



Nova Science Press
Journal of Psychology & Education

Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

**The “Eternal Recurrence” of the Overman On the Teaching Proclaimed by
Zarathustra**

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Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.66581/c7cew780>

Received 11 June 2026 • Accepted: 18 June 2026 • Published 30 June 2026

CITATION

Lang, X. (2026). The “Eternal Recurrence” of the Overman On the Teaching Proclaimed by Zarathustra. Journal of Psychology & Education, 1(5), 21.

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Abstract

Thus Spoke Zarathustra occupies a pivotal position in Nietzsche's oeuvre. The work brings together two of Nietzsche's most decisive ideas: the overman (Übermensch) and eternal recurrence. The overman is not merely an ideal opposed to the "last man"; it is also the figure through which the hatred of time is overcome. This is the point at which the concept of the overman becomes internally connected with eternal recurrence. The overman affirms the past, wills entry into the ring of eternal recurrence, enters each coming moment as a creator, and thereby confers meaning upon existence. Zarathustra is both the teacher of the overman and the teacher of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche's two key ideas can therefore be fully understood only within the narrative of Zarathustra's preaching and descent among human beings.

Keywords: Zarathustra; overman; last man; eternal recurrence

Introduction

The obscurity of Nietzsche's thought is well known. One of the major difficulties in studying Nietzsche lies in his distinctive mode of expression: aphorism, poetic diction, allegorical narration, and prophetic speech run through his writings. Thus Spoke Zarathustra begins with the line: "When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lake of his home."¹ In composing this work, Nietzsche deliberately adopts a biblical form, modeling Zarathustra's activity on the experience of prophetic preaching and, more specifically, on the narrative pattern of Jesus' ministry. Yet Nietzsche chooses as his spokesman not Jesus but Zarathustra, the ancient Persian prophet. This choice is not accidental. Nietzsche's opposition to Christianity is well known; in order to establish a new principle of value, he must first exceed the

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Zhouxing Sun (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2010), 5.

old principle of value. By writing in a biblical mode while displacing its theological center, Nietzsche seeks to criticize and overcome Christianity through its own rhetorical form. The new principle of value is concentrated in the concept of the overman.

Why, then, does Nietzsche assign the role of philosophical herald to Zarathustra? In his autobiography, Nietzsche explains that the singular historical significance of this Persian lies precisely in the fact that he first interpreted the struggle between good and evil as the true mechanism of things.² Nietzsche therefore reverses Zarathustra's historical function: the first moralist becomes the one who must overcome morality. As Sun Zhouxing notes, Nietzsche's primary reason for adopting the image of Zarathustra is to make him the herald of the doctrine of eternal recurrence; the name "Zarathustra" is inseparable from that doctrine.³ In Nietzsche's philosophical drama, Zarathustra becomes the teacher of eternal recurrence and the bearer of a value opposed to Christianity.

Eternal recurrence is one of the most important concepts in Nietzsche's philosophy. Philosophers have long disagreed over its significance. Karl Jaspers and others regarded it with considerable suspicion, whereas Heidegger attributed to it a decisive place in Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche himself describes the idea as standing "6,000 feet beyond man and time," and calls the fundamental conception of Thus Spoke Zarathustra—namely, the thought of eternal recurrence—the highest formula of affirmation available to us.⁴ He also claims that eternal

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche's Autobiography: The Revaluation of All Values*, trans. Zhanxiong Mai (Harbin: Heilongjiang Education Press, 2011), 114.

³ Sun Zhouxing, "Several Issues Concerning Nietzsche's Image of Zarathustra," *Journal of Tongji University (Social Science Edition)*, no. 5 (2009): 23–24.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. Zhouxing Sun (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2015), 272.

recurrence is “the most scientific of all possible hypotheses.”⁵ Although Nietzsche’s philosophy is often identified primarily with the will to power, eternal recurrence is no less central. As Heidegger’s interpretation suggests, the will to power thinks the basic character of beings as beings, whereas eternal recurrence thinks the meaning of Being as such.⁶ This article therefore takes Zarathustra’s preaching as its guiding thread and examines the relation between Nietzsche’s two key concepts: the overman and eternal recurrence.

