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Augenblick, Agency, and Eternal Recurrence

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Abstract: In developing Karl Jaspers' interpretation of the moment of decision (the *Augenblick*) and its relevance to eternal recurrence in Friedrich Nietzsche, I articulate the fundamental philosophical and historical importance of Jaspers' confrontation of Søren Kierkegaard's most fundamental thoughts on the subjects of time, agency, and the moment of decision with Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence. Jaspers argues that Nietzsche's conception of eternity and of the *Augenblick* is crucial to the philosophical significance of his conception of the eternal return. The eternal return involves a fundamental reflection for Jaspers not only on human beings' (existential) agency but also on being. Jaspers argues that Nietzsche's conception of eternity is displayed in the *Augenblick* that for Nietzsche brings past and future together in the eternity of one's choice. Jaspers maintains that the fundamentally new role eternity and eternal recurrence must play in his conception of agency and of being itself is ultimately unintelligible. Nietzsche's conception of the eternal return is purported to break apart into a rational scientific one, and a mythic and historical-philosophical one, neither of which is adequate on its own or in the end even intelligible when taken together. This is where I part company with Jaspers. I offer reasons to defend a less paradoxical and more intelligible interpretation of the fundamentally existential, and ontological, significance that eternal recurrence has for Nietzsche.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Friedrich; Jaspers, Karl; Kierkegaard, Søren; Plato's *Parmenides*; time; agency; eternal recurrence; being; history.

In his 1936 book on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Jaspers offers an interpretation with the aim and subtitle of *Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*.¹ Jaspers' book on Nietzsche is

¹ Karl Jaspers, Nietzsche. *Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*, Berlin, DE: Walter de Gruyter, 1936. [The translations are mine throughout; henceforth cited as *KJN*] For comparison, an English translation is published as Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche. An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity*, transl. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 1997. Note that I would already translate the subtitle of this work differently, literally as bearing the subtitle: *An Introduction to an Understanding of his Philosophizing*.

meant to be an introduction to an understanding of how Nietzsche philosophizes. In this, his major Nietzsche book, Jaspers takes up an important theme from his still untranslated book *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen (Psychology of Worldviews)*.² In the latter book, Jaspers had drawn attention to the significance of the *Augenblick*, the moment or blink of an eye that is the moment of choice, expressing for Søren Kierkegaard the fullness of time. In these two books that were published almost two decades apart, but in a sustained period of German crisis, Jaspers'

² Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Berlin, DE: Springer, 1922. [The translations are mine throughout; henceforth cited as *PW*]

interpretation of Nietzsche differs importantly in nuance and in extent. The interpretation of Nietzsche is foregrounded in his Nietzsche book where it was initially more in the background. The 1936 book was published at a time when the German National-Socialist regime had already begun to threaten his own life as well as that of his Jewish wife, Gertrude, whom he stood by at his own life-peril (as it was both the loving and the right thing to do).

Kierkegaard and the *Augenblick* in Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*

In his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Jaspers develops a conception of time and agency that is oriented around the notion of *Augenblick*, of the blink of an eye and Kierkegaard's interpretation of the moment of decision. The moment of decision is rooted in the *kairos*, or fullness of time, corresponding to the opportune moment of life-transforming choice in New Testament thought. The moment of choice is in a certain sense an encapsulation of the person's whole character and of everything that matters to an individual in that individual's life. The blink of an eye is the locus not only of agency but also of what Jaspers will later call "transcendence." Jaspers regards the *Augenblick*, as the way an individual experiences choice in the moment, as infinitely significant and interpretable and never exhaustively accessible:

Reflection on what has been thought about concepts of time fills intuition with the puzzling character of the *Augenblick*. It is impossible to grasp the way the *Augenblick* is experienced because therein lies the infinite but to look in that direction is to have an intimation of the essential life-attitude of the human being. To see a human being's life, one would have to see how the human being lives the *Augenblick*. [PW 112]

Jaspers seems to speak in his own voice in articulating this conception of the fundamental importance and infinity of the blink of an eye, although he is also interpreting Kierkegaard:

The *Augenblick* is the sole reality, reality in general in the life of the soul. The lived *Augenblick* is the ultimate, the blood-warm, immediate, living, bodily present [*leibhaftig Gegenwärtige*], the totality of the real, the only thing that is concrete [*das allein Konkrete*]. [PW 112]

Jaspers not only identifies the blink of an eye with the kind of bodily presence that for Edmund Husserl and phenomenology is the most fundamental and

epistemically privileged form of immediacy, but also with the notion of the concrete; that which is concrete is a totality that in Hegelian terms brings together the universal, the particular and the individual in a dynamic process in which all significance is first constituted. The process of the constitution of significance is also the process through which selves constitute themselves; it is also a process of self-constitution.³ In the terms of Ernst Cassirer's 1910 published book *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff*, concepts are not mere inductively formed abstractions but patterns of functional significance concretely manifest in cognitive function and in what humans do. They are concretely universal in significance because they participate in the holistic significance characteristic of human life.

Jaspers' interpretation of Kierkegaard can also be regarded as the first tentative exposition of Jaspers' own philosophical position. Jaspers notes that for Kierkegaard, individual human existence is a dynamic process in which human life comes to self-consciousness of itself. As is true for G. F. W. Hegel (and indeed for Immanuel Kant), the process in which human life becomes conscious of itself is also the process in which the fundamental oppositions of human life do not just come together but coalesce and concreate into the self of the concrete individual.

The human being does not exist unless the human exists as an "individual" [*als "Einzelner"*]. The human being cannot dissolve into something universal without losing existence; but merely as an individual [*Einzelner*], the human being is no self. To become a self means that the universal comes to be in the individual [*im Einzelnen*] and neither of the two is shoved aside. [PW 419-20]

Jaspers is especially interested in Kierkegaard's conception of the human being as a synthesis

³ The allusion to Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, Integrity*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009, is intended. Korsgaard's synthesis of the Rawlsian, Kantian, and Platonic conceptions of agency, also endeavors to overcome the limitations of individual agency and desire in the form of a fundamentally social conception that embeds our agency not only in the social and political realm. In her more recent work she has endeavored to give a fuller account of the place of human agency in nature and endeavors to do justice to the purposiveness of nature as an integral part of the kingdom of ends. I discuss her position in some detail in "The Kantian Idea of Constitutional Patriotism—Part 2: The Very Idea of a Constitutional Republic," *Existenz* 14/2 (2019), 83-100, here pp. 90-1.

and process of self-becoming. The process of self-becoming is the process of becoming a self. Neither Kierkegaard nor Jaspers wish to deny or reject the universal in the process of becoming a self. Indeed, the universal is no less constitutive of becoming a self than is the individual. The process of becoming a self is the process of fully adjusting the shared normativity of the universal to one's own concrete individual existence. At the same time, it is no less important that one's own individual and particular conception of self comes to adjust itself to the demands of the universal. The universal, that which is particular and that which is distinctively individual, must not only come together but come to be together, coalesce and thus congregate for one, in a concrete consciousness of what matters to one in what one does. This involves a complete transformation of the human being that also fundamentally transforms one's affective relation to oneself and to others. Kierkegaard at times has a rather abstract way of putting something that is for him a fundamentally concrete, ongoing concretion of the universal and the individual and Jaspers follows him in this abstract characterization:

For the human being to be a self the essence of this synthesis must become conscious to itself. [PW 420]

Such self-consciousness is the very sense of human beings as to who they are in what they do. Self-consciousness is not a merely abstract reflective relation; instead, self-consciousness is the sense that human beings have, at least intermittently, of going on together with others. There is a fundamentally normative commitment in going on together with others.

