Nietzsche's Account of Human Excellence

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Introduction

Although Nietzsche may be best known for his critical attacks on such prominent targets as traditional morality and asceticism, it is important to note that he did not think of himself primarily as a critic. Rather he took himself to be engaged in a fundamentally positive program, one of the central aims of which was to develop and defend a new account of human excellence. Now, admittedly, Nietzsche never settled on one overarching term, such as excellence, to refer to the ideal mode of being that he promoted throughout his works. Instead he coined an assortment of names to refer to particular types of human beings who he saw as exemplifying his ideal or important aspects thereof: these included, the free spirit, the new philosopher, the overman, the sovereign, and the Dionysian individual, among others. Despite this terminological inconstancy, Nietzsche's descriptions of his ideal—as a form of "greatness [Grösse]," "well-being [Wohlseins]," and "health [Gesundheit]," embodied by a "higher type" of human—demonstrate a consistent focus on the notion of human excellence (EH II 10, BGE 212, GS 382, HH P4). This is also suggested by his deliberate association with what he called "the classical ideal" of Homeric Greece and Rome (GM I 16).[1]

In this dissertation, I critically examine both the nature of Nietzsche's account of human excellence and the manner in which it is defended. My central thesis is that Nietzsche grounds his account in his psychology of the will to power. This grounding occurs in two ways: first, in the identification of excellence with the maximal realization of one's nature, understood as a complex of wills to power; and, second, in the employment of this psychology to establish a standard of value, on the basis of which excellence, so construed, is presented as an ideal to which humans should, in principle, aspire.

[1] See also KSA 13:11[138].

In the first two chapters, I defend a somewhat novel interpretation of Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power. This is divided into two parts: an analysis of his conception of power and an account of how he understands humans to be disposed towards power. For the former, I defend an interpretation, first proposed by Bernard Reginster, according to which, Nietzsche conceives of power as the activity of overcoming of resistance—or what I take to be the same, the discharging of one's strength. I then argue that Nietzsche construes the will to power, not as a desire, but rather as a tendency belonging independently to each of an individual's drives.

Following my defense of this two-part interpretation of the will to power, in chapter three, I examine how Nietzsche employs his psychology of the will to power to develop an account of human excellence. I argue that this involves conceiving of excellence as the realization of one's nature, where one's nature is understood as a complex of drives, and where the realization of this complex is understood to consist in its maximal aggregate achievement of power. In chapter four, I address what I take to be Nietzsche's central strategy for achieving power, self-creation, which is said to involve the imposition of a particular kind of order on one's drives. Then, in chapter five, I conclude with an examination of the standard of value on the basis of which Nietzsche promotes his conception of human excellence as an ideal to which one should, in principle, aspire.

Throughout my analysis, I will consider a variety of objections to Nietzsche's account of excellence, directed at both its internal consistency and its philosophical tenability. I argue that these objections can either be met or that the amendments they require are consistent with the main thrust of his account.

1. Nietzsche's conception of power

Of the many distinctive notions developed throughout Nietzsche's philosophical works, few have been cast in as many different lights as the will to power. Commentators have disagreed not only over Nietzsche's specific applications of the will to power, but also over his account of its very nature. In order to get a firmer handle on this important notion, one should begin by identifying its distinct points of ambiguity. At least three basic questions should be distinguished: first, what exactly is meant by 'power'?; second, what kind of disposition is the *will to* power?; and, third, how does Nietzsche mean to apply this will to human psychology? Each of these questions should addressed in turn. In this chapter, I will focus entirely on the first, leaving the second and third for the following chapter.

Although Nietzsche goes to great lengths to persuade his readers of the central role of power in human life, oddly enough, there is no decisive passage in which he offers a clear and direct analysis of this important concept. As a result, a wealth of scholarly work has emerged in recent decades, aimed at clarifying exactly what Nietzsche means by power. And as one might expect from the ambiguity of the text, the results have been remarkably diverse. Among the varied conceptions of power that have been attributed to Nietzsche, we find, "a sense of one's effectiveness in the world,"[2] "maintenance, persistence and self-development,"[3] the "overcome[ing] [of] oneself,"[4] "growth, development, expansion,"[5] and "the imposition of some new pattern of ordering relations upon forces not previously subject to them,"[6] to list just a few.

[2] Clark (1991), p. 211.
[3] Cunningham (1919), p. 479.
[4] Kaufmann (1974), p. 200.
[5] Ansell-Pearson (1991), p. 176.
[6] Schacht (1985), p. 228.

In a work entitled, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, Bernard Reginster offers yet another interpretation of Nietzsche's conception of power, which will be the subject of this chapter. According to Reginster, Nietzsche conceives of power as a kind of activity: namely, the "*the overcoming of resistance*."[7] On this view, enhancing a being's power involves increasing the extent to which it successfully exerts itself against some kind of opposing force or obstacle—where the extent of the being's exertion, or power, is determined by the extent of the obstacle with which it successfully engages.

In the first section of this chapter, I will critically assess Reginster's defense of this reading, arguing that the evidence he presents ultimately fails to make a convincing case for it. Following this, I will offer my own defense of this interpretation, drawn primarily from published writings that Reginster does not consider. During this discussion, I will also address an objection, recently put forth by Ivan Soll in an article responding to Reginster's work. Soll argues that insofar as 'power' is conventionally understood as capacity concept, it is implausible to suggest that Nietzsche would opt to define power in terms of an *activity*, such as the overcoming of resistance. In response to this, I claim that a philosophical basis for this admittedly unusual decision can be found in what I refer to as Nietzsche's Heraclitean account of the self.

1.1 *Reginster's interpretation*

In his attempt to show that Nietzsche conceives of power as the activity of overcoming resistance, Reginster turns almost exclusively to Nietzsche's unpublished notes.[8] The most

[7] Reginster (2006), pp. 131-132.
[8] Ibid., pp. 126-127.

important of these for Reginster's case was penned sometime between late 1887 and the middle of 1888, coinciding with the publication of the *Genealogy of Morals*. Here one finds Nietzsche taking aim at psychological hedonism—the view that pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the only ends that humans pursue for their own sake (KSA 13:11[111]).[9]

Against this view, Nietzsche argues that insofar as the most basic activities of living things are necessarily displeasurable, they cannot possibly be motivated by the desire for pleasure or happiness.

> …all expansion, incorporation, growth means [ist] striving against something that resists; movement [bewegung] is essentially tied up with states of displeasure; that which is here the driving force must in any event desire something else if it desires displeasure in this way and continually looks for it. For what do the trees in a jungle fight each other? For "happiness"?—*For power!* (KSA 13:11[111])

According to Nietzsche, all movement—construed broadly, as any form of exertion or action—involves a confrontation with some kind of obstacle to one's destination or end and, as a result, produces an experience of displeasure. This point is reiterated in another note from the same period, in which Nietzsche claims, "as a force can expend itself only on what resists it [jede Kraft sich nur an Widerstehendem auslassen kann], there is necessarily an *ingredient of displeasure* in every action" (KSA 13:11[77]).

In order to fully appreciate the reasoning behind this point, it is important to recognize the account of displeasure, or suffering, on which it depends. According to Reginster, Nietzsche takes this account directly from Schopenhauer, who holds that suffering consists in "[the will's] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal" (WWR I 56). Assuming this, one can see how, if all movement or action involves a confrontation with some form of resistance, then all such movement or action will include, as Nietzsche puts it, "an *ingredient of*

[9] See also KSA 13:14[152].

displeasure" (KSA 13:11[77]). And if this is the case, Nietzsche takes psychological hedonism to be untenable; for he assumes that actions that are "essentially tied up with states of displeasure" cannot be fundamentally motivated by a desire for its apparent opposite, pleasure (KSA 13:11[111]).

Of course, it should be noted that Nietzsche's argument clearly overlooks the fact that we do quite often desire things that are displeasurable for the sake of pleasure. This was acknowledged by one of the first psychological hedonists, Epicurus, who wrote that even if "pleasure is our first and native good… often we consider pains superior to pleasures when submission to the pains for a long time brings us as a consequence a greater pleasure."[10] Hence, a hedonist could contend that while humans do seem to readily accept the pain of confronting resistance in all of their actions, they do so only because this makes them likely to obtain a compensating sum of pleasure upon achieving their original end; and the achievement of this compensating pleasure might very well be their fundamental aim in life.

But setting aside the strength of this unpublished argument, we should consider, for our purposes, what the passage in which it is situated may or may not indicate concerning Nietzsche's conception of power. Reginster draws attention to the fact that Nietzsche's culminating assertion is that it is the striving "*for power*," rather than happiness, that ultimately provides the driving force behind our essentially displeasurable actions. Yet the comments leading up to this hardly amount to a definition of power; nor is it even clear that Nietzsche takes this final assertion to be proven by the argument that he has just presented.

Nevertheless, Reginster suggests that we can reasonably infer what Nietzsche means by power if we consider this assertion in light of Nietzsche's claim that all actions, including the

[10] Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus," p. 14.

basic life activities of "expansion, incorporation, growth," are displeasurable to the extent that they essentially consist in the "striving against something that resists" (KSA 13:11[111], 13:11[77]). Reginster reasons that if this is so, then striving *successfully*—or in other words, *overcoming* the resistance one confronts—must be the end that Nietzsche takes to be *fundamentally* pursued in all action. And given that Nietzsche designates this end as "*power*" in his culminating assertion, Reginster concludes that the will to power should be understood as "the will to overcoming resistance."[11]

But although this *may* be what Nietzsche has in mind, I find the evidence that Reginster presents to be far from conclusive. To begin with, although Nietzsche does appear to be committed here to the claim that, in all action, we aim at the overcoming of some inevitable obstacle, it does not necessarily follow from this observation that the overcoming of resistance, *itself*, is our fundamental end. After all, Nietzsche might hold, instead, that this overcoming is pursued only for the sake of achieving the will's original goal (that which the resistance in question is obstructing). And perhaps it is the attainment of *this original goal*¸ rather than the overcoming of the obstacle that separates us from it, that Nietzsche takes to be the fundamental end that he refers to as power.

However, Reginster argues that we can effectively rule this reading out, noting that

> In [WP 704],[12] Nietzsche explicitly distinguishes the will to power from the will to happiness. This suggests that the resistance to overcome is resistance against the satisfaction of desires and that the will to power is not a will to *the state in which resistance has been overcome* (a state in which desires have been satisfied), which is "happiness" in the sense presupposed by Schopenhauer's pessimism.[13]

[11] Reginster (2006), p. 126.
[12] KSA 13:11[111].
[13] Ibid., p. 126.

In other words, Reginster suggests that if Nietzsche accepts Schopenhauer's account of happiness, as the satisfaction of desire,[14] then Nietzsche cannot consistently claim that the fundamental aim of the will to power is the *original impeded goal* toward which the will is directed; since, if this were the case, then the attainment of power, on the one hand, and of happiness, on the other, could not be as distinct as Nietzsche seems to be asserting in this passage. Given the apparent importance of this distinction, here and elsewhere in Nietzsche's writings, Reginster concludes that the fundamental aim of the will, according to Nietzsche, must be the overcoming of resistance, which necessarily *precedes* the achievement of the will's impeded goal (happiness).[15]

There seem to me to be at least two basic problems with the reading that Reginster is purposing here. Firstly, if Nietzsche *did* accept Schopenhauer's account of happiness, then the desire for power would really always have to be equivalent to the desire for at least a certain instance of happiness. For by desiring power one *necessarily* desires the state in which this desire has been satisfied, whether that requires overcoming resistance in the pursuit of other ends or not. But second, and more importantly, there is good evidence that, although Nietzsche may have adopted Schopenhauer's account of suffering—as the experience of resistance to the achievement of one's ends—, Nietzsche maintained his own account pleasure. This is evident in a number of unpublished notes, dating back to the same period as the note that Reginster focuses on, where Nietzsche asserts that pleasure is a distinct *consequence* of achieving one's ends rather than the achievement of one's ends itself: "pleasure *supervenes* [*tritt*] when that which is being

[14] "When an obstacle is placed between [the will] and its temporary goal, we call this inhibition *suffering*; on the other hand, the achievement of its goal is *satisfaction*, contentment, happiness" (WWR I 56).
[15] Reginster (2006), p. 126.

striven for is attained: pleasure is an accompaniment, pleasure is not the motive [Lust begleitet, Lust bewegt nicht]" (KSA 13:14[121], emphasis added).[16]

Hence, Nietzsche *could have* held that power is the original end of the will, which the individual overcomes resistance in order to attain, without thereby reducing the desire for power to merely a special case of the desire for happiness (as Reginster contends). Of course, on this account of pleasure, the satisfaction of one's desire for power would always yield pleasure or happiness; and, thus, power and pleasure would be closely connected. However, Nietzsche makes this very point himself in the note just cited, claiming that any instance of pleasure constitutes "a symptom of the feeling of power attained" (KSA 13:14[121]).

Now, I might emphasize at this point that my aim is *not* to reject Reginster's basic analysis of Nietzsche's conception of power. In what follows I will argue that there is in fact excellent evidence in favor of the idea that Nietzsche conceives of power as the overcoming of resistance. However, for the reasons just presented, I think that Reginster's defense of his analysis, grounded in this fairly ambiguous note, fails to be decisive.

1.2 *Nietzsche's theory of life in Beyond Good and Evil*

It would seem that one of the more reasonable places to begin an examination of Nietzsche's conception of power is where he first officially presents it as the centerpiece of his theory of life in *Beyond Good and Evil*. This occurs amid a series of attacks on what he generally refers to as "the prejudices of the philosophers." Turning his attention to the topic of "physiology," Nietzsche famously asserts:

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[16] One should also consider Nietzsche's comment, in note written in the same period, that "it is *not* the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure… but rather the will's forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way" (KSA 13:11[75]).

> Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength [seine Kraft *auslassen*]—life itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*. (BGE 13)[17]

Despite how often this important passage arises in discussions of the will to power, little has been made of the crucial point of clarification that Nietzsche offers his readers when he equates a living thing's will to power with a *disposition to discharge its strength*.

Now, in order to make any sense of this proposal, one would need to first explicate the notion of 'strength.' In its common usage, 'strength' might seem to denote *the ability to achieve one's goals*—with particular kinds of strengths distinguished according to the types of goals achieved. This account might seem to be supported by our tendency to regard success in certain physical tasks as evidence that a person is 'physically strong.' Likewise, those who are said to possess 'moral strength' are often distinguished by their ability to successfully abide by their moral principles. Yet, considered more closely, it should be apparent that these specific conceptions of strength properly apply only to those achievements that require some significant effort or exertion on the part of the doer. It is only when abiding by one's principles is especially difficult that 'moral strength' is thought to be expressed or exhibited. We would want to know whether a person is capable of overcoming transgressive temptations or making 'hard' choices in order to preserve his moral integrity before concluding that he is strong in this regard; and a similar point could be made concerning our evaluations of 'physical strength' as well. Thus, it would seem that instead of denoting the general *ability to achieve one's ends*, 'strength' denotes, more precisely, the *ability to successfully overcome obstacles or resistance in the pursuit of one's ends.*

[17] See also KSA 12:2[63].

With this in mind, it is important to observe that in the abovementioned passage, Nietzsche does *not* equate the will to power with a will to *strength*. Rather, he makes a special point of emphasizing that it is the "*discharge* of its strength" that a living thing "seeks above all" (BGE 13). Hence, if strength is understood in the way I have just proposed, Nietzsche should be read as identifying the will to power, in this passage, with a will to *actively exercise* one's capacity to overcome resistance in the pursuit of one's ends. And this, in turn, would make the will to power equivalent to a *will to the overcoming of resistance*.

But while this interpretation fits quite well with the passage in question, we must also note that it commits Nietzsche to a highly unconventional conception of power, according to which, power is a kind of *activity*: namely, the discharging of one's strength or the overcoming of resistance. Yet in ordinary usage, power is surely a *capacity concept* which, like the concept of strength, denotes an *ability* to engage in certain kinds of activities as opposed to the active engagement itself. When we say that a person has power or is powerful, we mean to be commenting on what she is *capable* of doing, rather than what she is in fact doing. And even if this person happens to be currently engaged in some kind of powerful activity, we would still think of her power as *that which enables* the activity, and not as the activity itself.

In a recent article responding to Reginster's interpretation of Nietzsche's conception of power, Ivan Soll elaborates on this point,

> We do not conceive of power as an *activity* but as a *capacity*, which, to be sure, can only be *expressed* in various activities that exercise or manifest it but is not to be *equated* with any of the activities that do in fact express it. We think of a power or a capacity as something that could be expressed in ways other than the ways it is in fact expressed, that is, as something that always transcends the ways in which it is actually expressed. A power is what enables various sorts of actions; it is not the actions themselves.[18]

[18] Soll (2012), p. 126.

Soll concludes that attributing to Nietzsche the kind of dynamic conception of power that Reginster's interpretation proposes would "make it seem as if Nietzsche did not really understand what power is" and would, thus, "undermine the significance and interest of his theory of the will to power."[19] As an alternative, Soll suggests that we assume, more charitably, that while Nietzsche may have very well employed "an expanded and expansive notion of the way in which power is expressed and enjoyed," he nevertheless conceived of power, in line with our common understanding, as a certain kind of *capacity* that is exhibited in, but not identical to the activities that express it.[20]

Of course, if this were correct, Nietzsche's presentation of the will to power as a will to the discharging of one's strength, particularly in *Beyond Good and Evil*, would be rather puzzling. It seems that we would be forced to conclude that this formulation was an oversight, and that what Nietzsche really meant to say here was that, insofar as "life itself is *the will to power*," a living thing seeks above all to acquire greater *strength*—that is, a greater *ability* to overcome resistance. Yet such a reading, philosophically charitable though it may be, is certainly belied by the fact that Nietzsche quite deliberately emphasizes the notion of active discharge when he equates a living thing's will to power with the disposition to "*discharge* its strength" (BGE 13).[21, 22]

As a general rule of thumb, I agree with Soll that it is prudent to avoid defining a philosopher's terminology in ways that radically depart from common usage. After all, one

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[19] Ibid., p. 126.
[20] Ibid., p. 126.
[21] See also GM III 7.
[22] This conception of the will to power as a will to what would normally be thought of as the *discharge* of power is also evinced in an unpublished note from 1885 in which Nietzsche describes the will to power as "an insatiable desire *to manifest power*; or as the *employment* and *exercise of* power, as a creative [schöpferischen] drive" (KSA 11:36[31], emphasis added).

would expect a competent philosopher and stylist, like Nietzsche, to write with careful precision—choosing words that make his often subtle intentions especially clear to his readers. However, at the same time, we should not be too quick to rule out the possibility that, in the development of his theory of the will to power, Nietzsche genuinely meant to depart from our conventional conception of power, as he did with several other common notions, such as altruism, freedom, and knowledge. Indeed, as I will attempt to demonstrate in the following section, Nietzsche appears to have had important philosophical motivations for doing just this.

1.3 *Nietzsche's Heraclitean account of the self and the reconception of power*

There is good reason to think that Nietzsche was compelled to adopt the sort of dynamic conception of power found in the aforementioned passages as a result of what might be called his *Heraclitean account of the self*. This account consists in two basic claims concerning the nature of the self: first, that there is no substantive being or ego which exists in addition to and as the underlying cause of one's characteristic activities (that is, one's actions, thoughts, feelings, etc.); and, second, that the self is, therefore, nothing above and beyond its characteristic activities. Hence, on this account, a person is *constitutively related* to her actions just as, to use one of Nietzsche's favorite analogies, a particular instance of lightening is constitutively related to 'its' strike or flash.

One of the better known statements of this account of the self can be found in section 13 from the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche asserts that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything" (GM I 13). This section is particularly valuable for our purposes, as Nietzsche goes

on to employ his account of the self to undermine the popular distinction between strength and its active expression. He asserts that,

> a quantum of force [or strength; Kraft] is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a 'subject', can it appear otherwise. For just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an *action*, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum… (GM I 13)

One of the central points that is brought out here is that when we distinguish between *strength*, as a capacity to act strongly, and the *expression of strength*, as the strong action which supposedly results from this capacity, we necessarily presuppose that the strong individual exists, at least to some extent, as a substantive being or 'neutral substratum' which can possess faculties distinct from its activities. Hence, if Nietzsche's Heraclitean account of the self is correct, and we are nothing above and beyond our characteristic activities, then there can be no such underlying faculties as strength. Nietzsche is thus led to conclude, here, that all there is to strength is what is conventionally referred to as 'the expression *of* strength,' just as all there is to lightening is what tends to be referred to as 'the lightening*'s* flash.'[23] And with this he proposes a radical reconception of strength, parallel to his reconception of the self in terms of what would be typically thought of as 'the deeds *of* the self.'

One might contend, at this point, that Nietzsche cannot meaningfully employ the idea of an *expression of strength* without thereby positing some substantive strength as its cause or

[23] Compare this with an active account of strength that Nietzsche offers in an unpublished noted, written in 1888: "strength as a feeling of dominion in the muscles, as suppleness and pleasure in movement, as dance, as levity and presto; strength as pleasure in the proof of strength, as bravado, adventure, fearlessness, indifference to life or death" (KSA 13:14[117]).

source. In other words, if there is no strength, in the typical sense of a capacity for strong action, then there can be no expressions *of* strength either. Strictly speaking, I think this point is correct, and it at least shows that Nietzsche is being imprecise when he mentions the "expression of strength [Stärke von den Äusserungen]" here, as well as the "*discharge* [of] strength [Kraft *auslassen*]" in *Beyond Good and Evil* and elsewhere (GM I 13, BGE 13). However, I think it would uncharitable to conclude that Nietzsche is contradicting himself or perhaps revealing a lack of commitment to his Heracliteanism with such phrases.

It seems more reasonable to assume that when Nietzsche uses phrases like 'the expression of strength,' he intends to refer, in a loose way, to the *particular activities* that strength is conventionally thought to enable. Now, if we define strength as the capacity to overcome resistance, then it will be the *activity of overcoming resistance* that is conventionally referred to with the phrase, 'the expression of strength,' and surely *this* kind of activity can exist without a substantive capacity, like strength, to serve as its cause. Hence, on the charitable reading I propose, Nietzsche only uses phrases like 'the expression of strength' in order to draw his reader's attention to their usual referent: strong activity or the overcoming of resistance. This, of course, is compatible with it being his objective in the passage from the *Genealogy of Morals* to encourage the eventual avoidance of this kind of imprecise language, since he proposes a radical revision of the notion of 'strength' itself.

In this important passage we thus see how Nietzsche's rejection of the idea of a doer behind the deed eliminates the place of capacities in his account of the self and how, in the absence of capacities, Nietzsche is led to reduce the capacity concept, 'strength,' to the particular activities that 'strength' is typically thought to enable. Without considering any further textual evidence, I think it should be evident that the reductive project that follows from Nietzsche's

Heraclitean account of the self will have to extend to the concept of *power* as well. For insofar as power is also commonly conceived of as a capacity which transcends its various expressions, Nietzsche would presumably find it just as necessary to identify power with *powerful activity* rather than with the *capacity to act powerfully*, which he would have to regard as a fiction along with 'the doer.'[24]

Indeed, one can find such a proposal accompanying a defense of Nietzsche's Heracliteanism in his prior work, *Beyond Good and Evil*. In a series of early sections just following the presentation of his theory of life, Nietzsche attempts to defend his account of the self on the basis of introspection. This occurs by way of an attack on the opposing Cartesian view that one can actually know, with immediate certainty, that one exists as a substantive thinking being given the allegedly direct observation of oneself as an agent of thought. Against this, Nietzsche contends that while introspection might very well reveal a series of mental processes that we designate as thinking, one has no direct experience whatsoever of any 'I' or 'it' underlying this series as its cause:

> …it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject "I" is the condition of the predicate "think." *It* thinks; but that this "it" is precisely the famous old "ego" is, to put it mildly, only a supposition, an assertion, and assuredly not an "immediate certainty." After all, one has even gone too far with this "it thinks"—even the "it" contains an *interpretation* of the process, and does not belong to the process itself. One infers here according to the grammatical habit "thinking is an activity; every activity requires an agent; consequently—." (BGE 17)[25]

[24] This extension is already hinted at with his comment, slightly later in this section, that "scientists do no better" than those who mistakenly distinguish between lightening and its flash, or strength and its exercise. This is supposedly evident from the fact that they speak of "force" (*Kraft*: presumably used here in the sense of force or power rather than strength. Hence, Kaufmann's decision to translate it in this way) as something which "moves" or "causes" certain things to occur—thus, treating "force" or power as a capacity which is distinct from its characteristic effects (GM I 13).

[25] See also KSA 12:10[158], 13:14[98], 12:9[91], TI III 5, TI VI 3.

Nietzsche goes on to assert that this deep-seated assumption that all activities must be attributed to, or predicated of, some underlying being also convinced the "older atomists" to posit, "besides the operating 'power,' that lump of matter in which it resides and out of which it operates, which is to say: the atom" (BGE 17).[26] But insofar as the atomists' motivating assumption is, according to Nietzsche, without any empirical or a priori grounds, he concludes that we must learn to "get along without this 'earth-residuum'" (BGE 17).

In other words, Nietzsche proposes, here, that upon rejecting the assumption that "every activity requires an agent," we ought to limit our ontology to the flux of operating powers that introspection and our experience of the world actually reveal (BGE 17).[27] This entails that the powerful activities that comprise ourselves and the world are essentially independent of any being.[28] And without a being in which power, conventionally understood as a capacity, can reside, Nietzsche is thus led to the same kind of position that he came to with respect to strength and the self: namely, that all there is to power is what is conventionally thought of as 'the expression or operation *of* power.'[29]

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[26] See also BGE 12, KSA 13:14[122].

[27] See also KSA 11:36[34], 11:38[12].

[28] A similar point is made, invoking the lightening analogy from the *Genealogy of Morals*, in an early unpublished note written sometime between 1885-1886: "We have not regarded change in us as change but as an 'in itself' that is foreign to us, that we merely 'perceive': and we have posited it, not as an event, but as a being, as a 'quality'-and in addition invented an entity to which it adheres; i.e., we have regarded the *effect* as something that *effects*, and this we have regarded as a being. But even in this formulation, the concept 'effect' is arbitrary: for those changes that take place in us, and that we firmly believe we have not ourselves caused, we merely infer to be effects, in accordance with the conclusion: 'every change must have an author';—but this conclusion is already mythology: it separates that which effects from the effecting. If I say 'lightning flashes,' I have posited the flash once as an activity and a second time as a subject, and thus added to the event a being that is not one with the event but is rather fixed, *is*, and does not 'become.'- To regard an event as an 'effecting,' and this as being, that is the double error, or interpretation, of which we are guilty" (KSA 12:2[84]).

[29] This view is also suggested, albeit in a somewhat different way, by Nietzsche's later attempt in *Beyond Good and Evil*, to designate "*all* efficient force univocally as—*will to power*"—a proposal that is then repeated in an unpublished note, penned two years later: "all *driving* force is will to power [Daß alle treibende Kraft Wille zur Macht ist], that there is no other physical, dynamic or psychic force except this" (BGE 36, KSA 13:14[121] last emphasis added). The same proposal is made in a much earlier note, dating back to 1885, in which Nietzsche writes: "The victorious concept 'force,' by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as 'will to power,' i.e., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power" (KSA 11:36[31]).

Returning then to Nietzsche's discussion of the nature of living things, four sections earlier in *Beyond Good and Evil*, we should now be able to understand why he chooses to call the will to the *activity* of discharging one's strength, the will to *power* (BGE 13). While it might seem, at first glance, that it would be more appropriate to refer to this will as the will to the *expression of power*—had Nietzsche really meant to convey that it is an activity rather than a capacity that is sought—, such a decision would have required Nietzsche to tacitly endorse the idea that there is such a thing as the *capacity* to act powerfully, which transcends the powerful actions that express it. Insofar as he denies the existence of capacities, Nietzsche is thereby led to employ the, admittedly idiosyncratic, conception of power that is put forth in his inaugural presentation of his theory of life: according to which, power is the *activity* of discharging one's strength or—what I take to be the same—the activity of overcoming resistance.

1.4 *Further textual evidence concerning Nietzsche's dynamic conception of power*

In the previous two sections, I have relied heavily on only a handful of passages in order to defend the analysis of Nietzsche's conception of power that Reginster first proposed. This began with an examination of the section from *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche presents the will to power as the will to the discharging of one's strength, which, as I argued there, suggests that he conceives of power as the activity of overcoming of resistance. It was then noted that this conception radically departs from our common understanding of power insofar as it equates power with an *activity* rather than a *capacity*. Soll understandably takes this to cast doubt on Reginster's interpretation.[30] So to address this concern, I expounded on what I take to be Nietzsche's philosophical motivations for adopting a dynamic conception of power—

[30] Soll (2012), p. 126.

motivations rooted in the Heraclitean account of the self that is presented in the *Genealogy of Morals*, among other places (GM I 13).

In the following I would like to provide a broader range of textual evidence demonstrating that Nietzsche *consistently* conceived of power as the overcoming of resistance—specifically, throughout the later works in which the will to power became most prominent. The first case that I will examine comes from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which was published in several installments from 1883 to 1885, just prior to the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Following this, I will address the main discussions of power that arise in each of Nietzsche's following publications, leading up to *Twilight of the Idols*—taking careful note of the various ways in which his account evolved over the decade in which these works were written. It will be necessary to consider, in particular, the connections he came to draw, at different times, between power and human values, mastery, the feeling of power, action, and freedom. While such developments might give the impression that Nietzsche never truly made up his mind on the nature of power, I think it can be demonstrated that he did in fact maintain the basic conception of power that I attribute to him throughout these later works.

1.4.1 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra; values and the voice of the will to power*

Although discussions of power are quite prevalent throughout Nietzsche's early and middle period writings,[31] the term, 'will to power,' does not actually appear until as late as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the seventh of the twelve major works published during his lifetime. This occurs in a well-known section entitled "*On the Thousand and One Goals*," which, somewhat surprisingly, is only peripherally concerned with the nature of life and the will to power (TSZ I

[31] That is, his published writings from *The Birth of Tragedy* to the first four books of *The Gay Science*.

15). Rather, Nietzsche's primary purpose here is to defend an account of the way in which societies develop their distinctive sets of values—or, in Nietzsche's Mosaic language, their "tablet[s] of the good" (TSZ I 15).[32]

After noting the great variety of values that have been adopted by different groups in different eras, he proposes that each "tablet of the good" basically amounts to "a tablet of [a peoples'] overcomings" and, to that extent, represents "the voice of their will to power" (TSZ I 15). Nietzsche elaborates on the former point, explaining that "whatever seems difficult to a people" is understood to be praiseworthy, and, likewise,

> …what seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy. Whatever makes them rule and triumph and shine, to the awe and envy of their neighbors, that is to them the high, the first, the measure, the meaning of all things. (TSZ I 15)

Nietzsche proceeds to offer a number of historical examples of value-sets, taken from the ancient Persians, Jews, and Germans respectively, each of which supposedly exhibit a mode of evaluation, centered on the achievement of great challenges. Rather than assess this evidence here, we should instead take a closer look at what the two central claims that constitute this general account of human value judgments might evince concerning Nietzsche's conception of power.

The first of these claims is that humans value certain activities, or judge them to be good, to the extent that they involve the overcoming of great difficulties in the satisfaction of their needs; and it is emphasized that the degree of their praise is a function of the magnitude of the difficulty thereby surmounted. Hence, human value judgments are presented, on this account, as traceable back to a fundamental interest in *overcoming resistance in the pursuit of one's ends* (or

[32] This will be more closely examined in §5.4.1.1.

of the objects of one's needs).[33] Given Nietzsche's subsequent claim, that a society's 'tablet of values,' so construed, represents "the voice of their will to *power* [die Stimme seines Willens zur *Macht*]," it is thus apparent that he means to identify this basic interest with the will to power (TSZ I 15, emphasis added).

Hence, Nietzsche effectively implies here that to value and pursue the overcoming of great difficulties, or resistances, is simply to value and pursue *power*. Understood in this way, this important section from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* not only outlines Nietzsche's account of the will to power's role in the creation of human values, it also presents one of the earliest elucidations of his conception of power as the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of one's ends.

1.4.2 *Beyond Good and Evil; the will to mastery, and the phenomenology of power*

Three years later, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche expands upon the power centered depiction of life that comes to fore in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, beginning with his assertion that "a living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength [seine Kraft *auslassen*]—life itself is *will to power*" (BGE 13).[34] Much later, however, in the seventh chapter entitled, "*Our Virtues*," he offers a more subtle characterization of what he calls, at this point, "the fundamental will of the spirit" (BGE 230). This commences with the claim that what "the people call 'the spirit'" is, at bottom, a commanding force that "wants to be master [Herr] in and around its own house and wants to feel that it is master" (BGE 230). Taken in light of his previous assertions to the effect that *life is the will to power* and our drives are an "organization and outgrowth of one basic form

[33] In this respect, Nietzsche's account of values is structurally similar to the account that John Stuart Mill famously defends in *Utilitarianism*, according to which, the traditional values of human societies can be traced back to a fundamental interest in the maximization of the net balance of pleasure over pain.
[34] See also BGE 259.

of will (namely, of the will to power)," it seems reasonable to assume that the fundamental will that Nietzsche means to ascribe to 'the spirit' in this section is simply the will to power (BGE 13, 36).

Assuming this, we are confronted with, what appear to be, two startlingly new characterizations of the will to power. First, we find the object or end of this will, formerly characterized as the activity of discharging one's strength, described now as something called 'mastery [Herrschaft]' (BGE 230).[35] And, second, it is proposed that what the will to power seeks is not only this mastery, itself, but also, or instead, the *feeling* of mastery—adding an experiential dimension to the account of life found in the first chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*. We will need to consider both of these developments in turn, and it would be most useful to begin with the former.

1.4.2.1 *The will to power as the will to mastery*

By referring to the primary goal of the "fundamental will of the spirit" as 'mastery [Herrschaft],' Nietzsche raises the prospect that by identifying what exactly he means by "mastery," we can come closer to understanding his conception of power (BGE 230). Some of the details emerge in his subsequent discussion of what 'the spirit' specifically strives for in its attempts to be masterful. Nietzsche asserts that "it has the will from multiplicity to simplicity, a will that ties up, tames, and is domineering and truly masterful [herrschsüchtigen und wirklich herrschaftlichen]" (BGE 230). This imposing will is exemplified, for Nietzsche, in the "seeker after knowledge" who aims to incorporate "new experiences" by arranging them "within old divisions" (BGE 230). A similar analysis of the knower is offered again in a section from the

[35] See also TSZ II 12.

fifth part of *the Gay Science*, published in the same year as *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which Nietzsche describes the pursuit of knowledge as an attempt to "uncover under everything strange, unusual, and questionable something that no longer disturbs us" (GS 355). Such an accomplishment provides the knower with a kind of domination[36] and, hence, 'mastery' over her subject matter.

Following this discussion of how mastery is sought in the case of the knower, Nietzsche goes on to characterize this concept, more broadly, as "growth [Wachsthum], in a word—or more precisely the feeling of growth, the feeling of increased power" (BGE 230). Setting aside the distinction that is drawn again between mastery and the *feeling* of mastery, we might take a closer look, for now, at the identification of mastery with "growth" and "increased power" (BGE 230). Though the relation between growth and increased power is not explicitly spelled out in this section, one can effectively deduce it from the theory of life presented at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

For if, as this theory asserts, "life itself is *will to power*," then it would seem to follow that a living thing will expand itself, or grow, to the extent that it expands its own power (BGE 13).[37, 38] In other words, on Nietzsche's theory of life, growth and increased power should be one

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[36] Two years after the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche asserts, in an unpublished note that "the so-called drive for knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer: the senses, the memory, the instincts, etc. have developed as a consequence of this drive. The quickest possible reduction of the phenomena, economy, the accumulation of the spoils of knowledge (i.e., of world appropriated and made manageable)" (KSA 13:14[142]). And in another unpublished note, written one year earlier, he claims: "Appropriation and assimilation are above all a desire to overwhelm, a forming, shaping and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and increase the same" (KSA 12:9[151]).

[37] See also BGE 36, KSA 12:2[157], 13:14[101].

[38] Two years later, in an unpublished note, Nietzsche asserts that insofar as life is the will to power it strives toward "not merely conservation of energy, but maximal economy in use, so the only reality is the will to grow stronger of every center of force-not self-preservation, but the will to appropriate, dominate, increase, grow stronger… Life, as the form of being most familiar to us, is specifically a will to the accumulation of force [*Kraft*]; all the processes of life depend on this: nothing wants to preserve itself, everything is to be added and accumulated" (13:14[81]/ 13:14[82]). A few years after this, in *Antichrist*, Nietzsche also asserts that "Life itself is to my mind the instinct for growth, for durability, for an accumulation of forces, for *power*" (A 6).

and the same—a view which seems to be already implied by the way in which Nietzsche presents "the feeling of growth" and the "feeling of increased power," side by side, as presumable equivalents. But if this is correct, then by describing the attainment of mastery as "growth," Nietzsche merely identifies it again with the attainment of power, which leaves us without any clearer sense as to what exactly he means by either "mastery" or "power" (BGE 230).

While nothing more is said to explicate the concept of mastery in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche's unpublished notes from the same period offer a number of helpful discussions on the topic, which, among other things, make it clear that mastery, as Nietzsche conceives of it, is synonymous with the activity of overcoming of resistance. Some initial evidence of this is provided when he asserts, in the first of these notes, that the pleasurable element in "all activity" can be accounted for by the fact that "all doing is an overcoming, a becoming master, and increases the feeling of power," thereby suggesting that overcoming and becoming master are equivalent as Nietzsche understands them (KSA 12:7[2]).[39] In another note from this period, he describes the will's pleasurable confrontation with "opponents and resistance" as a "forward thrust… again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way," which depicts one's 'mastery' of an object as an overcoming of the resistance it poses to one's ends (KSA 13:11[75]).

The equation of these two notions can also be observed in the previously discussed note in which Nietzsche attempts to explain why there is, in addition to pleasure, "necessarily an *ingredient of displeasure* in every action" (KSA 13:11[77]). As was mentioned earlier, his claim

[39] A similar statement can be found in the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, in which Nietzsche describes the expression of strength as being rooted in "a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs" (GM I 13).

here is that "a force can expend itself only on what resists it," which, given his Schopenhauerian account of suffering, entails that all active force will produce some amount of displeasure. However, we should also note at this point how, in the conclusion that is supposed to be drawn from this, Nietzsche once again depicts the active force's attempt to overcome the resistance, against which it will express itself, as an attempt to *master* the resistance, asserting that "the measure of failure and fatality must grow with the resistance a force [Kraft] seeks to master" (KSA 13:11[77]).

Taken together, I think these unpublished notes make it apparent enough that Nietzsche understands mastery as the overcoming of some resistant object in the pursuit of one's ends. And in light of this, we can reasonably conclude that by describing the will to power, in the seventh chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, as a commanding force that seeks *mastery* "in and around its own house," Nietzsche reaffirms, albeit in new terms, his conception of power as the overcoming of resistance (BGE 230).

1.4.2.2 *The distinction between power and the feeling of power*

This brings us, then, to the second and perhaps more alarming point made in this section concerning the will to power's interest in achieving not only mastery but also the "*feel[ing]* that it is master" (BGE 230, emphasis added). At the outset, this seems to mark a radical, unforeseen change of direction in Nietzsche's understanding of the will to power. For not only is the distinction between power and the feeling of power altogether absent in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,[40] we also find it missing in Nietzsche's initial presentation of the will to power at

[40] The 'feeling of power' is neither mentioned in the four sections from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that refer to the "will to power" (TSZ I 24, II 12, 20, and III 10), nor in any of twenty-two sections that refer simply to "power" (TSZ I 11, 12, 14, 20, 24, 31; II 1, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 19, 20, 22; III 10, 12, 13; IV, 3, 13, 7).

the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil* itself (BGE 13).[41] One wonders why such a seemingly decisive revision should appear only now, seven chapters in, and, without any explicit mention, much less a defense.

Yet the appearance of such a significant discontinuity can be mitigated if one acknowledges a less often considered point that I take Nietzsche to make concerning the status of power: namely, that power is by its very nature a type of experience. Such a view, counterintuitive though it might be, is expressed and defended in a number of places throughout Nietzsche's works, as well as in the earlier chapters of *Beyond Good and Evil* which, thus, prepare the reader for the more nuanced characterization of the will to power provided in chapter seven.

Earliest among the evidence to consider is Nietzsche's well-known examination of the nature of willing from the first chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Rejecting what he takes to be the standard account of willing, as a 'simple' phenomenon, of which we are most intimately familiar, Nietzsche argues that it is, in reality, a poorly understood complex of disparate elements—"something that is a unit only as a word" (BGE 19). Taking a closer look into what "this one word" refers to, Nietzsche discovers three primary ingredients: first, a "plurality of sensations" including "the sensation of the state '*away from which*,' the sensation of the state '*towards which*,' [and] the sensations of this '*from*' and '*towards*' themselves"; second, "a ruling thought" which, in other discussions is greatly deemphasized;[42] and, third, allegedly most important, an "affect of command [Affekt des Commando's]" consisting of the experience of

[41] Indeed, even following this section Nietzsche often omits this distinction: for instance, in chapter nine, where he speaks of the "lust for power" [Macht-Begierden] (BGE 257).
[42] For example, consider his comment in an unpublished note from this same period that "All our conscious motives are superficial phenomena: behind them stands the struggle of our drives and states [Kampf unserer Triebe und Zustände], the struggle for dominion [Gewalt]" (KSA 12:1[20]).

successfully compelling one's "executive instruments, the useful 'under-wills' or under-souls" to action, and thereby enjoying "the triumph over obstacles [Triumph über Widerstände]" (BGE 19, KSA 10:24[32]).

One of the more striking features of this analysis is that it focuses entirely on the individual's *experience* of willing. Indeed, Nietzsche takes the various sensations involved in the willful progression towards a goal to *constitute*, rather than simply designate, the primary ingredients of willing. By reducing the will, in this way, to a complex of sensations, Nietzsche implies that the will itself is an essentially experiential phenomenon. Consequently, if power is understood as an activity of, or constituting, the will—namely, the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of one's ends[43]—then it too will be an experiential phenomenon. And this would effectively eliminate any genuine distinction between the 'feeling of power' and 'power,' as such.

