

Research Article

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Eternal Return Hermeneutics in Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida

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Abstract: Nietzsche's Eternal Return (ER) is interpreted in many ways, including by him. I present it as a hermeneutic device, a way of reading texts, especially those whose influence threatens one's authorial autonomy and/or are later difficult to take ownership of due to philosophical growth. It returns past texts with new interpretations, similar to the way ER leads one to embrace one's past without changing anything, which radically changes everything from a resented painful burden into a celebrated enhancement of freedom and power. I show how he could have derived the idea from Schopenhauer, his own embarrassing past, by performing the technique on Schopenhauer. The same attitude toward past texts of recreating them according to one's present interests and concerns simultaneously releases one's present texts for future readers to impose their readings onto them, just as Zarathustra tells his followers not to follow him. Heidegger takes the idea up in a far more nuanced account than he is usually given credit for and applies it, among other places, to the history of philosophy. All philosophers say the same as it keeps returning. Derrida then recreates this as iterability, the deconstruction of the no/change dichotomy that Nietzsche began.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Derrida, Eternal Return, hermeneutics, interpretation, polysemy

While the basic idea of the Eternal Return (ER) of the Same – that everything that ever has and will happen, has and will happen over and over again forever – remains the same across its recurrences in Nietzsche's writings, its significance changes. It variously expresses a cosmological hypothesis about the workings of the universe,¹ a thought experiment to test one's disposition to life or help make decisions,² the self-overcoming culmination of nihilism,³ and a response to temporality.⁴ The same idea returns over and over again but each time incorporated into a different writing with its own concerns and interests that color the idea's purport. Such polysemy fits Nietzsche's views on continuous reinterpretation.

This article adds another interpretation of ER to the four listed above that reads it as a hermeneutic⁵ principle that illuminates how Nietzsche thinks about writing and how he reads, especially how he reads

¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1059, 1063–4, 1066.

² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 341.

³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 56. As one of the reviewers of this article pointed out to me, *Beyond Good and Evil* 56 does not actually name ER. However, it discusses wanting “what was and what is... again just as it was and is through all eternity, insatiably shouting da capo,” which strikes me as a fairly clear allusion to ER. Also, an earlier draft does explicitly name it: “it truly takes the very best humor in the world to tolerate such a world of eternal recurrence as I have taught through my son Z<arathustra>” (Nietzsche, *Unpublished Fragments (Spring 1885–Spring 1886). The Complete works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 60–1). The fact that Nietzsche removed this is significant, but it does show how he linked ER to these ideas. See Parkhurst, “Nietzsche and Eternal Recurrence,” 181–96.

⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, II.20, III.2.

⁵ Note, I am using “hermeneutic” broadly to designate thinking about interpretation rather than any particular school of thought.

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himself. He should want to suppress, edit, or at least not draw attention to his early Schopenhauer-influenced writings in light of his later vehement rejection of his mentor. Republishing them substantially unchanged constitutes his willing the return of even those parts of his authorial past most resistant to affirmation. Paradoxically, however, returning these texts as the same changes them for they now return as reaffirmed. Nietzsche also adds Prefaces and autobiographical reflections that leave the words the same while reframing how we read them in a way that he can now will. This strange interlacing of changing and not changing is one example of the effect that ER induces in many binary oppositions that he believes structure traditional thinking, thereby helping change our thinking.

The idea then returns when Heidegger reads Nietzsche the way Nietzsche read Schopenhauer and his own early works, and again when Derrida reads Heidegger on the topic of reading Nietzsche. This way of reading plays an important role in the way each of these thinkers deals with nihilism.

1 Nietzsche's Autobiographical Recurrence

Interpreting ER is challenging since Nietzsche published little about it and much of what he did is rather enigmatic, a "riddle."⁶ Nevertheless, he often describes it as one of his most momentous ideas and what we have has proven sufficient for considerable thought, as he predicted. Along with evaluating present and future actions in terms of whether or not one would want to repeat them forever, ER also requires you to reflect back on your past to decide if you would be willing to live through it all again exactly as it happened. One thing that makes this difficult is that we have all gone through awful, humiliating, shameful experiences that we would never want to go through again. The Eternal Recurrence says, among other things, that "*every pain* and every joy and every thought and sigh and *everything unspeakably small* or great in your life must return to you,"⁷ including those parts of our past that have become a "painful embarrassment." It is Zarathustra's repulsion at the last and small men that blocks him from accepting ER for much of the book, for how can he want *them* to return?

We would all like to live our lives again – if we get to change it. We wish we could go back and do it over again with what we now know. The fact that the deeds we have done are permanent events in our past, that once done they can never be undone, causes great consternation as we gnash our teeth remembering the stupid, embarrassing, hurtful things we can never take back. ER is presented in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as addressing our frustration and anger that the past is unchangeable. The will is powerless to have any effect on it.

Willing liberates; but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? 'It was'—that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards. that is his wrath; 'that which was' is the name of the stone he cannot move.⁸

The will cannot will against the past and so cannot be what it is.

ER presents the solution of willing the past as it actually happened. We actually *can* "will backwards" ("Who could teach [the will] also to will backwards?") by turning all the events that just happened to occur to us into a life chosen by us. This is the philosopher's stone that transmutes accident into essence, a random series of events that we suffer into an origin story we endorse as what led us to ourselves. It is now how we became who we are.

To recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption... I taught you, 'The will is a creator.' All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident—until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I willed it.'⁹

⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III.2.

⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 341, all italics added.

⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II.20.

⁹ Ibid.

The fact that we can choose no other life does not block us from choosing the one we have, for we can always *not* choose it. In fact not choosing it, harboring a resentment against the past which erupts in a desire for revenge on the unyielding passing of time has been the default setting of humanity up to the present. Indeed, it plays no small role in inspiring metaphysics' age-old dream of escaping time and change. ER liberates us from this drive for revenge and so helps us achieve a "reconciliation with time" that perhaps could release us from metaphysics.¹⁰ We cannot create it, but we can re-create it from my *past* into my *past*.

Nietzsche actually faced a version of this situation when he decided to republish a number of his earlier writings in 1886. In particular, his first two books – *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations* – were written under the influence of his two greatest mentors: Wagner and Schopenhauer. These books are both deeply influenced by their thinking and filled with effusive paeans to their greatness. The Foreword to *The Birth of Tragedy* dedicates it to Wagner, "the man and fighter whose sublime lead I follow,"¹¹ who is "an omniscient master of music and of the stage and in all technical matters an innovator and developer... the supreme model for all art in the grand manner."¹² He later summed up "Schopenhauer as Educator" in *Untimely Meditations* as an attempt to give "expression to my reverence."¹³ Of Schopenhauer, "one of the teachers and taskmasters of whom I can boast," he writes, "that such a man wrote has truly augmented the joy of living on this earth... If I were set the task, I could endeavour to make myself at home in the world with him."¹⁴ I would not be unhappy with a review like that.

The problem is that Nietzsche came to despise everything these men stood for, thinking long and hard about their influence on him. In a late work, he describes his task as "to take sides against everything sick in myself, including Wagner, including Schopenhauer... Wagner was just one of my sicknesses."¹⁵ He declares himself their complete opposite as they line up with "revenge against life itself... Wagner as well as Schopenhauer... negate life, they slander it, and this makes them my antipodes."¹⁶

Nietzsche described his reaction upon rereading his earlier, rather sycophantic works in the Prefaces he wrote for their new 1886 editions and in *Ecce Homo* of 1888, which I will call collectively his reflective writings. The Preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, titled "An Attempt at Self-Criticism," describes it this way.

I declare that it is badly written, clumsy, *embarrassing*... I shall not suppress entirely just how *unpleasant* it now seems to me, how *alien* it seems, standing there before me sixteen years later.¹⁷

His autobiography says that "it smells offensively Hegelian, and the cadaverous perfume of Schopenhauer sticks only to a few formulas."¹⁸ A natural reaction would be to disown such juvenilia rather than owning up to them, suppressing them or editing out the more embarrassing passages like a jilted lover cutting their ex-paramour's face out of pictures. In fact, that is just what Schopenhauer did: he excised from later editions of *The World as Will and Representation* tributes to figures who had been discredited since the first edition came out.¹⁹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Foreword.

¹² Nietzsche, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" in Daniel Breazeale and R. J. Hollingdale, transl. *Untimely Meditations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 3.

¹³ Nietzsche, Friedrich, Reginald John Hollingdale, Richard Schacht, and Friedrich Nietzsche. *Human, all too Human*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996, Preface II.1.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator" in Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 2.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Case of Wagner in Aaron Ridley, and Judith Norman, transl. *The Anti-Christ; Ecce Homo; Twilight of the Idols: and other writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, Preface.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* in Aaron Ridley, and Judith Norman, transl. *The Anti-Christ; Ecce Homo; Twilight of the Idols: and other writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, We Antipodes. See also Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1005; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 99; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 56.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Preface 3, 2, all italics added.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* in Aaron Ridley, and Judith Norman, transl. *The Anti-Christ; Ecce Homo; Twilight of the Idols: and other writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 1. Nietzsche also writes of "the wretched and shallow chatter about optimism versus pessimism" and that one "needs no refutation of Plato or Christianity or Schopenhauer – he smells the decay" (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo The Birth of Tragedy*, 2).

