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Nietzsche and the Eternal Recurrence

PH.D. THESIS

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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Nietzsche's Reception History in the 19th and 20th Centuries Culture	9
1.1. Nietzsche's Reception in German Culture	10
1.1.1. Nietzsche in Ernst Bertram's Interpretation	11
1.1.2. Nietzsche in Martin Heidegger's Interpretation	27
1.1.3. Nietzsche in Karl Löwith's Interpretation	34
1.1.4. Nietzsche in Eugen Fink's Interpretation	51
1.2. Nietzsche's Reception in French Culture	67
1.2.1. Nietzsche in Pierre Klossowski's Interpretation	67

1.2.2. Nietzsche in Gilles Deleuze's Interpretation.....	77
Chapter 2: Eternal Recurrence in Contemporary Exegesis.....	86
2.1. Eternal Recurrence in Heidegger's Interpretation.....	86
2.1.1. Eternal Recurrence – <i>Fundamental Character of the Whole Concept of Being</i>	87
2.1.2. Eternal Recurrence – <i>the Last Fundamental Metaphysical Position of the Western Thinking</i>	100
2.1.3. Eternal Recurrence – <i>the Supreme Bringing to Persistence of the Perishable</i>	109
2.2. Eternal Recurrence in Gilles Deleuze's Interpretation.....	120
2.2.1. The Game of Eternal Recurrence.....	120
2.2.2. The Affirmation/Denial of Eternal Recurrence by Science.....	123
2.2.3. Eternal Recurrence – Two Aspects.....	125
2.2.4. Eternal Recurrence – Synthesis of Double Affirmation.....	130
2.2.5. Eternal Recurrence – Two Different Genealogies.....	131
2.2.6. Eternal Recurrence – the Third Figure of the Transmutation.....	134
2.3. Eternal Recurrence in Gianni Vattimo's Interpretation.....	138
2.3.1. Twilight of the Metaphysical Subject.....	138
2.3.2. Eternal Recurrence – Acceptance and Founder Item.....	144
2.3.3. Will to Power – Essence of the Eternal Recurrence.....	148
2.3.4. Eternal Recurrence – Allegorical and Prophetic Solution.....	153
2.3.5. <i>The Ultra-metaphysical Ultra-man</i>	155
Chapter 3: Eternal Recurrence's Doctrine.....	168
3.1. Aphorism 341. <i>The Gay Science</i>	168
3.2. <i>Thus spoke Zarathustra</i> . Eternal Recurrence Issue.....	176
3.2.1. <i>The Vision and The Enigma</i>	176
3.2.2. <i>The Convalescent</i>	179
3.3. Aforism 56. <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>	183
3.4. <i>Ecce Homo</i> . Eternal Recurrence Issue.....	186
3.5. <i>The will to power</i> . Eternal Recurrence Issue.....	190
3.5.1. <i>The Crisis: The Nihilism and the Eternal Recurrence</i>	190
3.5.2. <i>III. The Eternal Recurrence</i>	192
Conclusions.....	201
Bibliography.....	204

KEY WORDS

Eternal Recurrence, Friedrich Nietzsche, doctrine of the eternal self recurring, temporally identical recurrences, but numerically and qualitatively distinct, *ego fatum*, eternally recurring self-iteration, circular movement, the present coincides with the future and the past.

Nietzsche and the Eternal Recurrence

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to broaden the range of perspectives on the interpretation of Eternal Recurrence, along with other inseparable fundamental concepts that belong to Friedrich Nietzsche's thinking. After the chronological history exposure of Nietzsche's reception in German and French culture, this work includes detailed consideration of the Eternal Recurrence by Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze and Gianni Vattimo. The last chapter contains the analysis of the most fundamental paragraphs in which the idea of Eternal Recurrence is presented by Nietzsche himself. In conclusion, this research proposes an interpretation of the Eternal Recurrence as a psychological doctrine of the eternal self recurring.

This research, entitled *Nietzsche and the Eternal Recurrence*, aims to open new perspectives on the idea of Eternal Recurrence, being also a substantial guide in Friedrich Nietzsche's thinking deepening. The Eternal Recurrence is a concept essential to the understanding of the philosophical universe of Nietzsche, inseparable of the following concepts: will to power, the overman, nihilism, God's death, transmutation of all values.

