
The Affirmation of Life

The Affirmation of Life

∞ NIETZSCHE ON OVERCOMING NIHILISM

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*To my father and the
memory of my mother*

Preface

The present book develops a systematic interpretation of Nietzsche's ethical thought. I have relied on the critical edition of Nietzsche's works by Colli and Montinari, and I have referred to the still-classic translations of his works by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, including, no doubt controversially, their collaborative translation of *The Will to Power*. I have done so on the assumption that these are the translations with which the reader is most likely to be familiar. However, I have also consulted some new translations, such as that of *On the Genealogy of Morality* by Maudemarie Clark and A. J. Swensen. In general, I have left those translations intact, occasionally reproducing the original German, except in a few cases in which I estimated that they were simply too misleading. For Kant and Schopenhauer, I have also used the classic translations, and relied on the standard Akademie edition of Kant's original works, and the Brockhaus complete edition of Schopenhauer's original works. Here, too, I have remained largely faithful to the translations. I have indicated omissions of parts of the original text in all of my quotations with the convention "[. . .]."

I gratefully acknowledge permission to reproduce the following of my already-published materials: parts of "Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (June 1997), pp. 281–305, have been reproduced in Chapter 6; parts of "Happiness as a Faustian Bargain" in *Daedalus* 133 (2) (Spring 2004), pp. 52–59, have been used in Chapters 3 and 6; and parts of "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life" in *International Studies in*

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I have also benefited from discussions following presentations of parts of this book with audiences at Brown University, the University of Illinois at Champaign–Urbana, Stanford University, Cornell University, Wellesley College, the University of New Mexico, the University of Oklahoma, the Radcliffe Seminar at Harvard University, the Rhode Island Philosophical Society, the International Nietzsche Tagung in Naumburg, and the Nietzsche Kolleg at the Goethe-Schiller Stiftung at Weimar, and at various meetings of the North American Nietzsche Society.

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Abbreviations

Primary sources from Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Kant are cited in the text by abbreviation and according to prevalent conventions.

WORKS BY NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche's works are cited by section number and, when applicable, by chapter as well: for example, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, chapter III, section 11 is cited as GM, III 11. In the case of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I will also include within brackets the number of a subsection when applicable: for example, Z, III 12 [16]. Finally, I cite fragments from the posthumous notes in accordance to their classification in the *Kritische Studienausgabe*: for example, KSA 14 [453]. And I cite published texts from that edition by volume and page numbers: for example, KSA, I, pp. 783–792.

A	<i>The Anti-Christ</i>
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
CW	<i>The Case of Wagner</i>
D	<i>Daybreak</i>
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
HH	<i>Human, All Too Human</i> (volumes I and II)
KSA	<i>Kritische Studienausgabe</i>
TI	<i>The Twilight of the Idols</i>
UM	<i>Untimely Meditations</i>
WP	<i>The Will to Power</i>
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>

WORKS BY SCHOPENHAUER

Schopenhauer's works are cited by section number and, when applicable, by volume as well. Since the sections can be quite lengthy, I have also mentioned the translation's page number of the quotation: for example, *The World as Will and Representation*, volume I, section 57, p. 312 is cited as WWR, I 57, p. 312. Note that the chapters of the second volume of that work are numbered with roman numerals.

BM	<i>On the Basis of Morality</i>
FW	<i>Essay on the Freedom of the Will</i>
PP	<i>Parerga and Paralipomena</i>
WWR	<i>The World as Will and Representation</i> (vols. I and II)

WORKS BY KANT

Kant's works are cited by page numbers from the so-called Akademie edition. For example, the *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. p. 412 is cited as GW p. 412.

CPrR	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
GW	<i>Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals</i>

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
The need of some imperishable bliss."
Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams
And our desires. [. . .]
Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?

—WALLACE STEVENS, *SUNDAY MORNING*

Introduction

1. *The Systematicity of Nietzsche's Thought*

On November 13, 1888, a mere few weeks before his final collapse into insanity, Nietzsche makes the following announcement, in a letter to his friend Franz Overbeck: “The printing of *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer* is finished; the manuscript of *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* is already at the printer’s. The latter, an absolutely important book, gives some psychological and even biographical details about me and my writings; people will at last suddenly *see* me. The tone of the work, one of gay detachment fraught with a sense of destiny, as is everything I write. Then at the end of next year the *first* book of the *revaluation* will appear. It is finished.”¹ *Ecce Homo*, the last original work Nietzsche was ever to complete,² has all the trappings of an intellectual testament, from its title—“*Ecce Homo*” is an invitation to “behold the man” who is here presenting himself—to its content—Nietzsche reviews the nature and the significance of his intellectual contribution in a series of provocatively titled chapters (“Why I Am So Wise,” “Why I Am So Clever,” “Why I Write Such Good Books,” and “Why I Am a Destiny”). This “absolutely important book” closes with a last, anxious plea for understanding: “Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified*.—” (EH, IV 9).

