

A STUDY OF THE SELF IN NIETZSCHE'S FATALISTIC UNIVERSE OF
ETERNAL RECURRENCE

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ABSTRACT

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The doctrine of eternal recurrence is not only an aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, but a notion that structures the base of his philosophy. The doctrine is analyzed by many interpreters in various ways. The cosmological and the ethical-existential approaches to the doctrine are at the very base wrong. The doctrine's impact cannot be adequately understood in these terms. Besides, the doctrine of eternal recurrence has multiple problems within it, problems which can be solved if the doctrine is understood and analyzed properly. In this thesis it was suggested, following Lawrence J. Hatab and Pierre Klossowski, that the doctrine should be read in terms of *mimetic literality*. And in this way the reading and the understanding of the doctrine lead the *self* to a dissolution which solves many of the problems within the doctrine.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Eternal Recurrence, Self, Fatalism, Becoming.

ÖZ

NIETZSCHE’NİN YAZGISAL BENGİ DÖNÜŞ EVRENİNDE BİR KENDİ ÇALIŞMASI

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Bengi dönüş doktrini Nietzsche felsefesinin sadece bir parçasını teşkil etmez, aynı zamanda onun temelini de oluşturan bir nosyondur. Doktrin, birçok yorumcu tarafından çeşitli şekillerde yorumlanmıştır. Kozmolojik ve etik-varoluşsal yaklaşımlar temelinden yanlıştır. Doktrinin gücü bu yaklaşımlarla doğru anlaşılammaktadır. Bengi dönüş doktrini, içinde birçok sorun barındırmaktadır ve bu sorunlar, doktrin doğru anlaşılır ve analiz edilirse çözülebilirler. Bu tezde, Lawrence J. Hatab ve Pierre Klossowski takip edilerek doktrinin *mimetik literal* biçimde okunmasının gerekliliği vurgulanmıştır. Bu şekilde okunan ve anlanan doktrin, *Kendiyi* bir çözünmeye maruz bırakır ki bu da doktrin içerisindeki birçok sorunu çözmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nietzsche, Bengi Dönüş, Kendi, Yazgı, Oluş.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of eternal recurrence, maybe the most striking articulation of Nietzsche, is directly linked with essential notions in his philosophy, such as *amor fati*, *Übermensch*, becoming, and fatalism. It is also articulated by some writers (such as Löwith and Heidegger) that the doctrine is related to the notion of will to power. I believe that the doctrine is not only linked to other notions in Nietzsche's philosophy; it directly constitutes the core. Interpreting this doctrine in this work, I tried to shed light on the doctrine's meaning and importance for us and for the philosophy of Nietzsche.

There are several places in Nietzsche's writings where he explicitly mentions or alludes to what has come to be known as his doctrine of eternal recurrence. It appears in various passages in his work but those which are worthy of close attention are found in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, such as "On the Vision and the Riddle," "Yes and Amen Song"; in *The Will to Power* especially in the fragments between 1053 and 1066; and in *Gay Science*. The excerpt that is most often referred to and cited when speaking of this "doctrine" is from *Gay Science*, the infamous "The Heaviest Weight." I think it is the right point to begin.

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 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 and over 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 you 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 fort his ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?¹

It is a striking thought in its core. One might consider the common experience *déjà-vu* but in fact what Nietzsche is speaking of here is by no means something like *déjà vu*.² Of course there are many questions and points that come to mind such as “What recurs? How exactly does it recur?” The first question that someone confronted with this thought tends to ask is “Will I remember my previous selves?” and if not, then “What difference does it really make?” or more importantly “How can Nietzsche even talk about it?” “Is he putting it forth as a claim about a cosmological fact about the world?” In relation to the question “What difference does it make if I don’t remember the recurrences?” another fundamental question that arises concerns *the impact* of the doctrine: “What...if the [doctrine] is true?”³ Does it then have normative implications concerning how I should live my life? Or does it have some other

¹ F. W. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, Adrian Del Caro, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) § 341. From now on the book will be referred to as *GS*, and § referred to fragment numbers.

² I define *Déjà vu* as a feeling that the moment you are experiencing has been experienced by you before, and I think, as a person who experiences *déjà vu* time to time, this definition is adequate enough for our purposes. It can be experienced in another time of your life or it may be experienced in your dreams but if it is a remembrance of a pre-occurred life, it cannot be viewed as a proof of the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Firstly, it is not a remembrance as we think of a remembrance; it is just a weird feeling. Namely, we do not remember our pre-occurred life or the moment of the *déjà vu*. Secondly, if it were to be a remembrance, the situation would seem awkward: suppose that I experience a *déjà vu* and it is the remembrance of the pre-occurred life of me, then I must have experienced the same *déjà vu* in that life too at that certain point in time corresponding to this present *déjà vu*. But I do not remember experiencing *déjà vu*; I remember experiencing the instant. If *déjà vu* were related to eternal recurrence, the experience itself would carry in itself the feeling of *déjà vu* whereas I do not remember the *déjà vu*. Therefore either in that pre-occurred life, I did not experience a *déjà vu*, and this makes the pre-occurrence different from the present one (not numerically identical, which I discussed in the Chapter 4 in terms of personal identity), or I remember something that takes place in my life time whether it be a dream or a lived fact.

³ K. Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, Translated by C. F. Wallraff, F. J. Schmitz, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1965) p. 359.

transformative effect on me? Nietzsche certainly seems to have thought so. In this thesis, I tried to formulate a coherent account of the doctrine that answers these questions.

As mentioned above, there are many passages in Nietzsche's texts that put the doctrine plainly before us. The book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* contains these kinds of entries too. In the third part of the book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in the part entitled "On the Vision and the Riddle" Zarathustra, the teacher of *Übermensch*⁴ and of eternal recurrence,⁵ describes a vision he saw. In the vision, there is the dwarf to whom Nietzsche says:

"See this gateway, dwarf!"... "It has two faces. Two paths come together here; no one has yet walked them to the end.

This long lane back: it lasts an eternity. And that long lane outward — that is another eternity.

They contradict each other, these paths; they blatantly offend each other —and here at this gateway is where they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed at the top: 'Moment.'

But whoever were to walk one of them further —and ever further and ever on: do you believe, dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?"⁶

Zarathustra then states that from the gateway backwards is an eternity. Everything has passed eternally before, and the moment is included too. The moment he stands with the dwarf is already happened. He then goes on:

⁴ F. W. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Translated by A. Del Caro, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 5. From now on the book will be referred to as *Zarathustra*.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 177.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 125.

And this slow spider that creeps in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things —must not all of us have been here before?

—And return and run in that other lane, outward, before us, in this long, eerie lane —must we not return eternally?—”⁷

It can be seen from both passages that the doctrine of eternal recurrence is declared. In the part “Yes and Amen Song,” too, we see the doctrine is repeated as a chorus.

While the allusions to eternal recurrence in *Zarathustra* sound rather poetic, in *The Will to Power*, we find entries (entries 1053 to 1066, in particular) that seem to touch upon the cosmological side of the doctrine and even attempt to construct a proof for eternal recurrence as a cosmological doctrine. However, as is well-known, *The Will to Power* was published after Nietzsche’s death. Nietzsche himself never published a proof for the doctrine; most probably he did not consider himself proficient enough to publish a proof. I analyzed this issue in Chapter 2.

There is evidence that Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence contains traces of earlier thinkers. Although it would be trivializing Nietzsche to argue that the doctrine of eternal recurrence is simply taken in by him from earlier thinkers, it can be stated that some of the earlier thinkers have had an influence on him. He himself even acknowledges that he saw the thought in earlier thinkers⁸ although he also says that the thought has first struck him in Sils Maria in 1881. He says:

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁸ F. W. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Translated by W. Kaufmann, R. J. Hollingdale, (New York: Random House, 1967) § 1066. From now on the book was referred as *WP*, and § referred to fragment numbers.

Now I shall relate the history of *Zarathustra*. The fundamental conception of this work, the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable, belongs in August 1881: it was penned on a sheet with the notation underneath, “6000 feet beyond man and time.” That day I was walking through the woods along the lake Silvaplana; at a powerful pyramidal rock not far from Surlei I stopped. It was then that this idea came to me.⁹

It can be claimed that Nietzsche, of course, had read about such earlier ideas as a philologist; however, Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence is radically different from those of earlier thinkers both in terms of its foundation and in terms of its consequences. In this sense we may also believe that in Sils Maria, actually, the doctrine, as it is, struck him. The doctrine has many dimensions and important implications for Nietzsche’s philosophy in light of which similar ideas in earlier thinkers can only be said to have left a predisposing impression on Nietzsche, nothing more.

Almost everyone who is familiar with the works of Nietzsche could have read about how Nietzsche was fond of Heraclitus. Some thinkers, such as Deleuze, may claim that he adopted the idea of becoming from Heraclitus and used it to formulate eternal recurrence. Although I am totally against the view that Nietzsche treats the doctrine of eternal recurrence as a by-product and a function of his theory of ‘becoming,’ and not a foundational notion, I am pretty sure that Nietzsche was affected by Heraclitus. He says that

The doctrine of the “eternal recurrence,” i.e., of the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things —this doctrine of *Zarathustra might* in the end have been thought already by Heraclitus. At least the Stoics, who inherited almost all their ideas from Heraclitus, show traces of it.¹⁰

⁹ Nietzsche in N. Nabais, *Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, Translated by M. Earl, (London: Continuum, 2006) p. 181.

¹⁰ Nietzsche in W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974) p. 317.

George J. Stack¹¹ points out that Nietzsche is also familiar with the poet Hölderlin and surely read the following passages from “The Death of Empedocles”:

There will they open the book of destiny for you.
Go! Fear nothing! Everything returns.
And what will happen is already completed.¹²

It can be said that Empedocles’ idea is the idea of reincarnation while Nietzsche’s has nothing to do with it. But the idea of Empedocles is somehow stimulating. I can say that Nietzsche never, anywhere, implies a kind of reincarnation like that of Empedocles’ but the idea could have served as a starting point.

Further, Nietzsche is also aware of the fact that Lucretius¹³ mentioned such notions. Lucretius, in *De Rerum Natura*, argues that

...the sum total of indestructible atoms is extensive, but finite. Death involves the dispersion of the atomic elements comprising individuals, but not their destruction. It is possible...that the material components of an individual entity could ‘reassemble’ in time and produce the same individual again.”¹⁴

It can be seen from this passage that Lucretius’ notion is materialistic and atomistic¹⁵ while Nietzsche is not even sympathetic to material atomism, and

¹¹ G. J. Stack, ‘Eternal Recurrence Again,’ *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1984)

¹² Hölderlin in *Ibid*, p. 243.

¹³ According to Stack, Nietzsche studied Lucretius between 1867 and 1868. (*Ibid*, p. 244.)

¹⁴ Lucretius in *Ibid*, p. 244.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

therefore mechanism. Yet, the doctrine of eternal recurrence, as it appears in *The Will to Power* 1066, can be said to somewhat smell of Lucretius:

If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force —and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless— it follows that, in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations.¹⁶

Another writer Nietzsche possibly read about is Lange. Lange says, in one passage that within the “‘infinity of the worlds,’ it is possible that ‘the whole series of possibilities’ is somewhere in actual existence.”¹⁷ Lange suggests, here, that the repetition or recurrence of entities and a discussion about the entry 1066’s likeness in terms of series can be made possible here but yet, it is simply a similarity not an intellectual likeness. In another passage Lange quotes from Louis Blanqui:

The idea that everything possible is somewhere and at some time realized in the universe, and, in fact, has often been realized, and that as an inevitable consequence...of the absolute infinity of the universe...of the finite and everywhere constant number of elements, whose possible combinations must also be finite.¹⁸

Here, too, it is stressed that there is “an infinity of worlds.” Nietzsche would never agree with such a thesis since this thesis eliminates the “force centers” Nietzsche speaks of.¹⁹

Stack claims that Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence opposes the Wagnerian and Schopenhauerian approaches to music.²⁰ Nietzsche is against

¹⁶ *WP*, §1066.

¹⁷ Lange in G. J. Stack, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

¹⁸ Blanqui in *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the meta-music view of Wagner and the births and rebirths in his music-dramas. Stack also claims that some conceptions of Schopenhauer are the subjects of Nietzsche's critiques, such as the conception of an immortal life, considering the temporality of our existence as immortal within the grasp of music, "the renunciation of desire for more life," and "the valuation of *nirvana*."²¹ It can be said that this opposition led him to develop an account of recurrence, but one that is radically different from the Wagnerian idea of rebirth, or the Schopenhauerian one of the immortality of temporality.

Walter Kaufmann states that Nietzsche owned some of the books of Heinrich Heine. He quotes from a passage from Heine:

...And she answered with a tender voice: 'Let us be good friends.' — But what I have told you here, dear reader, that is not an event of yesterday or the day before.... For time is infinite, but the things in time, the concrete bodies, are finite. They may indeed disperse into the smallest particles; but these particles, the atoms, have their determinate number, and the number of combinations that, all of themselves, are formed out of them is also determinate. Now, however long a time may pass, according to the eternal laws governing the combinations of this eternal play of repetition, all configurations that have previously existed on this earth must yet meet, attract, repulse, kiss, and corrupt each other again.... And thus it will happen one day that a man will be born again, just like me, and a woman will be born just like Mary —only that it is to be hoped that the head of this man may contain a little less foolishness— and in a better land they will meet and complete each other a long time; and finally the woman will give her hand to the man and say with a tender voice: 'Let us be good friends.'²²

The so-called argument presented here is again a mechanistic one, and similar to the argument of Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* 1066. The argument is also atomistic and would therefore be rejected by Nietzsche. However, there are very interesting points of similarity. Both in *The Will to Power* and the Heine

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 245.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² Heine in W. Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 318,319.

passage quoted above, it is suggested that time is infinite and the bodies finite, and that there is, therefore, a repetition of events.

Another important figure is Dühring, whose work Nietzsche was closely related. Dühring criticized the notion of eternal return and took it to be impossible, claiming that infinite regress is contradictory.²³ Nietzsche argues that Dühring's thesis is wrong²⁴. Infinite series of events is conceivable and not contradictory for Nietzsche.²⁵

In short, it is evident that Nietzsche encountered some ideas of eternal return which might have affected him. However, there is no passage that *directly* refers to earlier thinkers. I think that the doctrine of eternal recurrence is in any case unique when considered in light of the whole philosophical work of Nietzsche. Moreover, it is fallacious to establish too close a connection between Nietzsche's ideas and the mechanistic ideas of earlier philosophers. The roots of the doctrine of eternal recurrence is only essential for knowing that Nietzsche had heard of such theses of eternal repetition and studied them.

As I have argued above, the doctrine of eternal recurrence is inextricably linked to many other aspects of Nietzsche's thought. This claim in itself is not uncontroversial since some may argue that Nietzsche's writings do not form a coherent whole. I do not take this stance, and while a systematic reconstruction of all of Nietzsche's work would certainly be beyond the scope of this study, my exploration of the topic of eternal recurrence in its relation to other elements of Nietzsche's thought may go some distance in substantiating this more *holistic* approach to reading Nietzsche. In light of this approach, it is necessary to first find the right conceptual framework in which to understand

²³ G. J. Stack, *op cit.*, pp. 246,247.

²⁴ *WP*, §1066.

²⁵ G. J. Stack, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

eternal recurrence. It can thus be seen that I do not initially assume to have in hand “a systematized Nietzsche” into which “the correct account” of eternal recurrence can be inserted. Rather, in trying to provide an account of eternal recurrence that makes sense, I hope to also arrive at some insights into what Nietzsche was saying.

Thus, in Chapter 2, I examined and rejected some of those interpretations of eternal recurrence which fail due to missing the larger context of Nietzsche’s ideas. To this end, I first examined the cosmological side of the doctrine and argued that no cosmological explanation of the doctrine can be given that is adequate and satisfactory. After Nietzsche many writers tried to figure out the cosmological argument in the entries of *The Will to Power* and some tried to reconstruct it, but it is impossible to posit such a hypothesis following the argument of Nietzsche.

Within the same chapter, the question “Is the doctrine of eternal recurrence an imperative?” finds its answer which is a qualified “No.” Also in the same chapter, the existentialist interpretations of eternal recurrence were examined. I believe that the existentialist interpretations are at the core, wrong; yet they identify some essential points for discussion and formulate many insights that are helpful to understand the doctrine. However I can easily and basically say that Nietzsche is *not* an existentialist philosopher.

Chapter 2 also includes a review of Heidegger’s Nietzsche as a misleading interpretation. Although I think that Heidegger’s Nietzsche is more a Heidegger than a Nietzsche, I cannot think of a work on Nietzsche that lacks at least a few words on Heidegger. In other words, Heidegger’s work on Nietzsche is not essentially crucial for me.

The issue of *Übermensch* is present in the first chapter too since it is essential to understanding how and why Nietzsche’s morality is different from the

traditional ones, which is the reason behind my rejecting the ethical and existential interpretations. And yet the relevance of the *Übermensch* to the doctrine of eternal recurrence is problematic. Since *Übermensch*, seems to be given as an aim, it seems to contradict a Nietzschean universe, or a Nietzschean *life*. After presenting the idea of *Übermensch* in the second chapter, I returned to this problem and attempted to solve it in the fourth chapter with the help of the interpretation of Klossowski.

Since the interpretations of eternal recurrence that are eliminated in this chapter all fail, as I mentioned above, due to missing the larger context of Nietzsche's ideas, I concluded the second chapter by presenting certain fundamental conceptual elements in Nietzsche's thought that are crucial for a correct reading of eternal recurrence. These elements have their roots in Nietzsche's rejection of the foundations of the traditional Western metaphysics and ethics. The notion of 'becoming' is a key component of this rejection of the Western tradition. In short, although I rejected an analytical attempt of a cosmological explanation, I did not pay insufficient attention to the ontology attending the notion of becoming. Actually the problem of becoming is an ancient question that repeatedly raises its head in the history of philosophy. It is evident that Nietzsche praises the notion of becoming over the notion of being, yet the tension between the notions of becoming and being is hard to solve.

Having identified the wrong ways of reading eternal recurrence and the key elements of Nietzsche's critique of Western metaphysics that are crucial to make note of for a right reading, in Chapter 3, I took a more direct and methodical approach, and addressed the question of what the most fruitful way of reading eternal recurrence for understanding it should be. Hatab offers a kind of reading that solves some problems concerning the doctrine of eternal recurrence, and I mainly accepted that kind of reading, namely *mimetic literal reading*. This chapter also contains a discussion of the crucial problems of fate, fatalism, and *amor fati*. Gleaning some answers from a number of writers, I

argued that there is a form of fatalism in Nietzsche, and this fatalism seems to give rise to problems. Following writers such as Solomon and Stambaugh, I suggested that this fatality is not an “outsider” fatality imposed on us but an “inner fatality.”