¹⁹ Parkhurst, "Schopenhauer's Sources on Mathematics Surrounding *The World as Will and Representation*," 31–58.

But Nietzsche republished these “embarrassing ... alien” writings substantially unchanged. This, I argue, constitutes an ER-style overcoming of any vengeful fixation on regrets in favor of embracing his past, including the parts he would now want to disown.²⁰ Obviously, this ER about writings is not the way it is described within the writings. But while it has no relevance to the cosmological interpretation of ER as a theory of how the universe actually works, it captures essential features of others. He is choosing to affirm some of the most regrettable moments of his own past, to bring them out publicly and relive their publication again just as they were before rather than availing himself of the opportunity to literally edit his past by editing his literary past. As an author, he is willing backward, turning his “I wrote it” into a “Thus I reprint it.” After all, as he concluded Book Two of *The Gay Science*, “as long as you are in any way ashamed before yourselves, you do not yet belong with us.”²¹

Nietzsche passed the test of ER as an author relating to his past writings, which are crucial to his self-understanding. When Nietzsche summed up his life in his autobiography, he told it almost entirely as a series of commentaries on his writings, tacitly equating his life with his work. *Ecce Homo* is an autobibliography – *Ecce Libro*. For someone whose thoughts and words were so central to his self-identity, perhaps the most important part of willing his past means willing his past writings, and this is precisely what he does by republishing them. Just as ER demands that you cannot seek or want to change anything about your life as you have lived it, so his unedited republications refrain from altering his texts as he has written them.

2 Changing Change

But, as always with Nietzsche, things are not so simple. ER has a peculiar way of subverting conceptual oppositions, such as the one that defines metaphysics for him: changing versus and not-changing. ER requires you to will your past to recur exactly as it did without trying or even wanting to change anything, yet this very commitment to changing nothing changes everything. It transforms your past from a resented burden to a celebrated elevation, from accidental events that compromise your freedom to an autonomously chosen self-creation. Thus, one who passes ER both will not to change her past *and* to change it utterly and to do one *through* doing the other. This relation defies traditional logic’s emphasis on mutually exclusive oppositions, “the fundamental belief of metaphysicians,” and so help being about “the arrival of a new breed of philosophers.”²² I will call this idea no/change. It occurs by means of a revaluation of values – re-evaluating his previous values – the movement Nietzsche uses to overcome Schopenhauer and his nihilism.

Applying no/change to Nietzsche’s writings would mean revisiting a text or idea and, without changing the literal words (just as one cannot wish to edit one’s past), fundamentally altering its meaning by reinterpreting it, here by reaffirming it. This applies ER to the interpretation of texts, a topic Nietzsche was quite interested in, in what I am calling ER Hermeneutics. Nietzsche argues that we are continuously interpreting everything we come into contact with, making hermeneutic applications of his ideas a natural extension, although these implications have not been fully explored. Gadamer once remarked on how “extraordinary that Nietzsche who is... *the* thinker who made a career out of the concept of interpretation, has neither been recognized as a hermeneutic thinker in his own right nor seen his works subject to a sustained examination from such a perspective.”²³

²⁰ “Except for these ten-day works, the years during and above all *after* my *Zarathustra* were marked by distress without equal. One pays dearly for immortality: one has to die several times while still alive” (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 5).

²¹ Interestingly, this aphorism celebrates artistic “falsification” of ourselves and alters perhaps the most famous (quasi-Schopenhauerian) line from *The Birth of Tragedy*: “As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us.” Its Preface describes the book as full of “the concealments of an artiste, with an artiste’s metaphysics in the background... independent, standing defiantly on its own two feet even where it appears to bow before an authority and its own veneration” (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Preface 2).

²² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 2.

²³ Davey, “Hermeneutics and Nietzsche’s Early Thought.” In *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, 88–188. New York: Routledge, 2002, 90. A number of scholars have argued that Nietzsche takes texts as a kind of

Nietzsche's act of republishing his works as the same instead of taking advantage of the opportunity to alter them gives them a different significance than they had when first published. His return *re-authorizes* them – both affirming them the way they were while simultaneously making his later self the originator of the new editions. Moving them into this new context, including new commentaries that cast them in a different light in the reflective writings, is a complex move that both repeats and rewrites them. ER Hermeneutics means rereading earlier work in such a way that enables one to robustly affirm it instead of regretting it. One brings it back from a past that is gone and settled by seeing how it addresses one's present concerns. Nietzsche's reflective writings change the meaning of the writings they are reflecting on, while leaving the words unchanged. What is extraordinary is that he tells us that this is what he is doing, especially in the reflective writings.

Nietzsche's reflective writings read his early works in terms of himself and his later interests, a primary one while writing on his writings being how to think about writing about philosophers. He works out a way to read himself that looks within these earlier texts to find ideas relevant to what he is thinking about at the time. Since this is exactly what he is thinking about while reading his own works, this is what he finds there.

He now finds his younger self's reading of Wagner and Schopenhauer to be not about them at all, but rather about himself.

Now that I am looking back from a certain distance upon the conditions of which these essays bear witness, I do not wish to deny that at bottom they speak only of me. The essay *Wagner in Bayreuth* is a vision of my future, while in *Schopenhauer as Educator* my innermost history, my becoming, is inscribed... At bottom it is admittedly not "Schopenhauer as Educator" that speaks here, but his opposite, "Nietzsche as Educator."²⁴

These two essays from *Untimely Meditations* purportedly concern the two early heroes he came to strongly reject, but now he sees them encompassing his own past and future, thus joining the tenses of time as ER does. From this perspective, affirming *Untimely Meditations* by republishing it affirms himself, not just because it was a necessary step on the way to becoming who he is but because he now sees that he was the actual topic. What is potentially embarrassing is the way his younger self obsequiously wrote about these two, so let's read it as talking about myself. Then, affirming the writings will not be affirming those sick thinkers but himself.

metaphysical and epistemological paradigm, such as Granier (in Allison, David B., ed. *The New Nietzsche*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977, 192, 135) and Nehamas (Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 3, 29, 90–1, 165). However, to the best of my knowledge, and that of the Nietzsche scholars I have run this past, no one has connected it with ER, certainly not the way that this article does. Löwith has resonance with some ideas, but does not connect them with textuality (Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of The Same*).

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo Untimely Meditations* 3. He says the same about "the most famous living follower of Schopenhauer: Richard Wagner" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 99, quoting Nietzsche, "Wagner in Bayreuth," 11), for whom his attitude similarly changed from devotion to rejection. "Instinctively I had to transpose and transfigure everything into the new spirit that I carried in me. The proof of that, as strong as any proof can be, is my essay on *Wagner in Bayreuth*: in all psychologically decisive places I alone am discussed – and one need not hesitate to put down my name or the word 'Zarathustra' where the text has the word 'Wagner'" (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo The Birth of Tragedy*, 4). He wrote of his new reading in a letter: "I have been looking through my books, and for the first time I feel ripe for them. Do you understand this? I have done everything well, but had no idea this was so... In *Ecce Homo* you will read a discovery about the third and fourth *Unzeitgemässe* which will make your hair stand on end – mine stood on end too. Both speak of me alone, *anticipando* ... Psychologically speaking, neither Wagner nor Schopenhauer makes an appearance there. Both these pieces have become clear to me only during the past two weeks" (letter to Peter Gast Sunday, December 9, 1888 Via Carlo Alberto 6/III). "The two essays on Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner represent, it appears to me to-day, more self-confessions, above all, more avowals of self, than any real psychology of those masters who were both related to me as intimately as they were antagonistically" (to Brandes Nice, February 19, 1888). "You see what I misjudged, you also see what I gave to Wagner and Schopenhauer – myself" (Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, We Antipodes, cf. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 370). He gives a similar retrospective rereading to *Human, all too Human*: "with my instinctive deviousness, I dodged the word 'I' again; this time it was not Schopenhauer or Wagner, but instead a friend of mine, the excellent Dr Paul Ree, who I showered in rays of world-historical glory... As a matter of fact, the passage contradicts five or six claims my friend makes: you can read about this in the Preface to the *Genealogy of Morality*. – The passage reads: 'What is the chief claim made by one of the boldest and coolest thinkers, the author of the book *On the Origin of Moral Sensations* [lisez {read–LB}: Nietzsche, the first immoralist]" (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo Human, all too Human*, 6).

This reframing gives us an entirely new way to read *Untimely Meditations* without literally changing a word as we read “Schopenhauer and Wagner or, in one word, Nietzsche” (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* Untimely Ones 1). What new meanings will these essays have when you read the passages about Nietzsche. Now, he can affirm his past books unreservedly without shame or regret as the test of ER requires.