Kierkegaard, Despair, and Becoming a Self

In Kierkegaard, following Kant, and German Romanticism and Idealism, the human being is understood to be a dynamic synthesis and concretion of the universal and the individual, of the social and of the private, of the infinite and the finite, of the eternal and the temporal, of freedom and necessity. The universal cannot be grasped in abstraction from the difference that it makes to the individual, private experience is never fully private but also an outgrowth of socially mediated experience with others in which language plays an important and social role. The infinite is always involved in the finite because finitude always presupposes a space of wider possibilities in which the finite is

embedded. The temporal gains its significance from its relation to the eternal. And freedom and necessity are both juxtaposed to each other and not possible the one without the other. In this synthesis, which is for Kierkegaard a process of becoming concrete, the universal, the social, the infinite, the eternal and freedom come as self to be in and as the individual. Jaspers refers to Kierkegaard's claim in *The Sickness unto Death* that the individual is so concrete in the process of becoming a self that no writer has ever been able exhaustively and adequately to describe the kind of self-consciousness of one's concrete individuality that is involved in being a self (PW 420-1).

Kierkegaard is broadly in line with Kant and German idealism on these points. However, Kierkegaard also maintains that normative commitments such as they are embodied in our social practices and even in ethics can and in a sense must be suspended "in a leap of faith" in favor of overriding religious commitments. These new religious commitments show both the significance and limits of ethical normativity; they in turn completely transform the individual, in a process that Kierkegaard identifies with Christian love. This conception of the significance of love is by no means outside of the purview even of the later Kant who comes to argue in his work on *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* that the good exerts a fundamental attractive power that transforms the individual and allows the individual to incorporate concern for others in that person's own sense of self. This idea has roots in the Platonic notion of *eros* as well as in the Christian conception of *agape* and is taken up by German idealism, Romanticism and Kierkegaard in a manner that brings both Platonic *eros* and Christian *agape* together in a fundamental self-transformation that is involved in becoming truly or authentically a self. Kant of course rejects the notion of a religious transcendence of the ethical, for he takes religious transcendence always only to be intelligible in ethical terms.

In the process of becoming a self, it is crucial that one come to identify how one goes on together with others with one's own sense of self; this openness to the other is a process of revelation and making manifest to the individual and in communication with others. The process of becoming open and manifest (*das Offenbarwerden*) is freedom for Kierkegaard and the life principle of love; it is characterized by a kind of interiority (*Innerlichkeit*) that is closed in on itself.

Even though openness and freedom are juxtaposed to closedness and unfreedom, there is still a definite closedness (*Verschlossenheit*) to the interiority of freedom (PW 421). Freedom is open to the universal and the eternal, it is closed to the business of everyday life and the concerns of everyday life and of institutional attachments.

Despair at Becoming a Self

Jaspers takes up key psychological concepts in Kierkegaard, melancholy (*Schwermut*, PW 422-3), anxiety (*Angst*, PW 116), but especially despair (*Verzweiflung*, PW 425-8) and the demonic (*das Dämonische*, PW 428-32). The significance of these affective relations in Kierkegaard and in Jaspers is ultimately not as psychological facts but in their fundamental role in self and world constitution. These concepts involve fundamental moods of human existence. They affectively express one's relationship to others and to oneself, and one's relation to that which transcends all the finite relationships in which one stands. In so doing, they affectively connect one to the past, present and future, and to eternity.

Jaspers is by no means inattentive to the dimensions of *Angst* that Martin Heidegger will focus attention on a full decade later in *Being and Time*. Much of the rich existential structure of the temporality of agency developed in *Being and Time* is already anticipated in Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* and will later be appropriated by Heidegger. Jaspers already notes that *Angst* is a characteristic of the kind of heightened self-consciousness that distinguishes the *Augenblick* and its distinctive temporality of agency from a more mechanical form of living (PW 116). Despair is however crucial to Jaspers' reconstruction of Kierkegaard's conception of the self as a relation that relates self-consciously to itself in virtue of a ground that escapes the self. Thus, despair makes the transcendent ground of human existence existentially manifest to the self.

Michael Theunissen emphasizes that Jaspers is the only existential thinker to put Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto Death* and its analysis of despair at the center of his analysis. In putting despair at the center of his analysis in his Kierkegaard *Referat* in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Jaspers stands in obvious contrast both to Heidegger and to Jean-Paul Sartre both of whom emphasize the conception of *Angst* (sometimes

rendered as anxiety and sometimes as dread) from Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*.⁴ Heidegger does not discuss despair in *Being and Time*. Mediated by Jaspers and by Kierkegaard's account of public life, Heidegger replaces despair with inauthenticity and inauthentic everydayness and focuses on the importance of *Angst* for its role in helping human beings to break through the reign of everyday publicity and authority to genuine individuality.

For Kierkegaard, despair is fundamental to human existence because of the human being's and the self's failure to be able to assert control over its own, and hence one's own, enabling conditions. Despair is key for Jaspers to the antinomial character of human experience. As a human being, one is always presented with possibilities in a situation over which one can never have complete control. A human existence inevitably comes up against limit-situations. Limit-situations are situations in which human beings encounter their finitude in a manner that grips them through and through and thus also has a fundamentally affective dimension to it. Human existence comes up against limit-situations because the ability of human beings to come to terms with the conditions for their existence are always outstripped by those very conditions. Human beings strive for but always in the end shipwreck in their efforts to control the totality of conditions that make their existence possible. Such shipwreck is manifest to them in a sense of despair at the human condition and in the face of the self that each human being wants to but cannot fully be.

Angst and especially despair mark the fundamental synthesis that is involved in becoming a self. To be a self is affectively to understand oneself as a self and affectively to understand one's situation as something that always both determines one's choices in the moment and ultimately eludes one's grasp. The ultimate inaccessibility of the ground of what a self does is manifest affectively in *Angst* and especially despair. This ground that is not in one's control is manifest in what one does and in the distinctive temporal synthesis of past, present and future that is the moment of choice, it is the blink of an eye. The *Augenblick* is itself an expression of how one comes to terms with the *Angst* and despair that characterize the temporality of the

⁴ Michael Theunissen, *Der Begriff Verzweiflung: Korrekturen an Kierkegaard*, Frankfurt, DE: Suhrkamp 1993, pp. 45-54.

human condition and the elusiveness of everything that one strives for as a self (including especially one's own self and its ground). The distinctive temporality of *Angst* and despair and the distinctive way in which they bring individuality and universality, the finite and the infinite, and the temporal and the eternal together is manifest in the blink of an eye that encapsulates a whole life in each moment of a human being's agency. Past, present, and future come together, concreate, in the moment that is also a transition from the past to the present to the future. The *Augenblick* is not just the relatedness of past, present, and future each other but through that interrelatedness the *Augenblick* is the relation to the eternal, to that which is always already there. This is the self in its authentic normative significance as well as the ultimate ground of normativity in how human beings go on together.

