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## Nietzsche's Will to Power as that Which Eternally Recurs

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# NIETZSCHE'S WILL TO POWER AS THAT WHICH ETERNALLY RECURS

by

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B.A. December 2019, Old Dominion University

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## ABSTRACT

### NIETZSCHE'S WILL TO POWER AS THAT WHICH ETERNALLY RECURS

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Commonly believed to be a thought experiment to help us with life affirmation, a cosmological or metaphysical interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence seems to be gaining ground. I argue for a metaphysical reading of the eternal recurrence. In arguing for this position, I hold that Nietzsche's view of the eternal recurrence can be traced back to his admiration for the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus. Specifically, I think Nietzsche draws on a few of Heraclitus' cosmological doctrines which include continuous flux, a unity of opposites, and eternal strife. In Nietzsche adopting Heraclitus' cosmological standpoints, my view is that Nietzsche's Will to Power is what eternally recurs. The methodology that I use is the "Reflective Journal/Research Diary" method. The format I apply for this method is writing in a textual document format. Further, I examine the primary literature for Heraclitus and Nietzsche and compare their cosmological and metaphysical doctrines. In doing so, I apply these doctrines to the eternal recurrence. In my reading of Nietzsche, I find that the Will to Power is a metaphysical force that makes up the whole universe. The Will to Power compels all life even down to cells and atoms, to strive for an expansion of influence. As such, the wills to power are in a never-ending competition and as a result, continuous change occurs. For Nietzsche, even though there is continuous change, the world isn't capable of eternally creating new things. As a result, competing wills to power win and lose contests in the same sequence thus, ensuring an eternally recurring world.

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This work is dedicated to my parents Billie and Marty Ackerman. I wouldn't have gotten as far as I have if not for their love and support.

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## NOMENCLATURE

<i>GS</i>	The Gay Science
<i>EH</i>	Ecce Homo
<i>WP</i>	The Will to Power
<i>WLN</i>	Writings from the Late Notebooks
<i>BGE</i>	Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future
<i>PTG</i>	Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks
<i>TI</i>	Twilight of the Idols Or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer
<i>HH</i>	Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits
<i>WWR</i>	The World as Will and Representation

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## INTRODUCTION

The eternal recurrence of the same is one of Friedrich Nietzsche's most important and controversial ideas. There are multiple perspectives on the eternal recurrence leading it to being a point of contention in Nietzsche scholarship. There are two competing views on the eternal recurrence. The first is that it is a practical thought experiment to help us with life-affirmation. The thesis of the thought experiment reading is that if we can desire a hypothetical eternal return to our lives with no changes, then it shows that we can affirm life for how it is. The other route scholars take is that it is a metaphysical/cosmological view about the universe. The metaphysical/cosmological reading of the eternal recurrence holds that we must literally live the exact same life eternally, within the same sequence, and with no changes. We ourselves not only return to the same life, but so does everyone else and the whole universe itself will repeat eternally.

I should point out that I do take "metaphysical" and "cosmological" to mean the same thing. Paul Loeb, a scholar who has a literal reading of the eternal recurrence, refers to the eternal recurrence as something that is cosmological to avoid the potential issues that comes from labeling it "metaphysical." These issues come from Heidegger's reading of the eternal recurrence. Heidegger's view of what constitutes something as "metaphysical" is if the driving question of our view or investigation is asking what "being" is?<sup>1</sup> Heidegger has a metaphysical reading of the eternal recurrence and thinks that Nietzsche uses it to inquire into the matter of "being." For the purposes of my thesis, not only will I be taking both terms to mean the same thing, but I will be using the term "metaphysical" for my reading of the eternal recurrence. When

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farrell Krell, (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 190.

I use the term “metaphysical” to describe the eternal recurrence, I am using it in the sense that it is a fact about the world that is beyond the realm of the sciences to investigate. Maudmarie Clark is a Nietzsche scholar who supports the definition of metaphysics that I will be adopting throughout this thesis (see Clark 2012: 161; for a challenge to Clark’s view, see Remhof 2021: 14-18).<sup>2</sup> Clark’s definition is consistent with her reading that in Nietzsche’s unpublished notes, he seems to be making room for a new kind of metaphysics that doesn’t posit a world of “being.” At the center of this different account of metaphysics is Nietzsche’s conception of the Will to Power.<sup>3</sup>

I will give a few different examples of readings on the eternal recurrence for some context of how my project differs from other readings. Alexander Nehamas is a philosopher who takes the route that the eternal recurrence is a practical thought experiment. Nehamas explains that in Nietzsche’s view, all actions we perform are equally a part of our identities.<sup>4</sup> Given that this is the case, Nehamas argues that to accept one’s life for how it is, one must accept all of their life’s aspects.<sup>5</sup> This includes all of the negative aspects of our past. The reason we must accept the negative aspects of our past is because they in part, have led us to where and who we are now.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the way to accept our life in its entirety is to desire an eternal return to that life with no changes.<sup>7</sup> What is at stake for Nehamas is that he views Nietzsche as wanting us to be

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<sup>2</sup> Maudmarie Clark, “Anti-Metaphysics I Nietzsche,” in Le Poidevin. *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, Routledge Philosophy Companions. London; New York: Routledge, 2012, 161. Justin Remhof, “Nietzsche: Metaphysician” (2021), Philosophy Faculty Publications, 66. [https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/philosophy\\_fac\\_pubs/66](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/philosophy_fac_pubs/66), 14-18.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, *Ibid*, 168.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander, Nehamas, “The Eternal Recurrence,” *The Philosophical Review* 89, no. 3 (1980): 346, accessed July 27, 2021. doi:10.2307/2184393.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Nehamas, “The Eternal Recurrence,” *Ibid*. 347

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*. 349

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*. 347

able to live an ideal life.<sup>8</sup> Living an ideal life would be to recognize and accept oneself and live in accordance with who we are.<sup>9</sup>

The philosopher Maudemarie Clark also holds the view the eternal recurrence is a thought experiment to help promote life-affirmation. Clark posits that being able to affirm the eternal recurrence doesn't mean to accept it as being literally true.<sup>10</sup> Rather, the idea is to cultivate an attitude of wanting to live one's life over again unchanged.<sup>11</sup> Clark argues that the eternal recurrence is meant to be Nietzsche's counter to life-negating ascetic ideals.<sup>12</sup> Ascetic ideals cause us to reject and devalue life which ultimately results in nihilism.<sup>13</sup> The eternal recurrence then, is Nietzsche's antithesis to nihilism and ascetic ideals.<sup>14</sup>

Paul Loeb argues for a cosmological interpretation of the eternal recurrence. Loeb views the eternal recurrence as us and the rest of the universe as literally recurring eternally. Loeb puts forth multiple arguments for his view, but one of the more compelling ones is that Nietzsche offers a formal proof for a cosmological doctrine of recurrence. This is in response to scholars who argue that Nietzsche never gave a proof in any of his published works. Loeb disagrees with this and in response, he argues that a proof for an eternal recurrence can be found in Nietzsche's fictional work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The proof is as follows: Nietzsche's character Zarathustra determines that he will eternally recur because he is "entangled in an eternally recurring knot of causes."<sup>15</sup> There are two main conclusions that Zarathustra draws from this.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 356

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 356

<sup>10</sup> Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Modern European Philosophy. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 252

<sup>11</sup> Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 252

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 252.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 252.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Loeb, "Eternal Recurrence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, edited by John Richardson and Ken Gemes, 659, Oxford Handbooks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

The first is “that the past and future are eternities,” and that time exists “as a relation among events.”<sup>16</sup> This would mean that what can happen in the present moment, has happened in the past, and will happen again in the future. Because time is a relation among events, Loeb says that the events happening now are “both preceded and followed by itself.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, everything that has happened in the past will happen again in the future ensuring an eternal recurrence of the same.<sup>18</sup> Loeb admits that there are many questions that need to be answered when examining this proof. Questions include why Nietzsche would think that the “past and future are eternal,” why he thinks time is relational, why Nietzsche invokes causation when at other times he is skeptical of causation, and why time “recurs in a circular fashion?”<sup>19</sup> Loeb never answers these questions as he thinks they are up for debate. However, his main point here is that Nietzsche did offer a proof for a cosmology of recurrence. Before we can even begin to answer the questions that the proof requires, scholarly consensus must be met that Nietzsche did indeed offer a proof.

My own interpretation of the eternal recurrence is that it is a metaphysical view about the universe that is inspired by Heraclitus’ doctrines of Flux, Unity of Opposites, and the eternal strife of the universe. Specifically, my view is that Nietzsche’s conception of the Will to Power as a force that makes up the universe is what eternally recurs. Thus, eventually ensuring a recurrence of the same events. This thesis will consist of four sections: Discussing first, how Nietzsche adopts Heraclitus’s cosmology of flux and how he makes it his own and applies it to the doctrine of recurrence; second, why the Will to Power is what eternally recurs and how it can result in identical events; third, how Nietzsche thinks we can embrace life and say “yes” to the

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Loeb, “Eternal Recurrence,” 159-660.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 660.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

suffering that results from the eternal recurrence; fourth, I will give some examples of where I can take my study of Nietzsche as a metaphysician in the future.

## HERACLITEAN FLUX AS A PREREQUISITE FOR RECURRENCE

I believe that Nietzsche bases a metaphysics of the eternal recurrence on his reverence for Heraclitus' cosmology of flux and unity of opposites. In Nietzsche's autobiography *Ecce Homo*, he states that "the doctrine of '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."<sup>20</sup> It should be said that not all scholars of Heraclitus interpret him as endorsing a doctrine of flux. However, I believe that there is textual evidence in the literature for at least a Heraclitean foundation on which Nietzsche can establish a doctrine of recurrence. For the sake of this thesis, I will approach it from the view that Heraclitus endorses a doctrine of flux. I will also interpret Nietzsche as adopting a view of Heraclitean flux.

### Heraclitean Flux and The Unity Of Opposites

The view attributed to Heraclitus that the universe is in constant flux comes from writings that are known as the "river fragments."<sup>21</sup> There are a few different river fragments each containing a metaphorical statement for what Heraclitus took the nature of the cosmos to be like. Here are a couple of examples:

"(B12) Upon those who step into the same rivers, different and still different waters flow."<sup>22</sup>

"(B49a) We step into and we do not step into the same rivers. We are and we are not."<sup>23</sup>

Despite the different wording within the fragments, they are both taken to be saying the same thing. That is, that the universe is in constant flux i.e., continuous change. These fragments are

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<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Ecce Homo," *The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 273-274.

<sup>21</sup> Jessica N. Berry, "Nietzsche and the Greeks," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, edited by John Richardson and Ken Gemes, 95, Oxford Handbooks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Curd, ed. Patricia Curd, *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, second edition, trans. Richard D. McKirahan and Patricia Curd, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011), 45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 45.

commonly interpreted to be Heraclitus metaphorically comparing the nature of the cosmos to a flowing river. One explanation posited by scholar Daniel W. Graham is that the waters of a river are always changing. In fact, Graham states that it is because the waters are always changing that allows a river to exist at all.<sup>24</sup> Despite the waters always changing, it's still the same river.<sup>25</sup> Graham's interpretation of the view is that Heraclitus isn't advocating that everything in the world is changing. Rather, he argues that the message of the river fragments is that some things must change for other things to continue existing.<sup>26</sup>

Another part of Heraclitus' cosmology in which flux comes into play is in the conception of a unity of opposites. According to Graham, Heraclitus argues that opposites are a part of the world and are within us.<sup>27</sup> That is, some things change and transform into their opposite. Graham gives the example of being awake and then falling asleep.<sup>28</sup> These are both opposite states that reside in us, but we cannot occupy a waking and sleeping state at the same time.<sup>29</sup> Thus, even though both states are interconnected due to our capacity to occupy either one, a state must change in order for the opposite to arise.<sup>30</sup> Here is an example that Heraclitus gives on a flux of opposites: "(B126) Cold things grow hot, a hot thing cold, a moist thing withers, a parched thing is moistened."<sup>31</sup> Now that I have given some background on Heraclitus' cosmology of flux and unity of opposites, we can now begin to connect him to Nietzsche's view of the eternal recurrence.

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<sup>24</sup> "Heraclitus (fl. c. 500 B.C.E.)," by Daniel W. Graham, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, <https://iep.utm.edu/heraclit/#H3>, July 29 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel W. Graham, "Heraclitus," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

<sup>26</sup> *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel W. Graham, "Heraclitus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/heraclitus/>>.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel W. Graham, "Heraclitus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>29</sup> The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Curd, ed., *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, 49.

## Nietzsche On Flux

Like Heraclitus, Nietzsche too thought that the world was in constant flux. Nietzsche's emphasis on change has been noted by scholars. Rex Welshon, whose view I will be adopting here, states that Nietzsche doesn't think that anything remains the same over time.<sup>32</sup> So, if Nietzsche is drawing from Heraclitus that everything is continuously changing, Nietzsche would disagree with Graham's reading of Heraclitus that only some things change. For Nietzsche, everything is continuously changing. In fact, Welshon states that Nietzsche altogether rejects the notion that there are substances.<sup>33</sup> In metaphysics, when philosophers often discuss things remaining the same, they are referring to enduring substances. *GS* 109 provides clear evidence of Nietzsche's rejection of substance in which he states, "there are no eternally enduring substances."<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche's rejection of eternally enduring substances is important for the notion that nothing is immune to change. The word "substance" comes from the Greek word "*ousia*," which means 'being'.<sup>35</sup> "Being" implies that something stays the same and never changes or, has reached a final state where change can no longer occur. Substances then, are fundamental entities that all objects are said to be composed of.<sup>36</sup> These entities are either said to stay the same "at a time," "over time" or stay the same during the change of the object or thing these entities are inhabiting.<sup>37</sup> Staying the same "at a time" refers to what is known as synchronic

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<sup>32</sup> Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*. Continental European Philosophy, Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004. 79-80.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude In Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York and Toronto: Vintage Books, 1974), 168.