This research foundation is made up of a chronological exposure of Nietzsche's thinking reception in German and French cultures. I widened the constellation of cultural references by presenting the effect that Nietzsche had in Romania during the interwar period on personalities such as Lucian Blaga, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, in Italy on Gianni Vattimo,

Maurizio Ferraris, in Netherlands on Paul van Tongeren, in United States on Walter Kaufmann, Alexander Nehamas, in Spain on Sergio Antoranz. Besides the objective exposure of these valuable readings and their historical evidence, this work contains comparative analyses and provides a critical milestone on the mentioned philosophical perspectives by a consubstantial or polemic positioning against them.

I encountered difficulties in finding texts that emphasize the idea of Eternal Recurrence, in choosing interpretations of the exegetes in order to expose and analyze them, in devoting space to their development in this thesis and in finding a stopping point in their reading, because Nietzsche is debated almost immeasurably in the history of universal philosophy. I express my concern about non-mentioning some brilliant exegetes or lack of accentuation of some interpretations. I tried to outline a more complex image of the idea of Eternal Recurrence focusing on philosophy and less on Nietzsche's biography, his connection with poetry, literature and music, or on the claim of his philosophy by National Socialism.

The methodology used is the deductive approach from general: Chapter 1. **Nietzsche's Reception History in the 19th and 20th Centuries Culture**, to particular: Chapter 2. **Eternal Recurrence in Contemporary Exegesis**, and then to individual: Chapter 3. **The Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence**. The argumentative structure of this research articulates in three chapters, ten sub-chapters, 209 pages and 428 footnotes.

The first chapter, **Nietzsche's Reception History in the 19th and 20th Centuries Culture**, contains the analysis of Nietzsche's philosophy interpretations made by the exegetes Ernst Bertram, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Karl Löwith and Eugen Fink, which highlights the impact it has had on German culture, as well as the interpretations made by Pierre Klossowski, Gilles Deleuze, Paul Ricoeur, Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Patrick Wotling, representatives of French culture.

Ernst Bertram's work, published in 1918: *Nietzsche; Versuch einer Mythologie*, paints a mythological character in Nietzsche, who, considering himself the leader of some creative, superindividual, conservative and revealing forces such as the mysteries of Eleusis, becomes a mystery himself through his tragic end. Eternal Recurrence is just a „fundamental chimera pronouncedly educational” and an „eternal self-crucifixion”.

In **Martin Heidegger's** interpretation, Nietzsche's thinking represents a metaphysical system based on will to power which designates the whole concept of being. According to Vasile Muscă, the will to power does not assign Nietzsche's thinking the shape of a system, because it is a biological, dynamic and complex principle, and not a metaphysical, stable and consistent principle of reality. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche fails to overcome metaphysics as he fails to understand what underlies being and as he has not exceeded the Platonic dualism of being-becoming, identity-difference. Nietzsche is the last metaphysician that heralds the end of the European metaphysics by extensive technical rationality.

According to **Karl Löwith**, Nietzsche is an experimenter whose philosophy is a „system in aphorisms” divided into three phases: the first one, named *you must*, is dominated by the influence of Wagner and Schopenhauer; phase two named *I want* (the metamorphosis of camel into lion) is characterized by the searching of his own destiny; phase three named *I am* (the metamorphosis of lion into child) culminates with Nietzsche - prophet of Eternal Recurrence. Through Eternal Recurrence as the overcoming of nihilism itself, Nietzsche tries to overcome the temporality and to recover the cosmological dimension of the pre-Socratic from the top of Christian modernity. The anthropological and cosmic perspective emerges from the possible double analysis of the Eternal Recurrence idea as „atheistic religion” and „physical metaphysics”. The historical and anthropological meaning results from the Eternal Recurrence as ethical categorical imperative of a practical postulate. As a result of the cosmological meaning, a contrary sense emerges: the eternal circular course of the natural world empties the goals and alienates man from nature. According to Löwith, the ethical dimension is as important as scientific proof in presenting the idea of Eternal Recurrence. The will to nothingness, reversed into will to Eternal Recurrence, develops the parable of human being as a Return of the Same, always eager to fix a transcendent goal, paradoxically included in the whole world as a meaningless Identical Recurrence, creative and devouring of itself.

To **Eugen Fink**, Nietzsche's labyrinthical life is a much inner secret than his work is. The operational principle specific to his philosophy concealed under aesthetic psychological disguises is the equivalence between *being and value*. In Nietzsche's new metaphysical dimension, time is eternal, perishable is made permanent, repetition becomes unique, the necessity co-belongs to freedom and vice versa. Repetition is time itself. There is no original life without it being already a repetition. Linear time is broken, present coincides with the future and the past. Fink does not doubt Nietzsche's atheism, who replaces God with Earth. Eternal Recurrence is an esoteric, ineffable doctrine, a new world experience, a new science of

time and a new cosmological concept of the ethic issue.

