

Nietzsche's Ethics of Danger¹

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Abstract: In this paper, I elucidate Friedrich Nietzsche's ethics of danger as a development from an ethics of affirmation to posit a practical reading of his ethical theory. *Gay Science* 341 contains the hypothetical scenario of the eternal return, and the way this is interpreted redirects one's total reading of Nietzsche's philosophy. My argument is that there is a vulnerability latent in identifying one's response to the eternal return through exposing oneself to the danger implicit in this return; from simply affirming it, a more appropriate reaction I argue is the rage that is made explicit. This paper begins with the backdrop of our contemporary situation from the insights of Peter Sloterdijk and Nietzsche, followed by a review of Deleuze's ethics of affirmation. I present the latter to situate the difficulty of articulating its practicality in the face of such a cynical condition. The last section develops Nietzsche's ethics of danger. This I directly borrow from Tobias Kuehne, which I expound via other insights from Nietzsche's philosophy. As a whole, my discussion of his ethics of danger is my attempt to articulate his ethical theory in a practical sense, away from the probable security offered by affirmation.

Keywords: Nietzsche, eternal return, ethics of danger, vulnerability

Ethics is Nietzsche's most sustained philosophical contribution, not just due to his critique of morality but his overarching project of a revaluation of values.² How this revaluation is understood and to what

¹ Originally entitled "Nietzsche's Ethics of Danger and the Last Human's Cynicality," this manuscript is a revised version of my presentation during the *Continental Philosophy Symposium II: Deutsche Philosophie* of the UST Department of Philosophy last 12–13 November 2024. As a disclosure, part of this paper was previously published in Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, "Humanity as the Will to Power: Affirmation and Danger in the Eternal Return," in *InCircolo - Rivista di Filosofia e Culture* 10 (2020), monographic issue on "Nietzsche the Humanist," 118–137, <<http://www.incolorivistafilosofica.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/InCircolo-n.10-6-Rennesland.pdf>>. However, the fuller arguments are found in this current manuscript since the previous manuscript contained only an overview of my assertions concerning how Nietzsche's philosophy may be read.

² See Simon Robertson, "Nietzsche's Ethical Revaluation," in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 37 (Spring 2009), 66–90.

it is tied tremendously differs among commentators. Obvious though is the importance of traditional notions of God, truth, and virtue among others as these form the basis of his critique.³ Agreeing with Nietzsche that the eternal return is nihilism's most extreme form,⁴ the challenge that follows is for each to confront ourselves. This is central to Nietzsche's philosophy since, for Ansell-Pearson, life seeks not its preservation but overcoming.⁵ Walter Kaufmann states that the eternal return may be identified in four separate passages,⁶ and I would like to stress that the way the eternal return is interpreted within Nietzsche's philosophy, sheds light on how the entirety of his philosophy is read.

The connection between reading the eternal return and the rest of his philosophy is quite prominent in a number of thinkers. Some examples are as follows. Martin Heidegger is quite noted for framing the eternal return as a metaphysical doctrine that allowed people "to rethink Nietzsche's critical approach to the metaphysical question of being in light of temporality, becoming and difference."⁷ Doing so, Heidegger created an imprint of Being on the animated reality of becoming.⁸ Pierre Klossowski provides a different direction, emphasizing the necessity of willing therein.⁹ The subject for Klossowski necessarily wills not the present but all the choices that he

³ See Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁴ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente* (Hereinafter cited as NF) 1886,5[71], <[http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1886,5\[7\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1886,5[7])>.

⁵ See Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 49 and 109.

⁶ See Walter Kaufmann, Translator's Introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 14. The four passages are: (1) GS III:109 "Let us beware. — [...] Let us beware of thinking that the world eternally creates new things. [...] But when shall we ever be done with our caution and care? When will all these shadows of God cease to darken our minds? When will we complete our de-deification of nature? When may we begin to "naturalize" humanity in terms of a pure newly discovered, newly redeemed nature? [...]"; (2) GS III:233: "The most dangerous point of view. — What I do or do not do now is as important for everything that is yet to come as is the greatest event of the past: in this tremendous perspective of effectiveness all actions appear equally great and small." (3) GS IV:285: "Excelsior. — [...] you resist any ultimate peace; you will the eternal recurrence of war and peace: you man of renunciation, all this you wish to renounce? Who will give you the strength for that? Nobody yet has had this strength! [...]" (4) GS IV:341: *The greatest weight*. (This passage I explain in the succeeding section.