<sup>35</sup> Howard Robinson, "Substance", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/substance/>>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, 79-80.



identity and when something stays the same “over time” it is known as diachronic identity.<sup>38</sup>

These are qualities of substances that in Welshon’s view, Nietzsche rejects.<sup>39</sup>

Nietzsche can be said to reject substance i.e., “being” and its qualities of synchronic and diachronic identity because he thinks that everything is continually changing. The reason Nietzsche views everything as changing is because rather than objects being composed of substances, they are composed of multiple centers of force. Nietzsche’s conception of force is what he refers to as the Will to Power. Sometimes, he also says that things are composed of “quanta of power” or “dynamic quanta.”<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche seems to refer to quanta of power, dynamic quanta, and wills to power as the same things. So, when not quoting a passage from the literature I will be using the term “Will to Power.”

In *WP* 635, Nietzsche explains that these “dynamic quantities of energy” are in tension with each other.<sup>41</sup> Due to this, the Will to Power is “not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos*, is the most elementary fact, from which a becoming, an effecting, emerge in the first place...”<sup>42</sup> What Nietzsche is arguing here is that different wills to power are in competition with each other to expand their influence. It’s within this struggle how “becoming” is able to occur. “Becoming” means that something is changing, and change is dependent upon which will to power is successful in overcoming the resistance put forth by the competing will to power. The victorious will to power consumes the opponent. In the consumption of one will to power by the other, change occurs.<sup>43</sup> If we accept Welshon’s interpretation which I do, then Nietzsche’s rejection of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 79-80.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (Penguin Random House UK: Penguin, 2017), 362.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 362.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Rüdiger Bittner, and Kate. Sturge, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 199.

enduring substance, synchronic and diachronic identity are very Heraclitean views because it is a rejection of “being.”

Nietzsche’s own rejection of substance and “being” in favor of change are consistent with his interpretation of Heraclitus’ view of “being.” In *PTG* Nietzsche claims that Heraclitus “altogether denied being” and saw “nothing other than becoming.”<sup>44</sup> There are a couple notable passages in *WP* that I want to draw the reader’s attention to. These passages include *WP* 1067 and 1064. Before I go further, I should note that depending on the English translation of the text one is drawing from; the terms “energy” and “force” are used interchangeably. So, for the purposes of my argument I will be taking both “energy” and “force” to mean the same thing.<sup>45</sup> For the sake of consistency, when not directly quoting from the literature I will be using the term “force” since force implies that something is always moving or active. Force being constantly active is consistent with how the Will to Power operates. In *WP* 1067 Nietzsche refers to the world as a “monster of energy” that is “forever changing.”<sup>46</sup> Further, in *WP* 1064, Nietzsche also states that “there is a fixed amount of force, but its essence is in flux.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, take for example this quote from *WP* 1064: “‘Change’ is essential to force...But this is just to say that change is subject to necessity.”<sup>48</sup> These quotes in the literature show that Nietzsche’s conception of force is in constant “becoming” and that the fundamental nature of force enables change.

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<sup>44</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington DC: Gateway, 1962), 51-52.

<sup>45</sup> I bring this up because in other English translations of *WP* 1067 the word “energy” is substituted for “force.” For example, *WP* 1067 appears in *Writings from the Late Notebooks* as 38[12]. In *WLN* 38[12] the English translation says that the world is a “monster of force.” *WP* 1067 and *WLN* 38[12] also appears in the *Nachlass*. In the *Nachlass* the quote in German is “Diese Welt: ein Ungeheuer von Kraft.” The German word *Kraft* can be translated as either force or energy. As such, when Nietzsche refers to force or energy, I will be taking him to mean the same thing when I use the quotations from his work in this paragraph.

<sup>46</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 585.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 582.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.

So far, I have argued that Nietzsche adopts a view that everything is always changing because the fundamental forces that make up the world are in constant conflict with each other. This was demonstrated by him rejecting eternal substances and pointing out key notes in *WP*. Nietzsche also shares some other similarities with Heraclitus' cosmology that can indeed be grounds for a metaphysics of recurrence. These similarities include war, strife, and necessity.

### Nietzsche On the Necessity of Change

In addition to flux, Heraclitus also says of the cosmos: "it is necessary to know that war is common... and that all things happen in accordance with strife and necessity."<sup>49</sup> I will discuss strife in section 2 and war in section 3. For now, I would like to discuss Nietzsche's view of necessity and how it relates to the concept of flux. I've already pointed to *WP* 1064 when Nietzsche says that "change is subject" to necessity, but there is an example in one of the published works where Nietzsche refers to necessity.<sup>50</sup> In *GS* 109 Nietzsche argues against there being any laws in nature, rather, "there are only necessities. There is nobody who commands, nobody who obeys, nobody who trespasses."<sup>51</sup> A question that should be answered is what is meant by the word "necessity"? According to Welshon, when philosophers talk about "necessity," they are often referring to things, aspects or events that would remain the same in any world.<sup>52</sup> That is, any world that is logically or metaphysically possible.<sup>53</sup> This includes worlds that are very different from our own. If it is as Nietzsche says, that change is necessary, then change must be a feature in at least any metaphysically possible world.

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<sup>49</sup> Patricia Curd, ed., *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, 47.

<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (Penguin Random House UK: Penguin, 2017), 583.

<sup>51</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude In Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, 168.

<sup>52</sup> Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, 93.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

I believe that Nietzsche does care about what must hold true in any metaphysically possible world. The reason for this is that he wants us to affirm what is metaphysically possible in the natural empirical world, also what he describes as the “apparent world.”<sup>54</sup> The “apparent world” is the only one that we can metaphysically conceive of because we can confirm it in experience. What Nietzsche wants to go against is what he calls “true worlds.”<sup>55</sup> For Nietzsche, “true worlds” are ones that cannot be confirmed in experience. He refers to them as a “true world” because those that believe in them claim these worlds to be either the only ones that matter or the only real ones. To those who believe in “true worlds” the apparent world is either ultimately meaningless or just a test in order to enter into the “true world.” Some examples of “true worlds” include afterlives such as Heaven or Nirvana. Other examples include the world of substance, permanence, Kant’s thing-in-itself, and “being.” I think the reason why Nietzsche emphasizes change as a necessity is because he is trying to show that there is nothing but change in the apparent world. In keeping with how much he draws from Heraclitus, in the following passage from *TI* Nietzsche argues that a world of change can be confirmed in experience through the senses while a world of “being” cannot and thus, is ultimately a fiction:

With the highest respect, I except the name of *Heraclitus*. When the rest of the philosophic folk rejected the testimony of the senses because they showed multiplicity and change, he rejected their testimony because they showed things as if they had permanence and unity. Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie. But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is

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<sup>54</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols: Or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Penguin Group, 1982), 481.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 481.

an empty fiction. The ‘apparent’ world is the only one: the ‘true’ world is a merely added by a lie.<sup>56</sup>

The reason Nietzsche can hold that change is necessary is because in his view, the only possible metaphysical world is the apparent one that consists of only “becoming.” In other words, the only metaphysically possible world is one in which there is continuous change. So, change is necessary. A world of “being” is nothing more than a fictitious “true world” with religious baggage.

What I have argued for thus far, is that Nietzsche views the world as being in constant change. Further, I have argued that for Nietzsche, change is a necessity because the world of change is the only metaphysically possible one because it is what we can confirm through experience. A possible dilemma arises which asks, how it is that change, or flux is subject to necessity within a repeating eternal cycle? After all, it doesn’t seem to make sense for there to be constant change if everything essentially stays the same because we are in an eternally recurring cycle. I believe that Nietzsche gets around this dilemma in two ways. The first way that Nietzsche gets around the dilemma is that he doesn’t think the world is capable of infinite creativity. That is, there are limits to the world’s creative potential. The second way Nietzsche gets around the dilemma is through his view of change as a necessity.

Addressing the first way Nietzsche gets around the dilemma, in *GS* 109 Nietzsche warns that we should “beware of thinking that the world eternally creates new things.”<sup>57</sup> That is, the world has limited creative potential which means that eventually the number of new developments in life will run out. The eternal recurrence then, is a happy medium between

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<sup>56</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols: Or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Penguin Group, 1982), 481.

<sup>57</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude In Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, Ibid, 168.

infinite creative potential and the world having permanence. Within an eternally recurring cycle, there is change, but it is recurring change. In part 2 I will delve a little further into the limited creative potential the world has. For now, I just wanted draw attention to it as a way Nietzsche could possibly get around the dilemma.

The second way in which I think Nietzsche can solve the apparent dilemma is by drawing attention to what he argues in *WP* 1066. In *WP* 1066 Nietzsche states that his conception of a recurring cosmos cannot be considered “mechanistic.”<sup>58</sup> If it did, an infinite and repeated course of “identical cases” wouldn’t be needed.<sup>59</sup> In other words, an eternal and repeated course of all things cannot be a state of “being” or final state. The change that the world undergoes allows it to reach a point in which to trigger the recurrence. It seems to be the case for Nietzsche, if the world is mechanistic, the world moves to a point in which a final state comes to be, and this implies that there would be no more transformations left for the world to undergo. So, the world would then become a stationary world of “being.” Nietzsche seems to differentiate between his conception of an eternal recurrence and a final state. In my reading, this is because for there to even be a recurrence, some form of change must be present while a final state means that the world has reached a point where change can no longer happen. Even if the changes within a recurring cycle are the same because they recur, they are still a form of change, nonetheless. The eternal recurrence then, is precisely Nietzsche’s challenge to any notions of “being” or final states. Nietzsche proclaims, “everything becomes and eternally recurs – *escape is impossible!*”<sup>60</sup>

Change as being a prerequisite for recurrence is implied in the passage of the “The Convalescent” in Nietzsche’s fictional work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In in this passage

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 585.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 585.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 580.

Zarathustra's animals proclaim they know him to be the teacher of the eternal recurrence. They state specifically, "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."<sup>61</sup> The "great year of becoming" that the animals refer to is the point in the cycle that initiates the recurrence and represents the transformative regression back to the first stage of the recurring cycle. This regression then, is the flux of forces back to their starting point to begin the cycle over again. The cycle must regress back to the beginning since the world has no ultimate end or final state. I use the word "regress" because it seems to be the case that the beginning of the recurring cycle is a point in which force and life itself is at its simplest form and is the least developed. As time goes on, force continues to further develop in the process of competing wills to power. This eventually results in more complex formations and developments such as organic life and intellect. Regression and development are forms of "becoming" because they are changes within the cycle. I believe that this regression and development of force is reflected in Nietzsche's description of a force's flux. In *WP* 1067 Nietzsche explains the world's flux as follows:

forever changing, forever rolling back, with enormous periods of recurrence, with ebb and flow of its configurations, bringing forth the most complicated from the simplest the most fiery, fierce and self-contradictory from the most still, rigid and cold and then from this profusion returning again to simplicity.<sup>62</sup>

We clearly see here that Nietzsche's view is that force can take on more complex forms deriving from simpler forms and regresses back to simplicity.

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<sup>61</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Penguin Group, 1982), 332.

<sup>62</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 585.

As argued for in the previous paragraph, an eternal recurrence can be brought about through the world's continuous change. Specifically, through the change of the world's forces. Further, the various forms that force takes ranges from simple to complicated and then back to simplicity when the recurring cycle begins again. At first, this may sound like it could possibly be a view of things being derived from their opposites as what is simple eventually develops into complexity only to eventually revert back to simplicity. Nietzsche holds the view that what we often consider to be opposites is incorrect. Instead of something deriving from its opposite, there is a process that force goes through that enables the change of different forms of life. I think that Nietzsche's view of opposites is inspired by his own interpretation of Heraclitus' unity of opposites. This is what I will elaborate on next.

### Nietzsche On Opposites

For some background, in *BGE 2* Nietzsche explains that many metaphysicians reject the notion that anything could arise from its opposite and even reject continuous change. Instead, they argue in favor of things originating from the "true world." As Nietzsche states, many argue that things arise "from the lap of Being, the intransitory, the hidden god, the 'thing-in-itself' – there must be their basis, and nowhere else."<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche certainly doesn't endorse this line of thinking. Recall that Nietzsche wants to embrace a world that is full of continuous change because it can be known through sense experience. If we reject the origin of things originating from a hidden realm of "being," then the question remains how anything could arise from its opposite? Nietzsche provides an answer in *HH 1* that not only solves the rejection of opposites

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<sup>63</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York and Toronto: Vintage Books, 1989), 10.



through affirmation of the “true world,” but states that what we perceive to be opposites is an “error of reason.”<sup>64</sup>

Nietzsche argues that “as historical philosophy explains it, there exists, strictly considered, neither a selfless act nor a completely disinterested observation: both are merely sublimations. In them the basic element appears to be virtually dispersed and proves to be present only to the most careful observer.”<sup>65</sup> What Nietzsche is arguing here is that there aren’t really opposites that are derived from each other (for example selflessness from egoism). Rather, Nietzsche says that what we take to be opposites are sublimations. The term “sublimation” that he is using is the one that is used in chemistry. In fact, the title of the aphorism where Nietzsche argues for his position on opposites is entitled “Chemistry of concepts and feelings.” In chemistry, sublimation is defined as a process whereby a solid is transformed into a gas without going through the middle process of turning into a liquid.<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche is using the language of chemistry specifically the word “sublimation,” to emphasize that we miss the “hidden middle process” that allows seemingly opposite states to come about.<sup>67</sup> This process can be known of only by “the most careful observer.”<sup>68</sup>

I believe that Nietzsche’s rejection of opposites and advocacy of a middle process that we often miss was inspired by his reading of Heraclitus’ unity of opposites. Before I go on to explain Nietzsche’s reading of Heraclitus’ unity of opposites, I should point out that just because Nietzsche rejects the notion that there are opposites, doesn’t mean that he wasn’t inspired by

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<sup>64</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann, (University of Nebraska Press: Bison Books, 1996), 13.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Justin Remhof, "Nietzsche: Metaphysician" (2021), Philosophy Faculty Publications, 66. [https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/philosophy\\_fac\\_pubs/66](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/philosophy_fac_pubs/66), 16.