The main concerns of Chapter 4 are the ‘self’ and ‘creative willing.’ After all the discussions from the previous chapters, there remained some problems such as “How can the will will the past? How can the will will all that happened? How can a willing be called creative?” These problems, in this chapter, were solved through an account of time and an account of the self. The crucial part of my thesis includes “the dissolution of the self.” Following the path of Klossowski, I suggested that the self is eliminated by the doctrine of eternal recurrence. The elimination of the self solves, I think, most of the problems that I mentioned related to the doctrine of eternal recurrence.

CHAPTER 2

IN SEARCH OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING ETERNAL RECURRENCE

In this chapter I examined the cosmological side of the doctrine which has its roots in entry 1066 of *The Will to Power*. Although the cosmological argument is misleading, one should at least be aware of the fact that it is not the right way to analyze Nietzsche. In this chapter I also explored the ethical and existential side of Nietzsche's doctrine as interpreted by various thinkers such as Deleuze, Solomon, and Jaspers. I argued that taking the doctrine as an ethical imperative is also misleading. Further, in this chapter I discussed Solomon's view that sees Nietzsche as an existentialist philosopher, and I rejected the idea. I, then, declared my view of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrine, which is that Heidegger touched Nietzsche and changed him drastically. I can say that the Heidegger interpretation of Nietzsche, although important for the sake of the fact that a great mind interprets an other, is a distortion of Nietzsche. The next section within the chapter is about the *Übermensch*. It is easy to say that the *Übermensch* issue is central in the book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The first question that comes to mind about this issue is: "How can *Übermensch* be possible in a life whose meaning is eternal recurrence?" In other words, "How can an aim be possible within eternal recurrence?" The answer to these questions can be revealed in the third chapter though. The notion of becoming is another subject of this chapter. The notion of becoming can easily be seen in Nietzsche's work. Yet, how can Nietzsche suggest a doctrine like eternal recurrence while at the same time praising the notion of becoming? I tried to give an answer to that question by discussing various claims from various Nietzsche scholars, such as Deleuze, Richardson, Ackermann, Stambough, and Jaspers. I concluded by discussing Jasper's account that affiliates becoming within the 'great cycle' of eternal recurrence.

2.1. Eternal Recurrence as a Cosmological Hypothesis

The doctrine of eternal recurrence has been taken by some interpreters as a cosmological hypothesis. The reason why it is examined as a cosmological hypothesis is the fact that Nietzsche, in some passages, presents the doctrine as if it is cosmological, and further, according to some interpreters, he tries to prove it.

It can be said that Nietzsche, here in *The Will to Power*, put forth a kind of proof. However, before looking at the fragment that most looks like a proof, namely, fragment 1066, the steps that lead to that argument should be clarified.

Nietzsche first presents the idea that there is no final state, no *equilibrium* in the world:

If the world had a goal, it must have been reached. If there were for it some unintended final state, this also must have been reached. If it were in any way capable of a pausing and becoming fixed, of “being,” if in the whole course of its becoming it possessed even for a moment this capability of “being,” then all becoming would long since have come to an end...²⁶

That a state of equilibrium is never reached proves that it is not possible.²⁷

As seen here, Nietzsche argues that if there could have been a state of equilibrium, it would already have been reached. It is not reached. Therefore there is no such thing. There is no state of being. It is the becoming that takes place. Although I argued later that there is some kind of a being in that becoming in a different sense of the term ‘being,’ it is here evident what Nietzsche means by ‘being.’ It is the state of equilibrium. The static world conception.

²⁶ *WP*, §1062.

²⁷ *WP*, §1064.

What, then, does Nietzsche propose? It is the “new world conception.” I think, by saying “new,” Nietzsche both opposes the Christian tradition and mechanistic approach.

The new world-conception. —The world exists; it is not something that becomes, not something that passes away. Or rather: it becomes, it passes away, but it has never begun to become and never ceased from passing away— it maintains itself in both. —It lives on itself: its excrements are its food.²⁸

The cycle is thus introduced; there is no ending point of the past or future, the world “lives on itself.” It “becomes and passes away,” yet “it has never begun to become and never ceased from passing away.” It is a purely dynamic world and we cannot even locate the moment of the state of being, in its core.

Nietzsche also says that there is no starting or ending point of the world, He in fact argues that the claim that *regressus in infinitum* is absurd is theologically motivated and there is not necessarily anything absurd with the notion of infinite regress if one considers it without the theological motivation —i.e., wanting to derive a need for a “creator”:

Lately one has sought several times to find a contradiction in the concept “temporal infinity of the world in the past” (*regressus in infinitum*): one has even found it, although at the cost of confusing the head with the tail. Nothing can prevent me from reckoning backward from this moment and saying “I shall never reach the end”; just as I can reckon forward from the same moment into the infinite.²⁹

He goes on to state that it is in fact the idea of a beginning —which requires the idea of creation— that is more absurd.

²⁸ *WP*, §1066.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

We need not worry for a moment about the hypothesis of a *created* world. The concept “create” is today completely indefinable, unrealizable; merely a word, a rudimentary survival from the ages of superstition; one can explain nothing with a mere word. The last attempt to conceive a world that had a beginning has lately been made several times with the aid of logical procedures —generally, as one may divine, with an ulterior theological motive.³⁰

As I mentioned in the Introduction, it is evident that Nietzsche met this idea in earlier thinkers.

I have come across this idea in earlier thinkers: every time it was determined by other ulterior considerations (—mostly theological, in favor of the *creator spiritus*). If the world could in any way become rigid, dry, dead, *nothing*, or if it could reach a state of equilibrium, or if it had any kind of goal that involves duration, immutability, the once-and-for-all (in short, speaking metaphysically: if becoming *could* resolve itself into being or into nothingness) then this state must have been reached. But it has not been reached: from which it follows—³¹

Finally, Nietzsche suggests in the following quotation a-seemingly-proof of a kind. He states:

If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force —and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless— it follows that, in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time every possible combination would at some time or another be realized; more: it would be realized an infinite number of times. And since between every combination and its next recurrence all other possible combinations would have to take place, and each of these combinations conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a circular movement of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated: the world as a circular movement that has already repeated itself infinitely often and plays its game *in infinitum*.

This conception is not simply a mechanistic conception; for if it were that, it would not condition an infinite recurrence of identical cases, but

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

a final state. *Because* the world has not reached this, mechanistic theory must be considered as imperfect and merely provisional hypothesis.³²

Nietzsche, thus, states the core of his argument and this argument would lead further discussions; the force and the centers of force is limited, in infinite time this must go through and throughout the certain “calculable combinations,” between each recurrences there have to be placed the “possible combinations,” thus each of these combinations goes on repeatedly, by the same sequence and therefore a cycle is produced. The verb ‘condition’ may invoke the feeling that Nietzsche proposes a kind of determinism. But, firstly, as we saw when the chapter progressed Nietzsche does not believe in the principle of sufficient reason. Secondly, determinism works for the mechanistic theory assigning causes and effects, namely ‘beginnings’ and ‘ends.’ Thirdly, these assignments of causes and effects may lead to a first cause that may be considered as a god. This argument, in itself, seems to be problematic —and I am sure that Nietzsche was aware of it. He never published this proof— but here we take it as if Nietzsche meant it. Arthur Danto formulated the proof in detail and I think, although it seems problematic as we shall see, it is the best place to begin.

2.1.1. Arthur Danto and a Reconstruction

Arthur C. Danto, in his book *Nietzsche as Philosopher*³³, gives an account that can easily be considered as analytical. He says that the method he uses is “logical analysis.”³⁴ What is important and essential for us begins with the seventh chapter of the book and is intensified when that chapter progresses.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ A. C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-19.

The doctrine of eternal recurrence, as Danto sees it, states that everything exists, returns not in a like manner but returns on exactly the same life, the indistinguishable one. In short, the same events will recur.³⁵ According to Danto, Nietzsche meant to prove it. Danto's aim is to try to reconstruct the argument of Nietzsche.³⁶ It is important here to note that, Danto's translation and understanding of fragment 1066 of *The Will to Power* is slightly different from what I have quoted above.

If the world dare be thought of as a determinate magnitude of power, and a determinate number of power centers —and every other idea is indeterminate and hence *unusable*— it follows that it has run through a calculable number of combinations in the great dice game of its existence. In an infinite time, every possible combination would sometime have been attained: more, each would have been attained an infinity of times. And then, between each combination and its next repetition, all the remaining combinations must then be run through, and each of these combinations determines the whole sequence of combinations, so that a whole cycle of absolutely identical sequences results. The world is a cycle which has already infinitely repeated itself, and plays its play *in infinitum*.³⁷

This is the first half of the argument, states Danto, and the main issue here is not about the combinations that have taken place or would take place, but the repetition of the whole series.³⁸ The second half of the argument³⁹ makes a bit more sense than the first half for Danto:

The total amount of energy [*All-Kraft*] is limited, not “infinite.” Let us beware of such conceptual excesses! Consequently, the number of states [*Lagen*], combinations, changes, and evolutions [*Entwicklungen*] of this energy is tremendously great and practically immeasurable, but in any case finite, not infinite. But the time through which this total

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 201,202.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 203.

³⁷ Nietzsche in *Ibid*, p. 205.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ It is not the second half of the argument textually in Nietzsche. Danto addresses it as second.

energy works is infinite. That means the energy is forever the same and forever active. An infinity has already passed away before this present moment. That means that all possible developments must have taken place already. Consequently, the present development is a repetition, and thus also that which gave rise to it, and that which arises from it, and so backward and forward again! Insofar as the totality of states of energy [*die Gesamtlage aller Kräfte*] always recurs, everything has happened innumerable times.⁴⁰

The passages assert three propositions according to Danto:

1. The sum-total of energy in the universe is finite.
2. The number of states [*Lagen*] of energy is finite.
3. Energy is conserved.⁴¹

It seems that Nietzsche thinks proposition 2 is derived from proposition 1. But this derivation is false, Danto declares. The lines of the argument are independent. 1 and 3 are depended one another at least. The term ‘state’ is not widely explained; this makes it hard to determine the truth value of 2. It is also evident an account of *Lagen* can easily be given that would render 1 and 3 true, and 2 false. The derivation, therefore gives in.⁴² Danto’s example makes the issue clearer.

[Assume] that [the total] amount [of energy] is equal to a finite number, 6. Suppose some of the energy is kinetic. Suppose again that as the kinetic energy increases, the potential energy decreases; the rate is such that the latter approaches 0 as the former approaches 6. These limits could be approached indefinitely without being reached.⁴³

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Danto, then, assumes a certain definition of *Lage*: “the amount of kinetic energy plus the amount of potential energy at any given instant.”⁴⁴ The *Lagen* can, thus, be infinite, and no *Lage* must recur. In this kind of an example, 1 and 3 are true, 2 is false. Therefore 2 does not follow from 1 and/or 3.⁴⁵ What would be needed for 1 and 3 to entail that a *Lage* occurs and recurs infinitely? Danto adds two more propositions to the argument:

4. Time is infinite.
5. Energy has infinite duration.⁴⁶

Arthur Danto, then, exemplifies the situation with another system. Let’s say that there are three “energy-*Lagen*”⁴⁷:

A,B,C. Suppose that each of these occurred for a *first* time a finite time ago... t_3 , t_2 , and t_1 . [Assume that] A had the first occurrence at t_3 . Then, before t_3 , there were *Lagen* for which our model allows. But from 5 it follows that there must have been energy before then, from 4 it follows that there was a “before then” for there to have been energy *in*, and from 3 it follows that the amount of energy before and after t_3 is the same. But...at least *one* of the...*Lagen* must have existed before t_3 or, what comes to the same thing, or there can be no first occurrence of each of the *Lagen*. Hence at least one of these *Lagen* must have occurred an infinite number of times....It is still possible that *two* of the *Lagen* could each have occurred a finite number of times.⁴⁸

Also, there is no way to say which *Lage* occurred and recurred infinitely and which did not. “Suppose A had occurred an infinity of times before B’s first occurrence. B would [then] mark a cutoff point”⁴⁹ —i.e. the state that interrupts

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the flow of the series. This would inevitably lead us to a state of equilibrium which Nietzsche firmly denies. Therefore another proposition is needed:

6. Change is eternal.⁵⁰

The series, nevertheless, can still be like "...A-B-A-B-A-B-A... [from infinity to infinity,] and at a new cutoff point C occurs."⁵¹ Therefore the static state, namely the equilibrium, is achieved again. So, another proposition is needed:

7. Principle of Sufficient Reason.⁵²

With this principle, the first occurrence of C (as a cutoff point) can be eliminated by the sufficient condition of A or B. So, "a finite number of occurrences" of C and others are achieved, thus, there is no first or last appearance of a *Lage*.⁵³

The doctrine of eternal recurrence, as Danto reconstructed it, and also as Nietzsche was aware of, is against the second law of thermodynamics, which briefly states that there will be "a final state" in the universe.⁵⁴ There are many scientific discoveries and theories that came after Nietzsche and there is no need to mention them. Danto's reconstruction yet, as a logical analysis, can be seen as a legitimate attempt. Danto, at the very last, thinks that the argument of Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* is invalid. It needs reconstruction, and that is, I can say, *another Nietzsche* who is not so consonant with the original one: Nietzsche as logician.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Simmel considers the issue from another angle.

2.1.2. The Touching Discs

Simmel gives an example about recurrence. Let's say that there are two discs touching one another at one point. They are fixed in parallel lines and they move together touching one another. They are rotating, yet in opposite directions. Assume that we mark each of the discs so that the markings meet one another at a point before the beginning of the rotation. It can, thus, be easily said that, according to Simmel, if C_{disc_1}/C_{disc_2} ⁵⁵ (or C_{disc_2}/C_{disc_1}) is an irrational number (such as $\sqrt{2}$) the markings can never touch one another. Therefore from infinite time and the finitude of the world it does not have to follow that there is a cycle of the events.⁵⁶

Ivan Soll says that “a random recombination of states might avoid Simmel’s criticism,”⁵⁷ yet he also states that the so-called determinism of Nietzsche makes it impossible. Soll presumes that Nietzsche argues for a determinism, — which I discussed that he does not and cannot. There can only be a fatalism which I discussed in the following chapter— therefore, it is not possible to refute Simmel’s argument.

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner also finds something wrong in Simmel’s argument: Simmel’s argument assumes that there is constant speed —an assumption that cannot be made within Nietzsche’s cosmology and metaphysics. There is no

⁵⁵ Circumference1/Circumference2.

⁵⁶ R. J. Ackermann, *Nietzsche: A Frenzied Look*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990) p. 155.

⁵⁷ Soll in S. L. Sorgner, *Metaphysics Without Truth: On the Importance of Consistency within Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007) p. 71.

such state of equilibrium in Nietzsche's cosmology.⁵⁸ Even though Sorgner is correct in saying that there cannot be such constant speeds, I cannot affirm this as a counter-argument since the conclusion Simmel draws from the system is independent of speed. In other words, the discs are touching one another, therefore whatever you do, accelerate positively or negatively, if the ratio of the circumferences is an irrational number the markings cannot coincide.

Simmel claims that a "part of the [universe] cannot recur, [therefore the universe] cannot recur."⁵⁹ It seems to me plausible but it is evident that such system of discs cannot be set up so perfectly within this world; there is even the problem of finding perfect discs.

2.1.3. Possibilities, Combinations

A different thesis about what Nietzsche says suggests both a non-determinacy and an account of such. The 'variation thesis' suggests that this life and the possible combinations of this life will recur; namely, the dice game of existence represents the variation that will be relived.⁶⁰ What recurs would be a variation of what occurs. But such a thesis cannot be relevant either since it is apparent that Nietzsche repeatedly stresses upon the necessity of *this very life's* recurrence. If I were to recur in a slightly different world which is a variance of this one, there would be nothing stressing (or heavy) about the doctrine of eternal recurrence; it would be even promising. It would be no more than a religion, as Solomon says, if Nietzsche meant variation by eternal recurrence. It would be like a "modified Christian view."⁶¹ As I argued in Chapter 4, the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ J. Krueger, 'Nietzschean Recurrence as a Cosmological Hypothesis,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol.16 No.4 (1978), pp. 441,442.

⁶¹ Solomon in *Ibid*, p. 442.

world and the so-called ‘person-me’ of the debate of personal identity in that world *must be* numerically identical.

On the other hand, the phrases “dice throw” and “passing through all possible combinations” before going into the next cycle *are* problematic. Williams and Palencik⁶² offer a way to analyze this problem. They say that we may implement a kind of possible world hypothesis in the doctrine. The decisions we make can be said to make us pop into another possible world. For instance I can choose to go to movie A or B. If I choose A, I shall “pop” into a world W_1 and the choice B becomes the possible choice for me to be actualized in the other cycle and would make me “pop” into the possible world W_2 .⁶³ However, there is no place in Nietzsche’s writings where we could see him openly proposing a possible world account.

It is evident, therefore, that the passage of Nietzsche does not suggest a possible-world hypothesis in an *obvious* way according to Williams and Palencik. However, they think that there is a point in the text where a different interpretation would put the doctrine in a different route, and this route seems related to a kind of possible world hypothesis.

Williams and Palencik, actually suggests a kind of re-reading of the entry 1066 and from the old German versions they see that the words “Combination” (combination) and “Wiederkehr” (recurrence) are in quotations.⁶⁴ They infer from this fact that these words are not used in their ordinary meanings. The quotation marks change the meaning of “combinations” from ‘states’ to ‘series’

⁶² L. L. Williams, J. T. Palencik, ‘Re-evaluating Nietzsche’s Cosmology of Eternal Recurrence,’ *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 42, (2004).

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 397.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 402.

and “recurrence” in quotation marks should be understood in terms of ‘series.’

The reading changes:

...between every combination (series) and its (the series) next recurrence all other possible combinations (states) would have to take place, and each of these combinations (states) conditions the entire sequence of combinations (states) in the same series.⁶⁵

Williams and Palencik comment on this passage and says that by choosing the movie A we eliminate movie B and the possible chain of events but when coming to that point again —and we must come, since energy is finite but time is not— we may choose movie B and start another chain of events and eliminate movie A and the possible events that will follow. Therefore one occurrence of the universe may not be followed by its repetition *successively* but the repetition must take place, let’s say, after a calculable number of occurrences of universes.⁶⁶ And by this interpretation, the factor of chance seems to be explained in a way.

But I think the interpretation distorts the argument at the very base. It is easy to live, knowing that there will be occurrences of universes different from this one, and thus, I will live different lives. It is not a stressful thought or the heaviest weight either when considered in this way.

In addition, it seems to me that there is a meta-point of the interpretation. Let me name the universes as such: A-B-C-D-G-T-H-E-S-F-A. We can say that I am living in A, and will live in it again after 9 universes. Let’s say that the universes go on like this: C-D-F-R-E-T-H-G-A-S-R. I name the first eleven universes U₁, and second eleven universes U₂. It can be said that U₁ will be repeated after some universes. And by conjoining U’s I can compose a big U, too. This goes on ad-infinitum and the biggest U that can be conceived still

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 404,405.

gets a recurrence. Another problem with the interpretation is that since there is no end point of the past or the future, I can pick the series of events or the states at random points within a universe, let's say, composed of one and a half universe (e.g. A and half of B) or the biggest U possible, as a series. I think that Williams and Palencik seem to consider only the occurrence and recurrence of the individual but if the probabilistic situation is so; there cannot be an individual called "me" since my father may not choose to marry my mother at that occurrence. This conception of Williams and Palencik, thus offers an interpretation of a vague and not legitimate kind.

