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THE MOMENT OF TRAGIC DEATH IN NIETZSCHE'S DIONYSIAN DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL RECURRENCE: AN EXEGESIS OF APHORISM 341 IN *THE GAY SCIENCE*

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Concluding his Preface to the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche warns that an aphorism, properly stamped and molded, has not been deciphered when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its exegesis. In this paper, I would like to propose a brief exegesis of what is arguably Nietzsche's most important aphorism, *The Greatest Heavy Weight*, in the penultimate section of Book Four of *The Gay Science*.[1]

This aphorism, Nietzsche writes, presents for the first time the fundamental thought of his most important work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, namely, the thought of eternal recurrence (*EH* III: Z1). What if, the aphorism begins, some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your most solitary solitude and say to you: "This life, as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more . . ." If this thought gained power over you, the aphorism concludes, it would change you; the question in each and every thing, "do you want this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest heavy weight. How well disposed would you have to become to life to crave nothing more than this?

Read without further exegesis, these few lines seem sufficient to support the view, held by traditional and recent interpreters alike, that Nietzsche intends his aphorism to convey a prescriptive teaching on how best to live one's life, or at least what ideal attitude to have toward one's life—namely, such as one would wish to live it again exactly as before. But this interpretation, I wish to argue, misses Nietzsche's strange emphasis on the specific moment in which the demon makes its announcement, and indeed simply assumes that this moment is supposed to be the same present moment in which the reader is considering Nietzsche's hypothetical questions. On closer inspection, I will argue, it becomes apparent that the moment of the demon's announcement is instead supposed to be the last moment in the reader's life—that is, the most solitary, silent and secret moment of the reader's death.

My evidence for this rather surprising claim will consist primarily in a contextual reading of Nietzsche's aphorism, supported by a close analysis of his use of time-indexicals, of his thematically linked poetic and

religious imagery, and of his appeal to a unified dramatic narrative. Supposing this evidence is persuasive, I believe it demonstrates that Nietzsche's first published presentation of eternal recurrence cannot be called prescriptive even in the minimal sense of urging one to improve one's attitude toward one's life.[2] For the psychological transformation Nietzsche envisions is supposed to take place, or to be imagined taking place, in the wake of a future deathbed revelation of life's eternal recurrence. Would the reader, at that last moment, be crushed by this revelation, or would he find it divine? The answer, I will argue, is for Nietzsche merely descriptive and diagnostic: it tells him whether the reader is a Socratic type, suffering from life's impoverishment, or a Zarathustran type, suffering from life's overfullness. In neither case, however, does Nietzsche indicate that there is anything the reader can do to change the kind of type and hence kind of answer that will inevitably be expressed once he is overpowered by the deathbed thought of eternal recurrence.

1. The Death and Rebirth of Tragedy

Although scholars commonly deplore the tendency to read the numbered sections of Nietzsche's books as self-sufficient aphorisms, no section is more quoted and explained out of context than *Gay Science* 341. There is, however, ample evidence that Nietzsche intended his readers to notice especially the structural and thematic links between this section and the two framing sections 340 and 342.

Structurally, all three sections constitute together the conclusion of the original edition of *The Gay Science*, and initiate the start of his next work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Moreover, the titles of the final sections, *The Dying Socrates* and *Incipit tragoedia*, are clearly meant to recall his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. For the latter title alludes of course to the title of this work itself, while the former alludes to Nietzsche's emphasis there on the image of the dying Socrates (*BT* 13, 15). Since that work blames Socrates for the death of tragedy, his death in 340 points the way to the rebirth of tragedy through the beginning of Zarathustra's death in 342.[3]

Mediating the two events, then, are Nietzsche's questions in 341 concerning the reader's response to the possible announcement of his life's eternal recurrence. But these questions are themselves preceded by Nietzsche's discussion of Socrates' "last word *[letzte Wort]*" in 340, and followed by an account of Zarathustra's words as he begins to perish in 342. I infer, therefore, that in 341 Nietzsche is also concerned with the theme of dying words, in this case the reader's. This inference is supported by Nietzsche's preoccupation throughout *The Gay Science* with the proximity of death, as illustrated by the Preface recollection of his own solitary near-death experience and the following section titles: "Last words" (36),

"Thought of death" (278), "Knowing how to end" (281), "On the last hour" (315).