The *Augenblick* as Atom of Eternity as Opposed to the Now as Time-Atom

In its empty form, the blink of an eye is, or rather seems to be, merely the empty passage of time, time as the succession of moments in the abstract form of experience, in what Kant calls the form of inner sense. Jaspers distinguishes time and the present as a succession of abstract moments, an abstract sequence ofnows that function as time-atoms, both from the time of sheer temporal succession and from time instrumentalized to attain specific tasks. However, both the time of sheer temporal succession and time and the present as a sequence or succession of abstract moments in truth abstract for him from, and in the end are always subordinate to, a much richer conception of the blink of an eye as an expression of the unity of one's agency in time, in nature and in history. At the limit, the blink of an eye is a mere time-atom, an isolated now, which in the end always belongs to an interval of successive experiences. This limit-conception of the time-atom is encouraged by the notion of time and of the present as a mere instrument to achieve future tasks. As one becomes focused on one's tasks, time seems to dissolve into isolated moments:

Again and again the present is regarded in terms of the future, *Leben* [life] and *Erleben* [experience] always destroyed as mere means. It is never a matter of a lived interpenetration of present and goal, instead the present is experienced as a means in a technical sense, destroyed, given up in the expectation of what is to be achieved. [PW 113]

The instrumentalization of time and the present as means to attaining specific tasks disguises the true structure of the time, life, and the temporality of agency. The present as means to realizing the future goals of everyday life is a future-oriented present, but a future-oriented present in which the full structure of the future-directedness and future-self-constituting role of the blink of an eye of agency is largely suppressed in favor of everyday stereotypical tasks, roles, jobs, and practices. For the most part one lives one's life in a manner that instrumentalizes time and the present in favor of anticipations of future satisfactions. Such instrumentalization of time encourages an abstract conception of time as a sequence of time-atoms, a sequence ofnows in which one anticipates the realization and satisfaction of one's aims.

Jaspers takes the Aristotelian conception to be that time is continuous presence and eternal momentary blinks of an eye in a sequence ofnows; this now sequence is an abstraction from our efforts at the manipulation of time in everyday life. Jaspers refers to Giordano Bruno who referred to this conception of the standing now (*nunc stans*) of eternity in his work *eroici furori*, as the "eternal presence of time" (PW 209), an expression which reappears in Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* conception of time and of its relation to eternity at the beginning of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. However, Jaspers' interest is in the much richer conception of time associated by Hegel and by others with the fundamental conception of agency.

Following Kierkegaard, Jaspers traces the conception of the *Augenblick* back to Plato's *Parmenides* (and the *Parmenides*' conception of the *exaíphnes*, which is the timeless moment of transition between rest and motion and between the temporal and the eternal). The Platonic conception of the blink of an eye is the *exaíphnes* of Plato's *Parmenides* (PW 156) linking rest and motion, the past, present and future in an atemporal now. This eternal now appears belatedly in human knowledge as a process of recollection and hence a kind of repetition of previously intuited eternal ideas. This version of the blink of an eye in a certain sense never truly is and thus can easily be confused with the now as a kind of time-atom, a time-slice of reality that seems to be divorced from everything past, present, and future.

The time-atom is nothing, but the *Augenblick* is everything. One does not always have the experience of the *Augenblick*, for the most part one goes through mere moments of time that serve another moment. [PW 112]

The blink of an eye properly understood is not a time-atom, an isolated present moment, which is itself the mere limit of an interval, and hence a vanishing quantity. While not itself eternity, the blink of an eye is an atom of eternity, the first reflection of eternity in time.

The Platonic conception of the *exaíphnes* is the immediate moment of transition between the eternal and the temporal. Plato's conception of the moment, of the *Augenblick*, of the atom of eternity, links change and rest and makes both possible but is itself according to Plato's *Parmenides* (156c9), out of time. The *exaíphnes* is the sudden transition from moment to moment linking the temporal to the eternal and is the non-mediated transition from rest to motion, and motion to rest.

The formal dialectic of time concepts begins with Plato's thought. The *Augenblick* is the paradox to be transition and yet also not to be; the *Augenblick* is as merely evanescent moment of time the absolute opposite of eternity and for that reason according to the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* [the coincidence of opposites] closely related to eternity. [PW 111]

Nicholas of Cusa's notion of the coincidence of opposites, in this case of the temporal and the eternal, is taken to be an important systematic and historical dimension of the development of this Platonic conception of eternity and of its unification with the notions of eternity implicit in the Hebrew Bible, in the New Testament, and in the Platonic tradition.

Kierkegaard, in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) refers to the blink of an eye in terms of the suddenness of transition induced by the blink of an eye as "atom of eternity." The *Augenblick* is to be understood as an "atom of eternity" rather than as an "atom of time." The *Augenblick* as atom of eternity has in philosophical and religious tradition functioned to synthesize and unite past, present, and future in at least three different ways depending on differing conceptions of eternity. Kierkegaard distinguishes three different ways in which the blink of an eye of agency, the *Augenblick*, can relate to the eternal: (1) the Greek form displayed by Plato's doctrine of recollection in which the eternal is manifest as the unchangeability of the past, (2) the eschatological form of thought in Judaism in which the eternal is in future, and (3) the Christian form of thought in which the eternal is the future that returns as the past in the moment of decision as *kairos* (or fulfillment of time). Following Kierkegaard, Jaspers

takes these three different ways in which one relates to the eternal in time to be different forms of the blink of an eye and of the relation of time and human agency to eternity.

Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, the *Augenblick*, and the Novel Significance of Eternity and Being

Kierkegaard distinguishes two Biblical conceptions of the moment of decision and of its relation both to time and to eternity. In Judaism and in the Hebrew Bible, the eternal is the messianic future, and the blink of an eye is always this anticipation of the eternal in the future. In the New Testament, the fullness of time is the blink of an eye of decision but also the eternal that is always also the future and the past (PW 110-1, KJN 362). Jaspers characterizes the momentary blink of an eye of decision in terms of his own watchword taken over from Kierkegaard, namely, "Existenz":

Instead of losing the present in the past and future, the human being finds Existenz and that which is absolute [*das Absolute*] only in the blink of an eye [*Augenblick*]. Passed and future are dark, uncertain abysses, are endless time, whereas the *Augenblick* can be the dissolution of time, the presence of the eternal. [PW 112]

In his major work on Friedrich Nietzsche, Jaspers invokes these three different notions of the *Augenblick* distinguished by Kierkegaard, the Platonic in which the eternal comes to one through the past of recollection and is manifest through the timeless transition from the eternal to time and change, in the conception of the Hebrew Bible in which the eternal is conceived as in the messianic future, and the Christian, and New Testament conception in which the past comes at one in the present of choice from the vantage point of the future (KJN 362). At first on Jaspers' account, Nietzsche seems merely and paradoxically to return to the third (Christian) mode of thought in thinking of time and agency as eternal recurrence. But in the end, Jaspers' position is that Nietzsche in one sense combines and, in another sense, rejects all three senses of eternity and of the *Augenblick* (KJN 362-3).

In Nietzsche's conception of being, of the eternity of eternal recurrence and of the now the middle of time and of space as in Nicholas of Cusa, is everywhere.