⁷ Sang Won Lee, "Facing the Lively Unity of Difference: Heidegger's Thoughts on Nietzsche's Philosophy of Eternal Return and the Self-Overcoming Power of Thinking," in *Human Studies*, 45 (2022), 223–241, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-022-09620-y>>.

⁸ See Bevis E. McNeil, "Heidegger's Interpretation of Nietzsche's Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence," in *Nietzsche and Eternal Recurrence* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55296-1_3>.

⁹ See Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Cycle*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 57.

formerly embraced to bring oneself to that point of the return, and tied to this is the importance of forgetting both the event and the return to allow the movement's circular nature to essentially occur. Gilles Deleuze argues the imperative nature of the return akin to a practical rule of reason in the manner of Kant's own moral imperative.¹⁰ Affirmation is important in Deleuze's reading as a fundamental aspect required to overcome the reactivity of forces.¹¹ It comes therefore as no surprise that an individual's creativity takes center stage in the eventual readings of Nietzsche's ethics and the entirety of his philosophy.¹²

These different readings provide an idea of the conflicting interpretations of Nietzsche's ethics (and philosophy as a whole) and conversely such theoretical discussions suggest neither the possibility for a personal adherence nor a practical application. However, what I see vital is a way to understand Nietzsche's ethical challenge—as how I would like to frame it—in the context of how we may make sense of it not as a theoretical musing but as an existential and practical consideration.

What I intend in this paper is to provide a different reading of Nietzsche's ethics grounded on the very experience of danger, arguing that such a disposition is ultimately what is enclosed in the eternal return passage. This paper begins with the backdrop of our contemporary situation from the insights of Peter Sloterdijk and Friedrich Nietzsche, followed by a review of Deleuze's ethics of affirmation. I present this view of Nietzsche's ethics to show the difficulty of articulating its practicality in the face of such a cynical condition. The last section then develops Nietzsche's ethics of danger. I directly borrow this from Tobias Kuehne, yet my discussion expounds this via other insights from Nietzsche's philosophy. As a whole, my discussion of his ethics of danger is my attempt to articulate his ethical theory in a practical sense.

An Ethics of Affirmation in Our Current Predicament

I begin this paper with a characterization of our contemporary culture, forming the backdrop for testing Nietzsche's ethical theory:

¹⁰ See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum Press, 1983), 68.

¹¹ See Michael Chiddo, "Unwritten Futures: Deleuze, Affirmation, and Creative Becoming," in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 36:1 (2022), 87–104, <<https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.36.1.0087>>.

¹² See Alessandro Tomasi, "Nihilism and Creativity in the Philosophy of Nietzsche," in *Minerva: An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, 11 (2007), 153–183, <<http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol11/Nietzsche.pdf>> and Philip John Puszczalowski, "Creativity, Culture, and Genius: Nietzsche's Ethics of the Creative Life" (PhD Dissertation, University of Calgary, Canada, 2016).

What could in fact expire now, what deserves to come to an end, is the period in which a certain rationalist skepticism was able to emerge as a dogmatic power. Under its reign, there was an abundant multiplication of metaphysically unmusical and religiously illiterate people, cooped up in the prefabricated constructions of despiritualization. Unfortunately today we must often count the universities, too, among these constructions— together with their philosophy departments.¹³

Peter Sloterdijk illustrates here our society's cynicism. I wish to read his words in relation to Nietzsche's own insight, telling us that "if modern man had any courage or resolution at all, if he were not merely a subjective creature even in his enmities, he would banish philosophy[.]"¹⁴ Reading these two passages together, one may surmise how Nietzsche's words gain an imperative status against the backdrop of Sloterdijk's characterization. There is a latent danger if the institutions that that ought to spark critical thought might be the very peddlers that hinder the cultivation of such.¹⁵ The danger that presses upon us is that perhaps behind the guise of a theory that is critical of society, we are in fact further promulgating society's decadent conditions. I propose a viable way forward using Nietzsche's philosophy. He notes the German hostility toward the Enlightenment, outlining their emphasis on primitive sensibilities as they "sought to restore the idea of a divine or diabolical nature suffused with ethical and symbolic significance."¹⁶ What Nietzsche identifies here is the emphasis given to emotion (instead of reason) as a reaction to the Enlightenment. Similarly, against the backdrop of a society that seems to have usurped the critical role of reason, an ethical view viable for our context today takes a similar route.