Nietzsche's reduction of willing, power and, as it turns out, all phenomena, to what we would normally think of as our experiences *of* them, is rooted in a general skepticism about our knowledge of a world beyond experience. In an unpublished note, written one year after *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes that "questions [about] what things 'in-themselves' may be like, apart from our sense receptivity and the activity of our understanding, must be rebutted with the question: how could we know that things exist?" (KSA 12:9[106]). This skepticism is developed in the second chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche chastises the majority of the philosophers of his time for blithely accepting what he takes to be two unwarranted assumptions on this issue: first, the metaphysical assumption that there really is an external or 'true' world underling the 'merely' "apparent world [scheinbare Welt]"; and, second, the supposedly "moral

[43] As he describes power in an aforementioned unpublished note: "*the will's* forward thrust… again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way" (KSA 11:26[231], emphasis added).

prejudice" that, supposing an external world does exist, it should be granted a kind of priority—that it "is worth more than mere appearance [Schein]" in the sense that we should value the apparent world only to the extent that we take it to accurately reflect the state of the external, 'true' world (BGE 34).

Against the metaphysical assumption, Nietzsche questions whether it is really necessary to posit an external world in the first place, asking "is it not sufficient to assume degrees of apparentness and, as it were, lighter and darker shadows and shades of appearance?" (BGE 34).[44] And with respect to the concomitant "moral prejudice" of those who posit an external world, or at least take the question of its existence to matter, he contends that "there would be no life at all if not on the basis of perspective estimates and appearances," which leads him to ask "why couldn't the world *that concerns us*—be a fiction?" (BGE 34).[45] In other words, Nietzsche asserts not only that we lack sufficient grounds for positing an external world, but also that, whether we recognize it or not, the true context of our life activities, as well as the objects of our knowledge, is what we think of as the merely apparent world. It should be noted that this radical theme is in no way limited to *Beyond Good and Evil*. One will find it running through almost all of Nietzsche's major writings, including his preceding work, *The Gay Science*, in which he argues, at one point, that "only we have created the world *that concerns man!* –But precisely this

[44] Nietzsche expands on this proposal in the previously cited note in which he rejects all attempts to gain knowledge of "things 'in-themselves'": "the world of 'phenomena' is the adapted world which we feel to be real. The 'reality' lies in the continual recurrence of identical, familiar, related things in their logicized character, in the belief that here we are able to reckon and calculate; the antithesis of this phenomenal world is not 'the true world,' but the formless unformulable world of the chaos of sensations—*another kind* of phenomenal world, a kind 'unknowable' for us" (KSA 12:9[106]).

[45] In an unpublished note from early 1888, Nietzsche reiterates his criticism of the prioritization of the 'true' world: "The worst thing is that with the old antithesis 'apparent' and 'true' the correlative value judgment 'lacking in value' and 'absolutely valuable' has developed. The apparent world is not counted as a 'valuable' world; appearance is supposed to constitute an objection to supreme value. Only a 'true' world can be valuable in itself—Prejudice of prejudices! Firstly, it would be possible that the true constitution of things was so hostile to the presuppositions of life, so opposed to them, that we needed appearance in order to be able to live— After all, this is the case in so many situations; e.g., in marriage" (KSA 13:14[103]).

knowledge we lack, and when we occasionally catch it for a fleeting moment we always forget it again immediately" (GS 301).[46]

In light of this general rejection of the distinction between the way things appear, and the way they are in themselves, I think it is possible to make sense of Nietzsche's otherwise perplexing tendency to shift back and forth between speaking of power and the feeling of power, as though they were one and the same.[47] We can see that by resolving to understand all objects only in terms of what "our sense receptivity and the activity of our understanding" presents us with, Nietzsche commits himself to the view that power is nothing other than what we typically think of as the experience *of* power; and, so, to will the attainment of power on this account would just be to will the *feeling* of power.[48]

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[46] In his prior work, *Daybreak*, Nietzsche writes that we are enclosed within the "horizons" of our 'sensory' feelings and "it is by these horizons… that we *measure* the world… this measuring we call sensation – and it is all of it an error!" (D 117). Yet the error, as he explains it, is *not* merely that these feelings misreport the state of the external world. Rather, he criticizes the subject for conceiving of these feelings as 'sensations' in the first place, since this assumes that there is some external world which can be accessed by means of them, and according to Nietzsche, "there is absolutely no escape, no backway or bypath into the *real world*!" (D 117). This theme can be found even earlier in the first part of *Human All Too Human*, entitled "*Of First and Last Things,*" when Nietzsche argues that "we behold all things through the human head" and although the *possibility* of a "metaphysical world" cannot be dismissed, it cannot be positively known either. Yet in spite of this, Nietzsche denies that we are any worse off as result, since, any knowledge of an external world would be entirely irrelevant to human life: "it would be the most useless of all knowledge: more useless even than knowledge of the chemical composition of water must be to the sailor in danger of shipwreck" (HH I 9, see also HH I 15, 16, 21). Long after the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*, we can also find Nietzsche returning to these positions in *Twilight of the Idols*, in which he claims: "the true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one"* (TI VI 1).

[47] This tendency is particularly apparent in a section from *The Gay Science* entitled "*On the doctrine of the feeling of power*." Despite the title, Nietzsche begins by claiming that "benefiting and hurting others are ways of exercising one's power upon others; that is all one desires in such cases," and that we only "want to increase [the] power" of our beneficiaries "because in that way we increase ours" (GS 13). Yet, soon after this he refers to people as "devotees of the feeling of power" (GS 13). Likewise, in a passage from the *Genealogy of Morals* that I will address in the following section, Nietzsche claims that "every animal" strives toward the optimal condition in which it can "achieve its maximal feeling of power," and, yet, by the end of the very same sentence refers to this as an animal's "path to power" (GM III 7).

[48] The connection between Nietzsche's rejection of the appearance-reality distinction, and his experiential account of power is perhaps most explicitly presented in an unpublished note from 1887 in which he writes: "Critique of 'reality': where does the 'more or less real,' the gradation of being in which we believe, lead to?—The degree to which we feel life and power (logic and coherence of experience) gives us our measure of 'being,' 'reality,' not-appearance" (KSA 12:10[19], see also 13:14[184]).

This reading not only eliminates the apparent discontinuity within and between Nietzsche's many published discussions of the will to power, it also explains why he so often presents his claim, that we will the *feeling of power*, as a clarification of, rather than a replacement for, the claim that we will the attainment of *power*. This mode of presentation appears, for instance, in his discussion of the "fundamental will of the spirit" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, when he describes the will to mastery as a will to "growth, in a word—*or more precisely* the feeling of growth, the feeling of increased power"—suggesting that what he means by "growth" or power, here, is just the feelings in which they consist (BGE 230, emphasis added). The converse of this clarifying comment is made in an unpublished note from the same period in which he states that "life as a special case (hypothesis based upon it applied to the total character of being,—) strives after a *maximal feeling of power* [*Maximal-Gefühl von Macht*]; essentially a striving for more power; striving is nothing other than striving for power [Streben ist nichts anderes als Streben nach Macht]; the basic and innermost thing is still this will" (13:14[81]-[82]).

In the preceding, I hope to have shown how the two unusual characterizations of the will to power that arise in the seventh chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* are actually consistent with Nietzsche's earlier account of this will as a disposition to "discharge [one's] strength" or, on my reading, overcome resistance in the pursuit of one's ends (BGE 19). I argued that, in light of his unpublished notes, we should understand the mastery with which Nietzsche identifies power here as the activity of overcoming resistance—where the mastered object is that which provides the resistance to be overcome. And I explicated how his repackaging of the will to power as a will to the *feeling* of power, rather than departing from his earlier account, merely underscores his

rejection of the traditional appearance-reality distinction, from which it follows that all power simply is a feeling of power.

1.4.3 *On the Genealogy of Morals; the path to the most powerful activity*

In the third essay of Nietzsche's subsequent work, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, one can find him effectively synthesizing the two accounts of the will to power found at the beginning and end of *Beyond Good and Evil* respectively. While explaining the philosophers' supposed attraction to the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche offers the following formulation of his theory of life:

> Every animal-therefore la bête philosophe, too—instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength [seine Kraft ganz herauslassen] and achieve its maximal feeling of power; every animal abhors, just as instinctively and with a subtlety of discernment that is "higher than all reason," every kind of intrusion or hindrance that obstructs or could obstruct this path to the optimum (I am not speaking of its path to happiness, but its path to power, to action, to the most powerful activity [zur That, zum mächtigsten Thun], and in most cases actually its path to unhappiness). (GM III 7)

Although one might be surprised to note that Nietzsche does not explicitly emphasize the *fundamental* status of the will to power in this particular passage, this is underscored elsewhere in the *Genealogy of Morals*: for instance, in the second essay, where Nietzsche accuses Herbert Spencer of adopting an account of life in which "the essence of life, its *will to power*, is ignored" (GM II 12).[49] More noteworthy, however, is Nietzsche's characterization of an animal's will to power as a will to "expend all its strength," which mirrors his earlier description of the will to power as a living thing's disposition to "discharge its strength [seine Kraft *auslassen*]" at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil* (GM III 7, BGE 13). And as in the seventh chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche refers to the object of this will as both "the feeling of power,"

[49] See also GM II 11.

and "power,"[50] which, if my earlier interpretation is correct, once again reflects his rejection of the appearance-reality distinction (GM III 7, BGE 230).[51]

Nevertheless, a new clarification of the object of the will to power is introduced at the end of this passage, when Nietzsche describes animal life as propelled on a "path to power, to action, to the most powerful activity"—thereby adding "action" and "powerful activity" to the list of phenomena with which he identifies power (GM III 7). The grounds for this new identification can be understood if we consider, again, the account of action that Nietzsche defends in his unpublished notes. One should recall that in one of these notes, which I have referenced twice before already, he asserts that all action includes an element of displeasure to the extent that it involves the expression of some force and "a force can expend itself only on what resists it" (KSA 13:11[77]).[52] This same point is made in another, related note: "all doing [alles Thun] is an overcoming, a becoming master, and increases the feeling of power" (KSA 12:7[2]). On this analysis, then, all action essentially amounts to the expression of force by means of an overcoming of resistance, and, consequently, it would seem that to will 'action,' or, specifically, "the most powerful activity," would be to will the greatest overcoming of resistance (GM III 7).

[50] The latter occurs when he describes the path to the optimum as a "path to power" (GM III 7).
[51] The denial of this distinction is reaffirmed in a number of places throughout the *Genealogy of Morals*—but most prominently in a section from the third essay, in which, Nietzsche asserts: "the entire conceptual antithesis 'subject' and 'object'-errors, nothing but errors! …voluptuous pleasure that reaches its height when the ascetic self-contempt and self-mockery of reason declares: *"there is* a realm of truth and being, but reason is *excluded* from it!"" (GM III 12). Nietzsche goes on to propose, in contrast, that "there is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be (GM III 12, compare to KSA 12:10[19]).
[52] This note was likely written in the same year that the *Genealogy of Morals* was published (1887).

1.4.4 *Twilight of the Idols; power and freedom*

The last piece of textual evidence that I would like to present in defense of my reading of Nietzsche's conception of power as the overcoming of resistance comes from an analysis of human freedom, presented in his next major writing, *Twilight of the Idols*. In a late section entitled, "*My conception of freedom*," Nietzsche attacks "liberal institutions" for promoting, what he takes to be, a "contemptible type of well-being" that "make[s] men small, cowardly, and hedonistic" and thereby undermines "the will to power" (TI 'What the Germans' 38). He tempers his critique, however, with the ironic observation that the *struggle* or war for liberal institutions has, nevertheless, had the opposite effect—supposedly promoting "freedom in a powerful way" (TI 'What the Germans' 38).

Nietzsche explains this cryptic point by outlining the particular conception of freedom he has in mind:

> How is freedom measured in individuals and peoples? According to the resistance which must be overcome, according to the exertion [Mühe] required, to remain on top. The highest type of free man should be sought where the highest resistance is constantly overcome: five steps from tyranny, close to the threshold of the danger of servitude [Knechtschaft]. (TI 'Skirmishes' 38)

Nietzsche thus recommends that freedom be measured, and presumably defined, in terms of the activity of overcoming resistance, with the degree of a person's freedom determined by the extent of the resistance she is able to successfully overcome or exert herself against. And it is this, somewhat peculiar, conception that leads him to conclude that those who enjoy the highest degree of freedom do so by virtue of striving under the sort of dangerous and challenging conditions from which liberal institutions typically emerge and which these institutions subsequently seek to abolish.

Now if Nietzsche were to go on to equate freedom, as he conceives of it here, with power, this would clearly support the interpretation that I am proposing. However, such an equation does not occur in this particular section; though his closing comments do draw a close connection between freedom and strength (TI 'What the Germans' 38). [53] Nevertheless, one can find Nietzsche explicitly arguing, throughout his philosophical career, that what we conventionally refer to as "freedom" is really power, as he understands it. An examination of the specific reasoning behind this view would go beyond the scope of my current project.[54] However, for now, we can at least take note of a few of the passages in which this equation arises.

In the previously mentioned section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which Nietzsche defends his experiential account of the will, he asserts that "that which is termed 'freedom of the will' is essentially the affect of superiority in relation to him who must obey," adding, later, that through this feeling one enjoys "the triumph over obstacles" (BGE 19). In an unpublished note from that same year, Nietzsche writes that "the most fearful and fundamental desire in man [is] his drive for power—this drive is called 'freedom'" (KSA 12:1[33]). Following this, in the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, when Nietzsche refers to the "*instinct for freedom*," he immediately clarifies, in a parenthetical note, that this instinct is, in his own "language: the will to power" (GM II 18).

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[53] At the end of this section, Nietzsche asserts: "the peoples who had some value, attained some value, never attained it under liberal institutions: it was great danger that made something of them that merits respect. Danger alone acquaints us with our own resources, our virtues, our armor and weapons, our spirit, and forces us to be strong… those large hothouses for the strong — for the strongest kind of human being that has so far been known the aristocratic commonwealths of the type of Rome or Venice, understood freedom exactly in the sense in which I understand it" (TI IX 38)

[54] In a future project, I intend to critically assess how Nietzsche defends this view in an early section from *The Wanderer and his Shadow* where he argues that "each considers himself most free where his feeling of living is greatest... That through which the individual human being is strong, wherein he feels himself animated, he involuntarily thinks must also always be the element of his freedom: he accounts dependence and dullness, independence and the feeling of living as necessarily coupled" (HH WS 9).

Yet perhaps the clearest indication that Nietzsche conceives of freedom as power, is provided in an unpublished note that appears to have been a rough draft of the aforementioned section from *Twilight of the Idols.*[55] He writes here that,

> The degree of resistance that must be continually overcome in order to remain on top is the measure [das Maass] of freedom, whether for individuals or for societies—freedom understood, that is, as positive power, as will to power. According to this concept, the highest form of individual freedom, of sovereignty, would in all probability emerge not five steps from its opposite, where the danger of slavery hangs over existence like a hundred swords of Damocles. Look at history from this viewpoint: the ages in which the "individual" achieves such ripe perfection, i.e., *freedom,* and the classic type of the *sovereign man* is attained—oh no! they have never been humane ages! (WP 770)

In this passage, Nietzsche explicitly asserts both that the activity of overcoming resistance provides the measure of freedom, *and,* that by "freedom," he means "positive power" or "will to power" (WP 770). In this way, he again evinces a conception of power as the overcoming of resistance.

1.5 *Conclusion*

With the preceding textual analyses, I hope to have demonstrated that, while Nietzsche's account of power developed in quite significant ways throughout the decade in which he wrote about the will to power most directly, he consistently employed a basic conception of power as the overcoming of resistance. What evolved, then, was not his understanding of power as such, but rather his sense of the pervasive significance of power in our lives—in particular, its hitherto unacknowledged place in morality,[56] as well as its connection with what we take to be human freedom and action itself. And although this conception, broadly applicable though it might be,

[55] This note was written in late 1888, the same year during which Nietzsche was working on *Twilight of the Idols*.
[56] I will have much more to say about this in chapter five.

admittedly departs from our own common understanding of power, it seems that Nietzsche was either well aware of this fact, or, at least, had good reasons for embracing the idiosyncrasies of his conception in light of his equally unconventional theory of the self.

2. The disposition towards power

Having made progress towards understanding Nietzsche's unorthodox conception of power, it is important to note that this brings us, at best, only halfway towards a full account of the *will to* power. At the start of the previous chapter, I suggested that, in addition to examining what Nietzsche means by 'power,' one should also ask: 'what kind of a disposition is the will to power?' (call this, *the question of disposition*); and 'how does Nietzsche mean to apply this disposition to human psychology?' (*the question of application*). Although any answer to the latter question would seem to presuppose an answer to the former, the question of disposition has nevertheless received far less attention in the literature on the will to power. Part of the reason for this is that, to many commentators, it seems patently obvious that the will to power is meant to be understood as a *discrete desire*, possessed by all living things to some, more or less, significant extent.

In this chapter, I will attempt to challenge this assumption, arguing that Nietzsche conceives of the will to power, instead, as a more generally applicable *tendency* towards power, possessed by psychological and non-psychological entities alike. After defending this view, I will then turn to the question of application, presenting a fairly wide array of textual evidence which reveals, or so I argue, a conception of the will to power as a tendency belonging, independently, to each of the drives—concomitant with, but in no instrumental relation to, their characteristic ends.

To begin, I would like to first critically examine the way in which Reginster attempts to answer the questions of application and disposition in *The Affirmation of Life*. After proposing a number objections to his approach, I will then turn to the defense of my own positions on these two issues.

2.1 *Reginster's interpretation*

In his interpretation of the will to power, Reginster follows the general trend among commentators in assuming, with almost no textual support, that Nietzsche conceives of this will as a desire: namely, the "desire for the overcoming of resistance."[57] Hence, apart from defending the aforementioned analysis of power, most of Reginster's attention is devoted to the question of application—concerning the way in which Nietzsche means to apply the will to power to human psychology. Now, on this issue, Reginster is, to his credit, far more willing than many others to acknowledge and accommodate Nietzsche's numerous assertions to the effect that the will to power is, in some important sense, "the 'essence' of life, or at least an essential fixture of human psychology."[58, 59] Although such assertions are often couched in fairly vague, inconsistent language, they plainly evince an ambitious intention on Nietzsche's part, which must be accounted for.

In order to explicate how the will to power could occupy such a significant role in life and human psychology, Reginster is led, as we will see, to a fairly tenuous interpretation of Nietzsche's discussions of this will—construing what appear to be descriptive claims about human psychology as covert value judgments. This interpretation is what I will refer to as the *normative reading*, which holds that when Nietzsche "presents the will to power as the *essential* human motivation," he is asserting "the ethical view that wanting power is what is *most*

[57] Reginster (2006), p. 132. Now, it should be noted that Reginster does address John Richardson's view (which is quite close to my own) that it is the *drives* that will power, through either "the *maximal achievement* of [their] specific end, or […] the *development* of [their] end (and of the specific pattern of activity involved in pursuing it)" (Ibid., p. 130). However, while Reginster objects to Richardson's interpretation of power, he never actually provides any reason to doubt Richardson's novel approach to the question of disposition.

[58] Ibid., p. 132.

[59] In contrast with Reginster, one might consider Brian Leiter's recent contention, in *Nietzsche on Morality*, that "to the extent [Nietzsche] sometimes seems to embrace" the strong claim "that *all* life (actions, events) reflects the will to power" "we must simply take [him] to have overstated his case… (something his penchant for hyperbolic rhetoric and polemics often leads him to do)" (Leiter [2002] p. 132, 139).

important" about humanity.[60] After explaining the difficulties that lead Reginster to embrace this reading, I will propose what I take to be a better way of accounting for the fundamental status of the will to power in human psychology—one which rejects the assumption that Nietzsche conceives of the will to power as a discrete desire.

2.1.1 *The reductionist reading*

Before assessing Reginster's normative reading of the will to power, we should first consider why he feels obliged to resort to it, rather than accept what is clearly the most natural way for those who think of the will to power as a desire to answer the question of application. Many have taken such assertions as "life itself is the *will to power*" or the will to power is "the essence of life" to express a *traditional theory of motivation*, according to which, power is the only end that living things desire for its own sake; I will refer to this as the *reductionist reading* (BGE 13, GM II 12).[61]

While this might provide a philosophically familiar way of understanding Nietzsche's more grandiose claims about the will to power's place in life, Reginster contends that if power is rightly construed as "the overcoming of resistance," then the desire for power cannot be essential to life in this traditional sense.[62] This is said to follow from the fact that power, so conceived, is a strictly *formal* phenomenon, in that it "gets a determinate content only from its relation to some determinate desire or drive."[63] For to overcome resistance one must already possess and pursue some specific end, other than power, for which there are obstacles or resistances that stand in one's way.

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[60] Ibid., pp. 132-133, emphasis added.
[61] See Hollingdale (2001), p. 158.
[62] Reginster (2006), p. 132, 129.
[63] Ibid., p. 132.

Consider, for example, an agent who decides to prepare a garden. By desiring to do so, he would establish an end, in relation to which, it would be possible to identify a variety of resistances with which to contend: resistances such as, the poor condition of his soil or the persistent threat of weeds. Upon identifying these obstacles, various forms of power would thereby become available to the agent, including, the forceful activities of tilling, fertilizing, and weeding, each of which would provide an opportunity for him to discharge his strength. Different ends will tend to be associated with different kinds and degrees of resistance, and, thus, different kinds and degrees of power. But regardless of these distinctions, it should be clear that without *any* determinate ends to pursue, nothing could serve as a resistance for the agent, as he would have no pursuits to be obstructed. Consequently, there would be no activity that could count as an instance of power for an otherwise aimless agent.

Reginster concludes from considerations of this sort that it is "difficult to see how power could be characterized if it is not by reference to other drives and their specific ends."[64] And this leads him to reject the reductionist reading, insofar as he takes it to be committed to the idea that "power is a determinate end that can be characterized without" making such references.[65] Although he is not entirely clear about why the theory of motivation that the reductionist reading attributes to Nietzsche should be committed to this, it seems likely that Reginster thinks that unless the desire for power is capable of preceding all other desires, it will not be able to serve as their foundation.

But while these considerations might show that any particular *instantiation* or achievement of power depends on the pursuit of a determinate end other than power (for which there are resistances to be overcome), this is not tantamount to showing, nor does it entail, that

[64] Ibid., p. 129.
[65] Ibid.

the *desire* for power needs to make reference to any specific, preexisting ends. Rather, we might think of the will to power, as Reginster has construed it, as a desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of *some* end. And there is no reason to think that in order to possess such a desire, an agent would have to specify the end in question.[66] After all, we think that a person can desire to marry *someone*, without having any particular person in mind yet; likewise, some yearn to be 'accomplished' without knowing what specific accomplishments they will pursue. Hence, it does not seem that the formality of Nietzsche's conception of power makes it necessary for the desire for power to be preceded by other determinate desires.

However, Reginster might contend, at this point, that it would still be impossible for the desire for power, understood in this way, to produce a network of desires, instrumental to itself. That is, it might seem that a formal conception of power, such as Nietzsche's, simply leaves no way of specifying the ends needed to instantiate it. But such a conclusion also seems mistaken, as there is nothing incoherent nor implausible about desiring to do something solely for the sake of the challenge it presents. Consider, for instance, the many people who commit themselves to competing in triathlons—a determinate end—solely for the sake of having new formidable resistances to overcome.

Insofar as it is *possible* for a living thing's desire for the overcoming of resistance to, both, precede all other desires and produce a network of desires instrumental to itself,[67] it would seem that the theory of motivation that the reductionist reading attributes to Nietzsche is, at the

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[66] A similar point is made by Clark in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Upon identifying the will to power with a desire for "a sense of one's *effectiveness* in the world," she notes that, although this identification makes the will to power a second-order desire, it does not rule out the reductionist reading that she attributes to Kaufmann (a reading which she rejects on other grounds). Clark explains that "it is not impossible—in the sense of logically contradictory—to have a desire to be able to satisfy whatever first-order desire one might come to have even though one has never had a first-order desire" (Clark [1991], p. 211).

[67] By 'possible' I mean only that such a scenario can be conceived without contradiction—not that it is at all likely that living things form their desires in this way.

very least, coherent. Yet beyond this quite minimal virtue, it must be admitted that such a theory is entirely unfeasible as a way of explaining the myriad desires that human beings actually possess—not to mention the radically diverse desires of living things in general. For it would be absurd to suppose that one desires to eat certain foods, see certain sights, maintain certain social relations, solely for the sake of overcoming the resistance they afford. On such a view, one would have to say, for instance, that I desire pistachios rather than walnuts because I believe, consciously or not, that the pursuit of the former will offer a greater opportunity to overcome resistance. Likewise, it would seem that a person, motivated in this way, would have to prefer only the most irritable and contentious of companions, since they would pose the greatest challenges. Having to attribute such a bizarre understanding of the origin of our desires to Nietzsche would, perhaps, be just as troubling as attributing to him a theory of motivation that is incoherent.

2.1.2 *The normative reading*

In order to avoid the problems associated with the reductionist reading, Reginster proposes that we adopt a less literal interpretation of Nietzsche's assertions concerning the 'essential' status of the will to power in human psychology. According to his alternative interpretation,

> when [Nietzsche] presents the will to power as the *essential* human motivation—the motivation that defines what it is to be human—Nietzsche actually turns psychology into an expression of his values. Thus, it is a psychological fact that human beings want power, but it is an ethical view that wanting power is what is most important ('essential') about them.[68]

[68] Reginster (2006), p. 132.

This distinctly normative reading of Nietzsche's account of the will to power was pioneered by Maudemarie Clark, who argues, in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, that Nietzsche expresses a "construction of the world from the viewpoint of his moral values" when he claims that life, in general, is the will to power.[69] Like Reginster, Clark is also led to this interpretation out of a concern over the plausibility of the view that "all behavior is motivated by the desire for power."[70]

On this interpretation, then, every instance in which Nietzsche seems to suggest that the will to power is somehow essential to life or to human psychology must be seen as primarily expressing a, more or less, covert evaluation or value judgment. Such a heuristic might have some plausibility when applied to Nietzsche's more ambiguous descriptions of the will to power. His claim, for instance, that "life *is* precisely the will to power" or his occasional representation of the will to power as "the will of life" are perhaps vague enough to accommodate such an approach (BGE 59, GS 349).[71] However, in more than a few of his published discussions of the will to power, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to see how the normative reading can be maintained.

For example, when Nietzsche first introduces his theory of life in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he specifically presents its central tenet—that "life itself is *the will to power*"—as a *competitor* to the 'physiological' assertion that "the instinct of self-preservation [is] the cardinal instinct of an organic being," thereby implying that his theory of life is a physiological, rather than an ethical theory (BGE 13). If the normative reading were correct, these allegedly opposed theories would

[69] Clark (1991), p. 227.
[70] Ibid., p. 212.
[71] Nevertheless, the ambiguity of such assertions can hardly be cited as positive evidence in favor of the normative reading. It is, perhaps, telling that Reginster offers no positive evidence at all during his discussion of these issues.

actually be compatible, since the will to power could be the most *valuable* instinct in organic life, even if it were not the cardinal instinct of all organic beings.

Reginster's normative reading also makes it difficult to account for Nietzsche's clarification of his theory of life, a few sections later in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he claims that it is possible to explain "our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of *one* basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power," adding in the subsequent chapter that "all organic functions [can] be traced back to this will to power" (BGE 23, 36).[72] It is not at all clear how such unequivocally descriptive statements about the essential status of the will to power could be reinterpreted as statements about the *value* of this will in the way Reginster proposes.

Yet, on the other hand, it is also difficult to see how these passages could be used to support the reductionist reading, since in neither of them does Nietzsche claim that all of an organic being's *desires* stem from a fundamental *desire* for power. Rather, he refers to the will to power as "a basic form of the will" out of which a living thing's "organic functions" and "instinctive life" supposedly 'develop' (BGE 36). Although the reductionist reading might be reasonably maintained in spite of this ambiguity, in light of our earlier observation that such a reading would commit Nietzsche to a theory of motivation that is at best, unfeasible, it would seem that we have ample reason to consider whether there is any alternative interpretation of Nietzsche's account of the will to power which can fare better—an alternative which, specifically, preserves the descriptive character of Nietzsche's account, while not simply equating it with a traditional theory of motivation.

[72] For Clark's attempt to align BGE 36 with her version of the normative reading, see Clark (1991), pp. 212-219.

2.2 *The will to power and human drives*

In the following, I will argue for an alternative interpretation of the nature of the will to power on the grounds that it more effectively accounts for Nietzsche's varied depictions of this will and the entities to which it is attributed, while also enabling us to explain the, as yet, elusive sense in which he takes the will to power to be 'essential' to human psychology. In other words, by providing a new account of the kind of disposition that Nietzsche understands the will to power to be, I take it that we can provide a more plausible answer to the question of application, concerning the extent or way in which he means to apply this disposition to human psychology.

I will begin by showing, in the following section, that Nietzsche conceives of the will to power in fairly broad terms—namely, as a *tendency towards*, rather than a *desire for,* the overcoming of resistance—, and that this thereby enables him to identify the will to power in both psychological and non-psychological contexts alike. Then, I will investigate the specific way in which he employs this widely-applicable conception of the will to power within the domain of human psychology, arguing that this involves attributing an independent will to power to each of an individual's drives—or, more specifically, characterizing the drives as forceful impulses that seek to discharge their strength in the pursuit of their distinguishing ends. In the final section, I will conclude with a critical examination of one of Nietzsche's earliest applications of this conception of the drives, which I take to both clarify and provide compelling support for his account of the will to power's fundamental role in human psychology.

2.2.1 *Nietzsche's expansive notion of the will to power*

Given how common it is to interpret the will to power as a desire,[73] one would expect to find Nietzsche regularly referring to it as such in his writings. However, when his actual discussions on the nature of this will are taken into account, it is surprisingly difficult to determine the kind of disposition he takes it to be. Apart from occasionally referring to the will to power as a "desire [Verlangen]," one will also find him describing it as, among other things, an "instinct [Instinkt]," a "drive [Trieb]," "a *pathos*," a "basic form of will [Einer Grundform des Willens]," the "primitive form of affect [die primitive Affekt-Forma]," as well as "all driving force [alle treibende Kraft]" itself, whether psychical or physical[74] (KSA 12:1[33], TI X 3, GM III 18, KSA 13:14[79], BGE 36, KSA 13:14[121], 13:14[79], 13:14[121]). Of course, some may be tempted to regard these various terms as just so many ways of referring to what is fundamentally a desire. However, this temptation should be assuaged upon observing how regularly Nietzsche attributes the will to power to entities that we would not normally think of as possible agents of desire: such as, "passions…[,] inclinations," a "protoplasm… extend[ing] pseudopodia," "trees," "every smallest part of a living organism," and, in his especially ambitious moments, "all events," "*all* driving force," and "the world" (BGE 198, KSA 12:9[151], 13:11[111], 13:14[174], 13:11[96], BGE 36, 186).[75,76]

Faced with these wide-ranging attributions of the will to power, some might try to salvage the traditional answer to the question of disposition, at least in part, by claiming that

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[73] Hollingdale (2001), p. 158; Clark (1991), p. 211; Solomon (2003), p. 25; Kaufmann (1980), p. 90.
[74] "all driving force is will to power, that there is no other physical, dynamic or psychic force except this" (KSA 13:14[121], See also BGE 36).
[75] See also KSA 12:1[58]
[76] In a late section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche suggests, more unusually, that groups of individuals are capable of manifesting a kind of higher order will to power. He claims that "this happens in every health aristocracy… it will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant—not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power" (BGE 259).

there are really two distinct notions of the will to power at work in Nietzsche's writings: a *psychological notion*, referring to a *desire for* power; and, a more widely applicable *expansive notion*, which Nietzsche occasionally employs, in non-psychological contexts, to denote a general *tendency towards* power (or, in our terminology, a tendency towards exertion or overcoming).[77,78] But whether we are warranted in foisting this distinction onto Nietzsche's work should be decided upon a careful examination of the particular passages in which he addresses the will to power's role within these different contexts. And, as I will argue in the following, such passages reveal, to the contrary, that Nietzsche intends to maintain a unified conception of the will to power—namely, the expansive notion—which he applies both within and beyond the psychological domain.

An especially clear example of the expansive notion of the will to power can be found in an unpublished note from 1887, in which Nietzsche writes, "the will to power can manifest [äußern] itself only against resistances; therefore it seeks [suchen] that which resists it—this is the primeval tendency [ursprüngliche Tendenz] of the protoplasm[79] when it extends pseudopodia and feels about" (KSA 12:9[151]). We see, here, that while Nietzsche first depicts the will to power as something that *seeks* resistances—an activity we might wish to reserve for desiring beings—, his application of this will to the protoplasm leads him to conceive of it in broader terms, as a "tendency [Tendenz]" (KSA 12:9[151]). In so doing, Nietzsche makes it possible to

[77] Higgins and Solomon (2000), pp. 218-219; Clark (1991), pp. 209-210; Leiter (2002), p. 252.
[78] Several of the commentators who propose this kind of distinction, suggest that it is only Nietzsche's psychological notion of the will to power that merits consideration. For instance, while Leiter sees some limited value in the psychological notion, he claims that we should ignore the expansive notion of this will as "a piece of crackpot metaphysical speculation" (Leiter [2002], p. 252).
[79] It seems that Nietzsche uses the term, protoplasm [Protoplasma], to refer to what is more commonly called an amoeba: a unicellular organism containing, but not the same as, its protoplasm.

locate the will to power in living things with little to no psychological character, including, in a note from this same year, "trees and plants" (KSA 13:11[111]).

This expansive notion also turns out to apply to non-living, or inorganic entities, to the extent that they too are capable of being, in some way or other, disposed to overcome resistances in the course of their characteristic activities. In another unpublished note, written two years earlier, Nietzsche claims, moreover, that the possession of a will to power is one of the central features that unites all organic and inorganic entities:

> The drive to approach [sich anzunähern]—and the drive to thrust something back [zurückzustoßen] are the bond, in both the inorganic and the organic world. The entire distinction is a prejudice. The will to power *in every combination of forces* [*Kraft-Combination*], defending itself against the stronger, lunging at the weaker, is more correct. (KSA 11:36[21], emphasis added)[80]

With the last sentence of this passage, one can begin to see just how widely Nietzsche means to extend his expansive notion of the will to power within the inorganic world. This extension stems from his view that all forces are, by their nature, forms of overcoming or exertion. As we have already seen, Nietzsche holds that "a force can expend itself only on what resists it"; elsewhere, he adds that "exercising power against other quanta of force [auf alle anderen Kraft-Quanta Macht auszuüben]" is, in fact, "*the essence*" of any given force (KSA 13:11[77], 13:14[81]-[82], emphasis added). It would seem to be on the basis of this conceptual link between the idea of force and that of the will to power that Nietzsche later proposes, in an early section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, that "*all* driving force [*alle* wirkende Kraft]" be "univocally" designated "as—*will to power*" (BGE 36). Two years later, Nietzsche repeats this equation in another note, asserting, this time, that "all driving force [alle treibende Kraft] is will

[80] See also KSA 11:36[20], 11:36[22], 12:9[151], 11:38[12].

to power… there is no other physical, dynamic or psychic force [physische, dynamische oder psychische Kraft] except this" (KSA 13:14[121]).

These two apparently related passages are especially noteworthy, since, in addition to showcasing Nietzsche's expansive notion of the will to power, they also reveal his intention to apply it equally in both non-psychological *and* psychological contexts alike. Such an intention is particularly evident in the later, unpublished note, when he asserts that there is no other "physical, dynamic *or psychic* force except" the ubiquitous driving force he calls will to power (KSA 13:14[121], emphasis added).[81] Similarly, in the section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, we see that while Nietzsche once again equates this will with "*all* driving force [*alle* wirkende Kraft]," he makes no attempt whatsoever to establish a separate, desire-based notion for its psychological manifestation; and this decision comes in spite of the fact that it is as a psychological phenomenon that Nietzsche first approaches the will to power in this section (BGE 36).[82] Hence, it would seem that rather than dividing his conception of the will to power into two notions with their own respective spheres of operation, Nietzsche conceives of this will such that it can apply both within and beyond the psychological domain.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that while Nietzsche might not conceive of the will to power in essentially psychological terms, he does give definite priority to its psychological manifestation. Indeed, one will only occasionally find him proposing, primarily in unpublished notes, that we understand the inorganic world in terms of the will to power—or, more specifically, that the mechanistic view of the universe be replaced by one in which all matter is

[81] Nietzsche's suggestion that the physical and psychical spheres are grounded in one and the same "driving force" is not particularly surprising given his anti-dualist conception of the soul, according to which, one is "body entirely, and nothing beside; …soul is only a word for something in the body" (TSZ 4).
[82] See also GS 360.

reduced to driving force or quanta of power.[83] His published works, in contrast, are filled with power-centered explanations of human behavior, one of which will be addressed at length in a later section.

In addition to devoting far greater attention to the will to power's role in human psychology, Nietzsche also takes this domain to provide our fundamental point of access to the will to power. This idea is most clearly developed in an aforementioned section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche indicates that it is as a psychological phenomenon that the tendency towards overcoming is primarily known of, while being only subsequently inferred to exist within the 'physical' or inorganic world (BGE 36).[84]

The direction of this inference—from the psychological to the physical—is rooted in a methodological resolution Nietzsche makes, at the start of the section, to use the subject's inner life as his sole source of evidence in determining the nature of the world.

> Suppose nothing else were "given" as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other "reality" besides the reality of our drives—for thinking is merely a relation of these drives to each other: is it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this "given" would not be *sufficient* for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or "material") world? (BGE 36)

Taking this conservative approach, Nietzsche is led to conclude that insofar as "our entire instinctive life" and "all organic functions" are "the development and ramification of one basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power"—, the world itself must also "be 'will to power' and nothing besides" (BGE 36).[85]

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[83] KSA 13:14[79], 13:14[186], 13:14[81]-[82], 13:11[73], BGE 36.
[84] See also KSA 12:10[19].
[85] I take it that this passage presents a significant challenge to the view, held by some, that Nietzsche grounds his psychology in his metaphysics.

This decision, to infer the will to power's physical manifestation from its occurrence in human psychology, provides yet further evidence that Nietzsche did not conceive of this will as a desire, since, had he done so, he would have committed himself to a radical panpsychism, which we have no outside reason to think he ever endorsed. Fortunately, we can see well enough that Nietzsche does not mean to cast the world as a complex of *desires* in this section, given that, prior to concluding that "the world viewed from inside" is "'will to power' and nothing else," he indicates that it is the expansive notion of the will to power—as "driving force"—that he seeks to project from psychological to the physical sphere (BGE 36).[86]

Nietzsche, thus, appears intent on understanding the will to power, in all its disparate manifestations, as a broadly applicable *tendency* towards overcoming or exertion. Yet, if we are to abandon the standard notion that he understood this will to be psychologically manifested as a desire, we must explain how else Nietzsche could have taken the will to power to operate within the psychological sphere, and how, moreover, this could have led him to describe the will to power as an essential feature of human psychology.

2.2.2 *The application to the psychological sphere*

Upon surveying Nietzsche's more detailed depictions of the will to power's role in life, one will frequently find him proposing not only that all organic beings possess the will to power, but also that within any given one of them there are, in fact, *several* "wills to power" operating simultaneously.[87] We see this, for instance, in an unpublished note from the summer of 1888, in

[86] Nietzsche's use of the will to power here can be compared to the way in which Freud develops his idea of the death and sex 'instincts' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Despite eventually construing them as fundamental tendencies of all organic matter near the end of this work, it is within the domain of human psychology that Freud first establishes the existence of such forces, and finds them to be of greatest interest.
[87] KSA 12:1[58], 13:11[73].

which Nietzsche asserts that "what man wants, what *every smallest part* of a living organism wants, is an increase of power" (KSA 13:14[174], emphasis added). In another note from that same summer, he proposes that "*All healthy functions* of the organism have" a need for "victory, opponents overcome, the overflow of the feeling of power across wider domains than hitherto," which leads him, in turn, to conceive of the "whole" organism in a disunified, agonistic way—namely, as "a complex of systems struggling for an increase of the feeling of power"[88] (KSA 13:14[174], emphasis added).[89]

Nietzsche appears to advance this conception of the organism at the level of human psychology by ascribing the will to power to each of the individual's drives or inclinations. This occurs, among other places, in a section from the fifth part of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he suggests that moralities consist of "counsels for behavior in relation to the degree of *dangerousness* in which the individual lives with himself; recipes against his passions [ihre Leidenschaften], his good and bad inclinations [ihre guten und schlimmen Hänge] insofar as *they have the will to power* and want to play the master" (BGE 198, second emphasis added).[90] One year later, Nietzsche writes, in a similar vein, that "our desires want to violate things with a protracted passion—their accumulated strength [aufgestaute Kraft] seeks resistance" (KSA 13:11[89]).

The idea that drives possess wills to power of their own is stated somewhat more precisely in two unpublished notes in which Nietzsche discusses the drives' involvement in the

[88] See also KSA 12:1[61], 10:8[23].
[89] A more unusual formulation of this view is stated in another unpublished note: "There is no will: there are treaty-drafts of will [Willens-Punktationen] that are constantly increasing or losing their power" (KSA 13:11[73]). Ludovici translates *Willens-Punktationen* as "punctuations of will," which, although still rather puzzling, seems to be more accurate than Kaufmann's translation.
[90] See also KSA 13:11[55], 12:8[1], 12:7[3], D 38.

formation of a subject's 'perspective.'[91] In the first, he argues that, strictly speaking, there can be no unified subject to which some single perspective belongs insofar as "every drive is a kind of lust to rule [Herrschsucht]," possessing a "perspective" of its own which "it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm" (KSA 12:7[60]). [92] This point is expanded upon in another note in which he concludes a similar account of the varied "perspectival appraisal[s]" wrought by our "fundamental drives" by proposing, moreover, that we conceive of "man as a multiplicity of 'wills to power': each one with a multiplicity of means of expressions and forms" (KSA 12:1[58]).[93]

Leaving aside the details of Nietzsche's perspectivism, I think if we acknowledge his conception of the drives as independent manifestations of the will to power, directed somehow at the particular ends that define them, we can better appreciate what he actually means when he writes, early on in *Beyond Good and Evil*, that "our entire instinctive life [Triebleben] [is] the development and ramification of one basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power" (BGE 36). Rather than claiming that one's drives [Triebe] are instrumentally derived from one, fundamental desire for power—as those who support the reductionist reading interpret Nietzsche to assert—, it would seem that what Nietzsche means to say here is that our drives are,

[91] Although there is much dispute over the way in which Nietzsche conceives of a 'perspective' and how his so-called 'perspectivism' should be understood, in the first of these passages, his concern appears to be centered simply on the limits of human knowledge. He argues that our understanding of the world unavoidably includes the interpretive input of our drives and, thus, "we cannot establish any fact 'in itself': perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing" (KSA 12:7[60]). The nature of the drives alleged influence over experience will be further discussed in the following section.