1. Several Images of Zarathustra

Who is Zarathustra? When Nietzsche first presents him, we encounter above all a solitary figure. Zarathustra does not dwell among human beings; he lives with his animals, the eagle and the serpent. Nietzsche writes: “Behold! An eagle soared through the air in wide circles, and on it hung a serpent, not like prey but like a friend; for the serpent was coiled around its neck.”⁷ That Zarathustra lives with these animals, rather than others, is significant. Nietzsche uses them to communicate a concealed philosophical meaning. The eagle flies in circles, while the serpent coils upon its head; together they form a powerful image of the ring of eternal recurrence. The eagle is the proudest of animals. It surveys the earth from above, does not move with the herd, and moves in solitude from height to earth and back again. This image corresponds to Zarathustra’s own solitary character. The serpent, by contrast, is a symbol of wisdom. In the biblical story it is the serpent who tempts Eve, telling her that the fruit of the tree of knowledge

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 35–36.

⁶ Zhang Ke, “Is the Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence Nietzsche’s Core Thought? On Heidegger’s Interpretation of Nietzsche’s Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence,” *German Philosophy Yearbook* (2008): 309.

⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 249.

will make her like God. The serpent is therefore both cunning and knowing. It possesses the power of mediation and transformation, and it controls the play between Being and appearance.

From the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* onward, the eagle and the serpent appear repeatedly. They are not only symbols of eternal recurrence; they also articulate an understanding of it. In Part Three, Zarathustra's animals say: "Everything goes, everything returns; eternally rolls the wheel of Being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of Being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of Being builds itself. Everything parts, everything greets itself again; eternally the ring of Being remains faithful to itself. In every moment Being begins; around every Here rolls the sphere There. The center is everywhere. Crooked is the path of eternity."⁸ What the animals express, however, is only the phenomenal surface of eternal recurrence. They perceive the circular structure of becoming, but they do not enter the gate of eternal recurrence. At this stage, eternal recurrence remains suspended above the earth like an otherworldly faith. Only when a being is placed within it does the ring of eternal recurrence begin to operate. In this sense, many interpretations of Nietzsche's doctrine remain at the level of the animals: they treat eternal recurrence as a cosmological belief without existential significance. After the dwarf, the eagle, and the serpent, Nietzsche introduces the young shepherd. This shepherd, who represents Zarathustra, goes beyond the dwarf and the animals. By biting off the head of the black serpent that has lodged in his throat, he defeats the serpent of nihilism and grasps the actuality of eternal recurrence in the moment.

⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 249.

What, then, is Zarathustra's image? Nietzsche himself asks: "Who is Zarathustra? Is he a promiser? Or a fulfiller? A conqueror? Or an inheritor? An autumn? Or a ploughshare? A physician? Or one who has recovered? Is he a poet? Or a truthful one? A liberator? Or a subduer? A good man? Or an evil one?"⁹ Zarathustra is indeed complex. From the perspective of ordinary human beings, he appears fragmentary, just as Zarathustra himself sees humanity as "fragments and limbs and dreadful accidents." To define Zarathustra, we must ask what he undergoes. In defining any person, we look to the actions and experiences through which that person's character is formed. As Aristotle's practical orientation suggests, action reveals essence. Napoleon is called a great commander because he underwent and performed the actions through which the essence of a commander was gathered in him. Likewise, Nietzsche describes Zarathustra as "the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle."¹⁰ The decisive question is therefore how Zarathustra becomes such an advocate. This question leads us to his preaching experience and explains why Nietzsche treats the whole of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the poetic articulation of eternal recurrence.

2. Zarathustra's Preaching Experience

2.1 The Preacher of the Doctrine of the Overman

When Zarathustra leaves his homeland and his lake and withdraws into the mountains, he is thirty years old. Jesus likewise began his public ministry at about thirty. Nietzsche once suggested that, had Jesus lived longer, he might not have persisted in the doctrine he believed to be true. Where Jesus' end becomes the origin of Christianity, Zarathustra's solitude becomes the

⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 221.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 349.

origin of a counter-teaching. After ten years in the mountains, Zarathustra's spirit overflows. He recognizes that he must give his love to human beings and says: "Behold! This cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become human again."¹¹ Thus begins his first descent. What does Zarathustra give to humanity? First, he announces the reality that "God is dead." He then proclaims the doctrine of the overman: "I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome."¹²

There have been many definitions of the human being. Some have defined the human as the rational animal; others have defined the human as the tool-using animal. For Nietzsche, however, the human being is an undetermined being, a transitional form. Heidegger praises Nietzsche's insight into the unfinished character of humanity. In *What Is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger makes the difficult claim that "the most thought-provoking thing in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking."¹³ The undetermined human and the "not-yet-thought" are closely related. The human being remains open because its essence has not yet been gathered into a final form. The overman names this openness as a task of self-overcoming.

