the assumption that, *prima facie*, the nature of the intellect is such that the last thing one should expect of it is for it to have contributed to there being a general positive moral valuation of truth. Nietzsche opens the essay with a striking description of the importance of the intellect in considered relation to the universe as a whole:

> In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of “world history”—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.

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66 Note that because ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’ is such a short fragment of text, comprising only two small sections, I will simply refer to it as “TL”.

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Nietzsche continues by claiming that, even by inventing such a fable, it is hardly possible to convey how “aimless and arbitrary” the human intellect must appear in nature. He describes it as having “no further mission that would lead beyond human life”; likewise, as having been “given only as an aid to the most unfortunate, most delicate, most evanescent beings in order to hold them for a minute in existence”, and as being “a means for the preservation of the individual”. The chief power of the intellect according to this account is its ability to facilitate dissimulation. Having been denied such natural weapons as “fangs and claws”, according to Nietzsche, man must rely upon the dissimulative power of the intellect in order to survive. In other words, he had to cheat, steal, disguise himself, adopt masks, act roles, stab others in the back, etc. According to this early essay, this power of dissimulation is the true underlying nature of the intellect. However, Nietzsche argues that, as humans banded together to live in communities (in order to more successfully survive, and to fend off boredom), they needed to invent regular and binding designations for objects in order to facilitate the communication that enabled communal living, and it was the intellect which achieved this by creating concepts.

Accordingly, the intellect created concepts in line with its dissimulative nature. The same creative capacity which facilitated the invention of masks and disguises, also created concepts via a process that Nietzsche describes as a metaphorical transfer of meaning. The implication of this is that the intellect itself and the processes by which it invented language and concepts (the materials of science) are, respectively, immoral and unscientific (i.e. creative/artistic). It is thus rendered quite incredible that there be a positive moral valuation of truth. Nietzsche however, suggests that such a moral valuation came about for pragmatic reasons. He argues that when an individual abused the conventional linguistic designations of objects, perhaps by agreeing to do something that he or she had no intention of doing, this was harmful to the community, and the individual was punished. Thus people learnt the importance of using the correct designations. Nietzsche suggests that, eventually, people forgot about this pragmatic origin and came to believe that truth-telling had intrinsic moral value.
In sum, in this early, unpublished essay, Nietzsche considered the intellect to be radically limited to the facilitation of the biological interests of human beings. Moreover, he considered the fundamental nature of the intellect to be dissimulative, and, in line with that, the creations of the intellect (concepts) to be the products of dissimulative creativity (hence not essentially different from artistic creations). A positive moral valuation of truthfulness had arisen, in line with this picture, simply due to its demonstrated utility in relation to the management of communal life. Having forgotten about this simple utility, but having grown accustomed to valuing truthfulness, people have managed to convince themselves that there is a moral compunction to look for "pure truth".67

In developing this picture I have neglected a large part of Nietzsche's argument in TL, which states that, due to the nature of language, adherence to the commonly agreed designations for things in communication also, strictly speaking, amounts to lying. This aspect of TL has generated an enormous secondary literature, because it is seen as a key element for Nietzsche's so-called "rejection of truth".68 I do not wish to become embroiled in the debate as to the true significance of this aspect of TL, but it seems apposite to summarize the position that I think Nietzsche outlines here in line with the account of the intellect that I have already presented. It is reasonably clear that the basic philosophical framework of Nietzsche's account of concept-formation and scientific knowledge in TL is derived primarily from his reading of Schopenhauer.69 Nietzsche argues that the human intellect is incapable of representing the true reality of the world

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67 In GM I, Nietzsche himself attacks this view on the grounds that such forgetting is psychologically implausible. Cf. GM I, §2.
69 Albert Lange's History of Materialism (primarily a refutation of materialism in support of a form of biological Kantianism) is also often cited as an important influence. I have relied upon S. J. Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Volume VII, Modern Philosophy Part II: Schopenhauer to Nietzsche (USA: Image Books, 1965) 126-133.
in concepts. The reason for this is that the human intellect is itself constituted in a particular way, such that it represents objects to the subject in primary accordance with the basic features of its own structure, rather than necessarily in accordance with the true nature of reality. This account is borrowed from Schopenhauer, and it is structured such that objects are represented [to the subject] in space and time, and in accordance with [Schopenhauer's account of] the principle of sufficient reason. The consequence of this, according to Nietzsche, is that scientific knowledge is not knowledge of a reality independent of human experience, but is actually conditioned and limited by the structure of such experience:

All that we actually know about these laws of nature is what we ourselves bring to them—time and space, and therefore relationships of succession and number. But everything marvellous about the laws of nature, everything that quite astonishes us therein and seems to demand explanation, everything that might lead us to distrust idealism: all this is completely and solely contained within the mathematical strictness and inviolability of our representations of time and space (7L).

As long as scientists presuppose that the pure truth which they are striving for comprises some kind of correspondence between language/concepts and the absolute reality of the universe (i.e. a metaphysical correspondence theory), then, according to Nietzsche's framework, this is simply impossible. The nature of the intellect itself obviates the possibility of such knowledge. My view is that the philosophical framework within which Nietzsche is working through the puzzle about the drive for pure truth can best be understood as broadly Kantian. As such, in the context of 1870s German philosophy, it is neither very novel nor very radical. I would therefore argue that what is philosophically innovative in this early essay is not so much the substance of his views about the limits of language and scientific knowledge, but rather his posing of the question of the puzzling origin of the moral equation “truthfulness = goodness”.

70 For further discussion of this point see: Clark, Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy, 79-90.
71 This is in line with the general approach to Nietzsche that situates his philosophy in relation to the progression of German philosophy that I outlined in the introduction.
By the time Nietzsche came to write the first edition of The Gay Science, the influence of Schopenhauer’s transcendental idealism on Nietzsche had begun to recede, and Schopenhauer’s metaphysical position was considered by Nietzsche to be suspect. That is not to say that the influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophical thought had receded, because it is evident throughout The Gay Science that many of Nietzsche’s own formulations of problems, as well as his use of examples and particular imagery, reflect Schopenhauer’s own formulations of parallel ideas and concerns. With respect to the origin and nature of the intellect, Book III of The Gay Science contains some particularly relevant passages. The passages in question refer to the development of what Nietzsche calls the “intellectual impulse”. It makes sense to see the intellectual impulse as an early formulation of what he later refers to as the ‘will to truth’. In many ways this is a much more convincing account than that offered in TL. It is at any rate more focused, and the context for the discussion is more explicit. The primary account is offered in §110 entitled ‘Origin of knowledge’, and in §111, entitled ‘The origin of the logical.’ These are the third and fourth aphorisms in Book III. However, before I discuss the account they contain, it is worthwhile touching on the first two aphorisms of Book III in order to get an idea of what is at stake here.

Book III begins with the iconic statement: “God is dead”. This aphorism (§108), which proceeds to attest to the necessity of “defeating His shadows as well”, is, in my view, an absolutely fundamental statement of Nietzsche’s philosophical mission. However, for our current purposes it is enough to acknowledge that the framework for this discussion is avowedly atheistic. The second aphorism of Book III outlines some of the so-called “shadows”. In it, Nietzsche denies the validity of any anthropomorphic interpretation of the world or universe. According to him, the universe lacks order, organization, form, beauty, and wisdom. He claims that it is simply wrong to consider the universe to be a “machine” or an “organism”. Instead, for Nietzsche the only conclusion we have a scientific right to is that the total character of the universe is “for all eternity chaos”.

72 In Chapter Four I provide a much more detailed account of Nietzsche's relation to Schopenhauer.
resulting depiction of the universe is of something amoral, inexorable, and indifferent. The final refrain of the aphorism consists of the questions:

When will all these shadows of god no longer darken us? When will we have completely de-deified nature? When may we begin to naturalize humanity with a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?

The point of this aphorism is to suggest that, ultimately, all the so-called “shadows of God”, are equivalent to errors committed by the intellect. This raises the very obvious question as to how and why such enduring errors have been possible. What is the significance of an “error”? What is the intellect such that it so readily produces errors?

GS §110 ‘Origin of knowledge’ begins to answer these questions. According to Nietzsche, the early evolutionary successes of human beings can be attributed precisely to the “species-preserving” value of their errors. Examples of these errors are the following: that there are enduring things; that there are identical things; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free etc. Nietzsche’s point is that while we might agree now that no leaf is absolutely identical to another, the belief that they were so initially facilitated the survival of human beings as species. Any single human who began to doubt that one edible fruit was identical to another, or indeed that one predator was identical to another, would be less likely to survive than someone who, say, ran away from everything that resembled a predator without wondering whether it was really a predator. Nietzsche sees the intellect in its rudimentary stages as being a kind of simplifying machine which acted on the overwhelming influx of sensory data in order to make it navigable, and in order to accord preference to decisive action rather than indecision. Over time, according to Nietzsche, these kinds of beliefs (“useful errors”) were to become, via inheritance, part of the “basic endowment of the species”. They were eventually incorporated into our very perceptions of reality.
What distinguished originary knowledge from "error" then, according to this view, was its success at facilitating the survival of individuals and communities. Its defining characteristic was that of a condition of life. Initially, says Nietzsche, to deny or to question what had been received as true from one’s forebears, and which formed the basis of one’s experience, was simply considered madness. However, eventually, what Nietzsche describes as a "subtler development of honesty and scepticism" arose – and this can be thought of as being the pre-cursor to ‘scientific’ thinking. The conditions for this were provided whenever two conflicting propositions arose about the world, which both seemed applicable to life because both were in accord with the ‘basic errors’.

When two such propositions arose, people argued as to their greater or lesser degree of usefulness. Likewise, according to Nietzsche, wherever these propositions did not seem to pertain directly to utility, they were argued about anyway, as an expression of the human impulse for playfulness. The skills and impulses that developed as a result of this activity of arguing gradually led to the creation of new impulses and drives. Thus, over aeons, the human brain developed an impulse for “truths as such” – this is referred to by Nietzsche as the “intellectual impulse”. Once it had developed itself, the intellectual impulse, which had obvious utility and success, and continually proves as much, became a steadily growing power until finally, and inevitably, it and the original ‘basic errors’ that were part of the “endowment of the human species” come to clash against one another. This clash constitutes part of the philosophical problematic which Nietzsche is addressing in The Gay Science. Granted that the so-called “basic errors” (i.e. “shadows of God”) have also proven themselves over millennia as facilitators of human survival and growth, the question that Nietzsche is interested in is the following: to what extent can truth (i.e. presupposing “unconditional honest atheism”) stand to be incorporated?

This question articulates Nietzsche’s concern for the ‘value of truth’, which is taken up in more detail in his later works and is incorporated into Nietzsche’s account of the importance of the ascetic ideal. However, before I pursue this connection, there is
another important aspect to the account developed in *The Gay Science* that anticipates the later direction of Nietzsche's thought. This aspect of the account pertains to the future implications of the development of the intellect; it is suggested in §113:

*On the doctrine of poisons.* – So much has to come together in order for scientific thought to originate, and all these necessary forces have had to be separately invented, practised, cultivated! In their separateness they have, however, very often had a totally different effect from that which they have today when in the realm of scientific thought they mutually limit and keep each other in check: they have worked as poisons, e.g. the doubting drive, the denying drive, the waiting drive, the collecting drive, the dissolving drive. Many hecatombs of human beings had to be sacrificed before these drives learned to grasp their coexistence and feel like one organizing force in one human being! And how far we still are from the time when artistic energies and the practical wisdom of life join in scientific thought so that a higher organic system will develop in relation to which the scholar, the physician, the artist, and the lawmaker, as we now know them, would have to appear as paltry antiquities!

This striking aphorism clearly states that the future consequence of the development of the intellectual impulse will be a "higher organic system". Moreover, this higher organic system is clearly a kind of person (i.e. it is an organism, not a system of knowledge), and it is hinted that it is a kind of super-organism which incorporates the scholar, physician, artist and lawmaker. The logic seems to be that, just as the intellectual impulse grew out of the coexistence of a bunch of drives which, considered in isolation were dangerous to the organism which bore them (Nietzsche describes them as acting as poisons), so the higher organic system of the future will incorporate several different types of person (scholar artist, physician, lawmaker) such that these different types come together in one organism to act like one organizing force. I suggest that this conception of a higher organic system is what Nietzsche subsequently refers to as the "Übermensch" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. One of the obvious implications of this account is that, considered in isolation, these types might also be viewed analogously as "poisons". The other implication of this account, which I will pick up on later, is that,
just as many hecatombs of people were sacrificed during the development of this drive, presumably the development of a higher organic system will likewise require massive sacrifice. However, for now, the important point for my purposes is simply that the development of this higher organic system is the eventual result of an on-going process which begins crudely with the development of the intellectual impulse in early human beings. As I expressed it in the first chapter, it pertains to the inner logic of the trajectory of human development.

This represents a significant break from the account proffered in TL. There, the intellect was simply a capacity belonging to humans who eventually used it to create concepts in a distinctive manner in order to stave off boredom and improve communication. People then forgot that this is what had happened and overestimated the importance of its creations. By the time Nietzsche writes The Gay Science, this picture has altered. The current character of the intellect is now described as the result of a long, complex and costly development that cannot be reduced to a simple capacity, but which is the result of the coming-together of many different biological drives. Moreover, Nietzsche implies that the story of this development is incomplete – and that the continued development of the intellect will eventually lead to the emergence of a “higher organic system”, which is presumably what he subsequently refers to as the Übermensch.

This very basic trajectory involving the development of the intellect can be thought of as running parallel to the trajectory outlined in the previous chapter which pertains to the ascetic ideal. While, on the surface, they appear to have very little in common, their coming together in many ways completes the picture of the trajectory that leads to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. The question that motivated Nietzsche’s interest in the intellect in TL, of the moral estimation of truth, also is answered in this union. Indeed, Nietzsche brings it all together explicitly in 1887 when he appends a fifth book and a new preface to The Gay Science and publishes On the Genealogy of Morals.
2.2 The will-to-truth and the ascetic ideal

In Book V of *The Gay Science*, published in 1887, Nietzsche develops an account of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal, in keeping with the conceptual framework and language of the previous four books, and thus not adopting the language of *On the Genealogy of Morals* (there is no explicit reference to the ascetic ideal). It seems appropriate to begin there. The key crucial aphorism is entitled ‘In what way we, too, are still pious’ (§344), and is the second aphorism of Book V. However, before I discuss that, let us look to the beginning of Book V, which opens, like Book III, with a reference to the ‘death of God’:

§343 How to understand our cheerfulness. – The greatest recent event – that ‘God is dead; that belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable – is starting to cast its first shadow over Europe… and now that this faith has been undermined, how much must collapse because it was built on this faith, leaned on it, had grown into it – for example our whole European morality. This long dense succession of demolition, destruction, downfall, upheaval that now stands ahead: who would guess enough of it today to play the teacher and herald of this monstrous logic of horror, the prophet of deep darkness and eclipse of the sun the like of which has probably never before existed on earth?…

Just as he had in Book III, Nietzsche sets out a scenario whereby the increasing sophistication of the human intellect, and the progress of science, has undermined the Christian world view. The consequences of this, according to Nietzsche, are far-reaching and profound. The consequence that Nietzsche shows the most interest in is the demise of the “whole European morality” (i.e. the morality of pity), which in Book III he had referred to as a “shadow of God”. In many ways, this aphorism is simply an iteration of the beginning of Book III. And, just as in Book III Nietzsche proceeded to examine the human intellect and science in order to clarify how this undermining of Christian faith had come about, so in Book V the following aphorism does just this. Only this time, there is a crucial twist. Science, (the fruit of the intellect) which, according to Nietzsche,
eventually undermined Christianity, is now considered, paradoxically, to itself rest on an identical faith!

§344 is a long aphorism (two pages) so I will not reproduce it in its entirety, but will instead paraphrase its argument. It begins with the claim that, in science, convictions have no place, but rather only hypotheses, regulative fictions, etc. can be taken seriously in the "realm of knowledge". On closer examination, says Nietzsche, does this not mean that only those convictions that have ceased to be convictions are "granted admission to science"? Indeed, the "scientific spirit" can only be "cultivated", according to Nietzsche, when one permits oneself no more convictions. This is all well and good, but Nietzsche goes a step further and asks: "in order that this cultivation begin, must there not be some prior conviction – and indeed one so authoritative and unconditional that it sacrifices all other convictions to itself?" (GS, §344)

The answer to this question is, according to Nietzsche, yes. The cultivation of the scientific spirit is possible only on the basis of the conviction that truth is necessary, and indeed, that nothing is more necessary than truth. Nietzsche describes this conviction as the "unconditional will-to-truth", and claims that it amounts to the desire not to be deceived. However, he asks, is it really self-evident that one should not wish to be deceived? It is not as if one knows in advance the character of existence, such that one is in a position to judge whether the greatest advantage is on the side of possessing truth or untruth about the world. In fact, as Nietzsche had previously claimed in Book III, errors have proven themselves to be useful, just as truths have, therefore, the unconditional will-to-truth could not have originated on the basis of a calculus of utility. So since there does not seem to be any eminently rational basis for the pursuit of truth "at any price", there can only be faith. Nietzsche describes the faith as a metaphysical faith: "the Christian faith which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth; that truth is divine...". His argument for this is straightforward enough, and relies on the premise (already discussed in Chapter One) that Christianity amounts to a denial of this-world, and an affirmation of some "other world" ("Heaven" – eternal life, the Good, etc.). The
argument runs like this: if the basic instinct of life, and the basic power of the intellect, is *dissimulation* - and is therefore by Christian standards "immoral", and (as he claimed in Book III of *The Gay Science*) if history, the universe, nature – the "world", are essentially "a-moral", then grounds for a moral commitment to truth at any price cannot be constituted by any affirmation of ourselves or "this world" – therefore, the only plausible grounds for such a commitment is an affirmation of some other world. On the basis of this claim, the question that Nietzsche poses at the end of this no longer concerns the extent to which humans can endure the truth – but is now rather the question of what would happen if humans were to lose faith in the importance of truth: "*But what if this [faith in the divinity of truth] were to become more and more difficult to believe, if nothing more were to turn out to be divine except error, blindness, the lie…?*"

This brings us back to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in which Nietzsche refers to this same question as the problem of the will-to-truth "becoming conscious of itself as a problem." According to this account, the consequence of this coming-to-consciousness of this problem is the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal. The argument in *GM:III* is essentially the same as in *GS* §344, but it is more useful for my purposes, because it ties this crucial question, and indeed the whole problematic of the 'death of God', into the development of the ascetic ideal. In *GM:III*,§23 Nietzsche begins drawing all the threads together by asking rhetorically whether "science" isn't the natural antagonist of the ascetic ideal. In other words, is science the counter-ideal, or the *expression* of such a counter-ideal, that Nietzsche is looking for to rescue the health of European culture? After describing the ascetic ideal as the one goal the human will has found for itself, to which there has been no match, Nietzsche asks:

Why has it not found its match? Where is the other "one" goal?

But they tell me it is not lacking, it has merely waged a long and successful fight against this ideal in all important respects: all of modern *science* is supposed to bear witness to that—modern science which, as a genuine philosophy of reality, clearly
believes in itself alone, clearly possesses the courage for itself and the will to itself, and has up to now survived well enough without God, the beyond, and the virtues of denial.

Having thus suggested the possibility of an antithetical relationship between science and the ascetic ideal, a relationship that he himself had seemingly posited in Book III of *The Gay Science* (assuming that the ascetic ideal and Christianity are essentially related), Nietzsche derides this same possibility as "noisy agitators’ chatter", and argues that the truth is precisely the opposite. In fact, he claims, science is the "latest and noblest form" of the ascetic ideal (*GM:*III,§23). Firstly, Nietzsche argues that the *practice* of science is often undertaken as a form of self-narcosis. Nietzsche describes the "heedless industry" and "heads smoking day and night" of the finest scholars as being primarily motivated (presumably at the level of the subconscious) by their desire to keep something hidden from themselves (*GM:*III,§23). This "something" is the fact that they are suffering, and devoting themselves to science is their means of remaining unconscious of this suffering. This is analogous to the Nietzsche’s account, discussed in the previous chapter, of the role of "affects" in distracting the sufferer from his or her suffering.

Secondly, in *GM:*III,§24, Nietzsche discusses those who he describes as the "last idealists left among philosophers and scholars". Nietzsche is not here referring to ‘Idealism’ as a philosophical (metaphysical) position, but is rather referring to those individuals who are committed to truthfulness. They are described as "hard, severe, abstinent, heroic spirits who constitute the honour of our age" and further as "atheists, anti-Christians, immoralists, nihilists... skeptics, epehctics... in whom alone the intellectual conscience dwells and is incarnate today..." (*GM:*III,§24). Nietzsche presumably considers himself to be among these "last idealists". In general, he claims, these last idealists are enemies of faith of any kind, seeing it as constituting an obstacle along the path of knowledge (this mirrors his claim in *GS*,§344 that only hypotheses and regulative fictions have right to citizenship in science). They therefore feel themselves to be "free spirits". However, Nietzsche argues that they are very far from being free spirits, because they still have faith in truth.
By faith in truth, Nietzsche means "faith in a metaphysical value, the absolute value of truth" (GM:III,§24). In other words, this is precisely the point of the argument (already discussed) that he outlined in GS,§344, and Nietzsche himself even quotes sections of that aphorism in order to illuminate his reasoning in GM:III. The innovation of On the Genealogy of Morals is the claim that this faith in truth is equivalent to faith in the ascetic ideal itself and, moreover, is that it (the faith in truth) is "sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone" (GM:III,§24). The simple point that Nietzsche is making here, in the context of GM:III, is that science itself is not in the business of creating values. Like art and philosophy (discussed briefly in Chapter One), science, according to Nietzsche, is conducted in the service of a prior value system. It is not presuppositionless. It presupposes the overriding importance of truth. Moreover, inasmuch as it has faith in truth as something eternal and immutable, it expresses a will-to-nothingness.

To further support the claim that the faith in truth which is the foundation of science and the ascetic ideal are intimately related, Nietzsche argues that the physiological preconditions for both are identical: "a certain impoverishment of life" (GM:III,§25). The argument here is that whenever the instincts are accorded less importance than dialectics (abstract reasoning), and whenever passions are considered as enemies, and whenever scholars emerge into the foreground of a culture, then something is going wrong. Nietzsche expands upon this argument in 1888 in Twilight of the Idols The Problem of Socrates' §10 and §11:

If one needs to make a tyrant of reason, as Socrates did, then there must exist no little danger of something else playing the tyrant. Rationality was at that time divined as a saviour; neither Socrates nor his 'invalids' were free to be rational or not, as they wished – it was de rigueur, it was their last expedient. The fanaticism with which the whole of Greek thought throws itself at rationality betrays the state of emergency: one was in peril, one had only one choice: either to perish – or be absurdly rational... The harshest daylight, rationality at any cost, life bright, cold, circumspect, conscious, without instinct, in opposition to the instincts, has itself been no more than a form of
sickness, another form of sickness – and by no means a way back to ‘virtue’, to ‘health’, to happiness.... To have to combat one’s instincts – that is the formula for décadence: as long as life is ascending, happiness and instinct are one. –

In other words, science, like the ascetic ideal, is an expedient to prolong the life of a sick organism. As in On the Genealogy of Morals, the sickness consists of instincts being in disarray. Socrates, according to Nietzsche’s account, taught rational philosophy (science) as a means of tyrannizing those instincts and distracting oneself from the essential meaninglessness of suffering. This was not a cure for the sickness but, on this account, it simply led to another form of sickness. There is no meaningful difference between this account of the significance of “science” and the account of the ascetic ideal already discussed.

So, having established that science, the will-to-truth and the ascetic ideal are more or less synonymous, we are now in a better position to see what the ‘self-overcoming’ of the ascetic ideal might look like. In many ways this moment of self-overcoming is the centre piece of Nietzsche’s philosophy. He refers to it as a “crisis”, and as an “awe-inspiring catastrophe”. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra he uses the symbolism of noon to depict it, the ‘moment of the shortest shadow’; but what is it? Firstly, we know that it involves the will to truth becoming conscious of itself as a problem:

Unconditional honest atheism... is therefore not the antithesis of that ideal, as it appears to be; it is rather only one of the latest phases of its evolution, one of its terminal and inner consequences – it is the awe-inspiring catastrophe of two thousand years of training in truthfulness that finally forbids oneself the lie involved in belief in God (GM:III.§27).

Put simply then, the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal, or at least the “terminal phase of its evolution” is simply the development of scientific atheism. However, more crucially, Nietzsche sees the development of this atheism as being a harbinger of the inevitable demise of the morality of pity:
All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming: thus the law of life will have it, the law of the necessity of "self-overcoming" in the nature of life—the lawgiver himself eventually receives the call: "patere legem, quam ipse tulisti." In this way Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality; in the same way Christianity as morality must now perish, too: we stand on the threshold of this event. After Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its most striking inference, its inference against itself; this will happen, however, when it poses the question "what is the meaning of all will to truth?"... As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness—there can be no doubt of that—morality will gradually perish now: this is the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe—the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps most hopeful of all spectacles— (GM:III,§27).

Conclusion
If we now attempt to bring all those threads of Nietzsche's grand account of the trajectory of the development of European humanity together, we have quite a picture. We have already seen, in Chapter One, that Nietzsche considers the vast majority of humanity to be essentially sick. For Nietzsche, this sickness consists in having one's instincts in disarray and turned against one another. We know too that, according to this picture, the so-called "priestly caste" has exploited this sickness in order to increase its own power, and it has taught the ascetic ideal, and encouraged the development of rationality, as a means of making humanity sicker, and therefore more in need of priests. This expedient has worked because it palliates the sick animal, thus offering some comfort from its suffering, but, more importantly, because no other expedient was available.

If one adopts Nietzsche's perspective, then this is indeed a sorry state of affairs. The history of humanity has, on this account, been the history of the systematic retrogression

73 Kaufmann translates this "Submit to the law you yourself proposed".
and degradation of an animal with apparently enormous potential for “splendour”. However, Nietzsche yet has grounds for hope inasmuch as he has reason to think that this steady decline cannot sustain itself indefinitely and, indeed, maybe already have reached its terminal phase. These grounds for this hope lie in the nature of the human intellect and its fruit – science. Nietzsche sees the development of the human intellect and rationality as being, above all, symptomatic of the regression of the human species. Humanity could no longer rely upon its instincts to facilitate its survival, and so it invented, and was taught by priests, to think abstractly about moral concepts such as ‘guilt’ and ‘sin’, and to pursue truth as a moral duty. Over millennia this originally error-prone capacity has, through a complex process of development, and through the coming together of various drives, become a very finely tuned capability, and has furnished humanity with enormous insight into the nature of reality. The consequence of this insight, however, is that it becomes harder and harder for humans to believe in the dogmatic aspects of the European world-view (Christianity) that had originally sanctioned and justified the development of the intellect in the first place.

According to Nietzsche, this more or less brings us to date. However, the consequences of the resulting atheism are reserved “for the next two centuries”. The consequence which seems of principal interest to Nietzsche is what he sees as the demise of the whole European morality (Christianity, the morality of pity). The logic of this demise is what he calls the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal; as an event it is described by Nietzsche as a “crisis without equal on Earth”. Nietzsche has little specific to say about the nature of this crisis, however, he does claim to have what in some sense could be described as an “answer” to it: that answer is Thus Spoke Zarathustra, the basic conception of which is the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.
Chapter 3: Recurrence as counter-ideal

"Whoever has gained wisdom concerning ancient origins will eventually look for wells of the future and for new origins. O my brothers, it will not be overlong before new peoples originate..."

—Zarathustra

Introduction

This chapter accounts for Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same by analyzing it in relation to the material just presented. The previous two chapters have introduced some key aspects of the basic account of the trajectory of European culture that Nietzsche outlines in his philosophy, namely the ascetic ideal and the will to truth. According to Nietzsche, nineteenth century Europe is entering the terminal phase of the development of the ascetic ideal. This terminal phase consists of the will-to-truth becoming aware of itself as a problem, and will result ultimately in the death of the whole European morality. Nietzsche predicts that the "monstrous logic of horror" of this self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal will play itself out over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

While generally adopting negative language for this scenario, describing it as a catastrophe, a crisis, etc., Nietzsche also frequently describes it in the opposite terms. For example, in GM:III,§27 he describes it as "the most hopeful of all spectacles". Nietzsche's reasons for investing so much hope in this immanent crisis are certainly not the focus of any of his discursive texts. Indeed, according to Nietzsche, it is Thus Spoke Zarathustra that one must read to gain insight into the grounds and nature of this hope.

In the chapter of Ecce Homo which discusses the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche writes:

The third inquiry offers the answer to the question whence the ascetic ideal, the priests' ideal, derives its tremendous power although it is the harmful idea par excellence, a will to the end, an ideal of decadence. Answer: not, as people may believe, because God is
at work behind the priests but *faute de mieux*—because it was the only ideal so far, because it had no rival. “For man would rather will even nothingness than not will”—Above all, a counter-ideal was lacking—*until Zarathustra*. 

As was discussed in the main Introduction, the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is described by Nietzsche as the “basic idea of *Zarathustra*” (*EH,Z*). This is compelling evidence for the claim that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, as the idea which Zarathustra’s animals describe as being that which he will teach, actually constitutes this counterideal. The question is – how would this work? In what sense could either a formula of affirmation, or a metaphysical or physical description of the universe function as an ideal (assuming, at this stage, for the sake of argument, that it constitutes one or the other), in a way that could provide a direction or goal for the human will in a comparable manner to the ascetic ideal?

In this chapter I approach these chapters by developing them in response to the important interpretation of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same developed by Maudemarie Clark in her 1990 book *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Clark argues that affirmation of eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's counter-ideal to the ascetic ideal. I have chosen Clark's book for several reasons. Firstly, being the heir of some ninety years of Nietzsche scholarship, Clark develops her own argument in response to problems with the principal interpretations developed before her. Indeed, she argues convincingly against the interpretations offered by Bernd Magnus and Alexander Nehamas. Secondly, however, Clark’s reading falls prey to the same basic assumption that I believe has caused so many problems in this area of scholarship. Clark assumes that Nietzsche’s goal with respect to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is to “teach” it by communicating its meaning via his books. My thesis marks a distinctive departure from this basic presupposition. Nietzsche has no such goal. Rather, I argue
that Nietzsche’s primary concern is his own relationship to the basic trajectory of
European culture, and in particular his relationship to the will-to-truth.74

Nietzsche considers himself to be a mouth-piece and proponent of the will-to-truth, to
such an extent that he begins to question its value. As such, Nietzsche sees himself as
being personally implicated in the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal. He views this role
as his destiny. With respect to this destiny, Nietzsche’s task is to overthrow the ideals
which comprise the ascetic ideal. In GS, §109 he refers to these ideals as “shadows of
God” and decries the need to defeat them. With respect to the idea of the eternal
recurrence of the same, Nietzsche sees widespread belief in a recurrence cosmology as
being the result of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal. He himself does not need to
teach it per se. He can contribute to the conditions under which this belief will arise by
undermining belief in the ascetic ideal.

