



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**Nietzsche's rejection of stoicism. A reinterpretation of Amor fati**  
Gaasterland, H.L.J.

**Citation**

Gaasterland, H. L. J. (2017, March 1). *Nietzsche's rejection of stoicism. A reinterpretation of Amor fati*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/46214>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/46214>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/46214> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Gaasterland, H.L.J.

**Title:** Nietzsche's rejection of stoicism. A reinterpretation of Amor fati

**Issue Date:** 2017-03-01

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis investigates Nietzsche's reception of Stoicism, and whether there is evidence for Stoicism influencing Nietzsche's conception of *amor fati*. Although secondary literature has made it seem plausible that *amor fati* carries traces of Stoicism, pointing to the conceptual parallels between the love of fate and life 'in accordance with nature', this historical study shows that this claim is unlikely at best.

The outcomes of this research are important both for a better understanding of the Nietzschean Stoa-reception and for a more complete understanding of *amor fati*. With respect to the first, this thesis has uncovered certain patterns that may potentially turn out to be relevant for other cases of Nietzsche's reception. Although he is notoriously inconsistent when it comes to explicit analyses of several philosophers and philosophies, combining remarks of sympathy with fiercely critical ones, this study shows that Nietzsche's Stoa-reception conceals a certain logic. Summarizing, it has the following four characteristics.

First, this thesis shows that Stoicism is of importance to Nietzsche in a variety of ways. In chapter 3 three kinds of perspectives on Stoicism are distinguished: Stoicism is discussed as a certain school in late Antiquity with a historical role to play, especially in relation to Heraclitus and Christianity; Stoicism is perceived as a (moral) school arguing for the benefits of a certain attitude, especially concerning emotions, the advantages of which can and should be examined for Nietzsche's age; and finally, the Stoics (Epictetus in particular) are approached as partners in a dialogue on a certain topic: pity, in this case. Related to these perspectives we have observed moreover how the different elements within Stoicism are addressed selectively: Nietzsche picks out the aspects of Stoicism that are of interest to him and ignores the rest. We have seen this in chapter 3 as well, where we noticed how Nietzsche rarely discusses Stoic logic, but pays substantial attention to Stoic ethics, which involves in particular the attitude to emotions. We have also seen that the context in which Nietzsche adheres to this strategy is one that is utterly un-Stoic; the context of exposing all metaphysical and moral assumptions as merely human, all too human fictions and projections rather betrays his identity as a modern thinker.

Secondly, some (but not all) of the recurrent characteristics Nietzsche ascribes to the Stoics within these perspectives are in line with the general approach of 19<sup>th</sup> Century scholars to Stoicism. That is, under influence of especially Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Zeller, Stoics were perceived as dishonest philosophers, putting forward an ineffective and petrifying strategy for dealing with emotions. It was assumed that as a philosophical school Stoicism could only thrive in a decadent and insecure age. Yet, as we have seen, Nietzsche's suspicion towards Christianity as a doctrine of decadence causes him to reconsider what these scholars took to be the weaknesses of Stoicism. Nietzsche speculates in 1888 that Stoic asceticism may be regarded as a 'Hemmschuh-Moral', which, in slowing down the rise of Christianity, must be regarded as something admirable. What is more, the early texts, too, contain passages revealing an appreciation of the Stoic strategies for withdrawal and calming down.

Thirdly, there is a development in Nietzsche's assessment, outlined in chapters 3 and 4. I have described how Nietzsche's accusation that the Stoic suppression of emotions results in a form of petrification (*FW* 306) is the outcome of a process that starts out more sympathetically; earlier texts (cf. *UB* II 5 and *M* 133) associate Stoicism with 'masculinity' and 'loyalty', characteristics that disappear from Nietzsche's texts from approximately 1880 onwards. This development should be placed in the context of a growing awareness of a conflict between the will to truth and life itself. The more Nietzsche becomes aware of the value of drives and emotions for the pursuit of knowledge, the less attractive the Stoic therapy of calmness becomes for him. This thesis, therefore, offers a correction of the widely accepted assumption (adopted by Martha Nussbaum, Michael Ure and Keith Ansell-Pearson) that Nietzsche adheres to Stoicism mainly in the context of finding a therapy for happiness. Also in texts written after 1881, especially in *GM* and *JGB*, the context in which Nietzsche engages with Stoicism is epistemological rather than therapeutic; again the Stoic dishonesty and ineffective and petrifying method is discussed (whereby *GM* III explicitly memorises how Nietzsche was previously drawn to this strategy<sup>789</sup>).