[92] A similar statement is made in an early section from *Beyond Good and Evil,* where Nietzsche writes: "But anyone who considers the basic drives of man to see to what extent they may have been at play just here as *inspiring* spirits (or demons and kobolds) will find that all of them have done philosophy at some time-and that every single one of them would like only too well to represent just *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate *master* [*Herrn*] of all the other drives. For every drive wants to be master [ist herrschsüchtig]: —and it attempts to philosophize in *that spirit*" (BGE 6).

[93] See also KSA 13, 11[73].

themselves, discrete instances of the will to power—that they amount to independent, specialized expressions of this basic form of will.

In addition to making sense of the sort of passages just cited, this reading also makes it possible to understand Nietzsche's more sweeping claims concerning the fundamental import of the will to power to human life: for instance, that "life itself is the *will to power*" (BGE 13).[94] For, according to Nietzsche, drives constitute the fundamental basis of the self. As he puts it in a passage from *Daybreak,* which we will be turning to in the following section, an individual's "being [Wesen]" is constituted by a "totality of *drives*," the distinctive character of which, is said to be determined by the content,[95] "strength," and relations between its members (D 119).[96] This reductive view of the self reappears throughout Nietzsche's later writings, becoming most prominent in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he casts the self as the "order of rank that the innermost drives of [one's] nature stand in relation to each other," describing this, elsewhere, as the "social structure of [one's] drives and affects" (BGE 6, 12, 36).

An examination of the specific grounds for this reduction would go beyond the scope of the current project, although one might already divine its connection to Nietzsche's aforementioned denial of a substantive, unified self—to whom we would normally think of the drives as belonging—,[97] as well as to his claim that "thinking is merely a relation of [the] drives

[94] See also GM II 12.
[95] By the content of a drive, I mean its distinguishing end.
[96] See also D 560.
[97] The connection between Nietzsche's Heracliteanism and his reductive view of the self is especially apparent in BGE 12, where he argues that that if materialistic atomism—which posits an "earth-residuum" or "particle-atom" as the fundamental seat of the activity we observe in the world—is rejected, then "*soul atomism*" should be denied along with it: soul atomism being defined as the traditional account of the soul as "something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an *atomom*" (BGE 12). Rather than thinking of the "soul" as an underlying, unobservable *possessor* of the drives and affects, Nietzsche proposes that we identify ourselves directly with the "social structure of [our] drives and affects" (BGE 12).

to each other"[98] (BGE 36, 6).[99] But more importantly, it should be noted that when this account of the self is considered in light of Nietzsche's conception of the drives, as independent manifestations of the will to power, it becomes immediately apparent how he could have taken the will to power to be essential to human psychology—claiming, for instance, that "you yourselves are… will to power and nothing besides"—without thereby committing himself to the implausible theory of motivation that is so often attributed to him (KSA 11:38[12]).

More needs to be said, however, in order to clarify exactly how Nietzsche understands the drives to manifest the will to power. In the following section, I will show that this involves casting them as forceful impulses, seeking to discharge their strength in the pursuit of their distinguishing ends.[100] Such a view emerges, among other places, in one of Nietzsche's earliest

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[98] Nietzsche provides a particularly clear outline of this account of conscious thought in an unpublished note from 1886: "*Every thought*, every feeling, every will is *not* born of one particular drive but is a *total state*, a whole surface of the whole consciousness, and results from how the power of *all* the drives that constitute us is fixed at that moment - thus, the power of the drive that dominates just now as well as of the drives obeying or resisting it. The next thought is a sign of how the total power situation has now shifted again" (KSA 12:1[61], see also 12:1[75]).

[99] See also D 109.

[100] In a recent article dealing with Nietzsche's ethical thought, entitled "*Deriving Ethics from Action*," Paul Katsafanas defends an interpretation of the will to power which is similar to but also different in important respects from my own. Like myself, Katsafanas adopts Reginster's reading of power as the overcoming of resistance. He also puts forth a philosophically, if not quite exegetically, compelling argument that Nietzsche's application of the will to power to human psychology amounts to an account of the nature of humans drives. On this account, "drives don't aim at the achievement of some determinate state of affairs; rather, drives aim at the process of expression" (Katsafanas, [2011] p. 637; for a similar account see Hill [2003], p. 212). Like my own interpretation, this way of construing the psychological application of the will to power—as an account of the nature of drives—makes it possible to understand how Nietzsche takes the will to power to be the essence of our psychology without recourse to a traditional theory of motivation (Ibid., pp. 632-633).

However, Katsafanas's interpretation achieves this in a way that effectively psychologizes the will to power and thus renders absurd Nietzsche's attempt to identify one unified will to power in psychological and non-psychological domains alike. On Katsafanas's view, power is a component of every desired end; we desire particular kinds of processes or forms of activities rather than the achievement of some determinate state of affairs. Hence, according to Katsafanas, the will behind the will to power is really just the will of desire—an essentially psychological disposition towards the attainment of some end. But as I have argued in the previous sections, Nietzsche casts the will to power as a *tendency* rather than as a desire. By attributing this tendency to the drives, he does not mean to make power a component of the *end* each drive pursues. Power is, instead, taken to be the force—a universal tendency to overcome resistance—by which the drives pursue their particular ends.

The interpretation I propose not only accounts for the passages in which Nietzsche appears to accept one unified conception of the will to power, it also explains a number of observations Nietzsche makes regarding this will's psychological manifestation. For instance, the drives are often described as stores of pent up force, which seek discharge. We see such a view in a late section from *The Gay Science*, entitled "*Two kinds of causes that are often confounded,"* in which Nietzsche touts, as one of his "most essential steps and advances," the distinction between

discussions of the role that the drives play in the formation of a subject's experiences. In my examination of this discussion, I will argue that the analysis Nietzsche's defends, here, not only helps us to better understand the way in which he intends his expansive notion of the will to power to apply to human psychology, but also serves as compelling evidence in favor of such an application.

2.2.2.1 *Drives, power, and the invention of experience*

Perhaps the most illuminating account of the way in which an individual's drives manifest the will to power is provided in one of Nietzsche's earlier and less often cited works, *Daybreak*. This might come as a surprise to some given that *Daybreak*, which was published in 1881, predates Nietzsche's first explicit use of the term, "will to power," in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by about two years (TSZ I 24). Nevertheless, as several commentators have pointed out already, a working idea of the will to power can be found well before its official designation.[101]

We see it, for instance, in the previously discussed section from *The Gay Science*, "*On the doctrine of the feeling of power*," in which Nietzsche argues that whether we benefit or hurt others, the exercise of our power is "all one wills [mehr will man dabei nicht]" in either case (GS

"the cause of acting from the cause of acting in a particular way, in a particular direction, with a particular goal. The first kind of cause is a quantum of dammed-up energy that is waiting to be used up somehow, for something, while the second kind is, compared to this energy, something quite insignificant, for the most part a little accident in accordance with which this quantum 'discharges' itself in one particular way—a match versus a ton of power… The usual view is different: People are accustomed to consider the goal (purposes, vocations, etc.) as the *driving force*, in keeping with a very ancient error; but it is merely the *directing force*—one has mistaken the helmsman for the steam" (GS 360, see also KSA 11:26[409]). Nietzsche thus presents power as the driving force that propels our end-directed behavior, rather than a feature or the form of our ends themselves.

Another observation that Nietzsche makes, which lends further support to my approach, is that the forcefulness or power of a drive increases as the drive is able to successfully discharge itself (D 119). This feature of the will to power will be examined more closely in the following section, but for now we might note that it would be odd to speak of the *strengthening* of a drive's will to power, if this will to power were understood as a feature of the drive's end rather than as an independent *tendency* of the drive towards overcoming or exertion.

[101] Kaufmann (1974), p. 178; Porter (2006), p. 549.

13).[102] One year earlier, in a similar section from *Daybreak*, entitled "*The demon of power* [*Macht*]," we find Nietzsche coming even closer to the theory of life that would eventually receive its fullest treatment in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> …not necessity, not desire—no, the love of power is the demon of men. Let them have everything—health, food, a place to live, entertainment—they are and remain unhappy and low spirited: for the demon waits and waits and will be satisfied. Take everything from them and satisfy this, and they are almost happy—as happy as men and demons can be. (D 262)

This, along with Nietzsche's many other discussions of power throughout *Daybreak*,[103] clearly evinces a nascent conception of the will to power that deserves the attention of any thorough analysis of his understanding of this will.

Most significant for our purposes, however, is an earlier section from *Daybreak*, entitled "*Experience and invention*," in which Nietzsche examines the creative influence a subject supposedly exerts over her experiences (D 119). This begins with an account of what he takes to be the most conspicuous example of such influence, in the formation of one's dreams. After investigating the creative forces at work here, Nietzsche attempts to show that these same forces determine our waking experiences to nearly the same extent. In both cases, he argues that it is the subject's drives which stand behind the inventive construction of her experiences; and that by probing the drives' struggle to exert themselves in this way, we can come to appreciate their basic nature, as forceful impulses, striving to discharge their strength in the pursuit of their respective ends.

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[102] It might seem preferable to cite a later section from the fifth part of *The Gay Science*, entitled "*Once more the origin of scholars*", in which Nietzsche concludes: "The great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power in accordance with the will to power which is the will of life" (GS 349). However, it should be noted that part five was not yet written when the first edition of *The Gay Science* was published in 1882. It appeared five years later in the second edition, at which point *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* had already left the press.

[103] D 18, 23, 42, 65, 66, 112, 113, 119, 128, 140, 146, 176, 184, 187, 189, 191, 201, 204, 215, 245, 248, 271, 348, 256, 360.

In the following, I will first examine the unconventional, power-centered account of the drives that emerges at the start of this section. Then, I will assess the two aforementioned examples of the drives' influence over experience, which serve to exemplify and support this account. Amid the details of Nietzsche's analyses of these examples, I will argue that it is his observations with respect to, specifically, the *inexpedience* of the drives' interpretive contributions to experience that ultimately serve as his best evidence in support of his view that the drives seek, in addition to their distinguishing ends, the discharge of their strength—or, what I take to be the same, power.

Nietzsche begins this section with a characteristically pessimistic assessment of the extent human self-knowledge.[104] He claims that the bulk of humanity tend to know quite little about the activity of their drives, despite the radically central role he takes this activity to play in human psychology.

> nothing… can be more incomplete than [an individual's] image of the totality of *drives* which constitute his being [die sein Wesen constituiren]. He can scarcely name even the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and counterplay among one another, and above all the laws of their *nutriment* remain wholly unknown to him. (D 119)

Nietzsche proceeds to describe how the "*nutriment [Ernährung]*" or "nutritional requirements [Nahrungsbedürfnissen]" of an individual's constitutive drives are or are not met throughout her daily life (D 119). The drives are portrayed as sovereign entities that aggressively pursue, among other things, the experiences an individual happens to have like "prey" (D 119). To the extent that they manage to "nourish" themselves on the subject's experiences, they are

[104] One might compare this discussion to the opening section of the *Genealogy of Morals*, which famously begins, "we are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge" (GM P 1).

said to grow stronger; while they become weak and will eventually wither altogether from a kind of "starvation" should they fail to seize any 'prey' of their own (D 119).[105]

Before explaining just how the subject's experiences are able to serve as her drives' "means of nourishment," Nietzsche offers a few observations regarding the broader outcome of this internal struggle for the development of the individual (D 119). He notes that since she is bound to know so little about her internal life, she will be unable to pursue, in any deliberate, rational way, the particular assortment of experiences needed to sufficiently nourish *each* of her drives, thereby neglecting, in most cases, what Nietzsche refers to as the "nutritional requirements of the totality [der gesammten Triebe]" (D 119). As a result, he concludes that we should expect, "the starvation and stunting of some [of the individual's drives] and the overfeeding of others," adding that, "every moment of our lives sees some of the polyp-arms of our being [unseres Wesens] grow and others of them wither, all according to the nutriment which the moment does or does not bear with it" (D 119).

This metaphorical depiction of the drives, as dynamic polyp-arms reaching out for a kind of nourishment, provides our first piece of evidence, in this section, that Nietzsche conceives of the drives as independent[106] instances of what he would later refer to as the will to power. For one should be reminded, here, of his aforementioned account of the protoplasm's will to power in a note, penned three years later. Nietzsche describes how the protoplasm "extends its

[105] See also KSA 13:14[174].

[106] Some recent work has been done on the way in which this metaphor portrays the individual's drives as sovereign or independent of one another. In an article focused mainly on this passage, entitled "*Polyp Man*," Brian Domino observes that, at the time that *Daybreak* was written, what stood out most about polyps was their ability to survive division—each 'arm' being capable of subsisting as its own independent organism (Domino [2004], p. 42). For a number of philosophers who learned of the polyp's autogenetic power, this provided support for the notion that "the soul could not be in the head or heart," but "was divisible and hence material" (Ibid., p. 43). Though Domino finds this reasoning somewhat suspect, he speculates that Nietzsche, who was familiar with the writings of some of these materialists, had this in mind when he chose the polyp as his metaphor for the human psyche.

pseudopodia in search of something that resists it—not from hunger[107] but from will to power. Thereupon it attempts to overcome, appropriate, assimilate what it encounters" (KSA 13:14[174]).[108] This multifarious search for overcoming is represented as the "primitive" pursuit of "nourishment," which Nietzsche goes on to propose as a basic model for *all* organic beings, composed, as he takes them to be, of "a complex of systems struggling for an increase of the feeling of power" (KSA 13:14[174], 13:14[174]).[109] Such an account, with its tendril imagery and reference to 'nutrition,' clearly parallels Nietzsche's depiction of the drives' pursuit of nourishment in *Daybreak*, despite the fact that the will to power is never mentioned by name in this early work (D 119).

But although Nietzsche might not directly describe the drives as pursuing *power* in *Daybreak*, his account of the particular kind of gratification they seek plainly captures his basic conception of power. Rather than taking the drives to merely pursue their distinguishing ends, he proposes that each of them strives for the "exercise of its strength, or discharge of its strength [oder Übung seiner Kraft, oder Entladung derselben], or the saturation of an emptiness," thereby

[107] It is interesting to note Nietzsche's decision, here, to distinguish between an organism's being motivated by hunger, on the one hand, and being motivated by the need for nourishment (thought of in in terms of power), on the other. No such distinction can be found in *Daybreak*. One possible explanation for this incongruity is that while Nietzsche is using the notion of 'hunger' metaphorically in *Daybreak*, his use is more literal in the unpublished note. Hence, in the unpublished note, one might think that he is claiming that the protoplasm does not literally seek sustenance when it extends its pseudopodia; rather, it seeks power, which provides 'nourishment' in a more figurative sense of the term (a sense denoting something like the gratification of a primary need). Another possible explanation, towards which I am slightly more inclined, allows that both uses of the term, 'hunger', are metaphorical, but holds that Nietzsche came to think, sometime after writing *Daybreak*, that hunger was the wrong metaphor for the will to power—that although an organism requires power for its 'nourishment', it does not seek it as though it were lacking (i.e. hungering after) something; rather, it seeks power out of, what Nietzsche would sometimes refer to as, an overflowing abundance. In its pursuit of power, the organism aims to discharge itself, as opposed to taking in something from without (as the metaphor of hunger might suggest). This line of thought can be found, among other places, in another unpublished note, written around the same time as the note in question, in which Nietzsche proposes a way of evaluating different standards of beauty: "In regard to all aesthetic values, I now employ this fundamental distinction: I ask in each individual case 'has hunger or superabundance become creative here?'" (WP 846, see also GS 370, KSA 12:2[122], 13:14[174], 12:10[145]).

[108] See also KSA 12:9[151].

[109] See also KSA 12:1[61].

depicting these so-called "polyp-arms of our being" as forceful impulses, seeking *discharge* through the pursuit of their distinguishing ends (D 119).

On this view, then, one does not simply desire the attainment of a particular end, such as honor; one aims, rather, to *energetically exert* oneself in successful honor-seeking activities.[110] To merely receive honor, say by birth, would be less satisfying than to *achieve* it by one's own efforts—efforts that Nietzsche would construe, along with all forceful exertions, in terms of the overcoming of resistance. In light of the terminology he would come to adopt in his later works, such a proposal would seem tantamount to conceiving of the drives as independent manifestations of the will to power; and given his understanding of the self, the individual would, thus, be represented as a complex of such wills (D 119). Hence, we find, in this section from *Daybreak*, the beginnings of Nietzsche's conception of the self as "a multiplicity of 'wills to power'" (KSA 12:1[58]).[111]

Still, all of this would be rather obscure, not to mention unconvincing, without any clearly worked-out examples of the drives pursuing power in the way Nietzsche proposes. For this, he first turns to the case of dreams, offering an account that seems to anticipate what Sigmund Freud would propose nearly a decade later in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Nietzsche hypothesizes that the vivid fantasies that occupy our minds as we sleep are the work of an anxious drive (or perhaps, a set of drives) which was left undernourished during the day and now

[110] Further support for this reading can be found in an unpublished note dating back to sometime between late 1887 and early 1888, in which Nietzsche asserts that "It is *not* the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure (I want to fight this superficial theory—the absurd psychological counterfeiting of the nearest things—), but rather the will's forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way. The feeling of pleasure lies precisely in the dissatisfaction of the will, in the fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance.—'The happy man': a herd ideal" (KSA 13:11[75]). This basic idea is presented again, with some interesting additions, the aforementioned section from *The Gay Science*, entitled *"Two kinds of causes that are often confounded*," where Nietzsche distinguishes between the cause of "acting in a particular direction" and "a particular goal" (GS 360).

[111] See also KSA 13:14[174], 12:9[13], 10:8[23].

seeks "to be active, to exercise itself, to refresh itself, to discharge itself" (D 119). It supposedly accomplishes this by freely interpreting, in concert with the "inventive reasoning faculty," the various "nervous stimuli" impinging on the sleeper—from "the pressure of the arm and the bed clothes" to the clamor of "night-revelers"—, producing fanciful "explanations" for these sensations, which relate to the drive's distinguishing end (D 119).[112, 113]

Nietzsche sees evidence of this in the fact that, while the nervous stimuli a sleeper encounters are fairly similar from one night to the next, the dreams that seem to arise from these stimuli often differ quite wildly, suggesting that "today's prompter of the reasoning faculty was different from yesterday's—a different *drive* wanted to gratify itself" (D 119). Thus, a repressed yearning for adventure might, on one night, lead one to dream of soaring "with the joy of an eagle up to distant mountain peaks," while on another night, a quite different set of inclinations might fill one's dreams with "tenderness and tears" (D 119). Rather than presenting any further evidence in support of his account, Nietzsche invites his readers, as he often does, to evaluate it in light of their own experiences.

Following this discussion of dreams, Nietzsche attempts to extend his account of the drives' interpretive enterprise to waking life, asking,

> …do I have to add that when we are awake our drives likewise do nothing but interpret nervous stimuli and, according to their requirements, posit their 'causes'? that there is no *essential* difference between waking and dreaming? that when we compare very different stages of culture we even find that freedom of waking interpretation in the one is in no way inferior to the freedom exercised in the other while dreaming? that our moral judgments and evaluations too are only images and fantasies based on a physiological process unknown to us, a kind of acquired language for designating certain nervous

[112] See also HH I 13.

[113] In a similar discussion from Nietzsche's previous work, *Human All Too Human*, he places greater emphasis on the effect of the *bodily* sensations of the sleeper, which, by virtue of their deviation from waking life, are said to be especially agitating to the sleeper's "nervous system": "almost all of our organs are active, our blood circulates vigorously, the position of the sleeper presses on individual limbs, his bed covers influence his sensibilities in various ways, his stomach digests and its motions disturbs other organs, his intestines are active, the position of his head involves unusual muscular contortions, his feet unshod and not pressing against the floor, produce an unfamiliar feeling, as does the difference in the way his whole body is clad" (HH I 13).

> stimuli? that all our so called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text? (D 119)[114]

Nietzsche thus proposes that our waking experiences are not merely composed of sensory stimuli, but consist, mainly, of the causal inferences we make in response to such stimuli. What we experience, in other words, is not some mercurial barrage of sense-data, but rather our own complex conception of its cause—a book resting on a table as opposed to a bundle of shape and color.[115] By the end of the section, Nietzsche goes as far as suggesting that our experiences may contain *nothing* apart from such causal inferences,[116] declaring that "to experience is to invent" (D 119).[117]

As with the formation of dreams, Nietzsche takes the inventive projections that allegedly constitute our waking experiences to be the work of our drives, which seek, in part, the discharge of their strength through this creative activity. In arguing for this, he once again draws our attention to the way in which one and the same set of sensory stimuli can admit of significantly different interpretations, depending on which of our drives happen to be active at the time. He has us consider, for example, the multitude of ways in which we might respond if, while walking through a market one day, our eye happened to catch some stranger laughing in our general direction as we passed by. Although the cause of the stranger's laughter, like the causes of nocturnal stimuli, may be unknowable from our vantage point, this won't usually deter us from

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[114] See also HH I 13.

[115] See also TI 'Reason' 5.

[116] We might note that this radical proposal would surely be less controversial in the case of dreams; indeed, our dreams seem to demonstrate just how powerful and all-encompassing our influence over our experiences can be. This is most likely why Nietzsche first examines the formation of dreams in his defense of this account of perception.

[117] In an unpublished note from the Fall of 1888, Nietzsche elaborates: "The of whole of 'inner experience' rests upon the fact that the cause for an excitement of the nerve centers is sought and imagined—and that only a cause thus discovered enters consciousness: this cause in no way corresponds to the real cause—it is a groping on the basis of previous 'inner experiences,' i.e. of memory. But memory also maintains the habit of old interpretations, i.e., of erroneous causality—so that the 'inner experience' has to contain within it the consequence of all previous false causal fictions. Our 'outer world' as we project it every moment is indissolubly tied to the old error of the ground: we interpret by means of the schematism of 'things'" (KSA 13:15[90]).

forming a fairly definite impression of the occurrence. And Nietzsche suggests, rather plausibly, that what we come to make of the ambiguous event—what we take it to signify—will reflect the kind of person we happen to be, and, more specifically, the particular drive that "happens at that moment to be at its height in us" (D 119).

If a drive to contemplation should take the lead, as we might expect of a scholar or philosopher, Nietzsche speculates that one would find clues as to "the nature of laughter as such" in the occurrence; a combative drive would likely interpret the stranger's actions as grounds for quarrel; while if benevolence commanded the moment, one might find oneself "glad to have involuntarily augmented the amount of cheerfulness and sunshine in the world" (D 119). In each of these cases, Nietzsche proposes that one's experience of the event will be shaped by an interpretation, through which one's most pressing drive, at that particular moment, will achieve a cathartic discharge of its strength.

Now despite the common sense appeal of this analysis, one could easily grant that such examples demonstrate our drives' ability to influence even our waking experiences, and yet reject Nietzsche's *power-centered* conception of the drives. For it might seem that their interpretive activity could be accounted for, just as effectively, on a simpler, more conventional conception of their nature—one that takes the drives to be *uniformly* focused on the attainment of their distinguishing ends, rather than seeking, in addition to this, the discharge of some alleged store of strength or force. After all, most of the abovementioned interpretations of the stranger's laughter would directly facilitate the ends of the interpreting impulse: in the case of the contemplative drive, by attributing the event to the nature of laughter as such, it would establish an opportunity to reflect; while the combative drive could find cause for attack by tracing the stranger's laughter back to some affront. Hence, in these cases, there would seem to be no

explanatory advantage to attributing a will to power to the interpreting drives. Their inventions could be seen as no more than a means to the ends these drives uniformly seek, as opposed to gratifying some ancillary need "to be active, to exercise [themselves], to refresh [themselves], to discharge [themselves]" (D 119).

Yet Nietzsche appears to take the interpretations our drives produce to be less expedient than such examples might suggest, and I think it is this somewhat understated point that reveals the explanatory advantage of his power-centered conception of the drives. Throughout the section, Nietzsche describes the drives' interpretive inventions as "*very free*, very arbitrary [willkürliche]," "a fantastic commentary" (D 119). However, it is not until the end that he offers any substantive evidence in support of these charges. This emerges in his discussion of how the drives' interpretive play can sometimes *undermine* one's actions, and why acting spontaneously can be more effective insofar as one thereby preempts such interference.

Nietzsche recalls one particular morning when he happened to witness a man abruptly faint in the street, causing a sudden uproar among a crowd of bystanders. Amid the confusion, Nietzsche apparently sprang into action, helping the stranger recover himself without the slightest hint of anxiety or trepidation. "Not a muscle of my face moved," Nietzsche remarks; "I felt nothing, neither fear nor sympathy, but I did what needed doing and went coolly on my way" (D 119). He goes on to explain that his equanimity was surely due to the spontaneity of his action, since, had he been told of the dramatic event in advance, he would have brooded endlessly over it; "all possible drives would have *had time* to imagine [sich vorzustellen] the experience and to comment on it" (D 119). Once the time to act had finally arrived, Nietzsche suspects that he would have delayed, or perhaps even fainted, himself! Although he does not explain exactly how this influx of anticipatory interpretation would have overwhelmed him at the

decisive moment, it is not difficult to imagine how this could occur. One might think of how an excessive outpouring of sympathy, in similar sorts of contexts, can often prevent one from identifying and executing the otherwise simple steps needed to assist the very object of one's concern.[118]

In such cases, the drives' interpretive work would seem to interfere with, rather than facilitate, one's actions, thereby hindering the achievement of the drives' distinguishing ends. Other, more familiar instances of this can be found in what is colloquially referred to as being 'swept up' or overcome by emotion. This is popularly depicted, for instance, in the archetype of the obsessed lover, whose infatuation swells at the expense of his romantic prospects, or in the braggart whose delusions of grandeur undermine the very pursuit of honor that inspired them. In these and other familiar scenarios, we find an agent's motivating drives forcefully exerting themselves on her experiences in ways that either fail to contribute to or positively undermine her drives' own ends.

This everyday psychological phenomenon would be rather puzzling on a more conventional understanding of the drives—one which sees them as wishful impulses, *uniformly* focused on the attainment of their distinguishing ends—, since, one would expect them, in that case, to prompt simpler interpretations, facilitating their aims in a more cool, efficient manner, while preserving the agent's energy for other pursuits. But if we suppose, as Nietzsche does, that our drives are, really, independent, forceful tendencies, striving to exercise their strength in the pursuit of their distinguishing ends, it would seem that we could make better sense of the *"very free,* very arbitrary interpretations" they so often produce (D 119). The frequent dream-like

[118] Indeed, it is partly with this issue in mind that the American Medical Association recommends, in their *Code of Medical Ethics*, that doctors refrain from treating their own family members (AMA, Opinion 8.19).

extravagance of such interpretations could be attributed, on this account, to the drives' ancillary need for exertion or power.

Hence, while the drives' involvement in the construction of a subject's experiences may not, by itself, provide compelling evidence in favor of Nietzsche's power-centered conception of the drives, his more specific observations regarding the inexpedience of these interpretative contributions can, as they suggest that the drives possess an independent, ancillary motive: namely, the will to power.

2.3 *Conclusion*

It would be helpful, at this point, to briefly review the direction that my interpretation of the will to power has taken over the preceding chapter. Following this, I will begin an examination of the implications that Nietzsche's account of the will to power has for his understanding of human excellence.

At the beginning of chapter two, I suggested that understanding Nietzsche's conception of power is not sufficient for understanding his notion of the *will to* power. The latter task requires that we address at least two further questions, which I referred to as, the question of disposition and the question of application. The former asks about the kind of will or disposition Nietzsche takes the will to power to be. In my attempt to provide an answer to this question, I first argued against the prevailing view that equates the will to power with a desire, by drawing attention to Nietzsche's repeated attempts to apply one *unified* conception of the will to power both within and beyond the domain of human psychology. This decision suggests, or so I argued, that Nietzsche does not mean for the will to power to be defined in essentially psychological terms. Rather, as we saw in both his published and unpublished writings, Nietzsche chooses to

define this will in a much broader way: namely, as a *tendency towards* the activity of overcoming resistance or the discharging of one's strength.

After defending this reading, I turned to the question of how Nietzsche applies the will to power, so conceived, to human psychology. I argued that this involves attributing a will to power to *each* of the individual's drives—specifically, by casting them as independent, forceful tendencies that strive to discharge their strength in the pursuit of their distinguishing ends. Understanding the will to power in this way yields exegetical as well as philosophical benefits; for when this reading is considered in connection with Nietzsche's reduction of the self to a "totality of *drives*," it becomes possible to make sense of his repeated claims concerning the will to power's fundamental status in human psychology without saddling him with the motivational theory that he is so often thought to endorse—a theory which, I argued, is implausible, if perhaps coherent (D 119). Nietzsche's psychological application of the will to power thus amounts to something more novel than an account of the ultimate end of human desire. It is, instead, an account of the very nature of our desires—one which, as his analysis of the formation of our experience helps to show, has fundamental implications for our understanding of human life.

3. Power and human excellence

Having examined Nietzsche's notion of the will to power and its application to human psychology, we are now in a position to understand the role that this notion plays in what I take to be his account of human excellence. In the following chapter, I will be arguing that Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power provides the foundation for his account of human excellence insofar as he conceives of excellence as the *realization of one's nature*, where one's nature is identified with the particular "totality of *drives*" that, according to him, "constitute [one's] being [die sein Wesen constituiren]," and where the *realization* of one's drives is understood to consist, not in the fulfilment of their distinguishing ends, but in their maximal aggregate achievement of power (D 119).

Before getting to the details of the connection between Nietzsche's psychology and his account of human excellence, I will begin, in the first two sections of this chapter, by addressing a series of critical passages from *Beyond Good and Evil*, which demonstrate both the theoretical import of the psychology of the will to power for Nietzsche, as well as his general intention to make this psychology the foundation of his account of human excellence. Following this, I will argue, on the basis of a broad range of textual evidence that, on this account, excellence consists in the realization of one's nature. And with this established, I will then examine the way in which Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power grounds his unique account of how it is that one's nature can be realized.

There are two interpretative challenges that I will discuss throughout this chapter. The first of these concerns Nietzsche's commitment to individualism and, more specifically, his recurring claim that excellence involves the achievement of a certain kind of personal singularity. While this position might seem, at first blush, to conflict with my reading of

Nietzsche's conception of excellence as the realization of one's nature, I will argue that is in fact consistent. The second interpretative challenge stems from Nietzsche's critical analysis of certain modes of being, including what he refers to as asceticism, which seems to reveal a human tendency to fall short of excellence. In an article entitled, "*Nietzsche: Perfectionist*," Thomas Hurka argues that this analysis contradicts Nietzsche's identification of human excellence with an "ideal of realizing human nature," grounded in his psychology of the will to power.[119] In response to this concern, I will argue that if Nietzsche's analysis of humanity's retrogressive tendencies is understood in light of my interpretation of his psychology as an account of the nature of human drives, this apparent contradiction can be resolved.

It should be noted from the outset that the goal of this chapter is simply to defend a general account of the way in which Nietzsche conceives of human excellence in terms of his psychology of the will to power. Two further topics that will need to be addressed, but which will receive their own respective chapters, are, first, the normative basis of this account—that is, on what grounds Nietzsche presents his conception of human excellence as an ideal to which one, in some sense, *ought* to aspire—, and, second, the practical strategies for achieving excellence, which Nietzsche proposes and defends throughout his works. The critical examination of these components of Nietzsche's positive philosophical program requires a careful understanding of how it is that he conceives of human excellence itself, and, hence, it is to the content of this conception that we should now turn.

[119] Hurka (2007), p. 10.

3.1 *The centrality of Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power*

Although Nietzsche defines the will to power in what I have argued are suprapsychological terms—namely, as a *tendency* towards, rather than a *desire* for the overcoming of resistance—it is nevertheless this will's application to human psychology that he chooses to focus his primary attention on. Nowhere is this more evident than in the opening chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche questions what he considers to be the "prejudices of the philosophers," and, upon attacking certain "superstitions" concerning "the idea of the soul," presents the will to power, for the first time, as the "cardinal instinct" of all "organic being[s]" (BGE 13).[120] Shortly after this prominent section, Nietzsche makes it clear that his psychology of the will to power is meant to be more than just a major focus for him; it is intended, moreover, to provide a principal foundation for his philosophical projects in general.

This methodological point is articulated in the concluding section of chapter one, where Nietzsche proposes that the entire field of psychology be reconceived as "morphology and *the doctrine of the development* [*Entwicklungslehre*] *of the will to power*" (BGE 23). Later on, one will recall that he clarifies that his new psychology is to explain "our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of *one* basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power" (BGE 36).[121] While such a proposal should come as no surprise given our earlier discussion of Nietzsche's account of the self and the drives that supposedly constitute it, what he goes on to say concerning the significance of this new psychology should be given special consideration. He asserts that psychology, as he construes it, will be "recognized again as the queen of the

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[120] See also KSA 12:2[63].

[121] Nietzsche's proposal in this section should also be compared to the illuminating account that he offers of his new psychology in an unpublished note, produced two years later, in which he writes, "*Unitary conception of psychology*. –We are accustomed to consider the development of an immense abundance of forms compatible with an origin in unity. [My theory would be: —] that the will to power is the primitive form of affect, that all other affects are only developments of it… that all driving force is will to power, that there is no other physical, dynamic or psychic force except this" (KSA 13:14[121]).

sciences, for whose service and preparation the other sciences exist" (BGE 23). And beyond standing at the foundation of all scientific investigation, in his closing sentence, Nietzsche declares his new psychology to be "the path to the fundamental problems [der Weg zu den Grundproblemen]" (BGE 23).

Bold, prominently positioned assertions such as these not only explain Nietzsche's decision to focus as heavily as he does on the will to power's application to, specifically, human psychology, they also help us make sense of why it is that, when he describes himself in his written works, it is almost always as a psychologist rather than as a philosopher.[122] We see this, for instance, in *Ecce Homo,* when Nietzsche writes that the "first insight reached by a good reader" of his should be "[t]hat a psychologist without equal speaks from my writings" (EH 'Why I Write' 5). In a later chapter, he goes even further, claiming that "there was no psychology at all before me; to be the first here may be a curse; it is at any rate a destiny" (EH 'Why I Am A' 6).

But despite the often scientific tenor of Nietzsche's writings, it is important to keep in mind that the fundamental problems that he seeks to engage are not strictly, nor even primarily, *descriptive*. Rather than focusing solely on humans as they are, Nietzsche shows a consistent concern for how they might aspire to be[123]—for a mode of being that I described in my

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[122] See HH P8, HH II P2, GS P2, BGE 269, GM III 19, 20, EH 'Why I Write Such' 6, 'Genealogy,' KSA 13:14[27]-[28].

[123] On the significance of this distinction for Nietzsche, one should consider his attempt, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, to distinguish the "*genuine philosophers*" from those whom he refers to as the "philosophical laborers" or "scientific labors of philosophy" (BGE 211). The latter, allegedly following the "noble model of Kant and Hegel," "have to determine and press into formulas, whether in the realm of *logic* or *political* (moral) thought or *art*, some great data of valuations—that is former *positings* of values," thereby making "everything that has happened and been esteemed so far easy to look over, easy to think over, intelligible and manageable, to abbreviate everything long, even 'time,' and to *overcome* the entire past" (BGE 211). While their title might sound somewhat belittling, Nietzsche is quick to acknowledge both the value of the philosophical laborers' task and the satisfaction that a "tough will" can achieve upon taking it up. That said, the philosophical laborers are characterized as mere facilitators of the "genuine philosophers," who go beyond the merely descriptive endeavors of the former and, as proverbial "*commanders and legislators,*" "determine the Whither and For What of man" (BGE 211, see also KSA 11:26[407], 11:38[13]). In the immediately following section, Nietzsche asserts that "by applying the knife vivisectionally to the chest of the very

introduction as human excellence, and which, as I will be arguing in this chapter, is rooted in his psychology of the will to power.

3.2. *The problem of human excellence*

When Nietzsche presents his psychology of the will to power as the "path to the fundamental problems," he notably does not specify the particular kinds of problems he means for his psychology to address (BGE 23). However, the remainder of *Beyond Good and Evil*, and in particular, chapter two, '*The Free Spirit*,' make it clear enough that the problem of human excellence, or of what Nietzsche often refers to as the *enhancement of human life*, is intended to be one of them. This is evident in at least two ways: first, in his repeated characterizations of the problem of human excellence as the fundamental problem confronting the type of thinker with which he identifies; and, second, in the way in which the interconnected notions of power and strength are consistently given pride of place whenever Nietzsche finds it necessary to represent his ideal in general terms.

The problem of human excellence is most explicitly cast as a fundamental problem for Nietzsche—and, thus, a problem to which his psychology of the will to power is intended to provide a new 'path'—in the concluding section of chapter two of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here, Nietzsche claims to be one of a select type of intellectual, whom he refers to as 'the free spirit' (BGE 44). After distinguishing this type from its antipode and occasional pretender, the

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virtues of their time, [these genuine philosophers] betrayed what was their own secret: to know of a *new* greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement" (BGE 212). In connection with this, one should also consider an unpublished note from 1885, in which Nietzsche writes, "Fundamental thought: the new values must first be created—we shall not be *spared* this task! For us the philosopher must first be a legislator. New types. (How the highest types hitherto [e.g., the Greeks] were reared: to will this type of "chance" consciously.)" (KSA 11:35[407], see also GS P2 2).

promoter of "the democratic taste and its 'modern ideas,'"[124] Nietzsche proposes that what truly defines an intellectual as a 'free spirit' is her understanding of and commitment to a certain ideal mode of being (BGE 44).[125] Free spirits are said to be those who have "opened [their] eyes and conscience to the question where and how the plant 'man [Mensch]' has so far grown most vigorously [kräftigsten] to a height"—a question which Nietzsche soon after frames as an inquiry into that which "serves the enhancement of the species 'man'" (BGE 44).[126] In an unpublished note that appears to have been an early draft of this important section,[127] Nietzsche adds to this that whoever merely "reflects on [such issues] becomes one of us, the free spirit" (KSA 11:37[8]).[128]

In addition to asserting the fundamental import of the problem of human excellence in these passages, we also find Nietzsche beginning to describe his ideal in ways that highlight the features of power and strength, thereby indicating the central influence of his psychology in his engagement with this problem. The first instance of this occurs with his characterization of the forerunning approximations of his ideal as 'plants' who have "grown most vigorously to a height [die Pflanze 'Mensch' am kräftigsten in die Höhe gewachsen ist]" (BGE 44). While Kaufmann chooses to translate 'kräftigsten' as 'most vigorously,' 'most *strongly*' would seem to be a preferable translation of this superlative, as it more overtly preserves the terminological connection that is present in the original German between this description of the forerunners of Nietzsche's ideal and his psychology of the will to power—a psychology, which, as I have

[124] Nietzsche later refers to this type as the free-thinker: "'*libres-penseurs*,' '*liberi pensatori*,' '*Freidenker*'" (BGE 44).
[125] See also HH P7, EH 'The Untimely' 2.
[126] See also BGE 203, WP 966, 973.
[127] Consider for instance Nietzsche's reference, in the unpublished note, to those who have "thought profoundly about where and how the plant man has hitherto grown most vigorously" (KSA 11:37[8]).
[128] In the opening lines of this note, Nietzsche also casts the problem of life-enhancement as "the great task and question" (KSA 11:37[8]).

emphasized,[129] is rooted in the claim that a living thing seeks "above all to *discharge* its strength [seine Kraft *auslassen*]" (BGE 13).[130] Taking this into account, Nietzsche thus appears to distinguish his proto-exemplars by the extent to which they fulfill the natural disposition that he attributes to all living things and that grounds his account of human psychology: the will to power.

The connection between Nietzsche's psychology and his conception of human excellence is given even greater emphasis later on in this same passage, when he describes how the forerunners of his ideal "had to develop under prolonged pressure and constraint into refinement and audacity, [their] life-will [Lebens-wille] had to be enhanced into *an unconditional power-will* [*unbedingten Macht-Willen*]" (BGE 44, emphasis added).[131] In the earlier mentioned unpublished draft of this section, Nietzsche offers his readers, in addition to this, a somewhat more precise account of the ideal being approached here, which further invokes his psychology of the will to power. This occurs when he portrays the free spirit's defining task as the establishment of,

> a reversal of values for a certain strong kind of man of the highest spirituality[132] and strength of will [starke Art von Menschen höchster Geistigkeit und Willenskraft] and to this end slowly and cautiously to unfetter [entfesseln] a host of instincts now kept in check and calumniated… (KSA 11:37[8])[133, 134]

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[129] See §1.2.

[130] An unpublished note from 1884 gives further support to this reading. Here Nietzsche claims that "The highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured. Indeed, *where the plant 'man' shows himself strongest* one finds instincts that conflict powerfully (e.g., in Shakespeare), but are controlled [wo die Pflanze Mensch sich stark zeigt, findet man die mächtig gegen einander treibenden Instinkte (z.B. Shakespeare), aber gebändigt]" (KSA 12:9[38], emphasis added).

[131] The unpublished version of the section uses the following wording instead: "his will to live must be enhanced to an unconditional will to power and to overpower" (KSA 11:37[8]).

[132] Regarding Nietzsche's somewhat unusual references to 'spirit [Geist]' and 'spirituality or intellectuality [Geistigkeit],' one should consider the section from *Beyond Good and Evil* that I discussed in 1.4.2 of my chapter on Nietzsche's conception of power, where Nietzsche effectively equates "that commanding something which the people call 'the spirit'" with a will to mastery or power (BGE 230).

[133] See also BGE 203.

[134] In the opening lines of this note, we find Nietzsche emphasizing the fundamental status of this program—casting it as "the great task and question" (KSA 11:37[8]).

In this passage, in particular, we see that in conceiving of his ideal in terms of the achievement of strength, Nietzsche means to employ his psychology, according to which, one's instincts or drives amount to independent manifestations of the will to power; for on this account, an individual's achievement of power will rest on that of her drives, and, consequently, Nietzsche's ideal will require that any traditionally repressed drives be unleashed [entfesseln] "to this end" (KSA 11:37[8]).[135] There will be much more to say about these details later on in the present chapter, however, at this point it should be sufficiently clear that Nietzsche understands the task of reconceiving of human excellence to be one of the fundamental problems to which his psychology of the will to power is said to provide a new 'path' (BGE 23).