I have divided the body of this chapter into six short sections. The first section briefly
outlines Clark’s basic approach to Nietzsche and to the idea of the eternal recurrence of
the same. The second section examines her account of the relationship between the
idea of the eternal recurrence of the same and redemption. Clark’s account
presupposes that Nietzsche is concerned with individual redemption, and I argue that
this presupposition is untenable and not at all supported by Nietzsche’s texts. The third
section outlines my own version of the relationship between eternal recurrence and
redemption. I argue that Nietzsche is concerned to redeem the world, rather than
individuals. The fourth section argues that Clark’s account of how the eternal recurrence
functions as a “counter-ideal” to the ascetic ideal does not make sense, and argues

74 It has been suggested to me that it is not clear why thesis is to be preferred to Clark’s here. I
understand this suggestion to be implying that my reading is somewhat deflationary, and that, in fact,
Nietzsche’s ‘pedagogical aims’ are central to ‘tragedy and drama’ of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. My
response to this is twofold. Firstly, the point of this chapter is to argue that my interpretation of Nietzsche’s
interest in the idea of eternal recurrence makes more sense of Nietzsche’s texts than Clark’s. The
question as to whether such an interpretation is deflationary, or even philosophically interesting is, to me,
beyond the scope of this dissertation. Secondly, I reject a reading of Thus Spoke Zarathustra that places
Zarathustra’s role as a failed teacher of the ‘doctrines’ of eternal recurrence at the heart of the narrative. In
my view (and this reading is outlined in detail in Chapter 5), it is Zarathustra’s self-overcoming (via is
encounter with the idea of eternal recurrence) that forms the core of the work.
instead for the view that inasmuch as the ascetic ideal is an expedient for prolonging the life of a sick organism, it is plausible to consider its counter-ideal to be an expedient for hastening the demise of a sick organism. The fifth section looks briefly at the problems involved in arguing that it is plausible to believe in a recurrence cosmology, and the final section accounts for the Nietzsche's view of himself as the teacher of eternal recurrence.

3.1 Maudemarie Clark and the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same

The overall point of Clark's book is to argue that Nietzsche's philosophical thought followed a certain six-stage development with respect to truth, such that he eventually came to hold a neo-Kantian position. Accordingly, she understands many of Nietzsche's famous rejections of truth as rejections of a metaphysical correspondence theory of truth which had as its basis an obsolete representationalist epistemology which he inherited from Schopenhauer. His mature position, according to Clark, did allow for the substantive pursuit of scientific truths, and was based upon a perspectivist epistemology. Clark argues that the rejections of truth found in Nietzsche's mature works can be explained as stemming from his aversion to the ascetic ideal and his concern about the nature of its relationship to the will to truth.

It is not the place for me to engage in any substantive analysis or criticism of Clark's account of Nietzsche's overall philosophical position. There is, however, one key implication of her account that is crucial to her interpretation of significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. This is her view that Nietzsche's mature view of truth entails the rejection of the pursuit of substantive a priori truths. This is crucial, because, according to Clark, the only arguments that can be found in Nietzsche's work for a cosmological account of recurrence (i.e. in the Nachlass) are based nearly exclusively

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76 Cf. Clark, ibid., 127-159.
77 Cf. Clark, ibid., 159-203.
on a priori considerations. Therefore Clark’s task, as she sees it, is to render Nietzsche consistent with respect to his theory of truth by freeing the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same from dependence on cosmological argumentation.

Clark pursues a two-pronged strategy in order to try and achieve this. On the one hand, she argues for an interpretative approach to Nietzsche that accords much less importance to the Nachlass than to the published texts. On the other hand, she advances what amounts to a prima facie coherent interpretation of the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that is based exclusively on the published materials. I will argue that the first prong is, at best, a tenuous approach to the relationship between Nietzsche’s published and unpublished texts. However, since it is quite literally impossible to conclusively demonstrate that Clark is at fault here, no matter how unreasonable her approach may appear in light of certain considerations, I will also argue that the second prong is ultimately untenable. Clark articulates the significance of the eternal recurrence as being redemptive. However, as I will demonstrate, the model of redemption which she relies on is inappropriate in this context.

With respect to her interpretive approach to Nietzsche, Clark argues that it seems a good idea to postpone relying upon the Nachlass for as long as possible. She quite reasonably claims that the nature of many of Nietzsche’s notes is such that it is difficult to ascertain the context of specific passages. This difficulty increases the likelihood of the interpreter bending the meanings of particular phrases to suit his or her ends. As well as this, Clark argues that as a matter of philosophical principle, where Nietzsche’s notes suggest a different position from that of the published writings, this different position, according to Clark, tends to be weaker. Accordingly, Clark claims that if she can ascribe a defensible and consistent philosophical position to Nietzsche exclusively

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78 She does acknowledge that one could plausibly consider the observation ‘the history of the universe has not yet come to an end’ to be ‘empirical’. Cf. Clark, ibid., 247.
79 Clark, ibid., 247.
80 Clark, ibid., 26.
on the basis of his published works, then the plausibility of granting equal status to the
Nachlass is greatly lessened.\textsuperscript{61}

This latter argument is quite strange. Clark seems to be saying that inasmuch as the
large amount of relevant Nachlass material differs from the published material, it should be ignored. Of course, as Clark acknowledges, it is not really an argument at all. It relies totally on her presenting a "defensible and consistent" interpretation of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same on the exclusive basis of the published texts. With respect to the status of the Nachlass material relating to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, Clark even goes as far as to say the following:

Although these arguments might be relevant for biographical speculation concerning what Nietzsche believed, they remain completely irrelevant to the philosophical question concerning the doctrine he actually presented in his books. We might be justified in saying that he also taught a cosmological doctrine of recurrence in his notebooks. But then he taught two different doctrines of recurrence, and we have no justification for conflating the two or for burdening the evaluation of the doctrine Nietzsche identified as his central teaching with the cosmological doctrine he played with in his notebooks.

In other words, she is saying that even if the Nachlass could be shown to contain strong evidence that Nietzsche himself believed in a recurrence cosmology, this would have no bearing on the significance or sense of the doctrine he taught in his published works. This would be a reasonable position to hold if the published works contained an unequivocal and clear statement of this teaching that could be contrasted with the material in the Nachlass. The problem however, as I discussed in the introductory chapter, is that they do not. The teaching that Clark refers to actually consists of a small

\textsuperscript{61} Clark, ibid., 26-27. It has been suggested to me that the central issue here is not the imputed incompatibility of passages in Nietzsche's published and unpublished works, but rather the absence of any positive argumentation for a recurrence cosmology in the published texts. I agree completely. For my discussion of this point see pp21-28. As I see it, it is precisely this absence of any positive account that makes the notebook entries (spanning 1881-1888) central to any reconstruction of the idea's sense.
number of scattered, oblique, and ambiguous references to eternal recurrence, some of which are contained in the quasi-mystical text *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In such a situation, it is not immediately obvious that the best approach is to discount the large amount of relevant material in the *Nachlass* (written over a period of over at least six years), on the principle that it is “philosophically weaker”. In sum, I remain unconvinced by Clark’s approach, and I cannot make any sense of her suggestion that there are two distinct doctrines of recurrence, one which we should ignore.

Clark begins by arguing for the irrelevance of the ‘truth’ of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, and instead focusing on its significance as a “practical” doctrine (in Clark’s words: “…a directive concerning how to live, rather than a theory concerning the nature of the universe.”82). As discussed, Clark bases her argument for the irrelevance of the cosmological considerations of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same on the fact that no argumentation for a recurrence cosmology was ever published by Nietzsche (one may be tempted to argue that, in doing so, she effectively begs the question!). Whereas other commentators had previously argued to the effect that the mere *logical possibility* of the cosmological version of recurrence could itself have a transformative effect, and that Nietzsche had merely toyed with proofs in order to satisfy himself that it was indeed logically possible,83 Clark rejects logical possibility as being too weak to demand the kind of radical response that Nietzsche obviously thought that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same warranted: “the mere possibility of recurrence seems to require about as much response as the possibility that the sun will not rise tomorrow.”84

According to Clark, the practical considerations are either dependent on the actual veracity of the cosmological version of recurrence, or the latter is totally irrelevant; there

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82 Clark, ibid., 247.
84 Clark, ibid., 250-251.
can be no middle ground. Because there can be no middle ground, and because the arguments for the cosmological account found in the Nachlass are, in Clark’s view, spurious, the only alternative, if one wishes to construe Nietzsche’s thought as consistent and coherent, is to dismiss them and focus solely on the practical considerations. Clark claims that Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same can be explained as an interest in how one would react to the hypothetical situation described in GS,§341. On this reading, Nietzsche’s interest is restricted to one’s attitude towards oneself, insofar as he believed that one’s reaction to the hypothetical scenario was indicative of this attitude. Clark acknowledges that for someone to imagine this scenario in the way that would satisfy Nietzsche’s interests, they would have to suspend their critical instincts and “play the game”. Accordingly, if one reacted joyfully to the demon’s statement about the eternal recurrence of the same, then one would be judged by Nietzsche to have an “affirmative attitude” towards life, whereas if one gnashed one’s teeth, then one would be judged to have a negative stance towards life.

According to Clark, by devising the thought experiment in GS§341, Nietzsche effectively created an “ideal”. This ideal is that of the attitude of the life-affirming person, and it is satisfied by anyone who reacts appropriately to the hypothetical scenario. The significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same for Clark is that it constitutes a test for this ideal. In Clark’s words: “...I interpret Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal recurrence as the presentation of such affirmation as an ideal for human beings.” Clark goes on to argue that the ideal presented by the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is designed by Nietzsche to be the counter-ideal to the ascetic ideal. By interpreting the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same in this manner, Clark claims that we can appreciate why it was of such great importance to Nietzsche, without according it any cosmological significance.

85 Clark, ibid., 251-252.
3.2 Recurrence as a means for individual redemption

Clark claims that Nietzsche's fictional work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the crucial text for determining the nature of the doctrine of eternal recurrence. In line with her overall stance, she claims Zarathustra teaches a doctrine of "affirmation of eternal recurrence", rather than a recurrence cosmology. In order to demonstrate this, Clark devotes a considerable proportion of her account of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to explaining key passages of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. She begins her analysis by stating that "Zarathustra apparently teaches eternal recurrence as a doctrine of redemption." Indeed, the crucial point for Clark is her view that a cosmological doctrine of recurrence is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for redemption. She defines redemption in this context by highlighting the following passage from *Ecce Homo*:

Zarathustra once defines, quite strictly, his task – it is mine, too – and there is no mistaking his meaning: he says Yes to the point of justifying, of redeeming even all of the past (EH III, Z, § 8).

For Clark this Yes-saying of Zarathustra is equivalent to him affirming the eternal recurrence of the same. Belief in a recurrence cosmology, without affirmation, would have no redeeming effect. On the other hand, affirmation does not, according to Clark, require belief (after all, it can be affirmative of a hypothetical situation!). This seems fair enough. Belief in a recurrence cosmology is obviously not, in and of itself, *redemptive*. However, Clark's point stands or falls on what redemption means in this context. In order to clarify this, Clark appeals to the following part of Zarathustra's speech to the hunchback from the chapter 'On Redemption':

'It was' – that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, it is an angry spectator of all that is past. The

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86 Clark, ibid., 256.
87 Clark, ibid., 256.
88 Z, cited in Clark, ibid., 257-258.
will cannot will backwards; and that it cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy.

Willing liberates; what means does the will devise for itself to get rid of its melancholy and to mock its dungeon? Alas every prisoner becomes a fool; and the imprisoned will redeems itself foolishly. That time does not run backwards, that is its wrath; 'that which was' is the name of the stone it cannot move. And it moves stones out of wrath and displeasure, and it wreaks revenge on whatever does not feel wrath and displeasure as it does. Thus the will, the liberator, took to hurting; and on all who can suffer it wreaks revenge for its inability to go backwards. This, indeed this alone, is what revenge is: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was'.

Verily, a great folly dwells in our will; and it has become a curse for everything human that this folly has acquired spirit.

The spirit of revenge, my friends, has so far been the subject of man's best reflection; and where there was suffering, one always wanted punishment too. For 'punishment' is what revenge calls itself; with a hypocritical lie it creates a good conscience for itself.

Because there is suffering in those who will, inasmuch as they cannot will backwards, willing itself and all life were supposed to be—a punishment. And now cloud upon cloud rolled over the spirit, until eventually madness preached, 'Everything passes away; therefore everything deserves to pass away. And this too is justice, this law of time that it must devour its children.' Thus preached madness.

Clark argues that, according to Zarathustra, willing has redemptive force. This works as follows: if one is not happy with the way things are, one can strive to change them by setting goals and working towards them (i.e. in willing). In Clark’s view, the will can thereby liberate us from our suffering (Clark apparently equates this liberation with redemption). However, when it comes to the past, the will can obviously not liberate us by setting goals, etc. This, according to Clark, can lead to depression. To counter this

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89 Clark, ibid., 258. It has been suggested to me that the heart of Clark's view of redemption is less a question of the redemptive power of willing, and more recognition of the idea that redemption concerns 'a certain appropriation of the past'. It seems to me that, if this is the case, such a view is in accordance with my thesis, with the caveat that this redemptive appropriation of the past pertains to the kind of religious redemption that Nietzsche wants to reject as belonging to the ascetic ideal. For more discussion see pp108-113.
depression, the will can act from "revenge". Clark explains that by taking revenge upon the object perceived to be the cause of the will's suffering, the sufferer experiences a sense of power relative to the object in question. According to Clark, the point of the above passage is Zarathustra's claim, that inventors of traditional redemptive doctrines (i.e. priests) have employed a "spiritualized" version of this basic psychological strategy. According to this reading, these inventors interpret life as a punishment, and see time as being inferior to eternity, and these objects (life, time, and temporal-life) are blamed for being the source of human suffering, and people are taught to revenge themselves against them.

Clark has here offered what we might think of as the "psychological structure" of redemption. It consists in gaining power over the source of suffering, by making it an object for the will. Clark now claims that by teaching affirmation of eternal recurrence, Zarathustra overcomes the will's powerlessness in the face of the past by allowing the will the experience of a certain kind of power in relation to it. One cannot change the past, but by affirming one's own recurrence, one must accept the inevitability of past events and thereby, in a limited sense, "choose" them. This gives the feeling of a certain kind of power relative to the past – and this, according to Clark, is redemptive. Clark cites the same chapter from Zarathustra again:

I led you away from these fables when I taught you, 'The will itself is a creator.' All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident – until the creative will says to it, 'But this I willed it.' Until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I will it; thus shall I will it.'

But has the will yet spoken thus and when will that happen? Has the will been harnessed yet from its own folly? Has the will yet become the redeemer and joy-bringer? Has it unlearned the spirit of revenge and all gnashing of teeth? And who taught it reconciliation with time and something higher than any reconciliation? For that will which is the will to power must will something higher than any reconciliation; but how shall this be brought about? Who can teach it also to will backwards?

90 Clark, ibid., 258.
Clark claims that the "willing backwards" referred to by Zarathustra in this passage is equivalent to affirmation of the eternal recurrence of the same. She argues that, since actual recurrence would not enable people to will backwards, belief in this recurrence would not liberate the will. If we cannot affirm recurrence, says Clark, belief in it would only make things worse.\textsuperscript{91} Whereas, if we can affirm recurrence, belief in it is unnecessary since we should have no need for revenge against the past or time in general.\textsuperscript{92} Therefore, argues Clark, there is no point in Zarathustra teaching a recurrence cosmology.

I agree with Clark that belief in a recurrence cosmology does not, in and of itself, liberate the will. However, there is something slightly odd about her account of redemption in this context. Clark writes: "'On Redemption' goes on to present eternal recurrence as liberation from both revenge and the doctrines inspired by it."\textsuperscript{93} Yet, Clark herself seems to have argued that the structure of redemption entails a kind of vengefulness, inasmuch as it requires the will to experience power relative to the cause of its suffering. According to Clark, by affirming the eternal recurrence of the same, one effectively makes one's past the object of a kind of choice. Now the logic here is that, presumably, by choosing the past in this way, one is empowering oneself in relation to it. In other words, one thereby gains a kind of power over the cause of one's suffering. This mirrors the psychological structure of redemption that she had previously outlined in terms of revenge. The problem is that it is impossible to tell what differentiates this account of redemption from the "spirit of revenge" which Zarathustra purports to reject. Clark may argue that the sense of choice \textit{vis à vis} the past, which she believes is facilitated by affirmation of eternal recurrence, and the nature of the power this entails relative to the cause of one's suffering, are essentially non-vengeful, but she does not provide any detail that would clarify this distinction.

\textsuperscript{91} Clark, ibid., 260.  
\textsuperscript{92} Clark, ibid., 260.  
\textsuperscript{93} Clark, ibid., 258.
I think that, in general, Clark has not thought through what Nietzsche means by redemption, and her failure to do so ultimately renders her position untenable. I do not deny that redemption is a major *motif* of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and in Nietzsche's philosophy more generally, but the question is — redemption of what? Clark's whole argument here assumes that redemption pertains to individuals, and functions at the level of a psychological mechanism. In her account Zarathustra teaches affirmation of recurrence in order to prevent depression by liberating the will. But what if Nietzsche means something quite different by redemption, and what if Zarathustra's redemptive task is not the redemption of individuals? The passages that Clark herself cites are not unequivocal evidence for her assumption. However, before we return to them in more detail, consider the following passage from *Ecce Homo* ('Why I Am So Clever', §1) in which Nietzsche claims to be totally uninterested in the problem of redemption:

Why do I know a few things *more*? Why am I altogether so clever? I have never reflected on questions that are none—I have not wasted myself.

Really religious difficulties, for example, I don't know from experience... “God,” “immortality of the soul,” “redemption,” “beyond”—without exception, concepts of which I have never devoted any attention, or time; not even as a child.

What is one to make of this? Is it a case of one of Nietzsche's infamous contradictions perhaps? Incipient insanity? A deliberate and spurious re-interpretation of the past? Or, one might simply say, that it is only “religious” redemption that Nietzsche objects to — and that he (and Zarathustra too) is interested in an atheistic form of redemption. I do not think that any of these answers are right. Nietzsche is simply uninterested in the question of individual redemption. If we examine the passages of Nietzsche's texts that refer to redemption, and there are many, we find two kinds. The only mention we find of redeemed people, individuals, consciences or souls are negative and are in the context of disparaging comments about priests. The positive references to redemption are essentially different, and pertain to the redemption of the world, of nature, of reality, or of time. For example, in *GS*, §109, which, as I have already suggested, constitutes a basic
account of Nietzsche's intentions, he describes his desire to "naturalize humanity with... a newly redeemed nature". In Ecce Homo, Nietzsche notes that Zarathustra (as cited by Clark herself) describes his redemptive task as pertaining to the redemption of "the past" and "all it was". GM:II, §24 contains a particularly famous passage about redemption:

But some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength will not let him rest in any aloofness or any beyond, whose isolation is misunderstood by the people as if it were flight from reality—while it is only his absorption, immersion, penetration into reality, so that, when one day he emerges again into the light, he may bring home the redemption of this reality: its redemption from the curse that the hitherto reigning ideal has laid upon it. This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to earth and his hope to man; this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness—he must come one day.—

The predominant sense here is that it is "reality" that must be redeemed. Moreover, it is to be redeemed from the "curse laid upon it by the hitherto reigning ideal" — which we know is the ascetic ideal. Certainly, Nietzsche also speaks of redeeming "us" from "nihilism", but there is no reason to assume that "us" here refers to "each of our individual selves", it could just as easily refer to "humanity" and function at the level of the species. In Twilight of the Idols ('The Four Great Errors', §8), Nietzsche writes: "What alone can our teaching be? - ... The concept 'God' has hitherto been the greatest objection to existence.... We deny God; in denying God, we deny accountability: only by doing that do we redeem the world. —"

Other passages in which Nietzsche refers to redemption are generally critical. For example, discussing Schopenhauer in Twilight of the Idols ('Expeditions of an Untimely Man', §21), Nietzsche argues that he is the merely the heir of a Christian interpretation
of existence inasmuch as he looked for ways of including the great “cultural facts” of mankind within a basic narrative of redemption:

...he knew how to make what Christianity had rejected, the great cultural facts of mankind, and approve of them from a Christian, that is to say nihilistic, point of view (namely as roads to ‘redemption’, as preliminary forms of ‘redemption’, as stimulants of the thirst for ‘redemption’).

The implication here is that it is Christian (and nihilistic) to interpret existence as primarily pertaining to individual redemption. This is a straightforward point for Nietzsche, and fits in with his basic analysis of the ascetic ideal. If one construes the whole of existence as pertaining to one’s individual redemption, then one assumes that existence is something that requires redemption. In other words, life is assumed to be a wrong road that requires correction, a mere path to the beyond. According to Nietzsche, one thereby assumes that existence is fundamentally a bad thing, a burden, or a punishment. To say it another way, one adopts a negative stance towards existence. It is from the harm caused by this widespread assumption that Nietzsche wishes to redeem the world. If this task is in fact the point of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, why would Zarathustra perpetuate a negative stance towards life by teaching a doctrine of individual redemption?

My point here is that Nietzsche’s published texts do not provide grounds for the assumption that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same (or indeed any aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy) is intended to facilitate redemption at the level of the psychology of the individual. It seems that, inasmuch as Nietzsche wants to redeem anything, he wants to redeem the ‘world’, ‘time’, ‘nature’ and ‘reality’. The world, according to Nietzsche requires redemption from the ascetic. This could be another way of saying that it needs to be redeemed from humanity (as proponents and manifestations of the ascetic ideal). Aside from her general interpretive approach, and her thesis about Nietzsche’s theory of truth, Clark’s principal argument for the irrelevance of the
cosmological version of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is that it is neither
a necessary nor sufficient condition of redemption. I believe that I have demonstrated
that her account of redemption is, at best, highly questionable, and not easily
reconcilable with Nietzsche's other statements about it. Two questions immediately arise
from this. Firstly, how are we to more fully understand redemption in the context of it
pertaining to the world or nature? Secondly, if it is not a doctrine of individual
redemption, then how does the idea of the eternal recurrence fit into all of this?

3.3 Recurrence and redemption of the world
If we now reflect back upon the passages that Clark referred to in order to support her
account of redemption, with an eye for Nietzsche's stated wish to redeem the world, we
can see quite clearly that one of the key points of the passage is simply that the former
teachings about redemption, in the context of the spirit of revenge (including the
problem of the will's relationship to time), were simply the preachings of "madness":

'Things are ordered morally according to justice and punishment. Alas, where is
redemption from the flux of things and from the punishment called existence?' Thus
preached madness.

'Can there be redemption if there is eternal justice? Alas, the stone it was cannot be
moved: all punishments must be eternal too.' Thus preached madness.

'No deed can be annihilated: how could it be undone by punishment? This, this is what
is eternal in the punishment called existence, that existence must eternally become
deed and guilt again. Unless the will should at last redeem himself, and willing should
become not willing.' But, my brothers, you know this fable of madness.

In fact, I would argue that the point Zarathustra is making here is that the whole
problematic of redemption, and the traditional dialectic between sin and grace, as well
as profound concerns about justice and punishment, should all be considered as the
preachings of madness. In the terms later articulated in On the Genealogy of Morals,
they were the teachings of the priests devised to make humanity sicker. The passage ends:

But has the will yet spoken thus and when will that happen? Has the will been unharnessed yet from its own folly? Has the will yet become the redeemer and joy-bringer? Has it unlearned the spirit of revenge and all gnashing of teeth? And who taught it reconciliation with time and something higher than any reconciliation? For that will which is the will to power must will something higher than any reconciliation; but how shall this be brought about? Who can teach it also to will backwards?

Clark reads this last passage as implying that the problem of redemption is the problem of reconciling the will with time. But it is not self-evident that this interpretation is warranted. To be sure, Zarathustra clearly states that the problem for the will (in the context of redemption) is its relationship to time: it cannot will backwards. This is the source of its “gnashing of teeth”. According to Clark, Zarathustra formulates the doctrine of affirmation of recurrence in order to solve this problematic relationship to time. But what if Zarathustra’s point here is more straightforward? What if he is saying simply that the problem with the whole traditional problematic of redemption is that it leads to a basic impasse? It amounts to the will confronting the past. However, the will simply cannot will backwards. Thus, no matter how much human ingenuity is devoted to the problem of redemption, and no matter how many teachings and preachings concern themselves with it, the basic problem is, and always will be, irresolvable. Indeed, according to Nietzsche’s analysis of the ascetic ideal, the priests have deliberately led people deep into this perverse dialectical quagmire precisely in order to distract and further sicken them, presumably secure in the knowledge the basic paradox which underlies their teachings can never be solved.

Zarathustra’s response to this works at several levels. While he has criticized and rejected the whole problematic of redemption as being the product of “madness”, he
does, I think, retain some ironic respect for the term. Here is an earlier passage from 'On Redemption':

The now and the past on earth—alas, my friends, that is what I find most unendurable; and I should not know how to live if I were not also a seer of that which must come. A seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future... to redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption.

I think that in this case, Zarathustra "lowers himself" to the level of the hunchbacks to whom he is speaking, and tries to engage with them on their own terms. In other words, while he himself thinks that the problem of redemption is a pseudo-problem and a dead end, he can appreciate that it still occupies others, and so he condescends to try to translate it into his own framework. Zarathustra, as a truth-seeker par excellence, has total insight into the nature of reality, and, in particular, to the dreadful spectacle of human décadence and sickness. He finds this widespread sickness depressing, and blames the priests for it. However, what prevents Zarathustra from despairing as a result of this insight is that he also knows what the future will hold, and he understands that he himself is one small link in the chain that will eventually become the future. Zarathustra sees that the current state of humanity is actually a "bridge to the Übermensch", and this affords him powerful solace. Because this insight into the future prevents him from becoming depressed and suicidally-nihilistic, Zarathustra refers to it as redemption, because it seems to him to be in some sense equivalent to that feeling which is yearned for by the hunchbacks. However, it remains the case that, having made his own peace with time, by seeing that it is the precondition of a desirable future, Zarathustra himself yearns for "something higher than any reconciliation".

I assume that this something higher is the redemption of the world. My thesis is that, according to Nietzsche, the world will be redeemed simply by the existence and prevalence of the Übermensch. We know from On the Genealogy of Morals that
Nietzsche’s ardent desire was for “but one glance of something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty, triumphant...” (GM: I, §12). Likewise, in The Anti-Christ, §3 he writes:

The problem that I raise here is not what ought to succeed mankind in the sequence of species (– the human being is a conclusion –): but what type of human being one ought to breed, ought to will, as more valuable, more worthy of life, more certain of the future. This more valuable type has existed often enough already: but as a lucky accident, as an exception, never as willed.

The main idea here concerns the human type that is “more worthy of life”. To put it crudely, I believe that Zarathustra is attempting to redeem the world by breeding a type of human that is more worthy of life. Life, nature, and the world will be redeemed on this account simply by the prevalence of “perfect, wholly achieved, happy” humans. The logic of this notion of redemption is that everything is justified by being part of the creation of something beautiful. The name of this beautiful type of human being, this “higher organic system” (GS, §113), that will redeem reality is, in Zarathustra’s idiom, the “Übermensch”. Zarathustra’s problem (and hence his redemptive task) is the problem of how to bring about the optimal conditions for the prevalence of the Übermensch. We know that Zarathustra is the teacher of the eternal recurrence of the same. As discussed above, Clark argues that if one is not able to affirm eternal recurrence, then belief in a recurrence cosmology would actually “make things worse”.94 I agree with her on this. One possible solution then to Zarathustra’s problem is for him to teach a recurrence cosmology precisely because it “can only make things worse”.

My thesis, in fact, is that belief in a recurrence cosmology makes things so much worse, according to Nietzsche, and makes one’s suffering appear so incredibly senseless, that it actually brings about the very depression (suicidal nihilism) that Clark assumes that Zarathustra is attempting to combat. This reading makes straightforward sense of Nietzsche’s frequent references to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as

94 Clark, ibid., 259-260.
being awful, abysmal, and terrible. As Clark herself points out, for those to whom the affirmation of the eternal recurrence of the same comes easily, the fact of a recurrence cosmology is not such a big deal. This is so, I would add, because the wills of these individuals are already structured in a way that accords with a recurrence cosmology. They are not décadent – and therefore not turned against themselves, or against the past. They have no reason to be depressed. This is in fact what, according to Nietzsche, defines them as healthy. They are already proto-Übermenschen. Nietzsche describes them when he says (as already cited above): “This more valuable type has existed often enough already: but as a lucky accident, as an exception, never as willed.” (A, §3)

Accordingly, Zarathustra’s animals testify to the fact that they themselves experience life in a manner which is in accord with a recurrence cosmology (Z,III, ‘The Convalescent’):

‘O Zarathustra,’ the animals said, ‘to those who think as we do, all things themselves are dancing: they come back and offer their hands and laugh and flee—and come back. Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of being is built. Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the ring of being remains faithful to itself. In every Now, being begins; round every Here rolls the sphere There. The centre is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity.’