Beyond all of these, one can easily say that, as Leibniz would say, if there are more than one universes that are identical with all of their qualities, there cannot be but one universe. In other words, if two things have the same qualities, they are not two but one; they are indiscernible, thus they are identical. The criticism is deep-rooted and it can be said that it provides support for the idea of eternal novelty, namely the idea that there is a single occurrence, rather than eternal recurrence. Although there is no real response that can be given to this criticism, one can always say that the same universe can happen successively on itself, and this is *logically possible*⁶⁷. Although the criticism is deep-rooted, some writers do not even take it into account. I am, at the very basic level, not opposed to the view of Leibniz, but I am aware of the fact that this kind of a cosmology (of eternal recurrence) cannot be easily proved. The power of the doctrine as I discussed later on lies not in the fact that it is proved or disproved.

In short, the doctrine as apparent in *The Will to Power* 1066, seems to suggest a proof in any way. However, as revealed through the discussions above the proof is not adequate. When one looks at the historical roots of the doctrine, we can say that Nietzsche's version of it is very similar to the ancient atomists'.

⁶⁷ D. Heyd, 'Is Life Worth Reliving?' *Mind*, Vol. 92, (1983), p. 24.

However Nietzsche opposes atomism and mechanism. Mechanism implies that there is a starting and an ending point of the universe (as in the case of the second law of thermodynamics saying that the universe would inevitably reach a point of equilibrium):

This is the sole certainty we have in our hands to serve as a corrective to a great host of world hypothesis possible in themselves. If, e.g., the mechanistic theory cannot avoid the consequence...of leading to a final state, then the mechanistic theory stands refuted.⁶⁸

The interpreters I discussed simply ignore the fact that Nietzsche is not an atomist. Further, regardless of how we read it, we can say that it is far from being a proof. Of course, if the meaning of life, or life itself, is eternal recurrence, I do want to know what kind of a recurrence it is. And whether it is really the case. But reading Nietzsche as a scientist, would lead us elsewhere in which there is no adequate argumentation by Nietzsche.

2.2. Eternal Recurrence as an Ethical and Existential Doctrine

Another misleading approach to eternal recurrence, in my opinion, is found in attempts at ethical and existential readings. Before going on with these discussions made especially by Deleuze, Hill, Kaufmann, Jaspers, and Solomon, I find it beneficial to talk a little about ethics of Nietzsche.

It is a fact that there is a huge literature on Nietzsche's ethics. I do not present here a review of literature on the ethics of Nietzsche but there are *at least* two aspects of Nietzsche's ethics that one has to remember when dealing with eternal recurrence: (1) Nietzsche does not assert a moral theory of a traditional kind. He, in each instant, is against what he calls 'value tables,' 'Platonic forms,' and following these, the 'Christian ethics' imposing given values as "good" and "evil." Against the other-worldly promises of Christianity,

⁶⁸ *WP*, §1066.

Nietzsche suggests an immanence, an authenticity, and within this authenticity life-as-it-is is a ‘being as becoming’ —which I discussed in this chapter (2.5)— in which there can be no stable values. Against these value tables of Christianity, he praises the “free spirit.” (2) Nietzsche believes in a typology. He suggests that there is a master-kind and a slave-kind. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he says:

As I was wandering through the many subtle and crude moralities that have been dominant or that still dominate over the face of the earth, I found certain traits regularly recurring together and linked to each other. In the end, two basic types became apparent to me and a fundamental distinction leapt out. There is a *master morality* and a *slave morality*; —I will immediately add that in all higher and more mixed cultures, attempts to negotiate between these moralities also appear, although more frequently the two are confused and there are mutual misunderstandings. In fact, you sometimes find them sharply juxtaposed —inside the same person even, within a single soul. Moral value distinctions have arisen within either a dominating type...or alternatively...among...the slaves and dependants of every rank.⁶⁹

However, beyond all of these moralities and values, Nietzsche does not argue for a “should-be,” namely, the existence of typological differences and the values they impose on one another’s actions are not in-themselves meaningful. What “should-be” or “shall be” is the coming of *Übermensch* —which I discussed in this chapter (2.4)— who is neither a slave nor a master since *it* is over-humanity. Nietzsche, mainly, praises creativity over any morality.

In light of these two aspects of Nietzsche’s stance on morality, it can be asked: (i) Does the doctrine of eternal recurrence suggest a way to act? (ii) To whom is eternal recurrence addressed?

⁶⁹ F. W. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Translated by Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) § 260. From now on the book will be referred to as *BGE*, and § referred to fragment numbers.

In virtue of these, I can say that the doctrine of eternal recurrence, as a part of the whole philosophy of Nietzsche, may contain ethical elements; although I agree with that, I do not think that the doctrine in its core is ethical. However, it is beneficial to look at the issue closely, considering the two aforementioned aspects of Nietzsche's morality, so as to see what the doctrine does not mean.

2.2.1. Eternal Recurrence as an Imperative

It can be said that the passage in *Gay Science* suggests that the doctrine seems to be a mere thought experiment and some can devise something like a Kantian categorical imperative from it. Deleuze is one of the interpreters who interpret Nietzsche's doctrine in this way.

The Kantian categorical imperative states, literally, "[a]ct as though the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature."⁷⁰ The corresponding Nietzschean imperative is said to be like this: "So to live that you must wish to live again."⁷¹ Deleuze,⁷² indicating the ethical aspect of the thought of eternal return, states that

...as a thought, it gives the will a practical rule. The eternal return gives the will a rule as rigorous as the Kantian one.... As an ethical thought the eternal return is the new formulation of the practical synthesis: *whatever you will will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return.*⁷³

I can say that the taking of the doctrine as an *ethical* maxim is a crucial mistake in more than one way.

⁷⁰ I. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Translated by Arnulf Zweig, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 222.

⁷¹ K. Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

⁷² G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Translated by H. Tomlinson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 68.

First, Nietzsche, cannot say *to all* that we should act in such and such way as I discussed point (1) in section 2.2. He may try to direct humanity to a creative position and try to make humanity give a product that is over them, yet, he does not suggest certain kinds of acts. Second, the typology of human beings suggest that one can adopt a lower position and another higher as I have mentioned in point (2) in section 2.2. The ones at the higher positions, let's say higher men, or a master kind, see certain achievements to be worthy of eternal repetition, the lower ones may see the same act as evil and not value it as eternally repeatable. Further there may be individuals to whom the doctrine may seem meaningless. Some may say that Nietzsche might not accept my claim that the doctrine means nothing to some people, but I can say that the everyday life of men is sometimes too shallow to think of such issues. Third, still, if we think of humanity as a whole and the doctrine as an ethical maxim, this would be creating new *value tables* rather than opening the way to creativity and furthering so-called development.

Kaufmann also says that the doctrine of eternal recurrence may be seen as something like the Kantian categorical imperative even though he also holds that this way of interpreting Nietzsche is wrong. As Kaufmann states, Kant believed that some conceptions, (e.g. lying, stealing) when universalized seems contradictory. In other words, Kant is trying to derive morality from a priori principles; he's trying to show that reason is the seat of morality. The imperative is of no concern to him emotionally. The believer of eternal recurrence, on the other hand, "would be deterred from certain actions —if at all— only by his affective response to the consequences."⁷⁴ Moreover, Kaufmann says that there is no moral feature in the doctrine of eternal recurrence due to the fact that what you are going to do is what you will have

⁷⁴ W. Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

done infinitely many times *beforehand*.⁷⁵ Kaufmann seems to believe that there is determinism in Nietzsche and this determinism does not allow for any moral conception. However, Nietzsche seems not to believe in a determinism but a fatalism which I argued in chapter 3 (3.2). But I do agree with Kaufmann that the doctrine is not a moral doctrine *in this way*.

Another interpreter who discusses eternal recurrence as putting forth an imperative is Kevin Hill.⁷⁶ Hill says that the Kantian imperative suggests to the individual that while an act is being committed, one should be thinking of what would happen if that act was universalized. He adds, there seems to be a similar approach in the doctrine of eternal recurrence which suggests a kind of eternity for actions. Hill states that in both cases if the will fails to will in an according way, it shows a “normative failing.”⁷⁷ We know Nietzsche does not try to paraphrase or restate the Kantian imperative but what is essential for Hill is “the motivational role of the test [of recurrence] in both cases.”⁷⁸ Hill, then, analyses the counterfactual basis of such motivational doctrines and says that it might be illogical to act in accordance with a counterfactual maxim.⁷⁹ However, according to Hill it is not the rationality of the thought that leads the individual to the maxim but the moral side of the thought experiment of recurrence.⁸⁰ The counterfactual “if” or clearly put, the phrase “live (act) in a way as if your life were to recur” is problematic for Hill. He states that there cannot be arisen original “normative intuitions” if it is put this way counterfactually. The counterfactual maxim of recurrence seems to have no

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 323.

⁷⁶ R. K. Hill, *Nietzsche: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (London: Continuum, 2007)

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 89.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 91.

“motivational” impact.⁸¹ He declares, assuming that the daemon comes and says such and such then I might think “[i]f I eternally recurred, I would care more about joyful self creation and less about suffering of future generations.”⁸² Yet I do not eternally recur. The counterfactual statement has no affect on me. Hill concludes that there should be no effect of the doctrine unless there is a metaphysical side of it.⁸³

On the other hand, Karl Jaspers, whose ideas are inspiring for me, taking the imperative in another angle yet, gives an existential account of eternal recurrence, which I do not quite agree with. It should firstly be said that Jaspers tries to capture Nietzsche’s philosophy as a whole and interprets it thus. However, for eternal recurrence’s special, the existential effect of the recurrence is, for Jaspers, the most essential aspect of the doctrine itself. “What happens if the idea is true?”⁸⁴ The basic impression of the thought, according to Nietzsche is a “*paralyzing shock*”⁸⁵ This shock, if it happens at all to an individual, can be converted into an affirmation. “Instead of being crushed, the believer will be *transformed*.”⁸⁶ Jaspers stresses this point’s generating a kind of imperative: “so to live that you must wish to live again.”⁸⁷ Yet, the imperative does not suggest any form of action according to him; it seems to be open to most extremist ideas too.⁸⁸ “The imperative demands only this one thing ‘Let us impress the image of eternity upon our lives.’ If this

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 91,92.

⁸⁴ K. Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

affirmation...is successful, even for a single moment...”⁸⁹ then all recurrence will be affirmed. In other words, your life affirmation will become a universal one. This kind of an affirmative person is valuable in Nietzsche’s account, Jaspers claims. It is evident that Jaspers has a different take on the doctrine. He thinks that it does not urge the individual act in a certain way but it frees the individual’s acts towards that which cannot be predicted. Namely, towards an existential future...Thus, the doctrine is not in any way determinative in character for him.⁹⁰

It can be said that Jaspers saves the doctrine from creating new value tables but still, I can doubt that Jaspers’ interpretation presents a compelling account of how the thought of eternal recurrence frees individuals. A believer of god may never feel a moment of regret in his life —except for some moments of sin maybe; and these moments may actually be the praised acts of a lion spirit for Nietzsche. That believer can affirm his life as it is, a life devoted to god and devoted to his kingdom which suggests certain acts and value tables for humanity. The doctrine of eternal recurrence, in spite of eliminating other worldly dreams and acting as a counter idea to Christianity, would mean nothing more than another life of worship and devotion for the believer. In this way, the doctrine of eternal recurrence acts as a guide, yet, does not mean anything more.

2.2.2. Nietzsche “the Existentialist”

Solomon goes further and even calls Nietzsche an “existentialist.” How is this so? Although the general view of Solomon does not attract me, the details of his view are very compelling. I detailed the view of Solomon in the following passages when discussing *amor fati*.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 360.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 360,361.

Solomon thinks that Nietzsche, in general, suggests a life style and a “rich inner life.”⁹¹ According to him, Nietzsche is a life philosopher. Having this quality, he is like the ancient philosophers. However, the life he suggests is, Solomon believes, an existential life of an outstanding kind. Solomon’s leading point is not “what did Nietzsche *really say*?” or it is not “what should we make of Nietzsche?” but “*what would Nietzsche make of us*?”⁹²

Although Nietzsche himself thought that he had written to “the few,” Solomon thinks that he had not.⁹³ Thus, the question “To whom is eternal recurrence addressed?” which I have already discussed in the beginning of this section, is answered by Solomon, but this answer I think leads to misconceptions. It is evident that the doctrine of eternal recurrence may not affect a certain kind of a self. Nietzsche’s so-called teachings are, truly or mistakenly, grasped by many. This grasping is not only for academic reasons but, Solomon thinks, this is because they adopt a life-style from the teachings of Nietzsche. People read Nietzsche in order to live a better life.⁹⁴ Nietzsche is the route to a “rich inner life.” Nietzsche himself did not think that many men are capable of this “rich inner life,” but one way or another, he is popular. We should not, however, lose the way by saying that all Nietzsche readers can understand the deep meanings in the texts. On the other hand, I am also sure that Nietzsche would not imagine being this popular too. In that sense, Solomon asserts that he takes Nietzsche not so much as an “abstract philosopher” but as a “role model.”⁹⁵ This role model, however, cannot introduce a way of free reading. It would not be a true reading if we do not try to understand Nietzsche but just read it and understand it common sensically. Solomon thinks that the cosmological side of the

⁹¹ R. C. Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great “Immoralist” Has to Teach Us*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 3.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 13.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

doctrine has nothing to do with him or should not concern other scholars since it is not adequately inserted. The ethical part of the doctrine as an imperative is baseless. Thus the importance of the doctrine is its being “a test” towards life.⁹⁶ The affirmative and transformative side of the doctrine is what is important for Solomon.⁹⁷ Our attitude towards life, therefore, can be changed, thinking in terms of this doctrine. According to Solomon, with this doctrine Nietzsche explicitly offers “self-scrutiny” and this make him an existentialist philosopher.⁹⁸

At the very base, existence, for Solomon, is “a celebration of *life*.” And “[f]or Nietzsche,... life was a ‘Dionysian’ celebration, and there was nothing beyond life. And life was not ... mainly a matter of making decisions.”⁹⁹ Nietzsche, Solomon says, protects fanatically “the existential self,” and the ones who “‘makes [themselves’] by exploring and disciplining his particular talents and distinguishes himself from ‘the herd’ and the conformist influences of other people.”¹⁰⁰

I am completely against such an existential view of the self as upgrading itself, namely, self-scrutiny. The humanity, the human should be overcome according to Nietzsche. There can be no development of humanity or the self. It is by contrast, the boundary of self that makes impossible the goal of humanity in a sense, which I argued in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 14,15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 176.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 176,177.

2.3. Heidegger's Reading of Nietzsche: An Existentialist Metaphysical Approach

It can be beneficial to talk about Heidegger, the interpreter taking the doctrine of eternal recurrence as a so-called metaphysical fact. However Heidegger's account is closely related with a *certain kind of* existentiality, which is an aspect of his metaphysical view.

A thesis on eternal recurrence that left Heidegger out would be a questionable completion. However I think that Heidegger's Nietzsche is not, in essence, a Nietzsche interpretation but Heidegger's declaration of his own philosophy over Nietzsche.

Heidegger takes eternal recurrence in accordance with will to power, and I think, too, they are not so distinct from one another. Yet Heidegger's Nietzsche is structurally different from what I have discussed in this thesis.

According to Hill, Heidegger's account of Nietzsche is a mixture of experience-based and metaphysics-based interpretations. The experience-based side of his interpretation can be traced back to his own conceptions of authenticity.¹⁰¹ I did not go deeply into Heidegger's work and search for the roots of his interpretation of eternal recurrence. I think this brief discussion will suffice to make it apparent that Heidegger distorted Nietzsche.

According to Hill, Heidegger thinks that, believing and affirming the truth of eternal recurrence despite "existential sufferings and crises" frees the agent. The agent makes it his own destiny by choosing a role within this "fact" and

¹⁰¹ R. K. Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

reflecting himself into the future with this role.¹⁰² It is important to note, for Hill, that this conception of Heidegger's runs counter to the thinkers who consider his interpretation to be only a metaphysical one. Although the metaphysical side of the doctrine is stronger, according to Hill, it opens a way to an existentialist (or experiential) view.¹⁰³

Heidegger seems to work on fragment 617 of *The Will to Power*:

To impose upon becoming the character of being —that is the supreme will to power. Twofold falsification, on the part of the senses and of the spirit, to preserve a world of that which is, which abides, which is equivalent, etc. That everything recurs is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being: —high point of the meditation.¹⁰⁴

As Heidegger sees it, in spite of the fact that Nietzsche can be seen as a “philosopher of becoming,” the doctrine of eternal recurrence seems to suggest a being. And this *symbolizes*, for Heidegger, Hill says, the “Platonic impulse” in Nietzsche.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Hill argues, Heidegger states that it is impossible to explain the doctrine empirically. The cosmological argument¹⁰⁶ is deductive;

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 149.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ *WP*, §617

¹⁰⁵ R. K. Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, too, has asserted a kind of cosmological argument which should be taken into account in his own philosophy;

Heidegger asserts the following line of thought:

1. The doctrine concerns the world in its collective (as opposed to pervasive) character;
2. The pervasive character of the world is force;
3. Force is intrinsically finite;
4. Given 2 and 3, the world is finite;
5. The play of forces never achieves any equilibrium or steady state;
6. The number of possible world states is finite;
7. Space is finite and imaginary;
8. Time is infinite and real;
9. The world, lacking any intrinsic, humanly significant order, is ‘chaos’;
10. The world is nonetheless governed by ‘necessity.’

also the notions “force,” “time” etc. are notions that cannot be set forth by an “empirical test.” Thus the argument is “rationalist” in character.¹⁰⁷ But Nietzsche was against rationalist argumentation. So, what is the explanation of this? The interpretation of Nietzsche by Heidegger supposes that knowledge is made apparent by the method of imposing a rule upon chaos.¹⁰⁸ Then, Hill articulates, Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence as a rationalist argument at the core in some sense can be understood in at least two ways. Firstly, it can be said that the thought of eternal recurrence is true since it shows the qualities of the world-in-experience. In other words, it corresponds a fact. Secondly, it can be said that the thought of eternal recurrence is true since the mind “imposes” a character on chaos. And so, “the thinker of the thought of eternal recurrence *makes it become* true by virtue of thinking the thought.”¹⁰⁹ This seems, according to Hill, to be “a transcendental interpretation”¹¹⁰ in a sense. But this transcendental approach to the doctrine

...in turn dovetails with the experiential account inspired by the choice of authenticity. If we think of the transcendental subject as spontaneous...then it would appear that we do not merely make the world eternally recur: we *choose* to make it eternally recur by authentically appropriating the past and authentically projecting ourselves to the future.¹¹¹

[Therefore] if the world is finite in its range of possible states and cannot achieve any steady state, but time is infinite, then eventually the range of states is run through and the world must begin again with a previous state. If the transitions from state to state follow necessity, then the world’s history must eternally recur.