<sup>67</sup> Justin Remhof, "Nietzsche: Metaphysician" 16.

<sup>68</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, 13.

Heraclitus. It's important to remember that in *EH* Nietzsche does say that he feels "altogether warmer and better than anywhere else" when it comes to Heraclitus' views.<sup>69</sup>

In *PTG* 5 Nietzsche explains that for Heraclitus, change comes about through a kind of struggle similar to his own view of competing wills to power. Nietzsche's explanation of Heraclitus' view on opposites is as follows:

he conceived it under the form of polarity, as being the diverging of a force into two qualitatively different opposed activities that seek to re-unite. Everlastingly, a given quality contends against itself and separates into its opposites; everlastingly these opposites seek to re-unite. Ordinary people fancy they see something rigid, complete and permanent; in truth however, light and dark, bitter and sweet are attached to each other and interlocked at any given moment like wrestlers whom sometimes the one, sometimes the other is on top... The strife of the opposites give birth to all that comes-to-be; the definite qualities which look permanent to us express but the momentary ascendancy of one partner.<sup>70</sup>

Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus is that at one point, there was once a unity of force. This force then split into two and this duality of force split into further multiplicities. As such, each fragment is seeking to re-unite to form a unity again. This can take place if these multiplicities of force are each competing to unify with each other. These are the conditions by which flux can come about. The force that Heraclitus takes the world to be composed of is fire. Specifically, he refers to it as an "ever-living fire kindled in measures and extinguished in measures."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Ecce Homo," *The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 273.

<sup>70</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington DC: Gateway, 1962), 54-55.

<sup>71</sup> Patricia Curd, ed., *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, 45.

Nietzsche explains that despite all the change that Heraclitus' fire goes through, there can never be an absolute opposite.<sup>72</sup> The reason being that everything is derived from fire. For some context, Heraclitus' view is an antithesis to Anaximander who equated the opposites of warm and cold because he thought moisture came from both. In Nietzsche's view, Heraclitus most likely interpreted cold as being "a degree of warmth."<sup>73</sup> Hence, why there is no such thing as an absolute opposite.

Just to recap, I have explained Nietzsche's view that what we think are opposites, are really sublimations because we ignore the middle process of what seeming opposites go through. Viewing Anaximander as having exaggerated what opposites were, Heraclitus viewed opposing forces as being the same because their basis is fire. Since everything is fundamentally fire, then it looks like there is no such thing as a complete opposite. Having been inspired by Heraclitus, Nietzsche kept the idea that opposition between forces enables flux but went the extra mile and rejected opposites altogether as a mistake in reasoning. Instead of opposites deriving from one another, there is only the hidden middle process which we often miss and what it seems like Heraclitus missed. The middle process that Nietzsche advocates for is the struggle of competing multiplicities of wills to power that bring about change.

### The World As Will to Power

For Nietzsche, the whole world is nothing more than competing wills to power. We can point to multiple passages in the literature in which Nietzsche claims that the fundamental force that makes the up the universe is Will to Power (see BGE 13, 256).<sup>74</sup> It's also important to

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<sup>72</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Ibid, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Ibid, 60.

<sup>74</sup> "Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength – life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results (BGE, 13)." "Even the body within individuals treat each other as equals, as suggested before... if it is a living and not a dead body, has to do to other bodies what the individuals

remember that *WP* 1067 refers to the world as a “monster of energy” and that it is “forever changing.”<sup>75</sup> Of this force, Nietzsche also describes it as “forever blessing itself as that which eternally recurs,” and says that “this world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And even you yourselves are this will to power – and nothing besides!”<sup>76</sup> In my view, we have clear evidence that the Will to Power is connected to the eternal recurrence and perhaps, the Will to Power itself is what eternally recurs. In the next section I will explore how it is possible that each will to power can recur and thereby ensure that we will live our lives in the same sequence with no changes.

In summary, what I have argued in this section is that Nietzsche’s conception of the eternal recurrence challenges “being,” i.e., final states or ultimate purposes. The eternal recurrence does this because the world is always in continuous “becoming” i.e., change. For Nietzsche, “being” implies that there are no changes. A world of stable and unchanging entities is a fictitious “true world” that cannot be confirmed in experience. Therefore, a world of stable and unchanging entities is to be rejected. Because the apparent world of change is the only one we can confirm of through experience, there is nothing but a world of change. Change allows there to be an eternal recurrence because when force reaches a certain point, the cycle must begin again and regress back to the beginning. Beginning the cycle over again is a change. Having gone further than Heraclitus, Nietzsche holds that there is only the process of forces competing against one another which results in the developments of various forms of life. As such, force

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within it refrain from doing to each other: it will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant – not from any morality or immorality but because it is living and because life simply is will to power (BGE, 259).”

<sup>75</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 585.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 585-586.

continues to regress, develop, and recur. This force is the Will to Power and the way that force acts allows for an eternal recurrence.

## STRIFE AND THE OPPOSITION OF WILLS TO POWER CONDITIONING THE ETERNAL RECURRENCE

The Will to Power is the driving force within all of life that compels everything to strive and overcome resistance. The goal of overcoming resistance is for an expansion of influence. The Will to Power shows that in Nietzsche's view, competition is an inherent principle of the cosmos. As such, if the world eternally recurs, then competition must also recur. I think that Nietzsche uses his knowledge of how the ancient Greeks viewed strife and his interpretation of Heraclitus to inform his view on the Will to Power and the eternal recurrence. These things will be elaborated on in this section and will allow us to see how Nietzsche thinks a metaphysics of recurrence is possible.

### Heraclitean Strife

Nietzsche's understanding of the Greeks' view of strife and the role it plays in life can be found in *Homer's Contest*. Nietzsche shows how prominent a role strife played in ancient Greek life and how it played on their psychology.<sup>77</sup> Nietzsche describes Greek life as being filled with misery and suffering. Specifically, Nietzsche says of Greek life that "in this brooding atmosphere, combat is salvation; the cruelty of victory is the pinnacle of life's jubilation."<sup>78</sup> At the core of the Hellenistic mindset, what is valuable in life consists of competition, overcoming struggle, and aiming for victory. In theory, victory in overcoming struggle through competition results in expanding one's own influence. Nietzsche says that two of the guiding principles that lead to the desire for conflict and victory were "*Eris* and envy."<sup>79</sup> This means that part of what

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<sup>77</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Penguin Group, 1982), 34.

<sup>78</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ibid.* 34.

<sup>79</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ibid.* 35.

was a guiding principle in Hellenistic culture was to seek out strife. In Greek, the word “strife” is translated as Eris and Eris is personified as the goddess of discord.<sup>80</sup>

Nietzsche posits that Hesiod and the Greeks viewed Eris in two different ways. First, Eris is viewed as “evil – namely, the one that leads men into hostile fights of annihilation against one another – while praising another Eris as good – the one that, as jealousy, hatred, envy, spurs men to activity: not to the activity of fights of annihilation but to activity of fights which are *contests*.”<sup>81</sup> What Nietzsche is saying is that on one hand, Eris i.e., strife was viewed as evil because she lead to senseless destruction. On the other hand, Eris was viewed as good because she fostered envy which was viewed as a life-affirming, competitive, and creative drive.

Nietzsche argues that the Greeks viewed envy differently than we do now. The Greek concept of envy as Nietzsche sees it, is that it is positive because it spurred competition and it was within competition that individuals were able to achieve greatness. Competition for greatness might entail things such as seeing who has greater athletic prowess. Similarly, when competition cultivates creativity, we see artists, musicians, and poets in rivalry to see who can produce the best work (see Nietzsche HH 170: 116).<sup>82</sup> The Greek view of envy is very different than a contemporary Christian view where envy is discouraged because it is thought a sin to be envious of another person’s abilities or success. When the Greeks saw others achieving victory, they wanted to compete against those who were great to see if they could be great themselves or

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<sup>80</sup> Andrew L. Brown, "Eris." In *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*,: Oxford University Press, 2012, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.lib.odu.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199545568.001.0001/acref-9780199545568-e-2491>.

<sup>81</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Homer’s Contest,” Ibid, 35.

<sup>82</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, *All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann, (University of Nebraska Press: Bison Books, 1996), 116.

do better than their opponents.<sup>83</sup> This is what Nietzsche thought envy meant to the Greeks. To be envious meant to foster rivalries with others in the same field and try to outshine one's rivals.

Not only did the Greeks seek out difficulty to overcome in the form of competition, but they went as far as making sure that competition was able to forever endure so that it could not have an end. Nietzsche argues that in the Greek view, if the contest comes to an end the very essence of Hellenistic culture would be in jeopardy:

the eternal source of life for the Hellenistic state would be endangered... the individual who towers above the rest is eliminated so that the contest of forces may reawaken – an idea that is hostile to the 'exclusiveness' of genius in the modern sense and presupposes that in the natural order of things there are always several geniuses who spur each other to action.<sup>84</sup>

The Hellenistic way of life was competition and as such, it was important that there could never be a one true victor. Further, no one person could have a monopoly on genius or talent. To ensure that strife and contest continues, Nietzsche says that the Greeks would often ostracize those who they thought were the best.<sup>85</sup> With the best out of the way, the contest can continue. To better highlight the point of ensuring contest could continue, Nietzsche invokes Heraclitus by quoting an example that he provides of the Ephesians ostracizing Hermodorus. The quote is as follows: "they banished Hermodorus, the best among them saying 'let no one of us excel, or if he does, be it elsewhere and among others'."<sup>86</sup>

Nietzsche thinks that the Greeks were driven to contest by the good Eris that enables victory, achievement, and creativity. If the Greeks had no contest, the evil Eris would come out

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<sup>83</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*.



leading to self-destruction. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* Nietzsche argues that Eris was so important to the Greeks that even Heraclitus took it beyond psychology and the culture of the city state, and applied as a principle of the cosmos: “it is Hesiod’s good *Eris* transformed into the cosmic principle; it is the contest-idea of the Greek individual and the Greek state... from the artists *agon*... transformed into universal application so that now the wheels of the cosmos turn on it.”<sup>87</sup> On Nietzsche’s reading, Heraclitus applies the law of Homeric competition to the cosmos. As such, strife is a fact about the universe because each fragment of Heraclitus’ fire is driven to compete for victory over one another. Heraclitus states that “everything comes to be [or, ‘occurs’] in accordance with strife.”<sup>88</sup> For Heraclitus, struggle and opposition are what allows for life to develop. So, when one fragment of the cosmic fire is victorious in consuming the other, flux occurs. This can be thought of in the same vein as artists competing over who has superior work. Just as strife pushes the artist to be creative for victory, so too does the strife of the cosmos foster creativity for change and new forms of life to emerge.

In the same way that the Greeks could not let the competition end, Heraclitus’ cosmic principle of strife cannot let the competition end either. For Heraclitus, life is just a game. Nietzsche quotes him as saying “the world is the *game* Zeus plays.”<sup>89</sup> This game is the competing fragments of the cosmic fire once again seeking to reunite and form a unity.<sup>90</sup> Once all of the fire has returned to a unity, the world is destroyed in being consumed by the unified flame. At this point, the competition has now ended. Nietzsche states in *PTG* that Heraclitus believed “in a periodically repeated end of the world, and in an ever renewed rise of another

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<sup>87</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington DC: Gateway, 1962), 55.

<sup>88</sup> Patricia Curd, ed., *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, second edition, trans. Richard D. McKirahan and Patricia Curd, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011), 47.

<sup>89</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

world out of the all-destroying cosmic fire.”<sup>91</sup> Nietzsche describes the birth of Heraclitus’ new world as emerging from the ever-living fire which has consumed and destroyed everything in its flames.

Heraclitus labels the total engulfment of the world as “satiety.”<sup>92</sup> A standard dictionary definition of *Satiety* is “the quality or state of being fed or gratified to or beyond capacity.”<sup>93</sup> What Heraclitus seems to be saying is that when the cosmic fire is completely unified, it is in a state of being full or satisfied. The reason for this satisfaction is because all the various fragments and the forms of life that they have taken have all been consumed to form the unity. Nietzsche states that when the fire is in this state of satiety it is described by Heraclitus in terms of “desire, a want, or lack.”<sup>94</sup> Heraclitus’ view of satiety as being both a state of satisfaction and lack seems paradoxical. The quote from Heraclitus that I believe Nietzsche is drawing from is “Fire is want and satiety.”<sup>95</sup> The question is how can something that is full and satisfied also be lacking and desiring? The answer is that when the fire is unified, it is full because all of the fragments are together. The lack consists in there being no more competition left.