According to **Pierre Klossowski**, a central place in Nietzsche's philosophy is occupied by the distinction between gregarious thinking and individual exceptional cases thinking. The Christian culture replaced by bourgeois culture, then by automatism of the social industrialization will desensitize humanity. Nietzsche will sustain a culture of emotions, of living, of the particular case through the lived experience of Eternal Return. Nietzsche develops the theory of the Vicious Circle from the concept of *re-willing the un-willed* to the creative will to power, elaborating a theory of the fortuitous case. The adherent of the doctrine will accept the dissolution of his accidental self to get another accidental self, which is the excedent of the same present existence managed by the economy of the Vicious Circle. The Vicious Circle conspiracy is projected against science, morality and Darwinian natural selection that conspires with gregariousness. Contrary to his postulate, the Vicious Circle will lead to historic setback and to inhuman by demolishing all the schemes comprehensible to human species. By realizing the industrial phenomenon, as one aspect of Nietzsche's project, instead of the overman, a new amoral form of gregariousness, the *super-gregarious* has come to rule the earth.

Gilles Deleuze sees in Nietzsche's philosophy an antimetaphysics and an absolute antidialectics. To stop history's nihilism and the supremacy of reactive forces fueled by Socrates and Hegel's dialectics we must change the principle of prospects assessment instead of replacing the divine values with human values. For a genuine understanding of Nietzsche's thinking, Deleuze advises us not to confuse will to power with *desire of domination*, as well as the mighty in social regime with the *strong* ones, not to consider Eternal Recurrence as a pre-Socrates concept, signifying the returning to the same point, and his last works disqualified by madness.

The second chapter, **Eternal Recurrence in Contemporary Exegesis** captures from many perspectival angles the silhouette of the Eternal Recurrence thought outlined by Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze and Gianni Vattimo.

In **Martin Heidegger's** interpretation, the **Eternal Recurrence** is a **metaphysical thought** because it thinks the whole concept of being. The Eternal Recurrence is the **fundamental character of the whole concept of being**, seen as a necessary eternal becoming without planned order, with limited space and infinite time, limited force whose changes are immeasurable. The world's universal character is the limited and the determined force, the force as will to power. Because the essence of the world is limited, the whole world is limited, too. The whole concept of being is will to power in terms of its constitution and Eternal Recurrence in terms of its **modality of being**.

The Eternal Recurrence's thought is founded in the temporality of the eternal time where human exists, therefore Eternal Recurrence is an anthropomorphic thought. Any interpretation of the world is anthropomorphic, and any de-anthropomorphic attempt is a human act, therefore Eternal Recurrence is simultaneously an **anthropomorphic and de-anthropomorphic thought**.

The heaviest thought is a counter-movement, a counter-thought, a counter-faith of Western philosophy's values seen as Platonism. The Eternal Recurrence is **the last metaphysical position from Western philosophy. Will to power is, in its essence, Eternal Recurrence**. The will to power is the unique principle of establishing values. Because nihilism is seen as a process of devaluation of the supreme values, it follows that the Eternal Recurrence is a **nihilistic thought**.

According to Heidegger, metaphysics is the truth of the whole concept of being. Man who thinks Eternal Recurrence as the truth of the whole concept of being will transform himself, history, being and the whole concept of being itself. The Eternal Recurrence, the whole concept of being, God are just questions which belong to human questionable area.

The identical which eternally returns is the perishable. Through identical's returning it comes to persistence. "The Eternal Recurrence is **the supreme bringing to persistence of the perishable**."

Eternal Recurrence along with will to power, transmutation of all values, nihilism, overman and justice is one of the **five fundamental concepts** that correspond to the essence of Nietzsche's metaphysics. Ștefan Augustin-Doinaș thinks that these words do not include Nietzsche's philosophy itself, but it is rather Nietzsche's vocabulary through which Heidegger speaks about the metaphysics of our era dominated by technology.

Aaron Dopf says that, most likely on purpose, Heidegger gives us a misinterpretation of Nietzsche's thinking, and most of all on the idea of Eternal Recurrence. This misinterpretation can be explained by the fact that Heidegger's analysis is not an

interpretation, but rather an approach of Nietzsche's thinking to his own ontological project; he founded his theories on Nietzsche's unpublished notes (*Will to power*) and not on those published during his lifetime; reducing him to a metaphysician, he ignores Nietzsche's many other facets, especially that of a great psychologist; his philosophy interpreted as a metaphysical system takes no account of the radical anti-metaphysical positions held by Nietzsche himself; will to power and Eternal Recurrence can and must be unified, but not metaphysically because will to power is a metaphysical concept, but the Eternal Recurrence is a psychological doctrine and only a corrective step toward the ultimate life affirmation expressed in *amor fati*.