To discuss this further, I draw attention to the last man's condition of which Zarathustra provides a caricature. I agree with Haroon Sheikh's reading, following Francis Fukuyama, that the last man is a figure of the

¹³ Peter Sloterdijk, *After God*, trans. by Ian Alexander Moore (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 206

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. by Daniel Breazealy, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 85.

¹⁵ In another piece, I dwelt on this more and provided a polemic on how there are certain conditions, particularly within the Philippine academe, that might hinder the flourishing of critical thought in the non-Western context. See Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, "The Challenge of Non-Western Discourse in Education: A Polemic on Alternative Discourses," in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 26:3, Special Issue on Philosophy and Education (October 2025): 541–560, <<https://doi.org/10.46992/pijp.26.3.a.10>>.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. by Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 117.

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thymotic drive's absence.¹⁷ The last man in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a personification of a life of utmost bliss, however, his happiness is forged due to a nonchalant experience of modernity. Mark Alfano aptly captures this:

[The last human] has no sense of wonder or curiosity to transfix him with rapt attention; instead, even his inquiries into love, creation, longing and the universe are accompanied by 'blinking'. The last man is overly familiar with people, things and concepts that should only be approached with reverence and terror.¹⁸

The last human trivializes events that ought to have been moments for a reevaluation. This is what is meant by promoting the virtue that makes small.¹⁹ This type of existence in fact is a return to the cynical condition with which I began this section; the last man "blinks, passively going along with life" just as "the easygoing modern individual who spends his time watching television, chatting with friends, and clocking into his job. His life may not be thrilling, but it's also not horrific."²⁰ He does so as a product of cowardice propelled by resentment and brands it as a virtue, fostering a life of mediocrity and envy. This affective experience (or the actual lack thereof) makes life's deep moments shallow and produces lukewarm individuals in the face of the passions. Reading Nietzsche's characterization of the last man, what is striking is the latter's repetitive blinking. Such an action may be considered as an escape from the tragic and a desire to speed up the necessary dialectic movements in life. The last human's repetition is manufactured and not organic. This individual stands as reason's inability to properly act according to one's environment, simply opting for damage control than attempting serious change or, better put, the absence of a *natural* engagement with one's situation. It is a life that has effaced the confrontation of forces within, that has silenced the various drives, that has resigned to "a new small happiness" with the word *new* simply an embellishment for the present just masked to *seem* new.²¹ This last human stands as a reminder of the comforts offered by maintaining the status quo, far from the vulnerability of what life

¹⁷ See Haroon Sheikh, "Nietzsche and the Neoconservatives: Fukuyama's Reply to the Last Man," in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 35/36 (Spring–Autumn 2008), 31.

¹⁸ Mark Alfano, "A Schooling in Contempt: Emotions and the Pathos of Distance," in Paul Katsafanas (ed.), *The Nietzschean Mind* (London: Routledge, 2018), 126.

¹⁹ See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 133–137.

²⁰ Paul Katsafanas, "The Fanatic and the Last Man," in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 53:2 (Autumn 2022), 146.

²¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 135.

entails, of the dangers latent in the eternal return. Life is affirmed yet under the pretext of the modern, cynical condition.

Against this backdrop, I intend to make sense of Nietzsche's ethics, particularly of the possibility of putting his thoughts into action, something I find more viable in my presentation of his ethics of danger in contradistinction to the ethics of affirmation. Yet, necessary first is a review of this reading. Gilles Deleuze maintains a poststructuralist reading of Nietzsche's philosophy, and this way of reading the thinker had a lasting effect upon his own way of philosophizing, something evident even in his later works.²² What is prominent in his Nietzschean reading is the importance of the quantity of forces and the active and reactive qualities.²³ The active force or drive is the desiring of power not in the social Darwinian sense but as the creation of the conditions that affirm existence most expressed in Nietzsche's eternal return.²⁴ In fact, life's perspectival consideration is ultimately brought to the fore when Deleuze equates the human person to that of affirmation.²⁵ The role of affirmation here is the avoidance of "the chain of negation and reproduction through opposition"²⁶ to *ressentiment* and nihilism as opposed to nihilism and is the very experience of the transvaluation of values qua the will to power.²⁷

For Deleuze—supposedly following the theme of philosophizing from Hegel onward—anthropology and ontology form an admixture that cannot easily be separated, and reading his work on Nietzsche leaves one a bit perplexed with how the human person (and Nietzsche's philosophy for that matter) seems to be that open to the role of gambling or wagering. Deleuze cites Nietzsche's own usage of a dice throw to illustrate the outcome of the eternal return.²⁸ Highlighted playfully by Deleuze, the subject of Nietzsche's eternal return is a gambler, and the wage is how life is lived and is to be lived. To win this gamble means not to predict the winning combination but to affirm such a throw. To further explain this, it would be best to turn our attention to the eternal return, better illustrated through

²² See James Mollison, "Deleuze's Nietzschean Mutations: From the Will to Power and the Overman to Desiring-Production and Nomadism," in *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, 16:3 (2022): 428–453, <<https://doi.org/10.3366/dlgs.2022.0485>>.