In other words, according to Nietzsche, this is the way that natural beings experience life. Presumably, when Nietzsche describes his desire to naturalize humanity (and thereby redeem nature), this is precisely what he has in mind. My suggestion to Clark is that Nietzsche does not seek to naturalize each individual by exposing them to the transformative effect of his counter-ideal, rather, he seeks to teach a doctrine that will redeem the world by bringing about the naturalization of the species. It may be that the best way to affect this kind of large-scale change would be simply to cull the sick which,

95 This will be explained in more detail in Chapter Six.
96 Cf. GS, §309.
according to Nietzsche, make up the majority of the species, and thus diminish their capacity to influence the character and future development of the species.\textsuperscript{97}

3.4 Recurrence as counter-ideal
I have framed this chapter by suggesting that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same functions as a counter ideal to the ascetic ideal. So having just articulated my positive thesis in relation to the problem of redemption, I'll now discuss how this might work as a counter-ideal. Once again, I'll use Clark's argument as a starting point. Clark argues that affirmation of the eternal is Nietzsche's counter-ideal to the ascetic ideal. The important question here, as I see it, is whether or not the idealization of an affirmative stance towards oneself and life can function as an ideal in a comparable manner to the way in which the ascetic ideal functions. It strikes me that there is a crucial difference between the functioning of the ideal of affirmation as interpreted by Clark, and the function of the ascetic ideal as taught by the priests. On Clark's reading, what is idealized and taught by Nietzsche, in an attempt to counter the ascetic ideal, is a particular attitude or stance as such – an attitude which can be tested by undertaking the thought experiment provided in GS, §341. The ascetic ideal, on the other hand, is not taught as an attitude or stance as such. It is the idealization of particular kinds of behaviour. Nietzsche describes this idealization as the expedient invented by priests in order to prolong the life of a sick animal.

According to Nietzsche, the priests' teaching expresses a particular stance against life but, with respect to its content, as a teaching, it does not articulate a particular attitude.

\textsuperscript{97} The implications of this reading are, it goes without saying, quite confronting. In the conclusion to the dissertation I discuss how I reconcile my view of Nietzsche as a lover of wisdom, with someone who propounds such difficult and violent ideas. For now, it should be noted that the way in which a philosophy of life becomes oriented toward a politics of death remains a central issue in bio politics. For some interesting treatments of this see: Foucault, Michel, \textit{Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France, 1974-1975}, edited by Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, English series editor: Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Graham Burchell, (Picador, USA 2003); Agamben, Giorgio, \textit{Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life} (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press 1998); and especially Esposito, Roberto, \textit{Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy}, translated by Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
The priest does not teach his followers to "adopt a negative attitude towards life". The follower is already sick with a bad conscience (as a result of his or her enslavement within the walls of society), and is in danger of contracting depression and suicidal nihilism from insight into the meaninglessness of his or her suffering. The priest teaches doctrines such as 'original sin', 'repentance', and 'redemption'. He or she likewise attaches moral significance to the kinds of behaviour he or she instinctively engages in (asceticism). These teachings express, according to Nietzsche, a negative attitude towards life as such (the ressentiment of the priest), but, more importantly, they are only capable of succeeding because the sickness which they combat is so prevalent. Nietzsche expresses his admiration of the psychological nous of the priests inasmuch as they were perceptive enough to realize that, because of the prevalence of this sickness (decadence), they could obtain power by cultivating it and exploiting it for their own ends (i.e. their war against the aristocratic knights).

This picture is further complicated by the fact that the ascetic ideal is, according to Nietzsche, as a result of its refinement of truthfulness, in the process of overcoming itself by undermining the moral world view it has created. Such is the immense world historical scale of this trajectory that it is not something that it is plausibly within the power of Zarathustra to control. Europe is, accordingly, under immanent threat of gaining insight into the senselessness of the widespread and inevitable suffering of humanity, and therefore of a new bout of suicidal nihilism. On Clark's reading, Nietzsche's response to this huge crisis is to articulate an affirmative attitude (which affirms 'this life' and 'this world' – and not some 'other' world), have it taught by a fictional character who speaks in parables, and to provide a test (in the form of a thought experiment involving a conversation with a demon), such that one can suspend one's critical faculties and take part in it to see if one has the appropriate attitude. For this to

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96 It has been suggested to me that this sentence implies a very one-sided view of truthfulness, seeing is exclusively as a 'negative' value (and thereby disregarding a more differentiated reading that allows for nobles calling themselves 'truthful ones' etc.). In response to this I direct the reader to Chapter 2, section 2 in which I give an account of the development of the will to truth. In that account I show that it is only the development of a particular moral evaluation of truthfulness (Cf. p90) that is central to the development of the ascetic ideal.
be even remotely sensible, Clark has to assume that it is plausible that, upon receiving Zarathustra’s teaching, people would then adopt the requisite stance towards ‘life’ and thereby save themselves from nihilism.

This assumption rests upon what Clark refers to as the transformative power of Zarathustra’s doctrine. My view is that there is no such transformative power, or at least none that is psychologically plausible in the sense that Clark requires (i.e. one that provides the individual will with a new goal to replace that which it loses as a result of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal). I cannot see any conceivable model by which the act of communicating the ideal of affirming the eternal recurrence could have an effect on people at a level commensurate with Nietzsche’s concerns, i.e. as having a large-scale, critical and defining impact on the future of European culture. Excepting people already on the fringes of psychological normalcy (whatever that means), it is highly unreasonable to expect that any rational person would simply adopt and/or sustain a Nietzschean stance towards life simply because he or she had read Thus Spoke Zarathustra, – even if he or she wanted to.

Indeed, the level at which Nietzsche analyzes the will and distinguishes between the healthy and the sick is primarily at the level of the instincts. Someone is defined as sick when his or her instincts are turned against him or her self. Consciousness, as Nietzsche writes frequently, is a surface phenomenon. It emerges in order to deal with the problems that are caused by the fact of the instincts being in disharmony. According to his argument in Twilight of the Idols (‘The Problem of Socrates’), the growth of rationality itself, and science, is the result of the need to control these discordant instincts. This discord is therefore the source of the will to truth. It is clear that whatever

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90 It has been suggested that by rejecting the transformative effect of recurrence in this sense I am contradicting myself inasmuch as the definition of ‘transformative’ includes the further sickening of the organism in question. In order to clarify my point here I note that by transformative I mean a transformation in the fundamental type of the organism in question i.e. from life-denying to life-affirming, or from ‘priest’ to ‘slave’ etc. I do not consider the further sickening of an already sick organism to be a transformation but rather the acceleration, accentuation or manifestation of an already inherent basic quality.
the nature of the crisis associated with the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal turns out to be, it is highly likely to be a crisis that effects people at this same physiological level. I therefore think it is simply implausible to suggest that Nietzsche thought that by articulating, or by communicating through writing, an affirmative attitude which countered the ascetic ideal, that this crisis could be averted.

One can agree that affirmation of the eternal recurrence represents something of an ideal for Nietzsche. However, without a convincing account of how this ideal fits realistically with the logic of the essentially historical and prophetic thesis that the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal will come to represent a crisis of unparalleled proportions for European culture, such an account remains incomplete. Consider the following: one of the fundamental presuppositions of On the Genealogy of Morals is that European humanity was sick, remains sick, and, in fact, has got sicker. The three essays which comprise it are designed as hypotheses that explain how this came about. Whether we agree with its content or not, the text undeniably attests to Nietzsche’s desire to safeguard the future of humanity by protecting the healthy and well-constituted from the sick (which constitute the overwhelming majority of humanity). At one point he even describes the need for a “very uninhibited hand” (GM:III, §26). Compare this with the claim in §2 of The Anti-Christ, written the following year: “The weak and ill-constituted shall perish: first principle of our philanthropy. And one shall help them to do so.” On the basis of this overall concern, it makes sense to conclude that whatever the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same amounts to in toto, it is reasonable to suppose that it at least plays some role in facilitating or complementing this principle of philanthropy. This is a dimension of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that is completely lacking from Clark’s interpretation.

In line with this consideration, my thesis, to say it a slightly different way, is that Nietzsche believes that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same will function as a principle of his special kind of philanthropy because it is an articulation of the most extreme nihilism thinkable. Put very crudely, according to Nietzsche, the sick will find life
untenable upon the basis of the apparent goallessness entailed by belief in an eternally recurring universe, they will become depressed and, eventually, they will die out. On the other hand, the healthy will understand the idea of the eternal recurrence as the highest thinkable formula of affirmation, and hence survive and flourish. Thus the ascetic ideal will overcome itself by bringing about the demise of its own manifestations (i.e. sick people). The ascetic ideal is described by Nietzsche as an expedient for prolonging the existence of a decadent or degenerating organism – surely it is plausible to describe its "self-overcoming" as its transformation into an expedient for accelerating the demise of these same organisms.

The presupposition of this thesis, however, is that people do in fact come to believe in the cosmological version of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. The question is: why should they? We have seen that Clark rejects such a possibility. Not only does she see such belief as being irrelevant because she claims to be able to provide a plausible and convincing account of its significance without recourse to such belief (a claim I reject), but, perhaps more importantly, she also sees no reason to accept the truth of recurrence. She argues that the cosmological arguments found in the Nachlass have been analyzed in depth and have been “found wanting” on a number of different counts.100

3.5 Believing in a recurrence cosmology
My thesis is that Nietzsche predicts that people will, as a result of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal, come to accept as true a world view that included, or was based upon, a recurrence cosmology. Thus, the psychological and physiological effects of believing in a recurrence cosmology are a key aspect of my analysis. In rejecting the possible relevance of believing in such a cosmology, on the basis of the prima facie weakness of Nietzsche’s arguments in the Nachlass, Clark would appear to hold a strong position

100 Clark, ibid., 246.
here. However, I hope to show here that the question of the strength of Nietzsche’s arguments does not pose a problem for my interpretation.

In Chapter Four, I argue that it is entirely plausible for Nietzsche to take a cosmological version of eternal recurrence seriously. The main point I make here is simply that it is not at all inconsistent or contradictory of Nietzsche to remain personally agnostic about the possibility of an eternally recurring universe, having affirmed it as a logical possibility, while believing that other people would come to accept it as true. This is the position I ascribe to Nietzsche. Clark might counter this and argue that if Nietzsche himself is not convinced about the truth, or at least the strong likelihood, of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, then he is hardly justified in expecting others to attain such conviction. Moreover, if, as I have suggested, what is instrumental in bringing about the overcoming of the ascetic ideal, and hence widespread belief in the veracity of a recurrence cosmology, is the refinement of the intellect and the cultivation of science that constitutes the kernel of the ascetic ideal, then Clark might argue that the onus is surely on Nietzsche to show that such belief is indeed in accordance with scientific thinking – rather than, say, popular superstition or mythology. I accept that this is a reasonable suggestion, and I will deal with it at length in Chapter Four. However, at a purely formal level, I think the force of Clark’s objection is mitigated.

While Nietzsche certainly did not present a convincing argument for either the veracity of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as such, or for the possibility of its future widespread acceptance (although, as I argued in the introductory chapter, and will argue further in Chapter Four, it is certainly a reasonable and cogent view to hold), there is enough evidence in the Nachlass to suggest that he did in fact think that others at least would come to believe in it. Consider, for example, the following note from 1887 (WP, §55):

Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind. Thus the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in aim – and
meaninglessness, is the psychologically necessary affect once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable. Nihilism appears at that point, not that the displeasure at existence has become greater than before but because one has come to mistrust any "meaning" in suffering, indeed in existence. One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered the interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain.

If one considers the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to be the most nihilistic and terrible idea, then this note constitutes an argument for the psychological likelihood of it garnering acceptance subsequent to the demise of the Christian-moral interpretation of existence. This is not at all an argument for the truth of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same per se. Whatever fundamental role is to be played by the will-to-truth in the overcoming of the ascetic ideal, it would be premature to think that it was the only effective psychological force at work, or that the transition from an erroneous world view to a true one would be necessarily clean and straightforward. Nietzsche does not elaborate on the nature of the "psychological necessity" mentioned in the above note in any detail – but the note itself is evidence that he thought that the result of the overthrow of a such a powerful and enduring interpretation of existence as was provided by Christianity would be likely to be an extreme counter-interpretation. The following passage is from the same note (WP, §55):

Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: "the eternal recurrence." This is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the "meaningless"), eternally! The European form of Buddhism: the energy of knowledge and strength compels this belief. It is the most scientific of all possible hypotheses. We deny end goals: if existence had one it would have to have been reached.

This passage clearly identifies the extreme position mentioned above as being the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Recurrence is also quite clearly discussed as a cosmology, and the passage includes one of the main premises of an argument for such
a cosmology. With these considerations in mind, it certainly seems reasonable to suppose that Nietzsche himself thought that there was some likelihood of others believing in a recurrence cosmology, and that such eventual belief fitted in with the basic trajectory that Nietzsche had outlined for Europe. Clark would presumably reject my argument here because I have based it upon an unpublished note, rather than an excerpt from one of Nietzsche’s published books. However, as I have already discussed, it seems reasonable to me to make use of this material.

Indeed, I think one of the strengths of my interpretation is that it coheres fully with both Nietzsche’s published and unpublished writings. For example, consider the following two notes, both from 1884 (around the time of the publication of the third part of Thus Spoke Zarathustra):

My philosophy brings the triumphant idea of which all other modes of thought will ultimately perish. It is the great cultivating idea: the races that cannot bear it stand condemned; those who find it the greatest benefit are chosen to rule... (WP, §1053).

I want to teach the idea that gives many the right to erase themselves – the great cultivating idea... (WP, §1056).

In these two passages (and many others that adopt similar terminology), Nietzsche quite clearly refers to the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as being an idea that “cultivates”. He quite literally claims that it will lead to suicide (of the many) and that races which cannot bear it will be “condemned”. The result will be that the races which find it beneficial (i.e. can bear it, and rejoice in it) will become the rulers. According to my interpretation, Nietzsche thought that the ascendency of such races would constitute “redemption” for the world, because then the world would be populated and celebrated by a “life-affirming” rather than a “life-denying” species.
3.6 The teacher of eternal recurrence

A key aspect of Nietzsche's relation to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same remains to be clarified; this is question of how he teaches it. In ZIII, 'The Convalescent' Zarathustra's animals tell him that he is the teacher of the eternal recurrence and, at the end of Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche refers to himself as the "teacher of eternal recurrence". As I highlighted in the introductory chapter, this is confusing because neither Thus Spoke Zarathustra, nor any of Nietzsche's other published texts, contain anything that could be considered a teaching in a straightforward didactic sense. Zarathustra, after being told by his animals that he will teach the eternal recurrence, does not appear to do so. He certainly doesn't go out and proclaim a recurrence cosmology to anybody. Indeed this lack of teaching is used by Clark as evidence for the fact that neither Nietzsche, nor Zarathustra, intended the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to have cosmological significance.

As already stated, according to Nietzsche, belief in a recurrence cosmology is the expected result of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal. In other words, Nietzsche predicts that it will take hold after the "shadows of God" (GS, §109) are defeated. Why would Nietzsche bother teaching a doctrine that he thought was going to take hold anyway, albeit at some point in the future? There are two primary considerations here. Firstly, I believe that Nietzsche did not think that the conditions were ripe for belief in a recurrence cosmology during the time he was writing. This is an underlying theme of his philosophy. For example, Twilight of the Idols begins: "this book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them is even living yet.... Only the day after tomorrow belongs to me. Some are born posthumously." Zarathustra bemoans the fact that he has come too early, and that people do not understand him: "I am not the mouth for these ears", he says (Z, Prologue). Moreover, Beyond Good and Evil is subtitled 'Prelude for a Philosophy of the Future'.

Secondly, if the conditions for belief in a recurrence cosmology, and hence the redemption of the world that Nietzsche seeks, are not ripe, and this is because the
“shadows of God” remain undefeated, then Nietzsche can contribute to bringing about the redemption he desires by contributing to the defeat of these “shadows”. Indeed, Nietzsche views this destructive task as his destiny. Again, this is an underlying theme of Nietzsche’s relationship to his own work. Consider the Preface to Ecce Homo:

Seeing that before long I must confront humanity with the most difficult demand ever made of it, it seems indispensable to me to say who I am... The last thing I should promise would be to “improve” mankind. No new idols are erected by me; let the old ones learn what feet of clay mean. Overthrowing idols (my world for “ideals”)—that comes closer to being part of my craft.

In this Nietzsche appeals to the future crisis, which he thinks will be associated with his name. As far as his practice is concerned, he claims that he is not in the business of erecting “new idols (ideals)”. He is in the business of overthrowing the old ones. In other words, Nietzsche himself is not concerned with erecting a counter-ideal to the ascetic ideal per se. His destiny is to overthrow the hitherto reigning ideals (i.e. the ascetic ideal) by being a mouthpiece for the will-to-truth which is the key effective force that brings about the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal. However, in effecting this self-overcoming, Nietzsche himself believes that he will thereby bring about the conditions under which belief in the eternal recurrence of the same can flourish. In summary, I argue that Nietzsche sees himself, and Zarathustra, as teachers of the eternal recurrence by virtue of the fact that their destructive work will bring about the conditions under which belief in the eternal recurrence of the same will flourish.

Conclusion
In sum, Nietzsche is interested in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to the extent that he predicts that it will have a major role in shaping the future. Nietzsche believes that, as a result of a moral compulsion for truthfulness, Europeans will eventually reject the Christian world view and accept a recurrence cosmology. Nietzsche thinks that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is so potent that when it
becomes a prevalent belief it will radically alter the aspect of European culture. It will apparently achieve this influence by bringing about widespread depression and suicidal nihilism, and ultimately thereby bringing about the demise of the "weak and ill-constituted". Subsequent to this "demise", the strong and happy would inherit the earth, thus "redeeming" it.

Nietzsche sees no need to 'teach' the eternal recurrence of the same didactically. He considers himself to be the foremost proponent of the will-to-truth, and, as such, to be destined to bring about the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal by overthrowing its 'idols'. In any case, the underlying logic of the development of the ascetic ideal, in a certain sense makes any 'teaching' of the eternal recurrence of the same redundant, since it is inevitable anyway. Thus, in line with the grand historical unfolding of the logic of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche understands his own destructive role to be his 'destiny'.

This interpretation of the significance of the eternal recurrence of the same relies itself on a number of critical assumptions. These are: that it is plausible for Nietzsche to believe that a recurrence cosmology could be an object of widespread belief; that it is plausible for Nietzsche to think that belief in a recurrence cosmology could lead to depression and "suicidal nihilism"; finally, that it is plausible for Nietzsche to think that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same could have a positive relationship to the world view of a natural being, such that it could be considered as a "formula of affirmation". These three critical assumptions are the subject of Part Two.
Part Two: Defending Nietzsche’s interest in recurrence

In Part One I argued that Nietzsche is interested in the possibility of a recurrence cosmology to the extent that he sees it as a probable object of widespread belief. In other words, Nietzsche predicts that a recurrence cosmology will be an object of belief — and that such belief will have a profound impact (in other words: a biological/psychological effect) on the believer. Part Two defends this interpretation by arguing that it is underpinned by coherent and interesting explanations of the three components of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that I identified in the Introductory Remarks. It thereby provides, albeit indirectly, a tripartite account of the meaning of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.

I have divided Part Two into three chapters, each of which addresses one of the three afore-mentioned dimensions of Nietzsche’s interest in eternal recurrence. Accordingly, Chapter Four addresses Nietzsche’s interest in the cosmological significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Chapter Five addresses Nietzsche’s view that belief in recurrence cosmology could precipitate depression and/or suicide. Finally, Chapter Six addresses Nietzsche’s account of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as a “formula of affirmation”. It will be argued in each of these cases that Nietzsche has valid reasoning, relative to the framework with which his thought is operative, for his concerns about the likelihood and effects of belief in a recurrence cosmology.

In Chapter Four, I argue that Nietzsche predicts that a recurrence cosmology will eventually come to be an object of belief for Europeans in line with his general account of the demise of Christianity and Idealism and, more specifically, the demise of transcendental idealism in its Kantian and Schopenhauerian guises. It will be shown that of particular interest in this respect is Schopenhauer’s argument for the transcendental
ideality of time, which is, in his view, the only way of averting the apparent absurdity of
the proposition (used by Nietzsche in his sketches for a cosmological proof of eternal
recurrence) that, in infinite time, everything that can possibly come to pass, must have
already come to pass. I argue that Nietzsche could reasonably expect this proposition to
raise its head again as a consequence of a general rejection of Idealism, and that it is
also quite reasonable for Nietzsche to suppose that the adoption of a recurrence
cosmology seems like a likely candidate to resolve it.\textsuperscript{101}

Chapter Five explains Nietzsche's view that belief in a recurrence cosmology could lead
to suicidal nihilism. In this regard, I highlight affinities between Nietzsche and
Schopenhauer on the great extent to which suffering is essentially constitutive of
existence, and remind the reader of the source of the power of the ascetic ideal: namely
humanity's need for a reason for, or interpretation of, its suffering. In line with this, I
argue that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is equivalent to the most
extreme nihilism on the grounds that it not only offers no ostensible answer to the
question of why humans suffer, but also offers no apparent solace, only interminable
and inexorable repetition of the aforesaid suffering. I also show, in this chapter, that
Nietzsche's view here concerning the potential effect of such nihilism (i.e. its potential to
cause suicide and depression), whilst perhaps foreign to today's readers, was very
much in line with the views of his contemporaries. Via commentaries on Anna Karenin
and The Brothers Karamazov I demonstrate that other leading thinkers of Nietzsche's
day believed that nihilistic beliefs could be expected to have similarly fatal effects on
those who adopted them.

Finally, Chapter Six explains Nietzsche's view that the idea of the eternal recurrence of
the same is a formula of affirmation. Once again, in order to highlight Nietzsche's train of
thought here, I appeal to striking affinities between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer on this
precise point. With respect to my claim in Part One that the idea of the eternal

\textsuperscript{101} It is noted that the general chain of reasoning here, which I claim is Nietzsche's, is dubious. I accept
this, noting that the merit of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is
beyond the scope of this dissertation.
recurrence of the same will not have an adverse effect on “healthy” human beings. I argue that this is the case, according to Nietzsche, because the noble qualities that he associates with “health” (such as courage and love) have psychological structures that mirror the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.
Chapter Four: Recurrence as cosmology

In the beginning was nothing – which exploded.

Terry Pratchett

Introduction

Prima facie, Clark’s claim that there is no reason for anyone to accept the truth of a recurrence cosmology is sensible. It is indeed accepted by commentators that the so-called cosmological arguments in the Nachlass do not establish the truth of a recurrence cosmology. It therefore makes sense to assume that any teaching that bases itself upon those arguments is destined to fail. However, in Part One I argued that Nietzsche was interested in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same primarily because he predicted that it would become an object of widespread belief. That is to say that the question of the ‘truth’ of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same was of less interest to him than the question as to whether or not it would be believed to be true, and the subsequent effect that belief in this doctrine could be expected to have upon its adherents. It is my view that Nietzsche’s prediction that it would be accepted as true is best understood in line with his account of the historical trajectory of European culture, understood as a function of the logic of the ascetic ideal, rather than as being primarily the product of a priori speculation of the kind found in the Nachlass.

However, if my thesis is to warrant any attention whatsoever then it needs to be shown that Nietzsche did in fact have some valid reasons for thinking that people would eventually come to believe in a recurrence cosmology. Indeed, this is precisely the point of this fourth chapter. I argue that Nietzsche’s interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same can be accounted for by highlighting certain features of the relationship between his own thought and that of Schopenhauer. It is well known that Nietzsche as a young scholar was heavily influenced by Schopenhauer, and that early texts such as The Birth of Tragedy and ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’ bear the indelible
stamp of this influence. It is also well-known that Nietzsche came to reject Schopenhauer's philosophy and free himself from its influence in what is sometimes referred to as his "middle" or "positivistic" period, during which he wrote Human, All too Human and The Dawn. However, what seems to me to be less well known is the extent to which Nietzsche's later thought can be read as an explicit thinking-through of the consequences of this rejection. Yet I argue that if one considers Nietzsche's later thought in terms of its affinity to Schopenhauer, as well as in terms of its contrasts therewith, then it is possible to see clearly why Nietzsche saw widespread belief in a recurrence cosmology as probable.

This works as follows: Nietzsche predicted a general "overcoming" of transcendental idealism in favour of a more "scientific" world view, in line with his account of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal, and the rise of the "will to truth". The nature of this overcoming is expressed quite clearly in two sections of Twilight of the Idols (the final aphorism of 'Reason in Philosophy'; and 'How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth'). Such an "overcoming" of idealism would, according to Nietzsche, lead to a re-consideration of one of Schopenhauer's key arguments for transcendental idealism, which is itself a modification of Kant's very well-known presentation of the first antinomy of pure reason. Schopenhauer had argued that if time was not considered to be merely one of the \textit{a priori} conditions of human experience, and instead was considered to be a determination of "things-in-themselves", and that time is, in its nature, infinite (which he quite reasonably assumed), then one is forced to concede that everything that can possibly come to pass, must have already come to pass. Schopenhauer evidently found this conclusion absurd, and consequently saw it as strong evidence for the truth of idealism. As I noted in the general introductory chapter, this same argument is clearly considered by Nietzsche as the principal cosmological consideration, and he appealed to it consistently in his notebooks from 1881 -1888 in connection with the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.
My thesis is that Nietzsche predicted, inasmuch as this problem would inevitably raise its head, that people would “solve” it by adopting a recurrence cosmology. That way they could conceive of a finite universe existing in infinite time, the possibility of which was not undermined by Schopenhauer’s argument. In order to demonstrate the plausibility of this interpretation I have divided this chapter into four sections. The first section argues for two introductory and straightforward insights into the nature of Nietzsche's orientation to Schopenhauer. The first of these is the fact that, in a very broad sense, Nietzsche accepts Schopenhauer's description of empirical reality. That is to say that Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer that the world is simply one of countless planets spinning in endless space, and that human life can be considered to be little more than an accident of fate that has arisen haphazardly upon its surface. The second insight concerns the fact that both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer see this “picture” as the appropriate backdrop of, and impetus for, philosophical questioning. I take it that these two insights are very obvious and uncontroversial. However, I relate them here because they seem to me to be very apposite to the question of why Nietzsche would concern himself with “cosmological” speculation on any level.

The second section examines the nature of Schopenhauer’s transcendental idealism, as well as the terms of Nietzsche's rejection of this aspect of Schopenhauer’s thought. Since it is apparent in many ways that Nietzsche saw Kant as being the principal transcendental idealist, and that many of his comments could apply equally to Kant and Schopenhauer, I also present an account of the Schopenhauer's own interpretation of Kant. The point here is to see Schopenhauer as being a “biological Kantian”. This is critical because the extent to which Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer about the possibilities of post-Kantian philosophy, notwithstanding the nature of any disagreements, provides the philosophical framework for the questioning that leads to a recurrence cosmology. I show not only that Nietzsche indeed rejects certain Kantian metaphysical postulates that he finds in Schopenhauer, but, I also argue that he retains broad aspects of Schopenhauer's “biological Kantianism”.

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The third section, although it is the shortest, is really the heart of this chapter. It presents my answer to the question: why is Nietzsche considering the idea of a recurrence universe in any case? My answer is simply that he is concerned with the consequences of the historical “overcoming” of idealism, and this leads him to consider at least one of the traditional conceptual problems that Kantian idealism had been originally designed to solve: namely the first antinomy of pure reason. I suggest that Nietzsche predicts that a recurrence cosmology would be likely to garner acceptance because it has the potential to resolve this same antinomy.

The fourth section deals with a particular issue that arises from this line of interpretation. This is the question of whether or not Nietzsche has any philosophical justification for dabbling in cosmology. This question is especially fraught when one considers some of the widely held beliefs about Nietzsche’s “perspectivism”. Indeed, in attempting to discuss this issue with undergraduate and fellow post-graduate students I invariably am told that, since Nietzsche “rejects metaphysics” and “denies the possibility of truth” he can not possibly intend there to be any cosmological significance to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. In response to these very general objections, the fourth section contains a brief enunciation of what I understand Nietzsche’s perspectivism to amount to. I argue that Nietzsche’s epistemological views owe much to his Schopenhauerian influence and, like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche maintains a positive attitude towards science. The key point is that Nietzsche understands the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as a “scientific” idea, rather than one that pertains to the “great problems” of philosophy. I will show that, insofar as this is the case, his cosmological speculations are perfectly consistent with his “perspectivism”.

### 4.1 A sphere floating in endless space

While it is clear that Nietzsche came to repudiate much of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical philosophy (and the moral system that was coeval with it), it is equally clear that many important affinities survived Nietzsche’s much-vaunted “break” with his former influence.
This section draws attention to the broad similarity between Schopenhauer’s conception of “empirical reality” and Nietzsche’s conception of “nature”, and demonstrates that the primary *motif* of these corresponding conceptions is the obvious disparity of scale between the infinite nature of the empirical universe on the one hand, and the finite life of an individual human on the other. It likewise draws attention to the fact that both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer saw this disparity as an appropriate backdrop of philosophical questioning.

I suggest that a key point of difference between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer concerning the prospect of the radical finitude of human existence in comparison to the seemingly unbounded nature of the universe is the implications such a prospect has for *philosophy*. Whereas Schopenhauer looks to philosophical knowledge to provide the means for redemption and comfort in the face of the “precariousness” and suffering that is constitutive of human existence, and to this end argues that the scientific worldview (i.e. knowledge of empirical phenomena) is *illusory*, Nietzsche comes to what may be considered the opposite conclusion. Rather than seeing the picture of a finite human existence in an infinite universe as being a prospect from which people need to be redeemed, Nietzsche sees it as leading to the philosophical question: *to what extent can [this] truth stand to be incorporated?* (GS§110).

To begin, let us simply examine several descriptive statements by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche that clearly testify to the broad similarity that I am concerned to highlight. Here is the opening passage of the second volume of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*:

In endless space countless luminous spheres, round each of which some dozen smaller illuminated ones revolve, hot at the core and covered with a hard cold crust; on this crust a mouldy film has produced living and knowing beings: this is empirical truth, the real, the world. Yet for a being who thinks, it is a precarious position to stand on one of those numberless spheres floating in boundless space, without knowing whence
or whither, and to be only one of innumerable similar beings that throng, press, and toil, restlessly and rapidly arising and passing away in beginningless and endless time. Here there is nothing permanent but matter alone and the recurrence of the same varied organic forms by means of certain ways and channels that inevitably exist as they do. All that empirical science can teach is only the more precise nature and rule of these events. (WWR, Vol II, 1).

Compare this with the opening of passage of Nietzsche’s early essay ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra Moral Sense’:

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of “world history”—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die. One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature. There have been eternities when it did not exist; and when it is done for again, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no further mission that would lead beyond human life.