2. The Moment of Death

Also supporting this inference are the various time-indexicals Nietzsche inserts into his first published presentation of eternal recurrence. The most precise of these is the demon's announcement in 341 of the return of "even this moment *[ebenso dieser Augenblick]*" when he is speaking to the reader—a reference, I would argue, back to 340 and Socrates' "last moment of life *[letzten Augenblicke des Lebens]*."[4] Accordingly, when Nietzsche asks the reader whether he has once experienced "a tremendous moment *[einen ungeheuren Augenblick]*" when he would have rejoiced at the demon's announcement, I believe he is asking whether there was ever a moment in the reader's life when he could have died happy at the thought of his life's eternal recurrence.[5] This suggestion is supported by Nietzsche's allusion to Goethe's poetic claim that Faust's last moment of life is also his highest moment. Thus, during his pact with the devil, Faust makes the following wager:

> If to the moment *[Augenblicke]* I should say:
> Abide! You are so fair!
> Then you may put me in fetters
> Then I wish to perish!
> Then may the deathbell toll,
> Then you are free of your service,
> The clock may stop, the hand may fall,
> As time comes to an end for me!
>
> (*F* 1699-1706)[6]

And this wager is honored, as Faust confirms in his dying words, at a moment during which the clock indeed stands still and is silent like midnight (a moment which the frustrated Mephistopheles calls Faust's "last, wretched, empty moment *[letzten, schlechten, leeren Augenblick]*)":

> To the moment *[Augenblicke]* I may say:
> Abide, you are so fair!
> The traces of my earthly days
> No aeons can impair.—
> In the anticipation of such high happiness
> I now enjoy the highest moment *[den höchsten Augenblick]*.
>
> (*F* 11581-11586)[7]

Other important temporal clues in Nietzsche's aphorism are these. First, the moment of the demon's announcement is specified at the start as coming some day or night, an odd vagueness that may well refer to the idea that death can come at any time. Second, although technically eternal recurrence should involve the reader's entire life, the demon

announces the return of the reader's life only as he now lives it and has lived it, but not as he will live it after the moment of the announcement—thus suggesting more precisely that the announcement is supposed to arrive at the end of the reader's completed life.[8] Third, the demon's announcement does not explicitly include Nietzsche's tense-symmetrical claim that the reader has lived this same life before, but states only that he will live this same life again—presumably after his death.[9] Fourth, the demon's final proclamation that the reader is turned over and over again along with the eternal hourglass of existence suggests the reader's continual death and rebirth. And, finally, Nietzsche alludes back to his mention in 340 of Socrates' last moment of life, last word, and last judgment when he concludes 341 by describing the demon's announcement as a last (*letzte*) confirmation and seal—an allusion that is lost, however, in Walter Kaufmann's translation of the latter description as an "ultimate" confirmation and seal.

Besides these temporal references, Nietzsche includes poetic images that he associates with the moment of death elsewhere in *Gay Science* and in *Zarathustra.* The most salient of these is his image of the reader's "most solitary solitude *[einsamste Einsamkeit]*," as in his observation in *Gay Science* 359 that philosophers, upon having the feeling of near-end which animals have prior to death, "go off by themselves, become still, choose solitude, hide in caves, become *wise.*" But there are also Nietzsche's suggestions, anticipated in 340, of a deathly stillness, silence and secrecy—as when he writes of a demon "stealing after *[nachschlichen]*" the reader to make its announcement.[10] These images are reinforced by Nietzsche's otherwise peculiar mentions of a spider, moonlight, and dust—all linked elsewhere for Nietzsche to death-imagery of sleep, dreaming, midnight, ashes, cobwebs, ghosts, shadows, Hades, coffins, and tombs.[11] The image of moonlight in particular, disassociated from the temporal setting of the announcement during some *day* or night, is best interpreted as Nietzsche's symbol for the midnight moment of death.[12]

3. Socrates' Death-Wish

Continuing, then, with this contextual reading of 341, I infer Nietzsche's intention to elicit first the reader's present conjecture as to how he would answer a deathbed announcement of his life's eternal recurrence. Next, Nietzsche suggests how to categorize this answer by comparing it, on the one hand, to his conjecture of the kind of answer Socrates might have given and, on the other hand, to the kind of answer he gives Zarathustra. Zarathustra's answer, I believe, constitutes the climax to Nietzsche's next book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* But the Socratic answer Nietzsche finds, of course, by thinking about the conclusion to Plato's *Phaedo.*[13]