(*Ibid*, p. 149,150.)

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 151.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

In this sense eternal recurrence means not an obedience to or the affirmation of fate but the active structuring of the world and taking responsibility for it by our will. In this sense, the existentialism of Heidegger and his metaphysics convene in an interesting point. The will to power is, thus, nothing different from eternal recurrence.¹¹²

Heidegger obviously distorts Nietzsche to put him on the way of his own thought. There are many problems about this conception of eternal recurrence as it is put forward by Heidegger, according to Hill.¹¹³ The claim that the argument is rationalist is wrong. Firstly (i), Nietzsche was not aware of the rational side of the argument. Hill exemplifies that when Nietzsche says something about time's infinity, he does not refer to some kind of mental shaping of the time or our intuitions about time. He does not say that we structure time. Secondly (ii), if it was the case that we structure the world, or time, namely experience, as such, if I chose not to impose this structure in this way, I would not lack experiencing the world, as I would, for instance, in Kant's philosophy. But Nietzsche believes, for Hill, there is no such choosing. We cannot choose how we observe. Thirdly (iii), as I said before, the Heideggerian interpretation smells too much of Heidegger's own philosophy. Although there are similarities between Heidegger's 'resoluteness' and Nietzschean 'affirmation,' namely that both offer an affirmative view of life, "Heideggerian resoluteness is chosen."¹¹⁴ Nietzsche does not suggest such an existentialist choosing as Heidegger's, Hill says. Moreover, "Heideggerian resoluteness contrasts with immersion in social norms."¹¹⁵ Nietzsche's view may not suggest such a "ruleless choosing," in this sense, and according to

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Hill, his morality “cannot be assimilated to such a model.”¹¹⁶ Nietzsche’s affirmation is not “about repudiating immersion in social norms, but about celebrating life despite...*suffering*.”¹¹⁷

It is evident that Heidegger tries to impose his own metaphysics upon the doctrine of eternal recurrence. It is natural for such big philosophers as Heidegger. I take the interpretation not as an interpretation of *Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence* but the interpretation of *an eternal recurrence* in a Heideggerian world.

I am inclined to look at the doctrine of eternal recurrence as a metaphysical doctrine, too. However, what I mean by ‘metaphysical’ is quite different from what Heidegger means. It revealed itself in the text but I have to say that it has semiological, (a bit) existential, typological aspects as well. I think that it will be beneficial to follow the path Jaspers asserted. Although I do not think that Jaspers is fully right when interpreting Nietzsche, he summarizes the core of the doctrine of eternal recurrence with the following sentence and my *route* is shaped in accordance with this sentence. Jaspers, tying the concepts, observes that Nietzsche “...conceives of being as ‘becoming’ and as ‘eternal recurrence’ and reacts to it with ‘amor fati.’”¹¹⁸

In the rest of this chapter, I tried to put forth a more positive reading of Nietzsche. To interpret Nietzsche correctly and in the right framework, it is fundamental to understand exactly how he rejects traditional metaphysics and morality and what he proposes in their place.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ K. Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

2.4. *Übermensch*

The notion of *Übermensch* is crucial to understanding Nietzsche's rejection of traditional morality. In contrast to traditional ethics which places a high importance on human beings, such as Kantian ethics which declares that humanity is an end-in-itself, Nietzsche declares that man is a means only, a bridge to *Übermensch*, and *Übermensch* is the aim.

It is hard to grasp the notion of *Übermensch* in the reading of eternal recurrence. The problem is mainly the problem of assigning an aim in an eternally recurring life. Firstly, it may be helpful to present "the teaching of *Übermensch*" from the mouth of the teacher Zarathustra. As a teacher of eternal recurrence, Zarathustra also teaches *Übermensch*.

Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and [*Übermensch*] —a rope over an abyss.

A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and standing still.

What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*.¹¹⁹

It can be seen that mankind, as it is, is needed as a rope. *Übermensch* is only possible through mankind, yet not a mere product of mankind. There is only one thing to be loved about humanity, which is "being a bridge."

*I teach you the [*Übermensch*]. Human being is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?...*

Behold, I teach you the [*Übermensch*]!

¹¹⁹ Zarathustra, p. 7.

The [*Übermensch*] is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the [*Übermensch*] *shall be* the meaning of the earth.¹²⁰

The teaching itself suggests *Übermensch*. And it can be inferred that Zarathustra teaches the meaning of earth. Zarathustra's stress on "shall be" in the passage quoted above implies that "I can say that the *Übermensch* is the meaning of the earth, I know that, yet your saying must contain a temporal tense: future *shall*." It is evident that Zarathustra is trying to lead the wills of humanity towards *Übermensch*.

In *On the Blessed Islands*, Nietzsche, shows the way leading to the *Übermensch*, and in a way curses the transcendent values.

Once people said God when they gazed upon distant seas; but now I have thought you to say: [*Übermensch*].

God is a conjecture, but I want that your conjecturing not reach further than your creating will.

Could you *create* a god? —Then be silent about gods! But you could well create the [*Übermensch*].

Not you yourselves perhaps, my brothers! But you could recreate yourselves into fathers and forefathers of the [*Übermensch*]: and this shall be your best creating.¹²¹

God is a thought that makes crooked everything that is straight, and causes everything that stands to turn. What? Should time be gone, and all that is not everlasting be merely a lie?

To think this causes whirling and dizziness to human bones and even vomiting to the stomach: indeed the turning disease I call it, to conjecture such things.

Evil I call it and misanthropic: all this teaching of the one and the plenum and the unmoved and the stated and the everlasting!

¹²⁰ Zarathustra, p. 5,6.

¹²¹ Zarathustra, p. 65.

All that is everlasting —that is merely a parable! And the poets lie too much.

But the best parables should speak about time and becoming: they should be praise and justification of all that is not everlasting.¹²²

God represents the static world conception and the other-world. This so-called promising ideal, which offers a new and immortal life to mortal beings is the barrier on humanity's way, actually on the way to *Übermensch*. Nietzsche emphasizes that the conjecture, god, is something beyond reach, yet *Übermensch* is possible. In fact, god's so-called promising future is only conjecture and is an easy-to-grasp tool to dry out creativity. Nietzsche, not instead of god, but *against* god, offers *Übermensch* to be created. He states that we cannot be the ones to create *Übermensch* but we can be bridges, means to *Übermensch*. We are still too-human to create the *Übermensch* himself. We are to clean the road, construct the bridges. The immortality, as is offered, is a sickness of the mind. It is disgusting. There is nothing to overcome but only duties to fulfill. To serve and to pray, that is "misanthropic." No human can be everlasting. "All that is 'everlasting' ... is only a parable."¹²³

The earthly approach to *Übermensch* instead of a transcendent approach to an unachievable seems to me a pleasant option. However, *Übermensch* is not an alternative to god. *Übermensch* is the end of the road of humanity. It can be seen as an aim. But how can it be in such a universe in which the only fact is eternal recurrence? As I pointed out in the following passages, an aim would be possible by the dissolution of the self, and this dissolution will be made through a certain kind of reading if not possible by a revelation as Nietzsche himself had become subject to.

¹²² *Zarathustra*, p. 66.

¹²³ *Zarathustra*, p. 99.

2.5. The Ontology of Becoming

As I declared above, the cosmological readings and the ethical, existential readings are fallacious in character. The cosmological readings, taking the doctrine as a cosmological argument from the book *The Will to Power*, suggest that it is seemingly an attempt at a proof. However, they take the concepts as atomistic as I declared earlier. Furthermore, it is unfair to take the doctrine as a cosmological one based on fragments from *The Will to Power* even though Nietzsche never published those notes. The so-called proof is not adequate; in addition, an analytical outlook to the doctrine is not the right attempt when interpreting Nietzsche.

The ethical and existential readings are also fallacious. Taking the doctrine as an ethical imperative is trivializing the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche, as I discussed, does not prescribe a kind of action. Further Nietzsche's philosophy contains certain typological elements and also opposes value tables. Considering these, the imperative, too, can be seen as senseless. Moreover, Nietzsche is not an existentialist philosopher as Solomon thinks. The right way of reading must be performed by analyzing certain key notions in the right way. One of the most important notions when considering Nietzsche's philosophy and the doctrine of eternal recurrence is the notion of becoming.

It is obvious from the texts of Nietzsche that he praises becoming (*Werden*), yet some interpreters say that the notion of being (*Sein*) is also an important issue for Nietzsche. I take a close look now at different ways of viewing being as becoming.

It is worthy of noting that Deleuze sees eternal recurrence as the "being of becoming," namely the continuous flowing of things, the continuous state of

becoming.¹²⁴ I do not go into a deep analysis of Deleuze in terms of “active and reactive” forces here since it takes us off our path. However, Deleuze takes our attention to the pre-Socratics and states that there are two words to explain the world: “chaos and multiplicity.”¹²⁵ It is explanatory to say, according to Deleuze that there must be a steady place between Anaximander’s point and Heraclitus’s. Becoming is the source of being according to Deleuze. He describes the continuous flux in the world in which plurality comes forth by pointing out that “the *multiple* is the affirmation of the One, and becoming, the affirmation of being.”¹²⁶ The multiplicity in the world thus presents a becoming and this goes on and on; this is “the One” Deleuze talks about. Eternal recurrence is “a function of becoming and multiplicity”¹²⁷ according to Deleuze. And it is the doctrine of eternal recurrence that one can only affirm the becoming purely. It can be said that Deleuze takes the doctrine, in a way, as an explanation of becoming in the world.

In the part “On Old and New Tablets,” we can adduce some deep thoughts about being and becoming. Although here Nietzsche states his thoughts in the framework of good and evil, namely of the “tablets,” some crucial ontological ideas can also be referenced.

If timbers span the water, if footbridges and railings leap over the river, then surely the one who says “Everything is in flux” has no credibility.

Instead, even the dummies contradict him. “What?” say the dummies, “everything is supposed to be in flux? But the timbers and the railings are *over* the river!

Over the river everything is firm, all the values of things, the bridges,...

¹²⁴ G. Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p. 71,72.

¹²⁵ J. A. Leigh ‘Deleuze, Nietzsche and the Eternal Return,’ *Philosophy Today* Vol. 22, No. 3, (1978), p. 211.

¹²⁶ Deleuze in *Ibid*, p. 212. [emphasis mine]

¹²⁷ Deleuze in *Ibid*, p. 216.

But when the hard winter comes, the beast timer of rivers, then even the wittiest learn to mistrust, and, sure enough, then not only the dummies say: “Should everything not —*stand still?*”¹²⁸

With the river metaphor here, Nietzsche implies the influences coming from Heraclitus on himself. He states that practical life needs some stand-grounds, but when living, one should not forget the becoming in which he lives on. We must here remember that even in the Heraclitean doctrine, there is something that does not change, which is change itself. Nietzsche, I could say, and some others also thought so, tried to capture this ground on the basis of eternal recurrence. But I cannot say that Nietzsche wanted a static ground. Eternal recurrence as we would see, constitutes the meaning of life and in this framework it cannot change but stays as the eternal meaning of life, yet not transcendent; very much immanent.

In his book *The Affirmation of Life*¹²⁹ Bernard Reginster also takes our attention to the concept of eternity. According to him, the concept of eternity, which plays a central role in the Christian tradition, must be reevaluated within Nietzsche. In the Christian tradition, the concept of eternity is understood mainly as an infinity, which survives *ad infinitum*. However Nietzsche treats the concept of eternity differently. It makes us aware of the finite world. It can be understood as “permanence”¹³⁰ too. It is in this sense that it suggests an infinite happening.

Thus becoming is understood as the opposite of what Christians take as eternal. Eternal recurrence, he says, dictates the non-changing of becoming. The non-

¹²⁸ *Zarathustra*, p. 160,161.

¹²⁹ B, Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006)

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 224.

changing quality of the world.¹³¹ Reginster tries to say that Nietzsche takes eternity not as a transcendent ground but makes it worldly. By doing that the meaning of eternity changes too. Reginster does not say this but it can be inferred from his line of thought that eternity changes its meaning in Nietzsche. I can add that whenever Nietzsche talks about eternity he does not refer to any transcendent ideal. He refers to the eternal cycle of world; the eternal recurrence of the same.

Robert John Ackermann¹³² also comments on the issue of becoming when analyzing the optimistic side of the doctrine.¹³³ He declares that “[t]he universe is permanent becoming.”¹³⁴ The doctrine of eternal recurrence “can be expressed as the endless return of becoming.”¹³⁵ The universe can be seen optimistically as a “Dionysian flux.”¹³⁶ It is quite beyond my conception that a flux represents an optimistic moral theory but Ackermann ties them in the sense that it suggests, in a sense, existentialism for optimists.¹³⁷

Joan Stambaugh, in her book *The Other Nietzsche*,¹³⁸ talks about becoming and its “innocence,” namely the “innocence of becoming.” She articulates that “everything is in a progress [(not a state)] of becoming.”¹³⁹ According to her Nietzsche tries to save becoming, liberating it from two things: (i) “any kind of

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Ackermann, *op. cit.*

¹³³ He divides the doctrine into two; (i) “pessimistic cosmological theory,” (ii) “optimistic moral theory.” (*Ibid*, p. 160.)

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 162.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 163.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 164.

¹³⁸ J. Stambaugh, *The Other Nietzsche*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994)

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 97.

being” that asserts another base for life and the world; such as Platonism, or a Kantian transcendental ground, (ii) any aim, teleological or other.¹⁴⁰ Both points imply a kind of immanent philosophy and so metaphysics. The innocence of becoming which is not separated from becoming itself, in light of these, means that “there is no unchanging being beyond or outside the world of becoming; and thus becoming is ‘guilty’ of, is *lacking*, nothing. This means that reality is not somewhere else, not in an eternal, unchanging ‘form’ such as beauty or good, nor in an afterworld or a backworld.”¹⁴¹ Thus, according to Stambaugh, there is becoming and it is not guilty, but innocent.

It can be said that the notion of becoming is the presupposition to eliminate some traditional concepts. In the article ‘Nietzsche on Time and Becoming’¹⁴² John Richardson approaches Nietzsche in a Darwinian way but what interests me is his declarations about what becoming “rules out.”¹⁴³ He states that becoming rules out: (i) “*substances*,” (ii) “*rest*,” (iii) “*causes*,” (iv) “*doer behind the doing*.”¹⁴⁴ I may not agree with the drives of the writer in the text, yet, the eliminations he makes are important and partly true.

Firstly, it is easy to say that the elimination of rest(ii) is completely true, which is the heart of the notion of becoming. Also it can follow from becoming itself that there cannot be a stable substance. The notion of substance is hardly anywhere taken seriously by Nietzsche himself, yet he sees the roots of the notion of substance(i) in the notion of the subject(iv) saying that “[t]he concept of substance is a consequence of the concept of the subject: not the reverse! If we relinquish...‘the subject,’ the precondition for ‘substance’ in general

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁴² J. Richardson ‘Nietzsche on Time and Becoming,’ in ed. K. A. Pearson, *A Companion to Nietzsche*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) pp. 208-229.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 211,212.

disappears.”¹⁴⁵ It is apparent here that Nietzsche opposes the traditional subject as well as the traditional substance. The traditional notion of “subject” accommodates the notion of substance. And Nietzsche also says that “...there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; ‘the doer’ is invented as an after-thought, —the doing is everything.”¹⁴⁶

Causes(iii) may be at some level eliminated. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche writes: “...the common people double a deed; when they see lightning, they make a doing-a-deed out of it: they posit the same event, first as a cause then as its effect.”¹⁴⁷ For this, Nietzsche says: “Two successive states, the one ‘cause,’ the other ‘effect’: this is false. The first has nothing to effect, the second has been effected by nothing.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, no state, or no thing has the power of affecting, and nothing has the potential to be affected. The so-called effect is a fallacious notion in this sense. It is true that Nietzsche does not believe in the principle of sufficient reason. I can, anyway, say that the causes as modern science understands or puts forward do not exist in Nietzsche but if we consider the will’s force, we cannot say that it causes nothing. It may not be a cause but some kind of an interaction. The traditional view of cause-effect states, mainly, that, e.g. I, let’s say, throw a rock at somebody else and it hits him, and then he bleeds. In this case, I cause the rock to be thrown, the rock causes the bleeding, and by the chain of events, I cause the bleeding. Firstly, the substantial view names things after ‘I’ or ‘rock.’ Secondly, this substantial view attributes some implicit potential to *matter*, namely ‘affecting,’ ‘to be

¹⁴⁵ *WP*, §485.

¹⁴⁶ F. W. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Translated by Carol Diethe, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) ‘Essay 1’ § 13. From now on the book will be referred to as *GM*, and § referred to fragment numbers.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *WP*, § 633.

affected.’ There is for Nietzsche, only wills that can affect, and only one another:

...we *must* make the attempt to hypothetically posit the causality of the will as the only type of causality there is. “Will” can naturally have effects only on “will” —and not on “matter” (not on “nerves” for instance—). Enough: we must venture the hypothesis that everywhere “effects” are recognized, will is effecting will...¹⁴⁹

It is evident from the elimination of causes(iii) that the so-called “determinism of Nietzsche” is limited to certain introductory books on philosophy.

Each four of the eliminations is crucial, yet I can say that the eliminations Richardson suggests may not be the effects of the becoming. For instance, Richardson would, most probably, think that becoming eliminates the ‘doer’ as the self. It can be thought so, but I can say that becoming, by itself, cannot eliminate such a strong fictive entity. We always think that, living in becoming or otherwise, there is a me and we refer to it in becoming, too. We say, pointing at our photo of years-ago “Look at *me*, I have changed a lot since then.” The self having a deeper meaning than ‘the doer,’ or ‘subject’ can only be eliminated through eternal recurrence as I argued for later in this work.

The views on Nietzsche’s becoming, generally take becoming itself as something that endures. It is a crucial notion and it should be understood within eternal recurrence as well. However, I can say that the doctrine as stated in the *Gay Science*, refers to no kind of a becoming. As it is, it refers to a complete sameness. I do not agree with Deleuze that there is no repetition but a multiplicity and flux *only*. I agree that there is multiplicity and becoming, but it is in the circle of the world, in eternal recurrence itself. On this, I am in firm agreement with Jaspers, although I am not an existentialist.

¹⁴⁹ *BGE*, § 36.