Few would deny that there are indeed a number of broad similarities here: both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche view our planet as being one of countless “spheres” or “stars” in an immense universe; both draw attention to the obvious disparity in scale between the immense and unbounded nature of the universe and the finite life of an individual and both, inasmuch as they deemed it appropriate to begin their respective works with such passages, obviously view this disparity as the appropriate backdrop for philosophical questioning. To be sure, ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’ was composed at a time when Nietzsche was still openly influenced by Schopenhauer. And indeed it has been argued, I think correctly, that the account of perception that he develops in the remainder of the essay is unashamedly “Schopenhauerian”. However,

there is no reason to think that the basic backdrop to philosophical questioning of an immense, unbounded and indifferent universe, in which a relatively insignificant individual makes a transient appearance, is ever abandoned, or even questioned by Nietzsche at any stage of his philosophical development. In order to illustrate this I will present and comment briefly upon two passages, from The Gay Science (1881) and Beyond Good and Evil (1886) respectively, which appeal to precisely the same sense of discord.

As I have already mentioned, the third book of The Gay Science begins with Nietzsche's claim that 'God is dead'. The task of philosophy in the wake of this death is, according to Nietzsche, to destroy the 'shadows' of God that remain. The very next passage (§109) cautions against making simplistic, pseudo-scientific assumptions about the true nature of the universe in the face of the absence of a theological explanation:

Let us beware of thinking that the world is a living being. Where would it stretch? What would it feed on? How could it grow and procreate? After all, we know roughly what the organic is; are we then supposed to reinterpret what is inexpressibly derivative, late, rare, accidental, which we perceive only on the crust of the earth, as something essential, common, and eternal, as those people do who call the universe an organism? This nauseates me. Let us beware even of believing that the universe is a machine; it is certainly not constructed to one end, and the word 'machine' pays it for too high an honour. Let us beware of assuming in general and everywhere anything as elegant as the cyclical movements of our neighbouring stars; even a glance at the Milky Way raises doubts whether there are not much coarser and more contradictory movements there, as well as stars with eternally linear paths, etc. The astral order in which we live is an exception, this order and the considerable duration that is conditioned by it have again made possible the exception of exceptions: the development of the organic. The total character of the world, by contrast, is for all eternity chaos, not in the sense of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, organization, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever else our aesthetic anthropomorphisms are called.
While it is ironic to draw attention to this passage as a description of the universe, given that it seems to caution against positive descriptions, and is obviously designed as a vehicle for conveying epistemological claims (that will be examined later in the chapter), it nevertheless does testify to Nietzsche's broad "worldview". The picture that emerges from this, and from many other similar passages, is of a universe so immense, so varied, so inscrutable, and so much exceeding the resources of human understanding, that any attempt to describe it, or accurately subsume it under a convenient concept such as "organism" or "machine", is doomed to failure. This picture is iterated in Beyond Good and Evil, §9:

You want to live 'according to nature'? O you noble Stoics, what fraudulent words! Think of a being such as nature is, prodigal beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without aims of intentions, without mercy or justice, at once barren fruitful and barren and uncertain; think of indifference itself as a power — how could you live according to such indifference?

Here again the point is made that the true character of the universe is essentially resistant to human attempts to come to terms with it. Moreover, it is implied that Nietzsche doubts that humans are comfortable with the actual truth of the matter. The universe (or "nature")\textsuperscript{103} is described as being fundamentally aimless, arbitrary, indifferent, etc. Now, since this passage too is also ultimately concerned with epistemological considerations (i.e. Nietzsche claims that the Stoics' conception of 'nature' is, in the final analysis, their own self-image which they have projected upon nature), it is important to raise a simple point here. That is, it is assumed tacitly in all of these passages that Nietzsche's own description of the universe as being something immense and inscrutable to such an extent that it resists truly accurate or total comprehension is itself meant to be understood as factual. This is obviously problematic if one holds the view that Nietzsche believed that it was not possible to state "facts". As I

\textsuperscript{103} I am assuming that Nietzsche uses "world", "nature" and "universe" interchangeably.

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have noted already, I will deal with the issue of Nietzsche’s epistemology later in the chapter, but for now I am assuming that, for the most part, Nietzsche can fruitfully be read as endorsing a mild scepticism with respect to the accuracy of scientific or philosophical claims about the nature of the universe. On this basis, there is no reason why Nietzsche would ever necessarily reject Schopenhauer’s depiction of humanity as a “mouldy film” that has arisen fortuitously upon one of numberless spheres revolving in seemingly “endless space”. Moreover, I do not believe that there is any direct evidence for thinking that he ever did reject it. All of Nietzsche’s comments about “nature” and its relationship to humanity support this basic picture.

Now in many respects this is a very modest claim, tantamount to saying not much more than that Nietzsche accepted the claims of astronomers and physicists to the effect that, as Douglas Adams puts it in The Hitch-Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, space is “vastly hugely mindbogglingly big”. Of course he did! The obvious question then is: so what? Why is it precisely Nietzsche’s agreement with Schopenhauer on such a broad matter that is the object of this section? Why is it interesting? The answer is that whereas for Schopenhauer this depiction of man as a tiny insignificant speck appearing fleetingly in a mindbogglingly immense and indifferent universe is, strictly speaking, an illusion, for Nietzsche, on the other hand, such a depiction approximates the simple truth of the matter. In order to illustrate this crucial difference, let us turn to another passage from Schopenhauer’s The World is Will and Representation, this time a discussion of the aesthetic affect of the sublime from the third book of Volume One:

If we lose ourselves in contemplation of the infinite greatness of the universe in space and time, meditate on the past millennia and on those to come; or if the heavens at night actually bring innumerable worlds before our eyes, and so impress on our consciousness the immensity of the universe, we feel ourselves reduced to nothing; we feels ourselves as individuals, as living bodies, as transient phenomena of will, like drops in the ocean, dwindling and dissolving into nothing. But against such a ghost of our own nothingness, against such a lying impossibility, there arises the immediate consciousness that all these worlds exist only in our representation, only as
modifications of the eternal subject of pure knowing. This we find ourselves to be, as soon as we forget our individuality; it is the necessary conditional supporter of all worlds and all periods of time. The vastness of the world, which previously disturbed our peace of mind, now rests within us; our dependence on it is now annulled by its dependence on us. All this, however, does not come into reflection at once, but shows itself as a consciousness, merely felt, that in some sense or other (made clear only by philosophy) we are one with the world, and therefore not oppressed but exalted by its immensity (WWR, Vol. I, 205).

There are two points to note here: firstly, Schopenhauer assumes that the prospect of an immense, unfeeling and unbounded universe is wont to disturb one's peace of mind (one notes too that in the other passage I referred to he describes humanity's position relative to the immensity of space as "precarious"); secondly, he argues that one can regain one's peace of mind by reflecting upon the philosophical knowledge that the empirical world, for all its immediacy and complexity, is, strictly speaking, an "illusion", something we have in fact created ourselves, *albeit* unwittingly.

Nietzsche, I submit, agrees that the former point is certainly possible, and even likely, but has reservations about the latter. Specifically, he rejects the view that empirical reality is an "illusion" (a view which Schopenhauer describes as the "fundamental view of idealism"), and that philosophical insight gives access to an underlying "reality" that undermines the significance of the empirical world. Moreover, as was discussed briefly in Chapter Two, Nietzsche characterizes the wish to console oneself with such "metaphysical knowledge", as well as the tacit assumption that consolation (read: "redemption") is required, as being indicative of a "will-to-nothingness".

For Schopenhauer, philosophical knowledge consisted of insight into the nature of the underlying metaphysical reality (which he termed: "the Will"), and philosophical wisdom consisted of resolving, on the basis of this knowledge, to henceforth live a life of strict

104 The use of the term "empirical" in this context will acquire greater significance in the next section when I explain its Schopenhauerian connotations.
asceticism. Nietzsche, as will be shown in the next section, rejects this metaphysical framework completely. While he always retains respect for Schopenhauer’s character, and particularly his forthright atheism, - and while, as I have noted above, he is in broad agreement with Schopenhauer with respect to the basic relationship between humanity and the empirical universe, Nietzsche sees this relationship as the basis of entirely different philosophical questions.

For Nietzsche the interesting philosophical question that proceeds from a detached scientific comparison of the significance of the life of a single individual (or even a species) with the immense and near infinite abundance of nature, concerns the effect this knowledge will have upon those who dwell on it. His question, to paraphrase the quotation from GS §110 that I have already cited, is: to what extent can European culture survive and flourish on the basis of this knowledge? This question is in turn refined in Nietzsche’s later works (beginning with Beyond Good and Evil in 1886) to become known as the question of the value of truth (which he understands to be coeval with the question of the value of morality). However, in order to understand Nietzsche’s reasoning here, including his grounds for a rejection of “metaphysics”, in its Schopenhauerian (and Kantian) manifestation, and thus appreciate how this rejection leads Nietzsche to predict that Europeans would come to believe in a recurrence cosmology, we need a clearer understanding of the substance and basis of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical ideas.

4.2 Schopenhauer and the “real world”

In the introduction to this chapter, I suggested that it was in relation to the Kantian transcendental idealism in Schopenhauer that Nietzsche understood his own orientation towards ‘Idealism’. Indeed, it is fair to say that with respect to the Idealism that Nietzsche ultimately positions himself against, it is Kant’s philosophical innovations, rather than Schopenhauer’s modifications of them, that are fundamentally determinative. This is evinced, for example, in a famous passage in Twilight of the Idols, in which
Nietzsche describes idealism as an “error”, and refers to its nineteenth century instantiation as being “Konigsbergian” (a reference to Kant’s home town). In understanding Nietzsche’s “overcoming” of Schopenhauer, as well as his own critical views on Idealism, it therefore makes sense to first reach a basic understanding of Schopenhauer’s own relation to Kant, and in particular to understand how (rightly or wrongly) Schopenhauer orientated his own ideas with respect to those of his forebear.

Now, it is well known that the results of Kant’s critique of the ideas of pure reason were radical in their implications. He claimed to have demonstrated that “metaphysics” was incapable of furnishing its practitioners with truths about the world (or reality) as it is “in itself”. Kant argued that, in the final analysis, the ideas of pure reason were merely the forms of the human intellect. So, rather than pertaining to the world as it existed independently of human beings (i.e. eternal truths about ontology), the ideas of pure reason, according to Kant, merely pertain to the conditions under which human experience of the world is possible, and the manner in which it is ‘given’. As a result, the traditional philosophical problems of God, Freedom and Immortality were shown to be irresolvable as they concerned ‘objects’/‘relations’ which lay beyond the possible scope of [scientific] ‘knowledge’ (leading Kant to famously claim that he had found it necessary to deny knowledge to leave room for faith). For Kant then, the business of philosophy was henceforth to consist of no more than criticism of pure reason.

Schopenhauer’s relation to Kant is ultimately ambivalent. Schopenhauer disagreed fundamentally with the conclusions that Kant drew from his critique (i.e. that “metaphysics” was impossible), but at the same time found that much of the content of the Kant’s analysis of human experience furnished him with “data and material” for his own philosophical system. In particular, Schopenhauer agrees with what he describes

105 Nietzsche, Tt: ‘How the ‘Real World’ at Last Became a Myth’, §3.
107 Much of the following account of Schopenhauer’s relation to Kant is drawn from the appendix to the first volume of The World as Will and Representation, in which Schopenhauer presents a ‘criticism of Kantian philosophy’. Cf. 415-534.
as Kant's "Idealism". This is the view developed by Kant that there is a distinction between the world of space and time, experienced by humans, and the world as it is in itself. For Schopenhauer, this distinction was Kant's greatest achievement. Of particular importance to Schopenhauer was Kant's argument (in the 'Transcendental Aesthetic') that 'space' and 'time' are the forms of empirical perception. In other words, they are \textit{a priori} conditions of the possibility of empirical experience. For Kant and Schopenhauer, we experience ourselves as inhabiting the world of space and time, but we have no right to conclude that space and time are determinations of "things-in-themselves". Schopenhauer puts it as follows: the world is empirically real (we experience it), but transcendentally ideal (it has no "reality" independent of our experience). As such he describes it ultimately as an "illusion" and likens it to the "veil of Maya", that can best be understood in relation to a dream.

Crucially, for our purposes, Schopenhauer describes empirical reality as having the nature of "constant becoming", rather than "being" (or "true being"). I draw attention to this because the distinction between being and becoming is made much of by Nietzsche, and in many instances his "critique" (to overstate the matter) of Idealism is restricted to comments such as: "being is an empty fiction". However, for the moment, let us simply note that, for Schopenhauer, "becoming" is simply equivalent to "empirical reality".

So, for Schopenhauer, the world is properly considered the "object" of the "subject", and is conditioned thereby. Whatever exists, exists \textit{for} the subject; the subject is the condition of all that appears, and it is the fundamental presupposition of all experience and knowledge. But while, as we have seen, Schopenhauer accepts Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic, in which Kant argues for the transcendental ideality of space and time, he argues that there are fundamental problems with the account of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{108} Schopenhauer, \textit{WWR}, Vol. I, Appendix, 417.
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Cf. \textit{Ti}, 'Reason in Philosophy', §2.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} See Schopenhauer, \textit{WWR}, Vol. 1, §2.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A17/B31 – A50/B74
\end{itemize}
human experience which Kant proceeds to add to this basic position.\textsuperscript{112} In particular, Schopenhauer argues that while Kant had convincingly accounted for the ‘forms’ of all human perception (i.e. space and time), he had failed to give any explanation of the content of perception.\textsuperscript{113} According to Schopenhauer, Kant had argued that experience (and knowledge) had a twofold source: on one hand, an object is given to us [via sensible impression], on the other hand it is thought [via concepts/categories of understanding]. To Schopenhauer, such an account is absurd and self contradictory. He argues that it is impossible to conceive of an “object” being “given” to “perception” for the simple reason that such an account of experience presupposes the very concept of “object” which it is designed to explain.\textsuperscript{114}

In contrast, Schopenhauer proposes his own model of experience: a “sensation” occurs in a sense organ, to this sensation the “understanding” is applied (which for Schopenhauer is the \textit{a priori} form of the law of causality or “sufficient reason”), as well as the forms of “perception” (i.e. space and time); our “intellect” then converts this amalgam into a “representation”. \textit{Qua} representation, an object now exists in space and time.\textsuperscript{115} Moreover, on this basis the object (as experienced) cannot be distinguished from the “cause” of the sensation (i.e. it does not make sense to then contemplate a possible “noumenal”, or “metaphenomenal”, cause of the perception), because, according to Schopenhauer’s schema, causality is simply the \textit{a priori} condition (or ‘form’) of the understanding. This process of representation is said by Schopenhauer to happen in animals and humans alike, although he thinks that only humans are capable of abstracting universal conceptions from representations – which is the essence of what he calls “thinking”.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{113} Schopenhauer, ibid., 437.
\textsuperscript{114} Schopenhauer, \textit{ibid.}, 438.
\textsuperscript{115} Schopenhauer, \textit{ibid.}, 438-439.
There are several points to note here. The first is that rational thinking, the systematic body of which we know as “science”, pertains to the strictly imminent phenomenal world. It examines the relations between representations. These relations are governed by regular laws (thus making continuity of experience in waking life possible), which, can indeed only be understood in terms of the causality that conditions them. In sum then, science consists in bringing the always implicit laws of causality to the level of deliberate conscious reflection, such that we can understand the ways in which representations are related to one another. Science is therefore “objective”, but only in the sense that it deals with “empirical objects” (representations) which cannot be conceived to have any reality independently of the subject. “True being” (which is independent of the subject), which Kant had referred to as the “thing-in-itself”, is inaccessible to scientific knowledge because science is restricted to representations. For Schopenhauer, science therefore is in no position to satisfy the “metaphysical need” which both Schopenhauer and Kant attribute to human beings.

The point of all this is that rather than seeing (as some have done) the consequence of Kant’s critique as being a general philosophy of science which championed the merits of the “hard” sciences over the empty pretensions of “metaphysics”, Schopenhauer draws the opposite conclusion. The sciences, having as their proper object the phenomenal world, which has been shown by Kant to have no ultimate reality, are thereby devalued. Moreover, since Kant’s attack on “metaphysics” was, according to Schopenhauer, based on an untenably narrow definition, his critique is thereby rendered less devastating. Philosophy retains her place as the queen of the sciences inasmuch as she not only understands the significance and the ways in which the different sciences relate to one another, but also comprehends ultimately how all of the various branches of knowledge relate to the riddle of existence by meditating on the nature of “true being”.

In this Schopenhauer departs radically from his Kantian influence. Rather than leaving the thing-in-Itself as an “unknown X” (to borrow a pertinent phrase from Nietzsche) in the manner of Kant, Schopenhauer argues that some humans do have a special kind of
access to the nature of the thing-in-itself, which he calls philosophical intuition – and the nature of the thing-in-itself turns out to be what Schopenhauer famously calls Will. This is a position which Nietzsche accepted in principle, and his early references (cf. The Birth of Tragedy) to things such as the “primal oneness” that can be experienced during “Dionysian ecstasy” bear testament to his attempt to understand such possibilities on his own terms.117 However, the ultimate basis of the possibility of this kind of philosophical intuition (or “immediate knowledge”) is the very fact that the human body, according to Schopenhauer, occupies the unique function of being simultaneously experienced as a phenomenal object and, inasmuch as the sense organs (i.e. nervous system) and the brain are the conditioning source of all representations, the thing-in-itself (or will):

To the subject of knowing, who appears as an individual only through his identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely different ways. It is given in intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the laws of these objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what is known immediately to everyone, and is denoted by the word will. The action of the body is nothing but the act of will objectified, i.e. translated into perception.

The basic relationship between the body and the thing-itself is that the body and its various functions are objectifications of the different aspects of the will. Thus, for example, the brain and its intellectual functions are the objectification of the will-to-know; what Schopenhauer calls the “will-to-walk” is, objectively perceived, the foot; and what he refers to as the “will-to-procreate” is, objectively perceived, the reproductive organs.118 The brain is then is both an object and the logical precondition of all objects. This is quite confusing and, as Sadler notes, Schopenhauer actually vacillates on the extent to which immediate self awareness is equivalent to knowledge of the will.119 The critical point is that, according to Schopenhauer, it is “inner experience”, rather than representational knowledge of the empirical world, that furnishes us with knowledge of


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“true being”. Furthermore, we can see Schopenhauer’s attempt to ground philosophical knowledge in immediate self-awareness as being a somewhat remarkable attempt at translating the rather austere Kantian metaphysical framework into *biological* terms.

This brings us to Nietzsche’s “overcoming” of Schopenhauer. We have already seen, in Chapter One, that Nietzsche rejects the distinction between a “real” and an “apparent” world, inasmuch as he sees it as being a function of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche in fact subsumes Schopenhauer’s particular distinction between a phenomenal world of ceaseless becoming on one hand, and the Will, or “true being” on the other, within the historical framework of this more general distinction. This is articulated in *Twilight of the Idols*, in which Nietzsche relates the history of this distinction in the following section, entitled ‘How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth’:

1. The true world—attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, he *is* it.  
   (The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, "I, Plato, am the truth.")

2. The true world—unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man ("for the sinner who repents").  
   (Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible—*it becomes female*, it becomes Christian ...)

3. The true world—unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it—a consolation, an obligation, an imperative.  
   (At bottom, the old sun, but seen through mist and skepticism. The idea has become elusive, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian.)

4. The true world—unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also *unknown*. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating: how could something unknown obligate us?  
   (Gray morning. The first yawn of reason. The cockcrow of positivism.)
5. The "real" world—an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating—an idea which has become useless and superfluous—*consequently*, a refuted idea: let us abolish it!

(Bright day; breakfast: return of *bon sens* and cheerfulness; Plato's blushes for shame; pandemonium of all free spirits.)

6. We have abolished the true world: what world has remained? the apparent one perhaps? ... But no! *With the real world we have also abolished the apparent one!*

(Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; *incipit Zarathustra.*)

We can see from this schema that Nietzsche sees the historical overcoming of Idealism as being a reaction to the instantiation described in stage 3. It is likewise clear that this is primarily Kantian idealism that Nietzsche is considering at this late stage in his thinking (1887). There are a number of insights here that concern us. Firstly, with respect to the Kantian view that the real world (i.e. "thing in itself") is unknowable, Nietzsche sees this as leading to the conclusion that inasmuch as Philosophy is concerned with such knowledge, it can no longer function as redemptive, or as any basis for action (i.e. as an *ethos*). The consequences of this are explained in stages 5 and 6: the notion of an "underlying reality" is, according to Nietzsche, eventually forgotten, abolished.

However, before we expand on the significance of this rejection it is worthwhile looking briefly at Nietzsche's grounds for this rejection. This is not made easy by the fact that Nietzsche nowhere presents a sustained critique of Idealism as such; one must rely on scattered derogatory references to it, as well as some oblique comments spread across his later works. However, inasmuch as he did venture any concrete arguments against Idealism, in its Kantian or Schopenhauerian formulations, he tends to focus on two central issues. Firstly, the status of the body as potentially subject and object is highlighted by Nietzsche on several occasions as being particularly problematic. Secondly, Nietzsche is sceptical about any claim to "immediate knowledge" such as we find in Schopenhauer's claim that we have unmediated access to the Will. Let us turn
immediately to the first issue. The following section (§15) from Beyond Good and Evil attests to the problem that Nietzsche has with this relationship:

If one is to pursue physiology with a good conscience one is compelled to insist that the organs of sense are not phenomena in the sense of idealist philosophy: for if they were they could not be causes! Sensualism therefore is at least a regulative hypothesis, certainly a heuristic principle. – What? and others even go so far as to say that the external world is the work of our organs? But then our body, as a piece of this external world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs would themselves be – the work of our organs! This, it seems to me, is a complete reductio ad absurdum, supposing that the concept causa sui is something altogether absurd. Consequently the external world is not the work of our organs -?120

Moreover, in the very next section of Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche draws sceptical attention to Schopenhauer’s claim that one has access to “immediate knowledge” of the will via one’s own body:

There are still harmless self-observers who believe ‘immediate certainties’ exist, for example ‘I think’ or, as was Schopenhauer’s superstition, ‘I will’: as though knowledge here got hold of its object pure and naked, as ‘thing in itself’, and no falsification occurred either on the side of the subject or on that of the object. But I shall reiterate a hundred times that ‘immediate certainty’, like ‘absolute knowledge’ and ‘thing in itself’, contains a contractio in adjecto: we really ought to get free from the seduction of words!...

120 In a similar vein, in Twilight of the Idols Nietzsche (in an expansion of this point that encompasses his rejection of Schopenhauer’s moral philosophy) writes: ‘What is, does not become; what becomes, is not... Now they all believe, even to the point of despair, in that which is. But since they cannot get hold of it they look for reasons why it is being withheld from them. ‘It must be an illusion, a deception which prevents us from perceiving that which is: where is the deceiver to be found?’ – ‘We’ve got it,’ they cry in delight, ‘it is the senses! These senses, which are so immoral as well, it is they which deceive us about the real world. ... Away, above all with the body, that pitiable idée fixe of the senses! Infected with every error of logic there is, refuted, impossible even, notwithstanding it is impudent enough to behave as if it actually existed’... (‘Reason in Philosophy’, §1)
One can see from these passages that, whether or not one ultimately accepts Nietzsche's criticisms, it is clear that his grounds for objecting to Kantian/Schopenhauerian idealism were not unreasonable. The question of how the sense organs can be both the source and product of representations does indeed seem to be problematic, if not downright paradoxical. And, with respect to Nietzsche's objection to the concept of "immediate certainty", it only requires a small degree of scepticism to side with Nietzsche on this issue. The other point to note with respect to these criticisms (and the sections the above passages are derived from) is what is not rejected by Nietzsche. Nowhere does Nietzsche reject Kant and Schopenhauers' broad thesis that knowledge of objects is conditioned by the constitution of the subject. In particular, Nietzsche is in broad agreement with the naturalistic suppositions of Schopenhauer's biological Kantianism. Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, sees knowledge as being primarily a means employed by a particular organism in order to survive, rather than as being the product of any kind of divine aspiration for "truth".

To conclude this section, I suggest that one can reasonably assume that Nietzsche predicted, in line with his account of the increasing potency of the “will-to-truth” which, as was shown in Part One, he considers to be coeval with the trajectory of the ascetic ideal, that his criticisms (in the mouths of others) would lead to a widespread rejection of transcendental idealism at a culture-wide level. Evidence for this interpretation is the fact that it is apparent that he interprets the rise of gradual rise of positivism (i.e. Comte) as belonging to this general picture. Now, as I suggested in the previous section, the key point to remember here is that the primary philosophical question for Nietzsche is not so much: “well what, then, is the underlying nature of “true being”?" Rather Nietzsche is interested in the potential consequences of a general rejection of idealism and turn towards a belief in the reality of “becoming”. To paraphrase: if Europeans reject Idealism as a philosophy, and turn to positivism and/or naturalistic materialism – a transition that Nietzsche thinks is underway, what will happen to them? It is this line of questioning that I see as leading directly to speculation about the possibility of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.
4.3 The problem of infinite time

In this section I argue that Nietzsche’s interest in the possibility of widespread belief in a recurrence cosmology was a direct result of his rejection of Schopenhauer. Quite simply, in retaining Schopenhauer’s broad descriptive account of phenomenal reality, as well as many key features of Schopenhauer’s “biological Kantianism”, yet discarding the “metaphysical” (or meta-phenomenal) support-system that underpinned Schopenhauer’s worldview, Nietzsche was forced to consider the possibility of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.

One of the most important factors to consider, in support of this general interpretation, is the fact that, in a key passage at the beginning of the fourth book of Volume One of The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer invokes the absurdity of what is arguably Nietzsche’s most important “cosmological” premise in order to refute any alternative to idealism. This premise is the argument, appealed to by Nietzsche consistently from 1881-1888, that because an infinite time has unfolded up until the present moment, it follows that everything that can possibly come to pass must already have come to pass. As is made obvious from the following passage, Schopenhauer too had considered the merits of this argument, and obviously found it cogent and compelling. In fact he exploits its strength in order to bolster his own case for Idealism:

For we are of the opinion that anyone who imagines that the inner nature of the world can be historically comprehended, however finely glossed over it may be, is still infinitely far from philosophical knowledge of the world. But this is the case as soon as becoming, or having-become, or will-become enters into his view of the inner nature of the world; whenever an earlier or a later has the least significance; and consequently whenever points of beginning and of ending in the world, together with a path between the two, are sought and found, and the philosophizing individual even recognizes his own position on this path. Such historical philosophizing in most cases furnishes a cosmogony admitting of many varieties, or else a system of emanations, a doctrine of
diminutions, or finally, when driven in despair over the fruitless attempts of those paths to the last path, it furnishes, conversely, a doctrine of a constant becoming, springing up, arising, coming to light out of darkness, out of the obscure ground, primary ground, groundlessness, or some other drivel of this kind. But all this is most briefly disposed of by remarking that a whole eternity, in other words an endless time, has already elapsed up to the present moment, and therefore everything that can or should become must have become already. For all such historical philosophy, whatever airs it may assume, regards time, just as though Kant had never existed, as a determination of things in themselves, and therefore stops at what Kant calls the phenomenon in opposition to the thing-in-itself, and what Plato calls the becoming never the being in opposition to the being never the becoming, or finally what is called by the Indians the web of Maya (WWR, Vol. I, 273-274).

Schopenhauer's argument, which is a modified version of the proof of the 'thesis' in Kant's first antinomy of pure reason,\(^{121}\) states that anyone who sees time as a determination of things (considered as independent from human experience), and/or who wishes to try to conceive of reality as having the basic underlying quality of "becoming" (rather than being), is forced to concede that a "whole eternity" must have already elapsed up to the present moment, and that it follows from this that everything that "can" or "should" become, must have become already. Schopenhauer does not here discuss the idea of the eternal recurrence per se. He appears to think that the conclusion of the argument is simply an inadmissible state of affairs. My thesis is simply that Nietzsche, in rejecting Kant's and Schopenhauer's transcendental idealism, was naturally led to reflect upon this argument. Moreover, in considering idealism to be more or less coeval with the ascetic ideal, and therefore predicting that idealism would be "overcome" at the level of a widespread cultural phenomenon, Nietzsche naturally assumed that other people would likewise be forced to re-consider this same argument. Adopting a recurrence cosmology is, it goes without saying, one way of reconciling

\[^{121}\] Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A426/B454: "If we assume that the world has no beginning in time, then up to every given moment an eternity has elapsed, and there has passed away in the world an infinite series of successive states of things."
Schopenhauer’s argument (and arguably resolving Kant’s first antinomy), because it views time as both beginningless and as a determination of reality.

Indeed if we consider the passage from Schopenhauer cited above in more detail, we can see a number of direct connections to those aspects of the relationship between Nietzsche’s and Schopenhauer’s philosophies that have been the objects of previous sections of this chapter. Firstly, in connection with the previous section, which dealt with Nietzsche’s rejection of idealism, we have a clear statement of what Nietzsche would no doubt consider Schopenhauer’s “lack of historical sense”. Schopenhauer believes that the proper object of philosophy is “true being”, which, according to his definition, is extra-temporal, and therefore removed from the possibility of being understood in relation to any kind of “development” or “process”. Consequently, although one assumes that this passage is directed primarily against the metaphysical historicism of Hegel, it is clear that Schopenhauer sees no merit in trying to ascribe any kind of philosophical significance to perceived connections between historical events. In ironic contrast, Nietzsche sees the historical connection between different instantiations of idealism as being of crucial significance to an understanding of his favoured philosophical questions: the values of truth and morality.