According to Nietzsche's exegesis in 340, Socrates' "last word"—"Oh

Crito, I owe Asclepius a rooster"—referred to the Athenian custom of sick people making a sacrifice to the god of healing, in hope of a cure. It was thus a veiled expression of Socrates' last judgment and inmost feeling that life was an illness from which he hoped death would cure him. Socrates, he writes, had concealed his pessimism from everyone all his life under a cheerful disposition—until something loosened his tongue at the moment of death and caused him thus to take his revenge for the suffering which life had inflicted on him.

In his later set of aphorisms on the problem of Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche makes this interpretation more explicit when he writes at the start of Socrates' dying reference to Asclepius, the divine physician, as a "healer" or "savior" *Heilande* from the long illness that is life. But what this really meant, he concludes, is that Socrates perhaps wisely recognized at the end that it was *he* who had been ill for a long time, that he had *wanted* to die, and indeed had courageously given *himself* the cup of poison by forcing Athens to give it to him. Socrates' last word, Nietzsche speculates, was therefore a coded insight that death alone might be a physician for Socrates' own illness.

4. A Prophecy of Life's Eternal Recurrence

On the contextual reading I have offered, therefore, the enigmatic and hypothetical start of 341 suggests Nietzsche's continued speculation regarding Socrates' dying words in 340: What if, in the last moment of your life, a demon were to say to you, the reader, as it may have to Socrates, that you would eternally have to relive your identical life?[14] Would you, the reader, not curse the demon who spoke to you thus, as perhaps Socrates did?

In support of this exegesis, there are first of all Nietzsche's linked religious images in 340 and 341. The most famous of these is the "demon *[Dämon]*" in 341. Although traditionally interpreted as Nietzsche's literary device for signifying the terrifying aspect of his doctrine, Nietzsche's allusions to *Birth of Tragedy* point more precisely to his use there of the term "demon *[Dämon]*" for the source of the dying Socrates' *daimonion (Dämonion)*.[15] This reading captures Nietzsche's emphasis in 341 on the auditory and prophetic aspects of the demon's announcement, and recalls as well his discussion in *Birth of Tragedy* of the dying Socrates' claim that the prophetic voice of the god Apollo speaks to him (*BT* 13-14).[16] Nietzsche's allusion to this discussion points in turn to Socrates' tribute to the god Asclepius in 340, a tribute which anticipates the reader's potential praise in 341 of the demon as a "god" and what it says as "godly." In 340, however, Nietzsche comments that Socrates' last words are "blasphemous," thus anticipating his mention in 341 of the reader's potential "cursing" of the demon.

Secondly, there are many clues of a unified dramatic narrative in 340

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and 341. Thus, when in 340 Nietzsche lists possible causes of Socrates loosening his dying tongue to condemn life—death, poison, piety, malice—I infer that he intends us to add to this list the possibility of the demon's announcement described in the following section. This inference is supported, first, by Nietzsche's parallel focus on the moment in which Socrates' loosened his tongue in 340, and in which the demon makes his announcement in 341; second, by his parallel focus on the verbal reply of Socrates in 340, and of the reader in 341; and, finally, by Nietzsche's parallel emphasis on the sharp shift in psychological states occasioned in Socrates in 340, and in the reader in 341.

The final, and most central, evidence of Nietzsche's continued speculation is the demon's announcement itself, that the moment of death does not end one's life, but rather begins again one's living of that identical life. For according to Nietzsche's exegesis in 340, Socrates' dying words expressed his hope that death would end the illness that was life. Hence Nietzsche's conjecture in 341 that only his *daimonion*'s deathbed shattering of that hope could have caused Socrates to loosen his tongue and take his revenge by revealing that life-long, but hitherto-concealed, hope. In this way, Nietzsche's deduction in 340 that Socrates "suffered from life" sets up his concluding question in 341 as to how "good to life" one must become in order to crave nothing more than the demon's announcement at the end of one's life. And his supposition in 340 that the dying Socrates "took revenge upon life" sets up his suggestion in 341 that the reader might "gnash his teeth" in response to the announcement that he must relive his life—an image that Nietzsche associates in *Zarathustra* with the human desire to take revenge for the unchangeability of the past (*Z*:3 "On Redemption").[17]