By that time, the figure of Dionysus has fully assumed the role of symbol for an ideal Nietzsche calls the “affirmation of life,” whereas “the Crucified,” an expression that traditionally refers to the Pauli-

nian conception of Christ, represents the opposite ideal of negation of life. The strategically significant location of these words unequivocally suggests, in my view, that Nietzsche regards the affirmation of life as his defining philosophical achievement. We truly “understand” him, he warns us, only insofar as we understand what the affirmation of life amounts to. Yet, in spite of the formidable literature on Nietzsche’s work, we still lack an adequate and compelling account of both the nature and the significance of this notion in his philosophy. Moreover, the project of a “revaluation of all values,” to which the letter also refers, and which will prove to be an essential requirement of the affirmation of life, has generated hardly less puzzlement and controversy.

The ambition of the present book is to articulate a systematic interpretation of Nietzsche’s philosophical project that delivers a plausible and compelling account of the nature and significance of the affirmation of life and of the attendant project of a revaluation of values. To fulfill this ambition, the interpretation I will develop here differs from most existing interpretations both in its broad outline and in its details. Since the differences in details are best revealed in the examination of specific issues, I will focus here on the distinctive traits of the broad structure of my interpretation.

Existing interpretations of Nietzsche’s philosophy fall roughly within two categories. Some take the studied disorderliness of his writings to signal the lack of a central, systematizing thought and adopt a piecemeal *thematic* approach: they pull scattered texts together to determine what his views are in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and so on.³ Since Nietzsche does develop views in all these areas, such interpretations can be very helpful. But this approach also invites worries about contrivance and anachronism. Moreover, if Nietzsche’s particular views are animated by a fundamental philosophical motivation, as I believe they are, this approach runs the risk of missing it, and therefore of misunderstanding them.

Other interpretations favor a more global *systematic* approach, which consists in identifying a central doctrine in Nietzsche’s philosophy and understanding everything else in relation to it.⁴ Existing systematic interpretations have often managed to account for many of those themes Nietzsche himself saw as his most important philosophical contributions—namely, nihilism, the revaluation of values (which includes the critique of morality), perspectivism, the will to power, the eternal recurrence, and the affirmation of life. But they have not succeeded in accounting for all of them or, at any rate, in explaining their

importance in Nietzsche's eyes. And they have also overlooked themes that are no less important for being more implicit, such as, for example, Nietzsche's ubiquitous concern with the problem of suffering. One shortcoming, in particular, is common to all existing interpretations: none has yet been able to explain adequately why Nietzsche regards the *affirmation of life* as his defining philosophical achievement.

The systematic approach I adopt in this book will, at the outset, encounter resistance, for it does not sit well with Nietzsche's famous quip against systematization: "I mistrust all systematizers. The will to a system is a lack of integrity" (TI, I 26). I believe this conflict is merely apparent. The "will to a system" Nietzsche repudiates here is a distinctive philosophical ambition that remains particularly tenacious throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. It is the ambition to make philosophical knowledge well founded and all inclusive, by showing how the entire body of knowledge can be derived from a small set of fundamental, self-evident propositions.⁵ Nietzsche's rejection of the "will to a system" is the rejection of this particular ambition, but not necessarily a rejection of all forms of systematic thinking. The systematic approach I adopt here (which is also the approach of the systematic interpretations to which I alluded earlier) simply assumes that, appearances notwithstanding, Nietzsche's thought is systematic in the sense that it is organized and logically ordered, and not a haphazard assemblage of brilliant but disconnected ideas.

Part of the problem with existing systematic interpretations of Nietzsche's thought lies in the kind of systematicity they seek in it. We can distinguish between two broad types of systematicity by distinguishing between two principles of systematic organization. Most existing systematic interpretations of Nietzsche take a *philosophical doctrine* as their principle: perspectivism, or the will to power, to mention some recent examples. By doing so, however, they find themselves unable to account for the significance of one or more of his other distinctive ideas. For instance, interpretations that emphasize perspectivism find it difficult to make sense of the importance Nietzsche assigns to his doctrine of the will to power;⁶ and one recent interpretation that, by contrast, centers on this doctrine almost entirely ignores the doctrine of the eternal recurrence.⁷

It is, of course, possible to tinker with these interpretations to make them better able to accommodate those features of Nietzsche's thought that they overlook or underestimate.⁸ But I believe that the sort of systematicity they seek is misguided in its very focus. In contrast to this

approach, I propose to take as the principle of organization of Nietzsche's thought not a certain philosophical doctrine, but a particular *problem* or *crisis*. The systematicity of his philosophy, in other words, is determined not by a central philosophical doctrine, but by the requirements of his response to a particular crisis in late modern European culture, namely, the crisis of nihilism.⁹ As soon as we begin to regard Nietzsche's philosophy as a systematic response to the crisis of nihilism, we become able to account for all of his main philosophical doctrines and to explain their importance in his eyes. Most significantly, we become able to understand the nature and privileged standing of his doctrine of the affirmation of life.