Secondly, in connection with my argument that Nietzsche broadly accepted Schopenhauer’s descriptive account of phenomenal (empirical) reality and the philosophical status of “science”, Schopenhauer evidently thinks that the reality of time itself (as opposed to its transcendental ideality) would necessitate a situation which is logically absurd. If time is indeed “beginningless”, as both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche tend to assume in their descriptions of the empirical universe, then the logical

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122 It is interesting to note that this has been actually been argued as recently as 2007 by theoretical physicist Peter Lynds: see his paper ‘On a finite universe with no beginning or end’ (arXiv.org): http://arxiv.org/abs/physics/0612053 (cited August 2008). Lynd does not refer to Nietzsche, and his argumentation works within a different conceptual framework, but the resulting cosmology is identical to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as Nietzsche articulated it. Lynd claims that this is the only way to resolve Kant’s first antinomy; not being a physicist myself, I do not presume to judge the merit of his argument.
implications that inhere in the notion of infinity quite naturally become problematic. Whereas for Schopenhauer this problem is compelling evidence for the truth of what he refers to as the "fundamental view of idealism", for Nietzsche there is no ready resolution. If one is committed to rejecting idealism, as Nietzsche is, then there are two classical alternatives. As Kant puts them: either, the world has a beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space; or, the world has no beginning and no limits in space (it is infinite as regards both). 123 Both alternatives have been shown by Kant to be ultimately incoherent. I submit that Nietzsche considered the possibility of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as a "third way". In his notebooks he asserts that one might accept the infinity of time, and yet assume that the universe is finite (if not necessarily with respect to space, then certainly with respect to energy). However, even in such a universe (assuming for the sake of argument that such a universe is coherent, which is not entirely obvious), Schopenhauer’s argument still has traction. One must still consider the fact that an eternity might reasonably be claimed to have already passed. Faced with such a mess, it is certainly reasonable to suggest that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same begins to look like a potential way out of this quagmire.

Now at this point it seems apposite to iterate the fact that there is a crucial difference to be noted between my suggestion that Nietzsche himself is committed to believing in the "truth" of a recurrence cosmology, and my suggestion that he is interested in the possibility of a recurrence cosmology to the extent that he predicted that others would believe in it. My view is that the latter suggestion is the correct one. There is a tendency to assume that, inasmuch as I am arguing that he was indeed dabbling in cosmology, then I must therefore be suggesting that Nietzsche was committing himself (perhaps unwittingly) to a kind of materialist realism that in many places he appears to strenuously reject. As is commonly argued, the nature of the epistemological consequences that Nietzsche drew from Schopenhauer’s biological Kantianism meant that, for Nietzsche, such a “meta-physical” assumption (i.e. materialism) is not coherent with Nietzsche’s own criticisms of Idealism. It should be remembered that while

123 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A426/B454.
Nietzsche certainly rejected the possibility of immediate knowledge of an underlying metaphysical reality, he did not reject the *conditional* nature of the human epistemological apparatus. That is to say, he agreed with Schopenhauer and Kant that the constitution of the human body, as the condition of the possibility of knowledge, rendered such metaphysical knowledge impossible. In order to clarify this, the next section will be devoted to an account of Nietzsche’s “epistemology”.

### 4.4 A taste for reverence

Having suggested that Nietzsche was in broad agreement with Schopenhauer’s biological Kantianism, let us now turn to a more detailed examination of what this means in more precise and more practical epistemological terms. I have already argued that there are no grounds for doubting that Nietzsche accepts scientific descriptions in the field of astronomy and biology as being factual. However I now want to modify this by adding the proviso that this is only true to the extent that the philosophical significance of these “facts” is tempered by recognition of two key insights which he derived from Schopenhauer. These are: firstly, that the human organism is the biological condition of knowledge; secondly, that knowledge is primarily and originally a *means* that a particular species (humanity) employs in order to survive.

The question is: where does this leave Nietzsche when it comes to the status of cosmological claims such as pertain to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same? Nietzsche famously has claimed that it is the “most scientific idea”.\(^{124}\) I take it that Nietzsche, in saying this, is suggesting that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is “scientific” to the extent that it pertains to *phenomena*, and understands the relationships between phenomena on the basis of numbers and lines, which are, according to him, a human contribution.\(^{125}\) That is to say, that the idea of the eternal

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\(^{124}\) WP, §55.

\(^{125}\) Cf. GS, §121: *Life not an argument*. – We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we are able to live – by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith no one could endure living! But that does not prove them. *Life is not an argument*; the conditions of life might include error.
recurrence of the same is primarily a "scientific" idea, rather than being "philosophical" (in the way that the Will was for Schopenhauer).

In order to understand the significance of this, let us now examine what this means in light of a more detailed account of "knowledge" in one of Nietzsche's later texts. With respect to Nietzsche's mature epistemological position (i.e. his view on truth), the only point of broad agreement amongst commentators is the fact that it is associated with something which he describes as "perspectivism". I am in agreement with Ted Sadler's articulation of this position, and I am likewise in agreement with his view that Nietzsche expressed his account of perspectivism quite clearly in a single aphorism in the fifth book of The Gay Science, entitled On 'the genius of the species'. The aphorism in question is too long to cite in its entirety (around three pages) and since a sustained discussion of this issue could easily take up several chapters, what I present here is largely borrowed from Sadler's commentary on it. However, Nietzsche does himself sum up his position at the end of the aphorism:

This is what I consider to be true phenomenalism and perspectivism: that due to the nature of animal consciousness, the world of which we can become conscious is merely a surface- and sign-world, a world turned into generalities and thereby debased to its lowest common denominator, — that everything which enters consciousness thereby becomes shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, a sign, a herd-mark; that all becoming conscious involves a vast and thorough corruption, falsification, superficialization, and generalization. In the end, the growing consciousness is a danger, and he who lives among Europeans even knows it as a sickness. As one might guess, it is not the opposition between subject and object which concerns me here; I leave that distinction to those epistemologists who have got tangled up in the snares of grammar (of folk metaphysics). Even less am I concerned with the opposition between 'thing in itself' and appearance: for we 'know' far too little to even be entitled to make that distinction. We simply have no organ for knowing, for 'truth': we 'know' (or believe or imagine) exactly as much as it is useful to the human her, to the species: and even
what is here called ‘usefulness’ is finally also just a belief, a fiction, and perhaps just that supremely fatal stupidity of which we will someday perish. (GS§354)

The title of this aphorism itself contains a reference to Schopenhauer. In the supplement to the fourth book of the first volume of The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer gives his account of the “metaphysics of sexual love”. Here he argues that “Nature” uses individuals as “means to an end” – the end being the perpetuation and health of the species. Schopenhauer quite eloquently argues that the absurd and irrational lengths which individuals will go to (often to their own detriment) in order to satisfy sexual love (by which he means all romantic love) is clear evidence for the view that what is at stake is the interests of the species, not the interests of the individual. Nietzsche here employs this basic logic, but replaces amorousness with consciousness.

Looking to the text (including the remainder of the long aphorism), let us begin by explaining what Nietzsche means by “animal consciousness”. I argue that he is here building upon what he takes to be one of the essential insights of Schopenhauer’s biological Kantianism: that consciousness is the product of, and conditioned by, our biological requirements. Nietzsche hypothesizes that the “subtlety and strength” of consciousness is related to a person’s “ability to communicate”, and that the general ability to communicate is based upon the “need to communicate”. In other words, Nietzsche is here suggesting that consciousness arose in human beings as a result of their need to communicate with one another (“in order to understand one another swiftly and subtly”). It follows from this that the development of language and the development of consciousness go “hand in hand”. According to Nietzsche, language and concept formation, as we saw in Chapter Two, are the result of a dissimulative creativity which functions by simplifying and falsifying experience in order to facilitate communication. Nietzsche now builds on this account by saying that consciousness itself is coeval with this process and is likewise the product of simplification and falsification. Crucially, this particular 1887 aphorism adds the further claim that what enters consciousness is necessarily falsified and simplified because it needs to be to correspond to our linguistic
requirements. As such, it does not necessarily pertain to our individual thoughts or experiences (which, for the most part Nietzsche believes function at the level of the pre-conscious), but to what he calls the “herd perspective”. This herd perspective is equivalent to the requirements of the survival of the species. In other words, Nietzsche believes that, unconsciously, we are always thinking in ways which are truly unique and individual, but in the process of becoming conscious of these thoughts they are translated (i.e. falsified and simplified) into terms that are conditioned by requirements of communication and the needs of the species as a whole. Sadler, in his commentary on this passage, compresses Nietzsche's account into four insights:

1. A distinction is to be made between verbal thoughts located within the surface and sign world of consciousness and pre-verbal thoughts which in some sense are ‘prior’ to consciousnesses. 2. The former are governed by ‘herd-utility’, whereas the latter pertain to ‘individual existence’. 3. The former kind of thinking is ‘false’, ‘superficial’ and ‘corrupt’ in comparison to the latter kind. 4. Perspectival thinking is located within the surface-and-sign-world and therefore is ‘false’ etc. in this sense.\footnote{Sadler, Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption, 26.}

Sadler's fourth point is the most controversial one. It is aimed against commentators such as Nehamas who see Nietzsche's perspectivism as being the view that different “perspectives” (or interpretations of a phenomena) are of equal epistemological validity (a view that, in my view, is very difficult to differentiate from a bland relativism), and that no one discourse can claim to have privileged access to “truth”. As Sadler is concerned to show, such an interpretation of Nietzsche does not map easily onto GS§354. Sadler argues that because different “perspectives” are operative within the surface-and-sign-world of consciousness, they necessarily each involve a certain minimal level of “corruption” and “falsification” with respect to the underlying experiences and thoughts that occasion them. However, it does not follow from this that each perspective is of equal epistemological value with respect to every other perspective. It is obvious from a reading of any of Nietzsche's texts that Nietzsche has reasonable regard for “science”.

\footnote{Sadler, Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption, 26.}
So, for example, faced with two competing cosmological claims about the relation of the sun to the earth (or “perspectives” as Nehamas might construe it), such as geocentricism and heliocentrism, Nietzsche would have no qualms about agreeing that heliocentrism was “better” or “truer” – it fits the data better, and explains a number of phenomena that geocentricism cannot account for.

Where Nietzsche’s “perspectivism” intersects with “science” is at the point at which scientists overreach themselves and stray into the area that he sees as being the proper domain of Philosophy. This latter point is explained in GS§373, which is entitled ‘Science’ as prejudice. Sadler suggests that the two key insights from this passage are: “1. What is “over the horizon” of the surface and sign world (thus of perspectives) pertains to the “great problems of existence”; 2. Access to this extra-perspectival realm depends on a “taste of reverence”.” Here is an analogy that Nietzsche uses to explain himself here:

Suppose one judged the value of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas – how absurd such a ‘scientific’ evaluation of music would be! What would one have comprehended, understood, recognized? Nothing, really nothing of what is ‘music’ in it!

This is again really only a slight modification of Schopenhauer’s view that “science” was incapable of answering the great problems of philosophy (i.e. freedom, God etc.). For Schopenhauer, as we have already seen, science was limited to examining the causal relationships between phenomena. According to him it examined these relationships with respect to numbers and planes, and hence ultimately of the ideas of pure reason (space being, according to Schopenhauer, the a priori condition of geometry; and time being the a priori condition of arithmetic). Nietzsche agrees. He thinks that we know as much as we need to about the world in order to manipulate it for our purposes. For example, in the nineteenth century the development of steam engines was possible on the basis of an understanding of the potential of pressurized steam to drive a piston.
Nietzsche would never have doubted that such a "scientific" understanding of the properties of steam was anything but factual. What he did object to was the prospect of an engineer, who was successful at wielding his scientific knowledge of the behaviour of steam under various conditions, concluding that the naturalistic materialism that may function as a regulative fiction for his own scientific investigations is somehow proved by the success of particular scientific hypotheses. Such a conclusion, says Nietzsche, is in poor taste, and is the domain of what he refers to as the "intellectual middle class". He writes:

...it is with the faith with which so many materialistic natural scientists rest content: the faith in a world that is supposed to have its equivalent and measure in human thought, in human valuations – a ‘world of truth’ that be grasped entirely with the help of our four-cornered human reason... Above all, one shouldn’t want to strip it (i.e. existence) of its ambiguous character: that, gentlemen, is what good taste demands – above all, the taste of reverence for everything that lies beyond your horizon!

Whereas the scientist and scholars who belong to this "middle class" can be very successful in their specialties, Nietzsche thinks that they never catch sight of the “truly great problems” (such as the question of the value of truth). What is required, according to Nietzsche, and as Sadler notes, in order for one to “catch sight of” the truly great problems, is a “taste of reverence”. What Nietzsche means is straightforward. However, the level at which one might appraise it critically is unclear. As far as I can tell, the most useful thing to note is that it corresponds roughly to Schopenhauer’s view that a certain kind of philosophical intuition into “true being” is possible in exceptional circumstances to extraordinary individuals (i.e. Plato, Kant, Goethe, etc.), with the caveat that Nietzsche rejects the possibility of being conscious of “immediate certainty”.

In any case, it is clear that Nietzsche thinks that a [metaphysical] “world of truth” is not accessible under normal conditions to human rationality. This notion of a “world of truth”, however, is highly apotheosized, and is equivalent to unmediated and complete access
to a “pure truth” that can be grasped as being conceptualized independently of the biological conditions under which human understanding is possible. Once this is understood I suspect that most scientists would agree with Nietzsche. Our biological composition obviously conditions the way we experience the world, and our knowledge of the world is obviously the product of our experience of it. It would be naïve to conclude that we can have exhaustive knowledge of reality, just as it would be naïve to conclude that all knowledge claims have equal validity with respect to one another, or with respect to the phenomena they seek to comprehend. Granted this, the “great problems” of philosophy are, Nietzsche argues, less a question of scientific knowledge and more a question of a “taste of reverence” for that which is “beyond our horizon” (i.e. beyond that which it is possible for our biologically conditioned rationality to grasp).

If we now reflect on Nietzsche’s claim that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is the “most scientific idea”, we can see that this is very far from being an unqualified endorsement of its “truth”. Arguably, Nietzsche is saying that belief in a recurrence cosmology may well be the closest approximation to the truth that our human rationality can achieve, or simply that it is the likely result of certain prejudices that attend the birth pangs of positivistic materialism; note that this is different from saying that it is “true”. Allow me to try to reconstruct Nietzsche’s logic, insofar as he might have speculated that this is how burgeoning post-Kantian materialists might think: “We experience and know the world with respect to numbers and planes and logic. This is the inescapable product of our biology. We cannot conclude that the world is finite with respect to time and space; we cannot conclude that it is infinite with respect to time and space; both of these options have been shown by Kant to be untenable. We cannot accept the tenets of idealism (we see it as cunningly disguised Christian apologetics, and “unscientific”). If the “stuff” that comprises the universe is finite (which is the most intuitively reasonable view), and time is infinite (also the most reasonable view in the context of nineteenth century physics), then everything that can have happened, must have happened. This is a problem. If the universe can ever come to an end or equilibrium, it must have already done it — therefore such an end is not possible. The most reasonable way out of this is
to conclude that time is a "circle", and that everything that can happen, must happen an infinite number of times."

The main objection to this general line of argument, as suggested by Eugen Dühring, is that while energy might be finite, space cannot easily be said to be finite, and therefore the number of ways that "stuff" can be combined is infinite. However, it is not clear that this argument meets Schopenhauer’s objection that if one treats time as infinite, then everything that can become, must become. It is well known that Nietzsche was aware of Dühring’s argument (as well as those of Dühring’s detractors, who did argue for a recurrence cosmology: Louis A. Blanqui and Gustav Le Bon). I conclude then that Nietzsche felt that Schopenhauer’s argument trumped Dühring’s at this point. As a result, I suggest that Nietzsche predicts that scientists and, following on their heels, the scientifically educated European public, will conclude that a recurrence cosmology is the most likely candidate for a scientific cosmology in the wake of the demise of Christianity and idealism.

The key point to remember is that insofar as Nietzsche is speculating about the possible "truth" of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, he is speculating about "scientific matters". He is not speculating about matters that require the “taste of reverence” which he sees as the basis of true philosophical questioning. Nietzsche himself, who, as a philosopher with a taste of reverence, acknowledges that there is a realm or realms “beyond” his “horizon”, inaccessible to his “human, all too human” subjectivity, is perfectly justified in allowing himself to remain skeptical with respect to the ultimate veracity of such scientific questions. His interest in the issue of scientific cosmology is primarily concerned with the potential implications that widespread belief in such a view may have for the future of European culture, and, in particular, the implications that such belief have for the “value of truth”.

127 Cf. Magnus, Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative, 64.
Conclusion

In sum, with respect to Nietzsche’s interest in the cosmological dimensions of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, I argue that this interest can be understood best as follows: Nietzsche predicts that, as a function of the ascetic ideal/will-to-truth, Christianity and Idealism will be “overcome”; any overcoming of Idealism will lead to a number of classical metaphysical problems being revisited; in the domain of cosmology (which pertains directly to “worldviews”) this will be Kant’s first antinomy of pure reason, and Schopenhauer’s variation of this problem; Nietzsche finally predicts that this antinomy will be resolved by adopting a recurrence cosmology.

I also argue that this interpretation of Nietzsche’s interest does not clash necessarily with his epistemological “perspectivism”, my own account of which I have briefly sketched. Indeed, in my view, one of the key advantages of this way of understanding Nietzsche’s interest in eternal recurrence is that it allows there to be a straightforward cosmological dimension (such as is represented in the Nachlass) that does not undermine the many interpretations of Nietzsche that would deny the possibility of him making straightforward scientific of metaphysical claims about the world. Although I have suggested an account of his epistemology that does allow his thought to bear a very positive relation to science, albeit with “philosophical” reservations about the ultimate veracity of scientific claims, I think that even those interpreters who understand Nietzsche’s views to have much more radical epistemological consequences would acknowledge that my interpretation of his interest in a recurrence cosmology does not lead him into contradiction.
Chapter Five: Recurrence as nihilism

Nihilists! F*ck me. I mean, say what you like about the tenets of National Socialism, Dude, at least it's an ethos!
—The Big Lebowski

Introduction
According to my thesis, Nietzsche expected widespread belief in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to have potentially catastrophic implications for European culture. I have suggested that, as far as one is able to tell, this is because Nietzsche thought that such belief would result in the development of "suicidal nihilism" amongst the doctrine's adherents. In other words, people could be expected to get depressed and kill themselves, perhaps en masse. Now I am assuming that most of my readers will be resistant to such an interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. "After all," such readers might say, "why would so brilliant a psychologist and thinker as Nietzsche arrive at a view that is, to our minds, patently ridiculous?" My own students, when I queried them on this topic, invariably rejected such a possibility on the grounds that if they were told by a demon that their lives were to recur eternally, their reactions would be ones of indifference. And indeed, I cannot help but be sympathetic to the straightforward nature of their responses.

However, despite my sympathy with this reaction, I am unable to escape the fact that there is a large amount of textual support for the view that Nietzsche himself considered the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to be profoundly horrifying. Moreover, he seems to have assumed that others would find it so. The later notes in the Nachlass are full of references to the cataclysmic effect of the "idea", its power to "condemn whole races" and such forth, and even the most famous of all references to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, the penultimate aphorism of the first edition of The Gay Science, written in 1881, well before Nietzsche could be said to be going mad, is structured around the assumption that the idea would possibly "crush" anyone over
whom it “gained power”. The question is: what is one to make of all these references if one assumes, like my students for example, that the prospect of an eternally recurring universe isn’t actually all that awful?

This chapter is based upon the assumption that Nietzsche did indeed think that belief in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same had the potential to induce suicidal depression. Rather than argue for the veracity of this interpretation per se, it explains how and why such a reading “works”. To this end, it is structured into three main sections. In the first section I argue that Nietzsche equates belief in a recurrence cosmology with nihilism. That is to say, that those who believe in a recurrence cosmology are likely to derive nihilistic consequences from such a belief. The primary consequence derived will be the view that existence has no “goal”. This basic equation of nihilism with the idea of the eternal recurrence is I think suggested quite clearly by Nietzsche in the following note from the Nachlass that I have already cited in Chapter Three:

Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: “the eternal recurrence.” This is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the “meaningless”), eternally! The European form of Buddhism: the energy of knowledge and strength compels this belief.

It is the most scientific of all possible hypotheses. We deny end goals: if existence had one it would have to have been reached.

The idea that existence has no “goal”, is presumably dangerous in Nietzsche’s view, because it can lead to the conclusion that there is no “meaning” in, or “reason” for, the suffering that is constitutive of existence. As Nietzsche argues in GM:III, §27, in the absence of such “meaning” – and in the absence of any answer to the question “why suffer?”, the natural tendency of human beings is towards “suicidal nihilism”. This picture “fits” Nietzsche’s analysis of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal.
Now, as I see it, this basic account raises two key questions. The first is that, even if one agrees to the above account of the way in which Nietzsche’s ideas fit together, the idea that someone might tend towards depression or suicide in the face of the “meaninglessness” that they derived from the “goallessness” of the universe is not necessarily compelling. Rather than attempt a direct response in the form of “it is compelling” (a position I have doubts about myself), I will, in the second section of this chapter, divert the reader’s attention to two literary milestones, written in 1877 and 1880 respectively, that base very famous and compelling narratives upon the same assumption. The first example I will discuss is the suicidal nihilism and eventual redemption of Levin, in Tolstoy’s great novel Anna Karenin, and, the second example is the descent into madness of Ivan, in Dostoyevsky’s novel The Brothers Karamazov. By examining the plight of these two famous literary characters, I will demonstrate that whatever we today might think about Nietzsche’s views on the potential psychological effects of “nihilism”, we must recognize that his views on this precise topic were certainly not idiosyncratic in his own day, and were in fact in keeping with the views of two of the world’s most penetrating “psychologists”.

The third section of this chapter addresses the second question that I anticipate. This regards the equation of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same with the most extreme form of nihilism. Whilst this can appear as a quite straightforward assumption, especially with respect to the passage that I cited above, two important recent commentators, Nehamas and Clark, both reject this equation. Indeed it is obvious that, having rejected the possibility of there being any cosmological significance to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, they cannot allow such an equation to stand. They thus find reasons to undermine the possibility of this reading. In general, both do this by questioning whether Zarathustra’s “most abysmal idea” is equivalent to a recurrence cosmology, and they each suggest alternative interpretations of this most abysmal idea, which it seems apposite to discuss in this section. My view is relatively straightforward: belief in an eternally recurring universe is equivalent to the most extreme nihilism; in the
narrative structure of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Zarathustra’s most abysmal idea is a recurrence cosmology precisely because it represents the most extreme nihilism.

5.1 The problem of nihilism
This section explains why Nietzsche thinks that the prospect of the recurrence of “existence as it is” has the potential to be experienced as an “awful” prospect. Moreover, I articulate this explanation in terms of what is often called the “problem of nihilism”. Once again, I appeal to the influence of Schopenhauer in order to account for the context of Nietzsche’s reasoning. In the previous chapter I argued that while Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer’s metaphysic of the Will, and the moral system he constructed upon this metaphysical foundation, Nietzsche is broadly sympathetic to many of Schopenhauer’s descriptive accounts of phenomenal reality. What I did not mention in the previous chapter was that a large proportion of Schopenhauer’s descriptions of phenomenal reality were devoted to depicting those aspects of it which we today would consider to be “negative”. Schopenhauer wrote forcefully, and at great length, about the very great extent to which human life is essentially characterized by suffering. There are literally hundreds of passages one could cite in order to illustrate Schopenhauer’s views on suffering. I have chosen the following from his essay ‘On the Suffering of the World’:

You can also look upon our life as an episode unprofitably disturbing the blessed calm of nothingness… As a reliable compass for orientating yourself in life nothing is more useful than to accustom yourself to regarding this world as a place of atonement, a sort of penal colony. When you have done this you will order your expectations of life according to the nature of things and no longer regard the calamities, sufferings, torments and miseries of life as something irregular and not to be expected but will find them entirely in order, well knowing that each of us is here being punished for his existence and in each in his own particular way… and regard every man first and foremost as a being… whose life is an expiation for the crime of being born.\(^{128}\)

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Nietzsche saw things quite so bleakly as his forebear, it is clear that Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer that suffering is an essential and, in most cases, very prominent feature of existence. This is evinced by no less than his account of the source of the power of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche writes, of man’s relation to the ubiquity of suffering: “... his problem was not suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, “why do I suffer?”” This is in fact the crucial point. Schopenhauer had constructed a detailed system that explained why it is that human life is constituted by suffering, and he had also taught asceticism as a means of reducing the extent of one’s suffering. Schopenhauer’s answer to the question of why humans suffer, and his advocacy of asceticism, were, however, indissolubly linked to his metaphysic of the “Will”, which was itself coeval with the fundamental view of idealism. Therefore, insofar as Nietzsche thinks that belief in the tenets of idealism is receding in Europe, he is justified in concluding that the Idealist “interpretation” of human suffering will lose support. For Nietzsche this is a serious problem. His analysis of the ascetic ideal stipulates that in the absence of “man” being presented with a reason for, or interpretation of, his suffering, his natural inclination is towards “suicidal nihilism”.130

In The Gay Science, Nietzsche gives an account of the historical abandonment of Idealism, only in this text it is accounted for primarily in terms of a rejection of Christianity. His account of the “death of God” runs parallel to his account of the overcoming of the distinction between a “real” and an “apparent” world. It is for this reason that Nietzsche describes Christianity as “Platonism for ‘the people’” - Plato being the arch-idealist in Nietzsche’s eyes.131 Further evidence for the parallel nature of these analyses can be seen in Twilight of the Idols, in which Nietzsche describes Schopenhauer as the “heir of the Christian interpretation [of existence]” and suggests that Schopenhauer had, to a certain extent, outdone Christianity by incorporating into

130 Note: see pp69-72 for my account of the way in which the ascetic ideal functioned as an ‘antidote to nihilism’ because it was a function of such a ‘reason’ or ‘interpretation’.
131 BGE, Preface.
his metaphysical worldview even those aspects of existence that Christianity had rejected and had thereby managed to “approve from them from a Christian... point of view...”. So if we turn now to examine some passages from The Gay Science that describe the consequences of the “death of God”, we can appreciate that for Nietzsche, these descriptions are equally applicable to the general consequences of the overcoming of Idealism. The most famous passage is arguably from §125 (‘The madman’), in which Nietzsche uses powerful imagery to depict the significance of this “death”:

‘Where is God?’ he cried; ‘I'll tell you! We have killed him – you and I! But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideward, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder? Isn't it night and more night coming again and again?... The holiest and mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it? There was never a greater deed – and whoever is born after us will belong to a higher history than all history up until now!...

We can see that, for Nietzsche, the “death of God” – and the corresponding overcoming of Idealism – are momentous historical events. The earth is likened to being “unchained from its sun”, and its peoples are now “straying as though through an infinite nothing”. It will be noted that this imagery makes just as much sense in relation to a rejection of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics as it does in relation to a rejection of the Christian God. If the conditioned world of phenomena is “unchained” from its meta-phenomenal

foundation (the ‘Will’), then it is also “unchained” from the possibility of redemption for the suffering that is constitutive of the human experience of [phenomenal] life. Moreover, it is also unchained from the moral system that Schopenhauer had proceeded to derive from his metaphysic. In 1887, in GS, §343, Nietzsche gives an even more chilling account of what is at stake here:

... now that this faith has been undermined, how much must collapse because it was built on this faith, leaned on it, had grown into it – for example, our whole European morality. This long dense succession of demolition, destruction, downfall, upheaval that now stands ahead: who would guess enough of it today to play the teacher and herald of this monstrous logic of horror, the prophet of deep darkness and an eclipse of the sun the like of which has probably never before existed on earth.

In general, this “situation” is widely known in the secondary literature as the “problem of nihilism”. The “problem”, as Nietzsche sees it, is that, as a result of the ascendency of the will-to-truth, Europeans no longer believe in a metaphysical interpretation of existence. According to Nietzsche’s picture, Idealism and Christianity are simply no longer considered to be credible “interpretations of existence”. However, the scientific rationality that is undermining them cannot, insofar as its domain is restricted to describing relations of phenomena in the domain of necessarily falsified conscious thought, replace those aspects of the former worldviews that provided a justification for basic existential questions such as: why do I exist?; why do I suffer? As we have seen, Nietzsche sees answers to such questions as vital because, faced with a lack of justification for their suffering, – or indeed a total absence of any ostensible meaning in existence, he believes that people are liable to become depressed and suicidal. Thus he predicts that, as the “shadows of God” are systematically destroyed by free-spirits, and the Christian moral world-view vanishes, the effect on European culture will be monstrous and horrible.
I suggested, in Part One, that Nietzsche was interested in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same because he believed that belief in it was equivalent to the most extreme form of nihilism. Indeed, demonstrating that this is the case is the point of the final section of this chapter. However, because that section will explain how the figure of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same functions at a symbolic level in Nietzsche’s poetic text *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it is perhaps apposite to anticipate it now with a very straightforward observation. Schopenhauer considered suffering to be an essential defining aspect of life. Nietzsche, I have suggested, is in agreement with him on this point. For Schopenhauer this was true to such an extent that he made the following claim:

*But perhaps at the end of his life, no man, if he be sincere and at the same time in possession of his faculties, will ever wish to go through it again. Rather than this he would much prefer to choose complete non-existence.*

Now if this can be read as being representative of the world view encompassed by the ascetic ideal, and Nietzsche certainly saw Schopenhauerian pessimism as being one of its final manifestations, then it is logical and obvious why Nietzsche saw the prospect of life recurring an infinite number of times (with no “finale of nothingness”) as a prospect that was indeed likely to be received as terrifying. Quite simply, it is the logical antithesis to the Schopenhauerian concept of the “blessed calm of nothingness”. The ascetic ideal teaches this “blessed calm” as an aim in life (i.e. asceticism), as well as a promise for after death (nirvana). So not only does the prospect of an eternally recurring indifferent empirical universe seem quite remote from any ideal that could function as an “interpretation of suffering”, but it even seems to deny the suffering individual the possibility of eternal peace after death. As such the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same can be understood as the “most extreme form of nihilism”. If I am indeed correct in suggesting that Nietzsche’s interest in the possibility of a recurrence cosmology was predicated upon his prediction that it would garner widespread belief as a consequence

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of the dissolution of the Christian/Idealist worldview, then understanding this is reasonably straightforward. Even so, one might still object that inasmuch as this is all based upon the assumption that unless people are provided with a justification of their suffering they will be led to take drastic measures such as suicide, then it is all based upon an assumption that is at best, radical, and at worst, trivial. However, the next section argues that this objection lacks an appropriate historical perspective, and that, insofar as he indeed assumed something like this, Nietzsche was keeping excellent company.

5.2 Nihilism in literature
As I mentioned in the introduction, I have asked a number of groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students whether or not they would consider suicide if leading cosmologists announced that the universe was cyclical, that each cycle was identical to every other, and that this business went on for all eternity. In every case the answer I got was a resounding “no”. Typically, indifference was seen as being the only really logical response, granted that one would in no way experience any sense of repetition, and that each cycle would still “feel” like the “only” one. I am sympathetic to this general response. It is very difficult for me to imagine myself becoming depressed or suicidal as a result of any cosmological insight.