He now reads his earlier writings as themselves transmuting their apparently external subjects into himself, making his work, like everyone’s, “the personal confession of its author... In the philosopher. there is nothing whatever that is impersonal.”²⁵ The reflective writings perform ER Hermeneutics on his earlier writings by reading *them* as performing ER Hermeneutics on *their* subjects, despite how they appear in the most obvious reading. He now presents his first book as “standing defiantly on its own two feet even where it appears to bow before an authority and its own veneration.”²⁶ His Preface tells us that he was “labouring instead to express strange and new evaluations in Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulations, things which fundamentally ran counter to both the spirit and taste of Kant and Schopenhauer.”²⁷

The transmission doesn’t stop there; he even attributes this hermeneutic strategy to the figures he is practicing it on. Nietzsche describes “that day in the May of 1872 the foundation stone was laid on the hill at Bayreuth” as a “decisive turning-point of [Wagner’s life],” where through a sudden transformation “everything that had gone before was a preparation for this moment” such that “Wagner beheld within him on that day, however – how he became what he is and what he will be.”²⁸ Not only did he experience this himself, but also his work takes his audience to a height from which “we behold... our struggles, victories and defeats as something sublime and significant.”²⁹

One of Wagner’s struggles was with his earlier work. It was optimistic which, once he became a disciple of the pessimist Schopenhauer, caused him to become

ashamed of himself... He thought long and hard, his situation seemed desperate... Finally, a solution dawned on him: the reef he had broken down on, what if he interpreted it as the *goal*, the secret aim, the true meaning of the journey?. And he translated the *Ring* into Schopenhauerian.³⁰

To escape his shame over his earlier work, Wagner reinterpreted it to make it in line with the Schopenhauerian philosophy that he now subscribed to. Now Nietzsche is, as he describes himself in another polemical work on Wagner from the same time, their “antipodes,” so he will do what they do in the opposite way. The Preface to *The Case of Wagner* describes his project as “to take sides *against* everything sick in myself, including Wagner, including Schopenhauer.”³¹ Where Wagner translated his work *into* Schopenhauerian, Nietzsche translated his out – while translating his own translating into Wagner’s translating.

With ER Hermeneutics in mind, we can now find anticipatory traces of ER Hermeneutics in his early works. For instance, *Ecce Homo* compares his early essay on Schopenhauer to Plato’s use of Socrates as a “sign language” for what he wanted to say. Furthermore, “this is really suggested with a perfectly uncanny sagacity near the end of Section 7 in the third *Untimely* one.”³² This passage warns of external influence, as both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer often do, “if a man perceives himself by means of the opinions of others, it is no wonder if he sees in himself nothing but the opinions of others!” Schopenhauer escaped being controlled by his influences through a rhetorical device: “everything he subsequently appropriated to himself from life and

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 6. Nietzsche both describes and applies the idea in *Ecce Homo*: “a well-turned-out person... collects from everything he sees, hears, lives through, *his* sum... He is always in his own company whether he associates with books, human beings, or landscapes... I have just described *myself*” (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* Wise, 2).

²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Preface 2.

²⁷ Ibid., Preface 6, see also Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human*, Preface II.1.

²⁸ UM Nietzsche, “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth,” 1.

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, 4.

³¹ Ibid., Preface, italics in original. About the Schopenhauerian *Birth of Tragedy*, his Preface says: “my instinct turned *against* morality at the time I wrote this questionable book; as an advocate of life my instinct invented for itself a fundamentally opposed doctrine and counter-evaluation of life, a purely artistic one, an *anti-Christian* one” (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Preface 5).

³² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* Untimely Ones, 3.

books, from the whole wealth of the sciences, was to him hardly more than colouring and means of expression; he employed even the Kantian philosophy above all as an extraordinary rhetorical instrument... just as he occasionally made use of Buddhist and Christian mythology to the same end.”³³ “Schopenhauer as Educator” attributed this appropriative strategy to Schopenhauer as his educator, but *Ecce Homo* attributes it to “Schopenhauer as Educator,” for we are now reading “Nietzsche” for “Schopenhauer.” This repeats *The Birth of Tragedy*’s Preface saying that that book tried to express anti-Schopenhauerian notions “in Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulations.”

Nietzsche’s reflective writings are re-creating these early works as themselves re-creating Schopenhauer’s thought, affirming this later rejected thinker by using him to say what he wants to say, which is that Schopenhauer re-created *his* great influence, Kant. Nietzsche escapes Schopenhauer’s overbearing influence precisely by taking an idea from him and making it his own – the idea of taking ideas from other texts and making them one’s own. This includes the idea of ER itself.

3 The Eternal Recurrence of Schopenhauer

Applying a hermeneutic ER, Nietzsche looks in his own earlier works and in their subject matter of Schopenhauer for what he can affirm in them and what he can appropriate for his own purposes, including ER itself. With the new perspective, we can find considerable anticipatory traces of ER in Schopenhauer’s work. After all, ER takes up “*Schopenhauer’s* question...: *Has existence any meaning at all?*” which emerges out of “his horrified look into a de-deified world.”³⁴

Schopenhauer’s horror is caused by his pessimism – his belief that the suffering in life outweighs its positive features – as well as his nihilism. One source of both of these fundamental problems is the fact that time is endless and that it endlessly repeats the same pattern. He “compare[s] time to an endlessly spinning circle.”³⁵ Each generation is substantially the same. “The will, which is objectified in human life as it is every appearance, is a striving without aim and without end... Every time a man is begotten and born the clock of human life is wound up anew, to repeat once more its same old tune that has already been played innumerable times, movement by movement and measure by measure, with insignificant variations.”³⁶ He often employs Plato’s definition of time as a moving image of eternity to reconcile unchanging the apparent opposites of change with permanence. “These situations, by constant recurrence, exist as permanently as humanity itself.”³⁷

Schopenhauer games out two possible reactions to suffering and eternal meaningless repetitiveness, summed up by the Greek and Christian perspectives. “The one points to the *affirmation* of the will to live, which remains sure of life for all time, however rapidly its forms may change. The other... points to the *denial* of the will to live, to redemption from this world.”³⁸ Note how he describes the affirmer who

is perfectly happy and content with life and who, after calm reflection, could *wish that his life as he has experienced it so far* would be of endless duration, or of *perpetually new recurrence*, and whose thirst for life is so great that he would gladly and willingly *take on all the pain and hardships* that life is subject to in return for its pleasures.³⁹

³³ Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” 7.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 357, see also Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” 3. This question, so important to Nietzsche, is also induced by Wagner: “he before whom there stands such a nature as Wagner’s is from time to time compelled to reflect upon himself, upon his own pettiness and frailty, and to ask himself: what would this nature have with you? to what end do you really exist?” (Nietzsche, “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth,” 7).

³⁵ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume 1, 306/329.

³⁶ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 322/§58. Cf., “the whole musical mechanism repeats eternally its tune” (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 109).

³⁷ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 249.

³⁸ Schopenhauer, *Studies in Pessimism; a Series of Essays*, 26.

³⁹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 310/334–5, all italics added.

Despite his obvious sympathies for denial, Schopenhauer refuses to recommend one reaction over the other due to the reader's absolute freedom.⁴⁰

This respect for the reader's independence is precisely what Nietzsche most praised him for in his early essay on Schopenhauer. Its first paragraph ends by exhorting that one should, "follow his conscience, which calls to him: 'Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself.'" ⁴¹ In fact, this is the paradoxical lesson Nietzsche learns from his educator: "your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you that the true, original meaning and basic stuff of your nature is something completely incapable of being educated."⁴² What his "first and only educator, the *great* Arthur Schopenhauer."⁴³ taught him was that no one could teach him. You yourself must take "what have you truly loved up to now... Compare these objects one with another, see how one completes, expands, surpasses, transfigures another, how they constitute a stepladder upon which you have clambered up to yourself as you are now."⁴⁴

The crucially important lesson that Schopenhauer is not-teaching him is ER, as Nietzsche later explains.

Whoever has endeavored with some enigmatic longing, as I have, to think pessimism through to its depths and to liberate it from... the form of Schopenhauer's philosophy; – may just thereby, without really meaning to do so, have opened his eyes to the opposite ideal: the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, insatiably shouting *da capo*.⁴⁵

Nietzsche thought Schopenhauer's thought through and came out the other end, inverting Wagner's translation into Schopenhauerian by inverting Schopenhauer. The pessimist offered a choice between the two ideals of will-, world-, and life-affirmer and -denier, confident he could make the case for the latter. But Nietzsche chooses the former, which he spells out in Schopenhauerian terms of the affirmation of the "perpetually new recurrence" of "his life as he has experienced it so far" with "all the pain and hardships."

In his despair, Schopenhauer stumbled – "without really meaning to" – onto a wholly different ideal that Nietzsche salvages from what Schopenhauer did with it to make it his own. It is here, where eternity's circular rotation has cut off all connection to external meaning, that the ideal of affirming this world emerges. Nietzsche takes up Schopenhauer's nihilism – placed in the mouths of the dwarf, soothsayer, and spirit of revenge in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*⁴⁶ – and reverses its valence. Schopenhauer wails that time's endlessness and repetitiveness rob life of all meaning. "All we do is chase appearances to infinity, moving without end or goal like a squirrel on a wheel... The truly philosophical way of looking at the world... does not ask where or whence or why... and focuses on what remains, namely the essence of the world that always stays the same... it wills: namely, nothing other than this world, life, precisely as it exists."⁴⁷ Nietzsche holds that it is this willing the world precisely as it is and has been that frees the will from "vengefulness" against the it was.