²³ See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 40ff. and Petra Perry, "Deleuze's Nietzsche," in *boundary 2*, 20:1 (Spring 1993), 175, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/303181>>.

²⁴ Deleuze (and Guattari) brings together Nietzsche and Bergson in his own philosophy later on. Desire becomes a central concern for Deleuze that serves as an indication of what ought to be selected in the return and is created. See Perry, "Deleuze's Nietzsche," 188.

²⁵ See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 183.

²⁶ Perry, "Deleuze's Nietzsche," 179. *Ressentiment* is taken here in its ability to frame elements in reactive oppositional pairs akin to the valuation of the slaves in opposition to that of the masters in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*.

²⁷ See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 71.

²⁸ See *Ibid.*, footnote 23, 202.

Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* since according to the author himself the elementary idea of this very book is the eternal return.²⁹ The eternal return may be likened to the return of chance; we are left with a choice to throw the dice once more, and this throw affirms the necessity. And Deleuze's reference is Zarathustra, who expresses his love for those who play fairly: "I love the one who is ashamed when the dice fall to his fortune and who then asks: am I a cheater?—For he wants to perish."³⁰ The experience that Zarathustra emphasizes here is not the glory of winning but the very embarrassment when one suddenly does since Zarathustra is not like a scholar who plays with "loaded dice" that always favor the individual.³¹ Rather he is a player who opens himself to every possibility of the dice throw.

Deleuze elaborates this further by saying, "It will be replied, in vain, that thrown to chance, the dice do not necessarily produce the winning combination, the double six which brings back the dice throw. This is true, but only insofar as the player did not know how to *affirm* chance from the outset."³² Indeed, players have no knowledge of the outcome of any throw and knowing such invalidates the entire process. Affirmation enters in the very selection of affirming the *chance* of that specific potential outcome. The specificity given to chance is identical in any illustration: the result of the dice throw (craps or hazard), the highest combination of five cards (poker), a hand's proximity to 21 (blackjack) or to nine (baccarat), which pocket the ball falls into (roulette), or ultimately the possible combinations on the screen (slots). For this reason, Zarathustra praises the player who does not rejoice when fortune has favored him. *Maybe the game is rigged?* This is a question that might come one way when suddenly a win is achieved or when a series of wins is experienced.

The reason behind this argument is that winning without doubt resembles the lack of a struggle. Tragedy must necessarily arise in order to create opportunities for nihilism to flourish amidst destructive and creative forces. Returning to Deleuze, affirmation is understood from another perspective:

To affirm is still to evaluate, but to evaluate from the
perspective of a will which enjoys its own difference in
life instead of suffering the pains of the opposition to this

²⁹ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How to Become What you Are*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. by Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 123.

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. by Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

³² Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 26.

life that it has itself inspired. *To affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives.* To affirm is to unburden: not to load life with the weight of higher values, but *to create* new values which are those of life, which make life light and active. There is creation, properly speaking, only insofar as we make use of excess in order to invent new forms of life rather than separating life from what it can do.³³

The human individual for him affirms oneself, similar to the child's affirmation of life in Nietzsche's three metamorphoses. It is the child that takes central stage and not the other characters since the camel rushes into the desert (affirmation in the serve of negation) and the lion negates itself (negation as a power of affirmation).³⁴ The child stands out because of its capability to embody the Dionysian *Yes* and its ability to remain open to struggle and to create. What is ultimately affirmed in the return is that of an active life, and Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche constructs an ethical test of character whether to affirm life and to what degree of affirmation. As I have pointed out, both the camel and the lion affirm, the former though a caricature of what the latter does yet both lack the creative capacity of the child. In sum, the eternal return in the form of life's affirmation takes place at two distinct tables with their respective dice throws: "The dice which are thrown once are the affirmation of *chance*, the combination which they form on falling is the affirmation of *necessity*."³⁵ Deleuze thus brings together chance and necessity in reading Nietzsche's ethics.