According to Jaspers, a static form of existence is never agreeable for Nietzsche. He conceives of being as dynamic, not as a being but becoming. He says “[w]e must *never* admit that anything just is.”¹⁵⁰ Becoming has not an aim in itself and it basically “*is*.”¹⁵¹ Jaspers states that Nietzsche never stops but tries to hold being in a *certain* way. Jaspers claims that “[b]ecoming is not accessible to the human understanding (*Verstand*)”¹⁵² Human beings’ mind is structured to term on being. So it is obligatory to say that “knowledge and becoming are mutually exclusive.”¹⁵³ If so, then “the knowledge is never the knowledge of becoming.” What follows is “everything in being is fictitious.”¹⁵⁴ Life, in its dynamic character, forms the “illusion” of being. But in order to live the very life, a “horizon” is needed, not becoming of something not fixed.¹⁵⁵ Otherwise, no life can be possible; that is why Nietzsche himself sees becoming as “true, but deadly.”¹⁵⁶ I discussed this deadly side of the life, thus eternal recurrence in the third chapter. It is so deadly that it even eliminates the self.

Moreover, Jaspers, interpreting Nietzsche, states: “Becoming, despite its inconceivability, is being itself. On the other hand, *being for us* is the interpretation which life has invariably created as its own condition.”¹⁵⁷ He adds “[a] comprehensive doctrine of becoming cannot be developed intellectually, for all intellectual determination involves interpretation that

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche in K. Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Nietzsche in *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

would lay hold of existing being.”¹⁵⁸ The doctrine of recurrence in itself carries along the becoming. Thus becoming is *in* the cycle. The cycle itself “did not become.”¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche says “I set *eternal recurrence* against the paralyzing sense of universal dissolution and incompleteness.”¹⁶⁰ It is, as I understood from Jaspers, the needed element tying becoming in being.

The doctrine of eternal recurrence is very essential for Nietzsche, yet it is questionable too. Basically, for Jaspers, the doctrine is stating that being is not eternal process of becoming but everything returns in an enormous cycle of being.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche in *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3

ETERNAL RECURRENCE AS TRAGEDY AND *AMOR FATI*: A POETIC READING

In this chapter it is articulated that the doctrine of eternal recurrence should be read in a certain manner, and with this kind of a reading, the text opens itself. Within the section of *amor fati*, the problems with affirmation are discussed and also an account of fatalism is given.

3.1. The Literal Reading

What one infers from the doctrine of eternal recurrence is directly linked to how one reads the doctrine. Actually it is related to the fact that you feel what Nietzsche is saying. Lawrence J. Hatab, in his book *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence*¹⁶² offers a certain kind of reading. The suggested reading of the doctrine, for Hatab, is needed to ensure the existential power of the doctrine. I think that this kind of reading is the closest reading to feel what Nietzsche offers. There is suggested an existential part of the doctrine within this reading and I think that there might be an existential force of the doctrine; yet it is not the core of the doctrine. The reading method Hatab offers is "literal reading," but he takes "literality" in a different perspective, which we see in this chapter.

For Hatab, the central question of the philosophy of Nietzsche is the meaning of life. However the question is not merely the question "What is the meaning of life?" but rather "Can there be meaning of life?"¹⁶³ It is referred to life itself.

¹⁶² L. J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence*, (New York: Routledge, 2005)

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

The question finds its answer in the fact that life is essentially “tragic” for Nietzsche.¹⁶⁴

Hatab argues for taking eternal recurrence literally. But in Hatab’s argument “literally” does not mean “factually.” In other words, the doctrine should not be read as if it is a cosmological fact, yet it must be felt. The doctrine, according to him, does not hide something in it that is different from the readings, e.g. an imperative, or a cosmological fact. It is clear.¹⁶⁵ The teacher of eternal recurrence, Zarathustra, Hatab interprets, is working on a new kind of language in which song and speech are mixed.¹⁶⁶ It will be helpful to know what Hatab, really, means by “a literal reading.” According to him, “literal” should be understood

...in a functional and performative sense rather than a descriptive sense. I begin by calling the literal as *written* in place of the descriptive *as is*. But this is not enough. In addition to what a text presents, I need to include *how* language and texts are engaged and received. This brings us to certain historical questions and particular remarks in Nietzsche’s writings that will help shape what I want to call *mimetic literality*.¹⁶⁷

Hatab, referring to ancient Greek thinkers, such as Plato, explains this notion and what he means by it. Briefly “the notion of mimetic literality...is...the immediate disclosive effects of language, whether oral or written, whether literal or metaphorical, whether factual or fictional.”¹⁶⁸ In order to understand the notion one can think of Greek tragedy. The *mimesis* of the tragedy, even if it be fictional in the extreme sense, generates an impact that affects the audience deeply. The fiction itself, for Hatab, in our minds, becomes a reality.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64,65.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

He says that “...mimetic literality can show how a metaphorical expression can be taken ‘literally,’ in the sense of being irreducible or immediately expressive without further analysis.”¹⁶⁹ Another way to understand mimetic literality is to think of it as “make believe.”¹⁷⁰ Hatab says that the notion can also be understood as “suspension of disbelief”¹⁷¹ He states that the power of words and meaning become apparent in such a way that it makes us believe or makes us suspend disbelief. One might even say that a fictive phrase is striking only if we “forget” that it is fiction.¹⁷² We think of it as if it is happening. Otherwise none of the books would be meaningful, even philosophy itself. According to Hatab, Nietzsche himself refers to Greek tragedy and says that the audience sympathetically identifies himself and equates himself with the tragic hero.¹⁷³ This Hatab calls a part of “mimetic psychology.” And it can therefore be called “mimetic identification.”¹⁷⁴ Hatab articulates that tragedy makes possible the “Dionysian effect of mimetic identification” which is feeling oneself in the body and , even, the mind of the hero of the tragedy.¹⁷⁵ Tragedy, according to Hatab, influences us and reflects a kind of reality to us since it says “Look there! Look closely! This is your life.”¹⁷⁶ However, there is lie in Greek tragedy too but the example of mimesis in the Greek tragedy is what confronts to Hatab’s mimetic literality, it can be said. Hatab, further says that, retrieving

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 96.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

from Greek tragedy again the mythical element too, “eternal recurrence can be understood as a tragic-mythic-poetic concept...”¹⁷⁷

Hatab claims that eternal recurrence is put in the style of “myth-as-story” (I guess he is referring to *Zarathustra* mainly) and it may well be conceived as a

...philosophical mythic-concept in the following ways: (1) it functions within the story of Zarathustra’s quest for life affirmation; (2) it performs a general (philosophical) function of forming a structure of repetition for all possible stories; (3) its formal structure, however, is inseparable from its material effect of drawing out the reader’s *own* specific life story by way of its disclosive force.¹⁷⁸

Hatab thinks that this kind of a language may be the best to understand Nietzsche.¹⁷⁹ There may be questions like “How can you offer a literal reading for such a philosopher?” Nietzsche actually uses a lot of illustrations and metaphors, etc. and metaphoric understandings or structurally different readings might suggest something essentially different from what Nietzsche said. And the doctrine “would be...weakened.”¹⁸⁰ Hatab, too, acknowledges that he is on “thin ice,” yet the literal reading offers more than what other alternative readings do, according to him.¹⁸¹

Hatab, quoting from Nietzsche, tries to unify life affirmation, eternal recurrence and tragedy: “who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo*¹⁸² —not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle...and not only to a spectacle but at bottom to him who needs

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 98.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 99.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*,

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*,

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 91.

¹⁸² (music) “From the beginning.” (*Ibid*, p.99)

precisely this spectacle.”¹⁸³ Hatab suggests that Nietzsche wants to claim that we must understand eternal recurrence in suspension of disbelief sense.¹⁸⁴ However so, it is evident that one must use mimetic identification to suspend his disbelief too.¹⁸⁵

Hatab declares, as I thought beforehand, that philosophical texts too can be read in mimetic literalness and in suspension of disbelief. All these mean that Hatab is saying that criticism is wrong when reading Nietzsche’s texts. The doctrine at first must be grasped (if not directly revealed) and for this Hatab suggests this method. This poetic aspect of Nietzsche is rooted, according to Hatab, in Nietzsche’s interest in poetry; according to Nietzsche, “before something is thought (*gedacht*), there must already have been something poeticized (*gedichtet*) in prereflective invention.”¹⁸⁶ Namely “‘thinking’ is abstracted from an already functioning and and living poetic language.”¹⁸⁷ Here Nietzsche refers to the language of Greek tragedy.¹⁸⁸

I can say that this kind of a reading is the best method to grasp the doctrine of eternal recurrence. It is now time to go on with some critical notions that must be understood properly such as fate and fatalism. The notion of *amor fati*, in this sense would be helpful.

¹⁸³ Nietzsche in *Ibid*, p.99

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 96.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

3.2. *Amor Fati*

Amor Fati, namely, the love of fate is a crucial notion for Nietzsche's philosophy of eternal recurrence. 'Fate,' here, refers to eternal recurrence. Therefore to love fate means to love eternal recurrence. The doctrine of eternal recurrence suggests an affirmative look to *life*, and to fate. Nietzsche says that:

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it—all idealism is untruthfulness in the face of necessity—but to *love* it...¹⁸⁹

Amor Fati: let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer.¹⁹⁰

The Christian tradition, as we well know of it, contains an other-worldly promise. This promising negates life-as-it-is, this very life in the world. By Yes-saying to life, Nietzsche opposes this tradition. This life is essential in the sense that there is no other-worldly life, no after-life. Longing for another world has its roots in resentment against this life. Nietzsche sees resentment as lying at the core of traditional morality and other-worldly religions and their negative consequences (such as neuroticism, the poisoning of joy of life, guilt-inducement, mediocrasy, cowardliness and self-deception). Thus he formulates *amor fati*, the love of fate, the love of eternal recurrence, as an antidote to resentment against life.

In "The Yes and Amen Song," the chorus part is the most important and structural part. It says:

¹⁸⁹ F. W. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in ed. K. A. Pearson, D. Large, *The Nietzsche Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 'Why I Am So Clever' § 10. From now on the book will be referred to as *EH*, and § referred to fragment numbers.

¹⁹⁰ *GS*, § 276.

Oh how then could I not lust for eternity and for the nuptial ring of rings —the ring of recurrence!

Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it were this woman whom I love: for I love you, oh eternity!

*For I love you, oh eternity!*¹⁹¹

Thus love, which may be the most precious thing that a human being has and can give, is dedicated to eternity. Life, as eternity, would be the wife of Zarathustra. The eternal recurrence, beyond all things, is the thing to be loved. This is actually, *amor fati*: the love of life, thus eternal recurrence, thus eternity, thus fate.

However, the notion of fate as eternal recurrence is something disturbing. It is evident that something or someone is fated. What does it mean? And how can we affirm the fate, eternal recurrence? In this sense, it is necessary that we must take a close look at the notions “fatalism” and “fate.” As I have discussed earlier, determinism is not a view one can defend in accordance with Nietzsche.

Joan Stambaugh, when analyzing the concepts of fate, fatalism and determinism says that they are substitutable in Nietzsche’s texts.¹⁹² Yet, still, Stambough, analyzing Nietzsche, declares that it would be helpful to make a distinction between “Turkish fatalism” and “Russian fatalism” so as to shed light on Nietzschean fatalism and fate.¹⁹³ Stambaugh says that Turkish fatalism suggests the individual and the fate should be taken distinctly. There is a man, and against him stands the fate. Whatever struggle the individual man holds has nothing to do with his future. Every struggle makes the situation get

¹⁹¹ *Zarathustra*, p. 184,185.

¹⁹² J. Stambough, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

messed up.¹⁹⁴ It can even be said that, psychologically, it is the struggle that makes things worse. There can be no hope that you can be free of your fate. Nietzsche, praising Russian fatalism, according to Stambaugh, says that Russian fatalism, means there can be nothing different from the way the things are, also the individual is of most importance here.¹⁹⁵

Russian Fatalism [is the] fatalism without rebellion with which a Russian soldier for whom the campaign has become too much at last lies down in the snow. No longer to take anything at all, to receive anything, to take anything *into* oneself —no longer to react at all...The great rationality of this fatalism, which is not always the courage to die but can be life-preservative under conditions highly dangerous to life...¹⁹⁶

Since there is no god or something like that to impose a fate on us, the individual is alone. Stambaugh tries to give an account of an “inner necessity” that Turkish fatalism does not have but the Russian has. It is also the opposition of *resentment* against life, this life-preservative fatalism.¹⁹⁷

Stambaugh also says that there are certain similarities between Spinoza’s *amor dei* and Nietzsche’s *amor fati*:

...neither is a personal creator-God, neither has anything to do with teleological purposes..., and both are strictly necessary and could not be otherwise in any way. Both thinkers stress the ‘immanence’ of God or fate, and both could be called *pantheistic* in a qualified sense.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 80.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 81.

¹⁹⁶ *EH*, ‘Why I Am So Wise,’ § 6. p.

¹⁹⁷ J. Stambaugh, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 75.

I will not go into any discussion of Spinoza but merely say that the fate of Nietzsche, for me is drastically different from what Spinoza called necessity and God. Stambaugh states that both Spinoza and Nietzsche praise “the inner necessity” in life, and what is to be loved is this inner necessity. There can be a freedom inside this inner necessity, Stambaugh says and he exemplifies this claim: a musician plays his instrument and finds ways to freedom inside it, yet there cannot be a choice but to play the instrument to be free. The feeling of belonging to fate grasps the individual and he feels himself one with his fate.¹⁹⁹

I can say that there are many ways Stambough is right but not wholly. To relate the fate with the individual is right in its core but it can be said that the notion of the individual or the self is vague in his account. I assume that he takes the notion of individual as person, which I consider a mistake. However, there is also a side on which he seems to be right. It is the feeling of “belonging to a fate”: “Belonging to eternal recurrence.” I can say that eternal recurrence is so impacting that it covers everything in it. Yet the individual, or the person as Stambough exemplifies is still a distinct one. He creates through art, (or maybe by just living) and this is the selfhood which I don’t think can be maintained with the revelation of the thought of eternal recurrence, which I discussed in Chapter 4.

It can be said that courage is necessary to live and to affirm.

Courage after all is the best slayer —courage that *attacks*; for in every attack there is sounding brass.

But the human being is the most courageous animal, and so it overcame every animal. With sounding brass it even overcame every pain, but human pain is the deepest pain.

Courage also slays dizziness at the abyss; and where do human beings not stand at the abyss? Is seeing itself not —seeing the abyss?

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 92.

Courage is the best slayer; courage slays even pity. But pity is the deepest abyss, and as deeply as human beings look into life, so deeply too they look into suffering.

But the courage is the best slayer, courage that attacks; it slays even death, for it says: “Was *that* life? Well then! One more time!”²⁰⁰

In the passage above, Zarathustra implies a key to independent act. It is the method to devastate and annihilate. It attacks, and it slays. It even slays death. We can understand from here that the sentence “Was *that* life? Well then! One more time!” refers to eternal recurrence. Here I can infer the fact that courage slays death by slaying the self. The courage to affirm eternal recurrence means the courage to get out of your *self*.

On the other hand, it is easy to say that Stambough is right to emphasize the issue of immanence. There cannot be an outer force to impose on us or on life some rules, besides, the death of god declares in Nietzsche the complete immanency of eternal recurrence, which is fate. To love this fate, as loving your creation of art is relatively simple and I can say that it cannot be that simple. Stambaugh presents the issue as if I simply play along my composition, or live accordingly, and this means *amor fati*. Solomon, in this context suggests a kind of fatalism that he thinks Nietzsche offers in his texts.

Solomon does not want to go into the detailed scientific discussions of what is called “determinism.” It is evident that Nietzsche is not a determinist in any way. Fatalism, on the other hand, is sometimes presented as a form of determinism. The essential point of the discussion, however, is what Nietzsche means when saying, or inferring, or implying fatalism. Nietzsche’s fatalism has nothing to do with scientific determinism. Its roots go back to the pre-Socratic Greeks and what they called *moira*.²⁰¹ It can be understood as an “aesthetic

²⁰⁰ Zarathustra, p. 125.

²⁰¹ R. C. Solomon, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

thesis”²⁰² that has nothing to do with causal chains. The weight is on the outcome of events. “...Oedipus was ‘fated’ to do the dastardly deeds that he was destined to do, and whatever causal chain he pursued, the outcome was already fixed.”²⁰³ It can be said that, according to Solomon, in determinism the events can be explained by tracing them back to their causes; in fatalism, the events “must” happen but there is no need of effort for the outcome; however, fatalism does not exclude such efforts. It is easy to make sense of Oedipus’ efforts and behaviors in the event chain, for Solomon. To put it more accurately, rather than tracing the events back to their causes as determinism does, Nietzsche emphasizes that, for Solomon, the wills that affect the outcomes are fated. Therefore, there is no need to refer the events to a god or something external, or holy. What is important is Nietzsche’s approach to the ancient fatalism which “... is both different and does not exclude responsibility.”²⁰⁴

Solomon also says that Nietzsche develops “a sense of necessity,”²⁰⁵ accordingly. Considering it, one can say that “... the culmination of choices and the accumulation of responsibility have a necessary and predictable outcome.”²⁰⁶ He gives the example of a young man of the age 16. This young man becomes interested in punk culture and lives a life according to it. Finally he commits a crime and is put into a prison; the neighbors or the family would say that they had said it would happen so. While there are specific choices that the boy makes, the path to the prison, the causal necessity of the events are *not important* for the family or neighbors. The outcome is what is important. From here, it cannot follow that determinism is not essential. There can be such a

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 178.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 179.

thing called determinism. However the essential part of “the narrative” is the outcome of it.²⁰⁷

The outcome is necessary quite independently of the *causal* necessity of the outcome.... [T]he difference between them is not so much the presence or absence of a causal explanation. The difference between them is the attribution of narrative significance to the outcome.²⁰⁸

According to Solomon, fatalism includes a kind of teleology, one which does not give place to an otherworldly being which lies behind the events but puts the emphasis on the “significance of an event or outcome.”²⁰⁹ When Nietzsche talks about ‘destiny’ we should understand a fatalistic teleology. The destiny cannot be understood by the analysis of causes. The fatalistic teleology, yet, grasps the “...results-focused, purposive nature of the narrative. One cannot understand destiny just by understanding how (causally) the outcome came about.”²¹⁰

It can be said that according to Solomon we have our destiny in our hands. There is no outer being who forces us to act accordingly. Although we are limited by our characters or by fate, we are, in a sense free. We are not the sufferers of fate or condemned to be free.²¹¹ “... [W]e are more like the oarsmen of our fate, capable of heroic self-movement but also swept along in a sometimes cruel but glorious sea.”²¹²

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

In this respect, we can instantiate the situation of Agamemnon too. Agamemnon is informed by an oracle to sacrifice his daughter by the will of Zeus so as to avoid a ruin in his expedition. The sailormen were dying, his warriors starving, if he did not sacrifice his daughter, all would die, his daughter included. Thus, he sacrifices his daughter. However, we understand from the passages that he felt guilty, and he is right in feeling so. The chorus also stresses the fact of his guilt. He is, in a way, obliged to do this, but still it was his decision. He is responsible for it.²¹³

Solomon states that there is no contradiction between self-creation and fatalism.²¹⁴ He says that we can see the perspectivist approach of Nietzsche in the combination of these notions. There are two fundamental theses, Solomon suggests, in this seemingly “paradoxical position.”²¹⁵ The first is that we always consider ourselves as free beings, independent of fate, or any determined causes. We think we are responsible for our acts and their outcomes. The second is that; we are “thrown into” the world with abilities and restraints. We are the results of our parents and, maybe, of our culture.²¹⁶ When thinking this way we can consider ourselves not free. Nietzsche, with these at hand, also gives importance to “agency,” according to Solomon. That is not like a Kantian agency, yet Nietzsche thinks that there is a creative-self, and it is responsible for the acts he created. Self-making, however, cannot be understood as a transcendent act. It is “a kind of self-cultivation.”²¹⁷ It is not free of the environment, our talents, character, or the culture. It is not a *becoming* in “ontological freedom...but becoming who you are. This strongly

²¹³ Martha Nussbaum, ‘Agamemnon’ in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

²¹⁴ R. C. Solomon, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 182,183.

suggests that self-making ('becoming') already embraces fatalism ('who you are')."²¹⁸ "Self-becoming," or self-creation is not "free will" in the traditional sense but it is inside *a* fatalism. The seeming-paradox is thus not a real paradox. We can see ourselves both "from inside and from outside."²¹⁹ This explains the critical point of the discussion according to Solomon.²²⁰ In the discussion of fate and fatalism, it is evident that Solomon, unlike Stambough, interprets *fate* as if there is an outer force (a god maybe) is implemented. The term "fate" in Nietzsche's texts, means the "fatalism" that Solomon has just discussed and interpreted.²²¹ It would be absurd to think that "anyone can do anything if only they try hard enough" since it should be remembered that character imposes certain kinds of limitations.²²² The fatalism of Nietzsche grasps us in the framework of creation of thy self.²²³ From here on Solomon tries to figure out the whatness of self-creation.

