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Pierre Klossowski

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Pierre Klossowski

NIETZSCHE'S EXPERIENCE OF THE ETERNAL RETURN

To Peter Gast

Sils-Maria, 14 August 1881

. . . The August sun is overhead, the year is slipping away, the mountains and forests are becoming more hushed and more peaceful. Thoughts have emerged on my horizon the likes of which I've never seen—I won't even hint at what they are, but shall maintain my own unshakable calm. I suppose now I'll have to live a few years longer! Ah, my friend, I sometimes think that I lead a highly dangerous life, since I'm *one of those machines that can burst apart!* The intensity of my feelings makes me shudder and laugh. Several times I have been unable to leave my room, for the ridiculous reason that my eyes were inflamed. Why? Because I'd cried too much on my wanderings the day before. Not sentimental tears, mind you, but tears of joy, to the accompaniment of which I sang and talked nonsense, filled with a *new vision* far superior to that of other men.

If I couldn't derive my strength from myself, if I had to depend on the outside world for encouragement, comfort, and good cheer, where would I be! What would I be! There really were moments and even whole periods in my life (e.g., the year 1878) when a word of encouragement, a friendly squeeze of the hand would have been the ideal medicine—and precisely then I was left in the lurch by all those I'd supposed I could rely on, and who could have done me such kindness. Now I no longer expect it, and feel only a certain dim and dreary astonishment when, for example, I think of the letters I get: it's all so meaningless. Nothing's happened to anyone because of me; no one's given me any thought. It's all very decent and well-intended, what they write me, but distant, distant, distant. Even our dear Jacob Burckhardt wrote such a meek and timorous little letter. . . .

FORGETTING AND ANAMNESIS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ETERNAL RETURN OF THE SAME

The idea of the Eternal Return came to Nietzsche as a sudden *awakening*, thanks to a *feeling*, a certain state or tonality of mind. Initially confused

with this feeling, the idea itself emerges as a specific doctrine; nonetheless, it preserves the character of a revelation—a sudden unveiling. Here the ecstatic character of this experience must be distinguished from the notion of the universal ring, a notion that obsessed Nietzsche in his youth, in his Hellenistic period.

But how does forgetting function in this revelation? More specifically, isn't forgetting the source and indispensable condition not only for the appearance of the Eternal Return but *for transforming the very identity* of the person to whom it appears? Forgetting thus raises eternal becoming and the absorption of all identity to the level of being.

Isn't there a tension implicit in Nietzsche's own experience between the revealed content and didactic message of this content—at least (as an ethical doctrine) when it is formulated in the following way: act as though you had to relive your life innumerable times and wish to relive it innumerable times—for, in one way or another, you must recommence and relive it.

The imperative proposition serves to supplement (the necessary) forgetting by invoking the will (to power); the second proposition foresees the necessity that was undiscerned in the act of forgetting.

Anamnesis coincides with the revelation of the return. But how can the return fail to bring back forgetfulness? Not only do I learn that I (Nietzsche) am brought back to the crucial moment in which the eternity of the circle culminates—at the very point when the truth of its necessary return is revealed to me—but, by the same token, I learn that I was *other* than I am *now* for having forgotten this truth, and thus I have become another by learning it. Will I change and forget once more that I will necessarily change throughout eternity, until I relearn this revelation anew?

The accent must be placed on the loss of a given identity. The "death of God" (of the God who guarantees the identity of the accountable self) opens the soul to all its possible identities, already apprehended through the diverse feelings of the Nietzschean soul. The revelation of the Eternal Return necessarily brings on the successive realizations of all possible identities: "All the names of history, finally, are me"—in the end, "Dionysus and the Crucified." The "death of God," then, corresponds to a feeling in Nietzsche in the same way as the ecstatic moment of the Eternal Return does.

DIGRESSION

The Eternal Return is a necessity that must be willed: only he who I am now can will the necessity of my return and all the events that have resulted in what I am—i.e., inasmuch as the will here supposes a subject. Now this subject can no longer will itself as it has been up to now, but must will all its previous possibilities; for, in adopting the necessity of the return as universal law at the outset, I de-actualize my present self to will myself in *all the other selves*, whose entire series must be gone through so that, following the

circular movement, I can again become *what I am at the moment in which I discover* the law of the Eternal Return.