During the last two years of his productive life, Nietzsche exhibits an abiding concern with systematizing his ideas. His unpublished notes, for example, contain more than twenty plans for a massive systematic work (the much touted, but never submitted for publication, *The Will to Power*), which is evidently intended to include and build on all of the main ideas he had developed in his works up to then. Although there are significant differences among the various plans, it is the broad similarities that are most striking. In particular, nearly all of these plans stipulate that this systematic work should begin with an examination of the nature and history of so-called European nihilism, which thus emerges as the central motivation of his philosophical project.

2. *Calibrating Expectations*

The objective of the present book is to address a difficulty that is almost unique to Nietzsche's philosophy. His philosophical works are notoriously confusing: almost every single one of them dabbles in a bewildering variety of subjects, often without recognizable order. Nietzsche hardly ever announces what he is attempting to accomplish, or how, leaving it to the patient reader's inspired guesswork to figure it out. The extraordinary, indeed confounding, variety of interpretations of his work attests to this difficulty. And it makes all the more pressing the task of determining a proper context in which the many themes and ideas he develops can be located, organized, and understood.

The present book attempts to circumscribe this context and so to elaborate a framework in which Nietzsche's main ideas ought to be understood. The interpretation developed here is global and systematic, but it is not exhaustive. It leaves untouched some important themes, concepts, and aspects of his thought. For example, this book has little to say about the diversity and peculiarity of the *styles* in which Nietz-

sche presents his views. This omission is justified, at least partly, by my view of the relation between the form and the content of his philosophical writings.

The manner in which certain philosophical views are presented can, on the one hand, have substantive implications for the proper understanding of these views. For example, when he signs a treatise with a pseudonym instead of his own name, Kierkegaard invites us to consider that he may not unqualifiedly endorse the views presented in it. On the other hand, the manner in which views are presented might also be dictated by their content. For example, it has been suggested that Nietzsche's "perspectivism"—understood to imply an opposition to all forms of dogmatic proselytizing—compelled him to present his views in a highly idiosyncratic variety of styles. This formal strategy would be meant to remind his readers that his views do not represent some objective truth, but only his own perspective.¹⁰

Although on different grounds, I share this general opinion that the manner in which Nietzsche presents his views is ultimately determined by their content. Thus, he explains as follows the occasional deliberate obscurity of his own style: "One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood. It is not by any means necessarily an objection to a book when anyone finds it impossible to understand: perhaps that was part of the author's intention—he did not want to be understood by just 'anybody.' . . . All the more subtle laws of any style have their origin at this point: they at the same time keep away, create a distance, forbid 'entrance,' understanding, as said above—while they open the ears of those whose ears are related to ours" (GS 381).

This selectivity is not motivated by sectarian proclivities, however, but by a consideration of the specific content of the views his books articulate and its effect on different possible readerships: "There are books that have opposite values for soul and health, depending on whether the lower soul, the lower vitality, or the higher and more vigorous 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; cf. 39, 43; EH, Preface 3). It is the very content of the truths Nietzsche uncovers that justifies the "esoterism" of his style (*ibid.*), so that any adequate account of the latter presupposes an understanding of the former. For this reason, the present book is confined to an exploration of the substance of Nietzsche's philosophy.¹¹

In addition, the present book will say comparatively little on a theme that has been salient in recent scholarship, namely, the theme of the nature of truth and knowledge. I do not ignore the issue altogether, but my discussion of perspectivism and truth will be limited here to the case of *value* judgment. I will not consider the issue of truth and knowledge in general for a variety of reasons. In the first place, some of the best recent work on this issue in Nietzsche has revealed that his views on these matters are far less troubling and prone to paradox than some of his iconoclastic rhetoric tends to suggest.¹²

It is worth noting, in this connection, that Nietzsche is often more concerned with the *value* of truth than with its nature, and that the manner in which he articulates this concern has underappreciated implications for his conception of its nature. Thus, when he calls the value of truth into question, he sees himself as challenging an assumption that he finds deeply entrenched in the Western philosophical tradition since Plato: “The problem of the value of truth came before us. [. . .] And though it scarcely seems credible, it finally almost seems to us as if the problem had never even been put so far—as if we were the first to see it, fix it with our eyes, and *risk* it” (BGE 1). He specifies that questioning the value of truth is asking whether untruth, uncertainty, or ignorance might not be preferable. On the most natural reading, this suggests that the will to truth is objectionable not because it is the will to truth *under a certain conception* of it, but insofar as it is a will to truth quite generally. And this indicates that Nietzsche must conceive of the truth whose value he calls into question in much the same way as the Western philosophical tradition conceives of it.