The concept of the overman is often misunderstood, especially when it is imagined as a being endowed with superhuman powers or as a figure beyond the ordinary human dimension. Walter Kaufmann objected to rendering *Übermensch* as "superman," because that translation easily suggests a comic-book or heroic fantasy figure.¹⁴ *Übermensch* is a compound word, and its decisive element is *über*, meaning "over," "above," or "beyond." The overman, in this sense,

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 6.

¹² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 9.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. Zhouxing Sun (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2017), 9.

¹⁴ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 308.

remains a human type, yet one who exceeds the present form of humanity. The overman is not an otherworldly divinity. He is the meaning of the earth, and this meaning requires fidelity to the earth. This opens a perspective opposed to all doctrines that slander this world.¹⁵ If “God is dead,” then the overman is not a new God replacing the old one. As Sun Zhouxing argues, Nietzsche never presents the overman as another God; rather, he presents him as a higher, well-formed human type, opposed to the modern human, the “good person,” the Christian, and other forms of nihilism.¹⁶ The overman is therefore not omniscient or omnipotent. He is defined by the self-overcoming of inherited morality.

Nietzsche repeatedly describes the human being as a bridge. Heidegger interprets the overman as a figure of passage and transition. To clarify the essence of the overman, Nietzsche introduces the last man, the figure that immediately precedes the possible appearance of the overman.¹⁷ The overman and the last man differ in kind. The last man represents the exhausted form of previous humanity. He does not belong to the “not-yet-thought.” His way of representing the world is captured by Nietzsche’s phrase: “We have invented happiness,” say the last men, and they blink.¹⁸ This blinking means a mode of appearance governed by concealment, comfort, and false truth. The last man no longer inquires into what appears; he demands conformity, conventionality, and safety. Whoever refuses this blinking truth is treated as a heretic.

¹⁵ Leo Strauss, *Nietzsche’s Heavy Thought*, trans. Yong Ma (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2020), 49.

¹⁶ Sun Zhouxing, “The Last Man, the Overman, and the Human of the Future,” *Philosophical Research*, no. 2 (2019): 110.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 84.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 97.

The last men are the preachers of virtue, the believers in a beyond, the despisers of the body, and the teachers of death. They make Zarathustra feel nausea and suffocation. The overman is the overcoming of this mode of representation. The morality of the overman lies in a will that creates beyond itself and, for that reason, is willing to perish.¹⁹ The will that continually exceeds itself and overcomes itself is directed toward a gathering that has not yet been spoken. Thought is capable of thought precisely because there remains something not yet thought. The overman is not the embodiment of fixed happiness or a dead doctrine. He is a figure who wills destruction and simultaneously wills self-transcendence. Heidegger's interpretation may be summarized in three claims: first, the overman transports the essence of previous humanity into its truth and assumes it; second, this essence is not a product of unconstrained imagination projected into emptiness; and third, the figure of the overman belongs to Nietzsche's metaphysical thought because Nietzsche's thinking is rooted in the prior destiny of Western thought.²⁰ This is the first teaching Zarathustra brings to humanity. He teaches the overman: the giver, the self-overcomer, and the dancer of life. He proclaims not a will merely to survive, but a will to power: reconstruction upon destruction, repeated within an eternal fate. This future human is the embodiment of the will to power and is directed toward the eternal recurrence of the same.

2.2 Liberation from the Spirit of Revenge

After returning to the mountains, Zarathustra again experiences the pain of overflowing wisdom. In a dream he sees a child holding a mirror. In the mirror he does not see himself but rather a devil's face and mocking laughter. He recognizes a danger: "Truly, all too well do I understand the dream's sign and warning: my doctrine is in danger; weeds want to be called

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 97.

²⁰ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 69.

wheat!”²¹ In this anxiety, Zarathustra decides to descend again in order to clarify and defend his teaching. The second part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, corresponding to Zarathustra’s second preaching experience, exposes once more the nature of the last man and seeks the bridge that leads toward the overman. It articulates the path by which one separates from the last man.