Solomon asserts that Nietzsche urges us to a new life. The life which is transformed and which is higher. This life can be achieved through "self-scrutiny and self-transformation."²²⁴ He is against the view that there is a conception of fatalism in Nietzsche, which is contradictory with self-creation. Nietzsche tells us to create new values, "scrutinize," "realize our destinies," and therefore "'create ourselves'...always *in accordance with* our inborn abilities and limitations."²²⁵ Solomon exemplifies two extreme positions of

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 183.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²²⁰ *Ibid*.

²²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 185-186.

²²² *Ibid*, p. 189

²²³ *Ibid*, p. 192.

²²⁴ *Ibid*.

²²⁵ *Ibid*.

self-making. The one is Kantian and it supposes that “we create ourselves *de nihilo*” which means “acting as an original cause.”²²⁶ This is not acceptable for Nietzsche, says Solomon. The other extreme is that strict determinism which states that ‘self-creation’ which carries with it the cultivation of the self that is independent of agency, and this is too unacceptable for Solomon. He states that the problem of self-creation is understood within the problem of free will, and this is a mistake. Solomon suggests, as Goethe says, “we are ‘free within limitations.’”²²⁷ The perspectivist view in any way allows such a conception. Self creation or even freedom may not necessarily involve free will. Solomon says that it should be remembered the emphasis in Nietzsche is on the “doing” rather than the “doer” putting the agency as a prerequisite for there to be a self²²⁸ which I discussed in the Chapter 4.

Solomon, concluding, sees eternal recurrence as a “fatalistic acceptance” for Nietzsche.²²⁹ It is a mythological thought and the agent is made to choose to affirm or negate the life he lives.²³⁰

Solomon thinks that the doctrine should not be read literally. He sees *amor fati* as distinct from eternal recurrence. Only if eternal recurrence is taken as the whole of life, can it be loved. Solomon says that I may not love some instants of my life and given a choice, I would like to change them, yet, as a whole life can be loved, and affirmed. He says “It is *my* life, whatever I may think of its details or the world in which I find myself ‘thrown!’ to live. And this, I think, is the sense of eternal recurrence.”²³¹

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 193

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 194,195.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Solomon asserts mainly that *amor fati* and eternal recurrence are by-products of Nietzsche's philosophy, Nietzsche actually gives to life the importance it deserves. I can, to a certain extent, agree with Solomon in the issues of fate and fatalism. But I am against the view that the limitation fatalism puts in our way is our characteristics or social life. It is natural life itself. Solomon suggests a kind of perspectivism and I can suggest such a perspectivism too; it might be said that there is no god's eye viewpoint to the world itself. The life, as we understand seems to contain a kind of creative willing, but actually life itself is not so optimistic. The doctrine of eternal recurrence is a kind of a thought that cannot be limited with our selves. It overcomes our selves. And yet the self itself the source of this fatality. I did go into deep discussion of it later on. It is apparent that Solomon tries to solve the problem of self scrutiny in a fatalist universe and making Nietzsche distorted, he solves it. However, it should be remembered that I agree to a certain point that our lives carries something beyond mere fatalism. He is right quoting that "... [W]e are more like the oarsmen of our fate, capable of heroic self-movement but also swept along in a sometimes cruel but glorious sea."²³² But it is not simply our characteristics or environmental social facts that limit us. I agree that the fatality in life is not imposed and it is in us; it is, I think, the limit of us as selves, as I said.

²³² Ibid, p. 180.

CHAPTER 4

ETERNAL RECURRENCE AS TRAUMA AND CREATIVE WILLING: DISSOLUTION OF THE SELF

The doctrine of eternal recurrence of the same, in light of what has been discussed above still has certain aspects to be analyzed. I argued for an inner fatality, this inner fatality seems to be placed *in* the self. The self, thus seems to be problematic. Also it is apparent that Nietzsche is talking about a “creative willing.” How can a creative willing be possible in a life which is eternal recurrence of the *same*? The problems, yet, can be solved within an appropriate analysis of the self and an account of creative willing.

The main problem concerning the self seems to be at first “what is the self that recurs?” There is no definition of the self inside this text, but I suggest, following the path of Klossowski, an account. On the other hand, there is something evident in the text that I do not take self simply as ‘person.’

The issue of creative willing is closely related to the self, and it has certain problems among which the most crucial is willing the past; another is the problem of willing all that happened. “Do we have to affirm all that happened?” And concludingly, in the life where eternal recurrence is the meaning, or rather life itself, “How can the will will creatively?” In what sense can it be free?

4.1. The Self

The position of self within the doctrine of eternal recurrence will shed light on some issues and it will also help us understand both the nature of eternal recurrence and the nature of the self within it. The self is a crucial notion and it

is important to understand the self in order to understand certain sides of eternal recurrence.

It is a great habit that we refer to ourselves as “I.” It is hard to answer the question “Who is me?” and I do not feel myself obliged to answer this question. Yet, implicitly I know that I assume an account of the self within my lines. I am inclined to confirm some ideas of Klossowski in this light. It could be said that the analysis of the self within eternal recurrence means for me the analysis of eternal recurrence within the self. It is us to whom eternal recurrence is spoken.

4.1.1. Self as Person

It is a common conception, even an intuition for some, to treat the self as a person. “Being me” means “being the *person I*” for some writers.²³³ The analytic tradition has a large literature on this issue of ‘personhood.’ What interests me is the aspect that analyzes person within eternal recurrence. I briefly explain a problem which can be seen as crucial for me too.

The main problem is whether it is me that recurs. Here it should be stated that the identity should be understood as a numerical identity, which is different from qualitative identity in which identity means exact similarity. A photon, let’s say, can be qualitatively identical with another, or an electron can be said to be so with another, but they cannot be numerically identical with one another. The question is whether the person A in the occurrence O₁ is identical with the person B in the occurrence O₂. If there is no difference between both occurrences, including time and place, and there are no differences between A and B, including time and place, it can be said that A and B are the same person. Nietzsche, in the passage “The Heaviest Weight” in the *Gay Science*

²³³ For further information see B. Garrett, *Personal Identity and Self Consciousness*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

talks about such a similarity, or rather identity. There are problems with this numerical identity according to some interpreters.

Ivan Soll²³⁴ states that eternal recurrence's impact lies in the thought that I have to live the same experiences, pleasure-giving or painful, eternally. To ensure such eternity, namely infinite repetition of my life, I have to be the same person with the person that recurs. In other words "me in the cycle A" should be numerically identical with "me in the cycle B." But according to Soll this cannot be properly put. He declares that "me in cycle B" can be the exact *Doppelgänger* (that is my double, or my replica) of "me in the cycle A" but it can not be numerically identical in any way.²³⁵

It can be said that I may worry about that *Doppelgänger* if there is a continuity of some kind, such as psychological continuity. It seems like the view of Derek Parfit on personal identity which holds that personal identity is not essential unless there is psychological continuity.²³⁶ However, it is obvious for Ivan Soll that if I were psychologically continuous with a later occurrence of so-called-me, then I would not be the *same* person with him. But because of the fact that such psychological continuity must entail a kind of memory there cannot be a recurrence of the *same*. Soll concludes that there is no concern for me to worry about the self that recurs, since that self is not me or does not belong to me in an appropriate way.²³⁷

²³⁴ In B. Reginster, *op. cit.*

²³⁵ Reginster, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

²³⁶ For further information see: D. Parfit, *Reason and Persons*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

Simmel argues for a similar point²³⁸ articulating that there cannot be a proper evidence that can serve as the basis of my being identical with the self that recurs in another cycle since there cannot be an “awareness” of the self in any of the other cycles, which can be counted as evidence of recurrence. Further, he says that if an experience occurs within my grasp, then I have to remember if it occurred earlier, namely, in another cycle. This kind of a remembrance, as we just discussed is impossible since there would be no sameness as such. In addition, there is no way to posit a kind of qualitative identity among circles. In that sense time would be the differentiating notion in order to say the first, third or the former repetitions. However it cannot be since absolute time within which cycles take place implies that the cycles are not the same: because of the fact that they all occur in different times; they would be distinct. Simmel concludes that Nietzsche must argue for a numerical identity, which only leads to an eternal novelty, namely a single occurrence.²³⁹

Taking self as person is fundamentally problematic yet we must keep in mind that many people take it so. When talking about themselves, referring to themselves as “I,” they basically think of being a person in this sense. It is, thus important to point out the analytical analysis of this personhood. The analytical analyses have hardly anything to do with the Nietzschean account that we discuss progressively. The style that Nietzsche treats the self in is tried to be made explicit within this chapter. There is no direct answer, yet, to be given to the question “What is self?” However, the problem-based discussion that follows will be helpful.

²³⁸ P. S. Loeb ‘Identity and Eternal Recurrence,’ in ed. Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

4.1.2. Self-Cycle & World-Cycle

It is evident that we are placed into the cycle of the world. Our lives, as we think of them in terms of eternal recurrence, starts with birth, goes on, and ends with death. And this cycle is repeated. As we think of the world in general, or some may prefer to name it “the universe,” a cycle starts with the start of the universe and ends with it; inside the universe, we are born and we die. Thus, we see that there are two cycles: the self-cycle and the world-cycle. In the self-cycle (that is our cycle as selves), the gap between my death and my birth is a gap, it can be said, in which there is no “me.” That period is a complete nothingness for me. Yet life goes on in that period and there exist events. Correspondingly, the affirmation of eternal recurrence, seems to have two aspects: one is “affirming my life,” the other is “affirming whole life.” In this section one could see the relation that Nehamas posits between these affirmations.

Alexander Nehamas gives an account of this problem. Nehamas, generally, thinks that the psychological side of the doctrine of eternal recurrence is much stronger than the cosmological claims Nietzsche tried to make.²⁴⁰ There are passages where Nietzsche tries to give a cosmological account in *Zarathustra* too, but we should understand these passages in their psychological value, according to him.²⁴¹

One of the most important issues is that the past can be affirmed thinking that “past events are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for one to be what one is.”²⁴² Nehamas, I can say, is trying to give a kind of account that ensures

²⁴⁰ A. Nehamas, ‘The Eternal Recurrence,’ *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3, (1980), p. 333.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 337,338.

²⁴² *Ibid*, p. 349.

us to make peace with our past since each individual instant of the past is a part of us. There should be nothing to change.

Although I do not agree with Nehamas wholly, I can say that eternal recurrence presupposes a recurrence that is the recurrence of all. Therefore, if you affirm your life, you must affirm the whole of history. It is not easy to do that since it can be said that we can only affirm what is known to us. We are not informed about history as it is, but through second-hand sources. We are not the witnesses of the whole history. Nevertheless the feeling that “I belong to fate” enables us to feel the essentiality of life, even if we cannot know everything.

Nehamas interprets Nietzsche saying that “if any one of [the temporal stages of the world] recurred at any time, all of them would also have to recur.”²⁴³ He also adds that there is no need that the cosmology of such an argument to be true.²⁴⁴ Nehamas, analyzing the doctrine of eternal recurrence asserts a conditional statement that requires neither a cosmology nor a physics: “If my life were to recur, it would recur in exactly identical fashion.”²⁴⁵ What matters is the affirmation of life that is exactly the same, further numerically the same.

Nehamas interprets the situation as one where affirmation can be made hardly, only with the presupposition that we have done nothing wrong or regrettable.²⁴⁶ It is too hard to do, yet, in any way, Nehamas claims, a single moment of affirmation means a total affirmation of our lives and the life as it is.²⁴⁷ He thus puts forth the following counterfactual claim: if you were to affirm your life; self-cycle, or a part of it, it would follow that you affirm the world-cycle. To

²⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 338.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 339.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 345.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 348.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 351-355.

put it more definitely: “If anything in the world recurred (including an individual life, or even a moment of it), then everything in the world would recur in exactly identical fashion.”²⁴⁸

The counterfactual Nehamas suggests, carries a form of determinism inside it. But it should be kept in mind that this kind of a determinism is not easily apparent in Nietzsche since causes and effects are, in Nietzsche, eliminated to a certain extent. The suggestion of Nehamas can be taken as a conditional, I can say, at least. However, in the form of a conditional, Nehamas would not accept that the argument itself is as strong as earlier.

The affirmation of world-cycle is a disturbing idea, and thinking of the world cycle as *life* and feeling belonging to it is also disturbing, but at the same time pleasure-giving. It must be kept in mind that life is sensitive, and Nietzsche touching our thoughts about life, touches also the most sensitive part of us. That is why we are both disturbed and in a way pleased.²⁴⁹

4.2. Creative Willing

Creative willing in a world of eternal recurrence seems to be problematic. Thinking in terms of affirmation and *amor fati*, the problem of affirming the past is also apparent in this sense, namely how can I will creatively and how can this willing be about the past; these problems are closely linked to the issue of time as well as the issue of willing.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in the part “On Redemption,” Nietzsche takes into account some problems of willing, concerning time.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 345.

²⁴⁹ As I understand from Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

‘It was’: thus is called the will’s gnashing of teeth and loneliest misery. Impotent against that which has been —it is an angry spectator of everything past.

The will cannot will backward; that it cannot break time and time’s greed —that is the will’s loneliest misery.

Willing liberates; what does willing plan in order to rid itself of its misery and mock its dungeon?²⁵⁰

And because in willing itself there is suffering, based on its inability to will backward —thus all willing itself and all living is supposed to be— punishment!²⁵¹

Unless the will were to finally redeem itself and willing became not-willing —; but my brothers, you know this fable song of madness!²⁵²

Since will cannot will backwards there appears a kind of resentment against the past. This impotence of the will against the past and the resentment that results from it lead to a tendency to perceive the will and willing itself, and thus life itself, as something that should be denied, something like a curse and punishment. This is all about the pessimistic viewpoint of religions towards life and their optimistic giving about the other-world. Existence is shown as a punishment to be struggled against. Yet Nietzsche implies that there *can* be willing backwards. We can say “I will it thus.”

Away from these fable songs I steered you when I taught you: ‘The will is a creator.’

All ‘it was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a grisly accident —until the creating will says to it: ‘But I will it thus! I shall will it thus!’²⁵³

...but how shall this happen? Who would teach it to also will backward?²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ *Zarathustra*, p. 110,111.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 111.

²⁵² *Ibid*, p. 112.

²⁵³ *Ibid*.

I can claim that eternal recurrence plays a fundamental role in backward willing. Since there will be no past, present, and future the willing can will independently. I can will the past as I will the future.

Conversely, it is crucial to make sense of “backward willing” to understand eternal recurrence. But is there really such a way of understanding the act of willing? Is there an interpretation of the will that makes it possible for it to will backward while retaining what we consider to be essential to what we understand by “the will”—i.e., freedom and creativity? It is important to know how the past can be willed as future or as present. It is the issue of time. The cosmological arguments are of no use. Then, how can we understand the past? As mentioned in the Introduction, Nietzsche in the part, “On the Vision and the Riddle”, tells a riddle “that he *saw*”²⁵⁵. In the riddle, Zarathustra saw the dwarf.

But there is something in me that I call courage; this so far has slain my every discouragement. This courage at last commanded me to stand still and to say: “Dwarf—you or I!”—

“See this gateway, dwarf!”... “It has two faces. Two paths come together here; no one has yet walked them to the end.

This long lane back: it lasts an eternity. And that long lane outward — that is another eternity.

They contradict each other, these paths; they blatantly offend each other —and here at this gateway is where they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed at the top: ‘Moment.’

But whoever were to walk one of them further —and ever further and ever on: do you believe, dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?”—

“All that is straight lies,” murmured the dwarf contemptuously “All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle.”

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

“You spirit of gravity!” I said, angrily. “Do not make it too easy on yourself! Or I shall leave you crouching here where you crouch, lamefoot—and I bore you *this high!*”

See this moment!” I continued. “From this gateway Moment a long eternal lane starches *backward*: behind us lies an eternity.

Must not whatever *can* already have passed this way before? Must not whatever *can* happen, already have happened, been done, passed by before?

And if anything has already been here before, what do you think of this moment, dwarf? Must this gateway too not already—have been here?

And are not all things firmly knotted together in such a way that this moment draws after it *all* things to come? Therefore—itself as well?

For, whatever *can* run, even in the long lane *outward*—*must* run it once more!—

And this slow spider that creeps in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must not all of us have been here before?

—And return and run in that other lane, outward, before us, in this long, eerie lane—must we not return eternally?—”²⁵⁶

By discussing with the dwarf, Zarathustra asserts an allegory about time. He says that there is a way back and forth, and the gateway we here stand is the moment, yet; in fact the future and the past go into infinity and merge into each other. Thus, time is a circle. However, it is not an easy thing to grasp; but the eternity Zarathustra suggests is the eternity of the past and the present, so the moment. Life goes on and on as circles. In this sense the past is not the past as we think of it; it shall recur since time is a circle. By affirming life as eternally recurring, we affirm the past just as we affirm the moment or the future. The moment of the thought plays a crucial role in this sense, which I argued later in 4.3.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 125,126

Zarathustra, then, uses the metaphor of the shepherd to illustrate how the thought of eternal recurrence can act on the self. On the mouth of the shepherd, there hangs the snake.