5. A Dionysian Doctrine

Turning to Plato's *Phaedo* for an understanding of Nietzsche's dramatic device, we find that such a deathbed prophecy would have indeed shattered Socrates' hope, instilled by his *daimonion* and expressed throughout the entire dialogue, of escaping a cycle of eternal rebirth.[18] This cycle is outlined in the "ancient doctrine" which begins Socrates' demonstration of the soul's immortality, "that [the souls of human beings] do exist in that world [of Hades], entering it from this one, and that they re-enter this world and are born again from the dead" (*P* 70c).[19] Most interestingly, we can find in Socrates' fear of imprisonment in this wheel of reincarnation one source of Nietzsche's speculation as to the potentially crushing weightiness of the demon's announcement—a speculation that inspires his title to 341, *The Greatest Heavy Weight*. For according to Socrates it is the corporeal condition of a soul that prevents it from being released:

> And one must suppose, my friend, that this [corporeal] element is ponderous, that it is heavy and earthy and is seen; and thus encumbered, such a soul is weighed down, and dragged back into the region of the seen, through fear of the invisible and of Hades . . . (*P* 81c)

Supporting Nietzsche's interpretation of his last words, Socrates concludes that the soul of the philosophic man must instead believe that "when it has died, it will enter that which is akin and of like nature to itself, and be rid of human ills" (*P* 84b).

In thus deriving the demon's prophecy in *Gay Science* 341 from the ancient doctrine in Plato's *Phaedo*, Nietzsche points to the specifically Dionysian element in his doctrine of eternal recurrence. For Plato argues that Socrates is one of the few devotees of the god Dionysus, and that this ancient doctrine is in fact a transposition of the riddles or mysteries built into the Dionysian rites of initiation. Plato is careful, however, to distinguish from the view of those "many who bear the thyrsus," Socrates' interpretation of these riddles as allowing release through the correct practice of philosophy. Nietzsche, of course, rejects this interpretation, and that is why he imagines Socrates' *daimonion*—a voice he interprets as Dionysian—prophesying to him at the instant of his death, and to his horror, that he is to be eternally reborn.[20]

More generally, Nietzsche rejects Plato's portrayal of Socrates as a true Dionysian; indeed, in *The Birth of Tragedy* he had already called Socrates the most magnificent expression of the Greek *anti*-Dionysian tendency (*BT* 14). Instead, Nietzsche claims the right to call himself the first Dionysian philosopher (with the possible exception of Heraclitus):

> Before me there did not exist this transposition of the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos: *tragic wisdom* is missing,—I have sought in vain after signs of it even among the *great* Greeks of philosophy, those of the two-hundred years *before* Socrates (*EH* "Books" BT3).

In particular, since he aims correctly to transpose the Dionysian mysteries into a philosophical doctrine of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche claims the right to sign himself: "I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus—I, the teacher of eternal recurrence" (*TI* "Ancients" 5; cf. also *KSA* 10:8[15]).

6. The Socratic Answer

Together, then, 340 and 341 may be regarded as conveying to us Nietzsche's speculation regarding Socrates' public dying response to his daemon's private prophesy of his life's eternal recurrence. But Nietzsche does not mention Socrates explicitly in 341, and concentrates instead on diagnosing the reader's conjecture as to how he would answer the demon's announcement.[21] Typically Nietzsche is regarded as envisaging a choice for *each* reader between the two kinds of answers he articulates.[22] But if

my interpretation is right so far, he should be understood instead as describing the already-determined answers of two entirely distinct, and mutually exclusive, *types* of readers, one of which may be categorized as the Socratic type.[23]

Supporting this understanding of Nietzsche's merely diagnostic intentions, is his later important contrast in Book Five of *The Gay Science* between two types of sufferers: those who suffer from life's overfullness, and those who suffer from life's impoverishment. Although he does not explicitly mention Socrates, his account of the latter type is obviously linked to his conclusion in 340 that Socrates suffered from life. For this type, he writes, needs a god who would truly be a god for the sick, a "healer" or "savior"; a calming and confidence-inspiring logic; and even revenge upon life itself (*GS* 370; also *NCW* 5). And in the contemporaneously written, and thematically continuous, new Preface to the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche explicitly contrasts the ancient Greek suffering from overfullness with the later suffering from decline and fatigue that led to Socratism and was perhaps the source of Socrates' secretive irony (*BT* P1; also *EH* "Books" BT).