The moment the Eternal Return is revealed to me, I cease being my own self, *here and now*. I am capable of becoming innumerable others, and I know that I shall forget this revelation once I am outside my own memory. This forgetting forms the object of my own limits. Likewise, my present consciousness will be established only in the forgetting of my other possible identities.

What is this memory? It is the necessary circular movement to which I yield myself, to which I deliver myself over from myself. Now, if I proclaim the will—and, willing it necessarily, I shall have re-willed it—I shall forcibly have extended my consciousness to this circular movement. And, in the meantime, even though I were to identify myself with the circle, I would never re-emerge from this image as myself. In fact, at the moment when I am struck by the sudden revelation of the Eternal Return, *I no longer am*. In order for this revelation to have any meaning, it is necessary that I lose consciousness of myself, and that the circular movement of the return be merged with my unconsciousness until such time as it leads me back to the point where the necessity of living through the entire series of my possibilities is revealed to me. All that remains, then, is for me to re-will myself, no longer as the outcome of these previous possibilities, no longer as one realization among thousands, but as a fortuitous moment the very fortuity of which entails the necessary and integral return of the whole series.

But to re-will myself as a fortuitous moment is to renounce being myself *once and for all*; it is not the other way around—i.e., it is not once and for all that I have renounced being myself. Also, the renunciation must in any case be willed. Moreover, I am not even this fortuitous moment *once and for all* if, indeed, I must re-will this very moment; *one more time!* For nothing? For myself. And here, nothing serves as the circle *once and for all*. It is a valid sign for all that has happened, for all that happens, for all that will *ever* happen in the world.

HOW CAN THE WILL INTERVENE WITHOUT FORGETTING WHAT MUST BE WILLED AGAIN?

Indeed, at the very moment when the circular movement was revealed to me as necessary, this experience appeared to my life as never having taken place before! The high feeling, the elevated state of soul, was required in order for me to know and feel the necessity that all things return. If I meditate upon the elevated state in which the circle is suddenly revealed to me, I conclude that it is not possible that it has not already appeared to me innumerable times, perhaps in other forms. But this conclusion is possible *only* if I admit that this heightened state is not my own obsession; that on the contrary it is the only valid apprehension of being, of reality itself. But I had

forgotten all about this, because it is inscribed in the very essence of the circular movement that the movement itself be forgotten from one state to the next (in order that one move on to another state and thus be cast outside of oneself; the alternative being that everything would come to a halt). And even if I didn't forget what I had been in this life, I would still have forgotten that I was cast outside myself into another life in no way differing from the present one!

At the risk of everything coming to a halt? Is this to say that at the time of this sudden revelation the movement was arrested? Far from it. For I myself, Nietzsche, was not able to escape it. This revelation did not occur to me as a reminiscence, nor as an experience of *déjà vu*. All would stop *for me* if I *remembered* a previous identical revelation that—even though I were to continually proclaim this necessary return—would serve to keep me within myself and, thus, outside the truth that I teach. It was therefore necessary that I forget this revelation in order for it to be *true*! For the series that I suddenly glimpse, the series that I must live through in order to be brought back to the same point, this revelation of the Eternal Return of the same implies that *the same revelation* could just as well have occurred *at any other moment* of the circular movement. It must be thus: in order to receive this revelation, I am *nothing* other than the capacity to receive this revelation *at all other moments* of the circular movement: nowhere in particular for me alone, but always in the movement as a whole.

Nietzsche speaks of the Eternal Return of the same as the supreme thought and also as the supreme feeling, as the loftiest feeling. Thus, in unpublished material written at the same time as *The Gay Science*, he states:

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 to whom effort procures the loftiest feeling, let him make the effort; he to whom repose brings the loftiest feeling, let him rest; he to whom the act of joining, of following and of obeying procures the loftiest feeling, let him obey. Providing that he becomes aware of what procures the loftiest feeling and that he draws back before nothing. Eternity depends upon it.

And he had noted earlier that, unlike natures endowed with an eternal soul fit for an eternal becoming and a future amelioration, present human nature no longer knows how to *wait*. The accent here is less on the will than on desire and necessity, and this desire and this necessity are themselves tied to eternity: whence the reference to the loftiest feeling, or, in Nietzschean terms, to the high feeling—to the elevated state of the soul.