Everything dies, everything blooms back, the year of being runs eternally. Everything breaks, everything is restored anew; the same house of being rebuilds itself eternally. Everything parts, everything greets

each other anew; the ring of being remains ever true to itself. In every now being begins; around every here rolls the ball of there. The middle is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity.⁵

For Nietzsche, being begins ever anew in every now and *Augenblick*. Jaspers emphasizes the importance of the eternity of recurrence to Nietzsche's conception of being. Jaspers also does so before Heidegger had developed any such conception of what being might mean for Nietzsche:

Recurrence is the expression of the way in which all things are taken up in being itself [*das Aufgehobensein aller Dinge im Sein selbst*], nowhere is there beginning, nowhere end, – the world is always perfectly complete, always whole, always middle, always beginning and end. [KJN 361]

Nietzsche takes the notion of being and of eternity from the philosophical and theological tradition. However, his rejection of a Platonic two-worlds metaphysics and of a transcendent God makes it impossible for Nietzsche to accept the notion of being and of eternity to which these three conceptions of the *Augenblick* distinguished by Kierkegaard are committed. This does not mean however that Nietzsche gives up on either the notion of eternity or of that of being. Jaspers argues that Nietzsche's conception of eternity is crucial to the philosophical significance of his conception of the eternal return and to its significance in addressing the meaning of being, but he is not satisfied that Nietzsche can truly make good on the fundamentally new role eternity and eternal recurrence must play in his conception of agency and of being itself.

Transcendence and Eternal Recurrence

The *Augenblick* has for Jaspers the character of what he in the 1930s begins to call "transcendence." However, in his Nietzsche book, one of the most puzzling aspects is that Jaspers seems to affirm the fundamental importance of transcendence to Nietzsche's thought and simultaneously also takes Nietzsche to reject transcendence. It is certainly true that Nietzsche rejects conventional moral and theistic conceptions

of transcendence. And Jaspers takes Nietzsche to reject a two-worlds metaphysics, albeit in a rather unsubtle form. Nietzsche's version of transcendence is taken to be committed both to perspectivism and to the dissolution of this belief that results from taking a certain perspective to be true (KJN 329-30). For Jaspers, transcendence is really the key to Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence and of its significance; "transcending remains the philosophical driver of [Nietzsche's] thoughts" concerning eternal recurrence and of the blink of an eye of choice that is always pitched asymmetrically between the past that recurs and the future that is not yet but will eventually recur (KJN 354). It is also true that Nietzsche is committed to transcending the human condition or, to use Nietzsche's expression, to the possibility of the *Übermensch*. Jaspers does not deny any of this. Thus, for Jaspers, Nietzsche only rejects transcendence in the sense that Jaspers regards as the only one intelligible to the rest of us. Jaspers rejects Nietzsche's ability to express transcendence for those of us who do not relate to the world in the way that Nietzsche does (KJN 361). Jaspers cannot see how the transcendence of human existence can be consistent with the thought that every choice that I make is revocable and repeatable. Rather for Jaspers, it is necessary that every choice be irrevocable and non-repeatable. Only under the condition that choice is irrevocable and non-repeatable is transcendence possible for human beings. The irrevocable and non-repeatable character of human choice determines the parameters of existence for humans in the here and now (*Dasein*):

Dasein can only understand itself as existence in terms of transcendence. [KJN 361]

Jaspers takes this conception of the irrevocable and non-repeatable character of action to be inconsistent with Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence. However, Jaspers concedes that Nietzsche does not see the inconsistency that Jaspers diagnoses:

Through the irreversibility of time and the irrevocableness of temporal existence in relation to transcendence, existence is as never recurrent the possibility of eternal satisfaction or of final loss. If we speak of the transcendence-lessness of his thought then that is true only for the way in which we can think it, not however for the way in which Nietzsche experienced it. [KJN 361]

Nietzsche's conception of the threshold that is the

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra, I-IV*, in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe, Vol. 4*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin, DE: de Gruyter 1988, pp. 272-3. [The translations are mine throughout; henceforth cited as Z]

Augenblick involves the very contradiction of the irrevocable and non-repeatable character of action and of its eternal recurrence. Action is always for Nietzsche both irrevocable and non-repeatable and the expression of a conception of the cosmos as the fundamentally repeatable expression of the enabling conditions of that action and of all the causal consequences of that action. This conception and its seeming contradiction is a fundamental feature at least of archaic thought. And it is arguably built into both the Platonic and the Kantian conceptions of agency. Jaspers sees the opposition between the irrevocability and non-repeatability of choice in the *Augenblick* and the repeatability of eternal recurrence as a fundamental antinomy in Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche seems to be equally fundamentally committed to the fundamentality of choice and the significance of what Jaspers calls "transcendence" and to the repeatability of eternal recurrence. Jaspers cannot see how Nietzsche can reconcile these two opposing conceptions.

Jaspers' Moment of Decision and the Eternal Return

In his book on Nietzsche, Jaspers brings the conception of the *Augenblick* and of its significance to agency and relationship to eternity to bear on Nietzsche and on Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence. Jaspers at first seems to suggest that Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence might be the one that Kierkegaard assigns to the Christian conception of the blink of an eye as *kairos*. It is the fulfillment of time in the moment that as eternal is both future and past (KJN 362). This would mean that even though Nietzsche had intended

the most radical break [with Christianity] he had not actually carried it out: he wanted a philosophy of godlessness with an ahistorical transcendence; but the secret fulfillment [of a philosophy of godlessness and ahistorical transcendence] would have brought him something else and from the content of that [Christianity] which he rejected. [KJN 362]

To be sure, there is some question whether Nietzsche ever sought a philosophy of godlessness or of ahistorical transcendence, as Jaspers claims. Both of those claims are difficult to reconcile with the trajectory of Nietzsche's thought from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Twilight of the Idols* which begins and ends with the dynamic significance of Dionysus and the historical development of, for him, the illusory conception of two-worlds ontology and thus of How

the True World Finally Became a Fable. Nietzsche does not allow himself to be impaled on a complete disjunction between the atemporal and the temporal. As Jaspers himself recognizes, Nietzsche seeks a mediation between the atemporal and the temporal in the thought of eternal recurrence. The thought of eternal recurrence of the same involves the recurrence of that which is not only qualitatively identical but also numerically identical and such cycles of numerically identical recurrence are then in every way indistinguishable from a single event. Thus, at the limit, even the distinction between qualitative and numerical identity collapses. Eternal recurrence is crucial to Nietzsche because it is only with the thought of eternal recurrence that the two-worlds conception of Platonism, "the death of God" and "nothingness" and nihilism are overcome (KJN 359). Once the two worlds conception has collapsed and the true world has finally become a fable then "this world is itself all being" (KJN 359).

"Time and the elimination of time become one" (KJN 361). As a transcendent being outside of time, God dies with the two-worlds conception. There is nothing in the idea of eternal recurrence that precludes the existence of temporal gods who are born, die, and are reborn. Eternal recurrence is then to serve as a better replacement not only for the true world that no longer exists but also for the loss of value that the loss of the true world and the loss of a transcendent God entail. At first the loss of the true world seems to eliminate all value and thus lead to nothingness and nihilism, but the notion of eternal recurrence retrieves that being and value.