In 341, therefore, Nietzsche may be read as arguing that the reader who would throw himself down, gnash his teeth, and curse the deathbed revelation of his life's eternal recurrence thereby demonstrates his Socratic suffering from life's impoverishment. And just as Socrates in 340 moves from cheerfulness to despair, so too the Socratic reader in 341 may be assumed to move to despair from a prior state of cheerfulness. The reason, Nietzsche suggests, is that Socrates and the Socratic reader previously believed and hoped that death would lead to some kind of change or improvement in their life, even if this meant only its complete end. For those who suffer from life's impoverishment, he implies, there is no worse possible afterlife than the eternal reliving of the life they have just completed.

7. The Zarathustran Answer

This leaves us, then, with the second type of reader, the reader who is supposed to be exemplified by Zarathustra in 342 and in Nietzsche's next work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. That Nietzsche intends us to think of this type as suffering from life's overfullness is indicated, first, by his question at the end of 341 regarding the extent of the reader's good disposition toward himself and life.[24] But it is especially indicated by his emphasis in 342 on the weariness and sickness (*Überdrüssigkeit*) Zarathustra experiences as a result of his sun-like overflow, his star-like over-richness, his over-accumulation of honey-like wisdom, and his golden rapturous all-too-great happiness. Hence Zarathustra's words, at the dawn-start of his tragic death, concerning his need and desire to go

under, to set like the sun. Zarathustra hopes to cure himself of his affliction by emptying himself of his overflow like a cup, by giving away and distributing his wisdom among men, by shining for them.

In *The Gay Science*, however, we are not told Zarathustra's "last word," but must instead find its anticipation in the answer attributed to the Zarathustran reader in 341.[25] Such a reader, Nietzsche writes, would ecstatically call the demon a god and its announcement the most divine thing he has ever heard—a last eternal confirmation and seal. In thus blessing the demon, rather than cursing it, such a reader anticipates Zarathustra's blessing of the sun for its overflow in 342, as well as his request that the sun bless him in turn as he begins to empty himself of his own overflow. Again, as with the Socratic reader, we are to infer from this response a sudden and sharp transformation in his psychological attitude toward dying. This time, however, we are to notice that his prior belief in some alternative to his life's eternal recurrence had left the Zarathustran reader melancholy at the possibility of some change, or even complete end, to his cherished self and life. For those who suffer from the overfullness of life, Nietzsche implies, there is no better afterlife than refilling the same cup they have just emptied until it is overfull again.

Conclusion

Here I conclude my exegesis of aphorism 341 in Nietzsche's *Gay Science*.[26] Although scholars like Kaufmann and Salaquarda have written persuasively of the need to interpret this aphorism in the context of its framing sections, taking this advice seriously yields some surprising results.[27] It turns out, I have argued, that Nietzsche's first published presentation of eternal recurrence is closely modeled on Plato's discussion of immortality in the *Phaedo*; that Nietzsche means for us to understand this presentation in the light of his understanding of Plato in his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*; and that Nietzsche is self-consciously presenting his doctrine as the central issue between the antipodal characters of Socrates, as created by Plato in the *Phaedo*, and Zarathustra, as created by himself in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it turns out that what has always been regarded as Nietzsche's reference to a moment somewhere in the midst of the reader's life is in fact most plausibly interpreted as a reference to the reader's last moment of life. It follows, I have argued, that the kind of practical significance Nietzsche intends in this aphorism is limited and non-prescriptive—namely, a diagnostically useful transformation in the reader's attitude toward dying.[28]

1 With minor alterations, I have followed the Kaufmann translations of Nietzsche's works. I have also consulted R. J. Hollingdale's translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961).

2 Cf. Bernd Magnus's "attitudinal" interpretation in *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* [= *NIE*] (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 142-45. Although Magnus rejects the idea that Nietzsche's doctrine is "normative" in the sense attached to Kant's categorical imperative (p. 139), he still finds a pluralistic and second-order normative dimension to the doctrine articulated in *GS* 341 (p. 179). Cf. also his "Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche's *Übermensch*," *Review of Metaphysics* 36 (March 1983): 633-59, esp. pp. 647-49.