A difficulty in this reading of Nietzsche's ethics is contained by the very idea of Nietzsche's eternal return as "the selection of the active life, leaving behind the reactive life" since in "the 'thought' of the eternal return, the one who is 'able to will' wills or 'selects' life[.]"³⁶ Against the backdrop of contemporary society, as figured above, it is quite challenging to simply have the outlook of life's affirmation. Although Nietzsche's ethics is widely regarded as a view that centers on power and strength, the very practicality of this purview of affirmation is obvious in that it only is appropriate to those who have the capacity to select or to will, those whose spirit is strong enough to affirm necessity and chance. Yet, honestly, we ought to consider the situation in which we do not possess such a disposition: is Nietzsche's ethics

³³ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁴ See *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁵ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 26.

³⁶ Paolo A. Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deleuzian Introduction to Nietzsche's Ethics and Ontology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 46.

still worth considering? I want to answer this positively, but doing so seems unfeasible via an ethics of affirmation.

Ethics of danger

Coming from the reading above, this section moves beyond it by focusing on the importance of danger for a more practical understanding of Nietzsche's ethics. The way I want to frame Nietzsche's ethics is through the danger that is present in our lives, something that Tobias Kuehne identifies in Nietzsche's philosophy. Kuehne attempts to construct a coherent reading of Nietzsche's ethics around the idea of danger. This he identifies in the early works in Nietzsche's confrontation with tragedy and the creation of seeming archetypes (the Rousseauian, the Goethean, and the Schopenhauerian) of the danger of succumbing to shortcomings or achieving one's full potential.³⁷ Likewise, the free spirit in the middle works embodies danger in relation to "established dogmas by incessantly trying to dismantle metaphysics" and also "their underlying assumptions of constancy (*HH* I:21), the applicability of generals to particulars (*HH* I:19), the separateness of identities (*HH* I:1), and truth as correspondence (*HH* I:11)."³⁸ What is essential to this reading of Nietzsche's ethics is danger's significance, which Kuehne identifies as an understudied aspect of his philosophy.

To better understand this, it is imperative to ascertain the role of danger here. Danger is the "threat of unexpected decline, dissolution, or the destruction of a previously stable structure[,] and that "it is only in this dangerous space that a *genuine* ethics can even emerge for him."³⁹ On the one hand, Kuehne characterizes the experience of nihilism in which the very structure of one's own valuation devalues itself, leaving the individual in a desperate state of exhaustion;⁴⁰ while on the other, an intimation of Nietzschean philosophy in spatial term is suggested through the *dangerous space* he describes from which ethics may emerge. These two aspects I identify in the fourth instance of the eternal return:

The heaviest weight. — What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you

³⁷ See Tobias Kuehne, "Nietzsche's Ethics of Danger," in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 49:1 (Spring 2018), 87, <<https://doi.org/10.5325/jnietstud.49.1.0078>>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 80–81.

⁴⁰ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. by Rüdiger Bittner, trans. by Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 146 and Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 11.

will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this again and innumerable times again?’ would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?⁴¹

As I mentioned in the introduction, the way the eternal return passage is interpreted directs how one reads the entirety of Nietzsche’s philosophy. What must be immediately clear in reading this passage is that Nietzsche presents the eternal return not to soothe the distress caused by nihilism but the very obverse. An understandable consequence of this is the experience of nihilism, and it is precisely because of this that Nietzsche presents the eternal return to exacerbate it in the hope not of an absolute affirmation—which might be the expected or assumed outcome—but actually to constantly expose oneself to this vital realization.⁴² He seeks to

⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. by Bernard Williams, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 193–194.

⁴² Above, I mentioned how Deleuze has a binary reading of life between affirmation and negation, manifested respectively as active and reactive forces. However, there is a need to go beyond this binary distinction (See Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), note 24, 154). For Deleuze, it is solely the masters who were affirmative in the proper sense through their descriptive valuation while the slaves were reactive, inverting the valuations from descriptive (good-bad) to evaluative (good-evil). Yet, in this mythical account, Nietzsche suggests an interbreeding among nobles and slaves, making life a constant tug between active and reactive forces, which he penned elsewhere as the “hybrid mixed man of Europe” as the person of modern ideas and dressed up in a classical or Christian attire. See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 87 and 113–114. Any sense of the pureness of valuation is impossible, and tied to this, an impossibility of a consistent Deleuzian reading of Nietzsche’s

aggravate such an emotion by forcing us to confront ourselves, seeking not the experience's preservation but its overcoming.⁴³ Aligned to this is Kuehne's characterization of nihilism that locates the individual in a desperate state of exhaustion. The eternal return is a terrifying idea—the section aptly titled *the heaviest weight*—as we understand the gravity of this idea more. The return is revealed to no other person but our very self; the return's success rests ultimately on one's capacity to make sense of it and to pay attention to what indeed returns eternally—especially those that are most trivial.⁴⁴ It is not simply the return of spectacular events but even those that are most mundane.