I should point out that I don’t believe that what Heraclitus has to say on unity conflicts with Nietzsche’s view that there isn’t any rest in the state of flux. The reason being that as soon as all of Heraclitus’ fragments of fire are once again unified, they divide again to restart competition. When I say that “lack consists in there being no more competition left,” I do not mean that there is an ultimate state of rest in the state of flux. Rather, what I mean is that when

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “satiety,” accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/satiety>.

<sup>94</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Ibid, 60.

<sup>95</sup> Patricia Curd, ed., *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, second edition, trans. Richard D. McKirahan and Patricia Curd, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011), 46.

one competition has come to an end, a new competition immediately begins again which enables more flux.

Since strife is a principle of the cosmos and all of life is simply a game, the competition must begin again. In *PTG* Nietzsche describes the beginning process for Heraclitus' new world as follows:

And as children and artists play, so plays the ever-living fire. It constructs and destroys, all in innocence. Such is the game that the aeon plays with itself. Transforming itself into water and earth, it builds towers of sand like a child building at the seashore, piles them up and tramples them down. From time to time the game starts anew. An instant of satiety – and again it is seized by its need as the artist is seized by his need to create. Not hybris but the ever self-renewing impulse to play calls new worlds into being. The child throws its toys away from time to time... but when it does build, it combines and joins and forms its structures regularly, conforming to inner laws.<sup>96</sup>

After the world is destroyed in the unified cosmic fire, the fire is ready to play the game again. The fire then divides into fragments once again initiating the eternal game of unification. Out of each flame being successful in unifying with the other, a new world comes to be, and continuous flux will ensue.

So far, we've seen in Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus how important strife is as a cosmic principle because it brings about competition which then results in flux and the formation of life. Further, on Nietzsche's view, when the fire is unified it divides itself again into various fragments thereby bringing about a new world. However, whether Heraclitus' world is a repetition of the previous one is unclear, and Nietzsche doesn't seem to address if it is. It's once

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<sup>96</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Ibid, 62.

again important to remember that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche says he feels “altogether warmer and better than anywhere else” when it comes to Heraclitus’ views.<sup>97</sup> Despite the murkiness of what Nietzsche thought Heraclitus’s newborn world would consist of specifically, this shouldn’t dissuade us from thinking that Heraclitus was highly influential on Nietzsche’s thinking. Even if there are subtle differences between Heraclitus’ and Nietzsche’s views there is no doubt in my mind that there are striking similarities between them. We must investigate how Heraclitus inspired Nietzsche’s view of the eternal recurrence and how the Will to Power plays a role in it. Let’s begin our investigation by discussing how strife plays a role in Nietzsche’s view of recurrence.

### The Strife of the Will To Power

The key reference in the literature where I believe strife plays a role in Nietzsche’s metaphysics is in *GS* 109. In this passage Nietzsche compares the world to the tune of a music box stating that “the whole music box repeats eternally its tune which may never be called a melody.”<sup>98</sup> This line in the *GS* was brought up by Paul Loeb in his essay on the eternal recurrence in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*. He highlights it to explain that scholars gloss over the fact that the Pythagoreans used music as way to understand the universe and that Nietzsche is doing something similar (see Loeb 2013: 657).<sup>99</sup> I’m not saying he is wrong however, I have my own perspective on the music box comparison. Something important that Nietzsche says is that the music box’s tune cannot be called a melody. The question is then raised why the eternal tune of the music box cannot be called a melody? My answer is that

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<sup>97</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (Vintage Books: New York), 1989, 273.

<sup>98</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufman, (Vintage Books: New York and Toronto), 1974, 168.

<sup>99</sup> Paul Loeb, “Eternal Recurrence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, edited by John Richardson and Ken Gemes, 659, Oxford Handbooks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 657.

Nietzsche views the universe as being in constant discord i.e., strife. The word *Discord* has a few definitions in the Maryam-Webster dictionary. The first two are associated with conflict.

However, it is the third definition of discord that I want to focus on for a moment. The third definition refers to “a combination of musical sounds that strikes the ear harshly.”<sup>100</sup> So, discord is not only associated with conflict, but is also associated with harsh sounding music. When Nietzsche says that the tune of the music box cannot be called a melody, this is his way of metaphorically stating that the universe is continuously in strife or, in conflict. Further, the “tune” of the universe isn’t pleasurable or harmonious as we often want music to be. Rather, because the state of the world is continuously in conflict, the world is harsh and painful.

Strife is an inherent principle of the world for Nietzsche because of the Will to Power. The nature of Will to Power is to seek out conflict and overcome resistance. In section 1 I had mentioned that there are various wills to power that are in competition with one another. The competition is what Nietzsche calls a *pathos* or rather, a prerequisite for there to be change. Nietzsche employs the good Eris that fosters an inherent competitive drive to the cosmos which enables creativity similar to his reading of Heraclitus.

This concept of conflict (strife) enabling creativity and change can be found throughout Nietzsche’s unpublished notes. For example, in *WLN* 9[91] Nietzsche states “all that happens, all movement, all becoming as a determining of relations of degree and force, as struggle”<sup>101</sup> In this note, we see that struggle plays a role in all becoming. Also, in *WLN* 9[151] we see that just like how Heraclitus’ fire seeks out resistance against other fragments, Nietzsche’s Will to Power does the same thing:

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<sup>100</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “discord,” accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discord>.

<sup>101</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Rüdiger Bittner, and Kate Sturge, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 154.

The will to power can only express itself against *resistances*; it seeks out what will resist it...assimilation and incorporation is, above all, a willing to overwhelm, a training, shaping and reshaping, until at last the overwhelmed has passed entirely into power of the attacker and augmented it.<sup>102</sup>

Something important to note is how the Will to Power has the similar property of Heraclitus' fire. While Heraclitus' fragments of fire strive to reunite with each other, Nietzsche's wills to power strive to consume one another. When one will to power consumes the other, a unification takes place. When the unification of various wills to power occur, becoming and change happens as the victor is "augmented" by its consumed opponent.

Now that I have shown that Nietzsche's Will to Power operates similarly to Heraclitus' fire in terms of consumption and how strife plays a role, I will argue for how Nietzsche agrees with Heraclitus's view that competition can never end because of strife. The inherent cosmic principle of strife is why the contest must continue to endure and allows there to be an eternal recurrence. If the world is all Will to Power and the world eternally recurs, then the contest can never truly end because the contests themselves and how each will to power wins and loses in the competition will also recur. Nietzsche does say in *WLN* 10[138] that the Will to Power will reach a point where it will fall into an eternal cycle:

in terms of mechanistic theory, the energy of totality of becoming remains constant; in terms of economics, it rises to its highest point then falls again in an eternal cycle; this 'will to power' expresses itself in the *interpretation*, in the way that *force is consumed* – the goal appears as the transformation of life and life at its highest potency... The same quantum of energy means different things at different stages of development.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, Ibid, 165.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 199.

In the quote above, we have Nietzsche first comparing the mechanistic view of the world (which he rejects), to one of economics. I believe he uses economics to metaphorically highlight a world which is constantly ebbing and flowing similar to the highs and lows of an economy (this is the kind of world he embraces). Nietzsche is saying that the world reaches a state that can be described as a high point, only then to fall. At first, this sounds very similar to the flux of force that is described in *WP* 1067. The reader might recall that in *WP* 1067 Nietzsche describes force as changing from simplicity to complexity and then regressing again to simplicity. While I think that both *WP* 1067 and *WLN* 10[138] express the same sentiment of development and regression of the Will to Power, I believe that *WLN* 10[138] also expresses a restart of competition. When Nietzsche says that life reaches a point in which it is at its “highest potency,” I interpret this view as life being at a point in which it is developed so much that wills to power can no longer compete with other wills to power. There must be a reason why wills cannot compete against other wills and thus ushering in the regression of life back to its simplest form. I think we can start to piece together why life would reach its highest potency by once again looking at *WLN* 10[138].

The other part of *WLN* 10[138] is as follows: “what characterizes growth in life is the ever thriftier and further – calculating economy that achieves more and more while expending less and less force... The principle of the lowest expenditure as the ideal.”<sup>104</sup> As we’ve covered before, becoming is able to happen because of competing wills to power. As such, when each will to power is victorious in overpowering and consuming its opponent, the winner is then augmented. The augmentation of a will to power signifies change in the world. Nietzsche compares competing wills to power to protoplasm that seeks out rivals to swallow and combine

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

with to grow stronger.<sup>105</sup> With each incorporation of an opponent, a will to power becomes stronger and the stronger it becomes, the less effort it must exert in the competition. The more a will to power becomes stronger and requires less effort to win, the more changes that occur until life reaches a point in which it can no longer change. The less effort that is required to win might be a double-edged sword for a will to power at the end of a competition. The reason is that despite a will's success in the competition and its overwhelming strength, a will to power might not have any more wills to go up against. If Nietzsche is correct in saying that "the will to power can only express itself against resistances," then a will to power will reach a point where it will no longer be able to express itself because it has become dominant or, the best amongst other wills. Therefore, if competition must continue in some way, then wills to power must find some way to continue competition.

To summarize what has been argued so far, when life reaches its "highest potency" the Will to Power reaches a point where it doesn't need to expend any more effort to continue swallowing opponents. Due to certain wills to power being dominant, not having to expend more effort, and not having any resistance to overcome, the competition is over. However, if Nietzsche agrees with Heraclitus that strife is an inherent principle in the universe, the competition can never be allowed to be over. Just like how the Greeks could not let the competition amongst themselves be over, Heraclitus followed their lead by applying a similar principle to his conception of the cosmos. I argue that Nietzsche does the same thing here. Since the Will to Power must seek out resistance to overcome, it cannot let the competition be over either.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 264.



### The Continuation of Competition

The question remains how does the Will to Power allow competition to go on? My view is that each will to power that is ultimately victorious in the competition and can expend no more effort towards resistance, must at some point let go of the opponents that they swallowed up. In a couple of notes, Nietzsche does say that a will to power can let go of or lose what it consumed. For instance, in *WLN* 9[151] Nietzsche says of the augmentation of a will to power, “if this incorporation fails, the formation will probably fall apart; and *duality* appears as a result of the will to power: to avoid of letting go of what it had captured, the will to power divides into two wills.”<sup>106</sup> What Nietzsche is saying here is that sometimes, when a will to power swallows its opponent, the victor might end up failing to keep the opponent that it swallowed because it is too weak. To prevent losses, the victor splits into two wills to power. What we see happening in this instance is a point in which a particular will to power overexerts itself and if a will to power doesn’t divide, it may lose everything it won.

There is another way that the Will to Power might lose what it has gained, but for another reason. The other reason is that a will to power loses what it has due to what Nietzsche describes as “hunger.” Or, to use Heraclitus’ phrasing, the Will to Power might have to lose its winnings due to “want and satiety.” In *WLN* 14[174] Nietzsche says that a will to power can give up winnings due to hunger:

*Hunger* cannot be taken as the premium mobile, nor can self-preservation: hunger, understood as a consequence of undernourishment, means hunger as a consequence of a will to power that is *no longer achieving mastery*... duality as a consequence of a unity being too weak...it is by no means a matter of returning something lost – only at a late

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 165.

stage, in the wake of the division of labor, after the will to power learns to take quite other paths to its satisfaction, is the organism's need to appropriate *reduced* to hunger, to the need to replace what has been lost.<sup>107</sup>

My view is that *WLN* 14[174] demonstrates that due to hunger originating from its overbearing strength, a will to power must find new ways of satisfying itself.<sup>108</sup> "Hunger" in this sense means that a will to power can no longer win competitions. The Will to Power must seek out resistance and if there are no more resistances to overcome, this presents a lack for the Will to Power thereby, starving it of competition. An important sentence from the quote is when Nietzsche says, "only at a late stage, in the wake of the division of labor, after the will to power learns to take quite other paths to its satisfaction."<sup>109</sup> The new way of satisfying itself (the Will to Power) I believe, entails giving up what a will to power has acquired as rewards in the competition. The rewards being the incorporation of other wills to power. As Nietzsche says, an organism needs to "appropriate" when it is hungry and then replace the losses. The appropriations are the winnings a will to power gives up. In giving up the winnings, competition may start again as a will to power seeks out resistance to potentially earn back its winnings.

At this point, the reader may have noticed further similarities between Heraclitus' fire and the Will to Power. These other similarities consist of lacking and dividing unities. Heraclitus' fire becomes a unity and divides while it seems to be the case that for Nietzsche, there are multiple unities of wills to power that must let go of what they had. When Heraclitus' and Nietzsche's unities (Heraclitus' fire and Nietzsche's Will to Power), can no longer go up against resistance, this is a lack and in Nietzsche's case, the Will to Power becomes hungry.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 265. In *WLN* 9[151] the Will to Power loses its winnings or splits into two because of weakness. In *WLN* 14[174] takes losses because it is strong or totally dominant and wants to restart competition again.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Hunger is a lack and what the Will to Power is hungry for is more competition. When life is at its highest potency i.e., is the most developed, we can say that it is both satiated and lacking. There is a lack or a want because there is no more competition while the Will to Power is satiated because of its victories.

Not only would lack result in no more competition, but this would mean the end of change as well and the world would enter into a final state of permanence or “being.” For Nietzsche, this cannot be allowed to happen because force is always in motion, and it is this constant motion that enables change. The motion of forces are wills to power in competition continually losing and winning battles. So, to satisfy the lack and restart the competition, all the victorious wills to power will let go of what they acquired. Recall in *WLN* 14[174] Nietzsche states that “only at a late stage,” can the Will to Power make the appropriations to begin satisfying its hunger.<sup>110</sup> This “late stage” is the point in which all life has reached its “highest potency.” Thus, due to the principle of strife, the Will to Power will make sacrifices to begin the contest over again. In this process, all highly developed life will regress, and a new world will begin again. This new world will signify the beginning of a new competition in which competing wills to power will do battle. As a result, not only will a new world arise but, new forms of becoming as well.