3 For a similar focus on the last three sections of the first edition of *The Gay Science*, see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 167-69.

4 Although "*Augenblick*" is a very common German word, Nietzsche's specialized use of it in *Zarathustra*'s "On the Vision and the Riddle," and his allusion there back to *GS* 341, supports the idea that its repetition in these aphorisms is not casual.

5 Cf. *Z*:4 "The Sleepwalker's Song" (a.k.a."The Drunken Song"), where the ugliest man, after his tremendous day with Zarathustra, declares that he wants to say to death: "Was *that*–life? Well then! Once more!"

6 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Part One and Sections from Part Two*; [=*F*] tr. Walter Kaufmann (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961). I am grateful to David Lupher for helping me see how Nietzsche's allusion to *Faust* might be used as support for my exegesis of *GS* 341. This allusion is indicated as well by Nietzsche's discussion of "fair moments" (*schöne Augenblicke*) in *GS* 339, by his parallel suggestion of a devil's wager in *GS* 341, and by his suggestion of Zarathustra's Faustian wish to perish in *GS* 342.

7 For a discussion of Nietzsche's concept of peak moments in *GS* 341, see Jörg Salaquarda, "*Der Ungeheure Augenblick*," *Nietzsche-Studien* 18 (1989): 317-37, and Robin Small, "Three Interpretations of Eternal Recurrence," *Dialogue* 22 (1983): 91-112.

8 Similarly, in Aphorism 56 of *BGE*, Nietzsche writes that the most world-affirming human wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity. Such a human, he adds, shouts insatiably *da capo* to the whole play and spectacle—thereby implying that these have just come to an end. Cf. also Schopenhauer's remark–in *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969)–that "at the end of his life, no man, if he be sincere and at the same time in possession of his faculties, will ever wish to go through it again" (p. 324).

9 Cf. *Z*:3 "On the Vision and the Riddle," where Zarathustra asks the dwarf, in language that recalls *GS* 341: "And this slow spider, which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things–must not all of us have been there before?"

10 Cf. *GS* 59-60, 87, 278. See also *Z*:3 "On the Vision and the Riddle," *Z*:2 "The Stillest Hour," and *Z*:4 "The Sleepwalker's Song."

11 See especially *Z*:2 "The Soothsayer" and *Z*:4 "The Sleepwalker's Song."

12 Cf. *Z*:4 "The Sleepwalker's Song," Sections 5 and 6, where Nietzsche

associates the intoxicating light of the full moon with the midnight hour, and writes of "the drunken happiness of dying at midnight *[trunkenem Mitternachts-Sterbeglücke]*."

13 Werner J. Dannhauser points out that Nietzsche's Basel lecture notes on the *Phaedo* show his doubts about the historical accuracy of the dialogue and his belief that Plato is concerned there to make a mythical example of Socrates (*Nietzsche's View of Socrates* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974], pp. 98-100). It might be argued therefore that in *GS* 340 and 341 Nietzsche aims to extract an aspect of the historical Socrates from a probable core of fact in the *Phaedo*, namely, Socrates' public last words.

14 On my reading, therefore, Nietzsche's "thought-experiment" concerns in part his rethinking of the *Phaedo*'s famous ending. But commentators often import Nietzsche's initial hypothetical phrase, "What, if" *(Wie, wenn)*, into the demon's announcement itself and hence read this phrase as a device for suspending the question whether eternal recurrence is true, or whether we have reason to believe it is true (cf. Magnus, *NIE*, pp. 74-5). In fact, the language of the demon's announcement is flatly declarative.

15 Cf. also *TI* "Socrates" 4. Nietzsche refers more generally to the Greek concept of *daimon* in *GS* 14 and 84. Salaquarda (pp. 325-26) and Small (pp. 102-04) also find an allusion to Socrates' *daimon* in *GS* 341.

16 Cf. also *GS* 84, 152, 316 for Nietzsche's interest in prophecy, especially among the Greeks.

17 In *Z*:2 "On Redemption," "it was" is the name Zarathustra gives to the will's gnashing of teeth and to the stone which the will cannot move. Nietzsche's allusion back to *GS* 341 suggests further that it is the stone's heavy weight which renders it immovable and, when innumerably accumulated through eternal recurrence, perhaps crushing. On my reading, therefore, the "heavy weight" *(Schwergewicht)* in *GS* 341 stems from the deathbed recognition that one's entire life, all one's actions, are past and hence unchangeable; while the "greatest" heavy weight *(das grösste Schwergewicht)* stems from the deathbed revelation that they are eternally recurring and hence unchangeable for all eternity.