Zarathustra states: “You have placed reward and punishment in the foundation of things—and now even in the foundation of your souls.”²² Reward and punishment are the morality of the last man. Zarathustra then identifies the last man’s most fundamental trait: “the spirit of revenge: my friends, that has so far been the best reflection of humanity; and wherever there was suffering, there was always supposed to be punishment.”²³ Why does the spirit of revenge arise? How does the last man fall into the vortex of reward and punishment? At this point, Zarathustra identifies the decisive problem: time. “This, indeed this alone, is revenge itself: the will’s ill will against time and its ‘it was.’”²⁴

The will is obstructed by time. All that “was” lies beyond the power of willing. Schelling writes that, in the highest and final sense, there is no being other than willing; willing is primal being.²⁵ The spirit of revenge is the most typical symptom of the last man. It is no longer merely a moral or psychological phenomenon; it is the representational structure of Platonism and Christianity as a whole. In this sense, Nietzsche’s account of revenge exposes the path of previous thought and at the same time thinks the Being of beings as a whole. If time is the key to

²¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 126.

²² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 145.

²³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 223.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 223.

²⁵ F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Hua Xue (Shenyang: Liaoning Education Press, 1999), 271.

revenge, what concept of time does Zarathustra presuppose? He extends Aristotle's thought in the *Physics*, where time appears primarily as a destructive factor.²⁶ Zarathustra similarly understands time through passing-away: if time exists, it passes, and this passing is unbearable.²⁷ The essence of time is disappearance. Time never remains; what it truly leaves behind is the past. This is the source of tragedy. The will is imprisoned, deprived of hope and even of freedom. The disgust produced by the obstructed will is revenge. The last man is the pessimist trapped within this tragedy. Beyond revenge, he possesses nothing.

For Zarathustra, the last man must be overcome. But how is this overcoming possible? When Zarathustra confronts the poisonous tarantulas, he says: "For that man be delivered from revenge—that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms."²⁸ Liberation from revenge is the bridge Zarathustra teaches. It is the path to the overman and to the Being of beings. Such liberation must return to the will's hatred of time and its "it was." Time and "it was" here name the same structure, because the essence of time is passing. The decisive question is how the will can cease hating time. This question leads us into the region of what has not yet been thought.

Zarathustra's answer is redemption: "To redeem what is past and to transform every 'It was' into 'Thus I willed it!'"—that alone should I call redemption."²⁹ True redemption is the overcoming of revenge. It transforms "it was" into "thus I willed it." In Heidegger's words, such

²⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Zhuming Zhang (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1982), 121.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 215.

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 155.

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 222.

transformation releases the will from what is counter to it.³⁰ The liberation of the will from what resists it takes place as a victory over the passing of time. Only such a will is the will to power. But how is the will to power awakened? How does the self-overcomer overcome itself? How does willing move from reaction to activity? This is possible only if the will is free. The freedom of the will means that, amid all departure, willing is still free. If the will does not flee what has passed but brings it back, then it can release itself from opposition. If the will continually wills and demands the departure and return of all things, then it is freed from hatred of time and from hatred of the merely past.³¹ What makes the will free points necessarily toward the eternal recurrence of the same. Only if the will wills and demands that every “it was” return eternally can it overcome hatred and thereby overcome the spirit of revenge.

The first two descents of Zarathustra show that eternal recurrence has long dwelt within his thought, even when it has not yet been named. The process of uncovering this thought is difficult, because Zarathustra remains a master of metaphor. Like his serpent, he governs the play between Being and appearance. In the first two parts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we do not find a direct exposition of eternal recurrence. Yet Nietzsche later insists that the work primarily expresses this thought. It is therefore only by entering the logic behind the obscure sayings that we can approach Nietzsche’s inner structure of thought.

2.3 The Teacher of Eternal Recurrence

Through the first two stages of preaching, Zarathustra discovers a path toward eternal recurrence. Yet this discovery fills him with terror. Although the spirit of revenge can be

³⁰ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 118.

³¹ Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 119.

overcome, such overcoming leads him into an even more desolate place: “all houses of Being remain to be built.” Between the most extreme nihilism and the highest value there lies only a narrow fissure. Zarathustra therefore bears the heaviest burden; the thought itself is the “greatest weight.” His soul says: “O Zarathustra, your fruits are ripe, but you are not ripe for your fruits.”³² He returns again to solitude. The stillest hour arrives, signaling that he is prepared to be shattered. When he returns to human beings once more, he has become mature.

At the beginning of his third descent, Zarathustra can no longer withhold the demonic thought: “This slow spider that crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must we not all have been here before?”³³ Zarathustra now teaches that all things will recur in the same way. Only through the eternal recurrence of the same can the will truly overcome hatred of the past. Nothing is simply past; everything returns. Every moment will return innumerable times. The will no longer has the right to hate. Its only path is to say: thus I willed it; I willed what was, because it is what will come again. This does not mean that the will passively accepts the poison of time. On the contrary, because of eternal recurrence, the will resolves to integrate every moment into its own essence. In this way, the will grants time the highest value.