Nevertheless, for Alexandru Boboc, "the proposed interpretation of Heidegger remains one of the most well supported interpretations in the history of Nietzsche's works research. Beyond any objection, Heidegger's analyses are points of reference in the debate around the controversial Nietzsche".

In Gilles Deleuze's interpretative universe, Dionysos owns the game of Eternal Recurrence, which aims **the winning number which affirms destiny, necessity and chaos itself, the becoming but also the being of becoming, the One but also the multiple**. Only the overman is able to issue such a throw of dice. Nietzsche's philosophy shows us the perspective to believe in the innocence of becoming, and the Eternal Recurrence in the innocence of the game.

"In the Eternal Recurrence, not the Same or One are returning, but rather the returning itself is the One stating only from/about manifold and in/of what is different." That is why **Nietzsche rejects the scientific theories of the mechanistic affirmation and denial thermodynamic of the Eternal Recurrence**, because both of them relapse in undifferentiated and identical, starting from the existence of a final stage of becoming. On the contrary, the Eternal Recurrence claims the reproduction principle of otherness and of repetition of difference, of the will to power.

The Eternal Recurrence, as a **physical and cosmological doctrine**, is the new formulation of the speculative synthesis which states the multiple. As an **ethical and twice selective doctrine**, the Eternal Recurrence is the new formulation of the practical synthesis which states the manifold joy. The Eternal Recurrence offers the will a Kantian rule: *what you do want, want it in such a way that you also want its eternal return*. The first selection removes the underdeveloped reactive forces. In the second selection, the nihilism overcomes itself and negation becomes affirmative power. Nihilism becomes full through Eternal Recurrence, transforming the negation into a negation of reactive forces. Joy means that little things do not return, because they are either eliminated, or Dionysian-like metamorphosed. Through Eternal Recurrence as a selective being, the affirmation remains the only quality of the will to power and the action remains the only quality of the force.

The Eternal Recurrence is a **synthesis of double affirmation**. The first affirmation is the multiple, the becoming, the hazard. The multiple is One, the becoming is being and the hazard is necessity, if they become the object of a second affirmation, the reflection. "Being is stated from/about becoming, One from/about Multiple, necessity from/about hazard, but only to the extent that becoming, multiple and hazard are reflected in the second statement which takes them as its object."

In short, Eternal Recurrence is a "synthesis of time and of its dimensions, synthesis of otherness and its reproduction, synthesis of becoming and being, stating out from/about becoming, synthesis of double affirmation."

According to Gilles Deleuze's classification, **the nihilism victory steps** regarding man are: the resentment, the burdened conscience, the ascetic ideal, God's death, the last man and the man who wants his destruction. They set the stage for the transmutation of all values. **The four figures of transmutation** are: the affirmation, the duplicated affirmation, the doubled affirmation and the product of the affirmation. Because of the reactive man's distorted valuations, Christianity, thinking about self, God, causality and final goal were born. The first figure of the transmutation makes from becoming and multiple an object of affirmation. The second figure of the transmutation consists in affirming the affirmation. The game of Eternal Recurrence, through which only the affirmation is returning, is **the third figure of values transmutation**. The Eternal Recurrence rejects man, because man, in his essence, is a reactive being. If man does not combine his forces with nihilism, he will enter in the Eternal Recurrence. The fourth figure of the transmutation produces the overman, the joiner of all that can be approved.

In Gianni Vattimo's interpretation, the idea of Eternal Recurrence aims to practically build a happy man able to want his own eternal recurring existence felt as the **perfect unit of**

essence and significance. This implies the denial of time and of metaphysical traditional mentality, designed as an Oedipal conflictual time. This also involves a radical man renewal. Eternal Recurrence is a doctrine of past redemption and a doctrine of Ultraman production. Man's past as a nihilistic history of metaphysics, of causality and of split of meaning, value, essence, significance, has to be redeemed through a radical transformation of human nature. Nietzsche proposes to build units of meaning and free production of symbols as a solution. Will's creativity cannot take place in the *ratio's* society, in the moral-metaphysical world of responsibility, but only beyond the *chains disease*, beyond the logic domination and conflict, beyond the original world divided into masters and servants, namely in genealogical thinking's world. In Nietzsche's itinerary for unmasking metaphysics, an important role has the Eternal Recurrence's connection with the removal of Platonic-Christian transcendence. The Eternal Recurrence is **the immortalizing historical decision which liberates the symbolic that unleashes humanity from the chains disease that belong to the ratio's world.**