But for all the preceding evidence that Nietzsche means to take the problem of human excellence as one of his central focuses, it should be acknowledged that there are numerous points throughout his later works where this problem might seem to be, at best, secondary to his attacks on the ideals of traditional morality and modernity, among other related targets. After all, with the exception of *Ecce Homo*, each of the titles that Nietzsche gives to his works, from *Beyond Good and Evil* on, serve to designate his *opponents*, thus suggesting a fundamentally negative program. In spite of such appearances, however, one will frequently find Nietzsche asserting that the negative program for which he is so well known is really motivated by a positive one—that his criticisms of certain modes of being are, more precisely, an extension of his defense of a superior mode which, due to the ongoing success of the former, has yet to be fully realized (EH 'Why I Am A' 1, 'Thus Spoke' 6). This point is made, among other places, in the sixth chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche describes how "genuine philosophers"–"all those extraordinary furtherers [Förderer] of man,"—have always opposed the

[135] See also KSA 12:1[4], 12:9[139].

ideals of their time out of an appreciation for one yet higher: "By applying the knife vivisectionally to the chest of the very virtues of their time, they betrayed what was their own secret [eignes Geheimniss]: *to know of a new greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement*"[136] (BGE 212, emphasis added).[137, 138]

Beyond Good and Evil is, thus, in several respects a pivotal work for Nietzsche. In addition to providing some of his most mature discussions of the will to power and human psychology, it also offers a number of invaluable insights into his philosophical objectives and methodology. We see this most distinctly at the aforementioned crescendo of Nietzsche's critique of the supposed "prejudices of the philosophers," where his psychology of the will to power emerges as the alleged "path to the fundamental problems" (BGE 23). And although Nietzsche chooses to leave his reader in some suspense regarding what fundamental problems he means for his psychology to engage, I take it that the passages just considered provide us with more than enough reason to conclude that the problem of human excellence is intended to be one of the most important among them.

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[136] One should also note that the account that Nietzsche goes on to give of the opposition between his own ideal and that of the "taste…and virtue of the time" indicates, once again, that it is his psychology that provides, for him, the 'path' to this fundamental problem. While he claims that supposedly "nothing is as timely as weakness of the will… in the philosopher's ideal, therefore, precisely strength of the will, hardness and the capacity for long-range decisions [or resolutions] [Stärke des Willens, Härte und Fähigkeit zu langen Entschliessungen]" determine "the concept of 'greatness'" (BGE 212).
The connection between strength of will or power and what is called, here, "the capacity for long-range decisions" is a topic that Nietzsche later expands upon in the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, with his account of the "sovereign individual" whose "right" or capacity to make and fulfill promises is said to stem from a strength of will which enables one to overcome external or internal impediments to one's resolutions—"this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate" (BGE 212, GM II 2).

[137] See also EH 'Beyond' 2.

[138] Naturally, one will find Nietzsche exemplifying this model of the 'genuine philosopher,' himself, in the five focused examinations of life-enhancement that appear in *Beyond Good and Evil*, as well as in his four discussions of the associated notion of human greatness (BGE 23, 44, 56, 225, 257, 262; and 44, 212, 241, 262). In each of these discussions, it should be noted that it is Nietzsche's *psychological* insights that lead him to question prevailing moral standards—particularly, the moral opposition to suffering—and, it is subsequently on the basis of these psychological challenges, or 'vivisections' as Nietzsche would call them, that he offers what is cast as a superior ideal.

3.3 *Human excellence as the realization of one's nature*

While many of Nietzsche's concise descriptions of his ideal reveal an underlying connection between his conception of human excellence and his psychology of the will to power, they leave much to be explained. In the following, I would like to examine this connection more closely. On the interpretation I will be defending, Nietzsche makes his psychology the foundation of his account of human excellence insofar as he conceives of excellence as the *realization of one's nature*, where one's nature is understood to consist in one's distinctive set of drives.

Now Nietzsche signals to his reader that he conceives of human excellence as the realization of one's nature in more ways than it would be useful to address. Hence, I have chosen to focus on what I take to be one of the more illuminating indications to this effect. This is found in the numerous discussions, scattered throughout Nietzsche's published and unpublished writings, in which he portrays his ideal as the *enhancement of human life* or *of the type, 'man*.' In the course of my analysis of this notion, it will be necessary to consider how it is that Nietzsche conceives of the 'nature' of an individual and the way in which this sets his account of human excellence apart from other accounts of excellence that place a similar emphasis on the realization of one's nature.

After establishing that Nietzsche understands human excellence as the realization of one's nature, where one's nature is understood to consist in one's distinctive drive set, I will then argue that it is his psychology of the will to power that provides the basis for his account of the *realization* of one's drives, and that it is, in this way, that his psychology serves as the foundation for his account of human excellence.

3.3.1 *The enhancement of life*

In several of the passages from *Beyond Good and Evil* that I cited as evidence of Nietzsche's commitment to the problem of human excellence, we found him characterizing his ideal as the *enhancement of human life*. This was observed, for instance, in the section in which he portrays the so-called 'genuine philosophers' as iconoclasts, driven by the knowledge "of a *new* greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement" (BGE 212). Among the many other reflections on this notion throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*, life-enhancement notably takes center stage in the opening section of Nietzsche's final chapter, "*What is Noble* [*Vornehm*]," where he defends at length the hypothesis that "every enhancement of the type 'man' has so far been the work of an aristocratic society" (BGE 257). Altogether, the 'enhancement of life' is addressed in five different sections throughout this work, making it one of Nietzsche's most common ways of representing his ideal.[139, 140]

Although many of the terms that Nietzsche uses to refer to his ideal, such as 'greatness,' 'nobility,' and 'splendor,' do rather little, in themselves, to elucidate his conception of human excellence, his discussions of 'the enhancement of human life' or of its 'type,' are considerably more informative insofar as they enable us to distinguish what I take to be the two basic components of his conception. Specifically, by examining what Nietzsche means by 'human life' and 'enhancement' in these discussions, one can identify how he conceives of what might be called the material and formal components of human excellence, respectively. By the *material component* of excellence, I mean the particular features of an individual that must be developed

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[139] BGE 23, 44, 212, 225, 257, see also HH WS 220, GS 377, A 43, EH 'Dawn' 2.

[140] Indeed, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, it is surpassed in frequency only by references to a "higher type of man [der höheren Art von Menschen]" and other similar applications of the metaphor of "height" to humanity, which occur fourteen times throughout *Beyond Good and Evil* (See BGE 6, 30, 41, 62, 72, 203, 212, 220, 221, 256, 258, 269, 274, 282). It should be mentioned, however, that Kaufmann uses the word "enhancement" as a translation for at least three separate German words: "Erhöhung," "Vergrösserung," and "gesteigert" (BGE 4, 212, 44). I will discuss each of these in §3.3.1.3.

or transformed in some way for excellence to be achieved.[141] Nietzsche sometimes describes this as the 'raw material' or "creature in man" that is molded through some process of self-development.[142] The *formal component* of excellence, on the other hand, consists in the specific 'mold' or condition[143] that, when imposed upon the aforementioned features, makes an individual excellent.[144]

In the following, I will explain in turn how each of these components are revealed through Nietzsche's discussions of the enhancement of human life, arguing that, taken together, they constitute a conception of human excellence as the *realization of one's nature*, where one's nature is understood, more precisely, as the particular set of drives of which individuals are allegedly composed.

[141] Some might take the task of identifying the 'material component' of excellence to be trivial; it might be expected that on any account of excellence, this role will be filled simply by the human individual. However, it should be noted that while accounts of human excellence may present excellence as a *property of* the individual, they often sdisagree over the specific features that, when suitably developed or altered, make or constitute his or her excellence: to list just a few of the different ways in which the material component of excellence has been specified, Epicurus identifies it with one's experiences of 'pleasure' and 'pain;' whereas Plato construes it as an individual's beliefs (specifically those regarding the form of the good); Aristotle represents it as the human function, or rational activity; and Spinoza, as one's 'conatus.'

[142] D 212, GS 215, BGE 225, GM II 17, 18, EH 'Thus' 8, KSA 12:5[64], 12:2[76], 13:14[8], 12:2[66].

[143] Nietzsche typically uses more figurative words like, 'style,' 'mold,' 'form,' or 'shape,' which allude to his metaphor of self-development as a kind of artistry (GS 390, BGE 225, KSA 13:14[170]).

[144] One can find Nietzsche conceiving of self-development in terms of the kind of matter-form distinction that I have proposed here in a late section from *Beyond Good and Evil* in which he criticizes those philosophical accounts of "the value of things" which give primary importance to "pleasure and pain," and seek to "*abolish suffering*" to whatever extent possible: "In man creature and creator are united: in man there is material, fragment, excess, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in man there is also creator, form-giver, hammer hardness, spectator divinity, and seventh day: do you understand this contrast? And that your pity is for the 'creature in man,' for what must be formed, broken, forged, tom, burnt, made incandescent, and purified—that which necessarily must and should suffer?" (BGE 225).

3.3.1.1 *Life as one's nature*

In Nietzsche's various accounts of life-enhancement, a conception of the material component of excellence can be identified by considering what it is that the enhancement of life is supposed to enhance.[145] Of course, if 'life' [Leben] was the only answer offered by these accounts, there would be very little to say here, as 'life' is a highly ambiguous term, which might refer to any of a wide variety of phenomena, including a person's character, actions, and/or the context in which these are set. Fortunately, Nietzsche employs at least four other, more precise terms in *Beyond Good and Evil* alone to specify the material on which he takes life-enhancement to be focused: these include, one's "life-will [Lebens-Wille]," "man" "the species 'man' [Species 'Mensch']," and, most often, "the type 'man' [Typus 'Mensch']" (BGE 23, 44, 44, 203, 225, 212, 257).[146]

The ambiguity that arises with Nietzsche's references to 'life' is lessened considerably when he talks instead of the enhancement of 'man [Mensch]' or of one's 'life-will [Lebens-Wille]' as this suggests that he means to concentrate on certain features of one's internal character rather than on one's actions or context.[147] When he then refers to the '*species* [*die Species*/*Art*],'[148] or '*type* [*Typus*]' 'man [Mensch],' we see that the material on which life-

[145] In other words, I take it that the material component of excellence and that of life-enhancement are the same for Nietzsche.
[146] See also BGE 62, KSA 12:10[159], 13:14[182].
[147] This reading is also reflected in an unpublished note from 1887 in which Nietzsche represents his ideal as that of a "*higher form of being* [*höhere Form zu sein*]" (KSA 12:10[17]).
[148] It should be noted that while 'species' may commonly refer to a broad, technically defined, class of organisms, it can also be used more loosely to mean, 'type,' and so encompass categories that may or may have any relation to biological taxonomy. Nietzsche appears to use 'species [Species]' mostly in the latter, loose sense. For instance, he speaks of the "species [Species]" of evil people "who are happy," "the whole European and American species [Species] of *libres penseurs*," and "the species [Species] of moral masturbators and 'self-gratifiers'" among others (BGE 39, EH 'Untimely' 2, GM III 14). Another relevant example comes from a late, unpublished note in which Nietzsche writes that a "[morally] virtuous man is a lower species [Species] because he is not a 'person' but acquires his value by conforming his to a pattern of man [Schema Mensch] that is fixed once and for all" (KSA 12:10[85], see also BGE 262). Also worth considering is a note in which Nietzsche appears to deny the relevance of the more technical, biological notion of 'species' to questions concerning the human good. He claims (erroneously, it seems) that biologists are wrong to think of the 'species,' presumably in *their* sense of the term, as a central locus of

enhancement is intended to focus encompasses, more specifically, those features which *define* or *are essential to* a person's[149] internal character—that which constitutes one's 'type'—, and this would seem to be appropriately termed, one's *nature*.[150]

Looking beyond Nietzsche's terminology, one can find further support for this reading in his first discussion of the enhancement of human life in *Beyond Good and Evil*, which just so happens to coincide with the earlier mentioned presentation of his psychology of the will to power as the "path to the fundamental problems" (BGE 23). Just after introducing this new conception of psychology, Nietzsche very briefly turns to the question of how human life, so conceived, might be enhanced. He offers, here, a partial and preliminary answer, asserting that insofar as his psychology could show that both the "'good' and the 'wicked' drives" are "life-conditioning affects [lebenbedingende Affekte]"[151] and "factors which, fundamentally and *essentially*, must be present in the general economy of life [das im Gesammt-Haushalte des Lebens grundsätzlich und *grundwesentlich* vorhanden sein muss]," it would follow that even the 'wicked' drives must "be further enhanced if life is to be further enhanced [folglich noch gesteigert werden muss, falls das Leben noch gesteigert werden soll]" (BGE 23, emphasis added).[152] Now the relevance of Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power to the stated indispensability of the 'wicked' drives is not made entirely clear in this section and will need to

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concern: "Basic errors of biologists hitherto: it is not a question of the species but of more powerful individuals" (KSA 12:6[26]).

[149] I have opted to use 'person' rather than 'man' in order to avoid the gendered connotation which is present in the latter but not in the German word 'Mensch' (distinct from 'Mann').

[150] Regarding Nietzsche's understanding of the 'type' of a person as her 'nature,' one should also consider a widely read note entitled "Anti-Darwin" (KSA 13:14[133]). In this section Nietzsche, for some reason, takes Darwinians to promote "the domestication of man" (KSA 13:14[133]). And against their supposed contention that "the effect of domestication can become profound, even fundamental," he argues that its effect has only been superficial "when it has not produced degeneration," since "everything that eludes the hand and discipline of man returns almost at once to its natural state [Natur-Zustand]. The type remains constant: one cannot 'dénaturer la nature' [Der Typus bleibt constant: man kann nicht 'dénaturer la nature']" (KSA 13:14[133]).

[151] Kaufman translates "lebenbedingende Affekte" as simply "life conditions," however, this seems needlessly imprecise.

[152] See also BGE 257.

be examined more closely later on.[153] But beneath this specific point, one should note Nietzsche's general equation of the enhancement of 'life' with the enhancement of that which *conditions one's life* [*lebenbedingende*] or of that which *is essential* [*grundwesentlich*] *to the general economy of life*; for with this move, he again indicates that one enhances one's life through the enhancement of what would seem to be best described as one's *nature* (BGE 23).[154, 155]

It is worth noting that this equation of the material component of excellence with one's *nature* does not begin in *Beyond Good and Evil*. It can arguably be traced back to Nietzsche's account of self-creation in *The Gay Science*, published four years earlier. In a section entitled "*One thing is needful*," he writes,

> To 'give style' to one's character—a great a rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weakness of their nature [seine Natur an Kräften und Schwächen] and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. (GS 290)

As with his account of life-enhancement, it is the essential features of one's character that are said to be molded through this form of self-development. And although Nietzsche might not refer to this process as a kind of '*enhancement*,' he does idealize its outcome, claiming shortly after this passage that "strong and domineering natures [starken, herrschsüchtigen Naturen]" will achieve "their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection [Gebundenheit und Vollendung]

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[153] He does, however, claim that this hypothesis "is far from being the strangest and most painful in this immense and almost new domain of dangerous insights" (BGE 23). For a more developed discussion of Nietzsche's view that his psychology of the will to power entails the indispensability of the 'wicked' drives, one should consider an unpublished note, penned a few year later, in which he argues that "there are *only* immoral intentions and actions" insofar as the "so-called moral ones" stem from the same root as those we deem immoral: "the derivation of all affects from the one will to power: the same essence" (KSA 12:10[57]).

[154] See also BGE 62.

[155] Nietzsche's use the word *Gesammt-Haushalte*, which is translated here as "general economy," is particularly telling, as 'Haushalte' typically refers to the 'economy' of a *household*, which, when metaphorically applied to human life, would seem to denote one's *internal character*. And by focusing, moreover, on that which is *fundamental* or *essential* to one's 'household economy,' Nietzsche appears to narrow in on one's *nature*—understood as the essential aspects of one's internal character (BGE 23, see also KSA 12:10[21]).

under a law of their own" (GS 290).[156] Hence, it seems reasonable to infer that Nietzsche's later account of the enhancement of one's 'type' is intended to build on this earlier account of the molding of one's *nature*.

3.3.1.2 *The diversity of types*

At this point, we should take a moment to note the way in which Nietzsche's idea of the 'type' or 'nature' of an individual—which I have identified as the material component of his conception of human excellence—differs in certain significant respects from the more conventional notion of 'human nature.' Whereas 'human nature' is often understood as a defining essence that roughly all humans share in common with one another, if not quite the set of features that define humanity, Nietzsche's notion of an individual's 'type' or 'nature' is meant to be far more specific, distinguishing particular groups of humans and even individuals from one another. In fact, Nietzsche holds that the idea of a universal 'human nature' or 'human type' is of little use, if not entirely erroneous, and should be replaced by the recognition of distinct intra-species types.

One will most often find this view employed as a premise in Nietzsche's argument against the imposition of certain moral standards onto all of humanity. A widely-read example of this occurs in a section from *Twilight of the Idols,* in which Nietzsche asks his reader to consider how "naïve it is to say 'this is the way people *should* be!'" when "reality shows us an abundance of types [Typen], a lavish profusion of forms in change and at play" (TI 'Morality' 6). The moralist is subsequently described as someone who vainly attempts to have people remade "in [his] own image" or according to his own, idiosyncratic type—a task which Nietzsche takes to be

[156] See also GS 335.

both impossible given the indomitable diversity of human types and harmful to the extent that it leads people to condemn themselves (TI 'Morality' 60).[157]

Another, in many ways more engaging discussion of this theme is presented in a lesser-known section from *The Gay Science*, entitled "*The greatest advantage of polytheism*" (GS 143). Nietzsche speculates, here, that gods were first posited in earlier societies for the sake of exemplifying the personal ideals of their originators. This being so, he reasons that belief in the existence of numerous gods, with their own distinctive characters, reflects an admirable recognition of and respect for the diversity of human types and of the distinct ideals appropriate to each. Polytheistic religions are said to have "permitted [one] to behold a *plurality of norms*; one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him," and it was, supposedly, in this way "that the luxury of individuals was first permitted; it was here that one first honored the rights of individuals" (GS 143).

The rise of monotheistic religions, on the other hand, marked a turn away from this recognition of human diversity. In its place was set the erroneous "doctrine of one normal human type" reflected in "the faith in one normal god beside whom there are only pseudo-gods" (GS 143). Nietzsche claims that this belief in "one normal type and ideal," which became a central presupposition of traditional morality, was "perhaps the greatest danger that has yet confronted humanity" insofar as it has threatened the species with a kind of "premature stagnation [vorzeitige Stillstand]"—presumably by discouraging the development or growth of those individuals whose distinctive 'type' or 'nature' is not represented by the prevailing ideal (GS 143).[158] A helpful continuation of these various points is offered in an unpublished note, written several years later,

[157] See also KSA 13:14[113].
[158] See also KSA 11:27[17]-[18].

> The will to a single morality is… a tyranny over other types by that type whom this single morality fits: it is a destruction and leveling for the sake of the ruling type… The demand for 'humanization' (which quite naively believes itself to possess the formula for 'what is human?') is a tartuffery, behind which a quite definite type of man seeks to attain domination. (KSA 12:9[173])

Given these sorts of arguments, which we find repeated throughout Nietzsche's philosophical career, one should resist the temptation to conclude that when Nietzsche frames his own ideal as the "enhancement of the type 'man' [Typus 'Mensch']," he means to suggest that there is some universal human essence, or type, of which his ideal is intended to be an enhancement.[159] Rather, Nietzsche's persistent rejection of the doctrine of "one normal type and ideal" should make it clear that on his account it would be the features that define one as a *particular* type of individual that are enhanced; as he puts this in *The Gay Science*, "we… *want to become those we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give laws to themselves, who create themselves" (GS 143, 335).[160,161]

Nevertheless, Nietzsche's numerous references to "the type, 'man'" in *Beyond Good and Evil* admittedly obscure this point and might even lead one to question whether he at some point abandoned the individualism just noted in the previous passages. This suspicion can be put to rest, however, by considering a discussion of the development of great individuals that appears in the final chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche makes it quite apparent that he still intends to incorporate his recognition of the diversity of human types in his conception of the enhancement of human life.

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[159] Reginster appears to interpret these phrases in this way in his discussion of Nietzsche's "ethical elitism" in *The Affirmation of Life*, despite noting, later on in the same chapter, that Nietzsche believes that there are "different 'physiological' types of human beings" who "create different moral codes" designed to favor their specific interests (Reginster (2006), pp. 263-264, 198).

[160] See also KSA 13:14[113].

[161] I will discuss this point at greater length in §4.3.

This section begins with an analogy to breeding and the conditions under which variation can arise within a species,

> A *species* [Art][162] comes to be, a type [Typus] becomes fixed and strong, through the long fight with essentially constant *unfavorable* conditions. Conversely, we know from the experience of breeders that species accorded superabundant nourishment [Ernährung] and quite generally extra protection and care soon tend most strongly toward variations of the type and become rich in marvels and monstrosities (including monstrous vices). (BGE 262)

Nietzsche sees the former tendency, towards the formation of relatively stable 'types,' illustrated in certain aristocratic commonwealths, such as those of "the ancient Greek *polis* or Venice," where an unusually high degree of interdependence was required among the ruling class to avoid "the risk of being exterminated" (BGE 262). "That boon, that excess, that protection which favor variations are lacking," as the ruling class is supposedly forced to preserve itself through its "very hardness, uniformity, and simplicity of form," which is said to manifest in strict educational practices, gender roles, inter-generational relations, marriage customs, and penal laws, which "take into account deviants only" (BGE 262).

If for some reason the ruling class's situation should become more secure, however, Nietzsche claims that this protective uniformity will quickly subside, and "variation" will flourish in "the greatest abundance and magnificence [Fülle und Pracht]; the individual dares to be individual and different [sich abzuheben]" (BGE 262). The description that Nietzsche proceeds to offer of this new growth of individuals demonstrates quite clearly the extent to which he retains the individualistic conception of human types, and thus of excellence, noted in *The Gay Science*,

> At these turning points of history we behold beside one another, and often mutually involved and entangled, a splendid, manifold, jungle growth and upward striving, a kind of *tropical* tempo in the competition to grow, and a tremendous ruin and self-ruination, as

[162] Kaufmann appears to have translated '*Art*' as 'species' here, so as to emphasize its distinction from the word '*Typus.*'

> savage egoisms that have turned, almost exploded against one another wrestle 'for sun and light' and no longer derive any limit, restraint, or consideration from their previous morality. It was this morality itself that dammed up such enormous strength and bent the bow in such a threatening manner; now it is 'outlived.' The dangerous and uncanny point has been reached where the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life transcends and lives *beyond* the old morality; the 'individual' appears, obliged to give himself laws and develop his own arts and wiles for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption [zu eigenen Künsten und Listen der Selbst-Erhaltung, Selbst-Erhöhung, Selbst-Erlösung]. (BGE 262).

The enhancement of life is thus depicted in this lyrical passage as a kind of "self-enhancement [Selbst-Erhöhung]" tailored to the particularities of the "individual" who undertakes a "greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life" by means of his own 'laws,' 'arts,' and 'wiles' (BGE 262).

One of the reasons that it is important to acknowledge the way in which Nietzsche's conception of human excellence takes the diversity of human types into account—namely, by making one's particular type the material out of which excellence is forged—is that this is one of the main features that distinguishes his conception from competing accounts of human excellence that place a similar emphasis on the realization of one's nature. It provides an alternative, for instance, to the more recent conceptions developed by philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition, such as G.E.M. Anscombe, Thomas Hurka, Philippa Foot, and Richard Kraut, each of whom derive their accounts of the human good from some general theory of human nature.[163]

In many cases, this approach is based on the unargued assumption that human excellence is a property that must apply to individuals only as *members of a species*. This assumption can be seen, for instance, in Foot's claim that "to flourish" just is "to instantiate the life form of [one's] species, and [therefore] to know whether an individual is or is not as it should be, one must know

[163] Anscombe (1958); Hurka (1996); Foot (2001); Kraut (2007).

the life form of the species."[164] In *Perfectionism*, Hurka actually considers a more individualistic account of human excellence, which he attributes to Rousseau, though it bears a rather striking resemblance to Nietzsche's notion of tailoring one's ideal to the particularities of one's type.[165] Hurka quotes a passage from Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in which he asserts that,

> Aside from the nature common to the species each individual brings with him at birth a distinctive temperament, which determines his spirit and character. There is no question of changing or putting a restraint on this temperament, only of training it and bringing it to perfection.[166]

Hurka grants that such an "individualist ideal might be plausible if each human's genes gave him a unique style of acting, which could be manifested in all he did and could be developed to higher degrees."[167] Yet he summarily rejects this possibility, claiming that to the extent that we observe "unique styles of acting" in certain human individuals, these styles should be considered a purely "cultural [and contingent] matter."[168] However, Hurka offers no defense of the claim that it is only *genetically* determined "styles of acting" that should be considered part of one's nature nor does he present any argument that such genetic distinctions do not exist in the human species.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, takes the diversity of human types to be a matter of common sense—something only the naïve or thoughtlessly self-absorbed could overlook[169]—though, he does argue for this position at times. One such argument appears in an early section from *The Gay Science* entitled "*Health of the soul,*" where he considers a principle, supposedly promoted by the ancient Stoic, Ariston of Chios, according to which "virtue is the health of the

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[164] Foot (2001), p. 91.
[165] Hurka (1996), p. 14.
[166] Ibid., p. 14.
[167] Ibid., p. 15.
[168] Ibid.
[169] See TI 'Morality' 6.

soul" (GS 120). Nietzsche claims that a more plausible formulation of this would be, "*your* virtue is the health of *your* soul" (GS 120). In defense of this amendment, he points to the fact that "there are innumerable healths of the body" evinced, for example, in the fact that there is no "normal diet" nor a "normal course of an illness" (GS 120). This being so, one should expect such variation at the level of one's soul and its excellence as well. Nietzsche thus concludes that one should "find the peculiar virtue [eigenthümliche Tugend] of each man in the health of his soul," while recognizing that "in one person… this health could look like its opposite in another person" (GS 120).[170]

Of course, one could question the analogy on which this argument depends—that is, one could question whether there is any good reason to believe that the body is relevantly similar to one's psychological constitution. One way of defending the analogy, which would be available to Nietzsche along with many other psychological naturalists, would be to deny any principled distinction between bodily and psychological functions, holding that the latter are merely a subset of the former. Nietzsche asserts such a view, himself, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, among other places: "I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body" (TSZ 4). If this is granted, then it would seem reasonable to infer that insofar as the relatively simpler bodily functions that make up, for instance, our digestive system, differ in quite significant ways among people, specifically with regard to what constitutes their healthy functioning state, then it is probable that the vastly more complex and interdependent bodily functions that produce our psychological life would differ at least as much, if not more so.

[170] See also HH I 287, 376, KSA 12:7[6].

Nietzsche's individualistic conception of one's nature thus provides a compelling point of departure from competing accounts of human excellence that equate excellence with the realization of some universally shared human essence. But now that it has been established that Nietzsche conceives of the enhancement of one's life as the enhancement of one's *particular nature*, we should consider what exactly he takes one's nature to consist in. Once this is understood, we will then be ready to examine the sort of 'enhancement' of one's nature that Nietzsche means to promote.

3.3.1.3 *The innermost drives of one's nature*

When Nietzsche equates the enhancement of life with the enhancement of that which is essential to the "general economy of life" at the conclusion of chapter one in *Beyond Good and Evil*, one will recall that he includes certain drives, vaguely described as 'good' and 'wicked,' in this 'economy' (BGE 23).[171] In the following, I would like to argue that Nietzsche takes the particular drives of an individual to be, moreover, the *sole* constituents of her nature, and that it is therefore one's drives that, according to him, constitute the material component of human excellence. There are three sources of evidence that I will consider in support of this reading: the first comes from a series of unpublished notes, in which Nietzsche equates one's nature with one's 'animal functions,' and these functions, in turn, with one's drives; the second, is found in his various published accounts of the nature of the self; and the third arises in an early discussion of self-development from *Daybreak*.

In a note, written two years after the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche hones his conception of the 'nature' that is to be enhanced on his ideal of human excellence.

[171] See also BGE 201.

Drawing attention to the "tremendous multiplicity of events within an organism," he distinguishes one's conscious life—"all our beautiful moods [Zustände] and heights of consciousness"—from what he refers to as one's "animal functions" (KSA 13:11[83]). The activities of one's consciousness are said to be inessential, a "surplus [überschuß]" or "small accessory [ein kleines Zubehör]," "except when they have to serve as tools of those animal functions," which are "as a matter of principle, a million times more important" (KSA 13:11[83]). As tools, conscious phenomena are said to labor "in the service of the greatest possible perfection [Vervollkommnung]… of the basic animal functions' [animalischen Grundfunktionen]:"[172] a task that Nietzsche subsequently describes as "the *enhancement of life* [*Lebenssteigerung*]"[173] (KSA 13:11[83]).[174] Hence, Nietzsche once again presents that which he takes to be *essential* to a person—that is, one's *nature*—as the material on which life-enhancement is focused. And this nature is construed here as a complex of "animal functions," which supposedly provides the directing force to which all else within an organism serves as a means (KSA 13:11[83]).[175]

Of course, Nietzsche's talk of the enhancement of humanity's '*animal functions*' is still rather vague; though some clarity is gained through his exclusion of the individual's "*conscious*

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[172] I have truncated this passage, which originally reads: "The entire *conscious* life, the spirit along with the soul, the heart, goodness, and virtue—in whose service do they labor? In the service of the greatest possible perfection of the means (means of nourishment, means of enhancement) of the basic animal functions: above all, the enhancement of life" (KSA 13:11[83]). Nietzsche's language is admittedly imprecise, however, I take it that, on the most straightforward interpretation of this passage, he is saying that our conscious life serves as a means to the perfection of the animal functions, and that their perfection constitutes the enhancement of life. It's worth mentioning that this reading of the passage is also adopted by Lester Hunt in *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue*, who notes as well that Nietzsche's "wording is not very clear here" (Hunt [1991], p. 100).

[173] In another note, written sometime between 1886 and 1887, Nietzsche draws out an implication of this reversal of the traditional priority of reason over the passions. He claims that while "the most logical and coldest thinking" has often been considered to be "of the *first* rank," if the value of thinking is instead measured "in regard to release of will" it may well be that "the most superficial, most superficial thinking" would turn out to be "the most useful" (KSA 12:5[68]).

[174] See also KSA 13:11[74], 13:11[145].

[175] See also KSA 12:9[102], GS 368.

life" from the functions he equates here with one's nature (KSA 13:11[83]).[176] In a similar note from the same year,[177] entitled, "*The role of 'consciousness,*'" Nietzsche presents yet a further refinement of his conception of one's nature, characterizing its basic constituents in more ordinary terms (KSA 13:11[145]). One's "consciousness" is portrayed, again, as an inessential means or "organ of" an underlying "directing agent [die Leitung]" (KSA 13:11[145]). However, this time, the essential "directing agent" is specified as a "directing committee [leitendes Comité]" of "the various *chief desires* [*Hauptbegierden*]," whose verdicts are allegedly reflected in the individual's experiences of "'pleasure,' [and] 'displeasure,'" "acts of will," and "ideas" (KSA 13:11[145]). The implication would seem to be that it is one's *drives* that constitute one's nature, and, therefore, one's *drives* that serve as the material on which life-enhancement is focused.[178]

This way of construing the basic constituents of one's nature is in no way limited to Nietzsche's unpublished manuscripts; it can also be found in the many published passages, considered in the previous chapter,[179] in which Nietzsche asserts that persons are fundamentally constituted by their drives or by a ruling subset of their drives. Such a view was first noted in the section from *Daybreak* that examined the drives' creative influence over one's experiences.[180]

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[176] One might also observe Nietzsche's comment, in the subsequent paragraph, that "one used to call" these essential animal functions, "'body' and 'flesh'" (KSA 10:24[16]).

[177] Indeed, these notes fall sometime within a five month span of each other (November, 1887–March, 1888)—a period which begins with the publication of the *Genealogy of Morals.*

[178] More evidence in favor of this interpretation of Nietzsche's conception of the individual's 'animal functions' can be found in the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, in which Nietzsche makes several references to humanity's "animal soul," "ancient animal self," and "*the animal* in man" (GM II 16, 18, 23). The referent of these various terms becomes clear near the end of this essay, where he concludes an analysis of the role of guilt in the early development of religion. Nietzsche speculates that "*beneath*" this development lies a kind of masochism: "that will to self-tormenting, that repressed cruelty of the animal-man [Thiermenschen] made inward and scared back into itself" (GM II 22). The target of the individual's self-torment is said to be "his nature, naturalness, and actuality," which Nietzsche equates at one point with the individual's "own ineluctable animal *instincts* [Thier-*Instinkten*]" (GM II 22, emphasis added).

[179] See §2.2.2.

[180] See §2.2.2.1.

Nietzsche began this section by claiming that one's "being [Wesen]"—which could also be translated as one's 'nature'—is composed of the "totality of [one's] *drives*" (D 119). The same general account is expressed on a number of occasions throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*. It first arises when Nietzsche claims that a philosopher's 'morality' "bears decided and decisive witness to *who he is*—that is, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other [in welcher Rangordnung die innersten Triebe seiner Natur zu einander gestellt sind]" (BGE 6).[181] We see it again, just a few sections later, when Nietzsche's proposes a reconception of the 'soul' or 'psyche': "such conceptions as a 'mortal soul,' 'soul as subjective multiplicity,' and 'soul as *social structure* [Gesellschaftsbau] of *the drives and affects*,' want henceforth to have citizens' rights [Bürgerrecht] in science" (BGE 12, emphasis added).

The last piece of textual evidence that should be considered concerning Nietzsche's conception of one's nature, and, thus, of the material component of human excellence, can be found in an account of self-development presented in a rarely discussed section from *Daybreak*, entitled "*What we are at liberty to do*" (D 560). Nietzsche takes aim, here, at the "doctrine of the unchangeability of character [der Unveränderlichkeit des Charakters]"—a doctrine which he almost certainly associates with Schopenhauer though he does not mention a source (D 560).[182] The section outlines the variety of ways in which an individual is "at liberty" to develop her character, and what is especially noteworthy for our purposes, is the way in which Nietzsche depicts self-development as a process whose sole medium is the individual's drives.

> One can dispose of one's drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis; one can do it with the good or bad taste of a gardener and, as it were, in the French or English or Dutch or Chinese fashion; one can also let nature rule and only attend to a little embellishment and tidying-up here and there; one can, finally, without paying any attention to them at all, let the plants grow up and fight their fight out among

[181] See also BGE 187.
[182] See Schopenhauer BM, p. 110.

> themselves - indeed, one can take delight in such a wilderness, and desire precisely this delight, though it gives one some trouble, too. All this we are at liberty to do: but how many know we are at liberty to do it? (D 560).[183]

Nietzsche, thus, depicts the development of oneself as the development, in some way or other, of one's *drives*. And one's drives are, correspondingly, presented as the basic constituents of one's *nature*; for to the extent that they can be thus manipulated, Nietzsche encourages his readers to reject the idea that their "*character* [*Charakter*]" is fixed[184] or that they amount to "*fully-developed facts* [*vollendete ausgewachsene Thatsachen*]" (D 560).[185]

So in both Nietzsche's unpublished and published writings, we find him conceiving of the nature of an individual as a complex of drives. And insofar as he depicts the enhancement of life as the enhancement of one's particular nature or 'type,' it is, therefore, one's distinctive drive-set that, for him, constitutes what I have referred to as the material component of human excellence.

3.3.1.4 *Enhancement as realization*

With this first component of Nietzsche's conception of excellence spelled out more precisely, we can now turn to an examination of its formal component: that is, again, the specific condition that, when imposed on the material component—in this case, an individual's drives—,

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[183] There may appear to be some tension between this account of self-development as the manipulation of one's drives and Nietzsche's aforementioned claim that it is one's "chief desires" which serve as the "directing agent" of an individual (KSA 13:11[145]). I will discuss this issue at length in the following chapter.

[184] This passage presents a serious challenge to Brian Leiter's claim, in *Nietzsche on Morality*, that Nietzsche accepts what Leiter refers to as the "Doctrine of Types": "Each person has a fixed psycho-physical constitution, which defines him as a particular *type* of person" (Leiter [2002], p. 8). Leiter briefly discusses this passage in his article "*The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche*" (Leiter [1998], pp. 250-251).

[185] It is also telling that Nietzsche employs the metaphor of vegetative growth in this drive-centered discussion of self-development, as this metaphor is similarly employed in several of his examinations of the notion of life-enhancement. For instance, in a previously mentioned section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, the challenge of identifying "serves the enhancement of the species 'man'" is said to begin with the question of "where and how the plant 'man' has so far grown most vigorously to a height" (BGE 44, see also KSA 11:27[59]).

enables or constitutes the achievement of excellence. Just as we were able to identify the material component by considering what exactly Nietzsche means by 'life' in his discussions of the 'enhancement of life,' so too can we identify the formal component by examining what he means by 'enhancement.'

Now as with the term 'life,' 'enhancement' is a rather uninformative word, suggesting little more than the idea of 'improvement' or of an increase in value. Hence, many different and, indeed, fundamentally incompatible things could be meant by the 'enhancement of one's nature.' Some might see this as a facilitating process, whereby an individual enables his nature to better achieve its own original ends, while others might construe it in a more revisionary way, as the imposition of entirely new ends on one's character.[186] Much of this ambiguity can be eliminated, however, by looking to the particular German terms that Nietzsche actually employs in his various discussions of what Kaufmann chooses to translate uniformly as the '*enhancement*' of human life. Three words recur most often—*steigern* [or *Steigerung*], *Erhöhung*, and *Vergrösserung*.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'steigern' is the most commonly used term for enhancement (BGE 23, 44, 252).[187] It first appears in the concluding section of chapter one, where Nietzsche claims that those "factors which, fundamentally and essentially, must be present in the general economy of life" must be "further enhanced if life is to be further enhanced [folglich noch gesteigert werden muss, falls das Leben noch gesteigert werden soll]" (BGE 23). Nietzsche employs it again in the equally important conclusion of the second chapter, when he writes that

[186] If the latter way of conceiving of the enhancement of one's nature seems unusual, one might consider the way in which the domestication of certain animals is often thought to improve upon their natural dispositions. Indeed, Nietzsche repeatedly uses the metaphor of domestication or 'taming' to refer to the type of 'enhancement' that he means to reject (see KSA 13:14[133]).
[187] See also KSA 13:14[158], and TI 'Skirmishes' 8, 10.

the "life-will" of his proto-exemplars "had to be enhanced into an unconditional power-will [sein Lebens-Wille bis zum unbedingten Macht-Willen gesteigert werden musste]" (BGE 44).[188]

While 'steigern' certainly implies the idea of improvement in these contexts, it suggests more than this—namely, an improvement involving the *increasing*, *heightening*, or *amplification* of that which is improved. This connotation is also present when Nietzsche uses the term, 'Erhöhung,' a derivative of the German word for 'height [höhe]': we see this, for instance, when he writes that "the discipline of *great* suffering… has created all enhancements of man [alle Erhöhungen des Menschen] so far" (BGE 225).[189] The same basic meaning is suggested by 'Vergrösserung' as well, when he speaks of "a new untrodden way to [the] enhancement [of man] [einen neuen ungegangenen Weg zu seiner Vergrösserung]" (BGE 212). Nietzsche's use of these more precise terms for enhancement indicates that when he addresses the 'enhancement of life,' he means to be referring to some kind of beneficial *amplification* of one's nature. But what exactly this amounts to is far from obvious and little is offered by way of clarification in the majority of these discussions.

Further insight can be gained, however, by considering the sorts of states that Nietzsche contrasts with the 'enhancement' of life. One such contrast is presented in the concluding section of *Beyond Good and Evil*'s sixth chapter, "*On the Natural History of Morals*." Nietzsche takes a moment here to describe the perspective of those who, like himself, realize "what, given a favorable accumulation and increase[190] of forces and tasks [einer günstigen Ansammlung und Steigerung von Kräften und Aufgaben], might yet *be made of man,*" and who nevertheless see the opposite ideal being advanced in their own time, due mostly to the influence of 'modern

[188] See also KSA 11:37[8].
[189] See also BGE 257.
[190] Kaufmann uncharacteristically, but more precisely in my view, translates Steigerung as 'increase' rather than 'enhance' here.

ideas' and "Christian-European morality" (BGE 203). The way that Nietzsche characterizes this contrasting ideal is, for the most part, unsurprising given its status as the antipode of his ideal of *amplification*: the former is said to promote the "diminution [Verkleinerung] of man, making him mediocre [Vermittelmässigung]," and turning him into a kind of "dwarf animal [Zwergthiere]" (BGE 203).[191]

But in addition to presenting a dichotomy, here, between the ideals of amplification and of diminution, Nietzsche offers a further point of clarification regarding the specific sort of diminution he has in mind. He describes it, repeatedly, as a form of "decay [Verfalls]" and, more often, as "*degeneration* [*Entartung*]"—giving added emphasis to the latter term on two separate occasions in the section (BGE 203).[192] Indeed, this section is not at all alone in its use of the notion of degeneration to characterize what is called, here, the modern or Christian-European ideal; the same account is offered throughout *Beyond Good and Evil* and in each of Nietzsche's subsequent works as well.[193]

This clarification of the specific kind of diminution of one's nature that Nietzsche opposes helps to shed light on how he conceives of the kind of amplification that defines his ideal. For to the extent that he conceives of these states as antipodes,[194] by characterizing the former as *degeneration* he implies that the latter is the opposite of this: namely, the *development*,

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[191] See also KSA 12:10[17].

[192] The first example of this emphasis occurs with the claim that "anyone who has the rare eye for the over-all danger that 'man' himself *degenerates* [dass 'der Mensch' selbst *entartet*]… suffers from an anxiety that is past all comparisons"; the second occurs when he writes that "the *over-all degeneration of man* [*Die Gesammt-Entartung des Menschen*] to what today appears to the socialist dolts and flatheads as their 'man of the future'—as their ideal—this degeneration and diminution of man into the perfect herd animal… is *possible*, there is no doubt of it" (BGE 203).

[193] BGE 30, 62, 197, 262, GM P3, III 13, TI 'The Four' 2, 'Skirmishes' 41, A 24, EH 'Birth' 2, 4, 'Dawn' 2, 'Why I Am A' 7, see also KSA 13:15[110], 13:14[111], 13:15[120].