I also suspect that at least significant portions of Nietzsche’s discussions of the nature of truth cannot be adequately framed, as they often are, in terms of the contemporary debate on this issue in analytic philosophy.¹³ And the framework I develop here might allow us to recognize in them very different philosophical stakes. For example, in his use of the term, *truth* is often the attribute not of a theory or a belief, but of a “world,” in which case to speak of the “true world” is to speak of the world that matters, or that ought to matter: “Obviously, the will to truth is here merely a desire for a world of the constant” (WP 585). Along similar lines, Nietzsche is often interested in truth insofar as it is the object of a particular desire. And so, his analyses aim more at determining what people want under the name of truth than at the nature of truth as it occupies contemporary analytic philosophers.

The present book departs from much of the recent scholarship not only in what it leaves out but in what it brings in. It is almost a commonplace in the scholarly literature of the past twenty-five years that Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly his ethical thought, is mainly negative and critical, and that he has little to offer in the way of a positive substantive ethical proposal.¹⁴ Contrary to this widespread perception, much of what follows will show that Nietzsche lays down the foundations for a remarkably rich substantive ethics, based on his much-misunderstood concept of the will to power. Admittedly, he does not develop fully this ethics of power, but we will see that this is only because this sort of detailed articulation would fall outside the scope of his central project of overcoming nihilism.

The focus on nihilism and on substantive ethics also led me to revisit the relation between Nietzsche's thought and the philosophy of Schopenhauer, to which he acknowledges a significant debt. My examination of Nietzsche's engagement with Schopenhauer sheds new light on important ideas of both. I hope to show, for example, that he inherited from Schopenhauer his ubiquitous concern with the problem of suffering, that his concept of the will to power grew out of his original understanding of the role played by the concept of the will to live in Schopenhauer's argument for pessimism, and that this concept of the will to power eventually led him to reject his predecessor's hedonistic conception of the good.

The systematic approach the present book develops should be assessed according to two main criteria: Does it ascribe to Nietzsche a coherent and compelling philosophical project, in which all of the distinctive themes of his thought are assigned a place and a significance in keeping with his own assessment of them? And does this systematic approach supply a fruitful framework for the interpretation of the often peculiar views Nietzsche develops in connection with those themes (for example, his reconsideration of the relation between suffering and pleasure, or the role of the concept of the eternal recurrence in the definition of the affirmation of life)? The ambition of this book is to offer an interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophical project that warrants a positive answer to each of these two questions.

The specific sort of systematicity my approach seeks, grounded as it is in a particular problem or crisis that took place in nineteenth-century European culture, also has noteworthy implications. The nihilism Nietzsche's philosophy addresses results in large part from the demise of the Christian worldview, particularly the dissolution of any credible

hope for an “eternal life” in another world. As Nietzsche himself recognizes, nihilism is a pressing problem for those who are still in the grip of this worldview, insofar as they believe, for example, that without the hope for another life, this one has no meaning. Views such as this may well sound quaintly antiquated to our highly secularized, “post-Christian” ears. Consequently, we might find it difficult to take seriously some of the worries and concerns they inspire, either because they are not perennial philosophical problems, or because, in any event, they no longer concern *us* here and now.

But it is not obvious that the problems nihilism forces us to confront are not perennial problems, or at least problems of enduring significance for us. As Nietzsche again remarks, we concede easily enough that the Christian idea of an eternal life no longer deserves to be taken any more seriously than a fairy tale, but we still often fail to appreciate—indeed, we may altogether suppress—the implications of such a concession for our general attitude toward our life in this world (see GS 125). For he believes that this idea was intended to help answer specific questions that persist even after the idea has been discredited, such as, for example, the question of the place and significance of suffering in human life. So, even if some of the language and context in which the question gets articulated seem odd and somewhat obsolete, the question itself is not.

3. Nietzsche’s Philosophical Project

Nietzsche’s philosophical project consists in determining whether there is a way to overcome nihilism. Nihilism is the conviction that life is meaningless, or not worth living. Chapter 1 offers an analysis of the nature and sources of nihilism. According to the most widely received interpretation, nihilism is a view about our *values*: they become “devaluated” because they lack objective standing. If there are no objective values, then nothing really matters: for human beings who need their lives to have meaning, this lack of normative guidance spawns nihilism, understood as *disorientation*. In contrast to the received interpretation, I argue that in Nietzsche’s considered view, nihilism is primarily a claim about the *world* and our life in it, and not about our values. It is the conviction that our highest values cannot be realized in this world, and that there is no other world in which they can. The ensuing condition is best described as *despair*.

The elaboration of a strategy to overcome nihilistic despair begins with an investigation of its sources. Nihilism is commonly presented as a direct consequence of the *death of God*. To say that “God is dead,”

Nietzsche specifies, is simply to recognize that the belief in God, and in another, metaphysical world, has become “unworthy of belief,” which amounts to saying that it has been *discredited*. A discredited belief is not, strictly speaking, refuted, but it is a belief the possible truth of which can no longer be taken seriously. Although the death of God is closely associated with Nietzsche’s philosophy, he says fairly little about it, apparently because he regards it as the inevitable consequence of various well-known intellectual and cultural developments, rather than a revolutionary new idea in need of much support and elaboration.