Only the **fully happy man**, who wears inside the entire significance of his life moments as a perfect coincidence between being and meaning, may want the moment as it is, always, without any reference to transcendence. Vattimo says that the issue that must be asked is the following: "How much should you love yourself and life, to want nothing but the eternal repetition of the moment and its option?" The interpretation key does not lie in Stoic-ascetic position, namely how strong you should be to accept the eternity of the moment, no matter how it would be, but how happy you should be to be able to wish the eternal return of the moment. The Eternal Recurrence is an **allegorical and prophetic announcement**, because it tries to unravel the enigma of the un-metaphysical man's issue. It proposes to humanity an experiment with its own self, which, after the practical test, will elucidate its own significance. It transcends any concrete formulation through its **theoretical and practical character.**

Besides the interpretation of the scene from *The Vision and the Enigma* of the snake biting by the shepherd as the acceptance of the Eternal Recurrence (idea taken from Löwith), Vattimo adds the decision character. The shepherd decides to establish and background the Eternal Recurrence itself, which is therefore an **element of acceptance, establishment and foundation**, because it must be chosen as a willful possibility, not just accepted. The shepherd bite can be interpreted as the historical act which establishes a new kind of humanity.

The problem of the *ultra-man* education goes beyond allegory, looking for immediate artistic and political solutions for his concrete implementation. Nietzsche's way of overcoming metaphysical tradition has a non-dialectical and ultra-metaphysical character. The ultra-man is not a reconciled subject, because is not reactively related to the separation ideal-real, to appear-to be. **The ultra-man himself lives in the three aspects of the Eternal Recurrence:** he is released from the Oedipal structure of the linear time, is released from metaphysics and its authoritarian structures, he is the release of symbolic and Dionysian. The ultra-man denies the transcendence and recognizes the spirit as the instrument of the body.

The history of our world is the history of the difference between being and beingness, signifier and signified, slave and master, father and son. **The overcoming of metaphysics coincides with the end and with the overcoming of the subject, being and difference.**

The free creativity from ultra-man's world produces symbols and non-reactive ways to be – and this is the only authentic novelty. It is necessary to us to prefer the *weak being* to the detriment of the *strong being* maintained by metaphysics. History has to be conceived as a succession of interpretations and ethics must be understood as *pietas*. Man defined in terms of chance, becoming, mortality, who shows respect for the cult memory, for what lived and left traces, for culture and values, ensures the continuity with human history and meanings chaining, offering sense to current experiences. To achieve that, we have to remove the so-called obvious, universally valid laws, authoritarianism, truth as the first principle, Platonic deception: the separation between world of essence and world of appearance.

Vattimo sets a circularity between Christianity, **weak ontology** and an ethics of non-violence. Through its new ontology, Vattimo believes he has found the true understanding of the Christian message in nihilistic interpretation, which is *caritas*. The *weak thinking* resumes from Christian heritage the principle of charity and refusal of violence. Christian charity is understood by Vattimo as duty to love the others. According to Vattimo, Nietzsche wanted to convey to the future human society the *ultra-man's* wisdom. The man-of-beyond is the creator of values, the original performer of the world and master in the art of living. The ultra-man's ideal is emerging as the only possible moral ideal of our time as era of nihilism. The modern culture is characterized by interpretative pluralism. The development of science, technology and communications is the process of worlds pluralization, which leads to the discovery of

God as a lie and requires an *ultra-man*. This autonomously interpreter, as wise plural subject, offers an ideal of life configuration that is living its own interpretation, without considering it metaphysically true.

The last chapter, entitled **Eternal Recurrence's Doctrine**, includes the analysis of the most important quotes in which Nietzsche himself presents the idea of Eternal Recurrence: the aphorism 341 from *Gay Science*, the texts *The Vision and the Enigma* and *The Convalescent* from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* masterpiece, aphorism 56 from *Beyond Good and Evil* and passages that contains the idea of Eternal Recurrence from the posthumously published work *Will to Power*.