[194] That Nietzsche thinks of these opposed states as, specifically, *antipodes* is evinced, among others ways, by his claim that his ideal rests on "opposite valuations," and thus requires one "to revalue and invert 'eternal values'" BGE 203).

growth, or *realization* of one's nature. This interpretation of the 'amplification' or 'heightening' of one's nature is also suggested earlier on in the section when Nietzsche describes his ideal in terms of *growth*, mentioning the "ways and tests that would enable a soul to grow to such a height and force [vermöge deren eine Seele zu einer solchen Höhe und Gewalt aufwüchse] that it would feel the *compulsion* for… a revaluation of values [Umwerthung der Werthe]" (BGE 203).[195] It should be noted that Nietzsche uses the verb 'aufwachsen' rather than simply 'wachsen' for growth, here; while the latter is used to refer to general increases in extent, the former has a more naturalistic sense,[196] which might be translated as maturation or development (or more literally, 'growing up').[197] Hence, the opposition between Nietzsche's ideal and its antipode is framed in terms of the contrasting states of *growth* and *degeneration*, and, in this, we see that by the 'amplification' of one's nature, he means, more precisely, its development or realization.

There is yet another way in which the opposition between Nietzsche's ideal and its antipode is often characterized which lends perhaps even stronger support to the reading in question. This can be observed in an unpublished note entitled "*Order of rank*," which was written about one year after *Beyond Good and Evil*. The beginning of this note recalls Nietzsche's above-mentioned discussion of the 'good' and 'wicked' drives. He claims that the mediocrity of the "typical man" stems from his failure to appreciate the "necessity for the reverse side of things: that he combats evils as if one could dispense with them" (KSA 12:10[111]). As a

[195] See also BGE 44, 262.
[196] This reading also helps to explain why Nietzsche so often employs the otherwise unusual metaphor of vegetative growth to describe his ideal. We saw this, for instance, in the passage where free spirits are said to be committed to the question "where and how the plant 'man' has so far grown most vigorously to a height"; similar uses of this metaphor can be found throughout Nietzsche's unpublished notes (BGE 44, KSA 11:37[8], 11:27[59], 11:34[74], 12:10[50], 12:9[153], see also GS 87).
[197] For instance, one would use 'wachsen' to say "a crowd is growing [Die Menge wächst]" or "her business grew [Ihre Firma wächst]," whereas 'aufwachsen' would be more appropriate for talking of a child growing up or maturing: "das Kind aufwächst."

result of rejecting certain necessary aspects of their character, Nietzsche asserts that "commonplace men can represent only a tiny nook and corner of this natural character"; consequently, "most men represent pieces and fragments of man: one has to add them up for a complete man to appear" (KSA 12:10[111]).

In contrast with the fragmentary character of this prevailing ideal, Nietzsche's "highest man" is said to represent a comprehensive development of one's nature.

> That with every growth of man, his other side must grow too; that the highest man, if such a concept be allowed, would be the man who represented the antithetical character of existence most strongly… that man must grow better *and* more evil is my formula for this inevitability— (KSA 12:10[111])

Nietzsche goes on to describe this as the ideal of a "synthetic man," whose 'wholeness' sets him apart from the fragmentary existence of his antipodes, the "lower men" (KSA 12:10[111]).[198]

This emphasis on the comprehensive employment of one's nature can also be seen in Nietzsche's several laudatory accounts of Goethe, who stands foremost among Nietzsche's short list of "perfect and well-constituted men" (11:41[6]-[7]). In a section from *Twilight of the Idols*, for instance, one finds Nietzsche endorsing Goethe's conception and embodiment of a higher type of human "who could dare to allow himself the entire expanse and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom" (TI 'Skirmishes' 49).[199] Nietzsche describes this mode of being, here and in other places, as "wholeness," "totality," and "fullness of life" or "of nature"

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[198] This way of conceiving of his ideal can be found as early as 1884, where Nietzsche writes the following: "I teach: that there are higher and lower men, and that a single individual can under certain circumstances justify the existence of whole millennia—that is, *a full, rich, great, whole* human being in relation to countless incomplete fragmentary men [voller, reicher großer, ganzer Mensch in Hinsicht auf zahllose unvollständige Bruchstück-Menschen]" (WP 997, emphasis added). A similar point is made in another note that attacks Schopenhauer's promotion of the 'castration' of rascals. Nietzsche retorts that one should prefer instead that "rascality and folly should increase. In this way human nature would be expanded" (KSA 12:10[104]).

[199] See also KSA 12:9[119]

(TI 'Skirmishes' 59, KSA 12:10[154], 11:25[211]).[200,201] This would seem to suggest that the excellent do not realize only certain aspects of their nature which are, for independent reasons, valuable to their mode of being; rather, it is the realization of their nature as such, which makes them excellent.[202]

Nietzsche thus appears to conceive of human excellence as a condition in which one's nature, or distinctive drive set, is in some sense, realized or fully cultivated. But this might strike some as odd; for what could it mean to *realize* one's drives, other than to merely satisfy their respective ends? Indeed, if one were to conceive of the drives solely in terms of their distinguishing ends, they would not seem to be the sort of phenomena that could be realized in the sense just considered. To explain what exactly Nietzsche has in mind by this, one must turn, at last, to his psychology of the will to power.

3.4 *Self-realization and the will to power*

So far we have identified in Nietzsche's varied discussions of his ideal, an account of human excellence as the realization of the particular set of drives that constitute the nature of an individual. This account is nicely summarized in an unpublished note from 1887, where Nietzsche writes that "the 'great man' is great owing to the free play and scope of his desires and to the yet greater power that knows how to press these magnificent monsters [Unthiere] into service" (KSA 12:9[139]).[203] We see, here, that employing one's drives or nature is not

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[200] See also KSA 12:9[178], 12:9[102], BGE 207, HH I 224, GS 300

[201] I will have much more to say about Nietzsche's conception of 'wholeness' in the following chapter on self-creation (See §4.2).

[202] In a note from 1884, Nietzsche call for a new "courage" or self-assurance in the face of "one's one nature," such that one will no longer require "moral formulas in order to welcome an affect"; he then offers the following, as his "standard: how far we can affirm what is nature in us—how much or how little we need to have recourse to morality" (KSA 12:10[165]).

[203] See also KSA 12:1[122].

something that is held to come ‘naturally’ to an individual; it requires, according to Nietzsche, a certain proficiency and power over oneself. In the next chapter, I will address a specific strategy that he proposes in this regard.

For now, however, we should consider two more basic questions regarding this account of excellence: first, what is meant by the employment or realization of one’s drives?; and, second, how does Nietzsche intend to measure the extent of this realization in different cases, given that he construes excellence as something that, as we will see, admits of degree? Clarifying these two issues will reveal the way in which Nietzsche grounds his account of human excellence in his psychology of the will to power.

3.4.1 *Drive development*

As I suggested earlier, the notion of realizing one’s drives poses certain perplexities. The realization of a drive would seem to involve more than simply the fulfillment of its characteristic end, as one typically thinks of self-realization as a process of development or growth—ideas that are clearly highlighted in Nietzsche’s discussions of the enhancement of human life. Yet the ideas of development and growth do not seem to apply to desires or drives, at least as they are commonly understood.

One might propose that a drive is realized to the extent that its possessor becomes more adept at securing the conditions for its fulfilment. Socrates, for example, could be thought to have further realized a drive for social interaction through learning how to engage his fellow citizens in philosophical discussion. However, the skills thus acquired would seem to belong to the drive’s possessor rather than the drive itself, and, it would therefore be misleading to suggest that the possessor’s *drive* had thereby developed in any way. Hence, a satisfactory account of the

realization of a drive, if one is possible, must identify a form of development that a drive itself can undergo.

Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power supplies the resources to identify such a form of development. To see how, one should first recall that, according to this psychology, one's drives amount to forceful tendencies that independently strive to overcome resistance in the pursuit of their characteristic ends. Drives are thus understood to possess, in addition to their ends, a certain degree of forcefulness or power—understood in terms of the activity of overcoming resistance—, and this power would seem to be something that could be meaningfully developed or further realized to the extent that a drive increases its degree of forcefulness through greater overcomings of resistance.

Indeed, in a number of places, one will find Nietzsche describing drives as capable of growth in precisely this sense. This was already observed, for instance, in his discussion of the drives' influence over one's experiences in *Daybreak*, where he explains how a drive is "nourished" to the extent that it enjoys, through some outlet or other, the "exercise of its strength, or discharge of its strength, or the saturation of an emptiness" (D 119).[204] Given the uneven distribution of this kind of 'strength training' among the drives, Nietzsche claims that "every moment of our lives sees some of the polyp-arms of our being *grow* and others of them wither, all according to the nutriment which the moment does or does not bear with it" (D 119, emphasis added).[205]

Admittedly, Nietzsche does not explicitly state what he means by 'growth' in this context; although he does give some indication, at the start of this section, that he conceives of a drive's growth as the intensification of its force or power when he characterizes the "*drives*

[204] See §2.2.2.1
[205] See also D 109, HH 212, KSA 11:36[22].

which constitute [one's] being [Wesen]" as forces which, apart from being distinguished by their ends, differ from one another in "strength" (D 119).[206,207] One should also note, as we observed earlier,[208] that insofar as Nietzsche conceives of living things as conglomerates of wills to power, he is led to generally characterize growth within the organic world in terms of increases in power (KSA 13:14[174], 12:9[13]). Hence, in a note from 1888, he writes that "it is part of the concept of the living that it must grow—that it must extend its power [seine Macht erweitert]" (KSA 13:14[192]).[209, 210] Thus, drives, as particular manifestations of the will to power within a living thing, would be understood to grow through the heightening of their respective power or strength.[211]

This form of development provides a way of making sense of the idea of realizing one's drives insofar as it is a development that is undergone by the drives themselves, as opposed to their possessors or some other character trait.[212] It also focuses on something other than the mere fulfilment of the drives' characteristic ends by placing decided emphasis on an activity which necessarily *precedes* the state of fulfilment: namely, that of confronting resistance to one's ends. Nietzsche underscores the latter point in a number of his defenses of the value of suffering—a

[206] See also KSA 12:10[133].
[207] He also notably contrasts the growth of a drive with its "wither[ing] [verdorren]" or with it becoming "dull [matt]," which Nietzsche equates, earlier on, with the weakening of a drive (D 119, 109). Elsewhere, he emphasizes the distinction between growth and "exhaustion [Erschöpfung]" (KSA 13:14[158]).
[208] See §1.4.2.1.
[209] See also KSA 13:11[96], 13:14[81]-[82], 13:14[101], 13:14[174], 12:9[13], GS 349, 371, A 6, BGE 230.
[210] One might recall Nietzsche's assertion, in an earlier discussed note, that "there is no will: there are treaty drafts of will [Willens-Punktationen] that are constantly increasing or losing their power" (KSA 13:11[73]).
[211] This reading fits nicely with the account of living things that Nietzsche offers in his late unpublished notes: "the rich and living want victory, opponents overcome, the overflow of the feeling of power across wider domains than hitherto. All healthy functions of the organism have this need—and the whole organism is such a complex of systems struggling for an increase of the feeling of power"; "life is only a *means* to something; it is the expression of forms of the growth of power" (KSA 13:14[174], 12:9[13]).
[212] Of course, for Nietzsche, the drives are not possessed by any substantive self or central agent in the first place, as he denies the existence of the latter kind of entity (See §1.3.).

state of being which, as was pointed out earlier,[213] is tightly associated for him with that of dissatisfaction.

In a late unpublished note, he writes, for instance, that "the normal dissatisfaction of our drives… contains in it absolutely nothing depressing; it works rather as an agitation of the feeling of life, as every rhythm of small, painful stimuli strengthens it" (KSA 13:11[76]). In another note from this same period, what is strengthened by the confrontation with resistance is more precisely identified as the will to power of the force in question: "a force can expend itself only on what resists it, there is necessarily an *ingredient of displeasure* in every action. But this displeasure acts as a lure of life [Reiz des Lebens] and strengthens the will to power" (KSA 13:11[77]).[214] This way of construing the conditions under which drives develop helps to make sense of Nietzsche's otherwise puzzling claim that it is suffering which plays one the most decisive roles in the cultivation of human excellence. Such a view is expressed, for example, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche writes that "the discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering—do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements of man so far?" (BGE 225).[215, 216]

Nietzsche thus conceives of the realization or growth of a drive as a form of development through which a drive increases its power or strength. Hence, by construing the drives as particular manifestations of the will to power, he is able to make sense of the peculiar notion of realization on which his account of human excellence depends.

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[213] See §1.1
[214] See also KSA 13:11[75], 13:14[174].
[215] See also HH 235.
[216] He subsequently describes this discipline as "that tension [Spannung] of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength…" (BGE 225).

3.4.2 *Breadth versus aggregate power*

While the preceding analysis of drive development might seem to supply all one needs to understand Nietzsche's account of human excellence, at least one further issue remains to be clarified. We should begin by noting that Nietzsche often presents his ideal as something that admits of degree. This is apparent in his frequent promotion of the idea of an 'order of rank' among people. We see this, among other places, in *Ecce Homo,* where Nietzsche claims that when he meets a new person, "the first point on which I 'try the reins' ['Nierenprüfe'] is to see whether [he] has a feeling for distance in his system [Gefühl für Distanz im Leibe hat], whether he sees rank, degree, order between man and man everywhere" (EH 'The Case' 4). The awareness of such orders of rank among people is a crucial determinant of one's wisdom and refinement, according to Nietzsche; it is said to distinguish the "*gentilhomme*" from the "*canaille*" who naively place people "on a par" (EH 'The Case' 4).[217]

Nietzsche's commitment to the idea of an order of rank among people suggests that he conceives of human excellence, and, thus, of the realization of one's nature, as something that one achieves to a greater or lesser extent. This raises the question of what, for him, determines the degree to which one's nature is realized. One appealing option would be to determine this by the *breadth* of an individual's self-realization; in other words, one's rank could be determined by either the number or percentage of one's drives that have been successfully developed or empowered. This might seem to be what Nietzsche has in mind when he advocates pressing one's various drives into service or when he presents his ideal mode of being as a kind of "totality" (KSA 12:1[122], 11:27[59], 12:9[178], 12:10[5]). However, in numerous places, Nietzsche states that it is, rather, the *aggregate power* of an individual, or of the particular drives

[217] See also BGE 221, 228, 263, KSA 12:7[6].

which constitute her nature, that determines her rank, and it is clear that he takes this standard to be distinct from one that promotes developing the greatest number or percentage of one's drives.

The view that one's rank is determined by one's *aggregate power* is plainly asserted throughout Nietzsche's unpublished notes: "What determines rank, sets off rank, is only quanta of power"; "Order of rank as order of power"; "What determines your rank is the quantum of power you are" (WP 855, KSA 12:2[131], 13:11[36]).[218] This standard is also suggested, among other places, in the preface to the *Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche famously proposes that "precisely, morality would be to blame if the *highest power and splendor* actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained" (GM P 6).[219]

Now, according to Nietzsche, achieving the greatest aggregate power does not necessarily involve empowering the greatest number or percentage of one's drives. This is due, primarily, to the independence he attributes to drives as impulses possessing *their own* respective ends and wills to power. As a consequence of their independence, power struggles are said to emerge among drives within one and the same nature. And if such struggles are left unchecked, "weaker human beings" result (BGE 200).

This issue is discussed in an unpublished note from 1884 in which Nietzsche remarks that "man has cultivated [gezüchtet] an abundance of *contrary* drives and impulses within himself" and that only by establishing "locally limited orders of rank in this multifarious world of drives" can he avoid "perish[ing] [zu Grunde geht] through their contradictions" (KSA 11:27[59],

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[218] In the aforementioned note in which Nietzsche casts the "enhancement of life" as the perfection of the "animal functions," he goes on to suggest the sort of standard in question: "What one used to call 'body' and 'flesh' is of such unspeakably greater importance: the remainder is a small accessory. The task of spinning on the chain of life, and in such a way that the thread *grows ever more powerful*—that is the task [die ganze Kette des Lebens fortzuspinnen und so, daß der Faden immer mächtiger wird—das ist die Aufgabe]" (KSA 13:11[83], emphasis added).

[219] Also, consider his definition of "'Perfection,'" in an unpublished note, as "*the type's increase in power*" (KSA 12:6[26]).

12:10[57]). In a similar note, he writes that "every drive, as much as it is active, sacrifices [opfert] force and other drives: finally it is checked [gehemmt]; otherwise it would destroy everything through its excessiveness [Verschwendung]" (KSA 10:8[23]). The nature of this antagonism is spelled out more precisely during Nietzsche's widely-read discussion of the autobiographical nature of most philosophy in the opening chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*. The drives of a philosopher are said to surreptitiously direct her intellectual work, and, moreover, compete with one another for such influence.

> …anyone who considers the basic drives of man to see to what extent they have been at play just here as *inspiring* spirits (or demons and kobolds) will find that all of them have done philosophy at some time—and that every single one of them would like only too well to represent just *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive wants to be master—and it attempts to philosophize in *that spirit*. (BGE 6) [220]

In this passage, Nietzsche suggests that, in addition to competing with each other for expression, drives often treat their counterparts, themselves, as resistances to overcome or master.

Given the antagonistic independence of the drives, Nietzsche concludes that if the empowerment of *each* drive is promoted, the result will tend to be an aggregate loss of power on the part of the individual—a condition which he often terms, 'mediocrity [Mittelmäßigkeit].' In a note dealing with many of the same issues as those in the passage just cited, Nietzsche claims that the "ruling drives" within an individual either "oppose or subject each other (join together synthetically or alternate in dominating). Their antagonism is so great, however, that where they all seek satisfaction [Befriedigung], a man of profound mediocrity must result" (KSA 12:7[3]). The idea would seem to be that if the drives' power is not checked in some way, they will tend to undermine each other's strivings, either by competing with each other for opportunities to discharge themselves, or by discharging their strength against their counterparts; in either case,

[220] See also BGE 200, KSA 12:7[60], GM II 16.

the outcome of this conflict will be enervation or a "'weak will,'" according to Nietzsche (KSA 13:14[219]).[221,222]

Nietzsche thus identifies a tension between the goal of empowering the greatest number or percentage of one's drives and that of achieving an individual's greatest aggregate empowerment. While he undoubtedly promotes the development of a multiplicity of drives in several places,[223] this is treated only as a *means* to the latter goal of achieving the greatest overall empowerment. Hence, in a note from 1885, he writes, regarding the "concept of 'perfecting [Vervollkommnung]': *not* only greater complexity, but greater *power* (—does not have to be merely greater mass—)… perfecting consists in the production of the most powerful individuals" (KSA 12:2[76]).[224]

Given the priority of overall empowerment, Nietzsche thus favors the *weakening* of a drive whenever this is necessary to increase one's aggregate power. This can be seen, among other places, in the previously mentioned note from 1884, where the individual is said to establish "locally limited orders of rank in his multifarious world of drives" so as to avoid "perish[ing] from their contradictions" (KSA 11:27[59]).[225] These orders of rank are said to involve, more specifically, the diminution or restraint [gebändigt] of certain drives for the sake of a stronger drive's gratification, through which, maximal aggregate power can be achieved,

> Thus a drive as master, its opposite weakened [sein Gegentrieb geschwächt], refined, as the impulse that provides the stimulus of the chief drive. The highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured.

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[221] See also KSA 13:14[157].
[222] Related to this, Nietzsche seems to think that if one takes as one's goal the gratification of each of one's drives—thereby prioritizing the breadth of one's self-realization—one will need to generally weaken one's drives to prevent the development of self-destructive conflicts of the sort just mentioned. This is suggested, for instance, in a section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche dismisses "Aristotelianism" as a morality of timidity and mediocrity insofar as he takes it to promote the "turning down of the affects to a harmless mean according to which they may be satisfied [befriedigt]" (BGE 197).
[223] This will be further discussed in §4.2.
[224] See also KSA 12:9[102], 12:10[133].
[225] See also 11:26[231], D 109.

> Indeed, where the plant 'man' shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully (e.g., in Shakespeare), but are controlled [gebändigt].[226] (KSA 11:27[59])[227]

More will need to be said in a subsequent chapter regarding the particular kind of order that Nietzsche thinks must be imposed on the drives to achieve their greatest overall empowerment.[228] But at this point we can conclude that, according to Nietzsche, the degree to which one achieves excellence is determined by the overall *magnitude* rather than the *breadth* of one's self-realization, where this magnitude is measured according to the aggregate power achieved by one's nature.

3.5 *The exceptional nature of excellence*

Before concluding my examination of the general structure of Nietzsche's account of human excellence, I would like to address an important challenge to this account, inspired by Thomas Hurka's observations in an article entitled "*Nietzsche: Perfectionist*." Hurka's interpretation of Nietzsche's positive philosophical program shares several basic features with my own. Like myself, Hurka takes Nietzsche to endorse a "conception of the good," rooted in "the abstract ideal of realizing human nature."[229,230] Hurka also sees Nietzsche as defining this realization in terms of his psychology of the will to power, such that "the best individuals are… those who are most powerful."[231] Where Hurka differs, however, is in his interpretation of Nietzsche's psychology, as he adopts what I previously referred to as the reductionist reading, [232]

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[226] 'Gebändigt' is perhaps better read as 'restrained,' as the former implies a restrictive form of control.
[227] See also KSA 12:7[3], BGE 200.
[228] See §4.2.1.
[229] Hurka (2007), p. 10.
[230] One difference that should be mentioned is that Hurka takes Nietzsche to claim that the realization of one's nature is objectively and intrinsically good. I will defend a different interpretation in the next chapter. However, as I understand it, Hurka's challenge to Nietzsche's account of human excellence is neutral between these two interpretations.
[231] Ibid., p. 10.
[232] See §2.1.1.

according to which Nietzsche claims that "all actions aim at an 'optimum' of power."[233] I will have more to say on this later.

The challenge that Hurka raises in his article concerns Nietzsche's repeated claim that excellence is only very rarely achieved among humans—that "the successful cases, among men… are always the exception" (BGE 62). Our species, as Nietzsche depicts it, is remarkably prone to what he sees as a kind of psycho-physiological failure—so much so that he is led to describe humanity at one point as "*the* sick animal" (GM III 13). What is most surprising about this, is that Nietzsche appears to attribute humanity's pervasive failure not only to unfavorable circumstances, but also to a variety of *internal* causes. And this poses something of puzzle. For if excellence consists in the realization of one's nature, understood in terms of an end towards which human psychology is supposed to be fundamentally disposed, one would expect humans to tend more naturally towards this mode of being. The challenge, then, is to explain how Nietzsche could reasonably deny this.

Now, according to Hurka, the only way for Nietzsche to maintain his view that excellence is exceptional in this way, is to abandon his psychology (or teleology) of the will to power altogether. In the following, I will examine Hurka's discussion of this problem, after which I will explain how it can be understood to challenge the account of human excellence that I have just attributed to Nietzsche, despite the differences in the way in which Hurka and I interpret Nietzsche's psychological views. Then, I will more closely examine Nietzsche's discussions of humanity's general failure to achieve excellence, arguing that his analysis of this failure is in fact compatible with the psychology on which his account of human excellence depends.

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[233] Ibid., p. 14.

3.5.1 *Hurka's challenge*

It would be helpful to begin my discussion of Hurka's challenge by briefly noting the specific way in which he analyzes Nietzsche's account of human excellence. According to Hurka, this account should be understood as a form of *teleological perfectionism,*[234] insofar as it endorses two basic claims: first, that the "human good" consists in the realization of one's nature; [235] and, second, that this realization amounts to the satisfaction of an ultimate desire, which directs all of human behavior. For Nietzsche, this ultimate desire is said to be the desire for maximal power.[236]

One of the ways in which Nietzsche supposedly distinguishes himself from other historical proponents of teleological perfectionism[237] is in his pessimistic assessment of humanity's prospects for achieving excellence. While most teleological perfectionists see humans as tending naturally towards greater perfection, Nietzsche adamantly denies this. According to Hurka, this can be seen in Nietzsche's identification of a variety of obstacles to perfection which "arise not only outside a person, in unfavorable external circumstances," but more significantly, "inside, in [one's] own anti-perfectionist tendencies or 'inner hopelessness.'"[238, 239] Nietzsche's recognition of the latter kind of obstacle is said to be evident specifically in

> …his remarks that powerful individuals need self-discipline and hardness toward themselves, presumably to control impulses that would lead them away from perfection; in his accounts of resentment and the slave-revolt in morality, which involves individuals choosing lesser forms of will and therefore less value for themselves as well as others;

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[234] Also see Hurka (1996), p. 36.
[235] Taken by itself, this is what Hurka refers to as *narrow perfectionism*.
[236] Hurka (2007), pp. 10-12, 22.
[237] Hurka has, specifically, Hegel and Marx in mind here.
[238] Ibid., p. 14.
[239] Hurka cites BGE 269 in reference to the notion of 'inner hopelessness.'

> and in his definition of decadence as a state in which 'the will to power is lacking' and an individual 'prefers what is disadvantageous to itself.'[240, 241]

Hurka takes these various observations to imply that "people sometimes and even often prefer lower to higher exercises of power" and this is said to contradict Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power insofar as it holds that maximal power is the ultimate end of all human behavior.[242, 243] Hence, Hurka concludes that, to avoid contradiction, Nietzsche must reject either his view that humans sometimes prefer lower exercises of power or his psychology (or teleology) of the will to power.

Given that Hurka takes Nietzsche's analysis of humanity's "anti-perfectionist tendencies" to be "one of [his] most valuable contributions" to the perfectionist tradition, Hurka claims that "Nietzsche's best move" is to abandon his psychology of the will to power.[244] In its place, Nietzsche could still hold that power is the *defining feature* of human nature insofar as it is manifested in, though not a goal of, all behavior.[245] This could be the case insofar as all human actions involve an attempt to "transform the world in light of a goal"—an activity which Hurka appears to equate with power.[246, 247] According to Hurka, this revision would thus enable Nietzsche to retain both his view that human excellence amounts to the realization of one's nature [248]—understood as the achievement of maximal power—, and his claim that people often

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[240] Ibid., p. 14.
[241] See A 6.
[242] Hurka (2007), p. 15.
[243] The contradiction arises assuming, as Hurka points out in a footnote, that the preference for 'lower exercises of power' is not, according to Nietzsche, simply the result of false beliefs regarding what course of action will achieve maximal power (Ibid.). Rather Nietzsche seems to hold that certain individuals can desire a mode of being, knowing full well that it will yield less power than some other alternative.
[244] Ibid., p. 16.
[245] Ibid., p. 15.
[246] Ibid., p. 15.
[247] For a similar analysis of power, see Hill (2003), p. 212.
[248] This is what Hurka refers to as a *narrow perfectionism*, of which *teleological perfectionism* is one specific variant.

desire and pursue something less than or even inconsistent with maximal power, and, hence, may be internally inclined to failure.[249, 250]

Now, it should be noted that on the interpretation of Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power that I have been defending, this psychology does *not* amount to a teleological theory of motivation, and, hence, Nietzsche is at least not directly subject to Hurka's challenge here. However, I do read Nietzsche as attributing an independent tendency towards power to each of an individual's drives. And, insofar as he takes the drives to be, as we saw earlier, the "directing agent" of human psychology, the will to power is thereby made a central cause of all human behavior (KSA 13:11[145]). Thus, Hurka's discussion still poses an important challenge; for the fact that Nietzsche equates human excellence with the maximal attainment of that towards which all human behavior is allegedly disposed, and, at the same time, regards excellence as a rare and poorly pursued achievement, calls for explanation.

3.5.2 *Pervasive sickliness*

While Hurka does a good job of highlighting some of the ways in which Nietzsche takes humans to be inclined to failure—by preferring, for instance, "lower to higher exercises of power"—he never mentions just how thoroughgoing this failure is according to Nietzsche.[251] In several places throughout his works, Nietzsche casts the vast majority of humans as sickly and ill-constituted in contrast to what are depicted as the rare, fortunate instances of human excellence. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for instance, he remarks that among humans there is "an excess of failures, of the sick, degenerating, infirm, who suffer necessarily; the successful cases

[249] Ibid., p. 16.
[250] As Hurka explains at the end of this discussion, "while all actions would exercise power," they would "do so by pursuing particular goals that may distract them from greater power" (Ibid.).
[251] Hurka (2007), p. 15.

are, among men too, always the exception" (BGE 62). One year later, in the *Genealogy of Morals,* Nietzsche claims, more dramatically, that the overall sickliness [Krankhaftigkeit] of humanity singles it out in the animal kingdom: "…man is more sick, uncertain, changeable, indeterminate than any other animal, there is no doubt of that—he is *the* sick animal" (GM III 13). In the following section he adds that the "normality" of human sickliness should thus increase our respect for what are described as "the rare cases of great power of soul and body, man's *lucky hits*" (GM III 14).[252]

This alarming state of affairs would perhaps be understandable if excellence were construed as a condition that was somehow foreign to humanity or otherwise inimical to its natural tendencies or drives. However, Nietzsche's conception of human excellence, as I have construed it in the previous sections, would seem to suggest the opposite, insofar as excellence is held to consist, again, in the maximal attainment of that towards which all of humanity's drives are allegedly disposed. One would expect the realization of one's nature, understood in this way, to come more or less 'naturally' to humans or to even be their default condition. Yet Nietzsche flatly denies this, claiming in a note from 1887, that "there has never yet been a natural humanity" (KSA 12:10[53]). Thus, he maintains that his ideal should not be characterized as a "'*return to nature*'"; "man reaches nature only after a long struggle—he never 'returns'" (KSA 12:10[53]).[253]

In the following, I would like to examine how exactly Nietzsche accounts for the supposed "normality" of human sickliness and determine whether this account conflicts in any way with his attempt to ground a conception of human excellence in his psychology of the will to power (GM III 14).

[252] See also KSA 13:14[123], 11:26[75]
[253] See also TI 'Skirmishes' 48.

3.5.3 *An internal cause of sickliness; asceticism and power*

It is important to note that Nietzsche's aforementioned characterization of humanity as "*the* sick animal" occurs in the context of an analysis of asceticism in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals* (GM III 14). In this essay, Nietzsche claims that it is in virtue of the proliferation of this "*life-inimical* [*lebensfeindliche*]" mode of being, appearing throughout human history and in "every class of society,"[254] that humanity has been a sickly species, with few examples of "great power of soul and body"[255] (GM III 11, 14).[256] Hence, by understanding the way in which Nietzsche accounts for the success of asceticism, we can identify how it is that humanity has become predominately sick according to him. And, as we will see, far from deemphasizing the psychology of the will to power, this account actually employs it as a central explanatory device.

We should begin by establishing what exactly Nietzsche means by asceticism, as his use of this notion is unconventionally broad in scope, covering far more than the lifestyle of the monastics with whom asceticism is most often associated. Surprisingly, it is not until fairly late in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, that Nietzsche presents a general account of the nature of this mode of being. This occurs in section 11, where he describes asceticism as a form of self-denial, whereby one actively seeks and, moreover, takes a kind of satisfaction in a state of ill-being,

> …here physiological well-being itself is viewed askance, and especially the outward expression of this well-being, beauty and joy; while pleasure is felt and *sought* in ill-

[254] Regarding the prevalence of asceticism, Nietzsche remarks, earlier on in the first essay that "so monstrous [ungeheuerliche] a mode of valuation stands inscribed in the history of mankind not as an exception and curiosity, but as the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena. Read from a distant star, the majuscule script of our earthly existence would perhaps lead to the conclusion that the earth was the distinctively ascetic planet" (GM III 11).
[255] Nietzsche also describes these successful cases as "the happy, well-constituted, powerful in soul and body" (GM III 14).
[256] See also GM III 13.

> constitutedness, decay, pain, mischance, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, self-mortification, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice… (GM III 11)

Throughout essay three, Nietzsche identifies this form of self-denial in a remarkably wide array of phenomena, from the belief in "man's 'sinfulness'" to the typical philosopher's alleged distrust of sensuality (GM III 17, 10). Nietzsche even includes certain atheists and skeptics, who he describes as the "nay-sayers and outsiders of today who are unconditional on one point—their insistence on intellectual cleanliness" (GM 24). This insistence calls for a certain 'physiological' condition that Nietzsche attributes to all scholars and scientists, and which is said to constitute a prototypic form of ascetic self-denial: "the affects grown cool, the tempo of life slowed down, dialectics in place of instinct, seriousness [Ernst] imprinted on faces and gestures" (GM III 24, 25).

In the section in which he first defines asceticism, Nietzsche claims that the prevalence of the ascetic mode of being suggests that it is the result of some "necessity of the first order," or, in other words, that it is sought for the sake of an "*interest of life itself"* (GM III 11). For if it were the product of external circumstances alone, a mere accident of history, one would expect it to be relatively rare, and certainly not humanity's normal condition nor "the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena," as Nietzsche takes it be (GM III 11). Asceticism is thus characterized as a kind of *self-contradiction*, involving the pursuit of one 'interest of life' at the expense of another.

Paradoxically, the interest that is said to be served by asceticism appears to be the very same interest that is consequently *undermined*—namely, power. Nietzsche makes sense of this by reviving an account of asceticism that he first developed several years earlier in *Human All*

Too Human, according to which, the ascetic possesses a *divided self*, in which one or more drives seek power through the suppression of their counterparts. [257]

> …here rules a *ressentiment* without equal, that of an insatiable instinct and power-will that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself, over its most profound, powerful, and basic conditions, here an attempt is made to employ force to block up the wells of force… (GM III 11)[258]

Although the result of this internal "discord" is a sickly, weakened state of being,[259] it is nevertheless an "*interest of life itself*," namely a particular drive's pursuit of power, that brings this sickliness about (GM III 11).[260]

This form of self-contradiction is possible, as I noted earlier,[261] insofar as Nietzsche attributes an independent will to power to each of the drives. Drives, on this view, do not seek power on behalf of the nature or totality to which they belong, but for themselves alone. As Nietzsche writes in a note mentioned earlier, unless it is "checked [gehemmt]," a drive will often sacrifice "force and other drives" in the course of its insatiable strivings (KSA 10:8[23]). Hence, the drives ignore "the advantage of the whole ego," acting, in many cases, "contrary to our advantage" (KSA 10:8[23]). Nietzsche's ascetic provides a clear example of this, as one of more

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[257] In *Human all too Human*, Nietzsche describes the ascetic mode of being as a "division of oneself": "There is a defiance [against] oneself of which many forms of asceticism are among the most sublime expressions. For certain men feel so great a need to exercise their strength [ferocity] and lust to rule [ihre Gewalt und Herrschsucht auszuüben] that, in default of other objects or because their efforts in other directions have always miscarried, they at last hit upon the idea of tyrannizing over certain parts of their own nature, over, as it were, segments or stages of themselves… This division of oneself, this mockery of one's own nature, this spernere se sperni of which the religions have made so much, is actually a very high degree of vanity… man takes a real delight in oppressing [vergewaltigen] himself with excessive claims and afterwards idolizing this tyrannically demanding something in his soul. In every ascetic morality man worships a part of himself as God and for that he needs to diabolize the other part. (HH I 137).

[258] This should be compared to an unpublished note from the same period in which Nietzsche describes sickness in the following way: "the antagonism of the passions; two, three, a multiplicity of 'souls in one breast': very unhealthy, inner ruin, disintegration, betraying and increasing and inner conflict and anarchism" (KSA 13:14[157]).

[259] Later in the third essay, Nietzsche claims that through the proliferation of asceticism humanity has been "'tamed,' 'weakened,' 'discouraged,' 'made refined,' 'made effete,' 'emasculated'" (GM III 21).

[260] Nietzsche therefore concludes in a later section of the *Genealogy of Morals*, that asceticism is not the all-encompassing denial of life that it often appears to be; rather, "life wrestles in and through it" (GM III 13).

[261] See §3.4.2.

of his drives are said to undermine the aggregate power of their totality by discharging themselves against their counterparts.[262]

Thus, it is Nietzsche's psychology, according to which drives amount to *independent* manifestations of the will to power, which, rather than contradicting his account of human sickliness, provides the framework with which to explain it.

3.5.4 *An external cause; the civilization and taming of man*

One might still find it doubtful, however, that humanity could be as prone to this kind of self-contradiction as Nietzsche proposes. While the preceding discussion suggests that there is something about the nature of humanity itself that gives rise to its sickly condition, namely its multifarious power psychology, this psychology, as we have seen, is also capable of supporting a 'healthy' condition of maximal power. What apparently makes much of the difference, here, is the *direction* in which one's drives are expressed, whether principally against inward or outward resistances, and it might seem from Nietzsche's assessment of humanity as "*the* sick animal" that he takes our drives to naturally prefer, for some reason, the former, self-contradictory mode of expression (GM III 14). However, this interpretation would overlook an important *external* factor to which Nietzsche appeals in his account of the rise of human sickliness, which we should take a moment now to consider.

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[262] It should be noted that Nietzsche still takes the ascetic to represent, in many cases, a remarkable achievement of power. In *Human All too Human*, he claims that "the saint practices that defiance of oneself that is a close relation of lust for power and bestows the feeling of power even upon the hermit; now his distended sensibility leaps out of the desire to allow his passions free rein over into the desire to break them like wild horses under the mighty impress of a proud soul" (HH I 142). Nearly a decade later, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche claims that "the most powerful human beings have still bowed worshipfully before the saint as the riddle of self-conquest and deliberate final renunciation" (BGE 51). This is because the powerful supposedly see a reflection of their own strength in the saint's ascetic practices: "they sense[…] the superior force that sought to test itself in such a conquest, the strength of the will in which they recognized and honored their own strength in dominion" (BGE 51, see also D 113).

In addition to citing our power psychology, Nietzsche also appears to credit humanity's nearly universal social situation with its propensity for ascetic self-contradiction. This is suggested, for instance, at one point in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche remarks,

> That [the ascetic] ideal acquired such power and ruled over men as imperiously as we find it in history, especially wherever the civilization and taming of man [Civilisation und Zähmung des Menschen] has been carried through, expresses [drückt] a great fact: the *sickliness* of the type of man we have had hitherto, or at least of the tamed man [des zahm gemachten Menschen]… (GM III 13)[263]

A connection is thus implied here between the success of asceticism and the attempt to civilize or 'tame' humanity. Though little more is said on this issue in the remainder of essay three, further insight can be found in the previous essay, in which Nietzsche offers a speculative account of how humanity's social development led to the emergence of a form of self-contradiction that he refers to as 'bad conscience.'

According to this account, when orderly societies were first established, humans who were otherwise "well adapted to the wilderness, to war, to prowling, to adventure" were required to subdue their hostile instincts in exchange for membership (GM II 16).[264] But while these instincts might have become progressively absent in the public sphere, Nietzsche contends that they did not wane altogether under the weight of this new pressure. Rather, they sought alternative, *internal* resistances against which to exercise their strength, since according to him, "all instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward [welche sich nicht nach Aussen entladen, wenden sich nach Innen]" (GM II 16).

> all those instincts of wild, free, prowling man turned backward against man himself… The man who, from lack of external enemies and resistances and forcibly confined to the oppressive narrowness and punctiliousness of custom, impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted, and maltreated himself; this animal that rubbed itself raw against

[263] See also BGE 208.
[264] See also GM II 3, 17.

> the bars of its cage as one tried to "tame" it; this deprived creature, racked with homesickness for the wild, who had to turn himself into an adventure, a torture chamber, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness… thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, man's suffering *of man, of himself*—the result of a forcible sundering from his animal past; as it were a leap and plunge into new surroundings and conditions of existence, a declaration of war against the old instincts upon which his strength, joy, and terribleness had rested hitherto. (GM II 16)[265]

Humanity's proclivity for self-contradiction is thus not entirely the result of internal causes, according to Nietzsche. Although it arises from the drives' natural striving for power,[266] the self-defeating direction of this discharge is held to be, in large part, the product of a repression imposed on humanity by its social situation. Nietzsche emphasizes this point in the subsequent section, where he claims that the development of the bad conscience was not a "gradual or voluntary one and did not represent an organic adaptation to new conditions"; rather, he describes it as a "break, a leap, a compulsion…" which was made possible only through violent tyranny on the part of those in charge of the first human societies (GM II 17).

Self-contradiction is thus understood as a power strategy of last resort for hostile drives that have been turned inward by the constraints of social living.[267] This is an important addition to Nietzsche's account of humanity as "*the* sick animal" insofar as it enables him to avoid claiming that humans, and indeed only humans, are *by their own nature alone* disposed to sickliness, and, thus internally ill-disposed towards the realization of their nature.

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[265] One should compare this passage, as Kaufman suggests in his translation of *The Will to Power*, to an earlier unpublished note in which Nietzsche writes: "Man's growing inwardness. Inwardness grows as powerful drives that have been denied outward release by the establishment of peace and society seek compensation by turning inward in concert with the imagination. The thirst for enmity, cruelty, revenge, violence turns back, is repressed; in the desire for knowledge there is avarice and conquest; in the artist there reappears the repressed power to dissimulate and lie; the drives are transformed into demons whom one fights" (KSA 12:8[4]).

[266] In a later section, Nietzsche depicts bad conscience as the result of the "*instinct for freedom*"—which he clarifies, is "in my language: the will to power"—"forcibly made latent… this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself" (GM II 18).

[267] In chapter five I will consider another, somewhat related purpose that Nietzsche attributes to self-denial: namely, the prevention of self-destructive internal discord within those too weak to establish an order among their drives (See §5.2.2.).

3.5.5 *Normal and unnatural*

Hurka is undoubtedly right to question how Nietzsche could take humans to be as ineffective in their pursuit of excellence as he does and yet equate excellence with the realization of their nature, understood in terms of the fulfillment of their most basic psychological tendency. But I hope to have demonstrated that this does not pose an insoluble problem, nor does it require, as Hurka suggests, a revision of Nietzsche's psychological views, so that the striving for power is no long their central focus. Rather, one can make good sense of the exceptional nature of human excellence by understanding Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power as an account of the individual nature of human drives.

Insofar as Nietzsche takes the drives to pursue power independently of each other, he is able to explain how enervating internal conflicts can arise within one's nature, and thereby account for humanity's supposedly widespread tendency to pursue weakness rather than excellence. And although this kind of discordant weakness is presented as the rule and excellence as the rare exception among humans, this does not mean that Nietzsche understands the former to be humanity's preferred or most natural mode of being per se. Rather, he takes the prevalence of self-contradiction to be, in large part, a product of humanity's social circumstances, which he sees as having aggravated the agonistic tendencies of our psychology for the sake of, among other things, social order.