I was the first to see the real opposition: the degenerating instinct that turns against life with subterranean *vengefulness* (...the philosophy of Schopenhauer...) versus a formula for the highest affirmation... a Yes-saying without reservation, *even to suffering*... Nothing in existence may be subtracted, nothing is dispensable.⁴⁸

Nietzsche takes up Schopenhauer's endless repetition of the same in circular time but forges a different ER out of it. He explains the process:

⁴⁰ Ibid., 285.

⁴¹ Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator," 1.

⁴² Ibid., 1.

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human*, Preface II 1.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator," 1.

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §56.

⁴⁶ "Why did we ever pursue any way at all? It is all the same... Nothing is worth while! You shall not will!" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III.12.16, see also Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II.19). "Time itself is a circle" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II.20).

⁴⁷ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 300–1/323.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy*, 2, all italics added.

such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this – to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection – it wants the eternal circulation: – the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements... My formula for this is *amor fati*.⁴⁹

Instead of negating it, he employs this “fundamental nihilism” by crossing over to its antipode, which of course is not a simple opposite but changes both. It is in fact the same sameness that induces despair in Schopenhauer that provides the key to Nietzsche’s notion once it repeats not/changed.

For Nietzsche, simply rejecting Schopenhauer, the great influence on his early intellectual life, would amount to a self-denial, a vengeful attempt to edit out what one was ashamed of. “The highest affirmation,” on the other hand, says yes to everything in existence and in one’s past, “without subtraction, exception, or selection.” Yet he can put Schopenhauer’s not/changed ideas to a very different use which gives them a wholly different significance. “The spirit’s power to appropriate the foreign stands revealed in its inclination to assimilate the new to the old.”⁵⁰ As he says of “genuine philosophers... their ‘knowing’ is *creating*, their creating is a legislation, their will to truth is – *will to power*.”⁵¹ This lets us master our past instead of letting it determine our future. “The will to power *interprets*... In fact, interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something.”⁵²

ER Hermeneutics, we *can* will backward because books are always open to new readings, a topic Nietzsche dwells on.⁵³ The Preface of his first book notes that “even today everything is still there for a philologist to discover and excavate in this area.”⁵⁴ As ER places the past into the future, Nietzsche’s reflections on his own past writings reflect how future readers may deal with him when he becomes their past. His reflective, re-creative rereadings of his early works show how books by Nietzsche can be read in ways that their original author probably did not intend. This re-authorizing pre-authorizes future readers to repeat the same gesture with any of his works, including the reflective writings that lay this process out.⁵⁵ Compelling his past to speak as he wishes is at the same time letting go of controlling how he will be read in the future.

Nietzsche dramatizes this as Zarathustra, the teacher of ER, teaches his pupils to be untaught, weaning them off his authority the way he early on described Schopenhauer and which Schopenhauer did in his offering the choice between life-affirmation and life-denial. Zarathustra tells his followers not to have faith in him⁵⁶ and asks them, “this is *my* way; where is yours?”⁵⁷ which Nietzsche echoes when he tells his readers, “these are after all only – *my* truths.”⁵⁸ You repay an author poorly if you remain only a reader.

Late in Book III, he refers back to ER’s recreating redemption but with a new twist.

I taught them to work on the future and to redeem with their creation all that has been. To redeem what is past in man and to re-create all “it was” until the will says, “Thus I willed it! Thus I shall will it”—this I called redemption...

Now I wait for my own redemption...; dying, I want to give them my richest gift. From the sun I learned this: when he goes down, overrich; he pours gold into the sea out of inexhaustible riches.⁵⁹

49 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1041.

50 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 230.

51 Ibid., 211; see also Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 19, 44, 225; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II.20, III.12.16.

52 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 643.

53 Ibid., 110, 470, 5481, 40; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 22. Nietzsche writes in “Schopenhauer as Educator,” “A moment... returns as a ghost... Then [a child] will learn to understand the phrase ‘it was’: that password which gives conflict, suffering and satiety access to man so as to remind him what his existence fundamentally is – an imperfect tense that can never become a perfect one” (Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 1). Our past—described in the same phrase as in Z, “it was” – returns, which shows our existence to be imperfect. Grammatically, the imperfect tense treats an action in the past as repeated or in progress.

54 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Preface 3.

55 Such as, perhaps, this essay, for “philosophers of the dangerous maybe in every sense” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 2).

56 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II.17.

57 Ibid., III.11.

58 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 231.

59 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III.12.3.

The book began with the sun, “you overrich star,” pouring out its abundance unto Zarathustra who “took your overflow from you.”⁶⁰ He took the sun’s activity of overflowing as he went to the people to publicize, to “give away and distribute” his wisdom. Now, near the book’s original end, he is applying what he learned from the sun to leave his “gold” riches to his followers, as his first sermon glorified. “I love him who casts golden words before his deeds and always does even more than he promises: for he wants to go under... I love him whose soul is overfull so that he forgets himself.”⁶¹ Zarathustra wants to “go under” (which also means to perish in German) and be forgotten so that his “golden words” can exceed his own intentions.⁶² “I love him who wants to create over and beyond (“über”) himself and thus perishes.”⁶³ He has answered the question, “you too have often asked yourselves, ‘Who is Zarathustra to us?’. And, like myself, you replied to yourselves with questions,” such as, “Who could teach [the will] also to will backwards?”⁶⁴ He has taught us to will backward as well as *not* to will forwards, giving up authority to make one’s words “inexhaustible.”

4 Heidegger’s Turn

Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche is well-known. He is often accused of ignoring the latter’s style and ambiguities by turning him into a flat-footed systematic metaphysician with, of all dreadful things, *doctrines*.⁶⁵ One can certainly find a lot of support for this reading in Heidegger’s writings, especially in his 1936–1940 *Nietzsche* lectures which form the textual basis for most interpretations. However, I maintain that this reading of Heidegger does to him precisely what it accuses him of doing to Nietzsche: it reduces his reading to a single thread, ignoring its rich nuances and complexities. The second quarter of *What Is Called Thinking?* gives a particularly subtle reading that concentrates on ER’s presentation in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, so I will focus here and supplement it with others when helpful.

We will be guided by a passage near the start of his reading that portrays Nietzsche as

a precursor, a transition, pointing before and behind, leading and rebuffing, and therefore everywhere ambiguous, even in the manner and in the sense of the transition... as Nietzsche himself knew and often put into enigmatic words. This is why every thoughtful converse with him is constantly carried into other dimensions... All the themes of Western thought, though all of them transmuted, fatefully gather together in Nietzsche’s thinking. This is why they refuse to be historically computed and accounted for. Only a dialogue can answer, then, to Nietzsche’s thought which is a transition—a dialogue whose own way is preparing a transition.⁶⁶

Heidegger calls Nietzsche the last metaphysician which places him next to whatever non- or post-metaphysics could be. Nietzsche is a transition – a bridge rather than an end – who aims at transitioning humanity. “With greater clarity than any man before him, Nietzsche saw the necessity of a change in the realm of essential thinking.”⁶⁷ Heidegger also seeks to overcome the long tradition of metaphysical thinking, making his

⁶⁰ Ibid., Prologue 1.

⁶¹ Ibid., Prologue 4.

⁶² “But what am I saying? Enough! Enough! At this point it behooves me only to be silent; or I shall usurp that to which only one younger, ‘heavier with future,’ and stronger than I has a right – that to which only *Zarathustra* has a right, *Zarathustra the godless*” (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, II.25. “When his work opens its mouth, the author has to shut his” (Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human*, II.140).

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I.17.

⁶⁴ Ibid., II.20.

⁶⁵ Derrida is perhaps the founder of this reading: “the virulence of Nietzschean thought could not be more completely misunderstood... His text finally invokes a different type of reading, more faithful to his type of writing: Nietzsche has *written what* he has written” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 19, see also 287). See also Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, 20, 52–4, 58, 72; Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 84.

⁶⁶ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 51.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 57.

immediate predecessor a promising place to look for help in thinking through this difficult maneuver of thinking metaphysics through to the end.

Nietzsche uses ER to create new ways of thinking by overcoming binary opposites and Heidegger claims it to be his most important idea here.⁶⁸ Despite its centrality, Heidegger considers it an intrinsically ambiguous idea – or rather, its ambiguity is part of what makes it so important.⁶⁹ Against his reputation, Heidegger discusses and emphasizes the importance of Nietzsche's "everywhere ambiguous" style of writing "enigmatic words."⁷⁰ Nietzsche talks a great deal about his multifarious style of writing, and Zarathustra repeatedly calls for new ways of communication for his new ideas.⁷¹ This culminated in the polysemy that Nietzsche's 1886–1888 writings read in his earlier works: ER Hermeneutics can will backward to read past texts differently because they contain multitudes, just like their authors.⁷² Like Nietzsche, Heidegger considers attention to what he calls the unsaid in what is said crucial to our dialogue with Nietzsche's texts. "Nietzsche's language, too, speaks only in the foreground, so long as we understand it exclusively in terms of the language of traditional thinking, instead of listening for what remains unspoken in it."⁷³ These "concealed"⁷⁴ layers are what enable past texts to say new things to us as we ask them new questions, a point Nietzsche commented on many times.⁷⁵ This is why Heidegger considers conversing the only appropriate way to approach these works. "Every interpretation is a dialogue with the work, and with the saying. However, every dialogue becomes halting and fruitless if it confines itself obdurately to nothing but what is directly said... The soul of dialogue... leads the speakers into the unspoken."⁷⁶

Heidegger begins his reading with a late letter to help us understand how to read Nietzsche: "it was no trick to find me: the difficulty now is to lose me."⁷⁷ As Nietzsche did with his early writings ("at bottom they

⁶⁸ Heidegger's other writings on Nietzsche often treat ER as equiprimordial with three other theses.