#### Eternal Recurrence Through the Same Competitions of the Will to Power

Despite thinking that new worlds will arise, Nietzsche warns us that we should not think of the universe as being infinitely creative. In other words, there is a limitation to how many new worlds can come into existence. In *GS* 109 Nietzsche does say that we should “beware of thinking that the world eternally creates new things.”<sup>111</sup> I believe that the main reason Nietzsche

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Ibid, 168.

warns us of believing in infinite creativity is because a world with no boundaries of creation encroaches on the territory of a “true world.” Believing in a “true world” in this instance, would mean to reject the natural empirical world which is one that has limitations. In *WP* 1062 Nietzsche argues that belief in a world of boundless creativity is merely religious wishful thinking:

This is just the persistence of the earlier religious reasoning and wishful thinking, a kind of longing to believe that somewhere or other, in some way or other, the world is the same as old, beloved, infinite, limitlessly creative... that ‘the old God still lives’.<sup>112</sup>

When Nietzsche talks about “true worlds” they often have religious connotations to them. A world with no creative limits Nietzsche argues, comes from a religious way of thinking. Even if the person who believes in infinite creativity doesn’t believe in God, they are still engaging in religious thinking.

Nietzsche thinks that when one believes in infinitely new creative worlds they often believe “that the world intentionally *evades* achieving any purpose and even devises expedients to avoid falling into a cycle.”<sup>113</sup> That is, new worlds continue to arise for eternity because the universe is actively avoiding any ultimate end, final state, or an eternal recurrence. In my reading of *WLN* 10[138], Nietzsche provides clearer restrictions on the world’s creativity. I have quoted this passage before where Nietzsche says that force falls into an “eternal cycle” when life is at its “highest potency.” In the remainder of the passage Nietzsche states the following about force:

the absolute necessity of the same things happening in one cycle of the world as in all others throughout eternity: not a determinism above what happens but merely that the

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<sup>112</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (Penguin Random House UK: Penguin, 2017), 582.

<sup>113</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, *Ibid*, 581.

impossible is not possible... that one particular force just cannot be anything other than precisely that particular force; that it does not discharge itself against a quantum of resisting force in any other way than according to its strength.<sup>114</sup>

Nietzsche seems to indicate here that in each combination of the world, some things will remain the same and this is determined by the strength of particular wills to power. What the quote above also indicates is that some wills to power are stronger and weaker than others. If some wills to power are stronger than others, then this will limit the creative potential of each combination of worlds. The reason is that becoming, or change is dependent upon which wills to power are winners and losers in the competition. If there are wills to power that are strong from the outset to the point in which it is likely that they cannot be outmatched, then they will inevitably be victors in each combination. Further, if there are wills to power cannot be outmatched, then no matter what combination of the world is present, some things will always remain the same which limits creative potential.

Even if Nietzsche doesn't believe that infinite creativity is possible, that doesn't mean that he believes in any permanent final states either which is something I've already discussed (see pages 13-14). Nietzsche's rejection of infinite creativity might seem contradictory at first, because the question arises how it is that nothing can remain stationary or permanent while at the same time the creative potential of the cosmos will eventually run out? The way that Nietzsche gets around this is through an eternal recurrence of the same. Further, if it is agreed that strife is an inherent part of the universe, then the world couldn't reach a final state because competition must go on some form. It is competition which enables change after all. Lastly, because the Will

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<sup>114</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, Ibid, 199.

to Power is conceived of as a kind of force, and the very foundation of the world is the Will to Power, the world cannot be in any state of permanence because force is constantly active.

We must now discuss how an eternal recurrence happens when the cosmos has reached the point in which nothing new can be created. In *WP* 1066 Nietzsche provides what might be the most important clues as to how a metaphysical eternal recurrence can occur. In *WP* 1066 Nietzsche says that if we think “of the world as a determinate magnitude of force,” then the world “must go through a calculable number of combinations.”<sup>115</sup> Nietzsche is saying that there is a certain quantity of wills to power. Nietzsche then states that these forces enable the world to go through a certain number of different combinations. With what we have discussed so far, what Nietzsche is saying shouldn’t be too surprising given that wills to power enable change. Nietzsche continues by saying that eventually, every combination will have occurred if an infinite amount of time has passed.<sup>116</sup> Nietzsche then argues that each combination of worlds will condition the eventual eternal recurrence:

since every other possible combination must have come and gone between each of these ‘combinations’ and its next ‘recurrence’, and each of these combinations conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a cycle of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated.<sup>117</sup>

I believe Nietzsche to be arguing that at some point every possible combination of the world will eventually happen. Within limits, each combination will consist of different histories, events, developments, evolutions, and formations. Sometimes, a combination will recur before

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<sup>115</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Ibid, 584.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 584.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 584-85.

moving on to a new one. Each combination that occurs somehow contributes to the eventual combination that will eternally recur.

In one combination, a will to power might win while, in another combination the opposite will to power might win. Depending on which will to power wins will condition the changes and how life develops in a particular combination. For a combination to condition an eventual eternal recurrence each combination must share a connection in some way and play a role in leading up to the eventual eternal recurrence. As Nietzsche says, “each of these combinations conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a cycle of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated.”<sup>118</sup> In my reading of this quote, Nietzsche is saying that in leading up to the eventual recurrence, each combination operates in an almost linear fashion as there is something within most of the combinations that connects them together. As each connected combination occurs, we get closer to the eternal recurrence. We must now investigate how each combination contributes to conditioning the eventual eternally recurring combination.

The evidence that I think will help us in seeing how the Will to Power eternally recurs is once again looking at *WLN* 9[151]. Recall that *WLN* 9[151] states that when a will to power is too weak to keep opponents that it has consumed, it will often divide into two wills to keep the other consumed wills. Within this same note, Nietzsche says something very interesting about what can happen when a will to power divides into two wills. After the division occurs the two wills may not give up the connection between each other.<sup>119</sup> My view is that the connection between various dualities of wills to power is what would allow for each combination of worlds to condition an eternal recurrence of the same combination.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, Ibid, 165.

When a will to power divides into a duality I believe that the two wills are the same as the original unity just slightly weaker in strength. The two wills are the same because they are essentially clones of each other. In other words, both wills share the same basic intrinsic properties. At times, Nietzsche seems to hint that wills to power have intrinsic properties in the *Late Notebooks*. For instance, recall that in *WLN* 10[138] Nietzsche states “that one particular force just cannot be anything other than precisely that particular force; that it does not discharge itself against a quantum of resisting force in any other way than according to its strength.”<sup>120</sup> It appears to be the case that one example of an intrinsic property that wills to power have are their strength. So, when a will to power divides into two wills they are the same because they share the same intrinsic properties.

The reason for the original unity dividing was to keep what it had. If the original unity divides it's not hard to imagine that the opponents that were consumed divide as well. So, within each of the two wills to power resides dualities of the consumed opponents. Further, if it is the case that with each opponent consumed a will to power grows stronger and has been augmented, then the duality of wills to power will have a greater measure of strength as well. The strength might not be as much if the unity had stayed together, but the divided wills to power ideally have an advantage in strength, nonetheless.

It might help to look at the division of the original unity as a form of asceticism (self-denial). Throughout the literature, Nietzsche does suggest that asceticism can lead to growth if implemented in the right way. One simple example of asceticism would be to deny oneself leisure time and devote that time to work in order achieve a goal. The same concept of asceticism can be applied to competing wills to power. To avoid overexerting itself and losing all it has, a

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<sup>120</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, Ibid, 199.



will to power can divide. This division can be looked at as a form of ascetism because it's giving up its unity. In giving up its unity a will to power is also giving up some of its strength to express itself against other wills. However, in giving up some strength at the moment, a will can gain the potential to become stronger and expand its influence further by being able to have more of a fighting chance against other wills. The dual fragments will then seek other opponents to consume making them stronger if in fact they win against other competing wills.

If each divided fragment can continue to win competitions and divide into more dualities, the original unity from which the connected dualities originated, continues to expand influence. Through the further expansion of a will to power's influence and the continued division of the dualities with a connection, the differences within each combination will become less frequent. To put it another way, the creative potential of each combination of worlds will become more limited as each successive combination is realized. In what follows I propose that there are two other reasons why creative potential declines in each combination and eventually leads up to a recurrence.

The first reason for creativity to decline is that each combination has progressively more divided wills to power that maintain a connection. If Nietzsche is correct that every combination possible will occur, it would stand to reason that there would be combinations that have a higher number of divided wills with a connection. Let's say for instance that in the very first combination of the world, it had the lowest number wills that divided and maintained a connection. As such, the first combination would have had the most creative potential. Then, in the next combination there were more divided wills with a connection, more in the next, and so on. The dualities that originated from a single unity of a will to power can continue to divide into further dualities themselves if need be. Further, the other dualities that arise from a will to power

that came from the original unity can maintain connections as well. As such, the more dualities that occur and win against other wills, results in the expansion of influence of the original unity that divided to begin with. This would result in certain changes within each combination. Within each combination, the more wills to power that must divide and be connected to keep winnings will expand influence themselves and determine the changes in the world in accordance with their victories.

The second reason for a decline in creative potential is that when the time comes that there is no more competition within the current combination, the wills to power that have divided and maintained connections do not release their winnings to begin the competition over again. Recall that because there is an inherent principle of strife, competition must continue in some form. When there are no more wills to power to be consumed, the wills that were victorious in the competition of one combination, let go of their winnings to start the competition over again. The start of a new competition marks the beginning of a new combination and thus, the potential for new changes and developments arise. However, if it is the case that there are wills to power that do not let go of consumed opponents, this will severely limit creativity if winnings aren't relinquished to start the competition from scratch. For there to be creative potential in each cycle, each successive cycle must rely on other wills to power that didn't divide or ones that did divide and not maintain a connection in the previous combination.

Once the unconnected and undivided wills to power give up what they have won, competition can begin again although, more limited than the previous one. Because the connected wills do not give up their winnings, some things will remain the same and the more each combination goes on, more things will remain the same. A potential reason why each connected will to power wouldn't give up its winnings is because they would have more of a

fighting chance to further expand their influence. If they do not give up their winnings, they can keep their augmented strength from the other wills that were consumed which gives them an advantage in the new competition.

Some of the connected wills to power from the previous combination will surely win and lose in each new combination. Further, towards the end of a combination the connected wills will not give up winnings because of the potential for a further expansion of influence. Within the combination that will eternally recur, every connected will to power that has won are wills that were multiplicities originating from a unity that had divided into a duality. Once this combination has reached its end, the result is the end of creative potential. Strife must play its role once more and somehow initiate competition.

An issue has arisen within the last combination that eventually recurs. The issue is that all the various wills to power that have won in the upcoming recurring combination are faced with want and satiety just like Heraclitus' unified fire. Each will to power has now been satiated because they are the winners in the competition within the combination, but they are starved for more competition. By its nature, a will to power continuously strives to expand influence and it can only do this by going up against resistance. Each will to power must now find another way to continue to expand its influence while maintaining their won strength.

It is at this point I want to direct the reader back to *WLN* 14[174] in which Nietzsche states that the Will to Power needs to appropriate when hungry. Within *WLN* 14[174] Nietzsche defines hunger "as a consequence of a will to power which is *no longer achieving mastery*."<sup>121</sup> In addition to a unity being too weak to keep winnings, no longer achieving mastery could also mean that a will has no other wills that it can go up against. In the context of the repeating

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 264.

combination, a will to power will give up just the right appropriations or, consumed wills to begin the combination over again. The words “right appropriations” are important here. That is, each victorious will to power must give up specific winnings in order to repeat the cycle over again. The specific winnings could be weaker wills or even consumed wills that were unable to be kept by a unity. Either way, each will to power enables a recurrence of the same cycle because they are able to repeat winnings and repeat the divisions into dualities and further multiplicities. The duplication of victories and failures in a cycle ensures that each will to power operates and acts in the same sequences thus, ensuring an eternally repeating recurrence of events, sequences, and developments in the combination.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF RECURRENCE

In the previous sections I have argued that change and competition play a role in conditioning the eternal recurrence. In this section I will discuss how Nietzsche thinks we can handle knowledge of the eternal recurrence. In my view, Nietzsche thinks that the main consequence of an eternally recurring world is continuous suffering. This is evidenced by Nietzsche's emphasis on loneliness in *GS* 341. Since the topic of loneliness plays an important role in *GS* 341, the example of suffering I want to focus on is loneliness. I will also discuss how Nietzsche thinks that we can affirm the loneliness and general suffering associated with the eternal recurrence. Lastly, I will discuss how Nietzsche's character Zarathustra handles the suffering of recurrence and how an affirmation of Heraclitean war is required for handling knowledge of the eternal recurrence.

### Loneliness and the Eternal Recurrence

The main example where the theme of suffering is a prevalent consequence of the eternal recurrence is in *GS* 341. *GS* 341 is titled *The Greatest Weight* and it is probably the most famous passage in the literature where Nietzsche talks about the eternal recurrence. In the passage Nietzsche asks us to imagine that we are experiencing our greatest moment of despair. This despair is what he describes as our "loneliest loneliness."<sup>122</sup> In the moment of our "loneliest loneliness" a demon comes and informs us of the eternal recurrence:

This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to relive once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to

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<sup>122</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, (Vintage Books: New York), 1989, 273.

return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight in between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!<sup>123</sup>

Nietzsche speculates about what our response would be to the demon once the eternal recurrence is revealed to us. Nietzsche asks, “would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus” or, would we revel in what the demon just told us and become excited at the thought of recurrence?<sup>124</sup> The knowledge of the eternal recurrence would either crush us or radically change us.<sup>125</sup> Nietzsche seems to think that to be positively receptive to the eternal recurrence takes exceptional strength. The reason being that life is fundamentally suffering and knowing that we must relive our whole life again for all eternity can make existence feel even worse.