Eternal recurrence — for Nietzsche the only possibility if there is no God — is also for him the thought with which alone he intends to escape all world-disparagement: the thought [of eternal recurrence] provides an impetus to world-realization and in such world-realization to the status of the human being, leads an unjustifiable and unconditional yes to its height but makes godhood and all being that presents itself as another than the world, superfluous. [KJN 360]

While Nietzsche regards all being independent of the world as superfluous, this does require for him that godhood itself becomes superfluous. It becomes in a certain sense incumbent on us to become such gods and to transcend humanity as it has hitherto been understood. Nietzsche does not need to give up on his earlier aesthetic justification of human existence, he can now even more fully extend aesthetic justification to the

artists that everyone is who forms a world for herself for which she is ultimately responsible: "All things are saved" (KJN 361).

Jaspers takes eternal recurrence to be an expression of "basic existential experiences"; eternal recurrence is "supposed to create the highest *tension* in my life and action, so that I reach the highest possibility"; eternal recurrence can establish such tension "because what once was is eternal" and "what I do now is my eternal being itself; in time what I am eternally is decided" (KJN 361). Here is where Nietzsche's conception of the *Augenblick* and of action meets the Platonic, the Judaeo-Christian, and the Kantian as well as the Kierkegaardian conception. It is the great merit of Jaspers to emphasize this dimension of Nietzsche's conception of the *Augenblick* and of eternal recurrence. Thus, Jaspers argues that

Eternity is in every momentary blink of an eye
[*Augenblick*] when love takes up being that is grasped
by it in the completion of that which is unchanging
[*Vollendung der Unvergänglichkeit*]. [KJN 361]

Jaspers picks up on a role for love inspired by Greek thought that is often missed, even the Platonic notion of *eros* does not seem to play a prominent role in Nietzsche, thus Jaspers is not really shading the significance of eternal recurrence and of the *Augenblick* to the significance that it has for Jaspers and especially for Kierkegaard but bringing that significance out.

Jaspers sets out a line of thought involving Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence that is fundamentally positive and deeply significant. Not only is recurrence in Nietzsche's sense to be fundamentally relevant to action, recurrence also is Nietzsche's answer to the fundamental meaning of being (KJN 361). Jaspers is right to say that Nietzsche knew of the Pythagorean doctrine of eternal recurrence and that Nietzsche had taken up the doctrine of eternal recurrence in what Jaspers calls its "mere rationality" into "the great chain of ethical and mythical thought" (KJN 361-2). In the period of his thought immediately subsequent to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche shows awareness of the doctrine of eternal recurrence in ancient Greek philosophy, and it is very likely that he was also aware of its role in Ancient Egyptian, and in Babylonian thought and Indian thought. He alludes to the conception of the great year in his *Zarathustra*. Jaspers is not quite right to say that Nietzsche's second of his youthful, *Untimely Reflections*, "Of the Use and Disadvantage of History

for Life" (1874) documents both that "he knew and rejected" [*gekannt und verworfen*] the Pythagorean doctrine of eternal recurrence (KJN 362). Nietzsche refers explicitly to and falls short of endorsing the doctrine of eternal recurrence in his "Of the Use and of the Disadvantage of History for Life," the second of the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen (Untimely Meditations)*, as a position held by the Pythagoreans. However, he does not seem to reject eternal recurrence in that early work as Jaspers claims. It is also misleading to say that Nietzsche "never related his thought" of eternal recurrence "back historically but experienced it as radically *new*" (KJN 362). In his *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche implicitly relates his conception back historically and presents it as something radically new. Even in his early work, Nietzsche maintains that the doctrine of eternal recurrence held by the Pythagoreans is what monumental history needs if

the powerful [human being] is to desire monumental history in its full iconic *truthfulness* that is to desire every fact in its fully formed distinctness and uniqueness.⁶

Nietzsche's own conception of the conception of history involves the need to relate to history in terms of its benefit for life and to make use of history to preserve and conserve the past (the antiquarian dimension of history), to relate critically to its effects in the present and to free oneself of the burden of that history (the critical dimension of history), and finally to have models for transformative change that powerful individuals can emulate in what they do (the monumental dimension of history). All these aspects of historical thought combine with ahistorical thought as having potentially both positive and negative import for life in Nietzsche's account "Of the Use and of the Disadvantage of History for Life." Nietzsche does not give up any of this general conception in his further development, although his

⁶ "dürfte der Mächtige die monumentale Historie in voller ikonischer *Wahrhaftigkeit*, das heisst jedes Factum in seiner genau gebildeten Eigenthümlichkeit und Einzigkeit begehren." Friedrich Nietzsche, "Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen, Zweites Stück: Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben," in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe, Vol. 1*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin, DE: de Gruyter 1988, pp. 242-334, here §2, p. 262. "Of the Use and of the Disadvantage of History for Life."

evaluation of the merits of Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner become much less fundamentally positive.

Nietzsche's *Augenblick* and Eternal Recurrence

For Nietzsche, *Augenblick* and eternal recurrence are linked together. The *Augenblick* is the midday of eternity that faces forward and backward in time. It is the threshold or gateway in the section *Vom Gesicht und Räthsel* (*Of the Vision and the Riddle*) in his book *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*), leading to the past and to the future in eternal recurrence:

"Behold this gateway! Dwarf!" I [Zarathustra] spoke further: "It has two facing views [*Gesichter*]. Two paths meet here; no one has ever gone either to its end. This long alley stretches back for an eternity. And the long alley out there, that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these paths; they offend each other face to face: — and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway stands written above: "Augenblick." But whoever would go down one of them, on and on, further and further: do you believe, dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?" [Z 199-200]

The threshold that is each moment, each *Augenblick*, looks back to the past and what has been, and looks forward to the future, to what will be. Nietzsche alludes to the Roman god, Janus, the two-faced god of the threshold and to a similar figure in Ancient Egyptian culture (of lions facing in opposite-directions often depicted below the sun-child and the ouroboros, the snake that bites its own tail of the lifetime, the aeon, of the cosmos). As the Egyptologist, Jan Assmann, indicates, in Egyptian thought, time, life, and the cosmos reverse themselves every night (and in death) and return to their beginning and are then at their acme in the noonday sun. Every day, every season and every pharaoh, every dynasty is conceived as this eternal recurrence of the same.⁷ In Ancient Egyptian and Akkadian thought and language, reflecting cultures in which the past has very much priority over the present and the future, one looks forward to the past and back to the future. In Indo-European languages one looks forward to the future and back to the past. These are opposites

perspectives that come together in the view of the blink of an eye and in eternal recurrence. In the Ancient Greek and in the Mesopotamian conception of the moment and of its relation to time and eternity, the blink of an eye of decision is submerged in the process of nature. The eternal comes to one from the mythic past, it is present as that which is to be repeated. The past and one's place in nature and history stand before the ancient Mesopotamian in their very language. In the conception of the future anchored in the way of talking about past, present and future in the languages of Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, the future lies in front of the agent in the moment of decision. Both seemingly incommensurable perspectives come together in the moment of decision, what one must do always already lies before one as one comes to terms with the past and the future significance of what one does.