⁶⁹ "The thought of return everywhere occupies the definitive position. Because this thought is to prevail over all, it can – indeed must – occupy various positions and exhibit sundry forms in the changing plans. Thus in a multifarious yet unified way it guides and sustains the whole in terms of its mode of presentation" (Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 4 vols, 154). See also Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 50.

⁷⁰ "That style is not a literary device; it is nothing less than the thinker's relatedness to the Being of beings, which must find expression" (Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 107; see also Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 37).

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Books 4; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Clever 7; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §§290, 125, 343, 365; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue 5; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II.20; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II.22; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III.9; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III.13.

⁷² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 490; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 19.

⁷³ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 55.

⁷⁴ The scare quotes indicate how our present concepts, grammar, and vocabulary force us into inappropriate descriptions, such as this realist ascription of meaning as an entity already contained within the text.

⁷⁵ "All the world is accustomed to confound the author with his work. What there is of spirit, sweetness and goodness in the latter can evolve only over the years... Good readers continually improve a book" (Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human*, II.153). An 1886 Preface recounts writing *Human, All-Too-Human* as a "look back across the broad and dangerous country my spirit had traversed up to that time... They were already in essentials the same ideas that I take up again in the present treatises-let us hope the long interval has done them good, that they have become riper, clearer, stronger, more perfect!" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Preface 2). Looking forward from the earlier book, Nietzsche hopes that it will "evolve" and "improve" if "good readers" separate it from its author. Looking back on the same book from his 1886 rereading, he determines that he is still writing "the same ideas" which nonetheless have changed and improved. They have done so through good readers, which must include Nietzsche's rereading of it for the Preface he is writing this in as well as what he has written in the meantime. The early aphorism symbolizes the rereadings that will improve his texts as a spider, which is what returns as a symbol of the teaching of ER in both Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 341; and Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III.2. The early text's symbol *has* become enriched by *literally* returning as the same idea changed into the idea of returning as the same. In an earlier passage that gets retrospectively enriched by being read in light of his later retrospective rereadings of his earlier works, he writes, "every later master who leads the taste of those who appreciate art on to *his* path involuntarily gives rise to a reordering and new assessment of the earlier masters and their works: that in them which is attuned and related to *him*, which constitutes a foretaste and annunciation of *him*, henceforth counts as that which is really *significant* in them and in their works" (Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human*, II.1.147). For more on this rich self-dialogue, see Braver, Lee. "Nothing Matters: Heidegger on Nietzsche on Nihilism." Kevin Aho, Megan Altman and Hans Pedersen, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Existentialism*. Routledge, 2023.

⁷⁶ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 178.

⁷⁷ 1-4-1889 to Brandes, quoted at Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 53.

speak only of me”⁷⁸), Heidegger makes this letter address himself by putting himself in place of the letter’s contemporary addressee: “we read the sentence, even the whole content of the paper, as if it were addressed to us.”⁷⁹ This actually repeats one of the ways that Nietzsche read Schopenhauer: “though this is a foolish and immodest way of putting it, I understand him as though it were for me he had written.”⁸⁰ Heidegger applies Nietzsche’s idea of reading one’s influential predecessor as if they had written for oneself to this very idea of reading an influential predecessor as if they had written for oneself, by taking up its assertion as if it had been written to him.

The text’s topic is directly relevant to our situation since it concerns how we readers should relate to the text. The letter presents Nietzsche’s influence as so strong that it inhibits our ability to be our own person – precisely the problem of ER that bedeviled Zarathustra’s relationship with the audience of his sermons and worried Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. “Go away from me and resist Zarathustra!... One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil... I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.”⁸¹

Heidegger applies this to Nietzsche scholars who misunderstand him precisely by trying to understand him, “by offering an overall exposition of Nietzsche’s philosophy. As though there could be an exposition that is not necessarily, down in its remotest nook and cranny, an interpretation... What a thinker has thought can be mastered only if we refer everything in his thought that is still unthought back to its originary truth.”⁸² The scholar who “eavesdrops on the great thinkers and ransacks them for views and standpoints”⁸³ does not enter into thoughtful dialogue. These are the readers who cannot lose Nietzsche because they never found him in the first place. Just as he reads the letter as addressed to himself, so Heidegger finds Zarathustra’s words applicable to the later scholarship about it, which constitutes the circumstances that Heidegger finds himself writing in. “It is as though Nietzsche had foreseen this, too; it is not for nothing that he has Zarathustra say: ‘They all talk about me. but nobody gives me a thought.’”⁸⁴ This “overall exposition of Nietzsche’s philosophy” bears more than a passing resemblance to the tin-eared reading often attributed to Heidegger.

What his commentary is doing is far more complex. It is trying to thread the needle of ER Hermeneutics, of changing without changing what he reads, following Nietzsche’s impossible command not to follow him by following out the implications of this way of reading. First, Nietzsche rejects the notion of a text outside of and beyond its readings, making a work as variable as its readings.

A “thing-in-itself” just as perverse as a “sense-in-itself,” a “meaning-in-itself” ... The question “what is that?” is an imposition of meaning from some other viewpoint. “Essence,” the “essential nature,” is something perspective and already presupposes a multiplicity.⁸⁵

Heidegger takes up this same view with Kant in the background, but he adds his own early ontology and Nietzsche’s thought to make the same point.

Everything great is unique, yet this uniqueness has *its own manner of steadfastness*—that is, of *historically transformed and altered return*. ‘Unique’ here means: precisely not *present at hand* on one occasion and *then past*, but rather, having been and thereby prevailing within the constant possibility of a transformed unfolding of its essence, and accordingly within the propensity to be discovered and to become powerful *ever anew and in an inexhaustible manner*... Kant can, and indeed must, be comprehended otherwise... Everyday opinion thinks that there must be a Sophocles in himself, a *Kant in himself*, a Frederick the Great in himself, in the same way as the desk here is a desk and the chalk, chalk.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* Untimely Meditations 3.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 53.

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” 2.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I.22. 3.

⁸² Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 54.

⁸³ Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 127.

⁸⁴ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 53.

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 556.

⁸⁶ Heidegger, Hölderlin’s Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine,” 127, all italics added.

Heidegger's phenomenological ontology recognizes beings as what appears as they appear with no noumenal leftovers. We usually think of meaning as a self-identical lump inserted into the words in the past – something present-at-hand in his early terminology – but this cannot accommodate the “inexhaustible manner” in which great works can be “comprehended otherwise.” That requires a new understanding of the being and time of texts, of writings' difference (“historically transformed and altered return”) and sameness (“its own manner of steadfastness”) across varying readings.

Heidegger identifies the issue of ER as one particular conception of temporality, which makes sense in the context of *Zarathustra*. “The revulsion turns not against the mere passing, but against that passing away which allows what has passed to be only in the past, which lets it freeze in the finality of this *rigor mortis*... against the ‘It was’.”⁸⁷ This traditional past, thought of as a former now that is gone and so unchangeable, is what impedes Zarathustra's will to be creative, and it has been dominant for so long that it impedes our ability to think new kinds of time. ER solves this by giving us a new time in which the past comes to us from the future, allowing us to recreate it as our own.

This old past may be appropriate to presence-at-hand, but he now adds a new kind of past which he calls the has-been.

What is past is *unalterably closed off, unable to be brought back*; it lies firmly in the past, which, as our language fittingly says, is a space of time—a storeroom, as it were—in which everything that has expired or passed away collects... irretrievably gone... That which has been, however, is that which *still presences*, which we ourselves in a certain way are, insofar as, *bringing it before us*... The shadows of those who once have been *visit us anew, come toward us, are of the future*.⁸⁸

Heidegger has been challenging traditional notions of temporality since the beginning of his career, portraying the past as coming to us from the future particularly vividly in *Being and Time*. There, temporality seemed an atemporal, ahistorical, permanent feature of existence. In the later work, historicity penetrates far deeper, permeating everything, including our thinking about historicity. “Our own way derives from [traditional thinking]. It therefore remains necessarily bound to a dialogue with traditional thinking... [which] must discuss the nature of traditional thinking.”⁸⁹ Instead of theorizing an ahistorical historicity, he now wants to be more consistent and discover it from an engagement with history. Thus, one way his reading of Nietzsche may help him twist free of metaphysics is by teaching him the historicity of thinking historically, according to a notion of the past coming to us from the future that comes to us from the past.

Heidegger reads ER temporality in Nietzsche when he reads him in line with ER temporality. Here is Heidegger describing how the temporality of traditional texts informs how he reads Nietzsche.