3.6 *Conclusion*

Over the last chapter, I have argued that Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power provides the foundation for his account of human excellence. This was demonstrated in two stages. First, I argued that Nietzsche conceives of excellence as the realization or growth of the

particular set of drives that constitute an individual's nature. Then, I suggested that in order to explain how drives can be realized Nietzsche appeals to their status as manifestations of the will to power—specifically, by construing their growth as the amplification of their forcefulness. It is then, on the basis of this power-centered conception of drive development, that excellence is defined as a condition in which one achieves a maximal aggregate degree of self-realization or power.

Now it should be noted that while this conception of human excellence, in a certain sense, establishes *one* ideal for all of humanity,[268] this in no way prevents Nietzsche from holding that his ideal may be realized in a variety of ways. For insofar as he understands individuals to be *uniquely* constituted by their drives, it follows that the condition in which these drives are maximally realized will be unique as well. We see this feature of his account articulated, for instance, when in *The Gay Science*, he writes that "we… *want to become those we are* [*die wir sind*]—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give laws to themselves, who create themselves [Sich-selber-Schaffenden]" (GS 335, 143).[269, 270] Hence, by recognizing the particularity of what I called, earlier, the material component of human excellence,[271] Nietzsche is able to provide a general account of the form of excellence, while, at the same time, advocating individuality.

We should now turn to the more practical side of Nietzsche's account of human excellence. At the end of this chapter, I considered one of the major internal obstacles that he

[268] I will critically examine whether and how this is the case in chapter five (See §5.2.).
[269] See also KSA 13:14[113], HH I 263.
[270] One should also consider Nietzsche's comments at the beginning of his essay "*Schopenhauer as Educator*" that "In his heart every man knows quite well that, being unique, he will be in the world only once and that no imaginable chance will for a second time gather together into a unity so strangely variegated an assortment as he is: he knows it but he hides it like a bad conscience why? From fear of his neighbour, who demands conventionality and cloaks himself with it" (UM III 1).
[271] See §3.3.1.

sees as undermining humanity's self-development: namely, contradiction among the drives. In the following chapter, I would like to examine how Nietzsche thinks this can be avoided through the imposition of an empowering order on one's drives. This will involve considering his conception of what was referred to in the passage just cited as self-creation.

4. Self-creation

Throughout his works, Nietzsche proposes a wide variety of strategies for achieving excellence, and, if the interpretation I have been defending in the previous chapter is correct, these should be understood as strategies for achieving a state of maximal power. In this chapter, I would like to examine what I take to be the most important of these strategies for Nietzsche. This is what is often referred to in the literature as self-creation or 'becoming what one is.' I will begin my examination by outlining two major challenges that Nietzsche faces in providing an account of self-creation, given his reductive view of the self and commitment to determinism respectively. Through my analysis of how he is able to meet these challenges, I will defend an interpretation of self-creation, according to which, it consists in the establishment of a specific kind of order among the drives—one through which their greatest aggregate power can be achieved.

4.1 *The agent of self-creation*

One of the central challenges that Nietzsche faces in developing an account of self-creation is to find a way of specifying what it is that directs this process without contradicting his reductive view of the self. As we have seen, Nietzsche repeatedly claims that the self amounts to no more than a conglomerate of independently striving drives.[272] Yet almost all of his discussions of self-development seem to presuppose an agent that stands apart from the drives, coordinating and in some sense imposing order on them.

[272] This view was noted, for instance, in an aforementioned section from Beyond Good and Evil, where Nietzsche proposes that introspection reveals nothing, within ourselves, apart from "our world of desires and passions" or "the reality of our drives" (BGE 36, see also 12). While one might be inclined to add conscious thought to this inventory, Nietzsche contends here, as he does elsewhere, that "thinking is merely a relation of [the] drives to each other" (BGE 36).

We see this, for instance, in the aforementioned section from *Daybreak*, in which Nietzsche argues against the view that one's character is fixed, claiming that "one can dispose of one's drives like a gardener" (D 560).[273] Though he never explains who or what this 'gardener' amounts to, Nietzsche's metaphor clearly suggests that it is distinct, in some way, from the drives it cultivates. A similar insinuation can be found one year later, in a section from *The Gay Science* in which Nietzsche describes how certain individuals "'give style' to [their] character" by "survey[ing] all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit[ting] them into an artistic plan" (GS 290). As in *Daybreak*, the 'surveyor' or 'stylist' that apparently directs this process is never accounted for.

But even if Nietzsche could identify the creative agent implied in these passages, he could not construe it in a way that would cohere with what is perhaps the most intuitive way of understanding self-creation. To many, the directing agent of this process must be, somehow, *causally-autonomous*, such that it, alone, can be responsible for the self it ultimately fashions. This is what Robert Solomon refers to as the 'bootstrapping' conception of self-creation, which holds that in creating oneself one must act "as an original cause for which there are no prior determining causes."[274]

One of the benefits of the bootstrapping conception is that it captures, in a rather straightforward way, the intuition that self-creation, if it is at all possible, involves the achievement of a kind of personal authenticity—that the identity of a 'self-created' person is in some important sense, 'her own,' as opposed to being the mere product of external forces. Indeed, Nietzsche often seems to gesture at such a notion in his own discussions of self-creation. This can be seen in the section from *The Gay Science* in which he writes that "*we want to*

[273] See also HH WS 53.
[274] Solomon (2003), p. 192.

become those we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves" (GS 335). Just before this, he condemns those who commit their lives, instead, to general moral principles, as this reveals that they have not established an ideal of *their own*; for, as he goes on to claim, an ideal of one's own "could never be somebody else's and much less that of all" (GS 335).[275]

Now insofar as Nietzsche is a determinist, he is certainly unable to claim that the directing agent of self-creation is causally autonomous. Hence, to creatively realize an ideal of 'one's own' cannot be understood to involve a kind of creation ex nihilo. This generates Nietzsche's second major challenge: namely, to account for the distinctive authenticity of the self-created person in a way that is consistent with his determinism.

In sum, the question is this: how could a satisfying account of self-creation avoid presupposing a causally autonomous central agent? In the following, I would like to first consider how Brian Leiter has addressed these issues in an article entitled, "*the Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche*." As we will see, although Leiter offers a compelling solution to the former challenge of identifying what it is that serves for Nietzsche as the directing agent of self-creation, he leaves the second challenge unresolved. After discussing Leiter's analysis, I will propose my own extension of it, focusing on Nietzsche's account of the unification of one's drives.

[275] Further evidence of Nietzsche's concern for personal authenticity can be found in an aphorism from *Twilight of the Idols*, where he asks what is described as the "second question of conscience:" "Are you genuine [echt]? Or merely an actor? A representative? Or that which is represented?" (TI 'Maxims' 38). One should note the way in which this parallels the following aphorism from *The Gay Science*: "*What does your conscience say?*—'you shall become the person you are'" (GS 270).

4.1.1 *Leiter's reading*

In his article, Leiter examines the tension between Nietzsche's conception of self-creation and his determinism. This tension arises for Leiter insofar as he accepts a version of the bootstrapping conception of self-creation. This is apparent in the two basic conditions that Leiter claims a self-created person must satisfy:

> (1) The person must be a necessary, though perhaps not sufficient, cause of what he becomes ('Causal Condition').
> (2) The person, in fulfilling the 'Causal Condition,' must satisfy the requirements for autonomous or free action ('Autonomy Condition').[276]

In order to meet the Autonomy Condition, Leiter explains that a self-creator must 'choose' "to contribute something independent to the production of the product, rather than simply functioning as a mere conduit for a larger causal process."[277]

Leiter's defense of the inclusion of this condition centers on a thought-experiment. He has us imagine that a terrorist group has kidnapped him, and using drugs, subsequently coerced him into engaging in certain criminal acts.[278] Whereas his transformation into a criminal would seem to meet the Causal Condition, Leiter claims that the Autonomy Condition would surely not be satisfied. And he concludes that it is precisely for this reason—that he would not have contributed something "independent" to his transformation—that it seems intuitively wrong to say that he had 'created' himself in this respect.

Now, as Leiter sees it, Nietzsche's determinism makes it impossible for him to allow that self-creating can *ever* meet the Autonomy Condition. To see exactly why this is the case, it would be helpful to take a moment to outline the details of Nietzsche's determinism.

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[276] Leiter (1998), p. 225.
[277] Ibid., pp. 225-226.
[278] Ibid., p. 226.

4.1.1.1 *Nietzsche's determinism*

On Leiter's interpretation of Nietzsche's determinism, it holds that both one's actions and conscious thought are causally determined by facts about one's character.[279] Leiter cites the following passage from *Twilight of the Idols* in support of this reading.

> We believe that we are the cause of our own will: we think that here at least we can see a cause at work. Nor did we doubt that all the antecedents of our will, its causes, were to be found in our own consciousness or in our personal "motives." Otherwise, we would not be responsible for what we choose to do. Who would deny that his thoughts have a cause, and that his own mind caused the thoughts? ...Today we no longer believe any of this is true. The "inner world" is full of phantoms and illusions: the will being one of them. The will no longer moves anything, hence it does not explain anything — it merely accompanies events; it can also be completely absent. The so-called motives: another error. Merely a surface phenomenon of consciousness, something shadowing the deed that is more likely to hide the causes of our actions than to reveal them. And as for the ego ... that has become a fable, a fiction, a play on words! It has altogether ceased to think, feel, or will! …What follows from this? There are no mental causes at all. (TI 'The Four' 3) [280, 281]

Although Nietzsche does not specify exactly what he takes the causal antecedents of our actions and thoughts to be here, Leiter claims that they amount to what he refers to as *type-facts*: "either *physiological* facts about [a] person, or facts about [a] person's unconscious drives or affects."[282] While I take the main thrust of this account to be correct, I would like to propose identifying the relevant type-facts, more simply, with *facts about a person's drives*. There are two reasons I think this amendment should be made: first, Leiter provides insufficient textual support for the claim that Nietzsche thinks the drives in question must be *unconscious,*[283] at least in the usual

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[279] Ibid., pp. 230-231.
[280] See also KSA 13:14[152].
[281] A more precise account of Nietzsche's view that our conscious thought is determined by our character—or nature—can be found in a section from *Human All Too Human*, entitled "*Cause confused with effect*" (HH I 608). Nietzsche begins by claiming that although we tend to think that the "principles and dogmas" we embrace have a crucial impact on our character, this reverses the true causal relation between these phenomena: "our thinking and judgment are, it seems, to be made the cause of our nature: but in fact it is *our* nature that is the cause of our thinking and judging thus and thus" (HH I 608, see also KSA 12:1[61], 1[75]).
[282] Leiter (1998), p. 230.
[283] Leiter's strongest evidence comes from an unpublished note from 1888, where Nietzsche writes that "everything of which we become conscious is a terminal phenomenon, an end—and causes nothing" (KSA 13:14[152]). This

sense of the term, and there is evidence, moreover, that Nietzsche would reject this qualification;[284] second, Leiter's description of type-facts as *either* physiological *or* psychological, might suggest that Nietzsche thinks that there is a substantive distinction to be made between physiology and psychology, when in several places he appears to see the latter as reducible to the former.[285]

There is another component of Nietzsche's determinism that should be added to Leiter's account. Apart from taking one's actions and conscious thought to be causally determined by one's nature—or in other words, one's drives—, Nietzsche also insists that one's nature is, itself, causally determined. This claim is emphasized in several places with the apparent aim of fending off those who would try to salvage a kind of causal autonomy for the individual by contending that although one's actions are determined by one's nature, this nature is nonetheless free of any causal antecedents. On such a view, one could be held morally responsible for *who one is*, if not

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would seem to suggest that what produces conscious phenomena is necessarily unconscious. However, it is important to understand what exactly Nietzsche takes the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious to amount to, here. Leiter's unqualified use of these terms might lead one to think that Nietzsche equates consciousness with mere *awareness*, however, there is evidence that this is not the case. In an article entitled, "*Nietzsche's Theory of Mind: Consciousness and Conceptualization,*" Katsafanas convincingly argues that Nietzsche has a different kind of distinction in mind—one which is allegedly responsive to the views of Schopenhauer and Kant. According to Katsafanas, Nietzsche holds that "a mental state is conscious if its content is conceptually articulated, whereas a state is unconscious if its content is nonconceptually articulated" (Katsafanas [2005], p.1). As Katsafanas points out, this way of understanding the conscious/unconscious distinction departs from our ordinary conception of these terms, according to which to be *conscious* of something just is to be *aware* of it (Ibid., p. 2). He claims that this cannot be Nietzsche's view insofar as he believes that there are "unconscious *perceptions*;" ("a perception is a type of awareness of the world, so by countenancing unconscious perception Nietzsche allows that we can be unconsciously aware") (Ibid., p. 3, see also D 115, GS 354, BGE 192, 268, KSA 12:9[106]). A defense of this reading would go beyond the scope of my current project, however, it is this way of understanding Nietzsche's account of the conscious/unconscious distinction, which leads me to reject Leiter's qualification that the causal antecedents of our actions and conscious mental life must be 'unconscious' in the usual sense of the term.

[284] Consider, for instance, Nietzsche's aforementioned claim in *Beyond Good and Evil* that introspection presents us only with "the reality of our drives" (BGE 36).

[285] This reduction is suggested, for instance, in the way that Nietzsche refers to his *psychology* of the will to power, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, first as a "morphology and *the doctrine of the development of the will to power*" and then as a "proper physio-psychology" (BGE 23, see also BGE 230). One might also recall his claim, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that "I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body" (TSZ 4).

directly for *what one does*. Nietzsche associates this view with the notion of intelligible freedom, developed, in similar ways, by Schopenhauer[286] and Kant.

Nietzsche's rejection of this alternative route to causal autonomy is proposed a few sections after the discussion from *Twilight of the Idols*[287] that Leiter cites. However, it is more precisely articulated a decade earlier in a section from *Human All Too Human*, entitled "*The fable of intelligible freedom*."

> …one successively makes men accountable for the effects they produce, then for their actions, then for their motives, and finally for their nature. Now one finally discovers that this nature, too, cannot be accountable, inasmuch as it is altogether a necessary consequence and assembled from the elements and influence of things past and present: that is to say, that man can be made accountable for nothing, not for his nature, nor for his motives, nor for his actions, nor for the effects he produces. (HH I 39)

After exploring several ways of making Nietzsche's determinism compatible with a form of self-creation that meets the Autonomy Condition, Leiter decides that this cannot be achieved. This leads him to conclude that the conception of 'creation' that Nietzsche employs is "at best a poor reflection of genuine creation; it is really a case in which only the Causal Condition, but not the Autonomy Condition, is satisfied."[288] In other words, to create oneself, according to Leiter's Nietzsche, one only needs to be a "necessary, though perhaps not sufficient, cause of what [one] becomes."[289] To support this surprising interpretation, Leiter then turns to a particularly helpful discussion from *Daybreak*.

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[286] In *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer argues that while actions are causal determined by one's character, one's character is situated "outside space and time, […] free from all succession and plurality of acts" and is, therefore, causally autonomous and subject to moral censure (Schopenhauer OBM, p. 110).
[287] This occurs in section 8, in which Nietzsche writes, "What alone can be our doctrine? That no one gives a man his qualities—neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself. (The nonsense of the last idea was taught as 'intelligible freedom' by Kant – and perhaps by Plato.) No one is responsible for man No one is responsible for a man's being here at all, for his being such-and-such, or for his being in these circumstances or in this environment. The fatality of his existence is not to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be" (TI 'The Four' 8).
[288] Leiter (1998), p. 254.
[289] Ibid., p. 225.

4.1.1.2 *Self-creation as self-mastery*

In a section entitled "*Self-mastery and moderation and their ultimate motive,*" Nietzsche sets out to describe six practical methods for "combating the vehemence [Heftigkeit] of a drive," each of which involve weakening, and thereby 'mastering,' a target drive in some way or other (D 109). These include: 1) depriving the target drive of gratification; 2) limiting the contexts in which the drive may be active (after which one might find it easier to employ the first method); 3) allowing the drive to exert itself to the point that it engenders disgust and is then more easily suppressed; 4) associating the drive with some "painful thought" (such as "disgrace, evil consequences or offended pride"); 5) diverting one's attention to a project that cultivates some other drive; and 6) perhaps only as a last resort, imposing an *overall* enervation or "exhaustion" on oneself such that the "*entire* bodily and physical organization" is weakened (Nietzsche cites the ascetic as an example of this technique, who "starves his sensuality" and thereby "ruins his vigour [Rüstigkeit]") [290] (D 109).

What is particularly important about this discussion is that at its conclusion Nietzsche offers one of his only accounts of what it is that directs an individual's self-development. He remarks that whereas it might seem that one's "intellect" is what determines whether one, in this case, desires to restrain a particular drive, which method of restraint one employs, and whether this attempt ultimately succeeds, the directing agent of this process lies elsewhere (D 109). As Nietzsche explains,

> What is clearly the case is that in this entire procedure our intellect is only the blind instrument of *another drive* which is a *rival* of the drive whose vehemence is tormenting us: whether it be the drive to restfulness, or the fear of disgrace and other evil consequences, or love. While 'we' believe we are complaining about the vehemence of a drive, at bottom it is one drive *which is complaining about another*; that is to say: for us to become aware [die Wahrnehmung] that we are suffering from the *vehemence* of a drive

[290] Also see HH I 139.

> presupposes the existence of another equally vehement or even more vehement drive, and that *a struggle* is in prospect in which our intellect is going to have to take sides. (D 109) [291]

Nietzsche thus proposes that the intellect is in fact no more than the unwitting instrument of another drive within one's nature, which stands in tension with some rival. Hence, self-mastery is merely a special case of internal conflict among one's drives—one in which a powerful drive aims specifically at the restraint of one of its counterparts.[292]

Now, Leiter appears to think that this account of self-mastery illustrates the way that Nietzsche means to conceive of self-creation. On this conception, an individual is merely "an arena in which the struggle of drives is played out" and it is the outcome of this struggle that ultimately determines what one becomes.[293] Hence, to 'create' oneself is simply to possess a nature in which one or more drives have exerted some kind of influence over one or more of their counterparts. Leiter concludes that the apparent tension between Nietzsche's determinism and his conception of self-creation is thus resolved by recognizing that determinism is "the dominant theme in Nietzsche's work, while his talk of 'creating' the self is merely the employment of a familiar term in an unfamiliar sense, one that actually presupposes the truth of fatalism."[294]

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[291] A short aphorism, published roughly five years later, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, suggests that Nietzsche maintained this account of the creative agent behind self-mastery. In it, Nietzsche claims that "The will to overcome an affect is ultimately only the will of another, or of several other, affects" (BGE 117, see also KSA KSA 10:16[33]).

[292] This seems distinct from internal conflicts in which a drive sets out to simply discharge itself against the resistance provided by one of its counterparts (see HH I 136).

[293] Leiter (1998), p. 225.

[294] Ibid., p. 255.

4.1.2 *A reply to Leiter*

It seems to me that the most significant contribution that Leiter makes in his article is to identify what serves, for Nietzsche, as the directing agent of self-creation. While many of Nietzsche's general discussions of self-development seem to suggest that this directing agent must be somehow distinct from the drives it fashions, the aforementioned section from *Daybreak* makes it quite clear that this is not what Nietzsche has in mind. Rather, on his view, an individual's drives must account for both *what is fashioned* and *what does the fashioning*. Where I disagree with Leiter's analysis, however, is in his suggestion that Nietzsche's description of self-mastery provides a *complete* account of his conception of self-creation—that these forms of self-development are, in other words, one and the same for Nietzsche. There seem to be three problems with this proposal.

First, the identification of self-creation with self-mastery[295] would appear to have the counter-intuitive implication that all, or at least most, people are self-created, insofar as the internal relations between their drives inevitably affect the course of their development.[296] Yet Nietzsche often characterizes self-creation as an *exceptional* achievement. For instance, in a discussion of Goethe from *Twilight of the Idols*, which I will be examining later, Nietzsche claims that to create himself, Goethe had to overcome the milieu of an entire century, and that those of the following century could only strive in vain for what he achieved (TI 'Skirmishes'

[295] Future references to self-mastery should be understood to refer to the general form of self-development mentioned in the earlier section from *Daybreak*. It seems likely to me that Nietzsche developed a more specific account of self-mastery later on in his philosophical career.

[296] In Nietzsche's discussion of the origin of the bad conscience in the *Genealogy of Morals*, one should recall his claim that in response to demands of society, humanity's instincts turned inward. Nietzsche refers to this as the "internalization of man," which he goes on to describe as follows: "thus it was that man first developed what was later called his 'soul.' The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was inhibited" (GM II 16).

49, 50).[297] The exceptional nature of self-creation is also indicated in the section from *The Gay Science*, in which Nietzsche writes that "*we want to become those we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves" (GS 335). He goes on here to claim that this requires the cultivation of a special kind of expertise which all previous "valuations and ideals" have supposedly disregarded: "we must become the best learners and discovers of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world: we must become *physicists* in order to be able to be *creators* in this sense" (GS 335). Although Nietzsche never elaborates on how such know-how is to facilitate the task of self-creation,[298] he apparently thinks that most people lack this prerequisite, and, hence, he would almost certainly reject any account of self-creation that entailed that many, much less all, people are self-created or inevitably become so.

The second difficulty with identifying self-creation with self-mastery is that, whereas all of Nietzsche's discussions of the former are decidedly positive, this is clearly not the case with the latter. For instance, in the section from *Daybreak*, we find Nietzsche attributing a form of self-mastery to the ascetic who "starves his sensuality and thereby also starves and ruins his vigour and not seldom his reason as well" (D 109). As we have seen in the previous chapter,

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[297] See also HH I 263, UM III 1.

[298] To understand what Nietzsche means by 'physics' here, I think it is important to consider an earlier, seldom discussed, section from *The Gay Science*, entitled "*Changed taste*" (GS 39). Nietzsche asserts, here, in line with his determinism, that the evolution of humanity's intellectual views—"opinions [Meinungen], along with all proofs [Beweisen], refutations, and the whole intellectual masquerade"—do not cause but are *caused by* changes in "taste [Geschmacks]" (GS 39). The general taste is said to be led in different directions by exceptional individuals who Nietzsche characterizes in a way that seems to make sense of his later discussion of the importance of physics to self-creation: "Thus they coerce many, and gradually still more develop a new habit, and eventually *all* a new *need.* The reason why these individuals have different feelings and tastes is usually to be found in some oddity of their life style, nutrition, or digestion, perhaps a deficit or excess of inorganic salts in their blood and brain; in brief, in their *physis.* They have the courage to side with their *physis* and to heed its demands down to the subtlest nuances. Their aesthetic and moral judgments are among these 'subtlest nuances' of the *physis*" (GS 39).

Nietzsche regards this condition as a kind of sickness, which one should avoid to whatever extent possible.[299] Elsewhere, asceticism is described in terms that sound directly antithetical to self-creation. In *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche characterizes asceticism as a "complete surrender of [one's] personality," which he contrasts in a later unpublished note with "richness in personality, abundance in oneself" (HH, I 139, KSA 12:10[128]). It is, thus, highly unlikely that Nietzsche would define self-creation in a way that encompasses the ascetic.

My last concern with Leiter's interpretation is that it leaves Nietzsche without a substantive account of the distinctive 'authenticity' of the self-created individual. For the fact, alone, that one or more of an individual's drives have impacted the course of her development provides little reason to conclude that her identity is in some important sense 'her own.' One might think of those who, like Nietzsche's ascetic, possess a drive that tyrannizes and effectively weakens the majority of its counterparts. While the character of such a person might be determined, to some extent, by a force internal to her nature (hence, satisfying Leiter's Causal Condition), we would be more intuitively inclined to regard such a person as self-*alienated* as opposed to authentic.

For these reasons, I think that Leiter's account of Nietzsche's conception of self-creation, though it correctly identifies what it is that must direct this form of self-development, is nevertheless, incomplete. In the following, I would like to propose what it is that I believe distinguishes self-creation from all other forms of self-development on Nietzsche's account: namely, the achievement of an internal condition he refers to as wholeness. Following my analysis of this notion, I will consider both the way in which it enables Nietzsche to capture our

[299] Also see TI 'Morality' 2; §5.2.2.2.

sense of the authenticity of the self-created individual, as well as the connection this notion establishes between his account of self-creation and human excellence.

4.2 *Wholeness*

Nietzsche's discussions of self-creation very often appeal to the idea of mastering or overcoming oneself in the sense of making the various constituents of one's nature pliant to one's creative influence.[300] However, it is important to note that this self-mastery is not, itself, construed as the *purpose* of self-creation. Indeed, Nietzsche specifically cautions against pursuing self-mastery for its own sake. We see this, for instance, in a section from *Human All Too Human*, in which he addresses the "overcoming of the passions" (HH I 53). The individual who achieves this is said to acquire a kind of "fertile ground" within himself, and his "immediate urgent task," according to Nietzsche, should then be to "*sow* the seeds of good spiritual works" in this new 'soil' (HH I 53). Nietzsche continues,

> The overcoming itself is only a *means*, not an end; if it is not so viewed, all kinds of weeds and devilish nonsense will quickly spring up in this rich soil now unoccupied, and soon there will be more rank confusion than there ever was before. (HH I 53) [301, 302]

Thus, to the extent that self-creation seems to presuppose the mastering of oneself, our central interpretative challenge should be to identify the distinctive end to which this form of self-mastery is directed.

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[300] For example, see GS 290, TI 'Skirmishes' 49, EH 'Why I am so Clever' 9.
[301] See also HH WS 65.
[302] Similarly, in a discussion from *Beyond Good and Evil*, regarding the influence of religion on different types of individuals, Nietzsche claims that for certain "ascending classes," religious devotion can provide a kind of preparation for greatness insofar as it cultivates in them "the strength and joy of the will, the will to *self-control*," which can eventually entice them "to walk the paths to higher spirituality, to test the feelings of great self-overcoming, of silence and solitude. Asceticism and puritanism are almost indispensable means for educating and ennobling a race that wishes to become master over its origins among the rabble and that works its way up toward future rule" (BGE 61, emphasis added, see also KSA 12:9[93]).

One of Nietzsche's most illuminating discussions in this regard occurs in a section from *Twilight of the Idols,* in which he describes the way in which Goethe allegedly created himself. Nietzsche writes, here, that Goethe represents

> a magnificent attempt to overcome the eighteenth century by a return to nature, by an ascent to the naturalness of the Renaissance — a kind of self-overcoming [Selbstüberwindung] on the part of that century. He bore its strongest instincts within himself: the sensibility, the idolatry of nature, the anti-historic, the idealistic, the unreal and revolutionary (the latter being merely a form of the unreal). He sought help from history, natural science, antiquity, and also Spinoza, but, above all, from practical activity; he surrounded himself with limited horizons; he did not retire from life but put himself into the midst of it; he was not fainthearted but took as much as possible upon himself, over himself, into himself. What he wanted was totality; he fought the mutual extraneousness [das Auseinander][303] of reason, senses, feeling, and will (preached with the most abhorrent scholasticism by Kant, the antipode of Goethe); he disciplined himself to wholeness, he *created* himself. (TI 'Skirmishes' 49)[304]

Goethe is thus characterized as someone who overcame [überwinden] himself—later, as an instance of a type that has its self in control [selbst im Zaume] (TI 'Skirmishes' 49). However it is not his self-discipline, as such, that makes Goethe an exemplar of self-creation. Rather, what leads Nietzsche to conclude that Goethe "*created* himself" is the internal condition that Goethe's self-mastery supposedly *enabled* him to achieve: namely, wholeness [Ganzheit] [305] (TI 'Skirmishes' 49).

This condition appears to involve two basic elements. To be whole, one must first cultivate one's character in a way that employs all (or nearly all) of the internal resources available to one. As Nietzsche puts this shortly later in the section, the type Goethe embodies is able to "afford [gönnen; or indulge] the whole range [ganzen Umfang] and wealth of being

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[303] It seems that 'Auseinander' would be better translated as 'disintegration' or 'disgregaation', here.
[304] See also HH I 95, KSA 12:9[178].
[305] Nietzsche seems to be referring to the same internal condition as both totality [Totalität] and wholeness [Ganzheit] in this section. The various discussions in which these terms are employed suggest that they are not conceptually distinct for Nietzsche, though it might be noted that he uses the term 'wholeness' more often than 'totality' in his published and unpublished writings (the former is used on 12 occasions, compared to the latter which is addressed only four times).

natural [Natürlichkeit; or one's naturalness]" (TI 'Skirmishes' 49). Beyond this, one must also *integrate* or *unify* these various internal resources. Hence, Nietzsche writes that Goethe's achievement of wholeness stands diametrically opposed to the internal disintegration [Auseinander] allegedly promoted by Kant.[306]

One can find Nietzsche promoting this idea of an all-encompassing unification of one's nature in several of his unpublished notes from the same year in which he wrote *Twilight of the Idols*. In one of these, he presents this condition as the defining feature of the "higher type," who is said to represent "an incomparably greater complexity—a greater sum of co-ordinated elements" (KSA 13:14[133]).[307] In another note from this year, he speaks of the "economizing [ökonomisiren]" of all of one's passions or desires, which he casts as a superior alternative to the suppression and extirpation of the passions, allegedly prescribed by the moralist: "instead of taking into service the great sources of strength, those impetuous torrents of the soul that are so often dangerous and overwhelming, and *economizing them*, this most shortsighted and pernicious mode of thought, the moral mode of thought, wants to make them dry up" (KSA 13:14[163], emphasis added).[308]

Although the idea of making use of the "whole range" of one's nature might make a certain intuitive sense, it is as yet unclear what Nietzsche has in mind when he talks of 'coordinating,' 'integrating,' or 'economizing' the various constituents of one's nature (TI

[306] One should also consider an earlier mentioned unpublished note from the same period in which Nietzsche describes the development of the "*whole man* [*ganze Mensch*]" (KSA 12:10[111]). He begins by contrasting such an individual with the great majority, who, with respect to their inner nature, allegedly "represent pieces and fragments of man: one has to add them up for a complete man to appear. Whole ages peoples are in this sense fragmentary; it is perhaps part of the economy of human evolution that man should evolve piece by piece" (KSA 12:10[111]). Nietzsche's "*whole man*" is subsequently said to be, not just a fuller representation of his nature, but a "synthetic man," suggesting again that wholeness involves both the *employment* and the *unification* of the sum total of internal resources available to one (KSA 12:10[111]).
[307] See also KSA 13:14[117], 12:9[166].
[308] See also KSA 12:1[122].

'Skirmishes' 49). In the following two sections, I would like to consider more closely what this unification required for wholeness—and thus for self-creation—consists in, according to Nietzsche.

4.2.1 *Teleological unity*

One might at first be inclined to think of the unity referred to in the aforementioned passages as involving no more than the elimination of internal discord or conflict among one's drives; to 'coordinate' one's nature, in this sense, could simply amount to segregating the drives' varied strivings, so as to reduce the potential for enervating power struggles. This interpretation might seem to be supported by the way in which Nietzsche often presents internal unity as the mere *opposite* of self-contradiction.[309] However, in several places, one will find him offering a more substantive account of the kind of unification he means to promote.

We see this at the end of his discussion of Goethe in *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche claims that Goethe's type knows, specifically, how to "use to his advantage [Vortheile]" all of the elements of his nature, including those that would cause the "average nature" to perish (TI 'Skirmishes' 49).[310, 311] This could be taken to suggest that what Nietzsche has in mind is a kind of *teleological unity*, whereby one coordinates the various constituents of one's nature in a way that serves a single purpose: namely, one's 'advantage,' perhaps understood as maximal power. Indeed, in a note from the previous year, Nietzsche similarly

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[309] For example, in one of his notes, he characterizes a "*victorious* will" in terms of "increased co-ordination, of a harmonizing of all the strong desires," which he contrasts with "contradiction and lack of co-ordination among the inner desires" (KSA 13:14[117]).

[310] See also KSA 12:1[122].

[311] This might be compared with an unpublished note from the previous year, in which Nietzsche writes that in 'overcoming' one's affects one should not aim to weaken or extirpate them, but rather to put[…] them into service: which may also mean subjecting them to a protracted tyranny" (KSA 12:1[122]). The goal of this tyranny should be to ensure that when our affects are "granted freedom again: they love us a good servants and go voluntarily wherever our best interests life" (KSA 12:1[122]).

describes Goethe as a rare instance of the "great *synthetic* man… in whom the various forces [Kräfte] are unhesitatingly harnessed for the attainment of *one goal*" (KSA 12:9[119], emphasis added). Yet in identifying what this unifying goal might be, it is important to recall what it is that directs the process of self-creation. According to Nietzsche, this must be a ruling *drive*. Thus, it would seem that if there is an interest, in the service of which the various elements of a 'whole' nature are united, it would need to be that of the particular drive that brings this wholeness about.

Although Goethe's achievement of wholeness is not described as the work of a ruling drive in *Twilight of the Idols*, one can find this way of understanding the cultivation of wholeness in several unpublished notes from this same year (1888). In one, Nietzsche asserts that the "supremest form of health" is achieved through the ascendance of a "dominating passion" within one's nature: "here, the co-ordination of the inner systems and their operation *in the service of one end* is best achieved" (KSA 13:14[157], emphasis added). He contrasts this with "the antagonism of the passions; two, three, a multiplicity of 'souls in one breast,'" which is regarded as "very unhealthy" insofar as it causes an "inner ruin, disintegration… inner conflict and anarchism—unless one passion at last becomes master. Return to health—" (KSA 13:14[157]).[312, 313] In another note, Nietzsche describes the former, healthy condition as involving the "coordination" of one's various drives [Antriebe] under the command of "a single predominant" drive; this is said to produce a "precision and clarity of direction [Richtung]" within the self (KSA 13:14[219]). In these passages, it is thus clear that the integration of one's passions or drives is understood to be the work of a ruling drive, which cultivates this unity for the sake of its own pursuits.

[312] See also KSA 13:14[117], 12:9[166], GS 113.
[313] When Nietzsche describes the "multiplicity of 'souls in one breast'" as a cause of internal ruin, it seems that he is not referring simply to the possession of a multiplicity of passions, but rather to a condition in which more than one passion vie for control over its counterparts (KSA 13:14[157]).

Now it might be thought that, on this teleological conception of the unity required for wholeness, the empowerment of one particular drive is favored over that of its counterparts and that Nietzsche has therefore abandoned the concern for aggregate power, which was previously said to define his conception of human excellence. This would imply a surprising tension between Nietzsche's conceptions of self-creation and human excellence. However, in the note just cited, Nietzsche goes on to claim that the result of the unity he describes is, in fact, "a strong will," whereas "multitude and disgregaation of impulses [Antriebe] and the lack of any systematic order among them result in a 'weak will'" (KSA 13:14[219]).[314] In other words, Nietzsche takes the coordinating domination of a single drive to be *necessary* to facilitate the aggregate strength of one's will.[315]

Of course, this overall empowerment is surely not the ruling drive's aim. As we saw earlier, Nietzsche conceives of the drives as independently pursuing *their own power*, without regard for the impact they have on the totality to which they belong; as he writes in one aforementioned note, the drives "do not consider the advantage of the whole ego (because they do not consider at all!), they act contrary to our advantage, against the ego: and often *for* the ego—innocent in both cases" (KSA 10:8[23]). Hence, to the extent that the ruling drive imposes an order on its counterparts that promotes their aggregate empowerment, this empowerment must be either a fortunate side effect of or, perhaps, a means to the ruling drive's own pursuit of power.

One could make sense of the empowering effect of teleological unity in the following way: insofar as the facilitating drives are employed in the service of a ruling drive's end, they

[314] See also KSA 11:27[59].
[315] Also consider a note from 1887, in which Nietzsche describes Napoleon as achieving "totality as health and highest activity [höchste Aktivität]; the straight line, the grand style in action rediscovered; the most powerful instinct, that of life itself, the lust to rule, affirmed" (KSA 12:10[5]).

would be afforded regular and mutually consistent opportunities to discharge their strength, which, on Nietzsche's account of drive development, would enhance their power over time. Moreover, if there was any way in which the ruling drive could further encourage the empowerment of its counterparts, it would seem to be in its interest to do so, assuming that it could only be benefited by having more powerful facilitators supporting its own pursuits.[316] Hence, there is at least some initial reason to think that the kind of teleological unity that Nietzsche associates with wholeness could promote the aggregate power of the self-created. I will have more to say on this later on in the present chapter. For now, however, we should examine how it is that Nietzsche understands the ruling drive to 'direct' the other drives within its totality.

4.2.2 *Fashioning the drives and multiplicity*

The previous account of the ruling drive's 'coordination' of one's nature has been rather sketchy. Unfortunately, Nietzsche says very little to explain just how it is that a ruling drive is supposed to 'direct' its counterparts in the service of its particular pursuits. One of his most focused discussions of this is offered in *Ecce Homo*, when he recounts his own attempt at self-creation. He writes, here, of an "organizing 'idea'"—later referred to as an "instinct"[317]—"that is destined to rule," and which apparently "prepares *single* qualities and fitnesses [Tüchtigkeiten; or capabilities] that will one day prove to be indispensable as means [Mittel] toward a whole

[316] At the same time, Nietzsche does appear to acknowledge the risk of power struggles developing among one's strongest drives over control over their totality. Hunt makes note of this in the following line from a discussion of the development of one's passions into virtues in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: referencing "the fight among your virtues" Nietzsche writes, "Behold how each of your virtues covets what is highest: each wants your whole spirit that it might become *her* herald; each wants your whole wrath, hatred, and love" (Z I 5, Hunt [1991], p. 71).
[317] This occurs when he describes his character as "a tremendous variety that is nevertheless the opposite of chaos—this was the precondition, the long, secret work and artistry *of my instinct*. Its *higher protection* manifested itself to such a high degree that I never even suspected what was growing in me" (EH 'Why I am so Clever' 9).

[Ganzen]—one by one, it trains all *subservient* capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task" (EH 'Why I am so Clever' 9). As a result of his ruling drive's coordinating efforts, Nietzsche claims that "one day all my capacities, suddenly ripe, *leaped forth* in their ultimate perfection" (EH 'Why I am so Clever' 9). He describes himself, in this 'perfect' condition, as embodying a "tremendous variety" of capacities "that is nevertheless the opposite of chaos" (EH 'Why I am so Clever' 9). This account suggests a rather intricate kind of coordination—one in which the ruling drive 'prepares [bereitet]' and 'trains [bildet; or forms]' its facilitating counterparts in some way. However, much is left unclarified.

Further insight can arguably be found in a passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that Lester Hunt cites in his analysis of Nietzsche's theory of virtue.[318] This passage appears partway through the early chapter, "*On Enjoying and Suffering the Passions* [*Von den Freuden- und Leidenschaften*]."[319] where Nietzsche offers his reader a poetic depiction of the way in which one's passions [Leidenschaften] can be transformed into virtues [Tugenden/Freudenschaften]. He describes this transformative procedure as such,

> Once you suffered passions [Einst hattest du Leidenschaften] and called them evil. But now you have only your virtues left: they grew out of your passions. You planted [legtest] your highest goal in the heart of these passions: then they became your virtues and passions you enjoyed [Freudenschaften]. (TSZ I 5)[320, 321]

One could reasonably interpret this as an account of the process by which a ruling drive 'trains' its facilitating drives in the service of its own end—assuming this end is what Nietzsche means to refer to as one's 'highest goal.'[322] Read in this way, Nietzsche's comments suggest that the

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[318] Hunt (1991), p. 71.
[319] For an interesting commentary on this translation, see Hunt (1991), p. 70.
[320] See also HH WS 37.
[321] I have used Hunt's translation of this passage (Hunt [1991], 71).
[322] Recall the note in which Nietzsche writes "the dominating passion, which even brings with it the supremest form of health; here the co-ordination of the inner systems and their operation in the service of one end is best achieved" (KSA 13:14[157], see also 12:9[119])

ruling drive does not simply determine the direction or context in which its facilitators strive; rather it also affects its facilitator's own end or mode of expression, insofar as the "highest goal" is said to be "planted" in the "heart" of the passions (TSZ I 5).

On Hunt's interpretation of this account, the individual's highest goal fully usurps the original ends of the target passions [Leidenschaften]; these passions become, in other words, "simply a source of energy" for the coordinating agent to redirect to its own end.[323, 324] It seems to me, however, that the ends of the targeted passions must retain at least some of their original character. Otherwise, the ruling drive's coordinating work would eliminate the multiplicity that Nietzsche repeatedly attributes to the self-created. We saw him pointing to this multiplicity, for instance, in the passage from *Ecce Homo* in which he characterizes himself as embodying a "*tremendous variety* that is nevertheless the opposite of chaos" (EH 'Why I am so Clever' 9, emphasis added).[325, 326] In an aforementioned note from this same period, he remarks, moreover, that for those 'higher types,' who represent "an incomparably greater complexity—a greater sum of co-ordinated elements," their internal "disintegration [die Disgregation]" becomes "incomparably more likely" (KSA 13:14[133]). This is presumably because the passions or drives that have been 'coordinated' within this type still possess their own distinctive ends which, given the right circumstances, may lead their strivings to fall out of alignment with those of the ruling drive or of their facilitating cohort.

But despite such references to multiplicity, the language in the passage Hunt cites clearly suggests that the ruling drive's end is, in some important sense, incorporated *within* its

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[323] Hunt (1991), p. 82.
[324] In a private conversation, Hunt has proposed that although the end of the passion might be extinguished through its transformation into a virtue, the passion might still retain its associated cognitive and somatic content.
[325] See also KSA 11:27[59], 11:35[18].
[326] Likewise, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes that the "greatness of man" should be sought in "his range and multiplicity, in his wholeness in manifoldness" (BGE 212).

facilitators. In order to make further sense of this point, I think it would be helpful to consider John Richardson's analysis of how, according to Nietzsche, two drives can become synthesized with one another. This procedure is said to typically involve a dominating drive using a weaker drive "for its own ends, the latter pursuing goals imposed on it by the first."[327] Richardson presents the following rather abstract account of this kind of synthesis,

> The weaker drive joins in the project commanded by the stronger and thereby enhances it; but as always struggling to assert itself within this relation, it also modifies that project with something of its own. …these projects adjust to one another proportionately to their relative power; each thereby finds some expression within the other.[328]

Unfortunately, Richardson seems to think that when the power differential between the synthesized drives is significant, the strivings of the weaker will be simply "absorbed or made (mostly) like" those of the stronger.[329] Such a reading would, again, make it difficult to account for the alleged multiplicity of those individuals whose nature has been coordinated by a ruling drive.[330] Nevertheless, Richardson goes on to present an example of how two drives that are "more evenly balanced" might be synthesized, and in this, I think we can find a plausible framework for understanding the way in which Nietzsche could take a ruling drive to influence the end or mode of expression of one of its counterparts.[331]

Richardson has us consider the practice of 'social eating'; he writes that "our interests in food and in social interaction here intertwine, and not merely in the sense of being pursued simultaneously."[332] Rather, in our various communal rituals surrounding food the strivings of our social and gustatory drives seem to exert a substantive influence on one another. Though

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[327] Richardson (1996), p. 46.
[328] Ibid., p. 47.
[329] Ibid.
[330] It should be noted that Richardson does recognize the importance of internal multiplicity or complexity for Nietzsche, though he takes this to be in tension with Nietzsche's "standard of unity" (Ibid., pp. 49-50).
[331] Ibid., p. 47.
[332] Ibid.