To begin with, let’s examine why Nietzsche might have had the demon come to us in our “loneliest loneliness.” Loneliness is certainly a form of suffering, however, upon first glance it isn’t entirely clear why Nietzsche would pick our loneliest moment for the demon to appear to us. In examining the matter of loneliness in *GS* 341, it might help to look at Nietzsche’s own personal life since at times some of his writing can seem autobiographical.

Much of Nietzsche’s own personal life was filled with continuous pain, especially loneliness, as he suffered from prominent health issues. Nietzsche’s ailments ranged from stomach and digestive problems to excruciating headaches and bouts of temporary blindness. It isn’t really known what Nietzsche’s health issues were. For a long time, historians thought that Nietzsche suffered from syphilis. However, more recent scholarship has heavily disputed the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

syphilis theory and argue that he most likely suffered from a brain tumor.<sup>126</sup> Nietzsche's health problems became so bad that he would leave Germany to find an environment that he hoped would be beneficial for his ill health. Isolated and lonely, Nietzsche would travel back and forth between various cities and towns in Switzerland, Italy, and even travelling to Nice.<sup>127</sup> While in these locations, Nietzsche would be in agonizing pain and bed ridden for days only sitting down to write his work when he felt he could manage it.

Nietzsche's geographical isolation from others was not the only cause of his loneliness. There were points in his life where he was intellectually lonely when among and corresponding with others. It's evident that Nietzsche wanted companionship with a likeminded person with whom he could discuss his views. In his personal letters he does express the frustrations of being alone and not having comradeship with others. I want to direct the reader to a very telling letter that Nietzsche wrote to his sister (Elizabeth) in May of 1884 describing the loneliness he feels. Portions of the letter are as follows:

I have found until now, from earliest childhood, *nobody* who had the same needs of heart and conscience as myself... But that one can only really grow among people of *like mind* and like will is for me an axiom of belief (even down to diet and the body's demands); that I have no such person is my misfortune... Almost all of my human relationships have resulted from attacks of a feeling of isolation... I have been ridiculously happy if I ever found, or thought I have found, in someone a little patch or corner of common concern... The feeling that there is about me something very remote and alien, that my

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<sup>126</sup> Lanier R. Anderson, "Friedrich Nietzsche", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/nietzsche/>>.

<sup>127</sup> Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*. Continental European Philosophy, Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004, 5.

words have other colors than the same word from other people... is nevertheless the subtlest degree of “understanding” that I have till now found.<sup>128</sup>

Nietzsche expresses in the letter that even if he presents a view that others have it still comes across to others as bizarre and different. The recognition from others that Nietzsche speaks bizarrely about commonly discussed things seems to be the only understanding he can get. At points, when Nietzsche thought he found someone who shared his sensibilities he was met with great disappointment. For instance, in part of the letter quoted above he mentions the end of his friendship with Wagner.<sup>129</sup> For context, when Nietzsche was a young adult, he became friends with the classical composer Richard Wagner. Nietzsche and Wagner bonded over their shared interest in the work of Schopenhauer. Nietzsche held Wagner in high regard viewing him as an artistic and musical genius who was going to usher in a great cultural revival to Germany. However, over time Nietzsche became disappointed with Wagner because of his antisemitism and promotion of German nationalism.<sup>130</sup> It was because of these faults that Nietzsche ended his friendship with Wagner. Nietzsche’s relationship with Elizabeth would eventually crumble as well due to similar reasons.

Nietzsche’s sister was a vehement antisemite who married another antisemite and proto-Nazi, a man named Bernard Förster whom Nietzsche hated.<sup>131</sup> Even among family Nietzsche felt isolated. Nietzsche’s and Elizabeth’s relationship deteriorated further when Elizabeth began to publicly promote Nietzsche’s work as aligning with antisemitic viewpoints. Nietzsche sent cease and desist letters to Elizabeth, but to no prevail. In one notable letter from Christmas of 1887

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<sup>128</sup> Christopher Middleton and Nietzsche, Middleton, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, 241.

<sup>129</sup> Middleton, *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>131</sup> Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, (New York, Schocken Books, 2000), 10.



Nietzsche states that due to his sister, antisemitic groups began reaching out to him through “*Anti-Semitic Correspondence Sheets*.”<sup>132</sup> In the letter Nietzsche expresses his disgust that these groups associate his prophet Zarathustra with their ideals.<sup>133</sup> Nietzsche’s books which contain the ideas that he can’t seem to share with other like-minded people, are being embraced by an audience who are the exact opposite of who he is trying to reach. What’s more, the people whom he despises (the antisemites), are the ones who are reaching out to him which probably only furthered his frustration and loneliness.

The beginning of Nietzsche’s apparent intellectual loneliness can be traced back to his rejection of Christianity. When Nietzsche was younger, he was planning on following in his father’s footsteps and becoming a priest. However, Nietzsche decided to pursue a career in philology which was the study of languages.<sup>134</sup> In *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* Rex Welshon notes that when Nietzsche made the decision to switch to philology instead of theology, it was met with the disapproval of his family. Further, Welshon notes that in one letter to Elizabeth, Nietzsche does say that Christianity is for comfort and happiness and that he gave up happiness in the pursuit of what is true.<sup>135</sup> The letter that I believe Welshon is referring to was written in June of 1865 in which Nietzsche says the following to Elizabeth:

On the other hand, is it really so difficult simply to accept everything in which one has been brought up, which has gradually become deeply rooted in oneself... which does moreover really comfort and elevate man? Is that more difficult than to take new paths, struggling against habituation, uncertain of one’s independent course, amid frequent

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<sup>132</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Letter To His Sister,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Penguin Group, 1982), 457.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 457.

<sup>134</sup> Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>135</sup> Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, *Ibid*, 4.

vacillations of the heart, and even of the conscience, often comfortless, but always pursuing the eternal goal of the true, the beautiful, the good? Is it then a matter of acquiring a view of God, world, and atonement in which one can feel most comfortable...? Do we, in our investigations, search for tranquility, peace, happiness? No – only for the truth, even if it were to be frightening and ugly... If you want to achieve peace of mind and happiness, then have faith; if you want to be a disciple of truth, then search.<sup>136</sup>

What Nietzsche is expressing in this letter to his sister is that it is easy and comforting to accept and conform to what one has been taught growing up. To go against the grain and reject what is expected of oneself by family or the community is difficult and filled with unhappiness.

Nietzsche himself actively decided to take the hard, painful, and lonely path by rejecting his Christian upbringing to satisfy his own intellectual pursuits.

The reason why I wanted to draw attention to Nietzsche's own struggles with loneliness is because loneliness is important to him on a personal level. Even though Nietzsche personally endured suffering, especially loneliness, he has a personal investment in still wanting to embrace life and show that life is still worth living even if it is mostly suffering. When Nietzsche has the demon come to us during our loneliest loneliness, the hope is that we can desire an eternal return to our lives even if life is filled with loneliness. While Nietzsche may have felt lonely due to who he was as a person, it was his individuality and loneliness that led to him write the insightful works of philosophy that have moved readers and inspired other thinkers. Extreme loneliness might be one of the worst things we can go through; however, I think what Nietzsche wants to show is that great things can come out of loneliness. Being different and breaking away from a

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<sup>136</sup> Christopher Middleton and Nietzsche, Middleton, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969. Ibid, 7.

community can allow us the potential to achieve excellence. It's through the pursuit of accomplishments that we might be able to endure loneliness and possibly say "yes" to the demon in *GS* 341. Working towards achievements may require rejecting the values of our communities which could lead to further loneliness. Nietzsche advocates to cultivate our own values and by doing so, we can live fulfilling lives even if our lives are lonely. I now want to briefly touch on Nietzsche's argument for a revaluation of values and show how revaluing values might be beneficial for our projects and for embracing a lonely existence in the face of eternal recurrence.

### Projects and Saying "Yes" to Suffering

In Nietzsche's mature works, he argues that the dominant form of morality in Europe is derived from Christian values. He also makes the claim that atheists are still very Christian. The reason being that atheists and secularists still adhere to Christian morality and do not realize it. Nietzsche thinks Christianity is life negating because it rejects the natural empirical world for one that can't be confirmed through experience such as Heaven. Further, Christianity tries to ease the burden of life's suffering through the promotion of its values and in doing so, ends up becoming nihilistic because Christian values hold that *this* life is unimportant.

Part of saying "yes" to life even in its bleakest moments requires a revaluation of our values. Nietzsche is taking our very moral foundations and asking us to place them under scrutiny and this might result in us rejecting the values that we hold dearly. When we reject the values and morality of the community, we are left on our own to cultivate values that would be personally meaningful to us. The search for meaning and figuring out how we should live our lives is a struggle that we must overcome if we are to truly embrace life for what it is and live a meaningful existence. Part of Nietzsche's own loneliness could have stemmed from the fact that many might not have been ready to hear his insights on morality. One can imagine the magnitude

of the task Nietzsche is asking of his readers. Nietzsche is asking his audience to revalue their own values and possibly give up the comforts that are associated with the morality of the herd.

For Nietzsche, cultivating one's own values, being an individual self, and achieving excellence, requires painful sacrifices. The ultimate sacrifice might entail giving up one's sense of community and finding ways to embrace loneliness. If we are faced with the realization of the eternal recurrence, knowing that we would have to relive our loneliest moment might be soul crushing for us. However, I think Nietzsche would say that to reject the pain of having to overcome any resistance including loneliness, would be to not only reject life, but also diminish our accomplishments. The reason being that having to overcome struggle is what allowed us to reach the heights of our achievements. Also, even though our individuality resulted in loneliness, it was our individuality and uniqueness that allowed us the potential to achieve excellence. Life might be fundamentally suffering, but we can make life much more bearable if we make suffering meaningful and channel it in a more positive direction. If we can show that our loneliness wasn't meaningless, then we can possibly bear the thought of having to relive our loneliest moment. That is, we can interpret our loneliness as actually being beneficial and helping us to be not only the best version of ourselves, but also beneficial for our projects.

The success of our projects might even earn us back a sense of community due to positive recognition. For instance, if someone is an artist and they put out paintings, the artist might gain a fanbase for their work. Their projects then take on a life of their own in which communities and subcultures develop and congregate to discuss the artist's work. Fans of an artist's work show that there are people who share similar tastes as the artist which also relieves the artist of their loneliness if there are likeminded people.

What I have been arguing for so far is that cultivating our own values and using our individuality to achieve success in our projects can make the suffering of loneliness bearable. The question that I think should be addressed is if we are unsuccessful in our projects, can we still affirm loneliness and an eternal return to loneliness? One could still argue that most of the suffering humanity experiences is ultimately meaningless. Further, not everyone is successful in their projects. People can suffer and say “yes” to the eternal recurrence of loneliness as much as they want. However, if we are never successful in our projects, then that means even our greatest moments of suffering didn’t have any real meaning to them. It is true that Nietzsche thinks that for most, meaningless pain is too unbearable. I believe this is his reason why in *GS* 341 he says that the knowledge of recurrence could crush us.<sup>137</sup> Being able to still affirm life in the face of the eternal recurrence even if our suffering doesn’t earn us success or have purpose is a form of overcoming resistance in and of itself. To achieve this form of life affirmation requires us to say “yes” to all the futility life has to offer. I say “futility” in the sense that often, our suffering is ultimately meaningless.

An example of life’s futility is not having recognition or acceptance from others. Success is in part determined by how others respond to our projects. Sacrificing our social life is a gamble and when we do not see a return on that sacrifice, this might result in our loneliest loneliness. Further, our feeling of failure and loneliness might be due to our projects being ahead of our time. That is, due to the conventions of the time period one is living in, one’s work will not be accepted by any of the communities at large. Many famous authors, poets, philosophers, and artists never earned fame or success during their lifetime, only gaining fame long after their deaths. To feel loneliness because no one accepts our work during our lifetime can be painful

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<sup>137</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, (Vintage Books: New York), 1989, 274.

because we aren't getting that recognition when we feel we need it most. Plus, there isn't any guarantee that future generations will even be receptive of our work which could still render the suffering our projects required as being futile.

Nietzsche himself could certainly fit the category for being ahead of his time. In fact, it seems that Nietzsche predicted that his work would not be recognized during his lifetime. Being the optimist that he is, I believe Nietzsche held out hope that there would be readers in future generations that would be receptive to his work. For instance, the subtitle for Nietzsche's *Beyond Good & Evil* is "Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future." Nietzsche certainly knew that many if not all readers during his lifetime would not be receptive to the ideas put forth in his work. So, he is relying on success until after his death. To suffer for your work even if you know there is a good chance that you will not personally benefit from it can be one many of the reasons why the eternal recurrence is so hard to accept and why accepting it might mean to say "yes" to futility.

It is for futility's sake, i.e., for the sake of meaningless suffering, why Nietzsche has the demon come to us in our loneliest loneliness. We must not forget that for Nietzsche, life fundamentally consists of painful competition and overcoming resistance. When we overcome resistance, we change and in theory, change for the better. To be faced with the realization of the eternal recurrence, and to embrace the fact that we will have to relive our lives which is full of failure, futility, and potentially meaningless suffering is to overcome resistance. The theme of overcoming resistance is why Nietzsche thinks that to say "yes" to the demon will radically change us. The change that we have undergone by saying "yes" to the demon is that we have become stronger because we have become better predisposed to life.