His own contribution, I suggest, begins with a crucial observation: nihilism does not follow directly (or necessarily) from the death of God. The inference from the death of God to nihilism holds only if one accepts a further, implicit assumption, namely, that our life has meaning only if God, or another, metaphysical world, exists. This assumption, in turn, is a consequence of the endorsement of certain distinctive values. Nihilism, remember, is despair, or the conviction that our highest values cannot be realized. Discrediting the belief in God (and in a metaphysical world beyond this one) motivates despair only on the assumption that our highest values could not be realized without the existence of God (or of a metaphysical world). If the realization of our highest values requires the existence of God (or a metaphysical world), it must be because they *cannot* be realized under the conditions of our life in “this” world. Such values are *life-negating*, or nihilistic, values; that is, values from the standpoint of which this life deserves to be repudiated, since it is hopelessly inhospitable to their realization.

Nihilistic despair, the conviction that our highest values cannot be realized, therefore has two sources. First, the belief in God, and in a metaphysical world beyond this one, has become discredited. Second, our highest values are life-negating values, or values that cannot be realized under the conditions of our life in this world. To overcome nihilism, then, one might either dispute the claim that God is dead, or call life-negating values into question. Nietzsche, who evidently endorses the death of God, argues that the strategy for overcoming nihilism is to reevaluate the dominant, life-negating values.



One possible form of revaluation is essentially *metaethical*. It consists in showing that values lack the metaethical characteristics required to possess normative authority. There is no reason to despair over the

unrealizability of values that prove to be illegitimate. Chapter 2 examines this metaethical form of the revaluation of all values. It is quite general: it affects life-negating values because it affects all values. As Nietzsche appears to see it, the nihilist is committed to two basic metaethical views. I call the first *descriptive objectivism*, which is the view that there are objective values. And I call the second *normative objectivism*, which is the view that the authority of values—in his words, the “value of these values”—depends on their objective standing. The devaluation of values consists here in showing that they lack objective standing. In other words, it is a denial of descriptive objectivism: there are no objective values.

The upshot of this form of revaluation, however, is to leave us bereft of normative guidance, in a state of disorientation. Such a strategy may well seem unsatisfactory, because it simply trades one kind of nihilism (despair) for another (disorientation). We have no reason to despair, since nothing really matters. But it is also ultimately ineffective because, as Nietzsche argues, this form of nihilism is only a “transitional stage,” or a hasty conclusion that can, and should, be overturned. His strategy to avert nihilistic disorientation, however, is ambiguous.

What I call the *subjectivist* strategy challenges normative objectivism by arguing that it rests on a deep misunderstanding of the nature of normative authority. Far from undermining their justification, the relation of value judgments to contingent (subjective) “perspectives” actually defines what counts as justification in the first place. Perspectives provide the terms in which value judgments are made and justified, so that the objectivist wish for non-perspectival justification proves to be nonsense. According to what I call the *fictionalist* strategy, by contrast, normative objectivism remains the correct account of the normative authority of our value judgments. This strategy averts nihilistic disorientation by proposing to conceive of descriptive objectivism as a form of make-believe. Although objective values do not really exist, we can create them much in the same way as, when we were children, we invented games to play.

Whether we attribute to Nietzsche a subjectivist rejection of normative objectivism or a fictionalist simulacrum of descriptive objectivism, the consequence is the same: nihilistic disorientation is averted. We are not allowed to devalue life-negating values and deny them our confidence, on the grounds that they lack objective standing. For either our confidence in them does not depend on such objective standing, or that standing can be restored by make-believe. But averting

nihilistic disorientation is bound to revive nihilistic despair: if our highest life-negating values escape devaluation, then we must confront again the fact that the conditions of our life in this world are essentially inhospitable to their realization.



To be effective, therefore, Nietzsche's revaluation must be *substantive*. In its metaethical form, the revaluation did not require that we know anything about the content of life-negating values and ideals. In its substantive form, by contrast, the revaluation of these values and ideals focuses on their content. Nietzsche declares that the revaluation of values is to be conducted under the aegis of his doctrine of the *will to power*. Before we can examine and assess the actual execution of the substantive version of the revaluation of values, we must understand this crucial doctrine. This is the task of Chapter 3.

The most maligned among Nietzsche's ideas, the concept of the will to power, is also the least understood. To form an adequate conception of it, I propose to take seriously Nietzsche's suggestion that the notion grew out of his critique of Schopenhauer's concept of the will to live. In the context of the systematic interpretation I am developing here, this should hardly be surprising. He finds in Schopenhauer's pessimism the paradigmatic articulation of nihilism, and the metaphysical basis of this pessimism is a certain conception of human willing. This conception of human willing is supposed to show why suffering is an inescapable feature of the human condition, and consequently why happiness, understood in hedonistic terms, is impossible.