18 Although Plato typically describes Socrates' *daimonion* as a merely prohibitive sign, Nietzsche may be read as alluding to Socrates' claim in the *Apology* that his *daimonion* did not hold him back from any word or deed that led him to being sentenced to death—thereby giving him a prophetic certainty regarding the goodness of his impending death. Cf. also Socrates' remark in *Phaedo* 85b concerning his deathbed Apollonian foreknowledge regarding the blessings of Hades.

19 Plato, *Phaedo* [=*P*], tr. David Gallop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

20 Nietzsche's conceit is further grounded upon Socrates' general observation that "when each one has died, the spirit *[daimon]* allotted to each in life proceeds to bring that individual to a certain place, where those gathered must submit to judgement, and then journey to Hades with the guide appointed to conduct those in this world to the next" (*P* 107d-e).

21 This interpretation differs from the usual diagnostic reading of *GS* 341 according to which Nietzsche intends his test to have some kind of prescriptive significance. It also differs from the diagnostic reading offered by Magnus ("Perfectibility," pp. 644 ff.), which seeks to minimize Nietzsche's interest in the truth of eternal recurrence, and which I would argue is still prescriptive. See Note 2 above.

22 Cf. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 151-56. Also diverging from Nehamas's interpretation is my suggestion that the timing of the demon's announcement is the reason why Nietzsche does not recognize indifference as a possible reaction.

23 This reading is also based on the alternating structure of the second half of the aphorism, together with Nietzsche's use of the exclusive disjunction "or" (*oder*) to introduce the two affirmative responses to the demon's announcement.

24 This question at the end of *GS* 341 is obviously the strongest evidence for a prescriptive reading of Nietzsche's first public presentation of eternal recurrence. Indeed, even if I am right in suggesting that Nietzsche intends the demon's announcement to arrive at the moment of death, it may be argued that I should read this final question as implicitly advising the reader to so improve his current disposition toward himself and life that he will crave nothing more than this last eternal confirmation and seal. Against this possible reading, however, I would point out that in *GS* 341 Nietzsche does not explicitly advise personal improvement, while elsewhere he argues in general against giving any such advice: "But even when the moralist addresses himself only to the single human being and says to him, '*you* should be such and such!' he does not cease to make himself ridiculous. . . . To say to him, 'change yourself' is to demand that everything be changed, even retroactively" (*TI* "Morality" 6; cf. also Small, p. 93). This point is reinforced by Nietzsche's reference in *GS* 340 to the life-long "innermost feeling" in Socrates that was revealed only at the moment of his death—an essential disposition that Nietzsche also seems to attribute to the reader of *GS* 341 when he writes of him being transformed "as he is." In both aphorisms, therefore, the psychological transformation induced by the prophecy of life's eternal recurrence seems to consist in the protagonist "becoming who he is" (*GS* 270, 335), that is, in his revealing and expressing the unchangeable core disposition that was hitherto concealed (perhaps even from himself). For these reasons, I am inclined to read the final question of *GS* 341 as merely rhetorical, *viz.* "Do you see how far you are from having the kind of essential disposition toward yourself and life that would lead you to crave nothing more than this last eternal confirmation and seal?"

25 This suggestion is supported by the fact that Nietzsche wrote his first draft of *GS* 341 at the start of August 1881 (*KSA* 9:11[143]), and his first draft of *GS* 342, the introductory passage to *Zarathustra*, very shortly after, toward the end of August 1881 (*KSA* 9:11[195]).

26 Limited space prevents me from considering here the extent to which my exegesis is able to account for Nietzsche's presentations of eternal recurrence outside of this aphorism.

27 Cf. Kaufmann's merely exhortative remarks in *GS* pp. 13-15 and

p. 272 fn. Although Salaquarda follows his own contextualizing precepts much more closely (pp. 321-23), I believe his interest in demonstrating the mystical tendency in Nietzsche's thought leads him to overlook the central points listed below. Cf. *GS* 126, where Nietzsche declares that mystical explanations present themselves as deep when in truth they are not even superficial.

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