It is such a high state of the soul, in such a feeling, that Nietzsche lived in the moment during which the Eternal Return appeared. But how can a state

of soul, a feeling, become a thought, and how can the loftiest feeling—the highest feeling, the Eternal Return—become supreme thought?

1. The state of the soul is a fluctuation of intensity.
2. In order that it be communicable, the intensity must take itself as an object and thus return upon itself.
3. In returning upon itself, the intensity interprets itself. But how can it interpret itself? By becoming a counterweight to itself. For this the intensity must divide, separate, and rejoin: now, this is what happens to it in what could be called moments of rise and fall. However, this is always a matter of the same fluctuation, of the wave in the concrete sense (and let us simply note, in passing, the important place that the spectacle of sea waves holds for Nietzsche's reflection).
4. But does an interpretation presuppose the search for signification? Rise and fall: these are designations, nothing else. Is there any signification beyond this ascertainment of a rise and fall? The intensity never has any sense other than that of being an intensity. It seems that of itself the intensity has no meaning. What is a meaning, and how can it be constituted? Also, what is the agent of meaning?

5. It seems that the agent of meaning, and therefore of signification, is once again the intensity, and this according to its diverse fluctuations. If by itself the intensity 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 state of the soul? A little earlier we asked how it could interpret itself, and we answered that it must act as a counterweight to itself in its rise and fall, but this did not go beyond a simple assertion. How, then, can it acquire a meaning, and how can meaning be constituted within the intensity? Precisely in returning upon itself—indeed, through a new fluctuation in which, by repeating itself and imitating itself, it would become a sign.

6. But first of all, a sign traces the fluctuation of an intensity. If a sign keeps its meaning, it is because the degree of intensity coincides with it. It signifies only by a new afflux of intensity, as it were, which rejoins its first trace.

7. But a sign is not only the trace of a fluctuation. It can just as well mark an *absence* of intensity. Here, too, what is peculiar is that a new afflux is necessary, if only to signify this absence.

Whether we name this afflux attention, will, memory, or whether we call this reflux indifference, relaxation, or forgetfulness, it is always a question of the same intensity, in no way differing from the movement of the waves of the same swell: "You and I," Nietzsche used to say, "we are of the same origin! of the same race!"

This flux and this reflux become intermingled, fluctuation within fluctuation, and, just like the shapes that float at the crest of the waves only to leave froth, are the designations left by intensity. And this is what we call thought.

But nonetheless, there is something sufficiently open in us—we other, apparently limited and closed natures—for Nietzsche to invoke the movement of waves. This is because signification exists by afflux; notwithstanding the sign in which the fluctuation of intensity culminates, signification is *never absolutely disengaged* from the moving chasms that it masks. Every signification, then, remains a function of the chaos out of which meaning is generated.

INTENSITY AS SUBJECT TO A MOVING CHAOS WITHOUT BEGINNING OR END

An intensity is at work in everyone, its flux and reflux forming the significant or insignificant fluctuations of thought. And while each appears to be in possession of this, in point of fact it belongs to no one, and has neither beginning nor end.

But, contrary to this undulating element, if each of us forms a closed and apparently limited whole, it is precisely by virtue of these traces of signifying fluctuations; i.e., by a system of signs that I will here name the everyday code of signs. So far as the beginning or end of our own fluctuations is concerned—on which basis these signs permit us to signify, to speak to ourselves as well as to others—we know nothing, except that for this code *a* sign always corresponds to the degree of intensity, sometimes the highest, sometimes to the lowest: even if this sign be the *me*, the *I*, the *subject of all our propositions*. It is thanks to this sign, however, which is nothing but an ever variable trace of fluctuation, that we constitute ourselves as *thinking*, that a thought as such occurs to us, even though we are never quite sure that it is not others who think and continue to think in us. But what is this other who forms the *outside* in relation to the *inside* that we hold ourselves to be? Everything leads back to a single discourse, to fluctuations of intensity that correspond to the thought of everyone and no one.

The sign “me” in the everyday code of communication, so far as it verifies our various internal and external degrees of presence and absence, thus assures a variable state of coherence in ourselves and with our surroundings. Thus the thought of no one, this intensity in itself, without determinable beginning or end, finds a necessity in him who appropriates it, and comes to know a destiny in the very vicissitudes of memory and forgetfulness; and this for the subject or the world at large. For a designation to occur, for a meaning to be constituted, *my will* must intervene—but, again, it is no more than this appropriated intensity.