On this conception, human willing is structured in first-order desires, or desires for states of affairs that do not include other desires, and second-order desires, or desires whose objects are or include other (first-order) desires. This structure of human willing makes happiness impossible, according to Schopenhauer, because it makes a once-and-for-all satisfaction of all of our desires impossible. Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power takes up and develops the distinctive idea of a second-order desire. On the interpretation I propose, the will to power is a peculiar kind of second-order desire, namely, the desire to overcome resistance in the pursuit of some determinate first-order desire. It is not the desire for the state in which that resistance has been overcome, nor is it a desire for resistance alone. It is, specifically, a desire for the *activity* of overcoming resistance.

On this interpretation, the will to power has a paradoxical structure. Insofar as it is a will to the overcoming of resistance, it must also will the resistance to overcome. And resistance is defined in terms of its relation to the pursuit of some determinate end. Accordingly, to will power is to desire this determinate end *and* resistance to its realization. It is, in Nietzsche's deliberately paradoxical formulation, "a struggle, and a becoming, and an end, and an opposition to ends" (Z, II 12).

The doctrine of the will to power has two fundamental implications. First, Schopenhauer defines *suffering* in terms of resistance to the satisfaction of our desires. Accordingly, the doctrine of the will to power radically alters our conception of the place and significance of suffering in human existence. Willing the overcoming of resistance implies willing the resistance to overcome, and this amounts to willing nothing less than suffering itself. Second, insofar as it is the desire for an activity, the will to power is a desire that precludes *permanent* satisfaction: the satisfaction of the desire for the activity of overcoming of resistance implies that resistance is eventually overcome, consequently the end of the activity that is its object, and the quest for new resistance to overcome. Hence, the pursuit of power necessarily assumes the form of an endless "becoming."



To understand the role assigned to the doctrine of the will to power in the revaluation of those life-negating values and ideals that lie at the root of nihilistic despair, we must first elucidate their content. Here again, Nietzsche turns to Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's pessimism has its source in a wholesale condemnation of suffering, which informs both his conception of the supreme principle of morality as *compassion*, and his view of the highest good (happiness) as the absence of pain and suffering, which he believes can only be achieved through *resignation*. Since Schopenhauer also shows that suffering is an essential feature of our life in this world, then these values and ideals are necessarily life-negating. And so, Chapter 4 argues that the central focus of Nietzsche's revaluation is the view that suffering is "evil" and "ought to be abolished" (see BGE 225), a view that has deep roots in Western culture, and finds its most radical expression in Schopenhauer's ethical thought. The importance of the will to power to the project of a revaluation of those values becomes clear. If Nietzsche can show that what he calls "power" is indeed good, then he will thereby

show that suffering, which is an essential ingredient of power, is also a good, and not the object of a legitimate wholesale condemnation.

The chapter begins by acknowledging that the project of a revaluation of *all* values appears plagued by a vicious paradox. A revaluation presupposes values in the light of which it is conducted, but it seems that if we are to reevaluate “all” values, we deprive ourselves precisely of all possible terms of revaluation. In particular, it seems that we lose the means to establish the value of power. I examine various proposals to address this paradox and draw on metaethical considerations developed in Chapter 2 to articulate a plausible resolution for it.

The chapter proceeds to elucidate the content of Nietzsche’s ethics of power and argues that it essentially rests on the view that the difficulty of an achievement contributes to its value. This view resonates with evaluative attitudes that are deeply entrenched in our ethical sensibilities. For example, our valuation of creativity is explained in terms of our valuation of the will to power. For creative activity is indeed the paradigmatic manifestation of the will to power, insofar as it involves the overcoming of boundaries or limitations hitherto unchallenged. The creative individual deliberately seeks resistance to overcome. Along similar lines, the valuation of competition also rests on the value we place on the overcoming of resistance. We must “grasp the value of having enemies” (TI, V 3), Nietzsche tells us, and seek the “worthier enemies,” for a weak opposition would make for a disappointing competition. He also observes that the distinctive quality of those achievements we call “great” is precisely the fact that they required the overcoming of considerable resistance. Great achievements are, as we might prefer to say, achievements that were particularly challenging.

The ethics of power supplies the principle behind Nietzsche’s revaluation of the morality of compassion and of the ethics of contentment or resignation. The chapter proceeds to show how his famous critique of morality is grounded in this ethics of power, as is his claim to have “discovered a new happiness.” And it concludes with a critical examination of the role of his “genealogy of morality” in his global project of a revaluation of values.



Nietzsche introduces the doctrine of the *eternal recurrence* to define his ideal of the affirmation of life: it is the “highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable” (EH, III 1). Yet, for all its importance, the idea

of the eternal recurrence is one of the most difficult and mysterious in a body of works that includes many difficult and mysterious ideas. In keeping with most of the recent scholarship, I assign it an essentially *ethical* significance: to affirm life is to will its eternal recurrence. This basic agreement notwithstanding, the recent scholarship still leaves us with a bewildering variety of interpretations. Chapter 5 opens with a detailed critical examination of the most important among them.