Richardson does not elaborate on his example, one might think of the experience of long-term travelers who adapt to the general eating habits of their host country.

For example, an American visiting Spain might, at first, find it somewhat disorienting to have his most substantial meal in the middle of the day, as opposed to in the evening. Yet we might imagine that adopting this regimen would enable him to better coordinate his meals with others, thereby facilitating some of his most fulfilling social interactions. Hence, assuming his social drive is sufficiently strong, one would expect him to 'impose' this new regimen on himself. While it might feel awkward at first, given enough time, we would hardly be surprised if the traveler actually came to prefer his new routine—not merely for it social benefits, but rather for its own sake.[333] In this case, it would seem appropriate to say that his social drive had exerted a substantive influence on the end or mode of expression of his gustatory impulses.

One could see this as an example of how a ruling drive might 'train' a facilitator. Although the end of the facilitating drive would remain distinct from that of the ruling drive, on this account, the former would nevertheless be altered in a way that clearly benefits the latter—by, in my example, broadening the field of opportunities in which the ruling drive is able to discharge its strength. Such an account thus provides a way of making sense of Nietzsche's aforementioned idea of implanting one's 'highest goal' in the 'heart' of one's passions or drives, while at the same time accommodating his view that the self-created embody a unification of multiple, diverse elements.

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[333] This example parallels, in several ways, Nietzsche's account of the development of moral virtue in *Human All Too Human*. In a section entitled "*The innocent element in so-called evil acts,*" he writes, "The ground for any kind of morality can […] be prepared only when a greater individual or a collective-individuality, for example society, the state, subjugates all other individuals, that is to say draws them out of their isolation and orders them within a collective. Morality is preceded by *compulsion*, indeed it is for a time itself still compulsion, to which one accommodates oneself for the avoidance of what one regards as unpleasurable. Later it becomes custom, later still voluntary obedience, finally almost instinct: then, like all that has for a long time been habitual and natural, it is associated with pleasure – and is now called *virtue*" (HH I 99).

At this point, we should briefly take stock of the ideas developed over the last three sections. In my attempt to expand upon Leiter's drive-centered account of self-creation, I turned to a discussion of Goethe in *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche identifies self-creation with the achievement of an internal condition referred to as wholeness. I then examined the nature of wholeness, arguing that this consists, according to Nietzsche, in the unification of all or most of one's drives in the service of a ruling drive's end. Then, in this section, I considered what this unification might amount to in practice.

In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to first return to the connection between Nietzsche's conceptions of self-creation and human excellence. Following this, I will conclude with a short discussion of how Nietzsche's account of self-creation, as I have construed it, is able to make sense of the 'authenticity' of the self-created individual without running afoul of his deterministic commitments.

4.3 *Self-creation and power*

In examining Nietzsche's conception of the teleological unification of one's drives, I drew attention to a note from 1888, in which he presents this unity as a prerequisite for strength. He claims, here, that whereas the disintegration of one's various impulses necessarily weakens one's will, "their coordination *under a single predominant impulse* results in a 'strong will'" (KSA 13:14[219], emphasis added). If this is correct, it would indicate a clear connection between self-creation and human excellence, in that the former would constitute a central strategy for achieving the latter, understood as maximal power. But why think that the

teleological unity of the self-created is in fact required for the promotion of their aggregate power?

I have already proposed one short account of the empowering effect this unity could have. The ruling drive's coordination of its counterparts would presumably ensure them regular and mutually consistent opportunities to discharge their strength, thereby encouraging their overall empowerment. Without this unity of direction, the strivings of one's various drives would likely clash, leading to enervating internal conflicts and/or the 'undernourishment' of the relatively weaker drives. Yet, one might agree that the empowerment of one's nature requires, for these reasons, *some* kind of internal unity while denying that this must involve the rule of *a single* drive. Why not think that several ruling drives could be just as, if not more, effective in establishing an empowering unity within the self?

One of Nietzsche's first, and perhaps most developed, published defenses of what might be called his 'autocratic' approach to internal unity[334] can be found as early as 1874, in the essay, "*Schopenhauer as Educator*" (UM III). In its opening section, Nietzsche clearly foreshadows his later discussions of self-creation, writing that the individual of his time should rise above his slovenly tendency to conform himself to conventional standards: "The man who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease taking himself easily; let him follow his conscience, which calls to him: 'Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not yourself" (UM III 1).[335, 336]

Nietzsche then turns to the question of how 'educators' might best cultivate the character of their 'pupils'—presumably with the aim of enabling them to fulfill this self-affirming

[334] By this I mean his view that internal unity requires the ascendance of just one ruling drive within the self.
[335] See also UM III 6.
[336] Compare this to the aforementioned aphorism from *The Gay Science* in which Nietzsche writes: *What does your conscience say?*— 'You shall become the person you are" (GS 270).

imperative. Two, seemingly opposed, pedagogical principles are considered in this regard. According to the first, which I will call the *unilateral principle*, an educator should begin by identifying her pupil's "real strength" and subsequently devote all of her "efforts and energy and heat" towards ensuring that this one "virtue" achieves "true maturity and fruitfulness" (UM III 2). The second, *multilateral principle* states, on the other hand, that the educator should instead "draw forth and nourish *all* the forces which exist in the pupil and bring them to a harmonious relationship with one another" (UM III 2).[337]

Given Nietzsche's later promotion of the maximization of one's *aggregate* power, we might well expect him to side with the latter principle. However, he claims, instead, that these two approaches to self-development are not mutually exclusive. Rather, according to Nietzsche, it is only by establishing a dominating central force within one's nature that an all-encompassing inner unity can be achieved.

> Where do we discover a harmonious whole at all, a simultaneous sounding of many voices in one nature if not in such men as Cellini, men in whom everything, knowledge, desires, love, hate, strives towards a central point, a root force, and where a harmonious system is constructed through the compelling domination of this living centre [durch die zwingende und herrschende Uebergewalt dieses lebendigen Centrums]? (UM III 3)

Inner unity is thus presented as something that must be forcibly imposed on one's nature, and, as Nietzsche sees it, only *a single* "root force" or "living centre" is capable of accomplishing this (UM III 3).[338] Hence, the multilateral approach to self-development, which seems to align with Nietzsche's ideal of maximal power, is understood to depend on the unilateral approach.[339]

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[337] See also KSA 3:30[2].
[338] In an earlier draft of this section Nietzsche writes that "harmony exists when everything is related to a center, to a cardinal force" (KSA 3:30[9]).
[339] Though it is worth mentioning that Nietzsche never explicitly claims that the dependency works in the opposite direction as well.

However, Nietzsche offers almost no evidence in support of this claim. His readers are merely encouraged to consider the life of Benvenuto Cellini, an accomplished Italian polymath from the 16th century, whose father allegedly insisted that he study music in addition to his true passion, goldsmithing (UM III 3). Yet by these details alone, it is hard to even see why Cellini provides us with an example of the interdependence of the unilateral and multilateral approaches to self-development. After all, Nietzsche never mentions what Cellini's ruling drive might have been,[340] much less how it came to harmonize its counterparts (UM III 3).

In his concluding comments, however, Nietzsche makes an additional point that I think offers some insight into why he claims that inner unity must be achieved by a *single* ruling drive. He remarks that the ideal educator must not only locate the "central force" within her pupil, she must also know how to "prevent its acting destructively on the other forces" by "mould[ing] the whole man into a living solar and planetary system" (UM III 3).[341] One's strongest drive is thus understood to pose an initial threat to its counterparts, which the educator mitigates by bringing these potential targets into alignment with the strongest drive's interests. In this harmonious condition, the strongest drive thus lacks any reason to contradict its counterparts, as this would be to contradict its own facilitators.

It seems to me that these same considerations might also explain why Nietzsche would deny that *multiple* ruling drives could effectively harmonize the self. For multiple ruling drives would seem to have numerous causes for conflict. Given that none could fashion the others' strivings to complement their own, these drives would presumably be led to compete over opportunities to discharge their strength. Conflicts over control of the weaker drives would likely

[340] It would surely be wrong to attribute to Cellini a 'drive to goldsmithing,' and any more plausible alternative—such as a drive to creative expression—would seem to explain his apparently secondary interest in music as well.
[341] In one of Nietzsche's unpublished drafts of this section, he writes in this same vein that "as things stand, without such educators, one often senses that one's strengths are in conflict with one another, revolting" (KSA 3:29[204]).

develop as well,[342] and this might generate opposed factions of facilitators within the self. Lastly, nothing would discourage the ruling drives from treating each other, or each other's facilitators for that matter, as resistances against which to discharge their strength. For these reasons, the ascendance of multiple ruling drives within the self would seem to leave the individual especially vulnerable to internal discord and the weakness of will this allegedly engenders.

This defense of the 'autocratic' approach to internal unity sits well with Nietzsche's comments in an aforementioned note from 1888, in which he contrasts the inner conditions of health and sickness (KSA 13:14[157]). Recall that he writes that whereas the "supremest form of health" is brought about by a "dominating passion"— "here the co-ordination of the inner systems and their operation in the service of one end is best achieved"—, numerous dominating centers are said to result in internal anarchy (KSA 13:14[157]).

> …two, three, a multiplicity of 'souls in one breast': very unhealthy, inner ruin, disintegration, betraying and increasing and inner conflict and anarchism—unless one passion at last becomes master. Return to health— (KSA 13:14[157]).[343]

We might note that Nietzsche's argument against the ascendance of more than one ruling drive within the self presupposes that multiple ruling drives would be incapable of cooperating with or accommodating each other's distinctive agendas. But why think this is the case? It seems to me that there are at least two reasons that Nietzsche could give for doubting the ability of several drives to peaceably share their rule over one nature.

First, it bears repeating that on his account, drives are understood to be purely 'self-interested,' pursuing their own power without regard for either the interests of their counterparts

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[342] Indeed, when Nietzsche proposes that all previous philosophical thought has merely been the intellectual expression of one's drives in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he remarks that "every single [drive] would like only too well to represent just *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate *master* of all the other drives" (BGE 6, See also KSA 12:7[60]).

[343] See also KSA 13:14[219].

or for those of the totality (or ego) to which they belong (see KSA 10:8[23]). Hence, it would be quite difficult to explain how a ruling drive could make any genuine concessions to its ruling counterparts; where their interests clash, one would expect conflict to ensue.

On the other hand, one might point out that insofar as the ruling drives would likely be comparable in their respective strengths, it could very well be contrary to their interests to enter into conflict. Accordingly, a multiplicity of ruling drives might opt to establish some kind of accord between themselves—involving, perhaps, a division of authority or resources. Yet, agreeing to, as well as enforcing, such an accord would require a degree of rationality that Nietzsche never ascribes to the drives. Indeed, in several places, he construes them as unintelligent, mindless entities. We see this, for instance, when he argues in an earlier mentioned note from 1888, that the drives do not consider "the advantage of the whole ego," in part because "they do not consider at all!"—"as every drive lacks intelligence, the viewpoint of 'utility' cannot exist for it" (KSA 10:8[23]).[344] Construed in this way, multiple ruling drives would seem to be practically incapable of engaging in the kind of strategic cooperation required for shared rule.

If what I have argued is correct, Nietzsche's commitment to the 'autocratic' approach to internal unity follows from the particular way in which he conceives of the drives: namely, as independent, contentious impulses, that must be coerced into unity. Now, insofar as he understands this unity to be a presupposition of strength, we can thus see how self-creation, construed as the unification of one's nature under a single ruling drive, provides a central strategy for achieving human excellence.

[344] See also KSA 13:11[89], GS 3.

4.3 *Authenticity*

Before concluding this chapter, there is one further issue that remains to be addressed. Earlier on, I pointed to an intuitive association between the idea of self-creation and that of a kind of personal authenticity; to create oneself would seem to involve taking a certain ownership over one's identity. While the bootstrapping conception of self-creation offered one appealing way of understanding this point—namely, by regarding self-creation as a form of autonomous self-*causation*—Nietzsche's determinism clearly prevents him from taking this approach. In what other way, then, can Nietzsche account for the authenticity of the self-created individual?

To answer this, one should examine more closely Nietzsche's repeated claim that to create oneself is to *become what one is*.[345] This notion appears in several places throughout Nietzsche's published works—from as early as "*Schopenhauer as Educator*" to as late as *Ecce Homo*, which he notably subtitles, "*How one becomes what one is* [*Wie man wird, was man ist*]" (UM III 1, EH 'Why I am so Clever' 9). But despite its prominence, Nietzsche almost never explains what 'becoming what one is' is supposed to entail. This might be understood to suggest that he takes its meaning to be self-evident. Yet the most straightforward reading of this notion makes little sense; for it is hard to see why one would ever need to *become* what one is, as one already *is* this, necessarily.

The only place in which Nietzsche seems to explicate the idea of 'becoming what one is' is in a rarely discussed section from *Human All Too Human*, entitled "*Talent* [*Begabung*]" (HH I 263). He writes here that,

> In as highly developed a humanity as ours now is everyone acquires from nature access to many talents [Talenten]. Everyone *possesses inborn talent*, but few possess the degree

[345] This claim was noted, for instance, in the section from *The Gay Science* in which Nietzsche writes "*we want to become those we are* [*Wir aber wollen Die werden, die wir sind*]—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves" (GS 335, see also EH 'Why I am so Clever' 9, UM III 1, TSZ IV 1).

> of inborn and acquired toughness, endurance and energy [Zähigkeit, Ausdauer, Energie] actually to become a talent, that is to say to become what he is [wird, was er ist]: which means to discharge it in works and actions [es in Werken und Handlungen entladet]. (HH I 263)

'Becoming what one is' is thus described as a kind of self-*realization*, where one's natural talents are compelled to express themselves in action. If one's talents [Begabungen/Talenten] are understood here as one's drives, it becomes quite clear why Nietzsche would later identify this form of becoming with self-creation; for both involve pressing one's nature into service. In referring to this process as 'becoming what one is' Nietzsche highlights the essential connection, on his view, between the discharging or activation of one's drives—construed as independent manifestations of the will to power—and the realization or development of one's nature.

Understood in this way, Nietzsche's conception of self-creation does appear to offer a way of capturing the authenticity of the self-created without contradicting his determinism. For although the self-created person would be no more causally responsible for the state of her character than, say, an ascetic, her character *would* be more 'her own,' in the sense that it would more fully express the particular constituents of her nature.

4.4 *Conclusion*

While Nietzsche's determinism and reductive view of the self might seem to stand in tension with his various discussions of self-creation, I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter that these important aspects of his philosophical thought are in fact consistent with one another. On the interpretation of self-creation that I have defended here, Nietzsche conceives of this process as a specific form of self-mastery, whereby a ruling drive unifies its various counterparts in the service of its own pursuit of power. To the extent that this internal condition—also

referred to as wholeness—is understood to be necessary for the full expression of one's nature, self-creation is thus made a central strategy for achieving human excellence.

5. The value of excellence

Beyond understanding the way in which Nietzsche describes human excellence and how it can be achieved, it is important to also consider on what grounds he means to *prescribe* it to humanity or in what sense he takes this mode of being to be an ideal to which humans should, at least in principle, aspire. This requires an examination of what I take to be Nietzsche's value standard, according to which power constitutes humanity's sole source of value. In the first few sections of this chapter, I will investigate the way in which this standard is proposed specifically in *Antichrist*, arguing that it is on the basis of this standard that Nietzsche means to promote human excellence as an ideal. Following this, I will then address two basic questions regarding the status of Nietzsche's standard of value.

The first of these concerns the scope of this standard, or, in other words, to whom it is intended to apply. As we will see, there are a number of discussions in which Nietzsche appears to recommend essentially weak modes of being to most people—specifically, to those whom he refers to as the 'masses' or 'herd.' Some have taken this as evidence that Nietzsche intends for his power-centered standard of value to apply only to a select minority. However, I will argue that this is not the case, and that Nietzsche's recommendation of a 'lower' ideal to most of humanity is actually meant to follow from his view that power is humanity's sole source of value.

I will then consider how exactly Nietzsche understands power to possess value. This will begin with a discussion of Richard Schacht's view that Nietzsche takes power to be *objectively* valuable in the sense that its value does *not* consist only in its being willed, desired, or otherwise valued by those for whom it is good. After reviewing the evidence in support of this reading, I will argue that Nietzsche does in fact take the value of power to consist only in its being the

object of our willing. I then conclude with a discussion of the way in which I understand this to limit, somewhat, the case Nietzsche is able to make for the promotion of human excellence.

5.1 *Nietzsche's values*

On the issue of values, Nietzsche is probably best known for what he attacks rather than what he endorses. Much attention has been paid, in particular, to his multi-faceted critique of the moral distinction between 'good' and 'evil.' Among the more widely-read instances of this critique is a section from *Twilight of the Idols* in which Nietzsche calls for all philosophers to "stand beyond good and evil and treat the illusion of moral judgment as beneath them" (TI 'Improvers' 1). This demand is said to follow from the insight that "there are no moral facts" and, thus, moral judgments, like religious judgments, "are based on realities that do not exist" (TI 'Improvers' 1).[346, 347]

But although Nietzsche might categorically reject the practice of *moral* judgment, it would be a serious mistake to think that he means to repudiate any and all forms of value judgment along with it. Indeed, throughout his works, one will repeatedly find him employing what he takes to be a distinctly non-moral or extra-moral standard of value under the heading, 'good and bad,' and, as we will see, it is on the basis of this alternative standard that Nietzsche casts his conception of human excellence as a value conferring end to which humanity should aspire.[348]

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[346] See also BGE 108, KSA 12:2[165].

[347] Of course, this is not the only type of criticism that Nietzsche directs at the practice of judgment. Just as important is his claim, addressed later on in *Twilight of the Idols*, that adherence to an "'altruistic' morality" is symptomatic of decadence: "'Not to seek one's own advantage'—that is merely the moral fig leaf for quite a different, namely, a physiological, state of affairs: 'I no longer know how to find my own advantage.' Disintegration of the instincts" (TI 'Skirmishes' 35).

[348] Nietzsche's intention to maintain a standard of 'good and bad' in the wake of his denial of 'good and evil' is given special emphasis at the conclusion of the essay from the *Genealogy of Morals* in which he investigates the historical development of these two value standards and the respective ideals they present to humanity. After

5.1.1 *Good and bad in Antichrist*

Despite the prominent role that Nietzsche's values often play throughout his works, there are surprisingly few published discussions in which he explicitly states what his conception of 'good and bad' fundamentally amounts to. This is not to say that his values are left entirely mysterious, as most of his evaluative assessments clearly revolve around questions of strength or power. For instance, when he denounces "liberal institutions" in *Twilight of the Idols*, it is because, in their attempt to reduce the suffering of humanity, they allegedly "undermine the will to power" (TI 'Skirmishes' 38). Nietzsche goes on to claim that "the peoples who had some value, attained some value [Etwas werth waren, werth wurden]," always did so under more dangerous conditions, in which confrontations with great resistances required the cultivation of their strength: "first principle: one must need to be strong—otherwise one will never become strong" (TI 'Skirmishes' 38).[349] Such an assessment implies that power is a source of value; however, there is admittedly room to question whether Nietzsche sees power as the *only* and *most basic* source of value in human life.

Hence, it is rather significant when, at the beginning of *Antichrist*, Nietzsche decides to offer a direct analysis of his conception of 'good' and 'bad.' This occurs in section two, where, without any prefatory qualifications, he writes, "What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? Everything that is born of

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describing the alleged ascent of 'good and evil' Nietzsche comes to the question of whether the "greatest or all conflicts of ideals" has come to an end, or whether it might reemerge and whether this should even perhaps be desired (GM I 16, 17). His answer is somewhat coy but nonetheless decisive: "Whoever begins at this point, like my readers, to reflect and pursue his train of thought will not soon come to the end of it—reason enough for me to come to an end, assuming it has long since been abundantly clear what my aim is, what the aim of that dangerous slogan is that is inscribed at the head of my last book *Beyond Good and Evil*. — At least this does not mean 'Beyond Good and Bad'" (GM I 17). Then, in a note appended to this essay, Nietzsche calls on "all sciences" to tackle the issues apparently revealed in these closing remarks, concerning the "the problem of value" and of "of the order of rank among values" (GM I).

[349] See also BGE 225.

weakness [aus der Schwäche stammt]" (A 2). If this seems to leave open the possibility that Nietzsche might recognize *other* fundamental goods, in addition to power, one should also consider an unpublished note from the previous year, in which he asserts, even more precisely, that "there is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power [Grade der Macht]" (KSA 12:5[71]).[350, 351]

Thus, we are presented with a value standard that would seem to be ideally suited for the promotion of human excellence, understood as the maximal realization of the wills to power that constitute one's nature. For if this standard were employed to evaluate persons—as Nietzsche certainly seems to intend in the aforementioned notes in which he proposes an "order of rank as order of power"[352]—one's value would be directly proportional to the degree to which one realizes one's nature through the achievement of power (KSA 12:2[131]).[353] On the other hand, Nietzsche does not directly indicate, in these passages, that he means to prescribe anything to humanity or that he believes that insofar as power is its sole source of value, the condition of maximal power ought to be pursued as humanity's ideal.

This further point is strongly implied, however, in the section immediately following Nietzsche's presentation of his value standard in *Antichrist*, where he explains that his primary intent in proposing this standard, is to establish which mode of being should serve as the object of humanity's aspirations.

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[350] See also KSA 13:11[83], 13:14[8], 12:10[133].
[351] Similarly, in a note from 1888, Nietzsche writes that "the attempt should be made to see whether a scientific order of values could be constructed simply on a numerical and mensural scale of force—All other 'values' are prejudices, naiveties, misunderstandings. –They are everywhere *reducible* to this numerical and mensural scale of force. The ascent on this scale represents every rise in value; the descent on this scale represents every diminution of value" (KSA 13:14[105]).
[352] See §3.4.2.
[353] See also KSA 12:10[118], 13:11[36], WP 855.

> The problem I thus pose is… what type of man shall [soll] be *bred* [züchten],[354] shall be *willed,* for being higher in value [als den höherwerthigeren], worthier of life [lebenswürdigeren], more certain of a future. Even in the past this higher type has appeared often—but as a fortunate accident, as an exception, never as something *willed*. In fact, this has been the type most dreaded—almost *the* dreadful—and from dread the opposite type was willed, bred, and *attained*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick human animal. (A 3)[355]

Thus, to the extent that Nietzsche's standard is understood to specify a mode of being that is "higher in value [höherwerthigeren]," he takes it to thereby establish an ideal to which humanity is to direct its will.[356] It is worth noting that the ideal so prescribed by Nietzsche's standard of value is presented, here, as the *antipode* of the ideal pursued thus far, as it is on the basis of this opposition that he often characterizes his positive philosophical program as what many interpreters refer to as a *revaluation of all values,* but what is perhaps better translated as, a *reversal of all values* [Umwerthung aller Werthe][357] (See A 61, EH 'Daybreak' 1, 'Why I am a' 1, GM I 17, KSA 12:10[145]).[358]

We will need to consider the specific grounds on which Nietzsche proposes his standard, or, more precisely, how he means to justify the claim that power is humanity's sole source of

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[354] Regarding Nietzsche's notion of 'breeding [züchten]' one should look to a note from this same year (1888) in which Nietzsche attempts to dispel the alleged "confusion of breeding and taming" (KSA 13:15[65]). That Nietzsche worries about such a confusion suggests, from the start, that the 'breeding' he promotes is best understood as a form of self-development as opposed a form of eugenics (See also KSA 13:15[55]/13:15[72]-[73], 12:9[1], TI 'Improvers' 2). He goes on to write that "breeding, as I understand it, is a means of storing up the tremendous forces of mankind so that the generations can build upon the work of their forefathers—not only outwardly, but inwardly, organically growing out of them and becoming something stronger" (KSA 13:15[65]). He concludes that "the goal of breeding, even in the case of a single individual, can only be the *stronger* man" (KSA 13:15[65]).

[355] See also BGE 203, KSA 11:37[8], 11:35[407].

[356] Nietzsche's conception of the higher type as an *ideal* that one should in principle pursue, is also suggested in the following section, where he remarks that although "mankind does not represent a development toward something better or stronger or higher in the sense accepted today" there are isolated successes among humanity that he characterizes, in idealistic terms, as constituting a "bull's-eye:" "success in individual cases is constantly encountered in the most widely different places and cultures: here we really do find a higher type, which is, in relation to mankind as a whole, a kind of overman. Such fortunate accidents of great success have always been possible and will perhaps always be possible. And even whole families, tribes, or peoples may occasionally represent such a bull's-eye" (A 4).

[357] I owe this observation, regarding the translation of *Umwerthung,* to Ivan Soll.

[358] Other statements of Nietzsche's ideal as the antipode and intended replacement of the prevailing idea can be found throughout his late unpublished notes: "replacement of morality by the will to our goal"; "Replacement of the categorical imperative by the natural imperative" (KSA 12:9[27]).

value. But I would like to postpone that discussion for the moment, in order to examine the intended scope of Nietzsche's power-centered standard of value. The preceding passages would certainly seem to suggest that Nietzsche takes this standard to apply to humanity as a whole (or as such). However, throughout his works, Nietzsche often recommends, to the majority of humans, an ideal that seems to be fundamentally incompatible with this standard. In the following, I will examine what implications this has with regard to the scope of Nietzsche's standard of value.

5.2 *The question of scope*

In many of his discussions of human excellence one will find Nietzsche proposing that his ideal is, in a certain sense, appropriate only for a select few. For the rest of humanity, his advice is radically different. In several places, he appears to direct the average person towards the aforementioned rival and antipode of his ideal: namely, the ideal of traditional morality or of 'modern ideas.' This surprising stance might seem to cast doubt on the idea that Nietzsche takes the value standard—in virtue of which he promotes his conception of human excellence—to apply to all of humanity. Indeed, Brian Leiter has argued, partly on these grounds, that Nietzsche's values should be understood as merely expressing "the evaluative taste of a certain type of person," in no way 'privileged' with respect to other evaluative tastes, which different types of people might possess.[359]

In the next few sections, I will investigate the reasoning behind Nietzsche's view that excellence, as he conceives of it, is appropriate for some but not for others, and consider whether this contradicts my reading of the intended scope of his standard of value.

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[359] Leiter (2001), p. 150; see also Leiter (2000); Janaway (2013), p. 200.

5.2.1 *Higher and lower virtue*

One noteworthy discussion in which Nietzsche can be found suggesting that there are some individuals for whom the ideal of traditional morality might be appropriate, occurs in a late section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which he offers an assessment of what is referred to as the "unegoistic morality" (BGE 221). Nietzsche describes this morality as fundamentally promoting an ideal of "self-denial and modest self-effacement" (BGE 221).[360] While one might expect him to reject these traits outright, Nietzsche instead presents a conditional critique, arguing that for those who are "called and made to command [Befhlen]," either trait "would not be a virtue [Tugend] but the waste of a virtue" (BGE 221). Thus, where the 'unegoistic morality' supposedly goes wrong, according to Nietzsche, is not in promoting self-denial, *per se*, but rather in assuming that this ideal applies to *all* of humanity. Its principal fault, in other words, is that it "takes itself for unconditional and addresses itself to all," including those for whom it is distinctly inappropriate—"the higher, rarer, privileged" (BGE 221).[361] Although Nietzsche never says it explicitly, he clearly implies by this that, while there are some who should avoid the 'unegoistic morality,' there are others, and more likely many, for whom its ideal of self-denial is appropriate (BGE 221).

This move is perplexing for a variety of reasons, but perhaps most of all because Nietzsche often associates the ideal of self-denial with weakness. Indeed, just earlier in the same chapter from *Beyond Good and Evil*, he describes the prevailing "ideal of a dumb, renunciatory, humble, selfless, humanity," as an ideal that fundamentally "weakens and thins down the will" (BGE 212).[362] One would thus expect Nietzsche to condemn the pursuit of this mode of being in

[360] See also EH 'Daybreak' 2, 'Why I Am A' 7, KSA 13:11[148].
[361] See also BGE 198.
[362] See also KSA 13:17[6], 12:9[30].

every case, insofar as it promotes precisely what his standard of value designates as the fundamental disvalue. To the extent that he, instead, judges the ideal of self-denial to be appropriate for some, and indeed for most, one might take this to demonstrate that Nietzsche does not actually mean for his power-centered standard of value to be applied to humanity, as such, but that he thinks there are a variety of different basic value standards suited for different types of individuals.

In order to determine whether Nietzsche is, in this sense, a pluralist about fundamental standards of value, one should consider the specific reasons he has for recommending different virtues to different types of individuals.[363] While his reasoning is fairly opaque in his discussion of the "unegoistic morality," it comes more clearly into focus in an earlier section, from the first chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche offers the following defense of the idea that different general types of individuals should pursue their own respective forms of virtue (BGE 221).

> What serves the higher type of men as nourishment or delectation [Labsal] must almost be poison for a very different and inferior [geringeren] type. The virtues of the common man might perhaps signify vices and weaknesses in a philosopher. It could be possible that a man of a high type, when degenerating and perishing, might only at that point acquire qualities that would require those in the lower sphere into which he had sunk to begin to venerate him like a saint. There are books that have opposite values for soul and health, depending on whether the lower soul, lower vitality [Lebenskraft], or the higher and more vigorous [gewaltigere] ones turn to them: in the former case, these books are dangerous and lead to crumbling and disintegration; in the latter, heralds' cries that call the bravest to *their* courage. (BGE 30)[364]

[363] In *Nietzsche And the Origin of Virtue*, Hunt presents a convincing case for the view that Nietzsche was an ethical relativist, but not with regard to his fundamental standard of value, according to which "one's rank is a function of the extent to which one has attained power" (Hunt [1991], p. 133). Rather, according to Hunt, Nietzsche is "a relativist about the question of what one ought to do," insofar as he claims that one ought to do what is "conducive to one's preservation or (if possible) one's growth" and recognizes that this requires different courses of action for different people (Ibid., p. 133). Hunt therefore suggests that when Nietzsche recommends, what I am referring to here as, the ideal of self-denial, it is because it provides certain individuals their best "means to preservation," understood as the preservation of their power (Ibid., p. 132). In the following, I will be defending a similar position, however, I will be focusing on different passages, concerned specifically with the problem of internal contradiction, which Hunt does not address in his analysis.

[364] See also KSA 12:8[4].

Nietzsche thus clarifies that it is the degree of one's strength or "vitality [Lebenskraft]" that determines which virtues one should attempt to cultivate within oneself (BGE 30). Before considering the rationale behind this claim, it should first be noted that when Nietzsche distinguishes between strong and weak types of individuals, here, he does *not* present them as equals. Rather, he endorses an order of rank, according to which those of "lower vitality [niedrigere Lebenskraft]" constitute a lower, "inferior" type of person, while the "more vigorous [gewaltigere]" are, to that extent, a "higher type of human [höheren Art von Menschen]" (BGE 30). This should already indicate that Nietzsche takes his power-centered standard of value to apply generally, regardless of the different virtues he recommends to different types of individuals.[365]

With that in mind, one should also note that although Nietzsche attributes a distinct set of virtues to the lower type, he does not do so because he thinks that the higher type's virtues would confer less value on the lower type. His reasons are, instead, practical. According to Nietzsche, the lower type is simply *incapable* of achieving the higher virtues, as, apparently, the higher type's "values for soul and health" would cause the "crumbling and disintegration" of the lower type (BGE 30).[366] On the other hand, Nietzsche appears to think that members of the higher type, or 'philosophers,' *could* adopt the lower virtues if they so chose; however, for such individuals, these virtues would allegedly "signify vices and weaknesses" (BGE 30). All of this suggests that

[365] Leiter argues that while the distinction between 'lower' and 'higher' types might appear to subject humanity to an overarching value standard, such distinctions should be understood as no more than vitriolic rhetoric, expressing Nietzsche's alleged "desperation… to reach an increasingly distant and uninterested audience. The Nietzsche who was almost completely ignored during the years before illness erased his intellect and deprived him of his sanity might have resorted to more and more strident and violent rhetoric out of frustration over not being heard" (Leiter [2001], p. 155). I find this way of explaining Nietzsche's numerous claims regarding the relative rank or value of different types of individuals to be implausible, insofar as Nietzsche is often quite explicit, as we see here and in the aforementioned passages from *Antichrist*, about why he ranks different types in the way he does.

[366] This point will be more fully clarified in section §4.2.2.2.

Nietzsche sees the virtues of the lower type as a *second rate* alternative to the higher virtues. And it would seem that the value standard on which this judgment is based is the same power-centered standard that leads Nietzsche to judge the lower type to be inferior; in other words, Nietzsche presumably ranks the lower virtues below the higher virtues insofar as the former constitute a lesser achievement of power compared to the latter.[367]

If this is correct, Nietzsche's suggestion that his ideal should be pursued only by a select minority of "higher, rarer, privileged" individuals is compatible with the view that the value standard on the basis of which he promotes his conception of human excellence applies to all (BGE 221). For there is nothing inconsistent about regarding a particular mode of being as supremely valuable and yet also claiming that certain individuals would be better off pursuing a less valuable approximation, if this lesser approximation is in fact the best they can achieve. Neither would such a recommendation contradict the view that the supremely valuable mode of being is the one to which humanity should, at least in principle, aspire.

But reading Nietzsche in this way presupposes that he takes the ideal of the lower type to be their most valuable alternative to human excellence in the sense that it enables them to achieve as much power as their limitations allow. Yet this certainly seems to conflict with his various descriptions of humanity's lower ideal as a self-denying mode of being that allegedly "weakens and thins down the will" (BGE 212).[368] In the following, I would like to briefly

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[367] In a similar vein, Nietzsche later claims, amid a critique of utilitarianism, that "what is fair for one *cannot* by any means for that reason alone also be fair for others [was dem Einen billig ist, durchaus noch nicht dem Andern billig sein kann]; that the demand of one morality for all is detrimental for the higher men; in short, that there is an order of rank between man and man, hence also between morality and morality" (BGE 228). Much earlier, in a section from *Human All Too Human*, entitled "*Morality and quantity,*" Nietzsche offers a more precise account of how different moralities could be ranked: "One man's morality is higher compared with another's often only because its goals are quantitatively greater. The latter is drawn down by his narrowly bounded occupation with the petty" (HH I 512).

[368] See also KSA 13:14[65], 12:9[30].

consider whether there is any way in which Nietzsche could plausibly recommend such an ideal to the weak on the grounds that it constitutes their best available power strategy.

5.2.2 *The lower ideal: strategic weakness*

In considering if and how Nietzsche could understand an ideal that specifically *weakens* one's will to, in particular cases, best facilitate one's achievement of power, one should consider, again, the argument that Nietzsche makes against empowering *all* of one's drives, which I discussed towards the end of chapter three.[369] It was noted, there, that insofar as one's drives pursue power independently, they may therefore become intertwined in enervating conflicts. Given this, one's achievement of maximal power was said to often require weakening or restraining certain drives within one's nature.

It would be helpful to briefly revisit some of the passages in which this view was originally brought out. After this, I will argue that it is in virtue of the same general considerations that Nietzsche appears to understand the ideal of self-denial as the weak's best strategy for achieving power.

5.2.2.1 *The value of restraint*

In an unpublished note from 1884, one will recall that Nietzsche writes that humans possess "an abundance of *contrary* drives and impulses" and to avoid "perish[ing] through their contradictions," they must establish "locally limited orders of ranks in [their] multifarious world of drives" (KSA 11:27[59]). The imposition of this internal hierarchy is said to involve the following: "Thus a drive as master, its opposite weakened [sein Gegentrieb geschwächt],

[369] See §3.4.2.

refined, as the impulse that provides the stimulus for the activities of the chief drive" (KSA 11:27[59]). Nietzsche thus suggests that it may be necessary to weaken or restrain at least some one's drives in order to avoid "perishing" from internal conflict (KSA 11:27[59]). While the stakes are somewhat unclear in this passage, elsewhere he explains that disorder among one's drives is a principal cause of *weakness*. We see this in a note from 1888, in which he writes: "the multitude and disgregaation of impulses [Vielheit und Disgregation der Antriebe] and the lack of any systematic order among them result in a 'weak will'" (KSA 13:14[219]).[370] Hence, paradoxical though it might seem, Nietzsche takes the partial weakening of oneself to be necessary to avoid a more profoundly weak condition.

This has important implications for how Nietzsche conceives of those who achieve a state of maximal power. Such individuals must possess a "chief drive" capable of coordinating and to some extent restraining their other drives, so that the totality it oversees may be maximally 'pressed into service' (KSA 11:27[59], 13:14[219]). In his note from 1884, Nietzsche goes on to write that the "highest man" must possess "the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured" and, thus, where humanity is allegedly strongest "one finds instincts that conflict powerfully (e.g. Shakespeare), *but are controlled* [or restrained; gebändigt]" (KSA 11:27[59], emphasis added).[371] Attaining such control or restraint is no minor achievement, according to Nietzsche; it requires great strength on the part of the coordinating agent. Hence, in an aforementioned note from 1887, he claims that "the 'great man' is great owing to the free play and scope of his desires and *to the yet greater power* that knows how to

[370] See also KSA 12:7[3], 13:14[157], HH WS 65, BGE 200.
[371] See also KSA 12:1[122].

press these magnificent monsters [prachtvollen Unthiere] into service" (KSA 12:9[139], emphasis added).[372]

From these points, we can infer that if one does *not* possess a source of strength sufficient to impose a systematic order on one's drives, one risks the development of enervating conflicts within one's nature—conflicts which would exacerbate the weakness one already manifests. In the following, I will argue that it is this concern that Nietzsche often seems to have in mind when he recommends the ideal of self-denial to the weak. This can be seen, among other places, in the critique of traditional morality that he develops in *Twilight of the Idols*.

5.2.2.2 *Self-denial in Twilight of the Idols*

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche dedicates an entire chapter, entitled '*Morality as Anti-Nature*,' to a critical assessment of traditional morality, focusing specifically on its promotion of self-denial—understood, here, in terms of the suppression of one's passions. What is particularly important to note, for our purposes, is the way in which Nietzsche qualifies his critique of this ideal, suggesting that self-denial is, despite its quite serious shortcomings, *indispensable* to those who are weak. As I will argue, the reasoning behind this qualification reveals how Nietzsche is able to regard the moral ideal of self-denial as the weak's best available strategy for achieving power.

The first section of this chapter begins with what should now be a quite familiar account of the natural course of an individual's internal development—starting with discord and ending, ideally, with a kind of refinement: "all passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous

[372] Similarly, in a note written sometime between 1885 and 1886, Nietzsche writes that putting one's 'affects' into service often requires "subjecting them to a protracted tyranny… at last they are confidently granted freedom again: they love us as good servants and go voluntarily wherever our best interest lie [wo unser Bestes hin will]" (KSA 12:1[122]).

[verhängnissvoll], when they drag down their victim with the weight of their stupidity [Dummheit]—and a later, very much later phase when they wed the spirit, when they 'spiritualize' themselves" (TI 'Morality' 1).[373] According to Nietzsche, traditional morality developed primarily in response to the former phase of self-development, offering an alternative method of quelling its adherents' internal discord. This alternative allegedly amounted to a declaration of 'war' on the passions, through the active suppression of such impulses as pride, sensuality, and avarice: "one sought to "destroy[…] the passions and cravings, merely as a preventative measure against their stupidity and the unpleasant consequences of this stupidity" (TI 'Morality' 1). Effective though this tactic might be at reducing the harmful effects of internal discord, Nietzsche unsurprisingly regards this approach as an inferior alternative to the "'spiritualization of passion'" (TI 'Morality' 1). According to him, the moralists who advocate the ideal of self-denial tend to overlook this option: they never bother to ask, "how can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a craving?'"[374] (TI 'Morality' 1). To this extent, they are said to be

[373] One might compare this with the previously mentioned note in which Nietzsche asserts that "as every drive lacks intelligence, the viewpoint of 'utility' cannot exist for it. Every drive, in as much as it is active, sacrifices force and other drives: finally it is checked; otherwise it would destroy everything through its excessiveness" (WP 372).

[374] While Nietzsche's notion of spiritualization is somewhat obscure in this context, I take it that this line provides some evidence that he means to equate it with the refinement of a passion, or its incorporation in some kind of order. Further evidence in favor of this reading can be found in a note from 1885, in which he offers concise sketches of various human functions, the fourth of which are "The spiritual functions. Will to shape, to assimilate" (WP 658). During this same year, he also writes that he desires for himself and "for all who live, *may* live…an ever greater spiritualization and multiplication of the sense; indeed, we should be grateful to the senses for their subtlety, plentitude, and power, and offer them in return the best we have in the way of spirit" (WP 820). Nietzsche goes on to claim that it is a "sign that one has turned out well, when like Goethe, one clings with ever-greater pleasure and warmth to the 'things of this world' …man becomes the transfigurer of existence when he learns to transfigure himself [er sich selbst verklären lernt]" (WP 820, see also BGE 61). One might read Nietzsche as describing the spiritualization of one's senses, thus, as their transfiguration, in the sense of shaping them into a harmonious unity. This understanding of the process of 'spiritualization' is suggested again in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche describes 'moral judgments' as being motivated by the 'spiritually limited's' resentment towards "those less limited" as well as by their desire to compensate "for having been ill-favored by nature—finally an opportunity for acquiring spirit and *becoming* refined—malice spiritualized" (BGE 119). Nietzsche subsequently offers an account of "higher spirituality" that he believes will flatter the 'merely moral man' and which once again hints at the connection between the process of spiritualization and the imposition of order upon oneself: "high spirituality itself exists only as the ultimate product of moral qualities; that it is a synthesis of all those states which are attributed to 'merely moral' men, after they have been acquired singly through long discipline and exercise, perhaps through whole chains of generations" (BGE 119, see also WP 383).

akin to dentists who once preferred to "'pluck out' teeth so that they will not hurt any more" (TI 'Morality' 1).