It doesn't seem as though Nietzsche thinks that just anyone can be able to accept that much of life is filled with meaningless suffering. This is especially the case if we have

knowledge that our life will be eternally repeated. To be able to cultivate a mindset where we desire an eternal return to potentially meaningless suffering requires strength, courage, and self-overcoming. I believe that to help us cultivate a mindset of being joyful of the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche presents us with a mythical figure who can be an inspiration for us to seek out difficulty and loneliness for embracing life. Nietzsche gives us this mythical figure in the form of the prophet Zarathustra. I now want to discuss how the character of Zarathustra is able to embrace the eternal recurrence and how the symbolism in “On The Vision And Riddle” and “The Convalescent” tie into the suffering that results from the eternal recurrence.

### The Prophet Zarathustra

Before we delve into Zarathustra, I want to provide some brief context for what I believe to be Nietzsche’s inspiration for the character of Zarathustra. Nietzsche recognized the pain that came from feeling like you weren’t part of a community. Loneliness is almost an inevitable result from not conforming to the values of one’s family or community. In *GS* 117 Nietzsche insists that through most of human history individuality was met with the pain of guilt and was seen as a punishment:

But during the longest part of the human past nothing was more terrible than to feel that one stood by oneself. To be alone, to experience things by oneself... to be an individual – that was not a pleasure but a punishment; one was sentenced “to individuality...”

Whatever harmed the herd, whether the individual had wanted it or not wanted it, prompted the sting of conscience in the individual... There is no point on which we have learned to think and feel more differently.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, (Vintage Books: New York), 1989, 175.

What I really want to highlight in the quote above is that Nietzsche is associating individuality with pain. Being an individual is painful because the community instills guilt for being different and not a part of the herd. In fact, one's individuality could be seen as a potential threat to the community. There might be examples of historical figures punished for their individuality that Nietzsche had in mind. The first historical figure who comes to my mind would be Socrates. I think Nietzsche wanted a Socrates like figure who in the end, has the courage to be an individual while also being able to say "yes" to the loneliness that could result from individuality.

Nietzsche does discuss Socrates at certain points throughout his work and Socrates fits the picture for a thinker who was punished for their individuality. Socrates was given the choice between exile or death for the crimes of blasphemy and corrupting the youth. Socrates could have chosen death perhaps because he viewed that non-existence was better than a lonely existence. Throughout Nietzsche's work, he seems to have a love hate relationship with Socrates. For instance, in *GS* 340 Nietzsche admits that he has an admiration for Socrates' "courage and wisdom."<sup>139</sup> Nietzsche has many philosophical disagreements with Socrates, however, I do think that what Nietzsche really admires in Socrates' courage was the individuality he displayed in his approach to engaging his fellow Athenians. Nietzsche does express that he wishes Socrates had kept this courage going towards the end of his life.<sup>140</sup> In *GS* 340 Nietzsche speculates that deep down, Socrates was a pessimist and hated life.<sup>141</sup> Nietzsche owes Socrates' pessimism to his last words, "O Crito, I owe Asclepius a rooster."<sup>142</sup> Nietzsche argues that Socrates' last words show

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<sup>139</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, Ibid, 272.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, Ibid, 272.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 272.



that he views life as a disease and that the god of medicine is curing him from the disease through death.<sup>143</sup>

Nietzsche ultimately wants to find a way that we can overcome the pessimistic attitudes towards life that people like Socrates display. The life and pain affirming figure can be found in Nietzsche's character, the prophet Zarathustra. Zarathustra affirms life through the eternal recurrence. However, at first, Zarathustra must overcome the struggle of saying "yes" to the eternal recurrence.

In "On The Vision And The Riddle" Zarathustra has a vision that he calls "the vision of the loneliest."<sup>144</sup> In the vision Zarathustra sees and experiences many strange things. These strange sights include a dwarf sitting on his shoulder and whispering in his ear, a gateway with two paths stretching out for all eternity, a terrified dog howling, and a shepherd writhing in agony as a black snake is hanging out of his mouth.<sup>145</sup>

In his vision, while Zarathustra is contemplating the horror of the eternal recurrence, he hears a dog howling and speculates about whether he had heard this same dog howling in his childhood:

bristling, his head up, trembling, in the stillest moonlight when even dogs believe in ghosts – and I took pity: for just then the full moon, silent as death, passed over the house; just then it stood still, a round glow... that was why the dog was terrified, for dogs believe in thieves and ghosts. And when I heard such howling again I took pity again...

Among the wild cliffs I stood alone, bleak, in the bleakest moonlight. *But there lay a*

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<sup>143</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, Ibid, 14.

<sup>144</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For All And None," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Penguin Group, 1982), 268.

<sup>145</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For All And None," 268-271.

*man*. And there – the dog, jumping, bristling, whining – now he saw me coming; then he howled again, he *cried*.<sup>146</sup>

In the quote above Zarathustra is taking pity upon this dog he thinks he might have heard howling in pain during his youth. The dog seems to be startled by the moonlight and the atmosphere of the night. When Zarathustra stands on the edge of a cliff, he sees a man lying on the ground. Zarathustra walks over to the lying man and the dog notices him coming over to get a better look. When the dog notices Zarathustra, he howls and cries again.

While there is a lot of symbolism in “On The Vision And Riddle,” I want to examine three striking pieces of symbolism that stick out to me and how they connect to the suffering associated with the eternal recurrence. These pieces of symbolism include the name of Zarathustra’s vision, the howling dog, and the shepherd with the serpent down his throat. The first piece of symbolism I want to address is what the howling dog represents.

I argue that the dog is a reference to a quote from Heraclitus. The quote referenced states that “(B97) Dogs bark at everyone they do not know.”<sup>147</sup> Further, the dog also represents the pessimists and the life negators who would gnash their teeth at the knowledge of the eternal recurrence. The evidence for the dog as being a nod to Heraclitus can be traced back to *PTG 7*. In *PTG 7* Nietzsche briefly discusses people’s discontentment with Heraclitus’ cosmology of flux, strife, and competition: “Gloomy, melancholy, tearful, sinister, bilious, pessimistic, generally hateful: only those can find him thus who have good cause to be dissatisfied with his natural history of mankind. But he would consider such people negligible... only to condescend

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>147</sup> Patricia Curd, ed., *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, second edition, trans. Richard D. McKirahan and Patricia Curd, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011), 44.

to offer advice like ‘Dogs bark at everyone whom they don’t recognize.’”<sup>148</sup> Those who don’t like Heraclitus’s view might not be able to accept that the world is nothing more than constant pain, struggle, and opposition. The pessimist might take solace in thinking that eventually their life or life in general will come to an end because the end of life means the end of pain.

However, if Heraclitus is correct in saying that a rebirth of the world will enable more competition, it shatters any hope that the pessimist has that all of humanity will one day be relieved of life’s suffering. Nietzsche interprets Heraclitus’ dog statement as a kind of sarcastic and pitying retort to those who would be displeased with his cosmology. The dog statement is essentially Heraclitus talking down to his critics telling them, “I present you the world for what it truly is, and you reject it? Well, what would you rather have me say? Something as banal and unchallenging as all dogs bark at strangers?”

When we come back to “On The Vision And Riddle” we can now begin to see the Heraclitean symbolism with the howling dog. As stated previously, my view is that the dog in Zarathustra’s vision represents the pessimists and life negators who can’t bear the thought of recurrence. Twice, Zarathustra states that he pities the howling dog.<sup>149</sup> Zarathustra pitying the dog is an important piece of evidence for why the dog is a reference to Heraclitus’ dog statement. The reason being that in the same way Heraclitus pities his critics who are the pessimists, Zarathustra pities the dog who is meant to represent the pessimists.

Those whom Heraclitus pities are those who cannot bear the thought of his conception of the cosmos. In Zarathustra’s vision, Nietzsche plays around with the condescending advice that Heraclitus gives to pessimists and turns the pessimists themselves into dogs. Another way that

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<sup>148</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington DC: Gateway, 1962), 64.

<sup>149</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For All And None,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Penguin Group, 1982), 271.

Nietzsche plays around with the dog statement is that when we contrast how dogs bark at strangers in Heraclitus' statement, Nietzsche switches it around and has the dog howl and cry when it sees Zarathustra coming. The twist is that the dog doesn't make these gloomy sounds because it doesn't recognize Zarathustra, it makes the sounds because it knows who Zarathustra is. Zarathustra is the teacher of the eternal recurrence and being the pessimist that the dog is, it dreads Zarathustra's message of recurrence just like how we might gnash our teeth at the demon's message of recurrence in *GS* 341.

Now, we come to the snake hanging out of the man's mouth. The man lying on the ground is a shepherd who is described as "writhing, gagging, in spasms, his face distorted, and a heavy black snake hung from his mouth."<sup>150</sup> Zarathustra speculates that the snake crawled down the shepherd's throat as he slept.<sup>151</sup> Zarathustra tries to get the snake out of the shepherd's mouth without success so, he implores the shepherd to bite the head off the snake. The shepherd bites off the head and laughs in a way that Zarathustra doesn't seem to think is human.<sup>152</sup>

I argue the snake that the shepherd is choking on represents two things. The first representation is that the snake is a reference to the one that tempted Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge. The second reference is to the ouroboros which symbolizes the eternal death and rebirth of the world.<sup>153</sup> The snake in *Zarathustra* has already been touched on by many Nietzsche scholars. For example, in *What Nietzsche Really Said* Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins argue that the snake is a reference to the one in the book of Genesis.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, "This Spoke Zarathustra," Ibid, 268.

<sup>151</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," Ibid, 271.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 271-72.

<sup>153</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Ouroboros," accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Ouroboros>.

<sup>154</sup> Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, (New York, Schocken Books, 2000), 233.

Further, Solomon and Higgins explain that because the snake crawls on the earth, “it represents earthly wisdom, as well as insight into the tragic.”<sup>155</sup>

I do agree with Solomon and Higgins on the symbolism of the snake in *Zarathustra*. However, I do want to expand on their view a little more by tying it into the suffering that results from the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche’s use of the snake in Zarathustra’s vision is symbolic of suffering associated with the knowledge of the eternal recurrence. In the book of Genesis, after being tempted by the snake to eat the fruit, Adam and Eve gained knowledge. However, their punishment for disobeying God was that their life became filled with suffering. This is evidenced by Adam having to work the land for their needs and Eve having to experience pain during childbirth. The message that can be taken away from Adam and Eve’s disobedience is that to have knowledge is painful. I believe that Nietzsche is very much aware of how painful knowledge can be hence, why our response to the demon in *GS* 341 might be to gnash our teeth and curse him when he gives his message.

The second symbolic meaning that the snake represents is the ouroboros. As stated previously, the ouroboros symbolized the eternal destruction and rebirth of the world. The ouroboros is often depicted as a snake curled up in a circle and eating its own tail.<sup>156</sup> As Nietzsche tends to do, he plays around with religious and ancient imagery to help illustrate his points. The way that Nietzsche plays around with the ouroboros is that instead of the snake eating its own tail, we have the shepherd pretty much devouring the snake, although reluctantly.

It is at this point that we should discuss who specifically the shepherd is in Zarathustra’s vision and then come back to the snake because they are connected. The shepherd is none other

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<sup>155</sup> Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, Ibid, 233.

<sup>156</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “Ouroboros,” accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Ouroboros>.

than Zarathustra himself. The evidence for Zarathustra being the shepherd can be found in the passage of “The Convalescent.” In the passage we see Zarathustra accept his role as teacher of the eternal recurrence. Zarathustra summons his animals to him so that he can tell them of the eternal recurrence which he coins as his “most abysmal thought.”<sup>157</sup> After he summons his animals Zarathustra falls to the ground and lies there for seven days.<sup>158</sup> The first piece of evidence that the shepherd in the vision is Zarathustra, is that Zarathustra is lying on the ground like the shepherd.

It appears Zarathustra’s animals knew what he went through while he was lying on the ground for seven days because they know of the eternal recurrence when he rises. Zarathustra says to his animals that they “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.”<sup>159</sup> Here we have the best evidence for Zarathustra being the shepherd in his vision. The snake suffocates Zarathustra and he bites its head off just like the shepherd. Zarathustra being the shepherd does not mean that we or his followers in the story should blindly follow him, but Zarathustra as the shepherd is meant to illustrate that Zarathustra is a teacher and a mentor who can lead us onto a path for embracing life for what it is.

When we come back to the symbolism of the snake, we now see the role it plays in Zarathustra’s destiny as teacher of the eternal recurrence. When Zarathustra bites the head off the snake, it represents Zarathustra overcoming the struggle of accepting the eternal recurrence and his role as teacher. As we’ve gone over before, when we overcome struggle Nietzsche thinks that we change and hopefully, that change goes in a positive direction. In Zarathustra’s vision, after

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<sup>157</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For All And None,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Penguin Group, 1982), 382.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 382.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 330.

the shepherd bites the head off the snake he is described as “no longer shepherd, no longer human – one changed, radiant, laughing! Never yet on earth has a human being laughed as he laughed!”<sup>160</sup> After the shepherd bites off the head of the snake, he is changed, almost seeming as though he is no longer human. The shepherd is changed for the better because he overcame the resistance put forth by the snake.