Fourthly, in order for the above development to be traced, some sensitivity was needed in order to discern the implicit references to Stoicism. It is possible in this regard to distinguish between three different kinds of references; 1. those that explicitly mention 'Stoicism' or refer to one of the Stoics by name – some clearly in a critical tone, others more appreciatively; 2. those that refer to Stoicism in an implicit manner, by only mentioning or discussing typically Stoic notions; 3. those that consider ideas, concepts or doctrines that are strongly reminiscent of Stoicism. A good example of the second kind of references is *MA* I book 1, the final aphorisms of which contain several formulations that are reminiscent of Stoic notions. Interestingly, these allusions can be found in the same book that explicitly rejects several of the traditional Stoic doctrines. This suggests not only that Nietzsche is very selective in his approach of Stoicism, as we noticed already; it also implies that Nietzsche's reception of Stoicism contains a combination of explicit rejection of (certain aspects of) Stoic doctrines and implicit but operational appropriations of modified versions of (other aspects of) Stoicism. The suspicion that Nietzsche is selective also in his ways of evaluating Stoicism is confirmed in two examples of the third kind we have come across: the doctrine of the eternal return and the case of 'Cosmic Stoicism'. Although all explicit references to Stoicism surrounding these doctrines imply that Nietzsche did not associate them with Stoicism (as is the case explicitly for the eternal recurrence in chapter 2.2 and 2.3, where we saw how Nietzsche distances himself from Stoicism in *EH* (GT) 3, and more implicitly for 'Cosmic Stoicism' in chapter 2.4), the possibility that Nietzsche implicitly takes over some modified forms of Stoicism for his own purposes while explicitly denying or hiding this strategy cannot be excluded. The similarities between Stoicism and Nietzsche's immanent and deterministic worldview may be coincidental and traceable to other sources (Heraclitus, for instance), but may also betray a silent and selective adoption of Stoicism. This possibility, even if we can only speculate, may be investigated further as an approach exemplifying Nietzsche's peculiar form of reception.

---

<sup>789</sup> *GM* III 24 5.399-400: 'Ich kenne dies Alles vielleicht zu sehr aus der Nähe: jene verehrenswürdige Philosophen-Enthaltbarkeit, zu der ein solcher Glaube verpflichtet, jener Stoicismus des Intellekts, der sich das Nein zuletzt eben so streng verbietet wie das Ja, jenes Stehenbleiben-Wollen vor dem Thatsächlichen, dem factum brutum, jener Fatalismus der „petits-faits“.'

Although it cannot be proven that Nietzsche was or was not inspired by Stoicism when writing down the words '*amor fati*' for the first time in 1881, it is established in this thesis that this moment takes place in a period in which Nietzsche is disappointed in Stoicism. The background of Nietzsche's disappointment is, I claim, the same that informs the coining of the words '*amor fati*'. It involves Nietzsche's growing awareness of the will to truth as a '*Leidenschaft der Erkenntnis*'. Possessed with this unusual passion Nietzsche comes to consider himself as the first individual who can experiment with new perspectives without perishing. This dangerous experiment should be seen as a first step towards a future of new species. Importantly, it requires a heroic endurance of pain and suffering for the sake of extending the boundaries of knowledge, and therefore dismisses the Stoic strategy of cooling down painful passions.

Finally, *amor fati* should not be considered as a static concept. It undergoes a significant development from 1881/1882 to 1888. Both the meaning of *amor* and of *fatum* change: whereas *amor* in 1888 is associated with total affirmation, it has connotations of greed and erotic desire in 1881/1882. *Fatum* is a concept of totality in 1888, and explicitly includes the history of the universe in which Nietzsche sees himself playing a decisive role. In affirming totality he thereby affirms himself as a piece of fate. In 1881/1882, *fatum* should rather be seen as a 'local' phenomenon. *Amor fati* as it is introduced in *FW* 276 falls short of total affirmation and is presented as something not easily achieved, but holding the promise of complete affirmation for the future. The *amor fati* of 1881/1882 should be situated in the context of Nietzsche's growing interest in physiology, I claim. Since Nietzsche approaches the '*Leidenschaft der Erkenntnis*' as organismically related to the enhancement of the human species, *amor fati* must be seen not as a therapy designed for all human beings in order to become happy, but as one that is helpful only for those few who, like Nietzsche, struggle to come to terms with being a 'thinker'.