Mircea Eliade provides support for the claim that eternal recurrence is one of the oldest of mythic doctrines that goes back in history beyond the Pythagoreans to nearly all ancient cultures.⁸ While it does not seem to have been part of the original teachings of Zarathustra (Zoroaster), it does become an important part of the later Zurvaist version of Zoroastrian (neo-Zarathustran) thought. Zarathustra could thus be seen by Nietzsche as freeing one, much like the Buddha in Indian thought (but without the Buddha's embrace of nirvana), from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth by his conception of individual responsibility and salvation and the eschatological dimension of his thought. The repetition of the past takes the form of cosmic cycles of recurrences culminating in the great year in which all celestial bodies are taken to return to their original positions and the entire cosmos is to be consumed by fire. For Nietzsche if any moment (*Augenblick*) recurs, then every moment recurs. Thus, in a sense, every moment is also a recurrence of the great year and a fundamental transformation of the individual and of the cosmos in which the individual and the cosmos are fundamentally renewed:

If only One Augenblick of the world were to recur, — said the lightning bolt — then they would all have to recur.⁹

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return; or, Cosmos and History*, transl. Willard R. Trask, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1954.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882-1884*, in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke, Kritische*

⁷ Jan Assmann, *Steinzeit und Sternzeit: Altägyptische Zeitkonzepte*, München, DE: Wilhelm Fink 2011, especially pp. 46-55.

Nietzsche refers to the "great year" explicitly in *Der Genesende* (Z 271-7), where Zarathustra's animals ascribe to him the "doctrine of eternal recurrence," a doctrine that he is supposed to be the "first" to teach and that is his "greatest danger and sickness":

You teach that there is a great year of becoming, a monster of a great year: a year that must turn over ever anew like an hourglass in order for it to run out and empty: – so that all these years are the same in that which is most small and most large, – so that we are the same both in that which is most small and most large in that great year. [Z 275-6]

Nietzsche suggests that a certain understanding of eternal recurrence involves the very sickness from which Zarathustra is recovering. He does not accept the finality of the "doctrine of eternal recurrence" ascribed to him by his animals, accusing them of making a hackneyed song, a *Leier-Lied*, out of his conception (Z 273). In allusion to the ouroboros, to the snake that bites its own tail, of Egyptian eternal recurrence, Zarathustra's vision of the threshold and its *Augenblick* in *Vom Gesicht und Räthsel* ("Of the Vision and Riddle") is supplanted by a puzzling new vision of a young shepherd who, having fallen asleep, has a snake crawl down and bite into his throat; Zarathustra cannot pull the snake out of the shepherd's throat but instead manages to get the shepherd to bite off the head of the snake and to spit it out; having spit out the snake, the shepherd is one transformed (Z 201-2). Later in the Convalescent, the shepherd becomes an image of Zarathustra himself who, having taught the doctrine of eternal recurrence, also proclaims the "great midday of earth and of humanity" and thus both affirms and transforms the doctrine of eternal recurrence (Z 276). The shepherd becomes a kind of image of Zarathustra and of the *Übermensch* who in the process of self-transcendence bites off and spits out the head of the ouroboric snake of eternal recurrence (Z 273). Zarathustra thus signifies that he also breaks through the third personal doctrine of eternal recurrence, a doctrine and words put into his mouth by his animals; he professes, in their words, to be tired of this biting and spitting out and sick from his own salvation and responds only as if in sleep and in silent "conversation with his own soul" (Z 273, 277). Like

the interior dialogue that is a conversation with one's own soul (according to Plato's notion of *logos*), there is a fundamental subjectivity but also intersubjectivity involved in the proper understanding of eternal recurrence. The conception of eternal recurrence is itself the expression of the commitment in the *Augenblick* of choice to the eternal significance of what one does, that in all the versions of what one does, one will ultimately come back to this same choice and to the choice as a choice by this same individual. One's choice is the expression of who one has been, is and will be and of how one is situated in the cosmos as a whole. It is only from the vantage point of the moment of choice that eternal recurrence becomes intelligible, but it is not as such properly understood as an objective doctrine nor is it to be understood as a merely subjective doctrine or belief.

Nietzsche never sets up a false dichotomy between the "rational" and merely "logical" argument for eternal recurrence and its historical and philosophical significance as Jaspers suggests that he does:

Since for Nietzsche the thought [of eternal recurrence] was not rooted either in the Christian or in the Greek world, it was therefore without history [*geschichtslos*]... and all-encompassing only in its historical insignificance [*in geschichtlicher Nichtigkeit*]; it would be for Nietzsche the means as it were to grasp hold of human beings after a *total break* with all traditional substantial content for faith in order not only to proceed with human existence but also to push it upward. [KJN 363]

Nietzsche never regarded his own positive conception of the eternal recurrence as anything but a radically new conception of age-old thoughts.

Eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's own account of how the problem posed by Schopenhauer's development of the Kantian conception of agency could be resolved. For Nietzsche, it is crucial to purge ethics and agent responsibility of the reactive attitudes that are generally regarded as constitutive of ethics and were also crucial to Schopenhauer's conception of ethics and of responsibility for action. Nietzsche seeks to unburden himself of a history in which humans are always subject to the reactive attitudes of guilt and thoughts of revenge and responsibility to things that are beyond their control, in short, in which one is subject to various forms of moral luck. But Nietzsche also especially thought that the doctrine of eternal recurrence, as he came to understand it, was of value to those who wished to take on a conception

Studienausgabe, Vol. 10, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin, DE: de Gruyter 1988, p. 479. [Cited in N 355, Aphorism n=8346 id='VII.15[3]' kgw='VII-1.501' ksa='10.479']

of the world as expression of their own autonomy rather than as a conception of radical dependence and heteronomy. Although Nietzsche is quite critical of Kant's ethics, in part because he identified Kant's ethics with an amalgam of what he had learned from Schopenhauer and F. E. Lange, he praised Kant for rejecting a role for sympathy that Schopenhauer had made central to his ethics.

Jaspers presents Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence as a form of nihilism, and it is undeniable that Nietzsche at times thought of eternal recurrence as stripping everything of meaning by making everything a matter of an endlessly repeated random happenstance. Jaspers accuses Nietzsche of both seeing the notion of eternal recurrence as a conception that evacuates everything and especially the historical tradition of its significance and throws human existence in the abyss of nihilism and of at the same time trying to forestall this conclusion by attaching to recurrence contents that have at best a purely contingent relationship to recurrence:

To elevate and bolster humanity, Nietzsche throws his thought [of eternal recurrence] into the complete emptiness of nothingness, which he had not only thought, but of which he had a terribly shattering experience. But instead of allowing the thought [of eternal recurrence] to become clear in the complete bottomlessness of its facticity, a bottomlessness through which it would have displayed its very unfitness [as a positive conception], he attached meanings to it that either do not belong to *this* idea [of recurrence] alone or are not necessarily connected to it [recurrence]. As a sign of this he speaks of "eternal" recurrence and allows...things to resonate in the "eternal" that are not expressly thought. [KJN 363]

Jaspers focuses on at least three fundamentally different dimensions to Nietzsche's conception of the eternal return. Nietzsche had a shattering phenomenal experience of the significance of eternal return at Sils-Maria in August of 1881. Nietzsche's conception of the eternal return first manifested itself to him as a fundamental threat to all significance, as an experience of nihilism that raised questions about the status of all normativity since it seemed to suggest that all normativity was merely apparent and the expression of a random and repetitive sequence of events that strips us of all control over our destiny. As Jaspers indicates, Nietzsche addresses this seeming evacuation of all significance and control over what one does with his conception of *amor fati* (KJN 363-6). One's own fate

is in a certain sense an embrace of what is outside of one's control. But that embrace of one's own fate is also possible because in a more fundamental sense that fate is under one's control. One's fate is one's own not because it could have been different but because it is tied up to one's fundamental choices. Nietzsche rejects the idea that responsibility for action involves taking the person who acts to be worthy of blame or of praise for what that person could have done otherwise; he does not think that choosing the life that one leads is an appropriate target for praise or blame in this sense. For this choice of a life Nietzsche takes to involve the illusion to which Plato in Book X of the *Republic*, and Kant in his Resolution to the third Antinomy seem to have fallen victim, that one can choose one's character in a sense that is independent of already having a character.