Now, in a feeling, in a state that I will term the loftiest feeling and that I will aspire to *maintain* as the highest thought—what has happened? Have I not exceeded my limits, and by the same token depreciated the everyday code of signs, either because thought abandons me or because I no longer

discern the difference between the fluctuations from without and from within?

Up to now, in the everyday sense, thought could always rely on the use of the term "myself." But what becomes of my own coherence at such a degree of intensity where thought ceases to include me in the term "myself" and invents a sign by which it would designate its own self-coherency? If this is no longer my own thought, doesn't it signify my exclusion from all possible coherence? If it is still mine, how is it conceivable that it should designate an absence of intensity at the highest degree of intensity?

Let us suppose that the image of the circle is formed when the soul attains the highest state: something happens to my thought so that, by this sign, it dies—so that my thought is no longer really my own. Or, perhaps, my thought is so closely identified with this sign that even to invent this sign, this circle, signifies the power of all thought. Does this mean that the thinking subject would lose his own identity because a coherent thought would itself exclude that identity? Nothing here distinguishes the designating intensity from the designated intensity—i.e., nothing serves to re-establish the ordinary coherency between self and world as constituted by ordinary usage. The same circuit brings me back to the everyday code of signs, and leaves me once again at the mercy of signs as soon as I try to explain the events they represent.

If, in this ineffable moment, I hear it said: "You will return to this moment—you have already returned to it—you will return to it innumerable times," as coherent as this proposition seems according to the sign of the circle from which it flows, all the while remaining this selfsame proposition, so far as this is really me in the context of everyday signs, I fall into incoherency. Incoherency here assumes two forms: in relation to the very coherence of this thought itself, as well as in relation to the everyday code of signs. According to the latter, I can only will *myself once and for all*; it is on this basis that all my designations together with their sense are communicable. But *to will myself again, once more*, implies that nothing ever gets constituted in a *single sense, once and for all*. The circle opens me to inanity and encloses me within the following alternative: *either* all returns because nothing has ever made any sense whatever, *or else* things never make any sense except by the return of all things, without beginning or end.

Here is a sign in which I myself am nothing, that I always return to—*for nothing*. What is my part in this circular movement in relation to which I am incoherent, or in relation to this thought so perfectly coherent that it excludes me *at the very moment* I think it? What is this emblem of the circle that empties all designation of its content for the sake of this emblem? The soul's elevated state became the *highest thought* only by yielding to its own intensity. In yielding to this state, chaos is restored to the emblem of the circle—i.e., the source of intensity is joined to the product of intensity.

By itself, the circle says nothing, except that existence has sense only in being existence, or that signification is nothing but an intensity. This is why it is revealed in a heightened state of the soul. But how can intensity attain to the actuality of the self that, nevertheless, is exalted by this high state? By freeing the fluctuations that signified it as *me* so that what is willed again once more re-echoes its present. What fascinates Nietzsche about this moment is not the fact of *being there*, but the fact of *returning* in what becomes: this necessity to be experienced and relived defies the will for and the creation of sense.

Within the circle, the will exhausts itself by contemplating this return within becoming, and it is revived only in the discordance outside the circle—whence the constraint exercised by *the highest feeling*.

The lofty Nietzschean states found their immediate expression in the aphoristic form: even there, recourse to the everyday code of signs is presented as an exercise in continually maintaining oneself discontinuous with respect to everyday continuity. When these states of feeling blossom forth into fabulous configurations, it seems as if the flux and reflux of contemplative intensity seeks to create points of reference for its own discontinuity. So many elevated states, so many gods, until the universe appears as a dance of the gods: *the universe being only a perpetual flight from and rediscovery of itself through a multitude of gods*. . . .

This dance of the gods pursuing themselves is still only a clarification, in Zarathustra's mythic vision, of this movement of flux and reflux, of the intensity of Nietzschean states, the loftiest of which occurred to him under the sign of the *divine vicious circle*.

The divine vicious circle is only a name for the sign that here takes on a divine countenance, under the aspect of Dionysus: Nietzschean thought breathes more freely in relation to a divine and fabulous countenance than when it struggles against itself, as in the trap of its own thought. Doesn't he say, in fact, that *the true essence of things is an illusion*—an affabulation—by which being represents things, an illusion *without* which being could not be represented at all?