And truly, I saw something the like of which I had never seen before. A young shepherd I saw; writhing, choking, twitching, his face distorted, with a thick black snake hanging from his mouth.

Had I ever seen so much nausea and pale dread in one face? Surely he must have fallen asleep? Then the snake crawled into his throat — where it bit down firmly.

My hand tore at the snake and tore —in vain! It could not tear the snake from his throat. Then it cried out of me: “Bite down! Bite down!

Bite off the head! Bite down!” —Thus it cried out of me, my dread, my hatred, my nausea, my pity, all my good and bad cried out of me with one shout.—²⁵⁷

He, then asks the sailors the meaning of the riddle, what does it mean? Who is the shepherd? Not answering them or getting an answer, he goes on:

—Meanwhile the shepherd bit down as my shout advised him; he bit with a good bite! Far away he spat the head of the snake —and he leaped to his feet.—

No longer shepherd, no longer human —a transformed, illuminated, *laughing* being!

Never on earth had I heard a human being laugh as *he* laughed!

Oh my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no human laughter —and now a thirst gnaws at me, a longing that will never be still.

My longing for this laughter gnaws at me; oh how can I bear to go on living! And how could I bear to die now?—²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The snake symbolizes, as I understand, the *truth* of eternal recurrence, and by biting the snake's head off, the shepherd affirms eternal recurrence of life, is enlightened, and transformed, and dissolves. We may not think of the shepherd as an individual self. Yet, thinking of it as a self, it can be said that the self to whom the eternal recurrence is revealed is the self that is dissolved and becomes "innumerable *others*." Being "innumerable others" is closely related to the issue of dissolution of the self which I discussed in the following section.

The yes-saying, as I have declared earlier, is what Nietzsche calls in his terminology 'affirmation.' The affirmation of recurrence frees the self and rescues it from its boundaries.

I am a blesser and a Yes-sayer if only you are around me, you pure, you bright one, you abyss of light! Into all abysses then I carry my Yes-saying that blesses

I have become a blesser and a Yes-sayer, and for this I wrestled long and was a wrestler, in order to free my hands one day for blessing.

But this is my blessing: to stand over each thing as its own sky, as its round roof, its azure bell and eternal security —and blessed is he who blesses so.²⁵⁹

Yes-saying to all things, to life, to eternal recurrence of the same is a noble act since this noble act would help the coming of *Übermensch*. And by saying "Yes," as an affirmative self in the universe, one, I think, makes himself authentic to the world and to life. He completely joins with it. He feels belonging to his fate.

To redeem those who are the past and to recreate all 'it was' into 'thus I willed it! —only that would I call redemption!

Will —thus the liberator and joy bringer is called; thus I taught you, my friends! And now learn this in addition: the will itself is still a prisoner.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 132.

Nietzsche sees Yes-saying as a redeemer, a freeing act. Eternal recurrence, as the very meaning of life, rather than binding us with chains, frees us. The creative will, that wills the past and the future as if they are the moment of happenings, makes possible freedom itself too, authentically. When the self dissolves, freedom becomes possible since inner necessity too is thus eliminated and therefore creative willing becomes possible. But how can this happen?

4.3. The Dissolution of the Self

Pierre Klossowski, in his book *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*,²⁶¹ envisages Nietzsche as a *self* and tries to figure out the rise and falls of his mind, or let's say the *soul*; and interprets Nietzsche himself and the doctrine of eternal recurrence on a self-based route. In order to understand the dissolution of the self we must understand certain aspects of the self.²⁶²

As Klossowski rightly notes, Nietzsche sees the body as the “locus of impulses” rather than a “property of the self.”²⁶³ This approach is beyond the traditional ‘physical’ conception of body. Klossowski, when considering the notion of body in Nietzsche suggests that the body in Nietzsche is like a war field in which the winners are not determined or *fated* from the outside. And due to these impulses and their interaction with each other, “the body becomes *fortuitous*.”²⁶⁴ Life as becoming, as I understand, can be represented in the life of the body for us. There is no law in the world of becoming, since even the so-

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 110.

²⁶¹ P. Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, Translated by D. W. Smith, (London: Continuum, 2005).

²⁶² See Introduction in *Ibid*.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 24.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

called causality itself is a fiction. The body, in this sense, is dependent on no laws. “[T]he body is the product of chance.”²⁶⁵ Our body is the standpoint of impulses that are nearly random.²⁶⁶

Klossowski differentiates the body from consciousness stating that consciousness somehow codes and decodes the body by the instrument of a “language of signs.”²⁶⁷ To be conscious is to use the stability of language.²⁶⁸ Consciousness is needed for something to be communicable, and in order to communicate it must use language. Language, however, is something static; it is not *becoming*, and it is also not *fortuitous*.

Also for Klossowski, “Every living being interprets according to a *code of signs*,”²⁶⁹ meaning that if you interpret, you use language, you use stability of the code of signs. Generally, if this body – this Warfield- is to be made communicable, something to be talked about, it must be coded and de-coded by consciousness itself. And consciousness, in order to present itself and to stabilize itself in the everyday code of signs, has to put a distance between itself and the bodily functions —warfield. In contrast, the impulses tend not to be placed under a self. We can say that the warfield tries to “de-individuate”²⁷⁰ itself authentically; the self has a tendency to dissolve.

In his interpretation of Nietzsche, Klossowski emphasizes the sickness of Nietzsche’s body. For Klossowski, Nietzsche, by investigating his own nervous system, comes to know himself in an original aspect. Owing to this, Nietzsche

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 21.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 22.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 20.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 32.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 36. (emphasis mine)

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 21.

develops an intelligence based on a physical criterion. Forces in our bodies from their origin, are distant-immediate ones. Nietzsche, in this way, is trying to understand the most immediate thing in himself by leaning to the distant, according to Klossowski.²⁷¹ As I said above, the war inside the body, the forces fighting, tends to destroy the boundary which is self. There is a distance, Klossowski asserts, between us and the forces in our body, yet it is also the most immediate thing to us. It is so familiar with us actually, but at the same time it is unknown. It is our own self that we are talking about, it is the most immediate thing to us. There cannot be anything closer to us. However, at the same time it is far. “Knowing thyself,”²⁷² “knowing the self” is a hard act to do. We should eliminate the boundary of the self in order to “know the self.” Nietzsche says,

What are we ourselves? Are we not also nothing but an image? A something within us, modifications of ourselves that have become conscious?

Our Self of which we are conscious: is it not an image as well, something outside of us, something external, on the outside? We never touch anything but an image, and not ourselves, not our Self.

Are we not strangers to ourselves and also as close to ourselves as our neighbor?²⁷³

It is what Klossowski, I think, takes our attention to. It means that the inner inspection is a hard act, and by doing this, Nietzsche both suffers great pains and also he grasps the most immediate thing in himself that is implicitly very distant for all of us. However, for Nietzsche, every act of creativity, it can be said that every act of introspection, finishes with pain, creativity causes pain and the pain causes creativity.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 18,19.

²⁷² *BGE*, § 32.

²⁷³ Nietzsche in P. Klossowski, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19.

And more importantly, “[s]tarting from [the impulses which the body gets affected by], Nietzsche suspected that beyond the (cerebral) intellect there lies an intellect that is infinitely more vast than the one merges with our consciousness.”²⁷⁵ The intellect, Klossowski talks about, which is dependent on physical criteria, is distinct from the everyday code of signs, it is different from consciousness as we know of and talk about it in ordinary language. It is a kind of unconsciousness.

It is in light of such an account of consciousness, a different sort of intelligence, and a corresponding understanding of unconsciousness that Klossowski interprets eternal recurrence. According to him, Nietzsche uses unconsciousness as the primary way to authenticity freeing it from the everyday code of language.²⁷⁶ The kind of intellect that Nietzsche is developing, according to Klossowski, is closer to the unconscious than it is to consciousness. This intellect lurks among the impulses. It is rooted in the locus of impulses which – unlike consciousness which tries to hold itself as a stable sign —tends to “de-individuate.”

I think that Klossowski’s interpretation, although he would not agree with me,²⁷⁷ leads to an aim in the condition that there is unconsciousness. By the dissolution of the self, I can say, by the elimination of so-called fatality an aim may be possible. For Klossowski, analyzing Nietzsche, makes consciousness a means rather than treating it as an end the way all other philosophers and thinkers before him have done.²⁷⁸ According to Klossowski “there would be an

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 26.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 33.

²⁷⁷ See. *Ibid*, p. 30.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 33.

end (the unconscious life) because there would be a *means* (which would be consciousness)”²⁷⁹ The dissolution of the self means, in this light, for me, the way to unconsciousness and freedom; the latter makes possible an aim.

I have already discussed and agreed with Solomon partially that there is an inner necessity that is called fatalism in Nietzsche. It is the inner fatality that necessitates the course of the human life, as in Agamemnon’s case. Similarly, Klossowski says, the identity of the self is indistinguishable from “a meaning or direction formed by the *irreversible* course of a human life. It experiences this direction or meaning as its own accomplishment.”²⁸⁰ “[T]he *self*,” Klossowski goes on, “as a product of body [—the product of the forces fighting in the locus of the impulses—], attributes this body to itself as its *own*, and is *unable* to create another.”²⁸¹ As I understand, while the forces in the body tend to dissolve and to de-individuate, the self seems like a boundary and even an individuating one. It tends to enclose the forces and attributes them to itself. And, yet, on the other hand, it becomes of a “prisoner of itself” —as for Nietzsche’s own “the will is”²⁸²— since, due to the fatalism of Nietzsche which I discussed earlier in the Chapter 3, the self appears unable to create another body. And there exists, in this body (and Self), in this “irreversible” way, a fatality.²⁸³ In other words, by being “me” I am a “prisoner *in my self*.” Saying that “... [T]he body is the *Self*,” I think, Klossowski implies that body is nothing more but a self; however, self is not only body, it is also the boundary. By this, “Nietzsche also developed a new version of fatality —that

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Zarathustra*, p. 210.

²⁸³ P. Klossowski, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

of the *Vicious Circle*, which suppresses every goal and meaning, since the beginning and the end always merge with each other.”²⁸⁴

Regarding this fatality, Klossowski claims that “... the experience of *Eternal Return*...announced a break with this *irreversible once and for all*...”²⁸⁵ How does this break happen? As I understand from Klossowski’s interpretation of Nietzsche, the key to understanding this break is seeing the tension between the de-individuating forces of the body and the individuating tendency of the self. As a collection of impulses, Klossowski says, the body is fortuitous.²⁸⁶ Therefore, Klossowski comes to the conclusion that the body’s attachment to the self is also fortuitous.²⁸⁷ It can be seen that the thought of eternal recurrence breaks the attachment of the body to the self and when this happens, the de-individuating forces are set free and the self dissolves. Thus eternal recurrence ensures a different kind of fatalism than the fatalism of the identity of the self through time. The inner necessity is broken by the thought of eternal recurrence.

The break in the inner necessity is closely related to forgetfulness. As will be remembered, memory was one of the most problematic concepts when interpreting eternal recurrence. Klossowski describes forgetfulness as “the *occultation of the signs*²⁸⁸ we use to designate the groups of events that are being lived through or thought at a given moment, whether near or far.”²⁸⁹ “The occultation of signs” *signifies* the elimination of the conscious world, and the self as a boundary. Nietzsche describes forgetfulness as not a passive

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁸⁸ My emphasis.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

faculty but “an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word, to which we owe the fact that what we simply live through, experience, take in, no more enters our *consciousness*...”²⁹⁰

Klossowski, interprets consciousness, and therefore decisions, as secondary to excitation and unconsciousness; as “nothing more than an *image of forgetfulness* —*the forgetfulness of everything that owes its origin to the upright position.*”²⁹¹ As I understand, “the image of forgetfulness” is not “*forgetfulness itself.*” The “image of forgetfulness” is apparent in the “upright position” and it is merely a reflection of “*forgetfulness itself.*” *Forgetfulness itself* is the forgetfulness that comes within the unconsciousness; it is the act of forgetting the conscious self; namely, it is ‘the occultation of the signs’ that we use in the everyday life. The image of forgetfulness, on the other hand, comes to the conscious self as a forgetfulness of earlier repetitions of eternal recurrence.

Forgetfulness, and the image of it both seem to be necessary. That forgetfulness is a necessary consequence of eternal recurrence has already been explained. But the image of forgetfulness is also essential. It is necessary for eternal recurrence since if the self before the revelation has such a remembrance, namely of the recurring self, it cannot be said that there is eternal recurrence, because of the reasons I have discussed in 4.1.1.

Klossowski thinks that “...the doctrine of the vicious circle...[is]...grounded in forgetfulness...” This is “not only for innumerable times but for all time and always.”²⁹² It means to me that when in upright position, when we are awake, we reflect on the image of forgetting that is necessary to forget (or rather not

²⁹⁰ *GM*, ‘Essay 2’ § 1.

²⁹¹ P. Klossowski, *op cit.*, p. 22.

²⁹² *Ibid*, p. 41.

remember) the recurring lives. When the thought strikes and consciousness is eliminated, we forget the conscious self, or rather, the self is forgotten without there being an “us” anymore. In this sense, the doctrine is “grounded in forgetfulness.” And another important point is that it is not happening “innumerable times” but “for all time and always.” Namely, due to the function of forgetting, we —as being selves— cannot remember the experience of the moment of the thought more than once. It is *for us* for all time and always. Namely, according to Klossowski, forgetting is also the “source as well as the indispensable condition not only for...Eternal Return, but also for *the sudden transformation of the identity* of the person to whom it is revealed.”²⁹³

Klossowski states that “We are other than what we are now: *others* that are not elsewhere, but *always* in this *same life*.”²⁹⁴ The core of Klossowski’s interpretation which is the disappearance of the self shows itself now. The self dissolves, the warfield becomes free, the boundary is eliminated. I think, we should not understand ‘being *other*’ in the sense of re-individuating. The de-individuated body, as Klossowski says elsewhere,²⁹⁵ tends to be the others. Namely, as I understand, belonging to life in its purest sense becomes apparent by the dissolution of the self. There is no me to feel belonging to life but the former “imprisoned” impulses of the body, the warfield becomes free and actualizes in innumerable others, there is also no boundary as in “between me and the others,” therefore the freed body *is* innumerable others.

When the thought strikes, the self dissolves. But how? I have already stated that the thought of eternal recurrence is quite striking. The moment of the thought, I suppose, is the moment of revelation. This revelation should not be understood as a revelation from the outside, but as a phantasm —which, for

²⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 44.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 41.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 45.

Klossowski, “refers to an obsessional image produced instinctively from the life of the impulses”²⁹⁶— coming from inside, and instinctively, I think. We are in nature and living; if the living becomes an authentic living then the thought shows itself. As it did with Nietzsche, we are told about this vision and by mimetic literal reading, which I have explained in Chapter 3, we can feel the thought in its core.

The doctrine’s coming to Nietzsche, or to any individual is not a plaything. Nor is it an intellectual game. The moment is an instantaneous enlightenment and it is also a crushing experience.²⁹⁷ It is the perfect moment of existence: Eternity’s revelation. Zarathustra says “at the hour of full noon”: “Quiet! Quiet! Did the world not become perfect just now?... Did I not fall —hark!— into the well of eternity?”²⁹⁸ Jasper, also interpreted the revelation as such: “Through every ring of human existence, there is always an hour when the mightiest thought, that of eternal recurrence of all things, occurs first to one, then to many, and then to all.”²⁹⁹ This moment is the moment of the thought. At that moment, Nietzsche is not himself, he becomes “the entire axis of all being.”³⁰⁰

The point the eternal recurrence struck the mind, and the psychological reaction of the individual, can be well explained through Zarathustra.

—What happened to me: listen! Didn’t time just fly away? Am I not falling? Did I not fall —listen!— into the well of eternity?

²⁹⁶ D. W. Smith in *Ibid*, p. x.

²⁹⁷ K. Jaspers, *op cit.*, p. 357.

²⁹⁸ Nietzsche in *Ibid*, p. 358.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

—What is happening to me? Still! Something is stinging me —oh no—
in the heart? Oh break break, heart, after such happiness, after such a
sting!

—What? Did the world not become perfect just now? Round and ripe?
Oh the golden round ring —where is it flying to now? I'll run after it!
Rush!³⁰¹

Here, Zarathustra can be said to be dizzied and struck by the doctrine's power. He feels eternity, he feels that time flies away. The happiness stings to his heart and the world becomes perfect. The golden ring of eternity, the eternal recurrence comes to him. That's why he says that life is his beloved and the marriage ring³⁰² ties him to the life and eternal recurrence of the same.

...oh how then could I not lust for eternity and for the nuptial ring of
the rings —the ring of recurrence!

Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children,
unless it were this woman whom I love: for I love you, oh eternity!

*For I love you, oh eternity!*³⁰³

Klossowski articulates that “Eternal Return is a necessity that must be willed.”³⁰⁴ Only the one who is me (the self) could will the return and the happenings that cause my very self, yet, “this subject is no longer able to will itself as it has been up to now.”³⁰⁵ However I will all of the earlier possibilities since:

...by embracing in a single glance the necessity of the Return as a universal law, I deactualize my present self in order to will myself in *all*

³⁰¹ *Zarathustra*, p. 224.

³⁰² As Hatab interprets it to be.

³⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 184,185.

³⁰⁴ Klossowski, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

the other selves whose entire series must be passed through so that, in accordance with the circular movement, I once again become what I am at the moment I discover the law of the Eternal Return.³⁰⁶

Although it seems that Klossowski refers to entry 1066 of *The Will to Power*, it is a rather different reference. He says that, as I discussed earlier, it is simply the dissolution of the self and the elimination of boundaries, both the boundary of the self and the boundary between me and the others. But since there is no me “*hic et nunc*”³⁰⁷, there is no others in the traditional sense. The others mentioned are the bodies, or the locus of impulses that can be “willed” not by the “self of me,” but by the “will” again since there is no me. It is evident that I have to forget the moment of the thought when the revelation comes to me since in that moment I am not inside of my *self*. I tend to be others rather than myself.³⁰⁸ Actually it is not ‘me’ that tends but the warfield. It can be said that the tendency is fortuitous; the will acts upon will. He says:

Were I to identify myself with the Circle, I would never emerge from this representation as myself; in fact, already *I am no longer in the moment when the abrupt revelation of the Eternal Return reached me*; for this revelation to have a meaning, I would have to lose consciousness of myself, and the circular movement of the return would have to be merged with my unconscious, until the movement brings me back to the moment when the necessity of passing through the entire series of my possibilities was revealed to me. All that remains, then, is for me to re-will myself, no longer as the outcome of these prior possibilities, no longer as one realization among thousands, but as a fortuitous moment whose very fortuity implies the necessity of the integral return of the whole series.³⁰⁹

Let’s try to analyze this interpretation of the self by Klossowski. This, Klossowski seems to suggest, can be made through unconsciousness. The

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 46.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 45.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 45,46.

revelation makes me unconscious (free from language); however, when I grasp the idea I should be conscious. The changing mental state —if this is so— makes me forget the event chains of my past, not also the previous revelation. If I remembered the recurrence of my life, and the moment of the previous revelation, the revelation would lack the meaning as unique. This loss of this uniqueness suggests a stable base. I feel that nothing unique happens, and this leads me to a monotonous, “*stimmung*.”³¹⁰ This striking doctrine, Klossowski therefore states, in its core, causes the absence of the self and with the forgetfulness, the self completely dissolves.