In aphorism 341 from *Gay Science*, the Eternal Recurrence is presented as an **experimental and psychological thought**, where two types of attitudes are shown: either we are crushed under the weight of this thought, or we jubilee of happiness because such a total affirmation of life is possible. For the last option, we have to love ourselves and our life. The thought of Eternal Recurrence forces us to reflect more on what type of man, behaviour and way of life we want to have. The weight of this idea reveals the fundamental question: *what should I want to wish to repeat eternally?*, and rests upon the decision of the moment, knowing that every present action will return forever. The Eternal Recurrence leads us back to the instinct and passions, life affirmation before their corruption by Christianity. What is really problematic to this aphorism is the assertion that the same life that we have now will return identically without anything new in it. But this doctrine appears revealed in various degrees of intensity, and this is the first presentation of it.

The Eternal Recurrence is a counter-movement to Christianity (the belief in afterlife), to Buddhism and metempsychosis (belief in past life and reincarnation), to life denial (Schopenhauer's pessimism, in contrast with life affirmation), to Wagner's Ring of the Nibelungs (as opposed to the Great Ring of Eternal Recurrence), to universal axioms (the opposite is his genealogical thinking), to linear time (in contrast with cyclic time). Eternal Recurrence doctrine is also conceived as a counter-movement to immutable One (to any transcendental superior being, in contrast to perishable plurality eternally returned), to heaven as pure abstract joy (counter-position to life understood as pleasure inseparable from suffering), to Jesus, God's son (in opposition to the non-Christian son), to Plato's Ideas (this doctrine may be called *Plato's Idea of this world*), to *thing in itself* of Kant (this *in itself* transformed in *myself* and *to myself* in this life of mine).

Therefore, the Eternal Recurrence has a **psychological, anti-Christian and life approving character**, but it also seems to have a **religious character**, being related to Christianity through its opposition to it. It is presented for several times as a belief and it has a religious tone. Perhaps Nietzsche wanted to replace the old belief of mankind that acted in a certain way determined by Christianity, with the belief in the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, and that this transformed humanity to live according to this new belief, remodeling our new form of existence.

In my opinion, in the parable of the gate above which it is written Moment, from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where past and future meet, lies the **Eternal Recurrence key interpretation**. For Nietzsche, there is no absolutely linear time where actions of the past are requiring the fatality of the events of my present life. If so, then the psychological significance of this idea would not have value, the overman would never be possible, self decisions would not belong to me, there were no originality, self overcoming, joy of creation, nothing really new. On the contrary, exactly the very possibility of change exists. The psychological impact - for example the impact of Eternal Recurrence - will bring the will of change and elevation, and this is possible because any change I make in the present, I'll make it for the future, but especially for the past -, these temporal units merging into a single point on the circle of my existence. My present decisions determine the past extent of my eternal recurring life, and thus, the entire circular course of it.

Dionysos as plural god opposes the unique Christian God. He is both will to power and Eternal Recurrence, is the most radical self affirmation as controversial plurality to which he manages to give shape in a continuous process of creation and destruction.

In closing the last chapter, I propose three hypotheses for the Eternal Recurrence interpretation: 1) The Eternal Recurrence as identical repetition with nothing new in it, but differently felt cognitively, psychologically and emotionally, 2) The Eternal Recurrence of the same life of an individual who manifests in each of his lives as different persons, 3) The decisional moment brings the whole series of life events. All these three hypotheses come under the Eternal Recurrence as the **doctrine of the eternal self recurring**. This implies a self consciousness that connects all the selves from the eternally recurring life, a huge memory and a necessary psychological angle research. The memories from the eternal self are latent in

subconscious and unconscious and awake in consciousness. Perhaps the entire philosophy of Nietzsche revolves around the issue of the complete awareness of the eternal self through which we would become able to complete life affirming, remembering all our selves from our eternally recurring life.

The **Conclusions** of the present thesis display the following interpretation of the idea of Eternal Recurrence: the same life of man eternally recurring, so **his lives are temporally identical, numerically distinct and can be qualitatively distinct**. The human being self is only a point in the circle of universal becoming and recurring, and many era elapse until the cyclic movement returns to this point – to use human common time terms – but zero time elapses between the conscious self in the circle and the next conscious self from the same circle. There isn't any prime self, but we can differentiate it by numbering it.

The present coincides with the future and the past, therefore any change I make at present in my own self from the previous life will be included in my future life self. All the events and decisions of the past self repeats exactly if I do not make any changes. But if I make changes, these will repeat in the future life because I acted in the past as well and the past is identical when returning. I even propose a Theo of consciousness and of collective memory of the eternally repeated life self with which it find itself in an intimate dialogue.

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