The exalted state of mind in which Nietzsche experienced the vertigo of Eternal Return gave rise to the emblem of the vicious circle; there, the highest intensity of thought (self-enclosed, coherent thought) was instantaneously realized together with a parallel lack of intensity in everyday expression. By the same token, even the term "me" was emptied of all content—the term to which, heretofore, all else had led back.

In effect, so far as the emblem of the *vicious circle* serves to define the *Eternal Return of the same*, a sign occurs to Nietzschean thought as an event, one that stands for all that can ever happen, for all that will ever happen, for all that could ever happen in the world, or to thought itself.

THE EXPERIENCE OF ETERNAL RETURN AS COMMUNICABLE THOUGHT

The very first version Nietzsche gives (in *The Gay Science*, §341) of his Sils-Maria experience—and later, in *Zarathustra*—is expressed essentially as a hallucination: at once, it appears that the moment itself is reflected in a burst of mirrors. Here it is I, the same “I” who awakens to an infinite multiplication of *itself* and of its own life, while a sort of demon (like a genie of the *Thousand and One Nights*) says: You will have to live this life once more and innumerable times more. Subsequent reflection declares: If this thought gained control over you, it would make of you an other.

There is no doubt here that Nietzsche speaks of a *return* of the *identical self*. This is the obscure point that was the stumbling block of his contemporaries and of posterity. Thus, from the outset, this thought of Eternal Return was generally considered to be an absurd fantasy.

Zarathustra considers the will as being bound to the irreversibility of time: this is the first reflective reaction to the obsessional *evidence*. Nietzsche seeks to grasp the hallucination once more at the level of conscious will by means of an “analytical” cure of the will. What is its relation to three-dimensional time (past-present-future)? The will projects its powerlessness on time and thus gives time its irreversible character. The will cannot stem the *flow of time*—the non-willed that time establishes as the order of accomplished fact. The result is the spirit of *vengeance* in the will with respect to what is immovable or unshakable, as well as its belief in the *punitive* aspect of existence.

Zarathustra’s remedy is to re-will the *non-willed* insofar as he desires to take the order of accomplished fact upon himself and thus render it *unaccomplished*—i.e., by re-willing it *innumerable times*. This ruse removes the “once and for all” character from all events. Such is the subterfuge that the (in itself unintelligible) Sils-Maria experience first offers to reflection, to the kind of reflection that hinges on the *will*.

Such a ruse, however, is only one way of eluding the temptation inherent in the very reflection upon the Eternal Return: *non-action*, which Zarathustra rejects as a fallacious remedy, is no less subject to the same inversion of time. If all things return according to the law of the vicious circle, then *all voluntary action is equivalent to a real non-action, or all conscious non-action is equivalent to an illusory action*. On the level of conscious decision, not to act corresponds to the *inanity* of the individual will. It would express the soul’s intensely elevated state just as much as it would the decision to pursue an action. So how would re-willing the re-willed be creative? To adhere to the return is also to admit that *forgetfulness alone* enabled us to undertake old creations as new creations *ad infinitum*. Formulated at the level of the *conscious, identical self*, the

imperative to re-will would remain a tautology: it seems that this imperative (although it demands a decision for eternity) would only concern the behavior of the will for the interval of an individual life—yet what we live through every day is exactly the re-willed, the non-willed, and the enigma of horrifying chance. This tautology is both in the emblem of the circle and in Nietzsche's own thought; and it represents the *return* of all things as well as itself.

The parabola of the two opposite paths, rejoining under the arch of a doorway on whose pediment is inscribed "The Moment" (in *Zarathustra*), only serves to recall the image of the aphorism in *The Gay Science*: the same moonlight, the same spider, will return. The two opposite paths, then, are *one*. An eternity separates them: individuals, things, events, ascending by one, redescending by the other, return alike to the *doorway* of the *moment*, having made a *tour of eternity*. Whoever halts in this "doorway" is *alone* capable of seizing the circular structure of eternal time. But there, as in the aphorism, it is still the individual self who leaves and returns *identical to himself*. Between this parabola and the will's *cure*, by re-willing the re-willed, the connection is certain. Except that it does not carry conviction.