This point can be better understood in terms of “a higher feeling” that Nietzsche talks about in the following passage. Though this passage seems to suggest a kind of imperative, its importance for Klossowski is not the imperative aspect, but the stress on the higher feeling:

My doctrine teaches: live in such a way that you must desire to live again, this is your duty —you will live again in any case! He for whom striving procures the higher feeling, let him strive; he for whom repose procures the highest feeling, let him rest; he for him belonging, following, and obeying procures the highest feeling, let him obey. Provided that he becomes aware of what procures the highest feeling, and that he shrinks back to nothing. Eternity depends upon it.”³¹¹

He thinks that the main focus in the text is on desire and necessity and these are related to eternity. From here we can reach Nietzsche’s reference, which is the highest feeling —*hohe Stimmung* (“the high tonality of the soul”).³¹² Nietzsche experienced the revelation of Eternal Return in such “high tonality of the soul.”³¹³ Klossowski, then, asks the question of how a *Stimmung* can become a

³¹⁰ The term should be understood in terms of the meaning Klossowski gives to it.

³¹¹ Nietzsche in *Ibid*, p, 47.

³¹² *Ibid*.

³¹³ *Ibid*.

thought. How does the highest feeling, that is “*höchste Gefühl*”³¹⁴ —Eternal Return— transform into the “supreme thought?”³¹⁵ Klossowski states seven steps on this way and these steps are important in order to express that there is an intensity which rises and falls.

(i)The tonality of the soul is a fluctuation of intensity.³¹⁶

From here I can understand that there is no stability within the soul, the intensity rises and falls, as apparent in Nietzsche’s case. Further I can say that this tonality is not unique to one person who is Nietzsche, it can be felt by others too. I do not suggest, like Solomon that Nietzsche talks for us all, but I can say easily that there are a lot of people for whom this intensity can take place.

(ii)In order for it to be communicable, the intensity must take itself as an object, and thus turn back on itself.³¹⁷

The second step suggests that the intensity of the soul may, in a sense, be communicable, namely can be explained to an other. For this, it must be taken as an object and reflect on itself. The intensity makes itself explicit by reflecting on itself. I can say that the doctrine of eternal recurrence as revealed to Nietzsche by his instincts is explained to us by reflection. The doctrine of eternal recurrence itself as we understand it can be said to be a reflection too. But it is up to us how seriously we can take it to our souls.

(iii)In turning back on itself, the intensity interprets itself. But how can it interpret itself? By becoming a counterweight to itself; for this, the intensity must divide, separate from itself, and come back together.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Now this is what happens to the intensity in what could be called moments of rise and fall; however, it is always the same fluctuation, a wave...in the concrete sense....³¹⁸

The reflection of the intensity is the cause, as I understand, of the rises and the falls. To try to make the thought communicable, one can make his soul rise and fall; this fluctuation is not wholly caused by an implicit struggle of communication but by an instinctive drive I think.³¹⁹ The intensity of soul's fluctuations resembles its division and reflection on itself.

(iv)But does an interpretation presuppose the search for a 'signification'? Rise and fall: these are 'designations,' and nothing else. Is there any signification beyond this observation of a rise and fall? Intensity never has any meaning other than that of being an intensity. In itself, the intensity seems to have no meaning. What is a meaning? And how can it be constituted? What is the agent of meaning?³²⁰

Klossowski here asks, firstly, whether the interpretation of intensity on itself necessitates "the search for a signification." He says that the rises and the falls are the identifications of what we refer to as "intensity of soul." I can say a state of the soul is permanent in the state of being in the highest feeling. The struggle to explain the intensity of the soul is nothing more than "a designation." In its core it does not refer to itself meaningfully. Examples may not be appropriate in this issue but if I am to give one; I can think of my hatred, by my hatred cannot reflect on itself meaningfully if it can. Further, more generally thus, my being in the highest feeling, or my being in the highest tonality of the soul cannot convey anything other than designations to itself. It divides itself, interprets itself, but in itself it is meaningless. The communicable side of it, moreover, is just a designation. Klossowski, then, asks what the meaning is and whether there is an agent of it. He answers:

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ I do not refer to something sub-conscious. I refer something authentic to us.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 47,48.

(v)The agent of meaning, and thus of signification, once again seems to be the intensity, depending on its various fluctuations. If intensity by itself has no meaning, other than that of being an intensity, how can it be the agent...of signification, or be signified as this or that tonality of the soul? We asked above how it could interpret itself, and we answered that, in its risings and fallings, it had to act as a counterweight. But this was nothing more than a simple observation. How then does it acquire a meaning, and how is meaning constituted in the intensity? Precisely by turning back on itself, even in a new fluctuation! By turning back on itself, by repeating and, as it were, imitating itself, it becomes a sign.³²¹

Here the term ‘agent’ (*suppôt*) is crucial. It “is itself a phantasm, a complex and fragile entity that bestows a psychic and organic unity upon the moving chaos of the impulses, primarily through the grammatical fiction of the I.”³²² The agent does not have to be just an individual. It may refer, as I understand, to various things among which is the intensity itself as here declared by Klossowski. Yet, there is no meaning of the intensity beyond itself, so it seems impossible to signify something as an agent. The meaning of intensity, therefore, is shaped by itself again. It turns back on itself by a new fluctuation, a new rise, a new fall; however, by this it becomes a sign. It represents itself as a sign.

(vi)But a sign is first of all the trace of a fluctuation of intensity. If a sign retains its meaning, it is because the degree of intensity coincides with it; it signifies only through a new afflux of intensity, which in a certain manner joins up with its first trace.³²³

A sign shows that here is a fluctuation. If the meaning stays stable, it means that the degree of intensity does not change. If it is to signify, there must be a new fluctuation of intensity; that is similar with the first one. This, according to me, does not represent a stability of meaning in any sense. It signifies

³²¹ *Ibid*, p. 48.

³²² D. W. Smith in *Ibid*, p. xi.

³²³ *Ibid*, p. 48.

something which it signified before, but with a new afflux of intensity. Therefore meaning varies, or I can say, meaning does not exist in the traditional sense. The fluctuation of intensity of the soul cannot be meaningful in itself, as Klossowski has said beforehand. However, it can constitute a sign which can, only as a sign, be signifiable.

(vii)But a sign is not only the trace of a fluctuation. It can also mark an absence of intensity —and here too, a new afflux is necessary, if only to signify this absence.³²⁴

With all of these, we can understand that the intensity of the soul is a crucial notion in Klossowski in terms of its being referable for many of the signs. The thought of eternal recurrence is revealed to such a self in which a high tonality of the soul exists. In other words, the high tonality of the soul is needed if the doctrine can be properly reflected by the self, and this reflection, irreversibly leads to the dissolution of the self as it is.

Klossowski mainly suggests that Eternal Return eliminates all surviving identities. According to him:

Nietzsche urges the adherent of the Vicious Circle to accept the *dissolution* of his fortuitous soul in order to receive another, equally fortuitous. In turn, having passed through the entire series, this dissolved soul must itself return, that is, it must *return to that degree of the soul's tonality in which the law of the Circle was revealed to it.*³²⁵

Consequently, Eternal Return, by its beginning, is neither “a postulate” nor a “representation.” It is a “*lived fact* and as a thought, a sudden one.”³²⁶ In his high tonality of the soul, Nietzsche experienced the fact of eternal recurrence. There appeared, according to Klossowski, two audiences to make the thought

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

explicit to: others, and himself.³²⁷ It is evident, and I have argued earlier, that Nietzsche tried to prove the doctrine, but never published it himself. And we can understand from his letters to his friends that he is not properly understood by them. The latter struggle can be seen as evidence to suggest that Nietzsche was trying to convince himself.³²⁸ However, it is evident from the works of Nietzsche that he believed in the doctrine. It is a phantasm for him. And by the authentic nature of the doctrine it is to him that the doctrine is revealed; and by himself.³²⁹

It is evident that the revelation of eternal recurrence eliminates the self, and this elimination opens a way to freedom. Freed from the boundaries of the self, consciousness turns into unconsciousness, the will wills creatively, and an aim becomes possible. Within all of these the most important point is the moment of the thought. When I was reading Hatab, I read an example about the death of one's mother. It gives me the impression that eternal recurrence must be seen like a trauma. The mimetic literality is a way to read the doctrine as such. It is like the pain of Oedipus or of Agamemnon. When we experience a traumatic fact, such as the death of our beloved one, the earth seems like a *phantasm* that is unreal, yet we do not stand in this kind of a psychology; it is destructive. We, consequently, turn back to our normal lives. The trauma is driven back to our souls. Yet, there can be no escape from a trauma, or we may not want to escape, the self seems as a fictive entity, we observe the events outside of us. When we remember the moment of the trauma, we remember it as if we are not in our selves, as if it is another world. The thought of eternal recurrence, if taken literally is a trauma, and in this trauma we lose our *selves*. The self dissolves. The fictive importance that we give our *selves* just goes away.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 72.

³²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 72-76.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 80.

Consequently, as I have discussed earlier, the world is in a process of becoming in the great cycle of being. In life we necessarily live in a fatalism. The core of this fatalism is not imposed on us from the outside but is inside of our selves, it is an inner fatality. By affirming life as it is and feeling my self belong to it, I affirm eternal recurrence of the same. Since there is no past or future or anything like that in eternal recurrence of the things I can also affirm the so-called past as it is a future or a moment. The eternal recurrence should be read in *mimetic* literality. By this way of reading I can feel the doctrine's power in the soul of my self, in a high tonality. I become unconscious, and I become other than I. The Warfield is liberated from the boundaries of the self. The self dissolves. By this dissolution, the inner fatality also dissolves. Therefore even an aim, namely *Übermensch*, can be possible without fatality. The eternal recurrence acts in this way, as a destructive principle.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this work, my aim was to clarify some problems within eternal recurrence and by this way shed light on what the doctrine of eternal recurrence means. The work contained a variety of interpretations from cosmological to existential and to a certain extent semiological. At the very end, the work suggests a certain account following some interpreters coefficiently.

The aim of the Chapter 2 was to demonstrate the fallacies involved in some ways of reading the doctrine of eternal recurrence, such as a cosmological reading or ethical-existential readings. This chapter also served to signal some notions and interpretations that shed light on the flow of my arguments in the following chapters. The second chapter began with a cosmological interpretation of the doctrine by some interpreters. Following Nietzsche's main argument apparent in *The Will to Power* 1066, Danto gives a reconstruction of this cosmological argument. However, as Danto tries to reconstruct the argument, the argument becomes the argument of Danto rather than Nietzsche's. It is also said by Danto, explicitly, that the argument or so-called proof of Nietzsche is not adequate at all. In the following section, I examined Simmel's argument who puts forth a counterexample of touching discs. That example shows that it is possible for a certain part of the universe not to recur. He argues that if a part of the universe does not recur, the universe cannot recur. But his example contains highly ideal objects such as perfect discs which is possible only ideally or geometrically. In the same chapter, Williams and Palencik propose a kind of possibility thesis depending on textual evidence of two quotation marks in Nietzsche's writings. They say that there can be recurrences but not successively. And there can be variations of what you have lived and the recurrences of them too, but again, not necessarily successively. After engaging in some critical discussion of Williams and Palencik

arguments, I also considered Leibniz's law of identity of indiscernibles as leading to a general and strong argument against the so-called cosmological hypothesis of Nietzsche. However, I argued that eternally recurring universes, although nomologically impossible seem to be logically possible.

In the section 2.2.1, I discussed the interpretations of the doctrine of eternal recurrence as an imperative. According to Deleuze, the doctrine of eternal recurrence says: "[W]hatever you will will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return."³³⁰ Or in a more *naïve* form, "Act in a way that you (will to) act such eternally." These so-called maxims are considered by some (such as Deleuze) to be similar to the Kantian categorical imperative, but I argued that eternal recurrence has nothing to do with generating an ethical imperative. The doctrine of eternal recurrence as an imperative is fallacious in more than one way, all of which depend on the fact that Nietzsche's typology and morality are radically different.

In section 2.2.2, I proceeded to consider interpretations of eternal recurrence based on interpretations of Nietzsche as an existentialist. I opposed treating Nietzsche as an existentialist and, more importantly, reading the doctrine of eternal recurrence as if it is trying to give an existentialist message. I am not sympathetic to existentialist interpretations of Nietzsche, since the existentialist interpretations operate with a conception, the self, that does not take into account how radically different Nietzsche's ideas on the notion of the self are. As a matter of fact, this thesis was centered on the idea that the thought of eternal recurrence can only be properly understood through an account of "the dissolution of the self" in Nietzsche. Nietzsche would not suggest a preoccupation with "self-fashioning" as the existentialists are prone to do. He rather would suggest an overcoming of humanity to *Übermensch*. It can be said that we are still "too human" and scrutiny makes no sense for us. We can only be "bridges."

³³⁰ G. Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

The thesis also considered Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. Yet, since, as most would say, Heidegger's Nietzsche is at the core not a Nietzsche but Heidegger himself, Heidegger's interpretation was also rejected.

Having clarified how I do not read eternal recurrence, and before moving on to present how I think it should be read, I finished the second chapter by two sections (2.4, 2.5) on Nietzsche's radically different "ethics" and ontology, respectively.

The *Übermensch* is the central notion of Nietzsche's morality. Therefore in 2.4., I presented this notion, which may be the most crucial notion of Nietzsche's morality. The problem is that Nietzsche presents *Übermensch* as a goal to be attained and the idea of a goal seems to be inconsistent with eternal recurrence, the life which is eternally recurring. As I suggested in Chapter 4, the problem may be solved as a result of the dissolution of the self. Yet I would like to emphasize that this solution can be seen *only as a suggestion* in this work.

The problem with all the misleading cosmological, ethical and existential interpretations is that they overlook how radically different Nietzsche's views on ontology and morality are from the traditional ones, such as atomism and Kantianism. Therefore, in the next section I presented an account of Nietzsche's views on ontology as an ontology of becoming. The ontology of becoming is an essential issue for the whole philosophy of Nietzsche as well as for the doctrine of eternal recurrence. It is therefore important to look in more detail at Nietzsche's "ontology of becoming," showing how he situates being and becoming in relation to each other, which notions in traditional ontology he rejects, and what he offers in their place. To do this, in this section of the thesis, I first declared the relationship between Heraclitus and Nietzsche on the notion of becoming, which Deleuze also takes our attention to. I presented

Reginster's argument where he stresses the difference between "eternity" as understood in Christianity and "eternity" in the doctrine of eternal recurrence as well as Ackermann's interpretation of becoming as an optimistic notion, Stambaugh's stress on the "innocence of becoming." Nietzsche, by suggesting becoming, also eliminates, according to Reginster, the teleology and aim. Furthermore as Richardson says becoming also eliminates "substances," "rest," "causes," and "the doer behind the doing." Jaspers, concludingly claims that the life as eternally recurring is in a state of becoming, but this becoming takes place in the cycle of being of eternal recurrence. Namely, eternal recurrence itself does not become.

In the third chapter, I first argued for a literal reading of the doctrine following Hatab. A *mimetic literality* is needed for the doctrine to affect the reader properly. I, then, discussed *amor fati* and its relation with eternal recurrence, concluding that what is to be loved is eternally recurring life. In this life, yet, a fatality is at stake. This fatality, as Stambaugh and Solomon argued, is not an outsider fatality, namely, it is not imposed on us; but is an inner fatality of a sort. This inner fatality's source seems to be the self. Therefore, the fourth chapter focused on the issue of the self.

In the fourth chapter the issue was mainly the self. I tried to show that a proper analysis of the concept of the self in Nietzsche and an account of the dissolution of the self in eternal recurrence provides satisfactory answers to the most fundamental and puzzling questions that arise in relation to this doctrine. I stressed the fact that the self should not be understood as "person." The analytical tradition analyzes the self as such and it is an analysis that does not fit Nietzsche's notion. However, one can see easily from the analytical conception of person that the recurring self cannot remember the other recurrences since in this way the self would be a different one. In the same chapter, I discussed the issue of self-cycle and world-cycle, the former refers to the recurrence of the self, the latter to the world as a whole. Nehamas argued

that if we affirm our lives, or even a single moment, it follows necessarily that we affirm the whole world-cycle. I see Nehamas' argument as a conditional, and it is also an implication of determinism that cannot be possible within Nietzsche. Also the problem of knowing the whole history is another compelling issue. We cannot know the history first-hand, and even by reading or watching mediately the historical events we cannot be sure about the truth value. However we can feel that we belong to life. This for me, is the right interpretation. Life is as it is, and it is me belonging to it. The problem with affirming our lives, as well as all of life, is that it is difficult to make sense of "willing" in this way—namely, "willing the past" or willing events that we are not directly associated with and do not even know about—let alone "creative willing," as Nietzsche says. The conception of time is important in that sense. Since the past cannot be changed as past, it is difficult to concede that saying "yes" to what has already happened amounts to "creative willing." In section 4.2 I suggested a solution to this problem through an account of time that is evident in Nietzsche's texts. It can be said that there is no past or future, the time as we think of it does not exist, there is eternal recurrence, and within the recurrence past and future collapses. Therefore I can will the past as I will the moment or the future since the past is also the future, the future is the past. This solution may be considered an answer to the question of how the will can will "backwards," but there still remains the question "But how can will will *creatively*?" My answer was that, *following the interpretation of Klossowski*, when the self dissolves the will wills creatively because the self is the source of the inner fatality, and thus a boundary. Klossowski says that, as I discussed earlier, we give meanings to things in the "everyday code of signs." The consciousness grasps the world and is made communicable through language. Nietzsche, yet, tries to adopt a different kind of intellectuality that has its source in the body which is attached to the self. The impulses struggling with and against each other inside us try to free themselves. But within the self they cannot do this. By the revelation of eternal recurrence, and I suggest that the *mimetic literal* reading can act on us as a revelation too, we become

unconscious, and the self dissolves. But the revelation should come to a high tonality of the soul as I discussed in the text.

Thus, I tried to provide an interpretation of eternal recurrence that is complete, satisfactory, faithful to the original Nietzsche texts and coherent at the same time.

To do this, I suggested that the cosmological interpretation of the doctrine is misleading and that the doctrine should be read in terms of *mimetic literality* so that the reader can understand Nietzsche's thought of eternal recurrence as a "lived fact." When one relates to this thought as "the heaviest weight," it has the impact of a trauma. The dissolution of the self, the dissolution of the past and the future into the moment and finally the dissolution of inner fatality thus clear the way for creative willing and *Übermensch*.

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