However, this section argues that despite the nature of my own response to this hypothetical situation, and the responses of my peers, it is important to appreciate that Nietzsche’s views on this precise topic are not necessarily as radical or as surprising as one might initially think. Indeed, one might even go as far as to venture that, to his contemporaries, Nietzsche’s concerns regarding the potentially catastrophic consequences of widespread belief in a recurrence cosmology comprised perhaps the least controversial aspect of his thoughts about this whole issue. In order to demonstrate that this is the case, I will show that the same assumptions that form the basis of

134 Cf. Clark’s discussion of Soll and Magnus on this point: Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy, 248-252.
Nietzsche's concern are fundamentally operative in two well-known novels, both of which were written during Nietzsche's working life. The first is Anna Karenin, completed by Count Lev Nikolayevich (“Leo”) Tolstoy in 1877; the second is The Brothers Karamazov, completed by Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky in 1880. It goes without saying that neither of these is an obscure, or even radical (in the sense of controversial) text. As well as enjoying widespread popular appeal, they are two of the most highly regarded novels in the literary canon. I draw attention to them in this context because they deal with the “problem of nihilism” in powerful and interesting ways that correlate precisely with Nietzsche’s concerns. Conveniently for me, they approach the “problem” in different ways, which together show that, whatever one thinks of Nietzsche’s views about this issue, one must at least acknowledge that he was far from being anachronistic or out of touch with the concerns of his age. Tolstoy does not refer explicitly to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. My interest in his text is based upon his more general concern with nihilism. Dostoevsky however does relate to the possibility of a recurrence cosmology in an important way. In fact, there are many clear parallels between his treatment of it and Nietzsche’s concern for the “awful” aspects of the idea.

Let us begin by examining the character of Konstantin Dmitrievitch Levin, the hero of Tolstoy’s famous novel Anna Karenin. As this is not intended to be a serious attempt at literary criticism, I will adopt the standard interpretation of Levin as being, in effect, a “stand-in” or “mouth-piece” for Tolstoy himself. The novel itself requires little

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135 It should be noted that there is little evidence to suggest that Nietzsche read either of the two texts in question, although he was certainly familiar with other works by both authors. In any case, this is beside the point. For a more detailed account of the interrelationship between the three authors see: Lev Shestov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche (Ohio University Press, 1969).  
136 I use the translation by Rosemary Edmonds (Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1954)  
137 I use the David Magarshack translation (Great Britain: Penguin Classics, 1958)  
138 There is substantial, compelling evidence for this common reading: e.g. ‘Levin’ is a variation of Tolstoy’s own first-name ‘Lev’; many of the significant events of Tolstoy’s own life (marriage, conversion etc.) are recreated quite accurately in the novel as events in Levin’s life; many of the views (e.g. on peasants, agriculture, Christianity) expounded by Levin in Anna Karenin were also communicated as Tolstoy’s own views in other media etc.
introduction. It follows the lives of the two main protagonists Levin and Anna, culminating in the tragedy of Anna's suicide, and Levin's redemption in marriage and Christianity. For reasons of economy, I do not discuss the character of Anna, and will mostly restrict my discussion of Levin to his conversion to Christianity, which occurs at the end of the novel.

Levin is a Russian man in his thirties who belongs to the landed nobility. He takes an active interest in the management of his large estates, the farming of which constitutes his primary source of income. In many respects he is an archetypal "Rousseauian" hero: he engages in hard manual labour and occasionally romanticizes the lives of the peasants; his manners are refined and he is well connected, yet he is made uncomfortable by what he sees as superficial and insincere in the drawing rooms and salons of 'high society', and this makes him clumsy; he is scientific and curious about all aspects of life, but he eschews the scholasticism and cliquishness of academic circles, preferring to tackle practical problems and to think things through for himself.

Yet of all Levin's idiosyncrasies, perhaps the most striking, and most significant with respect to the thematic unity of the narrative, is his compulsion to question the nature of, and reasons for, existence: What is life? Why am I here? What is to be done? Levin had been brought up a Christian, but by the time he had finished university he no longer believed in Christian teachings. Ever since then he had regarded the Christian faith as naïve and childish, little more than a harmless story that was edifying for women and little children, but not one that was capable of satisfying an enquiring, male, adult, rational mind. Hence Levin views science and reason as being the most likely candidates for furnishing answers to these big questions, and continued to read and study and contemplate, with the aim of answering them with some degree of certainty.

However, subsequent to the protracted and ignoble death of his brother Nikolai, and the suffocating fear which Levin experienced during the birth of his first child to his young wife Kitty, his need to answer these questions becomes almost pathological, and he is
struck by how inadequate the conceptual resources of the sciences are when held up to
certain undeniable realities of human experience, such as the fear of death, grief and
love:

[Levin] had been stricken with horror, not so much at death, as at life, without the least
conception of its origin, its purpose, its reason, its nature. The organism, its decay, the
indestructibility of matter, the law of the conservation of energy, evolution, were the
terms that had superseded those of his early faith. These terms and the theories
associated with them were very useful for intellectual purposes. But they gave no
guidance for life, and Levin suddenly felt like a person who has exchanged his warm fur
coat for a muslin garment, and out in the frost for the first time is immediately
convinced, not by arguments but with his whole being, that he is as good as naked and
must inevitably perish miserably.\textsuperscript{139}

In order to try harder to answer these questions, Levin studies the major philosophers
assiduously. He reads Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer. While
he reads them he experiences them as fruitful, but as soon as he tries to then apply
them to his questions on his own terms he reaches a dead end. He realizes that, as long
as he follows the very strict definitions given by these philosophers for very hazy terms
(e.g. \textit{spirit, will, freedom, substance}), he enters what in hindsight appears to be a mere
"verbal trap", and, while he \textit{seems} to comprehend something, when he then turns back
to "real life", the "artificial edifices" tumble like a house of cards and offer him no
satisfaction.\textsuperscript{140} This is devastating for Levin, who begins to think: "I cannot live without
knowing what I am and why I am here. And that I can't know, so therefore I can't live".\textsuperscript{141}

Indeed Levin is so distressed by all this that he even has to go to the trouble of hiding
ropes and guns from himself lest the temptation to suicide become overwhelming.

\textsuperscript{139} Tolstoy, ibid, 820.

\textsuperscript{140} Having said that, it is interesting to note that Tolstoy described Hegel's writings, in a letter, as
"unintelligible gibberish interspersed with platitudes". Cf. Isaiah Berlin, \textit{The Hedgehog and Fox: An Essay
on Tolstoy's View of History} (Great Britain: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), 11.

\textsuperscript{141} Tolstoy, op. cit., 823.
Finally, he sums up the fruits of his research and rumination in the following statement, which encapsulates all that he believes he has a right to rationally conclude about the 'meaning' of human existence:

'In infinite time, in infinite matter, in infinite space an organic cell stands out, will hold together awhile and then burst, and that cell is Me.' This was an agonizing fallacy, but it was the sole, the supreme result of centuries of human thought in that direction. It was the ultimate belief on which all the systems of thought elaborated by the human mind in almost all their ramifications were based. It was the dominant conviction, and of all other explanations Levin had unconsciously chosen it, without knowing when or how, as being at any rate the clearest, and made it his own.  

Needless to say, Levin does not derive much comfort from this conception of the universe. In fact, he is convinced that it can only be the "cruel jest of some evil power". But for all this, Levin does not kill himself, and instead begins to realize something quite striking. Whenever he puzzled over what he was living for, and why, and was unable to answer these questions, he tended to fall into despair. Yet, when he was too busy with farm work to worry about the problems of existence, it was clear that he did indeed seem to know what he was living for, and he was then quite capable of acting and living resolutely and confidently. Eventually, somewhat in line with this, Levin comes to experience an epiphany which changes his life forever.

It happens during a conversation with a peasant named Fiodr. During the course of the conversation, two other peasants are described, and contrasted with one another in the context of the management of subordinates: one is Platon, the other Kirilov. Fiodr has nothing but contempt for the latter, describing him as someone who “will squeeze a fellow until he gets what he wants”, while the former, Platon, will “give credit, and sometimes let a man off. And go short himself, too. He’s that sort of person.” To Levin’s question as to why Platon should let anyone off, Fiodr replies:

142 Tolstoy, ibid., 823.
Oh well, of course, folks are different. One man lives for his own wants and nothing else – take Mityuka (Kirilov), who only thinks of stuffing his belly – but Fokanich (Platon) is an upright old man. He thinks of his soul. He does not forget God.  

According to Fiodr, Platon “lives rightly” in “God’s way”. This seemingly rather banal conversation triggers what amounts to a revelation in Levin and, deeply agitated, he bids Fiodr a meagre goodbye and leaves. Alone with his thoughts, Levin recognizes this very simple statement as evidence of a universal and indubitable truth concerning the notion of “goodness”:

Fiodr says that Kirilov lives for his belly. That is intelligible and rational. All of us as rational beings can’t do anything else but live for our bellies. And all of a sudden this same Fiodr declares that it is wrong to live for one’s belly; we must live for truth, for God, and a hint is enough to make me understand what he means! And I and millions of men, men who have lived centuries ago and men who are living now – peasants, the poor in spirit and the sages, those who have thought and written about it, in their obscure words saying the same thing – we are all agreed on this one point: what it is we should live for and what is good. The only knowledge I and all men possess that is firm, incontestable, and clear is here, and it cannot be explained by reason – this knowledge is outside the sphere of reason: it has no causes and no effects.

Thus marks Levin’s conversion to Christianity, and, with the tragic suicide of Anna, the drawing of Tolstoy’s novel to a close. Levin soon comes to see that his new knowledge was not a discovery, but instead the fact that life had continued in spite of his doubts and he had not committed suicide demonstrates to him that he had really only opened his eyes to that which he had already known, and which had already been the basis of his existence:

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143 Tolstoy, ibid., 829.
144 Tolstoy, ibid., 830.
He had been living (without being aware of it) on those spiritual truths that he had imbibed with his mother’s milk, yet in thinking he had not only refused to acknowledge these truths but had studiously ignored them.

Now it was clear to him that he could only live by virtue of the beliefs in which he had been brought up.\textsuperscript{145}

But what does Levin’s revelation entail? What becomes of all the science and philosophy that he has studied? Simply this: it is dismissed.

I was in search of an answer to my question. But reason could not give me an answer to my question – reason is incommensurable with the problem. The answer has been given to me by life itself, through my knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. And this knowledge I did not acquire in any way: it was given to me as it is to everybody – \textit{given}, because I could not have got it from anywhere.

Where did I get it from? Would reason have ever proved to me that I must love my neighbour instead of strangling him?... Reason discovered the struggle for existence, and the law demanding that I should strangle all who hinder the satisfaction of my desires. That is the deduction of reason. But loving one’s neighbours reason could never discover, because it’s unreasonable.\textsuperscript{146}

We can see from the above summary of Levin’s story that it contains a number of key features which correlate closely to Nietzsche’s concerns. Crucially, for my purposes, Levin experiences the “scientific world view” as being devoid of any “meaning”. Basic existential questions, such as “what ought one to do?” and “why live?” (let alone “why suffer?”), are, in Tolstoy’s view, beyond the scope of scientific rationality (“reason”). However, since this same rationality has undermined the credibility of the Christian worldview (which did offer answers to these questions), there is now a vacuum of meaning. This vacuum is what Nietzsche refers to as \textit{nihilism}. Levin’s response to nihilism is, at least initially, a kind of suicidal depression. This is exactly in line with Nietzsche’s assumptions. If one considers the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same

\textsuperscript{145} Tolstoy, ibid., 832.
\textsuperscript{146} Tolstoy, ibid., 832.
to be simply a more extreme instantiation of nihilism than that which inheres in Levin’s cosmology (which does not entail any recurrence), then one can appreciate why Nietzsche viewed widespread belief in it as such a potentially awful prospect.

Also of interest is Levin’s relation to the idealism of Plato, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer. While he experiences them as edifying while he reads them, he also feels that none of them can stand up to his thoughts about “real life”. Note that this is not a rejection of philosophy per se on the grounds that it is “out of touch” with the practical problems of “real life” – rather it is trumped by the greater clarity and explanatory power of the scientific materialism that Levin eventually comes to abhor. Levin’s own intellectual honesty simply compels him to reject the metaphysical systems of the great philosophers, despite his “metaphysical need” (to borrow a phrase from Kant). I suggest that the story of Levin is in this sense a neat illustration of what Nietzsche considered as the will-to-truth: “that finally forbids itself the lie involved in belief in God”. It is obviously somewhat ironic in this context that Levin finally overcomes his “suicidal nihilism” by rejecting scientific rationality and embracing the Christianity of his youth. However, this is obviously beside the point. What is important is that we have good grounds for assuming that Tolstoy was in agreement with Nietzsche with respect to the potentially awful consequences of nihilism. One can see that, insofar as the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same can be thought of the most extreme nihilism, Tolstoy would certainly have agreed with Nietzsche that it had the potential to occasion suicide and depression among its adherents.

Let us turn now to the case of Dostoyevsky. The Brothers Karamazov requires little introduction; it is the story of three brothers, each of whom is loosely implicated in the murder of their father by a servant. Each of the three brothers has a distinctively different character, to such an extent that one is tempted to view them as contrived caricatures. The youngest (and hero of the story), Alyosha, is a religious novice, who is devout, humble and kind. His brother Dmitry is soldier who lives a hedonistic life of

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147 GM:III, §27.
drunkenness, promiscuity and gambling. The other brother Ivan is a serious and brilliant, albeit somewhat arrogant, intellectual. Much of the great interest in this novel centers on a number of conversations between Alyosha and Ivan, in which the two brothers discuss Ivan’s rejection of Christianity.

It should be noted that Ivan’s critique of Christianity, as related by him to Alyosha, is ostensibly a moral critique founded in theodicy. He essentially argues that no possible future redemption or harmony could possibly redress the suffering and evil that is palpable in the world. In order to highlight his case Ivan appeals to a few graphic anecdotes (which Dostoyevsky apparently found in his local newspapers) that involve despicable acts of cruelty committed against children, one in which a small girl is tortured and forced by her parents to eat excrement, and then left to freeze to death in the privy. Finally, he asks his brother the famous question:

...imagine that it is you yourself who are erecting the edifice of human destiny with the aim of making men happy in the end, of giving them peace and contentment at last, but that to do that it is absolutely necessary, and indeed quite inevitable, to torture to death only one tiny creature, the little girl who beat her breast with her little fist, and to found the edifice on her unavenged tears – would you consent to be the architect on those conditions?

The simple but profound issue raised here concerns God’s nature. How is it possible that an infinitely good, just and unconstrained God could include such suffering as part of a divine plan? The question of whether or not Nietzsche would see this as part of his own account of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal is I think quite open. Here we have what is arguably a case of Christian morality rejecting itself on moral grounds. Nietzsche depicts a similar situation, but tends to account for it primarily in terms of the Christian apotheosis of truthfulness, but Ivan’s argument is in no way incompatible with
Nietzsche’s broad framework. In any case, the result of Ivan’s rejection of Christianity is an ostensible atheism, which leads him to conclude that, in the absence of any divine moral authority, “everything is permitted”.

This nihilistic view – that in the absence of God everything is permitted – is shared by Ivan with his father’s servant Smerdyakov, who then promptly murders Ivan’s father (under the impression that Ivan had encouraged him to). Upon realizing this, Ivan is stricken by guilt and begins a descent into madness. Ivan’s condition includes extraordinarily vivid delusions which take the form of visitations from Satan, the “Wise and Terrible Spirit of the Wilderness”, who engages Ivan in long conversations. I will focus on one particular conversation in Book Eleven, which is important because it precipitates Ivan’s complete break down. The devil begins by mocking Ivan’s metaphysical questioning in a good-natured way, and goes as far as to articulate Ivan’s own conception of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same:

Our present earth has probably repeated itself a billion times. I mean, it has become extinct, frozen, cracked, fallen to pieces, resolved into its component elements, again the water above the firmament, then again a comet, again a sun, again an earth from the sun – this evolution, you see, has repeated itself an infinite number of times, and all in the same way, over and over again, to the smallest detail. A most indecely tedious business...

What is particularly striking about this episode is the nature of the hopes for humanity that had attended this general worldview. The devil goes on to ridicule these hopes, and finally to mock Ivan’s desire for truth:

“Once humanity to a man renounces God (and I believe that period, analogous with the geological periods, will come to pass) the whole of the old outlook on life will collapse by itself without cannibalism and, above all, the old morality, too, and a new era will

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148 See, for example, GM:III, §27 – “In this way Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality; in the same way Christianity as morality must now perish, too: we stand on the threshold of this event.”
dawn... Man will be exalted with a spirit of divine, titanic pride, and the man-god will make his appearance. Extending his conquest over nature infinitely every hour by his will and science, man will every hour by that very fact feel so lofty a joy that it will make up for all his old hopes of the joys of heaven... “The question is, my young thinker thought, whether such a period will ever come. If it comes, everything is resolved and mankind will attain its goal. But as, in view of man's inveterate stupidity, it may not be attained even for a thousand years, everyone who is already aware of the truth has a right to carry on as he pleases in accordance with the new principles. In that sense “everything is permitted” to him.... All this is very charming; only, if you want to lead a life of crime, what do you want the sanction of truth for?....

The parallels between this passage and Nietzsche's thought are numerous and striking. Like Nietzsche, Ivan predicts that a general overcoming of Christianity is inevitable. He uses the passing of geological periods as an analogy that graphically highlights the inexorable nature of this overcoming. Moreover, just as Nietzsche seeks the "highest splendour" for humanity, and hopes that such a state of affairs will emerge as a consequence of the overcoming of the ascetic ideal, Ivan declares that man's "goal" (which he, like Nietzsche, understands primarily in terms of pride and joy) will likewise be attained only after the last vestiges of Christianity have been universally renounced. The sharp irony here is the fact that, as Ivan is learning the hard-way, he cannot actually live in accordance with this worldview. Presumably, as is illustrated by the question of his younger brother Alyosha: “how can you live with such a hell in your head?”, Dostoyevsky's assumption here is that this worldview is not psychologically tenable. One simply cannot live in accordance with it, irrespective of whether one thinks it is "true" or not.

There are a number of fascinating questions that one could pursue with respect to the myriad correlations between Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky. However, this is not the place

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149 This corresponds to Nietzsche's claim, in 'Schopenhauer as Educator', §8, that "the only critique of a philosophy that is possible and that proves something, namely trying to live in accordance with it, has never been taught at our universities."
for such topics. What I am concerned to draw attention to for the purposes of my thesis is that Nietzsche, inasmuch as he was interested in the effects of the kind of worldview articulated by Ivan, was very much in agreement with Dostoyevsky that belief in such a worldview had the potential to cause harm. The close affinity of their respective analyses of this issue is perhaps demonstrated best by highlighting their views on the question of truth. Just as Ivan’s final descent into madness is precipitated by the devil’s question: “what do you want the sanction of truth for?”, which presumably demonstrates to Ivan that, for all his supposed radical and enlightened free-thinking, he has not escaped the Christian moral valuation of truthfulness that was part of a worldview he claimed to reject, Nietzsche predicts that the whole of the Christian moral worldview will finally perish when it finally asks itself the value of truth:

After Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its most striking inference, its inference against itself; this will happen, however, when it poses the question “what is the meaning of all will-to-truth?”

We can see then that even a very cursory examination of classic novels from the period makes it clear that Nietzsche’s concerns about the psychological consequences of believing in a recurrence cosmology (inasmuch as such belief was associated with general views about nihilism) were in keeping with the concerns of his time. No matter how remote from our sensibilities this view seems, it can at least be acknowledged that, from the point of view of late nineteenth century intelligentsia, it would have been accepted as contributing to a discussion that was very much alive. Both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky viewed their own respective understandings of “true” Christianity as the “solution” to the “problem” of nihilism. It goes without saying that it is at this point that Nietzsche’s thought becomes irreconcilable with theirs. Despite his corresponding prognosis concerning the fate of individuals in nihilistic, post-Christian Europe, Nietzsche saw – as will be discussed in the next chapter, the self-overcoming of Christianity as ultimately representing a hopeful spectacle. In fact this dual nature of the

150 GM:III, §27.
idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is important because this double symbolism is the key to an interpretation of Nietzsche's poetic work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In my view the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same represents for Nietzsche simultaneously the most abysmal idea and the highest formula of affirmation, the most extreme thinkable nihilism and the most positive grounds for action.

5.3 Recurrence as Zarathustra's "most abysmal idea"

Thus far I have been working under the assumption that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is, according to Nietzsche, an expression of the most extreme thinkable nihilism. To put it another way, it is the most nihilistic idea, and belief in it is generally considered to be equivalent to, coeval with, or at least the cause of, nihilism. There are passages in the *Nachlass* that seem to state this clearly, such as the following:

Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: "the eternal recurrence."

This is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the "meaningless"), eternally!

In the published texts, the strongest evidence for this view is the fact that Zarathustra (the "basic conception" of whose story is the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same) apparently experiences the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as his "most abysmal thought" and much of the actual narrative is structured around his various responses to it. However, as was mentioned in the main Introduction, several commentators have argued that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is not in fact Zarathustra's most "abysmal thought". In general, such arguments are employed in order to undermine any possibility of there being cosmological significance for the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. They are particularly problematic for my thesis because they undermine the possibility of equating belief in a recurrence cosmology with nihilism, which is an essential component of my interpretation.
As far as I can see, it is reasonably clear that Nietzsche is interested in the effect of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same *qua* cosmology, and that this cosmology figures in the narrative of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as Zarathustra’s most “abysmal idea.” This then sets up for Nietzsche the symbolic basis of Zarathustra’s Dionysian affirmation that will be the topic of the next chapter. Yet, my reasonable certainty on this matter is not a reason for believing me. Especially as there is a particular passage in *Ecce Homo,* which both Nehamas and Clark appeal to, that, *prima facie,* undermines the possibility of equating Zarathustra’s “most abysmal idea” with a recurrence cosmology. This is the pertinent passage:

> The psychological problem in the type of Zarathustra is how... he that has the hardest, most terrible insight into reality, that has thought the most “abysmal idea,” nevertheless does not consider it an objection to existence, not even to its eternal recurrence—but rather one reason more for being himself the eternal Yes to all things...

As Nehamas points out, if we take the “most abysmal idea” to here refer to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same (*qua* cosmology), then we are faced with the seemingly meaningless or bizarre claim that Zarathustra does not consider a recurrence cosmology as an objection to the eternal recurrence. As a consequence, Nehamas suggests that the Zarathustra’s most abysmal idea is rather his realization that: *if* he were to exist again as himself, then the “small men” (and indeed everything in life that Zarathustra detests) *must* also have to exist again too. In my view such a reading does not support the *pathos* of Zarathustra, nor does it allow the narrative to enjoy the same level of poetic unity that my interpretation provides.

Clark, referring to Nehamas’s discussion of the above passage, but disagreeing with Nehamas’s interpretation, argues that Zarathustra’s most abysmal idea is his realization that: *if* one wishes to truly affirm life, then one *must* affirm the eternal recurrence of

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151 Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 147-149.

152 This is consistent with Nehamas’s interpretation of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as being a heuristic theory of personal identity.
everything, including death and the small man.\textsuperscript{153} For Clark, as we have already seen, affirming the eternal recurrence of something in no way entails, or even implies, believing in the possibility of actual cosmological recurrence. Whilst I think that Clark deals much better with this issue than does Nehamas, we are still left with a troubling reading. In the narrative, Zarathustra is literally knocked over into a seven day stupor when he “summons” his most abysmal idea, not by a realization about the universe and his place within it, and the horror of the idea of “existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness”, but, as Clark would have it, by a requirement of logic concerning the definition of “affirmation”. My initial objection to this is simply that if one wishes to retain any respect for Nietzsche as a writer, then the alternative interpretations offered by Nehamas and Clark must be recognized as inadmissible.\textsuperscript{154}

Thus the point of this section is to demonstrate via a commentary of pertinent sections of \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}, that Zarathustra’s belief in a recurrence cosmology, and his equation of such a belief with the most extreme thinkable nihilism, make sense of the narrative, and the pathos, and, on top of that, highlight a level of poetic unity in Nietzsche’s text that is absent from both Nehamas’s and Clark’s interpretations. With respect to the troublesome passage referred to above, which appears to make a mockery of such a reading, I argue that the absurdity is only apparent, and is based simply upon a misunderstanding of the passage. As I will demonstrate, equating belief in a recurrence cosmology with Zarathustra’s most abysmal idea, and with the most extreme nihilism, allows one to make perfect sense of the passage in question.

In my view the narrative of \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} only makes sense because there is an essential connection between nihilism and the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. As Karl Löwith expresses it in his book \textit{Nietzsche’s Idea of the Eternal}

\textsuperscript{153} Clark, \textit{Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy}, 262-263. This is consistent with Clark’s view that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is part of a description of affirmation.

\textsuperscript{154} This claim is more fully defended on p203.
Recurrence of the Same, this connection is to be understood in the following manner. Thus Spoke Zarathustra is the story or parable of the self-overcoming of nihilism, in which “he who overcomes” and “what is overcome” are one and the same. Zarathustra overcomes “himself”; that is, Zarathustra qua the “will to nothing that has become free”, overturns himself into the “willing of the eternal recurring being of all that is”. In order to understand the description of Zarathustra as a “will-to-nothing that has become free”, consider the following aspects of his character: Zarathustra is a disciple of “truth”; as such he is still beholden to the ascetic ideal, hence he is described as a “will-to-nothing”. This “will-to-nothing” has become “free” because, in the pursuit of truth, Zarathustra has come to the realization that truth has no divine, moral, metaphysical or metaphenomenal sanction (i.e. God is dead, there is no possibility of knowing the ‘thing-in-itself’ etc.). The consequence of this realization is that it frees Zarathustra even from the compulsion to truthfulness.

So at the outset of the narrative, Zarathustra is this “will-to-nothing that has become free” —and, as such, he is essentially nihilistic. For Zarathustra, as a “strong, reverent type”, this nihilism consists of his simply being innocent and open to his own existence: the master who is content with his own world. But it is an entirely passive nihilism that also entails the essential goallessness of Zarathustra’s will. Indeed, the story of how Zarathustra came to be such a “will-to-nothing that has become free” is laid out clearly in the famous section ‘On the Three Metamorphoses’, which is an account of the spiritual transformation undergone by Zarathustra. The first stage of Zarathustra’s schema describes the spirit as a “camel”:

Of the three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.

There is much that is difficult for the spirit, the strong reverent spirit that would bear much: but the difficult and the most difficult are what its strength demands.

155 As was discussed in the introductory chapter, I do not agree with Löwith’s interpretation of the significance of Nietzsche’s “idea”. However, despite this, I agree with some aspects of his interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and have found his account very helpful in formulating my own.
What is difficult? asks the spirit that would bear much and kneels down like a camel wanting to be well loaded. What is difficult, O heroes, asks the spirit that would bear much, that I may take it upon myself and exult in my strength?....

Or is it this: feeding on the acorns and grass of knowledge and, for the sake of truth, suffering hunger in one’s soul?...

Or is it this: stepping into the filthy waters when they are the waters of truth, and not repulsing cold frogs or hot toads?...

All these most difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into the desert.

What is conspicuous about this passage is that this schema is obviously not universally applicable. There is no question of this being a prescription or model that the “masses” could follow in order to find “redemption”. It is directed at “strong reverent” types – presumably those with a sense of reverence that allows them to eventually catch sight of the “truly great problems”. Indeed, although it is Zarathustra himself who delivers this speech, it is obvious that it is primarily applicable to him.156 This is a very important point, the main consequence for my purposes of which is that Zarathustra’s reaction to the possibility of a recurrence cosmology is likely to be essentially different to the reaction that Nietzsche expects the masses (the “sick”) to experience. After all, Zarathustra’s wisdom, his starting point in the narrative, is the product of ten years of solitary ruminating in a cave. The camel clearly represents the acolyte of the will-to-truth. It is burdened by the “cold frogs and hot toads” of truth. The result of its intellectual

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156 I note here that, with respect to this precise point, my interpretation accords with that offered by Stanley Rosen in his important 1995 book The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1995) which is structured as a detailed commentary on the whole of Nietzsche’s poetic text. Rosen writes: “The three transformations apply to Zarathustra’s own career, and not to the human spirit as such.” (81). In general, I am very sympathetic to Rosen’s general approach to Nietzsche. However, I disagree with his argument that the teaching of the idea of the eternal recurrence is a “noble lie” (in the Platonic sense) that, it is hoped [by Nietzsche], will destroy European culture, so that, out of the ashes, new values can grow. In my view, Zarathustra does not himself conceive of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, nor does he employ it for instrumental reasons.
integrity is that it is set apart from other people. Moreover, its pursuit of truth leads finally to the second metamorphosis:

...here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon. Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god? “Thou shalt” is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, “I will.” “Though shalt” lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scales; and on every scale shines a golden “thou shalt”. Values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales; and thus speaks the mightiest of dragons: “All value of all things shines on me. All value has long been created, and I am all created value. Verily, there shall be no more ‘I will’.” Thus speaks the dragon.

My brothers, why is there a need in the spirit for the lion? Why is not the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, enough? To create new values—that even a lion cannot do; but the creation of freedom for oneself for new creation—that is within the power of the lion. The creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred “No” even to duty—for that, my brothers, the lion is needed. To assume the right to new values—that is the most terrifying assumption for a reverent spirit that would bear much. Verily, to him it is preying, and a matter for a beast of prey. He once loved “thou shalt” as most sacred: now he must find illusion and caprice even in the most sacred, that freedom from his love may become his prey: the lion is needed for such prey.

So after having created a desert for itself, the spirit is described as seeking to become master of his own desert. It is apparently assumed by Nietzsche that this is the destiny of “strong reverential” types. In order to do this however, it must conquer all previous values, including the apotheosis of truth. But for this, the spirit must transform itself from a camel into a lion. The lion is a “no-saying” spirit, it will destroy the “shadows of God”

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157 This echoes Nietzsche’s claim, in GS, §2, that: “the great majority lacks an intellectual conscience – indeed it has often seemed to me as if someone requiring such a conscience would be as lonely in the most densely populated cities as he would be in the desert.”
and find fault with everything that is sacred in order to create freedom for itself. However, as a "no-saying" spirit, the spirit cannot create new values. Its function is to create for itself the right to new values. Once it has destroyed all that it hitherto found sacred, and has created for itself the freedom for new values, the spirit must transform itself again:

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.