Anyone reading this passage of the eternal return might immediately focus on the first half, i.e., the demon's message, but I argue that more attention should be given to the remaining part of the passage. Nietzsche illustrates here two specific responses to the eternal return's message. The first is when the individual would “throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon” while the second is an answer to the demon, “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine!” I contend that the more appropriate response is the first in that the second presents a latent form of veneration not of the eternal return's very message but of the messenger. The thought of the return changes or destroys an individual, and if one ought to realize the destruction of one's own hollow ideas, the proper response is not to treat the messenger as a new deity but rather to be enraged by this greatest weight of departing from one's own godhead.

For this reason, I position this enraged attitude further away from the reading of Nietzsche's ethics as one of affirmation and more properly as an ethics of danger or of being vulnerable to such. The reason is quite straightforward: *affirmation* today is a buzzword in popular culture, engulfed by contemporary slogans such as *#DailyAffirmation* that proliferate on social media. Affirmation is taken on as motivational, a manifestation (in the sense of the word's current usage in social media) of better things, falsely equated to sheer bliss and the eradication of pain that reduces affirmation to a static

philosophy vis-à-vis actual lived experiences. For Deleuze, Nietzsche challenges each to become affirmative in facing life since the contrary is what characterizes the current nihilistic and decadent age and what is more common. Instead of affirmation, the forces' reactivity abounds, caused not through the power of the reactive will but due to the will's contagion and the triumph of reactivity over activity with life's reduction to adaptation and regulation (See Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. by Anne Boyman (New York: MIT Press, 2001), 75).

⁴³ See Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 116–121 and Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, 49 and 109.

⁴⁴ See Henri Lefebvre, *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, or, The Realm of Shadows*, trans. by David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2020), 173–174. I find this insight from Lefebvre quite remarkable, obvious in Nietzsche's mention of “this spider and this moonlight between the trees” and the shift of the message to “and even this moment and I myself.”

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<https://doi.org/10.25138/19.3.a3>

https://www.kritike.org/journal/special_issue_2026a/rennesland_january2026.pdf

ISSN 1908-7330



state. Yet, Nietzsche reminds us that life is most dangerous when things go easy for us,⁴⁵ and I add, when we want things to just be easy for us. I argue that this wrong sense of equivalence totalizes entertainment as society's defining character.⁴⁶ This causes the eternal return to be a caricature of self-help pamphlets that unknowingly reiterate Nietzsche's very words—"What doesn't kill me makes me stronger."⁴⁷—and invokes a cynical approach akin to moderation than a surplus of indulgence.⁴⁸ I argue that Nietzsche presents the eternal return to exacerbate any idols remaining in one's mind, not to throw humanity into despair but to push toward an embrace of danger.

Turning to the second aspect, the spatial dimension is disclosed as the eternal return begins with the demon chasing one to his loneliest loneliness. This depiction that brings together emotion and space is the stillest hour when the demon announces the noontide of the idols' de-deification and where that individual is most vulnerable. The experience of vulnerability signifies a missing aspect of our lives or something unfulfilled.⁴⁹ Vulnerability is an essential aspect of an ethics of danger, and the eternal return makes one vulnerable to the past—to the inability to change what has transpired—yet it also makes one vulnerable to the future, to what still *can* and *will* happen. This futural vulnerability opens us to the possibility of changing ourselves in a radical sense to the point that "we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not comprehend ourselves, we have to misunderstand ourselves."⁵⁰ This vulnerability ought to make us strangers to ourselves instead of merely affirming who we are since the futural aspect makes us realize the impossibility to return to antique virtue as reigning morality is proven false.⁵¹ One is chased by the demon toward one's utmost solitude, wherein we are strangers to ourselves. It is here where we confront ourselves of who we are and how we have been living. As a consequence of this encounter, the

⁴⁵ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), §266, 276

⁴⁶ See Byung-Chul Han, *Good Entertainment: A Deconstruction of the Western Passion Narrative*, trans. by Adrian Nathan West (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), §10.