In “The Convalescent” Zarathustra overcomes the struggle of accepting the recurrence by overcoming the snake. In overcoming struggle, Zarathustra’s transformation into the ultimate life-affirming teacher is evidenced by the references to the book of Genesis in “The Convalescent.” For starters, Zarathustra lies on the ground for seven days. The seven days is a reference to the time it took God to create the world. The seven days Zarathustra lies on the floor of his cave is how long it takes him to undergo his transformation into a life-affirmer and teacher of recurrence. At the core of the beginning of Genesis and Zarathustra’s acceptance of the recurrence, is creation. God created the world, and Zarathustra became who he really is. The other reference to Genesis which signifies Zarathustra’s transformation are the references to the garden of Eden. While Zarathustra is lying on the ground for seven days his animals go out of the cave to fetch “yellow and red berries, grapes, rose apples, fragrant herbs, and pine cones” as well as two lambs.<sup>161</sup> When Zarathustra rises he is among all of the goods that his animals had brought him. Further, after Zarathustra rises his animals tell him that “the world awaits you like a garden.”<sup>162</sup> Just like how God created the first man and put him in the garden, Zarathustra awakens a newly transformed man and is among the fruits and herbs that one may find in a garden. Plus, after his transformation, the world awaits him like a garden.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 328.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

After Zarathustra's transformation, he has now fulfilled his vision of the loneliest. We now finally come to why Zarathustra's vision is called the "vision of the loneliest." With what has been discussed in this section, we know why loneliness is of major importance to Nietzsche and the impact it plays in our suffering. However, it's the loneliness Zarathustra must experience when he accepts his role as teacher of the eternal recurrence that the vision's name is alluding to. The first clue to what the title of the vision represents is that the snake is black.<sup>163</sup> It could be that the black snake is a play on the concept of the black sheep which people are often called when they are different and don't fit in. Not fitting in could certainly lead to feelings of loneliness. The snake as a representation of wisdom gives Zarathustra knowledge not only of how life is and the role he is meant to play as teacher, but it gives him insight into the lonely journey he will have to undertake as teacher.

In "The Convalescent" Zarathustra's animals ask him that because he is the first person to ever teach about the eternal recurrence, "how could this destiny not be your greatest danger and sickness too?"<sup>164</sup> It's because Zarathustra is the first to teach the doctrine of recurrence why his vision is the "vision of the loneliest." Zarathustra might be able to accept his role as teacher, but that doesn't mean that it isn't a great burden and doesn't have a lot of suffering ahead him. Because he is the first to teach such a doctrine he will be met with loneliness. At this point in the story, it's not as if most or if any will accept the doctrine of recurrence. He might be hated by pessimists who could never accept such an idea as the eternal recurrence. Innovators are often not met with warm and open arms by the general population and it takes time for people to accept new ideas. Zarathustra's message might not be accepted until far into future when he is no longer around, which could make him feel as though his loneliness is in vain. To make matters

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 332.



worse, Zarathustra knows that he will have to endure the loneliness of teaching the recurrence forever. However, because of Zarathustra's transformation and affirmation of life, he has the strength to handle his role and the loneliness that comes with it.

### Willing the Eternal Recurrence of War

If we follow Zarathustra's example and accept the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche thinks that we will change for the better. To handle the knowledge of the eternal recurrence, we need to cultivate new attitudes and find new ways of dealing with suffering. In *GS* 285 Nietzsche seems to be saying that part of having to cope with life's suffering is to renounce the comforts that we afford ourselves when faced with the difficulties of life. To the potential person who can give up these comforts, Nietzsche asks the following:

You will never pray again, never adore again, never again rest in endless trust; you do not permit yourself to stop before any ultimate wisdom, ultimate goodness... you have no perpetual guardian and friend for your seven solitudes... there is no avenger for you any more nor any improver... you resist any ultimate peace; you will the eternal recurrence of war and peace: man of renunciation all this you wish to renounce?<sup>165</sup>

Nietzsche is asking if we can really give up our comforts that cause us to turn away from life's suffering. Nietzsche argues that to affirm life, we must admit to ourselves that life is fundamentally suffering. We must renounce the idea of running away to our comforts which tell us that suffering is merely a temporary test and that the "true world" is nothing but happiness. The specific comforts Nietzsche is asking us about in *GS* 285 refer to God, Heaven, and permanence.

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<sup>165</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufman, (Vintage Books: New York and Toronto), 1974, 229-230.

The references to God in *GS* 285 are when Nietzsche asks us about never praying again, having comfort in endless trust, an omnipresent figure during times of loneliness, and avoiding the idea that there is an “avenger” or “improver,” which is probably a reference to Jesus. For Nietzsche, God is probably the biggest psychological crutch we use to cope with suffering. As Nietzsche highlights in *GS* 285, we pray to God and ask Him for things and hope He delivers. In our moments of loneliness, we take solace in thinking that He is always with us.

The reference to Heaven is the “ultimate peace” that Nietzsche mentions. In Heaven, there isn’t any suffering at all and no suffering means to have ultimate peace. For Nietzsche, Heaven is just another psychological fabrication to run away from suffering. Belief in Heaven might relieve us of some pain by giving us hope that one day we will live a life with no suffering, but Nietzsche thinks this comfort comes at the great cost of rejecting the only world we can empirically know of and affirm. It goes without saying that to embrace *this* life, other worlds like Heaven must be done away with.

Lastly, we come to the comfort of permanence. In *GS* 285 the concept of permanence is referenced when Nietzsche talks about “ultimate wisdom,” “ultimate goodness,” and “ultimate peace.” Nietzsche argues that one of our greatest metaphysical errors is that there is permanence in the world. For some reason or another, continuous change is painful for us. It’s comforting to think that out in the world there are objective notions of goodness, justice, truth, and wisdom and all it takes is for us to search for them and eventually find them. For instance, if we found some inherent morality or standard of justice in the world, it would make things a lot easier for us especially when it comes to how we should treat others.

For a moment, let’s run with the concept of inherent and permanent morality. Nietzsche certainly doesn’t believe that there is any kind of permanent morality because values are always

changing. For instance, in *GS* 116 Nietzsche discusses the origin of community values. Nietzsche argues that morality arises from the needs of communities and with the different needs of different communities arise different moralities.<sup>166</sup> Also, when the conditions or needs of a community change, so does the morality.<sup>167</sup> Nietzsche has his criticisms of the morality of communities or what he often refers to as “the herd.” However, I wanted to mention Nietzsche’s view on the origins of community values because he thinks that everything continuously changes.

Change isn’t just relegated to metaphysics or biology. Rather, even what we take to be our most cherished values will eventually change. It is much more comforting for us to believe that there is a permanent form of morality that God placed in the universe, and that everything is in His hands. When the values of a community shift it is a long and painful struggle. For instance, struggle might come in the form of progressive movements fighting to secure rights for groups of people who have been traditionally oppressed. The progressives must constantly fight tough and often violent opposition from conservatives or the community at large. If the progressives of a movement win their cause, the morality of a community changes.

It is the attitude of affirming struggle and the change that results from it that Nietzsche thinks we should accept. In *GS* 285 after we renounce our comforts we can “will the eternal recurrence of war and peace.”<sup>168</sup> When Nietzsche refers to “war” I believe that he is metaphorically referring to any struggle and opposition that constitutes the world and enables change. Nietzsche’s mention of war is also another nod to Heraclitus because Heraclitus states

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<sup>166</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, (Vintage Books: New York), 1989, 174.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>168</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, (Vintage Books: New York), 1989, 230.

that “war is the father of all and the king of all.”<sup>169</sup> For Heraclitus, war as the father of all means that struggle and conflict are parents that give life to change. For Nietzsche, not only will change never cease, but we will have relive every painful struggle for all eternity. In *GS* 341 it takes exceptional strength to say “yes” to the demon and that strength originates from overcoming the hardship of renouncing all life-negating illusions that give us comfort.

When we throw away our comforts, most importantly permanence, we can affirm life for what it is and embrace the fact that all the suffering of the world will come back to us through the eternally recurrence. Often, when we take comfort in permanence, one of the things that we hope for is that one day we ourselves will be a complete work and will have no more growing to do. However, if it is true that everything will come back to us through the eternal recurrence, then we will have to relive the struggles that we went through that made us the people we are today. Our lives are filled with mistakes, regrets, and shameful moments, but it is through the overcoming of our errors that we learn from them and grow as individuals. There is comfort in feeling like we are done growing because the process of growing can be filled with pain. Being able to say “yes” to the eternal recurrence of war means to accept the fact that no matter how much we want permanence, we are forever condemned to be works in progress.

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<sup>169</sup> Patricia Curd, ed., *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, second edition, trans. Richard D. McKirahan and Patricia Curd, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011), 47.

## FUTURE STUDY

I believe that I can take my study of Nietzsche as a metaphysician beyond just the eternal recurrence. For starters, in the future I want to examine how much Nietzsche incorporates Schopenhauer's Will to Life into his notion of the Will to Power. Robert L. Wicks best defines Schopenhauer's Will as "a mindless, aimless, non-rational impulse at the foundation of our instinctual drives, and at the very foundational being of everything."<sup>170</sup> In other words, Schopenhauer's Will is a metaphysical force that makes up the whole universe. In fact, Schopenhauer argues that everything is made up of Will. Material objects such as tables, chairs, and rocks are manifestations of Will as well as plants, animals, and humans. Because everything is constituted by Will, everything is striving to attain some end or goal that in the grand scheme of things, can't be ultimately satisfied. In Schopenhauer's view, because we are never ultimately satisfied, happiness is impossible, and we are continuously suffering. Schopenhauer's conception of "suffering" is reminiscent to that of Buddhist un-satisfactoriness. In humans, Will manifests itself through wants and needs. In terms of wants, we can strive to attain what we want, however, shortly after we attain what we desire, we desire something else and the cycle of want continues.

I believe that Nietzsche incorporates Schopenhauer's Will to Life into his notion of the Will to Power. Further, I think that Nietzsche generally agrees with Schopenhauer that life fundamentally consists of suffering, striving, and general un-satisfactoriness. There are some similarities between the Will to Life and the Will to Power. The main similarity I hope to one day explore between both Wills are that they seem to revolve around a kind striving that never ends. For Nietzsche, the Will to Power is stemmed from a never-ending drive towards an

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<sup>170</sup> Robert Wicks, "Arthur Schopenhauer", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/schopenhauer/>>.

expansion of one's influence. So, both Wills seem to have something to do with a ceaseless hunger to always go further and achieve ends. Also, both Wills are what are fundamentally real in the universe. At first, there doesn't seem to be much of a difference between them.

Nietzsche's Will is a drive towards influence while Schopenhauer's seems more like a general striving aimed at any kind of end. However, it's unclear what exactly distinguishes something as striving towards an expansion of influence vs. a general striving towards an end. The vagueness of how the Will to Life differs from the Will to Power is one of the things I can investigate in the future.

One more thing I want to explore in the future would be the possible Heraclitean influences on Schopenhauer and how that influenced Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus. The inspiration for adding Heraclitean connections to Schopenhauer's Will on the list of future research was reading *PTG 5*. In *PTG 5* Nietzsche describes Heraclitus' cosmology of strife and how strife between two opposing forces enables flux. On the last page of *PTG 5* Nietzsche brings up a passage from Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* in which Schopenhauer describes how he thinks change comes about. The passage from *WWR* is as follows:

Forever and ever, persistent matter must change its form. Grasping the clue of causality, mechanical, physical, chemical and organic phenomena greedily push one another, for each would reveal its own inherent idea. We can follow this strife throughout the whole of nature. In fact we might say that nature exists but by virtue of it.<sup>171</sup>

It appears that Schopenhauer has a view that strife and opposition initiate change. Although, I think that Schopenhauer would associate change with the world of representation. For

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<sup>171</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington DC: Gateway, 1962), 56.

Schopenhauer, the world or representation is the world of appearances and a distortion of the thing-in-itself which is the Will to Life. Since the Will to Life is the thing-in-itself it is a permanent and enduring force similar to the Greek view of substance. Nietzsche would depart from Schopenhauer in saying that change is part of the world of appearances and not the thing-in-itself. Nietzsche rejects the kind of two world metaphysics that both Kant and Schopenhauer engage in. For Nietzsche, the only world is the apparent one and change is a part of it. It would also be interesting to see how much of the early Nietzsche was influenced by Schopenhauer's two world metaphysics and how much he thinks opposition and strife plays a role in Schopenhauer's philosophy.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have argued for a metaphysical reading of the eternal recurrence. I began by arguing that Nietzsche endorses a Heraclitean doctrine of flux and uses it to argue for the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche rejects that there is any such thing as “being,” permanence, and substances, instead, arguing that there are continuously opposing forces that initiate change. These forces are the wills to power and they are competing to extend influence over each other. When one will to power wins a contest and consumes another will, change occurs in the world. Nietzsche says that there is a determinate number of forces and when all these forces have either lost or won contests to the point that the world can no longer initiate change, all the forces will relinquish their winnings to begin a new world and initiate another competition. Eventually, each new world that arises conditions an eternally recurring world. This is due to each will to power maintaining a connection with each successive combination of the world. In the combination that eternally recurs, each will to power wins and loses contests in exactly the same way, thus ensuring an eternally repeating combination. Having knowledge of the eternal recurrence could potentially crush us because life is fundamentally suffering. So, Nietzsche wants us to cultivate an attitude of saying “yes” to the eternal recurrence. The two main ways we can say “yes” to the suffering of the eternal recurrence are channeling pain in a positive direction for projects and learning to accept meaningless pain. Part of how we are able to achieve the ultimate life affirmation is to get rid of comforts that cause us to negate life. Once we get rid of life negating beliefs, we can begin to affirm life for what it is in the face of the eternal recurrence.



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