At this point, the last man has been overcome, and the spirit of revenge has disappeared. Every coming moment becomes eternal. The moment no longer merely vanishes. The bridge to the overman has been built, and Zarathustra’s secret garden is opened. The mission of Zarathustra as teacher of eternal recurrence is accomplished in the third preaching experience. Everything recurs, and Zarathustra is no exception: “I return eternally to this same and selfsame

³² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 235.

³³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 235.

life, in what is greatest and in what is smallest, to teach again the eternal recurrence of all things, to speak again the word of the great noon of earth and human beings, to proclaim the overman again to humanity.”³⁴ In eternal return, Zarathustra recognizes his own essence: he exists eternally as the teacher of eternal recurrence.

3. The Problem of Meaning in Eternal Recurrence

The eternal recurrence of the same has always contained a serious problem. Heidegger formulates its most terrible form as follows: existence as it is, without meaning and without aim, yet inevitably recurring without end, all the way to nothingness—this is eternal recurrence. It is the extreme form of nihilism: nothingness, or meaninglessness, is eternal.³⁵ Between the highest value and the deepest void there lies only the narrowest fissure. If what one now experiences and will experience has already occurred countless times, where is the motive for existence? Where is freedom of the will? All the values one believes in seem to be swallowed by the ring of recurrence. Eternal recurrence not only shatters the dream of a beyond; it also breaks the meaning of this-worldly existence, casting beings as a whole into boundless solitude, like Sisyphus eternally pushing his stone up the mountain.

Nietzsche himself was aware of this problem. When he formulates the thought, he is terrified: “O abyssal thought, you are my thought! When shall I find the strength to hear you digging and no longer tremble? When I hear you digging, my heart leaps into my throat. Your silence itself would strangle me, you silent abyss!”³⁶ For this reason, he calls the thought the

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 350.

³⁵ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 458.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 255.

greatest weight. Nietzsche attempts in several ways to demonstrate the actuality of eternal recurrence, but these attempts often lead readers astray. The title under which he presents the thought—“On the Vision and the Riddle”—already reveals his anxiety. Great thinkers are often difficult because truth itself is difficult. Nietzsche states through the mouth of the Wanderer and his Shadow: “The desert grows: woe to him who harbors deserts!”³⁷ The thought of eternal recurrence had already begun to torment Nietzsche. Yet the question of human meaning must still be confronted.

The most influential interpretation of eternal recurrence remains Heidegger’s interpretation of the eternal recurrence of the same. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, however, offers a different reading. For Deleuze, eternal return is not the return of permanent sameness, a state of equilibrium, or a dwelling of identity. It is not the return of “the same” or “the one,” but the return that belongs to multiplicity and difference.³⁸ Keith Ansell Pearson summarizes this Deleuzian interpretation by emphasizing that eternal return is not the intensification of “this one” but of “another”; it is not identical reproduction but the repetition of difference.³⁹ Nietzsche’s attempts to demonstrate eternal recurrence begin from the idea that the universe has no final equilibrium: finite configurations of force and infinite time yield endless becoming. On this point, Deleuze and Heidegger are not entirely opposed. Their crucial difference concerns the mode of return.

³⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 488.

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Ying Zhou and Yuyu Liu (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2016), 101.

³⁹ Keith Ansell Pearson, “Living the Eternal Return as the Event: Nietzsche with Deleuze,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 14 (1997): 67.

Deleuze argues that Nietzsche's affirmation of multiplicity is concentrated in the tragic spirit. Dionysus affirms all existence, including death, rebirth, and the deepest suffering; this, for Deleuze, is the essence of tragedy—the affirmation of plurality and multiplicity.⁴⁰ Because Nietzsche's tragic thought is a thought of affirmation, Deleuze holds that Nietzsche cannot be affirming a rigid repetition of identity. Moreover, Deleuze argues that the will itself is plural and complex. Nietzsche departs from Schopenhauer precisely by refusing the unity of the will: once we assume that the will has unity or identity, we are already destined to negate the will itself.⁴¹ A will defined by identity ultimately imprisons itself in pity, morality, and asceticism. Such a will cannot overcome the spirit of revenge. For Deleuze, then, Nietzsche cannot have intended a dead cycle of identical repetition.