People still hold the view that what is handed down to us by tradition is *what in reality lies behind us*—while in fact *it comes toward us*... That self-deception about history prevents us from *hearing the language of the thinkers*... To acknowledge and respect consists in letting every thinker's thought come to us as something in each case unique, never to be repeated, *inexhaustible*—and being shaken to the depths by what is unthought in his thought. What is unthought in a thinker's thought is not a lack inherent in his thought. What is un-thought is there in each case only as the *un-thought*. The more original the thinking, the richer will be what is unthought in it.⁹⁰

It is because of the polysemy of Nietzsche's writings, their indefinitely many still unsaid layers, that they still have much to say which is what enables Heidegger to reorient them to help him with his own situation, interests, and goals. What is extraordinary is that the temporality that comes out of ER fits the interpretation of texts in a way that traditional time does not.

These are to twist free of metaphysics to find a different way of speaking and thinking. However, Heidegger frequently comments on just how challenging this liberation is, as any kind of simple or direct rejection of the tradition merely extends it by continuing its logic. Indeed, he often scolds Nietzsche for falling

⁸⁷ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 103.

⁸⁸ Heidegger, Hölderlin's Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine,” 98–9, all italics added.

⁸⁹ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 54–5; see also Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 8, 45, 75, 231.

⁹⁰ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 76, all italics but the last one added, see also Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 56, 165–6.

into this trap by merely reversing Plato's epistemologico-metaphysical hierarchy. Neither upholding nor dropping metaphysics can actually get free of it, but transcending this opposition into a new way of relating to the transition might. The last metaphysician who looks to "the advent of a new species of philosophers... – philosophers of the dangerous 'maybe' in every sense"⁹¹ might be able to help him think through this transition. Nietzsche serves as "a precursor" for Heidegger because he was "a transition, pointing before and behind, leading and rebuffing, and therefore everywhere ambiguous, even in the manner and in the sense of the transition."⁹² Nietzsche was a philosopher of transitions ambiguously – he was a transition in the history of philosophy and he organized his thought around the great transition of the death of God and he defined reality and humanity as themselves in constant flux, thoughts of stasis a legacy of metaphysics.

Rather than establishing doctrines, Heidegger considers this transition the point of Nietzsche's thought and of our reading him. "This crossing of the bridge is the one real step, and here that means always the sole step, of the entire thinking in which Nietzsche's metaphysics is developed. The purpose of the present lecture is to help us join Nietzsche in this one step of his thought."⁹³ We answer Zarathustra's call to overcome our present stage by allowing it to transform us and how we think. "Acknowledgment and respect call for a readiness to let our own attempts at thinking be overturned, again and again, by what is unthought in the thinkers' thought."⁹⁴

In particular, Nietzsche's thinking gives us a new way to relate to the old. As it gathers "all the themes of Western thought, though all of them transmuted," it simultaneously transmutes what Western thinking and transmutation are. Applying the ER Effect to his predecessors leaves him "pointing before and behind, leading and rebuffing" in a way that looks contradictory by present standards but is a precursor of those wanting to have their thinking overturned as they cross the bridge. This transmutation of same/different, no/change, and temporality is why philosophers "refuse to be historically computed and accounted for." Historical computation uses traditional sequential temporality that consigns past thinkers to what is gone and gives accounts of them ("overall exposition of Nietzsche's philosophy") that fix their thoughts like stones.

But this is resisted by *what* Heidegger reads in Nietzsche when this is *how* he reads him. In *What Is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger reads the account of ER in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as reformulating time to make the past pliable.

What, then, is the deliverance from revenge, if *revenge chains man to the arrested past?* ... What is revolting to the will fades away when *the past does not freeze* in the mere "It was," to confront willing in *fixed rigidity*... The will becomes free from what revolts it when it becomes free as will... *bringing back what is gone*... The will is delivered from revulsion when it *wills the constant recurrence of the same*... As the will of the eternal recurrence of the same, the *will can will in reverse*. For it will never encounter in that direction *any fixed bygones* that it could no longer will.⁹⁵

Heidegger is doing what he is describing – bringing back something that seemed fixed. What he is bringing back is the very thing he is talking about – Nietzsche's writing about bringing back what seemed fixed. He goes on to say that Nietzsche uses these notions for a metaphysics of the will in tune with technology, but *he* uses them for very different purposes, as we will see below. Heidegger's interpretive repurposing of Nietzsche's ER demonstrates the viability of ER Hermeneutics since he practices it in order to learn it in a tight hermeneutic circle. Zarathustra calls out from one mountaintop, "you shall first *learn* from me how to learn,"⁹⁶ and Heidegger responds, "it behooves us first of all to learn how to learn from the teacher, even if that only means to ask out beyond him. In that way alone will we one day experience who Zarathustra is."⁹⁷ Nietzsche learned from his educator Schopenhauer that we cannot truly learn from educators; Heidegger learns from Nietzsche that learning is overcoming your teacher.

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 2.

⁹² Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 51.

⁹³ Ibid., 97.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 104–5, all italics added.

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III.16.

⁹⁷ Heidegger, *Nietzsche* vol. 2, 216; see also *What Is Called Thinking?*, 25.

Heidegger's ER Hermeneutical reading transmutes Nietzsche by taking up and transmuting *his* transmuting of previous thinkers. This makes Nietzsche's position in the history of philosophy indeterminate for his relationship to other thinkers is transmutable as he transmutes their thinking. This offers Heidegger a way of relating to Nietzsche that is neither simple acceptance nor rejection by reading him as both the last metaphysician and something new. Nietzsche can be both an end and a beginning – beginning something new by being *both* end and beginning.

Nietzsche's ER Hermeneutics helped prepare for Heidegger's unheard-of way of listening for the unheard in one's philosophical predecessors – itself something unheard in Nietzsche's writings. Nietzsche's ambiguity means that his writings can continue to return as the same saying something different. Heidegger focuses on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* because it “thinks this thinker's one and only thought: the thought of the eternal recurrence of the same... For the thinker the difficulty is to hold fast to this one only thought as the one and only thing that he must think; to think this One as the Same; and to tell of this Same in the fitting manner.”⁹⁸ Nietzsche only thought the same but this is not at all the identical because like change, sameness has also been changed by ER so that it combines identity and difference. However, saying it in “the fitting manner” presents a challenge as Nietzsche knew because “the burden of thought is swallowed up in the written script, unless the writing is capable of remaining, even in the script itself, a progress of thinking, a way.”⁹⁹ Writing has a tendency to present itself as stuck in the past, leading us to treat it as if it were written in stone in the static univocity so loved by metaphysicians. Nietzsche ends *Beyond Good and Evil* by rereading it in disappointment that it has rigidified into a past written in stone.¹⁰⁰

ER Hermeneutics keeps writings underway, continuously undergoing an overcoming of whatever reading has become standard and tired. What else is scholarship? Bland restatements of the most obvious, widely accepting interpretation do not deserve one's time. Good reading follows Nietzsche's understanding of it that has applied the ER to in/correct, follow/reject, summarize/interpret, and know/create. Now armed with this notion, we can notice new details and aspects in canonical texts that give them a wholly new complexion, such as Kant's taking over Plato's “idea” and making it his own. “If we were to give out grades by the standards of the history of philosophy, Kant's historical comprehension of Aristotle and Plato would have to get a straight ‘F’. Yet Kant and only Kant has creatively transformed Plato's doctrine of ideas.”¹⁰¹

Kant's ability to take one form of ideas' atemporality (eternality) and transmute it into a quite different form that suits his purposes (time being inapplicable) demonstrates the temporality of ideas as it evolves and changes over interpretations. This shows how Kant was right in asserting that a philosopher may be understood by later readers “even better than he understood himself”¹⁰² as we apply his hermeneutics more consistently. Plato “spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention”¹⁰³ and Kant can reinterpret the Greek because it can be read differently, “surely quite susceptible of a milder interpretation.”¹⁰⁴ Like Nietzsche's readings of his predecessors, Kant's strong reading of Plato invites what Heidegger calls his violent interpretation which can claim greater fealty to Kant's hermeneutic actions than Kant's own account. Heidegger twines Kant's dictum around Nietzsche's ER Hermeneutic self-reading to give strong readings of his own early works as well as of Kant's subject, Plato's dialogues, which

can be interpreted in totally different spheres and respects... All true thought remains open to more than one interpretation – and this by reason of its nature... Multiplicity of meanings is the element in which all thought must move... Therefore, we always must seek out thinking, and its burden of thought, in the element of its multiple meanings, else everything will remain closed to us.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 50.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 296.

¹⁰¹ For more on Heidegger's appropriation of Kant's appropriation of Plato, see Braver, “Introduction: Why (Heidegger) Scholarship Is Generational.” *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 11 (2021), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.5840/gatherings2021113>.

¹⁰² Kant, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, a314/b370.

¹⁰³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A314/B370.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, A314/B371.

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 71, see also Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 113, 156, 172, 191, 201, 204, 219.

Polysemy is the fitting manner for saying the same because it allows us to say it as the same and different at the same time. Nietzsche took Plato's sock-puppeting of Socrates as a kind of model for his early use of Schopenhauer; now his successor Heidegger is doing the same to Kant's use of Plato.