⁴⁷ Cf. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 157 and Doug Waterman, "The Story Behind the Song: Kelly Clarkson, "Stronger"," in *American Songwriter* (updated 18 October 2021), <<https://americansongwriter.com/stronger-kelly-clarkson-behind-the-song/>>.

⁴⁸ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, trans. by Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 16.

⁴⁹ See Justin Remhof, "Nietzsche on Loneliness, Self-Transformation, and the Eternal Recurrence," in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 49:2 (2018), 195, <<https://philarchive.org/archive/REMNOL>>.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morality*, 3.

⁵¹ See Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 67–72.

individual is compelled to “grow more *honest towards oneself*.”⁵² Honesty might be considered a peculiar trait in Nietzschean philosophy, considering the enormous premium given to questioning truth, yet this is providentially a key aspect in Kuehne's reading of Nietzsche's ethics.

Kuehne underscores the connection between the free spirit's experience of danger and its “defining characteristic is his unswerving commitment to intellectual honesty (*Redlichkeit*), that is, his commitment not to deceive others or himself.”⁵³ An individual's honesty is tied to the truth about oneself as a human person away from its own animality⁵⁴ that is believed in or communicated. Yet what is the message that one ought to be honest about? I answer this by turning to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in which Nietzsche says “was geliebt werden kann am Menschen, das ist, dass er ein Übergang und ein Untergang ist.”⁵⁵ This sentence has been rendered differently in the English publications, primarily depending on how the pairs *Übergang/Übergehen* and *Untergang/Untergehen* are translated. What can be loved in man is that he is “a *transition* and a *destruction*” (Alexander Tille, 1896), “an over-going and a down-going” (Thomas Common in 1909), “an overture and a going under” (Walter Kaufmann, 1954), “a going-across and a down-going” (R.J. Hollingdale in 1961), “a transition and a sunset” (Stanley Appelbaum in 2004), “an over-going and a going under” (Clancy Martin in 2005), “a going-over and a going-under” (Graham Parkes in 2005), and “a *crossing over* and a *going under*” (Adrian del Caro in 2006).⁵⁶

The more poetic renditions of *Übergang* as Kaufmann's *overture*, Tille's and Appelbaum's *transition* and *Untergang* as Tille's *destruction* exhibit more the tensions within the human person. Each individual, in all of one's

⁵² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. by Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 102–103.

⁵³ Kuehne, “Nietzsche's Ethics of Danger,” 92.

⁵⁴ Nietzsche suggests a rupture between the human person and its evolutionary past (§31), associating our errors in moral judgement to such an animal past (§102) and suggests the human person's ultimate deanimalization (§106). See Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 23, 59, and 107.

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 12.

⁵⁶ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Alexander Tille (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), <<https://archive.org/details/thusspakezaralt00nietuoft/page/n4/mode/2up>>; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Thomas Common (Munich: Doppeltext, 1909); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1966); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Classics, 1961); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Stanley Appelbaum (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Clancy Martin (New York: Barnes&Nobles Classics, 2005); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). All emphases maintained.

greatness, is a crossing-over similar to a rope tied between animal and the *Übermensch*.⁵⁷ An individual person is a going across, a crossing over, a transition to reach the *Übermensch*. *Übergang* literally translates as above-going—going beyond/across or passing by or over—thus signifying a form of transition or migration, a crosswalk or even a checkpoint. The human person is a wanderer who tackles nature experimentally.⁵⁸ We ourselves are inklings of the greatness to come—an introduction to this future, an invitation to become it, and an opening to its eventual realization. We travel to realize this, and the journey requires a form of ignorance that requires a need to forget or to set certain things aside that would hinder such a voyage.

Conversely, *Untergang* is literally translated as under- or down going that conveys destruction, decline, and ruin through the symbolism of the setting sun. It is the dusk that anticipates not just twilight but also the eventual daybreak. It is against this backdrop that we ought to understand how the metaphorical translations of Tille and Appelbaum, either as *destruction* or *sunset*, convey the sense of being one's very own cause of destruction, and destruction is necessary to create a new type of morality and to transition to higher states. While the above translation would point to how the human person is ultimately an overture of one's capacities, one realizes at the same time that this likewise discloses our very failures and weaknesses. The terror that awaits each at the noontide of morality's revaluation is this very realization of the truth of who we are. We are inklings of the greatness to come but also of our ultimate destruction depending on how we react to the conditions we find ourselves in.⁵⁹

I assert that this is the realization when one is in that loneliest loneliness. It is where and when one fathoms how one is one's own destruction. To put it in spatial terms, the realization of the death of any reactive ontology is the realization of the emptiness of the person's interior. It is an emptiness in lieu of the presence of a dogmatic center or directive ideal. This emptiness causes an individual's life journey to constantly experience further threats of any value's sudden decline or devaluation. At the same time, however, this realization of destruction is likewise an overture of greatness: the individual has the capacity to live as a free spirit, having broken free from nihilism and striving not to be subjected by any imposing ideal. This condition is what is offered by the child at the end of the

⁵⁷ See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 7.