My own proposal rests on a central distinction between two roles the concept of the eternal recurrence may be thought to play in the characterization of the ideal of affirmation of life. In what I call its *theoretical* role, the eternal recurrence directly denotes, or indirectly helps to bring out, a particular *property of the life* to be affirmed. The affirmation of life is a demanding ideal in this theoretical view not because affirming anything is difficult, but because affirming a life with this property is. In its *practical* role, by contrast, the eternal recurrence tells us something about what sort of practical stance or attitude *affirmation* is, rather than about the life to be affirmed. The affirmation of life is a demanding ideal, in this practical view, because of the nature of affirmation itself.

Thus, when Nietzsche urges us to live our life so as to become able to will its eternal recurrence, he may simply ask us to heed the fact that it will, in fact, recur eternally. This would be one possible theoretical interpretation of the doctrine. In the practical interpretation, by contrast, he would invoke the concept of eternal recurrence to describe the particular attitude he wants us to achieve toward our life: the affirmation of life. From this practical standpoint, the important question is no longer whether I can establish that my life will eternally recur (or other relevant facts about that life, which the idea of eternal recurrence would be designed to bring out), but what the invocation of the eternal recurrence tells us about the nature of affirmation.

I argue that all of the main existing interpretations I consider are inadequate on both exegetical and philosophical grounds. I develop a version of the practical interpretation, which differs from others by attending to the overlooked contrast between the ordinary wish for the *eternity* of a moment (as when we wish of a particularly satisfying moment that it “would never end”) and the Nietzschean wish for its *eternal recurrence*. In this interpretation, the imperative to live so as to be able to desire the eternal recurrence of my life is not, as it is often assumed to be, the purely *formal* demand that my values, whatever they happen to be, be realized enough to leave me with no regret about

it. Rather, it is the *substantive* demand to live according to a certain value, or a certain range of values. To be able to desire the eternal recurrence of my life, as Nietzsche insists, I need a revaluation of values: specifically, I must value *becoming* and *impermanence*, which Nietzsche takes to be characteristic of the sort of activity involved in the pursuit of power. This is why he claims that living in accordance with the eternal recurrence requires a revaluation of the prevalent life-negating ideals of peace, rest, or tranquility, all of which demand a state of permanence, or “being,” as opposed to “becoming.” And so, the ethics of power, which defines the good in terms of activity and precludes a permanent, once-and-for-all satisfaction, represents a paradigmatic way to live up to the distinctive requirement of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence.



As Nietzsche defines it, the affirmation of life demands a revaluation of the dominant, life-negating values. To make a genuine affirmation possible, moreover, this revaluation must be quite radical: it must show that those aspects of human existence condemned by the nihilist (in particular, suffering) are not only bearable, but also desirable, and not desirable derivatively, but for their own sake. It does not suffice for the affirmation of life to acknowledge that suffering is a (contingently) necessary condition or consequence of the realization of certain values, such as creativity, for this remains compatible with a condemnation of suffering, and therefore with the negation of life. Indeed, we might still coherently aspire to a world in which we do not have to suffer in order to be creative. To affirm life, we must therefore show that suffering is good for its own sake. Chapter 6 shows how Nietzsche’s ethics of power makes such a radical revaluation of suffering possible. By making suffering an “ingredient” of the good (the will to power), it shows that suffering cannot coherently be condemned as a deplorable, if necessary, condition or consequence of its achievement.

Nietzsche leaves many important issues about the value and place of suffering in human life unaddressed, largely because his concern is to challenge the broad strokes of a deeply entrenched ethical sensibility and to revive a long-forgotten alternative outlook. His is a campaign to undermine Christianity and awaken dormant ancient Greek ideas. Although he acknowledges intimations of these ideas in Heraclitus, and even Socrates and Plato, among the Ancients, and in Goethe among

the Moderns, it is in the mythical figure of Dionysus that Nietzsche finds the best embodiment of his life-affirming ideal. The chapter therefore offers an analysis of Nietzsche's appropriation of this figure, as well as of the "tragic wisdom" it is supposed to incarnate. The analysis of Dionysian wisdom, it turns out, is an exposition of the troubling and paradoxical characteristics of the creative life. I also consider, in this connection, the figure of the "overman," which, despite its prominence in Nietzschean lore, has had a relatively short career in his writings. And I suggest that this baffling and recalcitrant notion admits of a simple and plausible interpretation, once it is placed in the context of the ethics of power.