Nietzsche's "enigmatic words," "everywhere ambiguous" as a transition, can bear various interpretations. A nebulous end-boundary renders the metaphysics it is supposed to mark off indeterminate, for if we cannot say where it ends then we cannot say what it is. Its unsettledness allows Heidegger to take up a non-bivalent relation to the tradition as a whole. Nietzsche showed him how "all the themes of Western thought" could be transmuted, returning as both the same and different which undermines any belief in a stable identity to their meaning. After all, we have learned from Nietzsche himself that "it has become necessary to improve our ability to listen;" "we gave ear from the start to a word of Nietzsche which lets us hear something unspoken" in order to break technology's insistence on "absolute univocity."¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche happily assumed this polysemy ("supposing that this also is only interpretation... – well, so much the better"),¹⁰⁷ fostering two different readings in Heidegger.

On the one hand, he can read Nietzsche as the culmination of metaphysics and the purest summation of its modern form to conclude that "the eternal recurrence of the same is the supreme triumph of the metaphysics of the will."¹⁰⁸ This reading helps Heidegger's project by epitomizing and clarifying what he is trying to leap away from ("Nietzsche's thinking gives expression to something that already exists but is still concealed from current views").¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, he can read Nietzsche as offering him concepts and approaches forged by ER from the other side that Heidegger can use to begin the other beginning, claims he also makes. For instance, ER shows the essential intertwining of being and time which Heidegger identifies as the "unthought in all metaphysics."¹¹⁰ While he does often accuse ER of betraying Nietzsche's stated commitment to flux,¹¹¹ the same gesture can be read in the opposite direction as liberating the will from revulsion against time "when it steadily wills the going and coming, this going and coming back, of everything."¹¹² He can also do both at the same time, as he does at the end of the lecture "Who Is Nietzsche's Zarathustra" given the year after *What Is Called Thinking?*¹¹³

There are three topics Nietzsche proves particularly helpful for Heidegger's concerns. First, texts' distinct way of being requires a distinctive temporality, just as ready-to-hand tools and existing Dasein needed something other than the traditional metaphysical time of presence-at-hand in *Being and Time*. "The common representation of time as a consecutive succession is in no way adequate to properly think history as it is... Through this view, we see the inceptual as what came earlier and has passed: it lies behind us."¹¹⁴ One common feature of Heidegger's early and later views of temporality is the rejection of the three tenses as mutually exclusive, making ER temporality highly intriguing.

Second, he argues that "both Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same, and his doctrine of the superman, must be traced back in thought to the relation between Being and human nature, so that we can give thought to both on their own doubt-provoking common grounds. Only then can we fully fathom what it means to say that Nietzsche's interpretation of the nature of revenge is metaphysical."¹¹⁵ Heidegger wrestles with the question of this relation between us and being throughout much of his career, constantly returning to the same topic to say it differently, dissatisfied with his previous efforts. He considers it "the one single

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 55, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 104. Heidegger says that Nietzsche defines modern being (Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 55, 75) through a theory of the subject, the *Übermensch* (Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 78), itself defined in terms of control and will (Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 74, 91–2) to become the "first to pose the thoughtful question" concerning technology (Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 65).

¹⁰⁹ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 59.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹¹¹ Mentioned at Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 108.

¹¹² Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 104.

¹¹³ Heidegger, *Nietzsche* vol. 2 229–30, 233.

¹¹⁴ Heidegger, *Heraclitus: The Inception of Occidental Thinking and Logic*, 60.

¹¹⁵ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 107.

question which all traditional thinking must first be brought to face... But it is a question of abysmal difficulty, simply because our seemingly correct posing of the question in fact muddles the question fundamentally.”¹¹⁶ Thinking through this relation may help liberate us from the metaphysical tradition but our present way of thinking and speaking bars us from even posing the question appropriately, much less coming to a suitable response. One reason to read Nietzsche is to see his way to “tell of this Same in the fitting manner.” My argument, fleshed out elsewhere,¹¹⁷ is that polysemy is this fitting manner partly because of this point. This view of meaning, as we have seen, changes “what it means to say that Nietzsche’s interpretation... is metaphysical.”

Third, Heidegger is using this thought *from* the history of philosophy to think *through* the history of philosophy, showing the historicity of thought in thinking about it. Nietzsche’s ER returns as the same idea – Heidegger uses his non-binary notions to address our past – and different – Heidegger incorporates it into his own project. He thinks the same thought of the same returning through time as his predecessor¹¹⁸ in order to think the sameness of thought returning through all thinkers throughout all time – the sempiternal return of the same. “Essential thinkers always say the Same. But that does not mean the identical. Of course they say it only to one who undertakes to think back on them... The fittingness of the saying of Being, as of the destiny of truth, is the first law of thinking.”¹¹⁹ A grasp of the sense of sameness that fits the fitting way thinkers say it lets us hear this recurring return. All thinkers think the same because they are thinking the same, i.e., the sameness of being and thinking that Heidegger struggles to say.

We are still not able even to give to all this an adequate and fitting name. But because the relation between Being and human nature carries all things... the relation must find expression at the very beginning of Western metaphysics. The relation is mentioned in the principal statements made by Parmenides and Heraclitus. What they tell us does not just stand at the beginning, it is the beginning of Western thought itself—a beginning that we still conceive in an all too artless, all too uninitiated fashion, only as a part of history.¹²⁰

Every thinker is thinking of being – for what else could we think about? – because we are of or belong with being – for how else could we think? Parmenides’ initiation of Western thought by telling us that we must think and say being and that these are the same does not stay in the past but recurs over and over again, giving fresh guidance to Heidegger’s new rereading of the past.

And yet, this same returns radically differently for each great thinker. Near the end of *What Is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger calls Parmenides’ Fragment 5 about the sameness of thinking and being “the basic theme of all of Western-European thinking. The history of that thinking is at bottom a sequence of variations on this one theme.”¹²¹ Nietzsche’s transmutational reading teaches Heidegger how to read violently, enabling him to find a history of being in metaphysical works about beingness.

In what looks like a chaotic manifold of representations when plucked out of history and shoved together historiographically, there is a sameness and simplicity of the *Geschick* of being... We only seldom and with difficulty bring into view the fullness and proper character of this “same” [in the history of thinking]. Being proffered itself to early Greek thinking as, among others, φύσις. For Kant, being means the objectness of objects... We remain perplexed when we assent to the fact that we think what is historically the same, despite the various manners of representation, experiencing, and expression.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁷ See Braver, “How to Say the Same Thing: Heidegger’s Vocabulary and Grammar of Being.” *The Review of Metaphysics* 75, no. 3 (2022), 525–58. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rvm.2022.0006>.

¹¹⁸ Heidegger draws on other sources for his notion of sameness, especially Heraclitus, the one tentative precursor Nietzsche recognizes for ER (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* The Birth of Tragedy, 3). For Nietzsche too, ER has returned from the history of philosophy for him to put it to new use.

¹¹⁹ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 264.

¹²⁰ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 107.

¹²¹ Ibid., 242.

¹²² Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 90–1.

The appropriate understanding of the same and history lets Heidegger appropriate the history of philosophy as the eternal return of the same thinking of the same, continuously returning differently.

5 Derrida's Iteration

As Nietzsche looked forward to future readers looking back at him, taking liberties with his texts to liberate new meanings he couldn't hear, Heidegger throws his own authority into question a number of times. For instance, after slogging through over 400 pages of dense argumentation establishing the thesis stated on the epigraph page, that time is the meaning of being, *Being and Time's* final sentence puts that claim back into question, forever returning readers onto the hermeneutic circle for another turn. The Addendum to "The Origin of the Work of Art" tells us how to read passages of the essay the way Nietzsche's Prefaces and autobiography do, concluding that "the author" faces "the quandary" of constantly changing his way of speaking or writing as he moves along the "stations" of his way.¹²³

Nietzsche's return continues returning through Heidegger onto his great reader, Derrida, who writes a great deal about reading, the end of metaphysics, and the polysemy (or dissemination) of texts. Considerations of space limit me to merely sketching the outlines of his turn here.

Derrida rejects the notion of passive reading that merely reproduces an original text as founded on a whole battery of metaphysical notions. As Plato said at the beginning of philosophy's consistent and emphatic graphophobia, writing is disturbing because it escapes the author's governing authority, allowing readers to make of it what they will (*Phaedrus* 275d-e). A realism of meaning assuages this semantic anxiety by positing a single, univocal sense – a transcendental signified outside the text – which readers can and should merely repeat.

A great deal then hangs on how we understand the repetition of the same. Traditional conceptions of reading as preserving a text's Real Meaning collapse without a noumenal sense or signified that transcends a text to harbor its self-identical meaning outside all interpretations – "there is nothing outside of the text."¹²⁴ Derrida's replacement follows a now familiar pattern of combining apparent opposites. Metaphysics "delud[es] itself, too, in wanting to look at the text without touching it, without laying a hand on the 'object'... Reading is writing,"¹²⁵ "commentary is *already* an interpretation."¹²⁶ The effect that ER has resonates with deconstruction's general overcoming of binary oppositions, especially those centering around repetition. "All oppositions based on the distinction between the original and the derived, the simple and the repeated, the first and the second, etc., lose their pertinence from the moment everything 'begins' by following a vestige."¹²⁷ Like ER, deconstruction throws out the idea of a first beginning, thwarting the distinction between original and repetition ("what is put into question is precisely the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure"¹²⁸). Works have always already been interpreted with no original text that can precede or be separated from these or, as Nietzsche puts it, "the text finally disappeared under the interpretation."¹²⁹ Derrida often puts the point in rather Nietzschean ways: "there are only perspectives with no referent outside perspective"¹³⁰ or "there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring."¹³¹

Readings without a text violate present thinking, calling for new ways. One example of an unconventional concept that helps us think textuality is "the strange alogical logic of what I call 'iterability.'"¹³² Signs must be repeatable to function in new contexts in order to functionally communicate. However, with no signified

¹²³ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 212.