Yet the aphorism claims that in re-willing, the self *changes*, becomes other. Here is precisely where the solution of the enigma resides.

Zarathustra seeks a change not of the *individual*, but of his will: to re-will the re-willed non-willed, this is what the "will to power" would consist in.

But Nietzsche himself dreams of an entirely different sort of change through the change in individual behavior. Re-willing the re-willed, if it is only the will's *assumption of the non-willed* as creative recuperation (in the sense that the enigmatic, the fragmentary, together with a horrifying chance, are all reconstituted into a meaningful unity), nonetheless remains at the level of a "voluntarist" fatalism.

The change of the individual's moral behavior is not determined by the conscious will, but by the economy of the Eternal Return itself. Under the emblem of the *vicious circle*, the very nature of existence (independent of the human will) and, therefore, also of individual acts, is intrinsically modified. Nietzsche says in a note as revealing as it is brief: "*My overcoming of fatalism*: 1. By the Eternal Return and by pre-existence. 2. By the liquidation of the concept of 'will.' "

A fragment from Sils-Maria, dated August, 1881, states: "The incessant metamorphosis: in a brief interval of time you must pass through several individual states. Incessant combat is the means."

What is this brief interval? Not just any moment of our existence, but the eternity that separates one existence from another.

This indicates that the object of re-willing is a *multiple alterity* inscribed within the individual. If this is an *incessant* metamorphosis, we can understand why Nietzsche claims that "pre-existence" is a necessary condition

for an individual's *being-as-he-is*. Incessant combat would indicate that from now on the follower of the vicious circle must practice this multiple alterity. But this theme will be taken up later on when he envisages a *theory of the fortuitous case*.

These fragments bear so many new elements for developing the thought of the vicious circle: no longer is it only a matter of the will being faced with irreversible time—a will that, when cured of its belief in a punitive existence, would break the chains of its captivity by re-willing the non-willed, thence to recognize itself (within a reversible time) as Will to Power, as creative will.

On the other hand, these fragments give an account of a transfigured existence that—because it is always the circle—wills its own reversibility, to the extent that it relieves the individual of the weight of his own acts *once and for all*. What is at first sight the most crushing pronouncement—namely, *the endless recommencement of the same acts, the same sufferings*—henceforth appears as redemption itself, as soon as the soul knows that it has already lived through other selves and experiences and thus is destined to live through even more. Those other selves and experiences will henceforth deepen and enrich the only life that it knows *here and now*. What has prepared the present life and what now prepares it in turn for still others remains itself totally unsuspected by consciousness.

Re-willing, then, is pure adherence to the vicious circle; to re-will *the entire series one more time*—to re-will every experience, all one's acts, but this time, not as *mine*: it is precisely this *possessiveness* that no longer has any meaning, nor does it represent a goal. Meaning and goal are liquidated by the circle—whence the silence of Zarathustra, the interruption of his message. Unless, of course, a burst of laughter can bear all its own bitterness.

At this point Nietzsche becomes divided in his own interpretation of the Eternal Return. The "overman" becomes the name for the subject of Will to Power, as well as the *meaning* and the *goal* for the Eternal Return. The Will to Power is only a *humanized* term for the soul of the vicious circle, while the circle itself is pure intensity *without intention*. On the other hand, as Eternal Return the vicious circle is presented as a chain of existence that forms the very individuality of the doctrine's adherents—those who know that they have *already existed* otherwise than they now exist, and that they will yet exist differently, from one "eternity to another."

In this way Nietzsche introduces a renewed version of metempsychosis.

The necessity of a purification, and therefore of a culpability, to be expiated across successive existences before the initiate's soul recovers a pure state of innocence—all this already admits of an immutable eternity (precisely the kind of ancient schema that has been transmitted to gnostic Christianity by the esoteric religions of India and Asia).

But there is nothing of the kind in Nietzsche—neither “expiation” nor “purification” nor “immutable purity.” Pre-existence and post-existence are always the surplus of the same present existence, according to the economy of the vicious circle. It supposes that an individual’s capacity could never exhaust the full differentiated richness of a single existence, much less its affective potential. Metempsychosis represents the *avatars* of an immortal soul. Nietzsche himself says: “If only we could bear our immortality—that would be the supreme thing.” Now, this immortality is not, for Nietzsche, properly individual. The Eternal Return suppresses abiding identities. Nietzsche urges the follower (of the vicious circle) to accept the *dissolution* of his fortuitous soul in order to receive another, equally fortuitous. Having traversed the entire series, this dissolved soul must in turn come back—namely, to the degree of spiritual excitation where the law of the circle appears.