Plato both accepts and breaks with cosmic determinism in which one's fundamental choices are preordained because they are part of a universal causal order (as Kant does). In Plato, the repetition of the past in choice in Book X of his *Republic* takes the form of one's choice of a new life that is grounded in the character that one has because of the kind of life that one has lived; but the choice and the character is something for which one is held to be responsible and whose consequences one must live through. This moment of decision for the lives humans intend to lead has a fundamental significance for the whole of all lives. Human beings have drunk from the river of forgetfulness and forgotten their past lives, but the choice of who one is to be is one's own even if it is based on the character that one has formed for oneself based on who one has become.

This (quasi-mythic) notion of responsibility is also connected to a mythic confrontation with eternal truth that occurred before any humans were ever born. Knowledge is a process of retrieving that which is eternal, and hence a process of repeating eternal truth but in a process that first makes such eternal being and truth intelligible to humans; this is especially true of the process of coming to know ideas; one comes to know them through a process of recollection. Plato's later doctrine of the *exaíphnes*, of the immediate moment transition from the temporal to the eternal and from the eternal to the temporal, helps explain how it is possible to grasp the eternal in the temporal and thus how recollection is possible. Truth as recollection is only possible if one already has knowledge of the eternal and the possibility of such truth itself needs explanation.

Actions and choices and the moment of decision (the *Augenblick*) are expressions of one's character and in a sense that character is eternal, it is always already in place in the moment of decision that determines not only how one must interpret the future but also how one must interpret the past. One's action fixes past, present, and future in the moment of making a decision, that is, in the *Augenblick*.

It is not that Jaspers thinks that this positive conception is absent from Nietzsche. But on Jaspers' view, this positive conception of eternal recurrence is ultimately cognitively and existentially inaccessible to anyone except Nietzsche:

Nietzsche dives as it were through it [the thought of eternal recurrence] into an atmosphere that is inaccessible to us; it is as if it [the thought of eternal recurrence] sank into nothingness. That we do not lose all philosophical connection to the thought, is the result of the expressed meanings of the thought that take up the thought and make it through this content part of the great chain of ethical and mythical thought. Therefore, an account that left these meanings out and took the thought in its mere objectivity would deceive one about Nietzsche's sense. [KJN 361-2]

Jaspers takes Nietzsche to view his conception of the eternal return as the starting-point for a radically new and positive conception that draws on the significance of the term "eternal" in the "eternal return" rather than talking of "endless recurrence" (KJN 362). But Jaspers is not convinced that Nietzsche succeeds in making this conception either cognitively or existentially accessible to us as Nietzsche hopes to do.

Nietzsche returns for Jaspers to the very connection between the past, the present, and the future in eternal recollection of who one has been and of how one is embedded in the cosmos but also to how the very meaning of cosmos is embedded in one's choice of self. Jaspers thinks of Nietzsche's conception of the *Augenblick* and of its relation to eternal recurrence as taking up the traditional question of being and of its relationship to becoming and of framing the significance of being and of becoming in relation to human existential choice in the moment of choice (in the *Augenblick*). The *Augenblick* brings together past, present and future in the present moment of choice. It also brings together being as becoming and passage with the eternal relevance of past, present, and future to the present of the moment of choice. To choose is always to embrace one's fate and thus also to constitute

the significance for one of one's fate and of the world process in which one's choice situates itself. Thus, for Jaspers, Nietzsche has a fundamentally existential conception of time, becoming, and being.

The way the world is, is not to be understood independently of the way in which the world presents itself at least to the creative individuals in their moment of fundamental choice of who they are to be. Those who create, create themselves, but also create the very framework of value and of significance through what they do. The significance that the aristocratic, creative individuals (*die Schaffenden*) give to their lives in their historical individuality is an expression of their autonomy (KJN 136 ff). The creative individuals bring forth themselves and give significance to time, becoming, and being and to the laws according to which they choose to govern themselves within the context of their situation and fate. For Jaspers, Nietzsche's conception of being and of becoming in the eternal *Augenblick* of eternal recurrence expresses Nietzsche's own self-conception of the way that his very aristocratic being and that of the cosmos is expressed. Jaspers writes:

Nietzsche's metaphysical thoughts communicate the content of the states of his aristocratic being, states that understand themselves through those metaphysical thoughts; they are supposed to become the awakening powers for others, powers that call these "states" and with that those others themselves as existence into being [als Existenz ins Dasein rufen]. This is fundamentally valid for all essential thoughts of Nietzsche but in a special sense for those thoughts that shook and fulfilled him like no other: He thinks being as "becoming" and as "eternal recurrence" and relates to it [being as "becoming"] in "amor fati." [KJN 347]

Overcoming Time and Resentment

As one looks back on the argument in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* one comes to see that it is not the doctrine of eternal recurrence that is the fundamental problem, although it is a mistake to take eternal recurrence to be a doctrine and one that is either true as such or false as such. The conception of time and of responsibility that the doctrine of eternal recurrence seems itself to imply is Nietzsche's fundamental target. Nietzsche's conception of Zarathustra's convalescence and salvation involves his own distinctive way of overcoming the passing of time:

This alone is *revenge* itself: the resentment of the will [*Widerwille des Willens*] against time and its "It was." [Z 180, Von der Erlösung]

Such resentment is for Nietzsche constitutive of much of culture and of philosophy and it has profound cosmic implications and implications for the very conception of morality and of a moral world order. Resentment of the will against time is the basis for a whole conception of the moral world order built on "the spirit of revenge" and the reactive attitudes that give to revenge the patina of justice. Revenge becomes retributive justice and punishment for suffering caused. Nietzsche identifies a fundamental line of thought in Judaeo-Christian morality that attempts to give moral and theological significance to suffering. It attempts to make sense of the suffering that is fundamental to all agency and to validate that suffering by viewing it as punishment for transgression:

Because there is suffering in anyone who wills, since the one who wills cannot will back, – therefore willing itself and all life ought to be – punishment! [Z 180]

Nietzsche sees this line of thought also as an important dimension of Platonic thought and even of Pre-Socratic philosophy. Zarathustra concludes his discussion of the role of resentment in the passage of time with a conception "preached by insanity" that Nietzsche in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* had ascribed to Anaximander in the tragic age of Greek philosophy:

"Everything passes therefore everything is worthy of passage!...And this itself is justice that law of time that she must eat her children": thus preaches insanity. [Z 180]

In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche takes Heraclitus to overcome Anaximander's conception of passage as punishment for the wrongdoing of separation from the unity of being with his conception of the flow of time and of becoming as comparable in the innocence of their becoming to a child playing draughts.