¹²⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

¹²⁵ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 63.

¹²⁶ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 143.

¹²⁷ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 330.

¹²⁸ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 6.

¹²⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 38.

¹³⁰ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 244.

¹³¹ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 320.

¹³² Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 119.

supplying signifiers with their meaning from outside, they get their sense from each other in accordance with Saussure's structuralist linguistics. This entails that any change in the context a signifier appears in will alter its meaning – and contexts *always* change. Every context imbues the “same” text with at least a slightly different meaning; usually imperceptible and unimportant, to be sure, but these can add up over time. Even a perfect reproduction would not reproduce perfectly since it would be a reproduction; only the original can be a perfect copy, yet it is precisely what cannot be a copy. Repeating the same ruins the sameness that the repetition tries to effect because it alters it by placing it into a new context, even though it needs this sameness for this alteration to occur since it must be the same signifier moved into a new context for it to change its meaning, as well as for language to function at all. Thus, one of the things that iteration alters is our understanding of alteration by combining qualities understood as mutually exclusive. “Iterability supposes... that the identity of the *selfsame* be repeatable and identifiable *in, through, and even in view of* its alteration. For the structure of iteration – and this is another of its decisive traits – implies *both* identity *and* difference.”¹³³ Derrida attributes the rethinking of sameness and difference to Nietzsche, especially two ideas.

Before being so radically and purposely the gesture of Heidegger, this gesture was also made by Nietzsche... The same, precisely, is *différance* (with an a) as the displaced equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other. Thus one could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives... And on the basis of this unfolding of the same as *différance*, we see announced the sameness of *différance* and repetition in the eternal return... the entire thematic of active interpretation, which substitutes incessant deciphering for the unveiling of truth as the presentation of the thing itself in its presence.¹³⁴

Since we cannot predict what contexts future readings will place texts into, we can place no limitations in principle or in advance on what might be read in them. It is not that signs can mean everything or anything, but that we cannot know what they may one day mean. This takes control away from the author for we can never know what our words will have meant as Derrida too defers his own authority to future readers. “The efficacy of the thematic of *différance* may very well, indeed must, one day be superseded, lending itself if not to its own replacement, at least to enmeshing itself in a chain that in truth it never will have governed.”¹³⁵

As Schopenhauer was to Nietzsche and Nietzsche to Heidegger, Heidegger looms large and ambiguous in Derrida's development. He calls Heidegger's thought “irreducible” and “uncircumventable” since “what I have attempted to do would not have been possible without the opening of Heidegger's questions.”¹³⁶ In particular, he is attempting “to read [the texts of the history of metaphysics], certainly, within the opening of the Heideggerian breakthrough, which is the only thought excess of metaphysics as such, but also to read them, occasionally, and faithfully, beyond certain propositions or conclusions within which the Heideggerian breakthrough has had to constrain itself.”¹³⁷ He takes certain tools and ideas from Heidegger, insisting “that Heidegger's text is extremely important to me, and that it constitutes a novel, irreversible advance all of whose critical resources we are far from having exploited.”¹³⁸ However, he also makes these his own, turning them against the ways that Heidegger compromised them, especially concerning the way Heidegger reads the tradition and Nietzsche in particular.

Derrida was perhaps the first to criticize Heidegger for pinning Nietzsche down to a precise position in the history of metaphysics with determinate views and certainly Heidegger does say this. His later work divides the history of metaphysics into epochs each with their own understanding of being, with Nietzsche often cast as representative of our epoch who ends the whole history. Nietzsche's ending metaphysics allows Heidegger's other beginning.

Derrida argues, however, that “there is no such thing either as the truth of Nietzsche, or of Nietzsche's text.”¹³⁹ As powerful and insightful as Heidegger's readings are, the same texts can be read to produce a

¹³³ Ibid., 53.

¹³⁴ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 17–8.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 24; Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 22; Derrida, *Positions*, 9.

¹³⁷ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 62.

¹³⁸ Derrida, *Positions*, 54.

¹³⁹ Derrida, *Spurs/Nietzsche's Styles*, 103.

completely different history, as Nietzsche said of supposed facts.¹⁴⁰ “It is always possible for a text to become new, since the blanks open up its structure to an indefinitely disseminated transformation.”¹⁴¹ Endless rereadability disrupts any univocal history of metaphysical works with a determinate order separating those inside from those outside. Heidegger’s project, he says, requires this metaphysical notion of meaning and history – his escape drawing him back into what he is trying to escape.

Every text can be read in different ways, however, including both as metaphysical and as non- or post-metaphysical.

Henceforth, the closure of metaphysics... would not occur *round* a homogeneous and continuous field of metaphysics. Rather, it would fissure the structure and history of metaphysics, *organically* inscribing and systematically *articulating* the traces of the *before* and the *after* both from within and without metaphysics. Thereby proposing an infinite, and infinitely surprising, reading. An irreducible rupture and excess can always be produced within an era, at a certain point of its text.¹⁴²

The attempt to determine what is metaphysics itself defines metaphysics, as it presupposes a clear sense that draws definite borders. The only way to be truly post-metaphysics is to give up the notion of post altogether since it merely perpetuates it and ER helpfully blocks the temporality needed for that view. “In the beginning, in principle, was the post, and I will never get over it.”¹⁴³

Derrida’s objection to Heidegger could fall victim to itself by claiming to have the one right interpretation of Heidegger as having the one right interpretation of Nietzsche. However, continuing the ER Hermeneutics we have seen, Derrida repeatedly states that Heidegger’s work is as polysemic as Nietzsche’s, whose semantic fecundity he is trying to save from one of Heidegger’s readings. It is the heterogeneity of Heidegger’s thought that allows Derrida to avoid taking a univocal position towards it. He can maintain his own polysemy by being both for and against Heidegger, being for him *by* being against him as Derrida uses his ideas against him. “Despite this debt to Heidegger’s thought, or rather because of it, I attempt to locate in Heidegger’s text – which, no more than any other, is not homogeneous, continuous, everywhere equal to the greatest force and to all the consequences of its questions – the signs of a belonging to metaphysics.”¹⁴⁴ Derrida reads Heidegger’s texts as polysemic in both giving a univocal reading of Nietzsche and teaching the polysemy of texts, as Heidegger found both this view and its opposite in Nietzsche who used it to reread his earlier self-reading Schopenhauer.

6 Conclusion

The return of the same has changed our understanding of returning and changing as it changes by returning as the same. Read this way, ER speaks of the inexhaustible richness of texts rather than the nature of the universe or which actions one should undertake, and the fact that it *can* be read this new way is a kind of performative proof of itself. We can find the new meaning in ER that one can always find new meanings in past texts as an example of what this new meaning describes. This reflexive structure resembles the way Heidegger explores the historicity of thinking by thinking historically, in dialogue with predecessors such as Nietzsche, to find new ways of finding new meaning in past texts. ER Hermeneutics explores the semantic nihilism that follows the death of the author-god which means that texts no longer have Truth but truths. “There are many kinds of ‘truths,’ and consequently there is no truth.”¹⁴⁵ But Nietzsche describes nihilism as essentially ambiguous between passive, where this loss unsettles those who want to be told what writings

¹⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 22.

¹⁴¹ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 345.

¹⁴² Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 172n.16.

¹⁴³ Derrida, *The Post Card*, 29.

¹⁴⁴ Derrida, *Positions*, 10.

¹⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 540.

mean, and active, where it invigorates those who want to creatively interpret.¹⁴⁶ The former “prefer even a handful of ‘certainty’ to a whole carload of beautiful possibilities,”¹⁴⁷ while the latter embrace the chaos that may yet birth dancing starts. “Inertia needs unity (monism); plurality of interpretations a sign of strength. Not to desire to deprive the world of its disturbing and enigmatic character!”¹⁴⁸

If nihilism means that there is no meaning, then textual nihilism says that texts have no meaning, a tempting view once traditional ways of settling sense have been withdrawn. These philosophers show how ER can overcome nihilism by generating new meanings, including the new meaning of ER as generating new meanings.

To aim at a post-anything merely extends that, according to this view. “The step ‘outside philosophy’ is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago with cavalier ease, and who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of discourse which they claim to have disengaged from it.”¹⁴⁹ It attributes a univocal sense to what it is positioning itself post of, thereby assuming the kind of realism of meaning that Nietzsche thought leads to nihilism. It is not the attempt to get out of metaphysics that gets us out but the undermining and overcoming of the very distinctions such as inside–outside or earlier–later that sustain the discourse of getting out. According to this way of thinking, the most nihilistic part of any post- is the post-itself.

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¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 600.

¹⁴⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 284.

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