⁵⁸ See Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 185.

⁵⁹ A provocative idea Nietzsche provides in §452 of *Daybreak*. He figures how impatience leads both the active and contemplative individual to act, leading them to a terrain antithetical to their original position. The journey changes the individual, and an initial defect makes them into a genius. See Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 190.

metamorphosis,⁶⁰ embodying an innocence to play the game of life anew. Through such an ordeal, one is led to actively forget the present and embrace a second innocence of becoming by accepting the whole of reality albeit maintaining a healthy skepticism of the whole.⁶¹ The challenge of the eternal return stands as a test of a sort for this sort of practice allowing a view of what it means to be fully human without any dichotomy.⁶² It is a challenge to become a child of second innocence and to love the world anew, seeing the world afresh similar to Zarathustra's perilous descent from the cave.

Concluding Remarks

In discussing the last man, Paul Katsafanas raises a thought-provoking question, "Why not simply go along with things and enjoy what life brings to you? Why not take it easy?"⁶³ This is the persistent question in our society today. My argument is that what we ultimately need is not simply an affirmation of life but a realization of how replete with danger it is. The shift from affirmation to danger in this paper is to further an understanding of goodness in Nietzsche's philosophy as not a teleological end but "is expressed through the movement of becoming itself."⁶⁴ The eventual test of strength in Nietzsche's philosophy is not the degree to which we are able to fashion our own ideals and live in peace but our capacity to bear the unfortunate experiences that are experienced alongside the favorable ones — and to will their return. One gains strength not through the avoidance of these errors but through their confrontation. The failure of Nietzsche's ethics is when an individual is unable to overcome the experience of the return or, to follow Deleuze's image earlier, fails to learn how to play the game. Yet, one's focus is not simply of the affirmation of chance and necessity but how these experiences make one precisely vulnerable.

In face of the crudest form of nihilism through the eternal return, Nietzsche situates the experience when one is compelled to confront oneself and makes the decision: Am I willing to play this game again? Am I willing to lose? What am I willing to give up to play again if it is to return? Lastly, if the Eternal Return is indeed to be taken seriously, one ought to become someone entirely new because of the dangers one is exposed to in such a game. The game is the same but entirely new, and one constantly needs to

⁶⁰ See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 16–17.

⁶¹ See Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, 109.

⁶² See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 267–269 and *Daybreak*, 304.

⁶³ Katsafanas, "The Fanatic and the Last Man," 146.

⁶⁴ Alex Obrigewitsch, "Nietzsche's Ethics of the Future: Creative Valuation and the Life of Self-Development," in *The Agonist*, 13:1–2 (Fall 2019), 88, <<https://doi.org/10.33182/agon.v13i2.1667>>.

open up to the dangers associated with this wager. To be open to the dangers laid out is not something one should shy away from but should accept fully—after all, we get our complete bliss when we are in most danger.⁶⁵

Against the backdrop of a society that seems to embrace if not further strengthen its cynical condition, Nietzsche's ethics of danger stands as a viable way forward. What is more fruitful is to learn how to make oneself more vulnerable to the return, rather than a mere affirmation of the experience presented to us by the eternal return. The challenge of the eternal return ought to make us more truthful to ourselves of how either our destruction or perfection lies in our own hands, and how we respond in the face of this return—either by affirming this new deity or the affective display of rage—determines how vulnerable we have made ourselves to the challenge. My argument in this paper was through the specific realization of how the ultimate challenge of the return is the experience of vulnerability, and that the ethical challenge serves its purpose when it allows us to experience what it means to become vulnerable to our previous actions and make us vulnerable to any further ones. In a practical sense, society's cynicism proliferates because of the lack of any sense of vulnerability and our constant truth-telling activity. This translates to the need to experience the rage prompted by realizing how our decadent conditions are caused by none other than ourselves. Yet at the same time, its change lies in our hands. Instead of simply affirming my condition, allowing myself to experience how vulnerable I am to what is happening creates a clearer situation in which I am drawn to select and act for myself and my overcoming.

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⁶⁵ See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 116.

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