Finally, the child symbolizes the new beginning. The story is quite straightforward, and links into Nietzsche's account of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal: the spirit pursues the ascetic ideal, but in doing so comes to the realization that the ascetic ideal has no sanction; it then attacks the ascetic ideal in order to try to free itself, it does this by attacking the ascetic ideal with its own most fearful weapon: truth; finally, having destroyed the ascetic ideal and, in the process, the moral drive for truth within itself, it seeks to be at one with itself and the world. The question is: where does the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same fit into this picture? It does not appear to have any obvious relation to this account of spiritual development. Indeed, it is obvious that this account of the metamorphoses of the "spirit" is that these metamorphoses have already been undergone by Zarathustra himself, prior to beginning of the narrative proper. This is made quite clear at the beginning of the Prologue when the old man who meets Zarathustra in the forest says to him:

"Yes, I recognize Zarathustra. His eyes are pure, and around his mouth there hides no disgust. Does he not walk like a dancer?
"Zarathustra has changed, Zarathustra has become a child, Zarathustra is an awakened one; what do you now want among the sleepers? You lived in your solitude as in the sea, and the sea carried you..."
In other words, Zarathustra, after ten years of solitude, has already overcome himself, and is now prepared to “go under” into the world of his fellow men to teach them his wisdom. His spirit has become a “child” and it is now free for the creation of values. The unfolding narrative of the first two books bears this out, as they are predominantly comprised of various episodes in which Zarathustra teaches his “new values” to people that he meets on his sojourn in “The Motley Cow”. Principal among these new values is Zarathustra’s teaching of the Übermensch. Once again, it is not obvious, nor is it made explicit at any point, that any of these new values, including the teaching of the Übermensch, have any obvious relation to a recurrence cosmology.

Zarathustra’s first encounter with anything that can plausibly be thought of as the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, takes place towards the end of the second book in the chapter called ‘The Soothsayer’. In this chapter, Zarathustra hears a soothsayer make the following pronouncement:

“—And I saw a great sadness descend upon mankind. The best grew weary of their works. A doctrine appeared, accompanied by a faith: ‘All is empty, all is the same, all has been!’ And from the hills it echoed: ‘All is empty, all is the same, all has been!’... ‘Alas, where is there still a sea in which one might drown?... verily we have become too weary even to die....”

Upon hearing the soothsayer’s words, Zarathustra becomes sad and weary. He becomes so “grieved in his heart” that he doesn’t eat, drink or rest for three days, and eventually even loses his speech. After sleeping and having a bad dream, Zarathustra tells his disciples that the soothsayer is to eat and drink by his side, and that “verily, I shall show him a sea in which he can drown.” What is going on in this section is quite opaque. It is not immediately obvious why it is that Zarathustra becomes so disheartened by the soothsayer’s words. This much does seem reasonably clear though: the soothsayer has prophesized the “appearance” of a “doctrine”. Moreover he
has prophesized that the effect of the doctrine upon its adherents will be weariness and depression. It is entirely reasonable to assume here that the soothsayer is prophesying that people will come to believe in a recurrence cosmology, and that the consequences of the belief will be a general loss of vitality. Now, what Zarathustra dreams upon hearing the soothsayer’s pronouncement is ostensibly a riddle, the meaning of which is concealed from Zarathustra in the second book. However, his description of the content of his dream is highly suggestive of the general interpretation of the book that I subscribe to. The dream begins with Zarathustra alone in the “castle of death”:

I had turned my back on all life, thus I dreamed, I had become a night watchman and a guardian of tombs upon the lonely mountain castle of death. Up there I guarded his coffins: the musty vaults were full of such marks of triumph. Life that had been overcome, looked at me out of glass coffins. I breathed the odor of dusty eternities: sultry and dusty lay my soul. And who could have aired his soul there?

My suggestion is that, upon hearing the doctrine of an eternally recurring selfsame universe from the soothsayer, Zarathustra is led once more to reflect quite radically (albeit subconsciously) upon the nature of his own existence and his life thus far, and the possibility of its eternal recurrence. From this new perspective (i.e. in the face of having to live this same life an infinite number of times), it seems to him that his own asceticism and solitude and his spirituality are not necessarily “life”. Rather, such an ascetic existence is akin to “guarding coffins and breathing the odour of dusty eternities”. The next passage describes his three “friends” in this life as “loneliness”, “silence”, and the “brightness of midnight”. In Zarathustra’s dream, this existence is

It should be noted that I have been unable to find any support for this reading in the secondary literature. The closest I can find is a tangential reference by Löwith to Zarathustra’s “ascetic wisdom” in a discussion of the later chapter ‘The Convalescent’. Rosen (op. cit. pp165-166) claims that the children and laughter represent a “satirical depiction of Zarathustra’s teaching of the innocence of Becoming”, but he offers no explanation of Zarathustra’s negative response to this “depiction”. Another interpretation, by Lawrence Lampert (in Nietzsche’s Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, (London: Yale University Press, 1986), 135-140) suggests that Zarathustra is guarding the world, as based upon the “past”, and that the children, representing nihilism, mock his aspirations for renewal and a redemptive future; in this case his disciple errs in not wanting to believe that Zarathustra was capable of experiencing terror. In relation to these accounts, I believe that my interpretation is reasonable.
described as being seemingly interminable until, suddenly, Zarathustra is awakened from his stupor by a loud knocking sound; and a fierce wind brings before him a black coffin out of which spews: "...a thousandfold laughter. And from a thousand grimaces of children, angels, owls, fools, and butterflies as big as children, it laughed and mocked and roared at me." At this point Zarathustra cries in horror "as he has never cried" and, in crying thus, awakens himself.

This episode is the first appearance of the basic symbolism that underpins Zarathustra’s concern with the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Out of the deepest No (a black coffin) comes the highest Yes (children and laughter). In my view, that which bursts out of the black coffin almost certainly represents the inexhaustible richness, variety, prodigality, wickedness, goallessness and chaos that together constitute the [Dionysian] essence of “life” (according to Nietzsche). Life taunts Zarathustra because, in the pursuit of his wisdom, he has led an essentially ascetic existence that has primarily deemed it expedient to “overcome” these essential aspects of life. The idea of the eternal recurrence of the same presumably causes Zarathustra to reflect that life cannot be overcome or contained by asceticism; there will be no “finale of nothingness”; its inexhaustible richness will never be exhausted; it will play itself out for eternity regardless of all Zarathustra’s wisdom and his plans for the Übermensch. Zarathustra’s favourite disciple interprets Zarathustra’s dream for him. He suggests that the night watchmen and guardians of tombs represent Zarathustra’s enemies. And that, as the force of laughter, Zarathustra has vanquished these enemies and thereby triumphed over all weariness unto death. However, upon hearing this, Zarathustra shakes his head. It is reasonably clear that the disciple’s interpretation is false, and that Zarathustra realizes that he himself is indeed one of those sombre guardians.

The next chapter, “On Redemption”, which was discussed in some detail in Chapter Three, presumably marks a kind of turning point in the narrative, one that pertains to Zarathustra’s trying to come to terms with the prophecy of eternal recurrence and the symbolism of his dream. Since this chapter was discussed in some detail in Chapter
Three, it is not necessary for me to repeat it. Nevertheless, the notion of redemption that, I argued, it began to articulate was not one that pertained necessarily to individuals, but one which pertained to the redemption of “life”. If this is indeed the case, it is possible to see how Zarathustra is beginning to formulate a response to the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Redemption is to be sought for the earth and life from the watchmen and guardians who have hitherto sought to entomb it (in coffins!). While “life” cannot, in the final analysis, be contained by human asceticism, its redemption is to be seen as befitting the gratitude and reverence of its disciples.

Book Two ends with a confusing episode in which Zarathustra’s confronts his “stillest hour”. In this stillest hour Zarathustra has another dream. This time a voice speaks to him and says: “You know it Zarathustra, but you do not say it!” To this, Zarathustra responds: “Yes I know it, but I do not want to say it!”. Presumably, Zarathustra knows that the universe is to recur identically, but for some reason he does not want to say this. My guess is that Zarathustra knows that by teaching the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, he can redeem “life”. However, he cannot bring himself to speak about the idea with his disciples because he is apprehensive about the effect the idea will have on them. The main issue here, as the nameless voice claims, is that Zarathustra has not yet become enough of a child to be able to teach the idea because he still has the “pride of youth” and he must overcome his youth too. Moreover, as becomes clear, Zarathustra is also held back by pity for those who will be adversely affected by the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Thus, Zarathustra replies: “I do not want to”. At which point he is laughed at by the voice and instructed to return to his solitude again. Zarathustra lies on the ground as if dead and once again returns to his loneliness. Thus Book Two ends.

Book Three contains the most relevant material for our purposes. The narrative predominantly concerns Zarathustra’s “loneliest vision”, which is related near the
beginning of the book to the "bold attempters of the open sea"$^{159}$ upon his departure from the blessed isles. This vision concludes Zarathustra’s own final wandering which led him at midnight to the peak of the highest mountain (his “hardest path” and “loneliest walk”), and to the knowledge that that the peak and the abyss are one.$^{160}$ In Zarathustra’s telling of his loneliest vision, he describes how during his ascent of the tallest peak, the “spirit of gravity”, his “devil” and “archenemy”, a creature a half-dwarf, half-mole, accompanied him astride his shoulder. It is worth noting that in the 1886 Preface to The Dawn, Nietzsche describes himself, qua author of The Dawn, as a “mole”. The mole is one who “tunnels and mines and undermines”, and of his task Nietzsche writes “I commenced to undermine our faith in morality”. Furthermore, Nietzsche speaks of the mole as being able to tell you “what he is looking for down there” only when he has “become a man again”. In light of this, the half dwarf/half man is best understood as the sceptical author of The Dawn on his way back to becoming a man, but whose dangerous knowledge weighs the spirit of the man (in this case Zarathustra) down. In summary, the dwarf/mole signifies nihilism qua radical moral scepticism. Indeed, the dwarf-mole (hence forward simply “dwarf”) pours “leaden thoughts” into Zarathustra’s brain via his ears:

“O Zarathustra,” he whispered mockingly, syllable by syllable, “you philosopher’s stone! You threw yourself up high; but every stone that is thrown must—fall! “O Zarathustra, you philosopher’s stone, you slingstone…. It was you yourself whom you threw so high,—but every stone that is thrown—must fall! “Sentenced to yourself and to your own stoning—O Zarathustra, far indeed have you thrown the stone, but it will fall back onto you!”

At this point Zarathustra’s courage takes over, for courage “slays the dizziness at the edge of abysses”, it slays “even pity” and, crucially, it slays even the fear of death when

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$^{159}$ These bold at-tempters should be understood in relation to the many sections in The Gay Science that deal with the prospect of an “open sea” for “free spirits”: particularly sections §124, §343 and §382.

it declares “Was that life? Well then, once more!” Zarathustra therefore tells the dwarf: “Dwarf! It is you or I!”

Löwith suggests, and I agree, that this moment in the narrative is a critical turning point which signifies Zarathustra’s turn from an ascetic wisdom to the unconditional affirmation of existence. The dwarf then jumps from Zarathustra’s shoulder and sits on a stone, thus Zarathustra becomes lighter (unburdened by existence) at the same moment as he sees the Gateway. It is in the symbol of the gateway that the idea of the eternal recurrence is first demonstrated. Upon it, is inscribed “moment”, at which it is “noon and eternity” because the ‘hands’ of future and past meet, and time is “completed”. Of the two temporal paths which meet at the gateway, one runs back infinitely, and to that extent, “eternally” – apparently in a straight line back in time; the other runs, likewise, eternally forwards:

“But whoever would follow one of them, on and on, farther and farther: do you believe, dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?”—

“All that is straight lies,” murmured the dwarf contemptuously. “All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle.”

Just as Zarathustra is asking “And this slow spider that crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway... must not all of this have been before?”, he hears a dog howl nearby which reminds him of an experience of his youth. Upon hearing the cry Zarathustra takes pity. Immediately the gateway and the dwarf and the spider are gone and before Zarathustra is a man – a young shepherd. Hanging from the mouth of the shepherd is a heavy black snake. Zarathustra is unable to pull it out and yells “Bite! Bite its head off”. The shepherd does so, spewing the head of the snake far away, and in doing so is “no longer shepherd, no longer human” but one changed, and laughs a laughter such that no human had ever laughed.

161 Löwith, ibid., p69
Of the bold sailors, Zarathustra asks what he saw in the parable, who is the man into whose mouth all that is heaviest and blackest will crawl? Indeed, later in Book Three, in the chapter, ‘The Convalescent’, in which Zarathustra at last “summons up” his most abysmal idea, these questions are answered. This chapter represents the heart and thematic core of the narrative. Before examining the pertinent passages, however, let us look briefly at the chapter before it, ‘On Old and New Tablets’, since this effectively introduces the pivotal episode. In this chapter, Zarathustra sits surrounded by the tablets of old values that he has destroyed. Principal among these old values are the teachings of "good" and "evil" (i.e. the morality of pity). Also, littered around Zarathustra are some "new" tablets, covered in writing, which presumably represent his own creations. The most relevant passages for my purposes concern these new “values”.

The first value that Zarathustra suggests is “my great love of the farthest demands it: do not spare your neighbour”. This is a simple statement of Zarathustra’s concern for the future splendour of mankind, even if that future splendour is only possible at the expense of the present generation. The next key value is the statement: “Everything is in flux”. This is a simple statement of Zarathustra’s belief in a metaphysic of Becoming (what Sadler refers to as Heracliteanism). Another key value is: “...a new nobility is needed to be the adversary of the rabble and of all that is despotick and to write anew upon new tablets the word “noble”.” Again, this statement is clear evidence for the interpretation that I have suggested, in which what is primarily at stake is the ascendency of a new nobility, in opposition to the current “rabble”. In §20 Zarathustra declares “O my brothers, am I cruel? But I say: what is falling, we should still push. Everything today falls and decays.... I am a prelude of better players...” We can see from this that, as I suggested in Chapter Three, Nietzsche/Zarathustra sees his destiny as destructive; it requires him to destroy the “shadows of God”, even though, according to his historical analysis, the destruction of these shadows is an historical inevitability.

The final passages from ‘On Old and New Tablets’ states clearly that it is Zarathustra’s destiny to “break the good and the just”. The “good and the just” are synonymous with
the “rabble”; they are those who are captive to the morality of pity, and the ascetic ideal, espoused by the priests. Zarathustra’s frightening pronouncement is that the “good and the just” represent the greatest danger for “all of man’s future”; this is why they must be “broken”. Thus Zarathustra’s last new “ideal” is delivered, when, in response to the horror of his imaginary listeners, he tells them to “become hard”. In other words: “Harden yourselves so that you can bear the spectacle of suffering that will ensue from my [Zarathustra’s] teaching.” The chapter ends with Zarathustra talking to his “will”. Zarathustra asks his will to “save” him for “great victory”. The question is: victory over what? As will be seen, Zarathustra is here steeling himself for victory over his greatest enemy: pity. The articulation of these values depicts the philosophical attitude that Nietzsche wants for his philosophers of the future. Only those who, like Zarathustra, embody these values can bear what he describes as the ‘hardest thought’, which is introduced in the subsequent chapter.

‘The Convalescent’ begins with Zarathustra summoning up his most abysmal thought. This thought is the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. As soon as he does this he falls down as if dead and remains prone for seven days, after which his animals come to speak to him. They tell him that he is the teacher of the eternal recurrence of the same, the doctrine that is his “greatest sickness”. Again, I accept Löwith’s explanation that this is the case because the teaching of the eternal recurrence of the same is the truth of nihilism\(^{162}\) – it means: everything is without purpose, “all is the same, nothing is worth while, knowledge chokes”:

> Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of being is built. Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the ring of being remains faithful to itself. In every Now, being begins; round every Here rolls the sphere There. The center is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity.

\(^{162}\) Löwith, ibid., 72-73.
Thus Zarathustra's animals speak to him upon his waking. After hearing them describe their experience of eternal recurrence, Zarathustra explains that what had choked him was “disgust with man” and the knowledge that the rabble (the “small man”) would recur eternally too: “Alas, man recurs eternally! The small man recurs eternally!” Zarathustra's animals don't listen to Zarathustra, instead they speak to him of his future death:

"'Now I die and vanish,' you would say, 'and all at once I am nothing. The soul is as mortal as the body. But the knot of causes in which I am entangled recurs and will create me again. I myself belong to the causes of the eternal recurrence. I come again, with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent—not to a new life or a better life or a similar life: I come back eternally to this same, selfsame life, in what is greatest as in what is smallest, to teach again the eternal recurrence of all things, to speak again the word of the great noon of earth and man, to proclaim the overman again to men. I spoke my word, I break of my word; thus my eternal lot wants it: as a proclaimer, I perish. The hour has come when he who goes under should bless himself. Thus ends Zarathustra's going under.'"

Book Three ends with two short chapters, one of which relates Zarathustra's subsequent conversation with “Life”, and the second called the “Yes and Amen Song”, the refrain of which is “For I love you, O eternity!”. In both of these chapters Zarathustra apparently extols the affirmative significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Since this affirmation is the subject of Chapter Six, let us now turn to the nature of Zarathustra's most “abysmal thought”. Prima facie we can see why Nehamas's interpretation of the content of Zarathustra's most abysmal thought might make sense. Zarathustra clearly states that what had previously “choked” him was the realization that the “small men” would recur eternally. However, in my view there is a lot more going on here, not the least of which is the implication of a cosmological reading suggested by Zarathustra's disgust at the idea of the recurrence of the small men.

There are a number of parallel concerns at play in Zarathustra's confrontation with the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same in this episode. Firstly, Zarathustra confronts
the essential goallessness of existence that is apparently entailed by an eternally recurring universe. For Zarathustra, this is not, in and of itself, very problematic. He is a strong, reverent spirit who is concerned about the redemption of the earth, and who loves life. He thereby comes to realization that the eternal recurrence is actually a wonderful blessing, because he will return to life and love it again. Zarathustra also confronts, and bears, the ironic knowledge that his own redemptive task is ultimately subject to recurrence, and that the whole history of mankind, including his teaching, and those aspects of humanity which he finds cause to redeem, will likewise play themselves out again and again eternally with no final resolution. This latter insight justifies Zarathustra's comment that: "alas, man recurs eternally". Zarathustra's animals express Zarathustra's response to this insight with the words: "I spoke my word, I break of my word: thus my eternal lot wants it; as a proclaimer, I perish." The implication is that Zarathustra's desire to "improve mankind" by teaching them the Übermensch is essentially overcome by his coming to terms with the irrevocable fatalism of the eternal recurrence of the same.

However, in my view, what Zarathustra finds hardest to bear, and what he conquers in this key episode of the narrative is the pity he experiences before the aspect of the endless and unexpiated suffering of mankind, and also for the suffering that will be caused by the doctrine he himself is destined to teach. The primary evidence for this reading is the riddle which this episode is designed to solve. The riddle is the question of what is signified by the snake that chokes the shepherd. If we recall briefly Zarathustra's vision, we see that Zarathustra learned about the fact of eternal recurrence, and that, upon doing so, he heard a dog wail and felt pity. Immediately, he sees the shepherd who is being choked by the snake. The transformation of shepherd only occurs when he ejects the snake from his mouth. It is pity, resulting from knowledge, that chokes the shepherd, just as it is pity that Zarathustra spends seven days combating before he

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163 Assuming that the snake in this case retains its Biblical symbolism...; if it does, this also corresponds to a key Schopenhauerian point, which is that it is sexuality that is essentially representative of the "affirmation of life" but simultaneously representative of the suffering that is essentially constitutive of human existence. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.
awakes to a newly created future. This reading also clarifies the substance of Zarathustra’s new tablets, which encouraged him to become “hard”, and to bear the spectacle of suffering that is immanent, by seeking comfort in the knowledge that such suffering is necessary for the redemption of the earth.

Further evidence for this reading is that it corresponds precisely with one of the fundamental tenets of the “morality of pity”, as understood by Schopenhauer. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Six, in line with a discussion of Schopenhauer’s distinction between life-affirmation and life-denial. However, for the purposes of this interpretation it is important to note that, according to Schopenhauer, no one who had true insight into the totality of suffering that humans and animals must endure could ever will for the eternal recurrence of life, but rather that such insight inevitably (except in the case of the truly wicked) leads to pity and compassion, and a resulting moral compunction towards voluntary renunciation, resignation and will-less-ness.\(^\text{164}\)

Finally, the fact that Zarathustra does not discuss this aspect of his confrontation with his most abysmal thought with his animals constitutes further evidence for the veracity of this interpretation. Zarathustra describes his animals’ response to his convalescence as making a “hurdy-gurdy” song of his ordeal. In my view, he humours them by describing the source of his disgust at the eternal recurrence of the small man, because this accords with the hurdy-gurdy song that they have already made of the meaning of the eternal recurrence. Zarathustra’s animals, as natural and periodic beings that live in the horizon of the eternally present,\(^\text{165}\) cannot share Zarathustra’s insight into the nature of human suffering. They cannot see the spectacle of an eternity of suffering occasioned by Zarathustra’s insight, nor can they understand why Zarathustra requires so much courage and hardness to affirm the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. The key

\(^{164}\) Cf. Schopenhauer, WWR.Vol., I, 279.

\(^{165}\) For more detail see Nietzsche’s description of the way cows experience life: ‘On the Use and Disadvantages of History for Life’, §1, 60-62. This point is essentially an adoption of a Schopenhauerian distinction between animals and humans. Nothing that Nietzsche writes between Untimely Meditations and Thus Spoke Zarathustra challenges the framework of this distinction.
to understanding this however is Zarathustra's claim, from his vision, that "Courage slays even pity. But pity is the deepest abyss: as deeply as man sees into life, he also sees into suffering."

According to my interpretation, it is precisely Zarathustra's realization, in the course of the narrative, that the universe recurs eternally that confirms to him that existence has no goal, and that suffering has no "meaning". Indeed, a recurrence cosmology seems to belie the possibility of any divine or extra-natural, overarching goals for existence as a whole, or any kind of global or universal narrative that one might utilize in order to interpret the "meaning" of one's life; similarly, it does not seem to promise any redemption for the suffering that life entails. In contrast, it seems simply to sanction goallessness and meaninglessness as such. Like Sisyphus forever pushing his stone to the top of the slope, only for it to roll back to the bottom again, existence, with all its suffering, is simply to start all over again and play itself out in identical fashion.

The whole thing seems utterly pointless. Indeed, the realization that this is how the world works is Zarathustra's "most abysmal thought" and it is equivalent to the most extreme nihilism. Such nihilism is likely to crush those "sick" who come to believe in it, because it offers no interpretation of their suffering. As Nietzsche himself describes the "psychological problem in the type of Zarathustra", it is the problem of how Zarathustra can bring the most extreme "Yes" [to life/existence] out of this most extreme "No". Zarathustra turns his nihilism into the most extreme Yes by willing the eternal recurrence of the same, by saying: "was that life? – well then, once more!" He thus overcomes himself: he is the "self-overcoming" of nihilism, and he now wills the paradoxical goal of goallessness as such. However, whilst Zarathustra has the strength to overturn his will in this manner as a response to nihilism, this nihilism is not the only barrier to affirming eternal recurrence.

The principal obstacle that Zarathustra faces to willing the eternal recurrence of existence is that such an act entails his willing for the eternal recurrence of all the
suffering that humanity must necessarily endure. There are two aspects to this suffering. Primarily, Zarathustra, as a disciple of truth, knows that suffering is essentially constitutive of life, and knows further that the spectacle of so much suffering is nearly impossible to affirm. This difficulty of affirming life corresponds to Schopenhauer’s discussion of affirmation of the will-to-live. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six. The second aspect of the suffering that Zarathustra must overcome is his insight into his own role as the teacher of the eternal recurrence of the same. According to my interpretation of Nietzsche’s interest in eternal recurrence, Zarathustra knows that his teaching is an integral part of a “monstrous logic of horror”, the nature of which will include widespread depression and suicide. As such, Zarathustra requires great courage before he can truly acknowledge his own role in this suffering, even though he knows that his actions belong to the redemption of “life”.

In sum then, the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same has a double significance for Zarathustra. It is as such that it is his abysmal thought. At a cosmological level it entails belief in the essential goallessness of existence, and is therefore equivalent to nihilism. Zarathustra’s response to this goallessness is to affirm it. In my view, Zarathustra, as a strong reverent spirit, dancer-singer, and noble soul, has no problem affirming his own recurrence, or the recurrence and redemption of “life” as such. However, as a knower, truth-seeker, and philosopher, Zarathustra understands that such affirmation of his own life entails affirmation of the recurrence of every other life, and hence the immense amount of suffering that is constitutive of human existence, and this insight contains within it a very great temptation to pity. This temptation to pity the plight of universal human suffering is inclusive of temptation to pity the future suffering caused by the belief in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.

If, as with Clark’s interpretation, Zarathustra’s abysmal thought is the realization that, if he is to truly affirm life, then he must affirm the eternal recurrence of all existence, including those aspects of it that he detests, then it is difficult to see how Nietzsche’s account of the psychological problem of Zarathustra makes sense. For Clark, as was
discussed in Chapter Three, the narrative of Thus Spoke Zarathustra can be summarized as follows: Zarathustra wishes to affirm life; he has trouble doing this because he detests the "small man"; his most abysmal thought is his realization that he cannot achieve his goal of affirming life unless he also affirms the eternal recurrence of everything including the existence of the "last man"; after much tribulation he finally does this; he is "redeemed". According to Clark's account, Zarathustra overcomes his "disgust" with various aspects of life, but in an instrumental way. He does this in order to achieve a preconceived goal, that of "affirming" life. On Clark's account this then restores a goal to the human will that was lost as a result of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal. But if nihilism is characterized by goallessness, then how has it come about that Zarathustra has the original goal of "affirming life"? To me this interpretation simply does not make sense of the material.

Considering the passage from Ecce Homo that both Clark and Nehamas cited as evidence against a cosmological reading of recurrence, we can see the following. If the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is equivalent to nihilism, then the "problem" that Nietzsche identifies in the text can be understood as being the psychological problem of how he who has insight into the ostensible goallessness that characterizes a recurrence cosmology, nevertheless doesn't see such goallessness as an objection to one's own [finite] existence, nor even to the eternal recurrence of one's existence. In other words, Zarathustra doesn't see ostensible meaninglessness/goallessness, or the fact of human suffering, as constituting objections to the eternal recurrence of his existence.

**Conclusion**

According to my interpretation, Nietzsche predicts that belief in a recurrence cosmology had the potential to cause harm on such a scale that it would irrevocably alter the aspect of European culture. I have suggested that this "harm" includes the real possibility that believers in a recurrence cosmology will become depressed and/or suicidal, and that as
a result their influence on culture will wane and the noble will “inherit the earth”. In this chapter I have outlined what I believe are Nietzsche's reasons for thinking that a cosmological belief of this nature could have such a powerful effect. Principally, I argued that belief in a recurrence cosmology is equivalent to what Nietzsche considers to be “extreme nihilism”. This nihilism simply consists in believing that existence has no “goal” and that there is no “meaning” to human suffering. The backdrop of Nietzsche's reasoning here is the analysis of the great extent to which human life is constituted by suffering that is presented by Schopenhauer. I further argued that this aspect of Nietzsche's thought is clearly not as radical or controversial as one might expect, and one can see quite clearly that corresponding assumptions about the effects of nihilism and belief in eternal recurrence are operative in the great literary works from the same period in Europe.

Finally, I presented a short commentary on pertinent sections of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that was designed to highlight the way in which what I believe is a coherent interpretation of this seminal work supports the interpretation of the Nietzsche's interest in eternal recurrence that Part Two of this dissertation defends.
Chapter Six: Recurrence as affirmation

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.
—Shakespeare, The Tempest.

Introduction

Having examined Nietzsche’s views about what I have called the “nihilistic” aspects of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, it is now time to examine Nietzsche’s interest in the affirmative dimension of recurrence. In the famous aphorism §341 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche poses the question of how “well disposed” one would have to become “to life and oneself” in order “to long for nothing more fervently than this ultimate confirmation and seal.” In *Ecce Homo*, he describes the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as the “highest formula for affirmation that is at all attainable.” In the previous chapter we saw that Zarathustra turned his deepest “No” into his highest “Yes” by renouncing goals and embracing a recurrence cosmology and the essential goallessness that this cosmology entailed. It is clear from these observations that Nietzsche invests high hopes in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, and considers it as singularly symbolic of *affirmation*.

This final chapter of my dissertation explains how this symbolism works. Since much of the substance of Nietzsche’s account of this was quite clearly implicit in the commentary on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that comprised the final section of the previous chapter, this chapter will be noticeably shorter than previous ones. In fact, in many respects the “affirmative” significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is self-evident and logical, and there is substantial consensus to this effect in the secondary literature.

166 EH, ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’: §1.
As a result, there is little need for me to present an argument for this here. Quite simply, for Nietzsche, unconditional affirmation of the eternal recurrence of all aspects of life is the highest kind of affirmation and Yes-saying to existence.

The first section of this chapter compares Nietzsche's conception of affirmation, and the general distinction between life-affirming and life-denying, with that of Schopenhauer. I show that Nietzsche agrees with his predecessor that willing the eternal recurrence of one's life is indicative of the affirmation of the will-to-live. However, whereas Schopenhauer posits such affirmation as possible only on the basis of ignorance of the extent to which suffering is constitutive of existence, Nietzsche argues that true affirmation is equivalent to affirming one's eternal recurrence despite such knowledge.

The second section argues that, according to Nietzsche, it is the nobles, or those endowed predominantly with noble qualities such as courage and love, who will survive belief in a recurrence cosmology. In order to demonstrate this, I show that Nietzsche understands such qualities to have a recurrence structure built into them. For Nietzsche, to love something is to wish for its eternal recurrence, likewise, to be courageous is to face death with the wish for the eternal recurrence of one's life [and death]. Finally, I look briefly at a few passages from the fourth book of The Gay Science in which Nietzsche generally develops the theme of "Yes-saying". By highlighting a number of pertinent passages, I show that they reinforce my general interpretation.