Nietzsche takes there to be, and rejects, a whole conception of the world based on an ethical order of things and an order of justice grounded in (but that also attempts to escape from) the reactive attitudes and a thirst for revenge against that which causes one pain because one cannot alter it:

"Things are ordered ethically according to right and punishment. Oh, where is there salvation from the flow of things and the 'existence' of punishment?" Thus, preaches insanity.

"No deed can be destroyed: how could it be undone through punishment!" This is the eternal affliction of "existence" that existence must also eternally be deed and punishment! [Z 181]

Buddhism and more recently Schopenhauer and Wagner attempt to escape from this cycle of change, punishment, and revenge through a self-renunciation of the will. Zarathustra characterizes this as the "fable song of insanity" that the "will might save itself and willing become non-willing" (Z 181).

How is it possible to achieve release and salvation from time and its "it was" if the ways of Platonism, Christianity, and Buddhism are closed? Nietzsche rejects a two-worlds metaphysics in which one can go outside of time to an eternity outside of time in order to seek salvation from time and its it was. In the place of such "fable songs," Nietzsche's Zarathustra teaches:

"The will is a creator [*ein Schaffender*]." All "it was" is a fragment, a puzzle, a cruel accident – until the creative will [*der schaffende Wille*] says: "but this is what I willed!" – until the creative will says to it: "This is what I will! This I will come to will!" [Z 181]

Nietzsche concludes that by becoming a creator in this sense who affirms what is willed as an expression of that spirit of creativity, one comes to give up on the "spirit of revenge," becomes "reconciled with time" and achieves something "higher than all reconciliation"; this is what the will is impelled to will that is "the will to power" (Z 181). Such will to power is itself nothing but the internal dynamic of agency in its efforts to overcome the obstacles to agency.

In conclusion, Zarathustra asks who it is who has taught the will such "backwards willing" (Z 181). And the answer that he implicitly provides to his question is that it is in the nature of those who make and create, *die Schaffenden*, and of their creative will, their *schaffender Wille*, that they creatively understand everything including the past, present and future history of the cosmos so as to conform to their sense of the significance of what they do in the here and now of the *Augenblick* of decision and of their fate. Those who create, embrace their fate, but the creators embrace their fate not as something to which they are merely subject but that is an expression of who they are. The past and its "it was" is no longer conceived of as an impediment to successful agency but as the expression of the very success in the past (and in the present and the future) of that agency and in this way it becomes an expression of the will to power.

Those who embrace their fate make every choice in the past a choice that they affirm and make again in the future as an expression of their present choice, so that the pastness of choice does not mean that one's choice is now no longer one's own choice. This is where eternal recurrence takes on its distinctive new significance. The world with all the bad things connected to the world as it is and to action will recur eternally and this encourages Nietzsche and Zarathustra in their disgust in humanity and existence:

"The small man recurs eternally!"...The greatest much too small! – That was my discomfiture with what is human! And eternal recurrence of even that which is smallest! – That was my discomfiture with all existence! Oh, disgust! Disgust! Disgust! – Thus spake Zarathustra and he sighed...as he remembered his sickness." [Z 274-5, *Der Genesende*]

Zarathustra's convalescence from his sickness at the decrepit state of humanity involves the recognition of the "innocence of becoming" and the recognition of *amor fati*; it is to realize that everything happens without an underlying reason or teleology. Nietzsche had early realized that there could be no problem of theodicy for the Greeks because even their gods were subject to fate and tragedy. Fate is crucial to Greek tragedy and its tragic age. One must embrace such fate and randomness that is outside of one's own control and that gives one the only kind of control that there is, to embrace the choices that one makes in virtue of whom one truly is: *amor fati*.

Jaspers rightly emphasizes the importance of Nietzsche's notion of the creators or makers (*die Schaffenden*) in Nietzsche's conception of the transvaluation of values. One would think that the creators are important because they represent the transcendence of what is already there in what they do. However, Jaspers sees a fundamental opposition between *amor fati* and fate on the one hand and transcendence on the other:

The creator [der Schaffende] who encounters things or who succeeds in his path, has a consciousness of fate in Nietzsche's philosophizing instead of a relation to transcendence. Instead of transcendence, Nietzsche conceives of "necessity." [KJN 159]

For Nietzsche, love of fate, the embracing of who one takes oneself truly to be is transcendence, but this is a kind of transcendence that Jaspers seems to find inconceivable because it is also an expression of the necessity of one's fate. Thus, Jaspers takes Nietzsche

both to embrace transcendence and paradoxically to reject transcendence. Like Kant's embrace of the compatibility of the incompatibility and the compatibility of freedom and determinacy (necessity) in the autonomy of the moment of choice, for Nietzsche, the compatibility of these two seemingly incompatible points of view is only graspable from the vantage point of the moment of choice. Kant's third Antinomy seems to suggest that one must be able to go to the beginning of time and to choose the whole timeline in which one's empirical character and the choices that express that character are situated. Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence seems to suggest that he is offering an answer as to how that might be possible. It is possible to choose one's character if time is circular, and if, in every moment of choice, one initiates the whole timeline in which one's choices are made. But that is a third personal point of view on human beings' choices that collapses as one realizes that the eternal recurrence of the same is indistinguishable from the non-recurrence of the same. Like the moment of choice in Kierkegaard, and in Kant, the eternity of eternal recurrence in Nietzsche is nothing but the fundamental significance that by virtue of being agents, humans give to their own life by embracing that significance even in, or especially in, its tragic character. The seeming chaos of events in history and in the cosmos only takes on significance in the light of what one chooses and the significance that one can give to what one chooses and in this lies one's eternity and one's being.

Jaspers urges his readers to embrace the existential vantage point of choice and paradoxically finds Nietzsche's conception of it incomprehensible (from a third person, objective, point of view). This is, I would suggest, not a limitation in Nietzsche's conception of the *Augenblick*, but rather a limitation in the vantage point of arguments developed from a fundamentally third personal objective point of view. In Nietzsche's perspectivism, the subjective and the objective do not stand opposed to one another, but the subjective must include the objective and the objective the subjective vantage point of the agent in the *Augenblick* of choice. It is only from this vantage point that Nietzsche's conception becomes intelligible to one. Thus, I am not maintaining that Nietzsche believed the doctrine of eternal recurrence to be objectively true and, also, took this doctrine to be existentially significant even though the doctrine of eternal recurrence is objectively false (or even for

that matter objectively true); Jaspers, at least at times, seems to embrace this reading. I am asserting that Nietzsche took eternal recurrence to be true in the sense of its existential significance than which there is no deeper or more fundamental level of significance. It expresses the Kantian conception of autonomy stripped of the role of reactive attitudes that are grounded in the resentment against time and its "it

was" in Kantian morality, and thus a return to the "innocence of becoming" in Heraclitus' vision of the cosmos as characterized by the randomness of child's play. This is the conception that grounds Nietzsche's significance for Jaspers, and I would suggest, ought also to do so not merely for the past, but also for the present, and for the future as well.