To demonstrate the eternal return of multiplicity, Deleuze turns to Nietzsche's image of the dice throw. The throw of the dice has two moments: the moment of casting and the moment of falling. These two moments belong to the same world. "The relation of multiplicity and unity, of becoming and Being, constitutes a game. To affirm becoming and to affirm the Being of becoming are the two moments of the game."⁴² To throw the dice is to face chance and affirm contingency. The return of the dice is the affirmation of necessity. Nietzsche identifies chance with multiplicity. The affirmation of the moment therefore lies in affirming its contingency and plurality. The second moment of the dice throw, the return, is not only the affirmation of necessity but also the return of the first moment itself; it is the repetition of the throw, the

⁴⁰ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 36.

⁴¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 15.

⁴² Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 53.

regeneration and reaffirmation of chance.⁴³ Chance affirms necessity, and necessity affirms chance. The two are internally linked.

Through Deleuze's account of the return of multiplicity, the meaning of the moment becomes clearer. The eternal recurrence of the same and the eternal return of multiplicity are not simply mutually exclusive. Rather, they are two aspects of eternal recurrence. As the return of actual facts, eternal recurrence is the reappearance of the same. As the return of the moment, however, it is the collision of past and future; the moment itself is always open to multiplicity and contingency. Every moment is filled with the essence of the will to power, and this will must be plural if it is to desire continual self-overcoming. Eternal recurrence places beings into the open field of time, dispels the gloomy atmosphere of mere circular repetition, and grants life its highest value.

The meaning of the future human—the overman—therefore lies in striving to overcome oneself in every moment. To realize the best possible moment is to assume the greatest responsibility for life. We are always confronted by the question: do you will this again and again, innumerable times? This question becomes the source of the future human's motivation and the disclosure of the meaning of the earth. Kathleen O'Dwyer observes that the mystery of hope within despair, the resilience of beginning again after failure, and the affirmation that life is worth striving for are combined in the poetic claim that life has meaning and that the search for meaning itself is worth the effort.⁴⁴ Even if we are repeating the moments of a previous ring, we still choose to overcome ourselves. Even if all things finally perish and return to nothingness, life

⁴³ Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 56.

⁴⁴ Kathleen O'Dwyer, "Nietzsche's Challenge: Eternal Recurrence," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 51, no. 2 (2011): 253.

remains worthy of affirmation. This is the expression of the will to power and the essence of the tragic spirit. In countless identical mornings, Sisyphus still pushes his stone up the mountain with full energy; this is his highest contempt for Zeus. As Strauss puts it, the earth itself has no purpose; only when human beings will the earth to have meaning does the earth possess meaning.⁴⁵

4. Conclusion

The concepts of the overman and eternal recurrence are internally connected. The overman becomes the overman because willing enters the ring of eternal recurrence and creates beyond itself in the recurring moment. The doctrine of eternal recurrence removes the mysterious veil of Platonism and Christianity. It teaches that the otherworldly beyond contains only nothingness: there is no original sin, no redemptive debt, and no salvation outside the earth. The earth is the foundation and aim of the Being of beings. Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead" therefore demands a return to beings themselves and to the overman as the this-worldly aim of humanity.

The overman and the last man are opposed images of human possibility. They embody different human essences. The overman signifies the enhancement of humanity, whereas the last man signifies decline and decadence. Their deepest difference lies in their relation to time. The last man's relation to time generates the spirit of revenge; the overman overcomes hatred of time. In Nietzsche's thought, eternal recurrence is the essence of Being. No being can pass beyond the limit of eternal recurrence, and the overman neither does nor can transcend that limit. Therefore, the realization of the overman must occur within the ring of eternal recurrence. The future human

⁴⁵ Strauss, Nietzsche's Heavy Thought, 49.

is not a final destination; indeed, there may be no final destination, because time for Nietzsche is a ring.

The overman first affirms fate and the meaning of the earth. In every moment of the ring, he takes himself seriously and attempts to overcome himself. Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*: “Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all, someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.”⁴⁶ As Aaron Ridley explains, to love fate is to say yes to the counter-concepts of the created God: temporality, embodiment, contingency, and every necessity of a life without transcendence.⁴⁷ This is Nietzsche’s tragic wisdom. It is the morality of the overman: no original sin, no hatred of time, no spirit of revenge, but affirmation of all that has been and the effort to confer meaning upon every coming moment through one’s own will.

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⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 223.

⁴⁷ Aaron Ridley, “Nietzsche’s Greatest Weight,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 14 (1997): 23.

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