6.1 Back to Schopenhauer
Since I have argued in the previous two chapters that Nietzsche conceived of the possibilities and possible consequences of belief in a recurrence cosmology in the context of his own rejection of Schopenhauerian idealism, it seems apposite to introduce the positive implications of such belief in the same context. In order to do this I am going to examine several long passages from each author, in order to bring to the fore the grounds for Nietzsche's divergence on matters that are to a high degree similar. Once
again, the extent to which Nietzsche’s concerns, even as they relate to such classically “Nietzschean” matters as “life-affirmation” and “life-negation”, are dependent upon Schopenhauer’s original formulations of them, is very striking. In particular, I argue that Nietzsche is very much in agreement with Schopenhauer that affirmation of life is more or less equivalent to something like a “natural” attitude. Where Nietzsche diverges from Schopenhauer is with respect to the question of whether such affirmation is both possible and warranted upon the basis of true insight into the extent to which suffering is truly constitutive of existence.

Here are two long consecutive passages from Nietzsche. The first is an excerpt from the second last aphorism of *Twilight of the Idols*, and the second is a large section of the final aphorism from the same text. I have already commented briefly on both of these passages in the introductory chapter, so they should be familiar. Speaking about orgies, Nietzsche writes:

For it is only in the Dionysian mysteries, in the psychology of the Dionysian condition, that the *fundamental fact* of the Hellenic instinct expresses itself – it’s ‘will to life’. What did the Hellene guarantee to himself with these mysteries? *Eternal* life, the eternal recurrence of life; the future promised and consecrated in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; true life as collective continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality. It was for this reason that the *sexual* symbol was to the Greeks the symbol venerable as such. Every individual detail in the act of procreation, pregnancy, birth, awoke the most exalted and solemn feelings. In the teachings of the mysteries, *pain* is sanctified: the ‘pains of childbirth’ sanctify pain in general – all becoming and growing, all that guarantees the future, *postulates* pain.... For the eternal joy in creating to exist, for the will to life eternally to affirm itself, the ‘torment of childbirth’ *must* also exist eternally....All this is contained in the word Dionysus: I know of no more exalted symbolism than this Greek symbolism, the symbolism of the Dionysian. The profoundest instinct of life, the instinct for the future of life, for the eternity of life, is in this word experienced religiously – the actual road to life, procreation, as the *sacred road*....It was only Christianity, with *ressentiment*
against life in its foundations, which made sexuality something impure: it through filth on the beginning, on the prerequisite of our life...

And, of tragedy, he writes:

Tragedy is so far from providing evidence of pessimism among the Hellenes in Schopenhauer’s sense that it has to be considered the decisive repudiation of that idea and the counter-verdict to it. Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the sacrifice of his highest types – that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I recognized as the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet. Not so as to get rid of pity and terror, not so as to purify oneself of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge – it was thus that Aristotle understood it –: but, beyond pity and terror, to realize in oneself the eternal joy of becoming – that joy which also encompasses joy in destruction… And with that I again return to the place from which I set out – Birth of Tragedy was my first revaluation of all values: with that I again plant myself in the soil of which I draw all that I will and can – I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus – I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence…

We may as well ask what orgies and tragedy have to do with the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. From the former passage, we can see that Nietzsche’s interest in Greek orgies is apparently predicated upon the extent to which he thought that they (and the exalted symbolism which surrounded them) were expressions of a “triumphant Yes” to life. So on the basis of their attitude towards sexuality, Nietzsche describes the Greeks as being a life-affirming, as opposed to a life-denying, race. He then expands this analysis in the latter passage to argue that, contrary to the views of some well-known commentators (namely Schopenhauer), the existence and nature of Greek tragedy do not contradict this assessment. In fact, argues Nietzsche, Greek tragedy can be more accurately considered as an extension of this basic, affirmative, “Dionysian” impulse. Notably, in making this claim, he invokes his role as the teacher of the eternal recurrence.
The point here is that it is clear that, even at this final stage of his philosophical career (1888), Nietzsche absolutely still considers Schopenhauer to be his primary interlocutor. The correspondence between sexuality and “affirmation” of the “will-to-life” that Nietzsche suggests in the former passage is consciously an adaptation and extension of a key Schopenhauerian position. In the fourth book of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, and in the two essays ‘The Metaphysics of Sexual Love’ and ‘On the Affirmation of the Will-to-Live’ in the fourth book of the second volume, Schopenhauer had articulated the same basic equation. As I have already mentioned in Chapter Four, Schopenhauer’s view of sexuality, as is expressed in his essay ‘On the Metaphysics of Sexual Love’ is that it serves the interests of the species at the expense of the interests of the individual (he refers to it in this capacity as the “genius of the species”). Schopenhauer’s argument here is based simply on the premise that romantic love tends to cause an individual substantially more pain and suffering than pleasure (and he cites the agreement on this point of numerous ancient authors), and he notes that any pleasure that sexual satisfaction does afford is evanescent, and often accompanied by negative emotions such as shame and disgust. However, more importantly, in ‘On the Affirmation of the Will-to-Live’, Schopenhauer argues that the sexual impulse is the quintessential, highest, and indeed clearest, manifestation of the nature of what he calls the “will-to-live”; a term which, for him, is absolutely synonymous with “Will” (as the basic underlying metaphysical reality, the most discernible character of which is a ceaseless, surging striving). However, after making this claim, he extends this analysis in the following way:

Now, as the focus of the will, that is to say, its concentration and highest expression, are the sexual impulse and its satisfaction, it is expressed very significantly and naively in symbolic language of nature by the fact that individualized will, hence man and the animal, makes its entry into the world through the portal of the sexual organs. The affirmation of the will-to-live, which accordingly has its centre in the act of generation, is inevitable and bound to happen in the case of the animal. For the will that is the *natura*
naturans first of all arrives at reflection in man... Here the matter now begins to be grave and critical for him; the question forces itself on him whence is all this and for what purpose, and principally whether the trouble and misery of his life and effort are really repaid by the profit... Accordingly, here is the point where, in the light of distinct knowledge, he decides for the affirmation or denial of the will-to-live, although he can as a rule bring the latter to consciousness only in a mythical cloak.

Like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer depicts the symbolism of childbirth as being in some sense the non plus ultra of symbolism (i.e. the "symbol venerable as such"). He also suggests that this basic symbolism encompasses sexual symbolism – and sexuality, which he has already described as the highest expression of the essence of the will-to-live. Moreover, what Schopenhauer has said here is that, insofar as one reflects upon the nature of life and brings to consciousness this very knowledge concerning the role of sexuality and the extent to which it is essentially expressive of one’s inner-most reality, and further – the extent to which it undermines the potential for one’s happiness, then the question of whether, in light of this, one’s existence itself can be said to be worth the suffering that it entails arises. In order to answer this question, one must either affirm or deny this will-to-live. If we reflect at this point then on Nietzsche’s interest in the significance of orgies for the Ancient Greeks, we can see quite clearly what is at stake here in the contrast that he draws between the Hellenic veneration of sexuality, and Christian denunciation of sexuality. In venerating sexuality, the Greeks, according to Nietzsche affirm the will-to-live. The Christians, on the other hand, on the basis of their rejection of sexuality, can be said to deny (or at least to seek to deny) the will-to-live. Notably, we can also see clearly to what extent Nietzsche’s analysis here evinces his acceptance of this Schopenhauerian framework [of affirmation versus denial].

It seems to me that the obvious question here is: to what extent does it really matter whether someone, or some culture, or some religion, affirms or denies life or sexuality? What philosophical concerns motivate this interest? In Chapter One, I suggested that

167 i.e. “Nature doing what nature does”
Nietzsche's interest in this issue is founded primarily upon his explicitly stated wish for the "highest future splendour" of mankind. It, quite reasonably, seems to him that such a future splendour was more likely to be achieved by "life-affirming" rather than "life-denying" types, inasmuch as such types were described as bearing qualities (such as courage, love, honour) that Nietzsche associated with "splendour". Moreover, in Chapter Three I also argued that, according to Nietzsche's understanding of the notion of redemption, the future prevalence of such splendid types of human beings would redeem life and the world.

One of the key implications of this reading is that, as far as I can see, there is little reason to assume that Nietzsche expected Zarathustra's teaching of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to be instructive or normative in the sense that it taught one how to affirm, or indeed that one ought to affirm, life. I argued rather that Nietzsche's interest in a recurrence cosmology is predicated upon his view that belief in it will harm life-denying types, and, in some vague sense, enhance or stimulate life-affirmative types. I suggested that Nietzsche sees such denial and affirmation as being rooted in physiological conditions, and not being in any straightforward way the object of volition.

The implications of Schopenhauer's view that the sexual impulse is the highest expression of the will-to-live, is that one who acts in pursuance of sexual gratification thereby affirms the will-to-live. Indeed, the implications are even wider. Schopenhauer goes on to say that any maintenance of one's body, and indeed any action that is in accordance with one's "natural" instincts, are acts of tacit affirmation. Finally, Schopenhauer extends this point to encompass any act of egoism whatsoever on the behalf of the individual. Accordingly, if affirmation of the will-to-live is equivalent to the pursuing of one's bodily needs, and acting upon one's instincts, this is very much like saying that it is the "natural" attitude. In fact, this is precisely Schopenhauer's point, and,

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169 This could presumably happen strictly indirectly: i.e. by diminishing the influence of life-denying types, the depressive effect of belief in a recurrence cosmology could thereby lead to the relatively greater influence and prevalence of life-affirming types.
as I will show shortly, it is at precisely this point that Nietzsche diverges from his former teacher. Most humans, according to Schopenhauer, spend their whole lives blindly striving to satiate their desires, and suffer accordingly, in perfect oblivion to the knowledge that the world around them, and the happiness which they pursue, are cruel illusions. Schopenhauer doesn’t think that such lives differ much in significance from the lives of animals.

In any case, conscious realization that one’s actions are indicative of affirmation of the will-to-live can presumably lead one to a position of such knowledge whereby the question might force itself upon one in the manner described by Schopenhauer. Let us now examine a passage in which Schopenhauer describes what knowledgeable affirmation of the will-to-live might “look like”. In the fourth book of the first volume of his *magnum opus*, Schopenhauer gives this account of someone who does affirm the will-to-live:

A man who had assimilated firmly into his thinking the truths so far advanced, but at the same time had not come to know, through his own experience or through a deeper insight, that constant suffering is essential to all life; who found satisfaction in life and took perfect delight in it; who desired, in spite of calm deliberation, that the course of his life as he had hitherto experienced it should be of endless duration or of constant recurrence; and whose courage to face life was so great that, in return for life’s pleasures, he would willingly and gladly put up with all the hardships and miseries to which it is subject; such a man would stand “with firm, strong bones on the well-grounded earth” (Goethe) and would have nothing to fear... many men would occupy the standpoint here set forth, if their knowledge kept in pace with their willing, in other words if they were in a position, free from every erroneous idea, to become clearly and distinctly themselves. This is for knowledge the viewpoint of the complete affirmation of the will-to-live.  

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In this passage Schopenhauer quite clearly states that "complete affirmation of the will-to-live" is equivalent to desiring the "constant recurrence" of one's own life. It hardly needs to be said that Nietzsche is in complete agreement with Schopenhauer on this point. Indeed, this passage alone goes a long way towards justifying Nietzsche's interest in the "affirmative possibilities" of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same. Note, however, that there is a very different emphasis. For Schopenhauer, complete affirmation of the will-to-live is only possible on the basis of imperfect knowledge of the world (or, as another passage makes clear, on the basis of wickedness). It is here described as the prerogative of those who lack deeper insight into the fact that constant suffering is essential to life. On the other hand, of the man who is in possession of complete and true philosophical insight into the nature of reality, Schopenhauer writes:

He knows the whole, comprehends its inner nature, and finds it involved in a constant passing away, a vain striving, an inward conflict, and a continual suffering. Wherever he looks he sees suffering humanity and the suffering animal world, and a world that passes away. Now all this lies just as near to him as only his person lies to the egoist. Now how could he, with such knowledge of the world, affirm this very life through constant acts of will, and precisely in this way bind himself more and more firmly to it, press himself to it more and more closely? Thus... that knowledge of the whole, of the inner nature of the thing-in-itself, which has been described, becomes the quieter of all and every willing. The will now turns away from life; it shudders at the pleasures in which it recognizes the affirmation of life. Man attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composure, and complete willlessness.

In other words, according to Schopenhauer, knowledgeable affirmation of the will-to-live is only possible on the basis of relative ignorance regarding the extent to which suffering.

\footnote{Schopenhauer, \textit{WWR}, Vol., I, 379.}
is constitutive of life. Complete knowledge regarding this aspect of existence, according to Schopenhauer, invariably leads to denial of the will-to-live. Upon the basis of such knowledge, the will "turns away" from life and actively practices asceticism. Schopenhauer's reasoning here is complex, and this point is actually the lynch-pin of his ethics. For our purposes it is not necessary to account for this here. It is clear from the passage cited above that it is with regards to this issue that Nietzsche parts ways with Schopenhauer. The Greeks, according to Nietzsche, did not lack knowledge of the extent to which suffering is constitutive of existence, they were able to affirm life the will-to-live despite their knowledge of this fact.

According to Nietzsche's schema, like Schopenhauer's, affirmation of the will-to-live, or simply the affirmation of life, is the "natural attitude". However, in Nietzsche's language, "health", understood as the harmonious co-existence of the instincts, is the basis of such affirmation. On the other hand, "sickness", understood in terms of the instincts being discordant with one another, is the basis of life-denial, and the ascetic ideal justifies this denial as an expedient to prolong the existence of the organism. So, unlike with Schopenhauer, affirmation and denial are not dependent upon the amount of one's philosophical knowledge. Moreover, Nietzsche differs from Schopenhauer in thinking that the vast majority is sick, and is therefore life-denying rather than life-affirming. According to Nietzsche, European culture is sick, and the passages cited at the beginning of this section point to Greek tragedy as "healthy" culture, inasmuch as it was typical of a life-affirming existence. The overall point of this section, however, is the following: Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer that willing the eternal recurrence of one's life is indicative of life-affirmation. As such, only life-affirming types can be expected to affirm or will the eternal recurrence of existence.

6.2 Who can affirm recurrence?
I have suggested previously that, according to Nietzsche, it is the "strong" and "healthy" that will not only survive belief in a recurrence cosmology, but may even experience it as
stimulation for further growth, or as a symbol of affirmation. Nietzsche's reasoning here is that the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same will complement their dominant instincts, because what I call the "structure" of these instincts accords with a recurrence cosmology. This requires explanation. In many places Nietzsche aligns "strong, happy" beings with the ideals of nobility, and also with the "gaya scienza" of the Provencal knights. Accordingly he associates these ideals with such human qualities as love, courage, magnanimity, and self-reverence. Nietzsche's descriptions of such qualities – I will show how he treats love and courage in this manner – depict them as having an "eternally recurring" structure.

In the fourth book of The Gay Science, the structure of which is designed to anticipate Thus Spoke Zarathustra (its final aphorism is actually the first aphorism of Thus Spoke Zarathustra), Nietzsche provides many indications as to the nature and preconditions of his view of affirmation. For the particular purposes of this argument, I will begin by illustrating Nietzsche's account of loving. But I will then reinforce my overall interpretation of the significance of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same by showing how a number of other key aphorisms fit this bigger picture. The aphorism in question is §334, entitled "One must learn to love". It contains the following passage:

This happens to us in music: first one must learn to hear a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate and delimit it as a life in itself... and now it continues relentlessly to compel and enchant us until we have become its humble and enraptured lovers, who no longer want anything better from the world than it and it again. But this happens to us not only in music: it is in just this way that we have learned to love everything we now love. We are always rewarded in the end for our good-will, our patience, our fair-mindedness and gentleness with what is strange... Even he who loves himself will have learned it this way – there is no other way. Love, too, must be learned.

The point here is that, to love something is, according to Nietzsche, to want nothing but it, and it again. In other words, it is to wish for the eternal recurrence of the object of
one's love. Although the ostensible purpose of this aphorism is to develop the claim that if one is to love something, this love must be learned. Such learning itself requires the qualities of good-will, patience, fair-mindedness and gentleness. With the possible exception of gentleness, these are all qualities that Nietzsche explicitly associates with nobility. The final point he makes is not so much prescriptive as descriptive. It is a description of how the noble comes to love him or her self. Now, if to love something is to wish for it and it again, and if such a wish is a product of the qualities of good-will, patience, fair-mindedness etc., i.e. noble virtues, then it is not much of a leap from here to the view that affirmation of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is the natural and logical extension of these same virtues. In other words, according to Nietzsche, willing for the eternal recurrence of one's life is the epitome of the "noble" attitude and, as such, presumably comes quite easily to one endowed with noble qualities. Therefore, one can imagine that if a "noble person" were to come to believe in a recurrence cosmology, such a belief would complement, and accord with, his or her dominant instincts and qualities.

This is clear evidence for my view that Nietzsche did not intend his "teaching" of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same to be prescriptive in any straightforward sense. Rather, it makes sense of Nietzsche's description of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as a "principle of selection". In this particular note he claims that those who cannot bear the idea "stand condemned". My interpretation of how this works is simple. Noble, life-affirming and self-loving types have no trouble bearing the idea of an eternally recurring universe because such a cosmology is in accordance with the instincts that they already have. Only the "sick", whose instincts are in discord, and whose centre of gravity is in a "beyond", cannot bear the meaninglessness of the eternal suffering entailed by a recurrence cosmology, and will fall prey to suicidal nihilism. An examination of Nietzsche's treatment of courage reinforces this interpretation. Thus Spoke Zarathustra contains two episodes in which courage is described as being the attitude towards life that says: Was that life? Well then! Once more! The first is said
when Zarathustra is conversing with the dwarf during the “vision and riddle” in the third book:

Courage is the best slayer: courage slays even pity. But pity is the deepest abyss: as deeply as man sees into life, he also sees into suffering.

Courage, however, is the best slayer—courage which attacks: which slays even death itself, for it says, “Was that life? Well then! Once more!”

In such words, however, there is much playing and brass. He that has ears to hear, let him hear!

The point here is straightforward. Inasmuch as one is courageous, according to Nietzsche, one can look at life and assent to living it again. Indeed, courage is here exemplified by one who demands to live life again. Presumably then, to demand the eternal recurrence of one’s life would be to epitomize courage. Aside from this account of what I call the “structure” of courage, Zarathustra’s comments constitute further evidence for the terms of the comparison between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer that I suggested in the previous section. The key point here is the question of pity. Just as Schopenhauer had argued that denial of the will-to-live on the basis of true philosophical insight was impossible because such insight would invoke pity, and hence lead one to seek to deny the will-to-live as the cause of suffering, Zarathustra implies that “pity” signifies the greatest challenge because “as deeply as man sees into life, he also sees into suffering”.

Again, the implication here is of general agreement between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. So great is the amount of suffering in the world, and so profound is its effect upon human life, that acquaintance with this knowledge can be expected to excite pity in its bearer. The difference is that where Schopenhauer sees that denial of the will-to-live will be the invariable result of such knowledge (except in the case of true wickedness), Nietzsche claims that whether one denies the will to live, or whether one overcomes pity and affirms life on the basis of this knowledge, is a question of one’s
courage. Given that courage is one of the qualities that Nietzsche associates with the ideal of nobility, this is further evidence for the view that affirmation of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is something that can be expected to belong only to the healthy. In sum, the answer to the question of who can affirm the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is quite simply: “the noble”.

6.3 Saint Januaris
So, I have suggested that Nietzsche’s account of affirmation is closely reliant upon Schopenhauer’s account, which describes it as the natural instinct as such and, moreover, that his teaching of affirmation is not prescriptive. According to my reading, noble types can be expected to affirm a recurrence cosmology because such a worldview is in accordance with their dominant ("natural") instincts. On the other hand, the “sick” are not necessarily to be expected to somehow begin to affirm the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same as the result of an exhortation to do so, or even as the result of some kind of self-overcoming. I suggest that, according to Nietzsche, they are doomed; they will perish – and, as he says quite clearly, this is quite in accordance with his “principle of philanthropy”. Now the result of the “selection” that is the function of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same will be the “future splendour” of mankind, which is understood by Nietzsche in terms of a “humanity of the future”, “higher organic system”, and, of course, the Übermensch.

In this final section, I want to briefly examine a few passages from the fourth book of The Gay Science that I believe strongly reinforce this general interpretation. In particular, I hope to highlight some of Nietzsche’s intimations for what a future European culture might look like, after the demise of the morality of pity. Book Four begins with Nietzsche declaring “Amor fati: let that be my love from now on”. Amor fati means “love of fate”; Nietzsche describes it in connection with his wish to learn to see beauty in necessity. Seen in connection with Schopenhauer’s account of affirmation of the will-to-live, this can be paraphrased as Nietzsche wishing to see beauty in the natural world which
encompasses all suffering (necessity being synonymous with "natural" according to Schopenhauer's account of empirical reality). The idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is, on this reading, the "confirmation and seal" of amor fati, because such a cosmological structure mirrors the psychological structure of affirmation of the will-to-live (i.e. willing the eternal recurrence of one's existence). In §285, Nietzsche writes of willing the "eternal recurrence" of war and peace:

... there is no more reason in what happens, no love in what will happen to you; no more resting place stands open for your heart in which to find and no longer seek; you arm yourself against any ultimate peace; you will the eternal recurrence of war and peace; - Man of renunciation, all of this you wish to renounce? Who will give you the strength to do so? No one has yet had the strength!...

It is clear that this is not necessarily a reference to a recurrence cosmology. Nevertheless, it fits my interpretation. The key point here, it seems, is that, according to Nietzsche, it will require immense strength to renounce all of that which had formerly interpreted one's suffering and provided metaphysical comfort in the face of the suffering that is constitutive of existence: the "shadows of God". Nietzsche declares that "no one has yet had the strength" for such renunciation; the implication here is that no one would survive such renunciation. This fits my interpretation precisely because it is not clear that the noble will have to renounce anything as a consequence of believing in a recurrence cosmology. The noble type, according to Nietzsche's definition, takes natural delight in its own existence, and does not require metaphysical comfort. Not requiring it to begin with, it does not, therefore, need to renounce it. The man of renunciation that Nietzsche refers to in this passage is the disciple of the will-to-truth, beholden to the ascetic ideal. It is in this sense that Nietzsche describes truth as a fatality.

There are a large number of aphorisms in the fourth book that contain relevant passages. However, rather than comment on them all I will just draw attention to one more – which happens to be my favourite: §337. In this aphorism Nietzsche
communicates a remarkable idea: that if one could experience all the history of man as his own history, and thereby feel the "monstrous sum of all kinds of grief", and compress all of this into a single feeling – then this would result in a godlike happiness unknown to humanity so far, which would be called: "humaneness". In my view, this is one of Nietzsche's most beautiful aphorisms:

... We of the present day are only just beginning to form the chain of a very powerful future feeling, link by link—we hardly know what we are doing...Anyone who manages to experience the history of humanity as a whole as his own history will feel in an enormously generalized way all the grief of an invalid who thinks of health, of an old man who thinks of the dreams of his youth, of a lover deprived of his beloved, of the martyr whose ideal is perishing, of the hero on the evening after the battle that has decided nothing but brought him wounds and the loss of his friend. But if one endured, if one could endure this immense sum of grief of all kinds while yet being the hero who, as the second day of battle breaks, welcomes the dawn and his fortune, being the heir of all the nobility of the past spirit—an heir with a sense of obligation, the most aristocratic of all old nobles and at the same time the first of a new nobility—the like of which no age has yet seen or dreamt of; if one could burden one’s soul with all of this—the oldest, the newest, losses, hopes, conquests, and the victories of humanity; if one could finally contain this in one soul and crowd it into a single feeling—this would surely have to result in a happiness that humanity has not known so far: the happiness of a god full of power and love, full of tears and laughter, a happiness that, like the sun of the evening, continually bestows its inexhaustible riches, pouring them into the sea, feeling richest, as the sun does, when even the poorest fisherman is still rowing with golden oars! This godlike feeling would then be called—humaneness.

Once again, a comparison with Schopenhauer on a corresponding point illustrates the primary sense of this passage. As we have already seen, according to Schopenhauer, true philosophical insight into the nature of the suffering that humanity and all living beings must endure leads to the quieting of the will-to-live and is the basis of asceticism. Nietzsche, in contrast, looks forward to the day when such true philosophical insight will lead instead to a feeling of godlike happiness, which he calls "humaneness". This is
perhaps the clearest indication of what affirmation of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same looks like, in Nietzsche's view. Notably, such affirmation is the domain of some future generation, endowed with noble qualities, in particular the qualities that allow it to endure the spectacle of so much suffering as constitutes the history of humanity. Finally, it is important to note that all this is possible, according to Nietzsche, on the basis of the “sense for history”, which he describes as the distinctive “virtue and disease” of this age. This sense for history is nothing more than the level of development of the will-to-truth that has realized that the secrets to the myriad riddles of morality are to be found, if they are to be found at all, not in the inscrutable heavens, but in the early, rude, and perhaps shameful, beginnings of human culture.

Conclusion
In sum, the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same is a symbol of affirmation, according to Nietzsche, on several levels. On one level, it is quite clear that someone who consciously desires the eternal recurrence of the universe, and their own existence, thereby exhibits an affirmative attitude towards life. I have also suggested that, according to Nietzsche, there is a sense in which noble qualities anticipate the conscious willing of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same inasmuch as such willing is implicit in such qualities. It is reasonably clear that people endowed with such noble qualities should have no trouble living in accordance with belief in a recurrence cosmology.

Finally, in contrast to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche argues that conscious affirmation of the eternal recurrence, on the basis of philosophical insight into the extent to which suffering is constitutive of human existence, is the highest thinkable affirmation, albeit something he considers to be incredibly difficult. Indeed, it is this difficulty, requiring the individual to overcome pity and compassion for suffering humanity, which justifies the pathos of Zarathustra’s response to a recurrence cosmology.
In Part One of this dissertation I argued that Nietzsche is interested in the possibility of an eternally recurring universe to the extent that he sees it as one day being the object of widespread belief. According to my interpretation, Nietzsche thinks that belief in a recurrence cosmology will have dire consequences for the "sick". These consequences include depression and suicide. As a result of the sick becoming depressed and suicidal, their influence on European culture will, according to Nietzsche, wane, presumably thereby leaving Europe in the hands of the "strong" (i.e. healthy). According to Nietzsche, the ascendency of such strong, happy human beings is equivalent to "redemption" of the earth. In Part Two, I defended this interpretation by attempting to account for Nietzsche's reasoning with respect to the three "dimensions" of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that I suggested, in the Introduction, were integral to his interest in the idea. These dimensions were: the cosmological significance of the idea; the nihilistic implications; and, its role as a formula of affirmation. I believe that I have shown that, in each of these cases, my overall interpretation supports plausible reconstructions of Nietzsche's reasoning, and thereby makes sense of the whole range of Nietzsche's sometimes confusing [published and unpublished] references to "eternal recurrence".

Throughout this dissertation I have postponed a discussion of two closely related concerns that, I anticipate, will trouble some readers. The first of these concerns is the question of whether or not, on my reading, Nietzsche is to be considered a kind of proto-Nazi, or a proponent of eugenics – i.e. to what extent does he advocate the preponderance of a certain type of person (e.g. the "blonde beast") at the expense of others? And to what extent is he prepared to advocate the perhaps violent sacrifice of the latter in order to achieve such preponderance? The relatively straightforward approach to reading Nietzsche that I have adopted is certainly suggestive of such a reading. Nietzsche's apparent approval of the widespread depression and suicide that
he believes will result from belief in a recurrence cosmology, on the grounds that the "world" will be redeemed thereby, will no doubt alienate many of his readers, and make many of them wary about endorsing or accepting his enthusiasm for this spectacle.

The second concern is the question of whether or not some of Nietzsche's dichotomies that I rely on for my thesis can stand up to critical scrutiny. Thus far, I have not sought to problematize or question Nietzsche's distinction between "health" and "sickness", or between "priests" and "aristocratic knights", or between "noble" and "common". More crucially, at no stage have I addressed the question of the extent to which Nietzsche himself may have problematized his own distinctions, or the extent to which such distinctions may have conflicted with his other important philosophical analyses.

It seems to me that both of these concerns can be mitigated to some extent by recognizing that, in order to try to reconstruct Nietzsche's interest in a very narrow area, albeit a central one, it has been necessary for me to impose quite radical restrictions upon the scope of my exposition. The straightforward approach to reading Nietzsche's texts that I have adopted throughout this dissertation has, as a result of Nietzsche's powerful style, naturally served to highlight what one might consider to be the "dramatic" side of his thought. However, in my view it would be a mistake to conclude that a thinker of Nietzsche's calibre would understand the aforementioned dichotomies to reflect essential differences, or, in the final analysis, to be serious aids to philosophical reflection. It is more likely that, insofar as the dichotomies undoubtedly embody some degree of truth, no matter how nebulously, Nietzsche viewed them as starting points for a genuine investigation into territory that, in his view, remained relatively uncharted.

The point then is that the edifice built on top of these conceptual foundations, including my interpretation of Nietzsche's interest in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, can be seen most usefully as belonging to such a starting point. Moreover, if Nietzsche's own philosophical activity had not been so tragically cut short by the abrupt onset of silence in 1889, we would perhaps have ultimately been presented with a
philosophical discussion of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same that lives up to the myriad promises of Nietzsche’s impassioned intimations. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case. What we do have, however, is a beginning, and one that can undoubtedly be the departure point for many a philosophical journey. Nietzsche, prescient as ever, foreshadowed such a result in his 1881 publication The Dawn:

We aeronauts of the spirit! – All those brave birds which fly out into the distance, into the farthest distance – it is certain! somewhere or other they will be unable to go one and will perch on a mast or a bare cliff face – and they will even be thankful for this miserable accommodation! But who could venture to infer from that, that there was not an immense space open before them, that they had flown as far as one could fly! All our great teachers and predecessors have at last come to a stop and it is not with the noblest or most graceful of gestures that weariness comes to a stop: it will be the same with you and me! But what does that matter to you and me! Other birds will fly farther!
Editions and Translations of Nietzsche's Writings


*David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer* (*David Strauss des Bekenner und der Schriftsteller*, 1873) translated by R. J. Hollingdale in *Untimely Meditations*.

*On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (*Von Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, 1874) translated by R. J. Hollingdale in *Untimely Meditations*.

*Schopenhauer as Educator* (*Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, 1874) translated by R. J. Hollingdale in *Untimely Meditations*.


Critical Literature on Nietzsche


**Other Works Cited or Consulted**