While this might seem to constitute an all-encompassing rejection of moral self-denial, Nietzsche adds a crucial qualification to his critique. He claims that "it should be admitted, however," that among the "'poor in spirit'" for whom this morality was allegedly designed, "the concept of the 'spiritualization of passion' could never have formed" (TI 'Morality' 1). Though he does not explain why this should be the case, the subsequent section offers a clear answer. Nietzsche asserts that the moral method of "castration" and "extirpation" in the face of internal discord,

> …is instinctively chosen by those who are too weak-willed, too degenerate, to be able to impose moderation [Maass] on themselves; by those who are so constituted that they required La Trappe,[375] to use a figure of speech, or (without any figure of speech) some kind of definitive declaration of hostility, a cleft between themselves and the passion. Radical means are indispensable only for the degenerate; the weakness of the will—or, to speak more definitely, the inability not to respond to a stimulus—is itself merely another form of degeneration. The radical hostility, the deadly hostility against sensuality, is always a symptom to reflect on: it entitles us to suppositions concerning the total state of one who is excessive in this manner. (TI 'Morality' 2)

Nietzsche thus suggests that the strategy of directly combatting or diminishing the force of one's passions is 'indispensable' to individuals whose weakness of will makes them incapable of establishing order or moderation within themselves.[376, 377] This point is made again in an unpublished note from the same year, where Nietzsche writes that those who lack "the strength

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[375] A reference to the Trappists, a French order of monks who were known for their rigorous, ascetic practices (See D 192).

[376] See also D 160, 331.

[377] In an unpublished note from this year, Nietzsche seems to have this same idea in mind when he writes, "Everything that a culture *posits evil* gives expression to a relationship of *fear*, thus a *weakness*. *Thesis:* everything good is the evil of former days made serviceable. *Standard:* the greater and more terrible the passions are that an age, a people, an individual can permit themselves, because they are capable of employing them as *means, the higher stands their culture*; the more mediocre, the weaker, the more submissive and cowardly a man is, the more he will posit as *evil*: it is with him that the realm of evil is most comprehensive. The basest man will see the realm of evil (i.e., of that which is forbidden and hostile to him) everywhere" (KSA 12:9[138], see also 11:44[6]).

to restrain an impulse," whose instincts "*have* to react,"[378] have good reason to fear their instincts, and, thus, do "well to avoid the opportunities ('seductions')" that cause such reactions to occur (KSA 13:14[157]).[379] Hence, Nietzsche seems to think that there are at least some individuals who lack the strength of will to coordinate or impose any order on their drives. And in these cases, moral self-denial may actually provide one's only available method of avoiding the disastrous effects of internal discord, which as we saw earlier, include a more profound state of weakness.[380, 381]

In this series of sections, Nietzsche does not indicate how common he takes this kind of 'degenerate' weakness to be. However, much later in *Twilight of the Idols*, one will find him

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[378] One might also compare this to what Nietzsche refers to as lacking a center of gravity within oneself. In an aforementioned note on "weakness of the will," he characterizes weakness and strength as such: "in the first case it is the oscillation and the lack of gravity; in the later, the precision and clarity of direction" (KSA 13:14[219]).

[379] See also KSA 13:14[102].

[380] There are two passages from *Human All Too Human* that are worth mentioning with regard to this interpretation. The first comes from a discussion of asceticism, in which Nietzsche argues that ascetic self-denial is actually far *easier* than realizing and maintaining one's 'personality' and often pursued for this very reason: "In many respects the ascetic too seeks to make life easier for himself: and he does so as a rule by complete subordination to the will of another or to a comprehensive law and ritual; somewhat in the way in which the Brahman decides nothing whatever for himself but is guided every moment by holy writ. This subordination is a powerful means of becoming master of oneself; one is occupied and thus not bored, and yet one's own willfulness and passions are not in any way involved; after one has acted there is no feeling of responsibility and therefore no pangs of remorse. One has renounced one's own will once and for all, and this is easier than renouncing it only now and again; just as it is easier to relinquish a desire altogether than to enjoy it in moderation. If we recall the relationship between man and state now obtaining, we discover that there too unconditional obedience is more comfortable than conditional. The saint thus makes his life easier through this complete surrender of his personality, and one deceives oneself if one admires in this phenomenon the supreme heroic feat of morality. It is in any event harder to maintain one's personality without vacillation or dissimulation than it is to free oneself of it in the way described; and it demands, moreover, a lot more spirit and reflection" (HH I 139, see also KSA 13:14[102]).
The next passage comes from the concluding section of *'The Wanderer and his Spirit,'* where Nietzsche addresses the alleged "chains" that have been imposed on man "so that he should no longer behave like an animal" (HH WS 350). According to Nietzsche, "[man] has in truth become gentler, more spiritual, more joyful, more reflective than any animal is. Now, however, he suffers from having worn his chains for so long, from being deprived for so long of clear air and free movement… Only when this sickness from one's chains has also been overcome will the first great goal have truly been attained: the separation of man from the animals. - We stand now in the midst of our work of removing these chains, and we need to proceed with the greatest caution. Only the ennobled man may be given freedom of spirit… only he may say that he lives for the sake of joy and for the sake of no further goal; an in any other mouth his motto would be perilous" (HH WS 350).

[381] One year earlier, Nietzsche writes in an unpublished note that "Moral intolerance is an expression of weakness in a man: he is afraid of his own 'immorality,' he must deny his strongest drives because he does not yet know how to employ them. Thus the most fruitful regions of the earth remain uncultivated the longest:—the force is lacking that could here become master—" (KSA 12:10[206], see also 12:10[111]).

casting it as the essential feature of the modern condition. He does this in a section, entitled "*Freedom which I do not mean,*" which follows his aforementioned discussion of the connection between power and freedom (TI 'Skirmishes' 41). [382] Here, Nietzsche characterizes what he takes to be the "modern conception of 'freedom,'" as "abandonment to one's instincts [seinen Instinkten überlassen sein]"—or "*laisser aller*" (TI 'Skirmishes' 41).[383] This form of freedom is said to be "one calamity more [ein Verhängniss mehr]" in the present era insofar as the vast majority of people suffer from self-destructive, internal discord; as Nietzsche puts it, "our instincts contradict, disturb, destroy each other" (TI 'Skirmishes' 41). And he adds that this condition of "physiological self-contradiction" is no anomaly, but rather defines "what is modern" (TI 'Skirmishes' 41).

Nietzsche goes on to claim that the modern condition should be confronted by training people in a kind of self-denial, where "under iron pressure" at least one of their "instinct systems [Instinkt-System]" would be "paralyzed to permit another to gain in power, to become strong, to become master. Today the individual still has to be made possible by being pruned" (TI 'Skirmishes' 41).[384] In this way he appears to cast the modern individual in the same light as the aforementioned "'poor in spirit,'" for whom a radical attack on certain uncontrollable passions was said to be indispensable (TI 'Morality,' 1, 2).

Yet, it should be noted that Nietzsche still takes self-denial to be, at least in principle, an inferior alternative to the establishment of an order among one's instincts that would permit each

[382] See §1.4.4
[383] See also BGE 188.
[384] He adds that such a training is almost never pursued by those who need it most: "the claim for independence, for free development, for laisser aller is pressed most hotly by the very people for whom no reins would be too strict. This is true in politics, this is true in art" (TI 'Skirmishes' 41, see also BGE 188).

of them to be, in some way, pressed into service. This is apparent in his later discussion of Goethe, who is said to have conceived of a higher type of human,

> …who might dare to afford the whole range and wealth of being natural, *being strong enough for such freedom*; the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength, because he knows how to use to his advantage even that from which the average nature would perish; the man for whom there is no longer anything that is forbidden — unless it be weakness, whether called vice or virtue. (TI 'Skirmishes' 49, emphasis added)

Goethe's higher type—which Nietzsche soon after endorses as his 'Dionysian' ideal—is thus able to forgo the moral method of directly combatting and suppressing the passions, insofar as this higher type possesses the *strength* sufficient to press the "whole range and wealth" of his nature [Natürlichkeit] into service—employing, specifically, that which would cause "the average [durchschnittliche] nature to perish" (TI 'Skirmishes' 1).[385, 386]

I take these closely connected discussions from *Twilight of the Idols* to reveal the way in which Nietzsche is able to recommend moral self-denial, which he sees as weakening one's will, to some without thereby abandoning his view that power is humanity's sole source of value. For to the extent that those who are weak are taken to be incapable of effectively ordering their drives, in the sense required for human excellence, moral self-denial appears to provide their only way of evading the enervating effects of internal discord. In this way, self-denial can be understood to strategically weaken particular components of one's will *for the sake of* avoiding a more profound state of overall weakness.[387] And insofar as this is the case, it makes good sense for Nietzsche to regard the ideal of traditional morality as both inferior to human excellence, and

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[385] See also KSA 12:1[122], 12:2[81], 12:9[138].

[386] This should remind one of the section from *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which Nietzsche claims that what serves the "higher type of men as nourishment" poses a serious threat to the lower, weaker type, and may "lead to crumbling and disintegration" (BGE 30, see also KSA 12:2[97]).

[387] As was mentioned earlier, Nietzsche sometimes terms this resulting state of weakness, 'mediocrity.' This was observed in the aforementioned note in which Nietzsche writes that the "the ruling drives… either oppose or subject each other (join together synthetically or alternate in dominating)" (KSA 12:7[3]). He then adds a third possibility, when he continues, "Their profound antagonism is so great, however, that where they *all* seek satisfaction, a man of profound mediocrity must result" (KSA 12:7[3]).

at the same time appropriate for the weak—or for those whom he describes in *Beyond Good and Evil* as possessing a "lower soul, lower vitality [Lebenskraft]" and, therefore, a lower ideal (BGE 30).

5.3 *The objectivist reading*

Now that we have established that Nietzsche does in fact take humanity as a whole to fall within the scope of his power-centered standard of value, we should examine how it is that he means to justify the claim on which this standard rests: namely, that power is humanity's sole source of value. I would like to begin this examination by considering an interpretation proposed by Richard Schacht in *Nietzsche*. According Schacht, Nietzsche takes power to be objectively valuable, in the sense that its value does not consist solely in its being willed or valued by those for whom it is good. After outlining Schacht's defense of this reading, I will propose several objections, which will lead to my proposal of an alternative account of the way in which Nietzsche means to attribute value to power.

5.3.1 *Schacht on Nietzsche's conception of value*

In a lengthy chapter on Nietzsche's understanding of values, Schacht claims that one of Nietzsche's major philosophical projects is to "ground a certain conception of value and standard of evaluation," specifically, "in a consideration of the fundamental character of existence."[388] This is said to provide the justificatory basis for the all-encompassing affirmation of life that Schacht sees Nietzsche endorsing, for instance, in an unpublished note from 1888, where Nietzsche writes that "the highest state" attainable to a philosopher consists in, what he calls, "a

[388] Schacht (1985), p. 346.

Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection" (KSA 12:10[3]/13:16[32]).

In the following, I will first examine and critically assess the particular argument that Schacht takes Nietzsche to advance in favor of his conception of value. Then I will separately consider the evidence that Schacht presents in favor of attributing this argument to Nietzsche.

5.3.1.1 *The metaphysical argument*

According to Schacht, Nietzsche argues for his power-centered standard of value on the basis of his metaphysical thesis that the will to power constitutes "the essential nature of reality generally – and so of life and the world" in particular.[389] This argument can be succinctly reconstructed as follows:[390] insofar as life is fundamentally constituted by the will to power, and "there is nothing external to [life] by reference to which its value might be measured or its character weighed and found wanting," it follows that one must take the will to power—or more precisely, power, itself—to be the primary locus of value.[391] Schacht thus claims that it is "as a constitutive principle" that Nietzsche understands the will to power to be "the ultimate basis of all value."[392]

As an argument, I do not find this to be particularly compelling. First of all, we are given no reason not to prefer nihilism, or the denial of all value. All Schacht says in this regard is that Nietzsche presents us with a "stark choice" between either his power-centered standard of value or radical nihilism and that "whereas the former course accords with the only reality there is, the

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[389] Schacht (1985), p. 346.
[390] Schacht's own reconstructions of this argument are quite concise, rarely requiring more than a paragraph to state (See ibid., p. 346, 367, 396).
[391] Ibid., p. 367, see also 398.
[392] Ibid., p. 367.

latter may be considered a kind of absurdity—albeit one which may beckon to those weary of the game."[393] But why nihilism should be regarded as "a kind of absurdity" is never clarified by Schacht. And to simply reject it because it appeals to the weary would be ad hominem.

But even if we are to assume that nihilism is not a genuine option, and value must be attributed to *something* in life, it does not seem that one is in any way committed to grounding one's conception of value in whatever happens to be the most fundamental constituent of reality. For one might instead identify the fundamental locus of value as some *higher-order* phenomenon, to which power gives rise, but is not equivalent. Although this higher-order phenomenon might be fundamentally *constituted by* power, its value might nevertheless derive from its formal qualities alone—just as, for example, the aesthetic value of a particular statue might be rooted in its shape or symmetry rather than in the clay out of which it is made.

Of course, despite the weaknesses of this argument, it is still entirely possible that Nietzsche endorses it. However, as I will argue in the following section, Schacht provides scant evidence that this is the case.

5.3.1.2 *Schacht's interpretation of Nietzsche*

In his attempt to attribute the abovementioned argument to Nietzsche, Schacht first gives special weight to a line from an unpublished note from 1887, which reads, "there is nothing to life that has value except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power" (KSA 12:5[71]). Although Nietzsche's claim is rather underdeveloped, here, Schacht takes this to show that Nietzsche understands his standard of value to be "neither conventional nor stipulative (nor, for that matter, merely symptomatic of his own constitution); it has the same

[393] Ibid., p. 398.

status, on his view as" his metaphysical thesis that reality and thus life is fundamentally constituted by the will to power.[394]

Much of Schacht's attention is then dedicated to two passages from *Twilight of the Idols* that would actually seem to *challenge* the idea that Nietzsche means to directly attribute value to life in the first place. In one of these, we find him rejecting *all* purportedly objective attributions of value to life,

> Judgments, judgments of value, concerning life, for it or against it, can, in the end, never be true: they have value only as symptoms, they are worthy of consideration only as symptoms; in themselves such judgments are stupidities. One must by all means stretch out one's fingers and make the attempt to grasp this amazing *finesse*, that *the value of life cannot be estimated*. Not by the living, for they are an interested party, even a bone of contention, and not judges; not by the dead, for a different reason. For a philosopher to see a problem in the *value* of life [im *Werth* des Lebens ein Problem sehn] is thus an objection to him, a question mark concerning his wisdom, an un-wisdom.
> (TI 'Problem' 2)

In this passage, Nietzsche appears to be contending that humans are not, nor can they ever be, in a position to accurately judge the value of life itself. Such a judgment would require a kind of impartiality that he takes to be unavailable to humanity, insofar as one cannot help but see life through the lens of one's own interests.

In another section from *Twilight of the Idols*, which Schacht also takes note of,[395] Nietzsche underscores this point again, arguing that in order to be justified in one's judgment of the value or disvalue of life, "one would require a position outside of life, and yet have to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it… reasons enough to comprehend that this problem is for us unapproachable" (TI 'Morality' 5). As Nietzsche goes on to explain, our evaluative perspective is not external to, but rather firmly situated within life, insofar as the valuations that constitute this perspective necessarily express the interests that guide us as

[394] Schacht (1985), p. 349.
[395] Ibid., p. 395.

particular living things: "when we speak of values, we speak with the inspiration, with the way of looking at things, which is part of life: life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values" (TI 'Morality' 5).[396] Thus, if value judgments reliably indicate anything, according to Nietzsche, it is only the character or interests of those who make them; it would seem to be in this spirit that he claims, in the earlier passage, that our value judgments "are worthy of consideration only as symptoms" (TI 'Problem' 2).

Interestingly, Schacht takes these passages to support rather than undermine his claim that Nietzsche intends to "ground a certain conception of value and standard of evaluation" specifically "in a consideration of the fundamental character of existence."[397] He does admit, however, that Nietzsche's central point "may easily be misinterpreted."[398] According to Schacht, one should be particularly careful not to assume that Nietzsche means to suggest that evaluations can *never* be more than a reflection of their evaluator's necessarily partial standpoint and that any attempt at an objective evaluation of life is, for that reason, illegitimate.

Rather, on Schacht's interpretation of these passages, Nietzsche only intends to reject those purportedly objective evaluations of life that appeal to a standard of value, "established independently of a consideration of the nature of 'existence.'"[399] In lieu of such 'external' standards, one's only remaining option is thus to adopt a standard where that which fundamentally constitutes the nature of existence—namely, power—is designated as the sole

[396] In a section from *Human All Too Human*, dealing with these very same issues Nietzsche clarifies the relationship between the evaluator and her evaluation, somewhat. After similarly denying the justifiability and impartiality of "all judgments as to the value of life," he considers whether "it would follow from all this that one ought not to judge at all, if only it were possible to *live* without evaluating, without having aversions and partialities!... a drive away from something divorced from a feeling one is desiring the beneficial or avoiding the harmful, a drive without some knowing evaluation of the worth of its objective, does not exist in man" (HH I 32).
[397] Schacht (1985), p. 346.
[398] Ibid., p. 395.
[399] Ibid., p. 395.

source of value. It would be helpful to consider Schacht's argument for this reading in his own words, as he frames it in a rather subtle way.

> In short, if by 'life' (or 'the world') one understands the fundamental and all-encompassing reality of which our existence is a part, it is not something the value of which can be judged or determined by reference to any independent criteria. On the other hand, in suggesting it to be objectionable if a philosopher should 'see a problem in the value of life,'[400] Nietzsche is implying that he considers it a mistake to regard the value of life as *problematical*–something which remains an open question after the basic character of 'life' has been comprehended. This, he holds, is not the case; but it is not the case for a reason which goes beyond that indicated above [regarding his claim that 'life itself forces us to posit values'], and which in a sense renders it appropriate to speak of value with reference to life and the world. For on his view there is an ultimate standard of value, which is to be conceived in terms deriving directly from a consideration of the essential nature of reality generally – and so of life and the world – the character of which he indicates by means of his notion of 'will to power.' And if the former is given and determined by the latter, then once this is seen, and life (along with 'the existing world') is apprehended as 'the expression of forms of the growth of power' (WP 706),[401] reference to its value at once becomes intelligible and ceases to be problematical. This standard is not external to life and the world, deriving instead from a consideration of what they fundamentally are.[402]

If Schacht is correct, then in the aforementioned passages from *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche is making two claims: first, that the value of life cannot be judged from a standpoint (or by virtue of a standard) that is external to life; and, second, that the positive value that life possesses in itself should be so patently obvious to one as not to require any judgment in the first place. Yet this seems far afield from what Nietzsche actually says in these passages. The first claim is stated in deceptively simple terms, suggesting that Nietzsche is merely ruling out externally situated[403] value judgments concerning life, thereby leaving us to pursue internally

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[400] See the first of the two quotes from *Twilight of the Idols*, cited above (TI 'Problem' 2).

[401] It is worth noting that the part of this note that Schacht is referencing was, according to Kaufmann, crossed out in Nietzsche's original manuscript (WP p. 375, footnote 83; KSA 12:9[13]).

[402] Schacht (1985), p. 396.

[403] Another concern I have with this interpretation has to do with the way it construes the notions, internal and external, in these passages. Schacht makes it seem as if Nietzsche is primarily concerned with whether the *value standard* employed to evaluate life is derived, in some sense, from something internal to or external to life. However, it seems to me that Nietzsche is at least equally if not solely focused on the position of the *evaluator*: whether she is assessing life internally, as one of the living, or from a position external to life (which humans could not possibly achieve). Nevertheless, I think there are problems with this interpretation even if we ignore this

situated judgments, in their place. However, Nietzsche claims that it is *only* the externally situated value judgments that could have any legitimacy concerning the value of life. As he puts it in the second passage from *Twilight of the Idols*, "One would *require* a position outside of life [eine Stellung ausserhalb des Lebens], and yet have to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be permitted even to touch the problem of the value of life" (TI 'Morality' 5, emphasis added).[404]

Nietzsche is also quite far from suggesting anything akin to the second claim, that the positive value of life, when judged from within, is too apparent to even be questioned. Rather, in both passages he clearly states that it is *all* judgments concerning the value of life—whether "*for it* or against it," or whether life is taken to be "*justified* or unjustified"—that he rejects (TI 'Problem' 2, 'Morality' 5, emphasis added). And he does not reject such judgments because they call for us to consider what is already obvious; he rejects them because, as he asserts with added emphasis, "*the value of life cannot be estimated*" (TI 'Problem' 2).

For these reasons, it does not seem plausible to me that Nietzsche means to rest his standard of value on the claim that power is valuable, in itself, nor that he embraces the argument in support of this view, which Schacht attributes to him.[405]

5.4 *The subjectivist reading*

The preceding discussion suggests that Nietzsche does not mean to claim that power is objectively valuable, to the extent that he does not think it is possible to justifiably claim that

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distinction. Hence, I use the terms 'externally situated judgments' and 'internally situated judgments' to encompass either or both of these readings.

[404] See also HH I 32.

[405] As Nietzsche claims in a section from *The Gay Science* that I will discuss in the following: "Whatever has value in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less" (GS 301).

anything possesses value in itself given the partiality of our evaluative standpoint. As he puts this in a note from 1888, "it is impossible to be objective" in our measurements of value; "we are not judges but interested parties" (KSA 13:15[92]).

But this might seem to pull the rug out from under the power-centered standard of value that I uncovered at the beginning of this chapter.[406] For in what other way could Nietzsche mean to assert that power is the fundamental source of all value in human life? In the following sections, I will consider on what grounds Nietzsche is able to endorse his value standard in light of his aforementioned critique of judgments concerning the value of life. This will focus, primarily, on an important passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which Nietzsche presents what I will refer to as a subjectivist theory of value.

5.4.1 *Value and value judgment in Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

One of Nietzsche's most illuminating, published discussions on the nature of both value and human value judgments comes from a section in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* entitled "*On the Thousand and One Goals*." Here, Nietzsche considers two distinct questions, which I will address in turn: first, what is it that leads different societies to adopt their specific "tablet[s] of the good" or basic value judgments? and, second, what is it for something to possess value in the first place? (TSZ I 15). By examining the way in which Nietzsche answers both of these questions, I will argue that one can identify how it is that he intends to ground the power-centered standard of value, on the basis of which he promotes his conception of human excellence as an ideal.

[406] See §4.1.1.

5.4.1.1 *Value judgment and the will to power*

As one might recall from my earlier discussion of "*On the Thousand and One Goals*" in chapter one,[407] Nietzsche addresses the first of the abovementioned questions by proposing that, despite the vast disparities between the various "tablet[s] of the good" that different societies come to adopt, each of these tablets is developed in the same basic way (TSZ I 15). A society, or at least its value legislating class, is said to attribute value to certain activities and character traits on the basis of one fundamental criterion: namely, the degree to which the activity or trait enables the legislating class's overcoming of resistance. Nietzsche writes, "praiseworthy to them is whatever they consider difficult; what seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult" is valued yet higher, and called, "holy [heilig]" (TSZ I 15).[408] A society's "tablet of the good," is, thus, said to amount to "a tablet of [its] overcomings" (TSZ I 15).

Nietzsche notably adds to this account that the basic value judgments of a society thereby express "the voice of [its] will to power" (TSZ I 15). Though he does not elaborate on this important point, here, it is repeated in perhaps clearer terms in a later section from book two of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche asserts that "out of esteeming itself speaks—the will to power" (TSZ II 12). What he seems to mean by this is that it is humanity's fundamental interest in the achievement of power that ultimately induces it to value that which enables or occasions

[407] See §1.4.1.

[408] Nietzsche offers four historical examples of allegedly power-centered tables of values in support of this account: first, the Greeks, "'Always you shall be the first and tower above others: no one shall your jealous soul love, unless it is the friend'" – this is what made the soul of a Greek tremble: with this he walked the path of greatness;" the Persians, "'Speak the truth and be skilled with the bow and arrow' – this seemed both dear and difficult to the people from whom my name derives – the name that is both dear and difficult to me;" The Jews, "'Honor father and mother and comply with their will down to the roots of one's soul' – this tablet of overcoming a different people hung over themselves and became powerful and eternal thereby;" and lastly, the Germans, "'Practice loyalty and for loyalty's sake risk honor and blood even on evil and dangerous things' – teaching themselves thus another people conquered themselves, and thus conquering themselves they became pregnant and heavy with great hopes" (TSZ I 24).

its overcoming of resistance. A society's basic value judgments express, in other words, its predilection for the specific power strategies that its will to power leads it to adopt.[409] In an unpublished note from this period Nietzsche frames this as such: "All valuations are only consequences and narrow perspectives in the service of this one will: valuation itself is only [the] will to power" (KSA 13:11[96]).

Insofar as this analysis is said to account for the value sets of "every people," Nietzsche seems to be proposing that his power-centered standard of value is, in effect, humanity's *generally accepted* value standard (TSZ I 15). Yet, one should be careful in interpreting this point. By claiming that humanity's values reflect the specific power strategies employed by its will to power, Nietzsche almost certainly does not mean to imply that all humans are *consciously aware* that this is the case nor that they *believe* that power is the sole source of value in their lives. That he denies this seems particularly likely given his observation, in this same section, that different societies tend to balk at each other's values, regarding them as repugnant and even delusional. Presumably their sentiment would be rather different if they believed that their values shared a common foundation.

What Nietzsche most likely intends to claim when he asserts that "out of esteeming itself speaks—the will to power" is only that, when humans value a certain activity (or character trait), this is *best explained by* the fact that this activity has empowered them in some way, and that their interest is therefore drawn to the activity to the extent that they are fundamentally disposed to pursue power (TSZ II 12).[410] It does not seem that humans would have to recognize that their

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[409] In two notes from this same period, Nietzsche puts this point in the following ways: "values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination;" "Values and their changes are related to increases in the power of those positing the values" (KSA 13:11[99]).

[410] One should consider an unpublished note from this same year in which Nietzsche suggests the following relationships between one's desires and one's ascriptions of value: "Desire magnifies that which one desires; it grows even by not being fulfilled—the greatest ideas are those that have been created by the most violent and

value judgments are determined in this way, for this account to be correct. For it is hardly far-fetched to suppose that one might overlook the way in which at least some of one's evaluative judgments are determined; such failures of self-knowledge have been well documented in the psychological research on cognitive bias. Yet that it not to say that Nietzsche's account is at all modest; if he is correct then humanity's value judgments exhibit a comprehensive, almost entirely unacknowledged, bias towards power.

5.4.1.2 *Value*

Nietzsche's claim that the will to power provides the underlying inspiration for humanity's value judgments does not, itself, answer the further question: *what is it for something to possess value?*[411] Hence, the preceding interpretation does not rule out Schacht's claim that Nietzsche understands power to possess value in itself—or that the goodness of power does *not* depend on its being the object of some will. However, in the remainder of "*On the Thousand and One Goals*," Nietzsche appears to unequivocally reject this way of conceiving of value. In what is, for our purposes, an especially important passage, he writes,

> Indeed, humans gave themselves all of their good and evil. Indeed, they did not take it, they did not find it, it did not fall to them as a voice from heaven. Humans first placed values into things, in order to preserve themselves – they first created meaning for things, a human meaning! That is why they call themselves "human," that is: the esteemer. Esteeming is creating [Schätzen ist Schaffen]: hear me, you creators! Esteeming itself is the treasure and jewel of all esteemed things. Only through esteeming is there value, and without esteeming the nut of existence would be hollow. (TSZ I 15)

protracted desires. The more our desire for a thing grows, the more value we ascribe to that thing" (KSA 12:10[174]).

[411] Analogously, if it were discovered that our judgments regarding the intelligence of different people are systematically biased in favor of those with more symmetrical facial features, this would tell us nothing at all about the nature of intelligence itself, or what it is for something to be intelligent.

Nietzsche thus proposes that for something to have value just is for it *be valued* or *esteemed*. Hence, nothing can possess value in itself; rather it is "only through esteeming [that there is] value" (TSZ I 15). In the following, I will refer to this as Nietzsche's *subjectivism*.

Now there are different kinds of subjectivism that this passage might be thought to express. In light of Nietzsche's earlier discussion, in which he focuses on the question of how different *societies* develop their 'tablets of the good,' it might appear that he is proposing a kind of *social subjectivism*, according to which, what has value for some individual is determined by the value judgments or esteemings of her particular *society*.[412] However, there is good evidence that this is not Nietzsche's view, and that what he means to propose is what might be called, *individual subjectivism*, according to which what has value for an individual is determined by *her own* value judgments. That Nietzsche endorses this latter view is suggested in two sections from *The Gay Science*, written in 1882, just one year before the first book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

In the first of these, Nietzsche offers a statement of his subjectivism, closely resembling the one just considered in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This occurs towards the end of a discussion of the extent to which the human perspective has been creatively fashioned: "Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present—and it was we who gave and bestowed it" (GS 301).[413][414] While the referent of 'we' is perhaps ambiguous, shortly later, in a widely

[412] Of course, it is notoriously difficult to explain what it means for a society to endorse some set of value judgments. However, I take it that this is not a problem for Nietzsche, as he is not a social subjectivist.
[413] See also D 38, 119, KSA 12:5[108].
[414] R. Jay Wallace has argued that this and other apparent rejections of the objectivity of values, should not be taken at face value. Rather they should be read as "polemical invitations to attend to the role of evaluative outlooks within the economy of human drives and purposes" (Wallace [2001], p. 134). Regarding the abovementioned line from *The Gay Science*, Wallace contends that "strictly speaking, [Nietzsche is] saying that there are no mind-independent facts about value; but his *aim* in saying this is to get us to think about the psychological process of investing things with value" (Ibid., p. 134). The benefit of this unusual rereading of Nietzsche's comments on the nature of value,

discussed section entitled "*Long live physics*," Nietzsche revisits the issue of value creation, urging his readers, this time, to take a certain creative license with respect to *their own* value judgments: "let us… *limit* ourselves to the purification of our own opinions and valuations and to the *creation of our own new tables of what is good*, and let us stop brooding over the 'moral value of our actions'" which allegedly "offend[s] our taste" (GS 335).[415]

This would seem to indicate that Nietzsche thinks that it is ultimately the value judgments of the *individual* that have authority for her, whether these judgments are modeled on those of her society[416] or are in some sense self-authored.

5.4.2 *Subjectivism and Nietzsche's standard of value*

When Nietzsche's subjectivism is combined with his aforementioned account of the nature of human value judgments, it would seem to entail his power-centered standard of value. For if humans, in fact, attribute value to things only insofar as they promote their own power, and what has value for them is directly determined by their attributions of value—or their 'esteemings'—then it would follow that power is humanity's sole source of value. Hence, human

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according to Wallace, is that it makes better sense of Nietzsche's attack on traditional morality. This attack is said to be rendered "banal" on the view that "there is nothing that is genuinely and independently valuable, or worthy of choice, admiration, and pursuit" (Ibid., p. 134; for a similar attempt to reframe the aforementioned passage from *The Gay Science* see Hussain [2007] pp. 161-162.). Yet, this seems to misunderstand subjectivism generally and Nietzsche's subjectivism in particular. To reject the objectivity of values is entirely consistent with acknowledging that certain ends are *subjectively* valuable. And as I will explain in the following section, Nietzsche's theory of value judgment enables him to apply his standard of value to all of humanity, even while embracing subjectivism.

[415] Also see KSA 10:24[32]-[33].

[416] I take it that an individual subjectivist can hold that although it is the individual's value judgments that ultimately determine what has value for her, societies of individuals, as a matter of sociological fact, can come to adopt the same basic set of judgments. Indeed, Nietzsche appears to think that most humans today generally feel less pressure than they once did to accept their society's value judgments as their own. This is addressed in a section from *The Gay Science*, entitled "*Herd Remorse*," where Nietzsche claims that during the "longest period of the human past nothing was more terrible than to feel that one stood by oneself. To be alone, to experience things by oneself, neither to obey nor to rule) to be an individual—that was not a pleasure but a punishment… Freedom of thought was considered discomfort itself… To be a self and to esteem oneself according to one's own weight and measure—that offended taste in those days. An inclination to do this would have been considered madness; for being alone was associated with every misery and fear" (GS 117).

excellence, understood as the achievement of maximal power, would on this view constitute humanity's highest achievement of value. And it would make sense, on these grounds, to regard this mode of being as an ideal towards which humans, to the extent that they are capable of it, should aspire.

5.5 *The promotion of excellence and Nietzsche's elitism*

Nietzsche's decision to ground his standard of value in the way I have just proposed imposes at least one significant limitation on his promotion of human excellence. To see this, note again that, on his view, it is the *individual's* attributions of value, determined by *her own* strivings for power, that determine what has value for her. Thus, to the extent that Nietzsche's standard of value enables him to prescribe something to the individual, it is that she pursue *her own* excellence—or at least, the nearest attainable approximation.

Of course, it might turn out that encouraging the excellence of one's companions, or of people in general, plays an important instrumental role in the achievement of one's own excellence. Indeed, in several places Nietzsche suggests that benefiting others is a source of empowerment for the individual. For instance, in *Daybreak*, he asks, "why is making joyful the greatest of all joys?—because we thereby give joy to our fifty separate drives all at once. Individually they may be very little joys: but if we take them all into one hand, our hand is fuller than at any other time – and our heart too" (D 422).[417] While the empowering payoff of benefiting others might provide a basis on which Nietzsche could enjoin us to empower others,

[417] In a section from *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche similarly argues that *both* harming and benefitting other people are "ways of exercising one's power upon others" (GS 13). Regarding the benefiting of others, he claims that "we benefit and show benevolence to those who are already dependent on us in some way (which means that they are used to thinking of us as causes); we want to increase their power because in that way we increase ours, or we want to show them how advantageous it is to be in our power; that way they will become more satisfied with their condition and more hostile to and willing to fight against enemies of our power.

he could not justifiably claim that we should empower others simply for the sake of promoting power, generally. For to make the latter claim without violating his subjectivism, Nietzsche would have to assert that the will to power, which determines our attributions of value, is a will, not simply to *one's own* power, but to power, generally. Yet this is most certainly not something that Nietzsche would accept, and for good reason; for it would be absurd to suppose, for instance, that, in a power struggle, the will of the defeated party is in any way satisfied through the power gained by its opponent.

That Nietzsche is limited, in this way, to encouraging the individual to focus primarily on her own empowerment might seem obvious, yet there are many places in which he flatly contradicts this point. One characteristic example is cited by Hurka in his earlier mentioned article on Nietzsche's alleged 'perfectionism.'[418] This occurs in "*Schopenhauer as Educator*," where Nietzsche asserts that one ought to devote oneself to the general production of excellent individuals in one's society—whether or not one is capable of rising to their ranks.

> Sometimes it is harder to accede to a thing than it is to see its truth; and that is how most people may feel when they reflect on the proposition: 'Mankind must work continually at the production of individual great men – that and nothing else is its task.' How much one would like to apply to society and its goals something that can be learned from observation of any species of the animal or plant world: that its only concern is the individual higher exemplar, the more uncommon, more powerful, more complex, more fruitful – (UM III 6)

Leaving aside Nietzsche's unusual characterization of non-human life, what is important to note here is his claim that the individual ought to take a genuine concern in cultivating the excellence of *others*—specifically, those most capable of achieving excellence. Shortly later in this section, he articulates his point in yet starker terms: "the question is this: how can your life, the individual

[418] Hurka (2007), p. 18.

life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance? How can it be least squandered? Certainly only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable exemplars" (UM III 6).

It might be suspected that these comments reflect an earlier philosophical perspective, not yet informed by Nietzsche's aforementioned views on the nature of value. Yet, the same elitist program can be found throughout many of his later works and unpublished notes.[419] For instance, in a postscript to the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, published more than a decade after "*Schopenhauer as Educator*," Nietzsche writes that "The well-being of the majority and the well-being of the few are opposite viewpoints of value: to consider the former a priori of higher value may be left to the naïveté of English biologists" (GM I 'postscript).[420] But of course, if my analysis of Nietzsche's account of value is correct, then *neither* of these 'viewpoints of value' are available to him, as it is only the individual's *own* well-being, which she esteems for the sake of her own power, that can possess value for her.

Nietzsche thus faces a dilemma: either he must abandon his view that it is an individual's will to *her own* power that determines the attributions of value that are decisive for her; or, he must abandon his claim that the individual should dedicate herself to the production of excellence generally, whether or not this includes cultivating her own excellence.

In Hurka's discussion of this issue, he suggests that it would be most charitable to assume that Nietzsche would take the former option; for, as we have seen, Hurka argues that Nietzsche already has good reason to abandon his psychology (or teleology) of the will to power insofar as it supposedly contradicts his views regarding humanity's anti-perfectionist tendencies.[421] However, as I argued earlier, Nietzsche's account of humanity's pervasive tendency to failure is

[419] Hurka offers the following citations: GS 23, Z I P4, BGE 258, 126, 199, 257, 260, 265, GM I 17, III 14, WP 766, 246, 252, 373, 660, 681, 877, 881, 987, 997.
[420] See also KSA 12:5[108].
[421] See §3.5.1.

not only consistent with, but in fact dependent on, his psychology of the will to power. And if my interpretation in the previous chapters has been correct, this psychology plays a fundamental, and indeed ineliminable, role in many of Nietzsche's most important topics.

Given this, it seems that Nietzsche's most tractable option is to abandon the view that the individual should dedicate her life to "the good of the rarest and most valuable exemplars" (UM III 6). That said, I find little to gain in speculating as to what Nietzsche would prefer, himself. What is clear is that although his account of value might provide an adequate foundation on which to enjoin the individual to pursue *her own* excellence, or at least the nearest attainable approximation of it, this account is incompatible with the claim that she should directly devote herself to the excellence of others.

5.6 *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I examined the specific grounds on which Nietzsche casts his conception of human excellence as an ideal to which one should, at least in principle, aspire. This was said to depend on a value standard, articulated most clearly in *Antichrist*, according to which, power is humanity's sole source of value (A2). In my analysis of this standard I argued, first, that it is intended to apply to all humans and, second, that it follows from the combination of Nietzsche's psychological account of human value judgments and his subjectivist theory of value.

With Nietzsche's standard of value, we can see the second way in which his psychology of the will to power grounds his account of human excellence. For insofar as he embraces a subjectivist theory of value, it is the fact that all human activity, including valuation, issues from the complex of wills to power that constitute each individual, that leads him to adopt the standard of value on the basis of which he promotes human excellence as an ideal.

Conclusion

In my analysis of Nietzsche's account of human excellence, I have placed considerable emphasis on his psychology of the will to power. This psychology was said to play a foundational role in both the conception of self-realization that Nietzsche identifies with excellence, as well as in the theory of value judgment on which his promotion of this mode of being depends. Understanding Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power is thus a basic precondition to understanding his positive philosophical work.

However, this point has not always been recognized in the literature. Indeed, several commentators contend that Nietzsche's psychology was either overstated or misconstrued in his writings. Brian Leiter, for instance, has suggested that Nietzsche's presentations of the will to power as the fundamental feature of human life should be dismissed as the mere product of his "penchant for hyperbolic rhetoric."[422] Robert Solomon, similarly, regarded Nietzsche's later formulations of his theory as "clearly outrageous overstatements" of his more considered views on human nature.[423] As we saw, a more subtle point is made by Reginster, who claims that many of Nietzsche's descriptions of the will to power were not intended to be read literally, but should be understood, instead, as evaluative claims about the importance of the will to power.[424]

Much of the resistance to recognizing the foundational role of Nietzsche's psychology of will to power in his work seems to stem from the way in which this psychology has been interpreted. Commentators have often assumed that when Nietzsche claims, for instance, that our "entire instinctive life [is] the development and ramification of *one* basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power," he means to be proposing a traditional theory of motivation,

[422] Leiter, (2002), pp. 141-142.
[423] Solomon, (2002), p. 85.
[424] Reginster (2006), p. 132; see also Clark (1991), p. 227.

according to which, power is the only thing that humans desire for its own sake (BGE 23). Interpreting Nietzsche in this way might very well make the deemphasizing of his psychology seem charitable; for it is quite difficult to see how the wide array of any individual's desires could be systematically traced back to a fundamental desire for power, particularly when power is understood as the activity of overcoming resistance.

In chapters one and two, I defended an alternative interpretation of Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power, which, in my view, renders it considerably more plausible. I argued that this psychology should be understood, not as a theory of motivation, but instead as an account of the nature of human drives—according to which they amount to forceful tendencies that independently strive to discharge their strength, or overcome resistance, in the pursuit of their characteristic ends. In addition to accommodating the diversity of human desire, this reading also explains the sense in which Nietzsche conceives of the excellent individual as *realizing* her nature, construed as a totality of drives. Moreover, it enables us understand the inner turmoil that Nietzsche thinks an individual must overcome in order to achieve this self-realization, and thereby, maximal power. For insofar as the drives are said to strive for power, independently of each other, the individual is understood to be vulnerable to enervating internal power struggles. As I argued, it is with this vulnerability in mind that Nietzsche is led to see the imposition of a productive order on one's drives as a central prerequisite for human excellence.

Nietzsche's account of human excellence thus gets its distinctive identity, in large part, from his psychology of the will to power. But this, of course, is not the only feature that makes his account stand apart from other philosophical examinations of the good life. In the preceding analysis, I called attention to Nietzsche's rejection of, among other things, the existence of a central agent, the primacy of consciousness, free will, the uniformity of human nature, and the

objectivity of values. Such commitments have traditionally played an important part in discussions of excellence—so much so that one might reasonably suspect that a philosopher who denied all of them could have nothing substantive to say about the good life. I take it that Nietzsche's work on human excellence shows that this is not the case, that even upon as radical a reconception of the human condition as he proposes, the question of how to live can still be fruitfully engaged.

Bibliography

Abbreviations for Nietzsche's works

A *Antichrist*
BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*
BT *The Birth of Tragedy*
CW *The Case of Wagner*
D *Daybreak*
EH *Ecce Homo*
GM *On the Genealogy of Morals*
GS *The Gay Science*
HH *Human, All Too Human*
KSA *Kritische Studienausgabe*
TI *Twilight of the Idols*
TSZ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
UM *Untimely Meditations*
WP *The Will To Power*
WS *The Wanderer and His Spirit*

Abbreviations for Schopenhauer's works

WWR *World as Will and Representation*
BM *On the Basis of Morality*

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