If the law of the vicious circle dictates the individual’s metamorphosis, how can it be willed? Suddenly we become aware of the circle’s revelation: to remain in this awareness it suffices to live in conformity with the necessity of the circle: to re-will this same experience (the moment when one becomes *him who* is initiated into the secret of the vicious circle) supposes that *all the livable experiences* have been lived through. Therefore, all existence previous to this moment—which privileges one existence among thousands—no less than all that follows, is necessary. To re-will all experiences, all possible acts, all possible happiness and suffering, means that if such an act were accomplished now, if such an experience were now lived, it would have been necessary both for a series to have preceded it and for others to follow; not within the same individual, but in all that belongs to the individual’s very potential, so that one day he could find himself *one more time*.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ETERNAL RETURN AND TRADITIONAL FATALISM

Nietzsche completes his thought of fatalism within the image of the circle. Fatalism in itself (the *fatum*) posits a chain of events that is pre-established according to a certain disposition and whose development is realized in an irreversible way. Whatever I do and whatever I decide to do, my decision, contrary to what I think, obeys a *project* that escapes me and of which I am ignorant.

The vicious circle reintegrates the experience of the *fatum* (in the form of a movement without beginning or end) with the play of chance and its thousandfold combinations as so many series forming a chain. As an image of destiny, the circle can only be *re-willed*, for, in any case, it must *recommence*.

Chance is but *one thing* for each of the moments (i.e., for each individual, singular, and therefore fortuitous existence) that compose it. It is by "chance" that the figure of the circle appears to an individual. Henceforth, he will know how to re-will the entire series in order to re-will himself; or, in other words, by virtue of his very existence, he cannot *fail* to re-will the entire series that both leads up to and surpasses his own existence.

The feeling of eternity and the eternalization of desire are merged in a single moment; the representation of an anterior life and of an ulterior life no longer concerns a beyond, or an individual self that would attain this beyond, but, rather, it concerns living the *same life*, experienced across its individual differences. The Eternal Return is only the way it unfolds. The feeling of vertigo results from the *once-and-for-all* when the subject is surprised by the whirl of *innumerable times*. The once-and-for-all disappears: intensity itself issues forth as the vibrations of being—an unending series of vibrations that projects the individual self *outside of itself* as so many dissonances. All resounds until the consonance of the moment is restored—the moment itself in which these dissonances are once again reabsorbed.

At the level of consciousness, meaning and goal are lost. They are *everywhere* and *nowhere* in the vicious circle, since no point of the circle can be both beginning and end at once.

Finally, and from its very inception, the Eternal Return is not a representation, nor is it exactly a postulate. Rather, it is a *lived fact*—as a thought, it is a *sudden* thought. Fantasy or not, the Sils-Maria experience exercises its constraint as an ineluctable necessity. Alternating between dread and delight, the interpretations of Nietzsche will be inspired by this moment, by this felt necessity.

HOW NIETZSCHEAN FATALISM IS CONCLUDED BY ELIMINATING THE CONCEPT OF WILL

Nietzsche does not say that the thought of the Eternal Return and the pre-existence it presupposes can itself bring fatalism to a close, for, in the second place, he *does* say that his fatalism is necessary in order to eliminate the concept of will. If the thought of the Eternal Return in its various extensions already abolishes the identity of the self along with the traditional concept of the will, then Nietzsche seems, under the second aspect of his fatalism, to make an allusion to his own physiology. According to this, there is no will but one of *power*, and in this context the will is nothing other than a primordial *impulse*. No moral interpretation grounded on the intellect could ever suspend the innumerable metamorphoses it lives through, the shapes it adopts, or the pretexts that provoke them—whether this be an invoked *goal* or a meaning that is supposedly given within these metamor-

phoses, within this impulse, or even at the level of consciousness. In this way, fatalism becomes merged with the impulsive force that, precisely, exceeds the initiate's "will" and *already modifies it*, therefore threatening its very continuous identity.