The chapter also examines how nihilism, which Nietzsche prominently describes as a philosophical problem, "the logical conclusion of our great values and ideals" (WP, Preface 4) can also be an expression of "physiological degeneration" (WP 38). He maintains that the life-negating values, of which nihilism is the "logical conclusion," have their origin in the *ressentiment* of the "weak and ill-constituted." A close analysis of this diagnosis permits one, in turn, to shed some light on his deeply disturbing declaration that helping the weak to "perish" is a matter of "philanthropy" (A 2). And it frames a critical reconsideration of the ethical relativism sometimes attributed to Nietzsche.

Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of some further conditions for the affirmation of life. And it shows how Nietzsche's own life and philosophy are exemplary instances of the very will to power they were devoted to recognize, analyze, and advocate.

4. *The Question of the Nachlass*

Heidegger's famous contention that Nietzsche's true philosophy is contained almost exclusively in the late portion of the large body of unpublished notes he left behind set off a sometimes intense debate over the status of these notes, collectively known as the *Nachlass*.¹⁵ The reaction to Heidegger's contention has been strongly negative and justified on a variety of grounds. One such ground is the fact that, until recently, the late portion of the *Nachlass* was known only under the guise of an alleged book—*The Will to Power*—which Nietzsche never wrote, but which was composed by editors from his unpublished notes under the supervision of his sister, Elizabeth. Pressed by Elizabeth's ideological commitments and personal ambition, the editors' presentation of the notes violated the most basic philological standards: for example, they included materials Nietzsche clearly intended to discard,

and organized the notes according to plans he had eventually abandoned. Moreover, they simply ignored the fact that, by the end of his productive life, Nietzsche had apparently renounced the project of writing a book entitled *The Will to Power*.¹⁶

These observations command considerable caution in the use of these notes, to be sure, but they do not warrant, in my opinion, the complete repudiation some scholars have advocated. Let us review briefly the main grounds for such a repudiation. In the first place, a quick look at the recent critical edition of Nietzsche's late unpublished notes suffices to show that the editors of the current version of *The Will to Power* have taken worrisome liberties in their selection and presentation of them. They left out many of them and organized others in rather arbitrary ways, dividing up materials found together in his notebooks, and grouping materials from heterogeneous sources as if Nietzsche had written them together. Such liberties affect less the content of Nietzsche's notes, however (insofar as he did, after all, write them), than the manner of their presentation. Accordingly, like many scholars, I will use *The Will to Power* as a loose connection of notes, rather than a full-blooded book, referring to the critical edition whenever misleading impressions need to be corrected.

Second, even though the editors did follow Nietzsche's plan in the presentation of his late notes, it is only one of up to twenty-five plans he elaborated—one, moreover, that was apparently superceded by at least a dozen later versions (cf. WP 69n/KSA 12: 2 [100, 131]). There are, without a doubt, some significant differences among these plans, but it is their broad structural similarities I find most striking. Most of the plans require (1) an examination of the nature and history of European nihilism; (2) a critique of dominant values, particularly what are referred to as Christian and moral values; (3) a revaluation of these values, which takes the will to power as its principle; and, finally, (4) the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, sometimes presented as “the instrument” of the new philosopher who aims to achieve a Dionysian affirmation of life. The order and the manner in which those themes are treated vary from one plan to the next, but these four issues retain their place and their basic significance throughout Nietzsche's revisions.¹⁷ This observation alone strongly suggests that, during the last two or three years of his productive life, the general conception Nietzsche had of his philosophical project was remarkably stable.

This observation seems moot, however, as soon as we remember that Nietzsche eventually renounced the project for a book entitled *The Will*

to *Power* and sketched out instead the outline of another work, entitled simply *Revaluation of All Values*, whose first installment is *The Anti-Christ* (KSA 13: 22[14]). But this may well not be a very significant change, for the project of *The Will to Power* was always conceived as but one version of the enterprise of revaluation,¹⁸ an enterprise for which Nietzsche continued to express his enthusiasm in published books as well as in private correspondence, nearly until his final collapse into insanity.¹⁹ The opening sections of *The Anti-Christ*, moreover, clearly show that he was far from having abandoned the idea of the will to power as the guiding principle of his revaluation (A 2). And his very last unpublished notes attest to his enduring concern with nihilism, his claim to find its source in Christian or moral values, the need to subject these values to a critique, and the resulting prospect of a so-called Dionysian affirmation of life (KSA 13: 23[13]; 24[9]).

The most damning element in the case against the *Nachlass*, in the end, may well be the very fact that it remained unpublished. Some of the materials in it were not published, in all likelihood, simply because Nietzsche never saw fit to publish them. Some portions of it were never published probably because they are inconsistent with views he endorsed in print (for instance, the “cosmological” version of the eternal recurrence discussed in WP 1062–66). Other portions are evidently early drafts of eventually published materials. Still other portions are neither duplicated in the published works nor inconsistent with them and may well contain views Nietzsche did not repudiate but never had the time to prepare for publication. Nevertheless, such materials still ought to be dismissed, because they form an essentially unfinished project, marking a perhaps important but forever irretrievable new direction of his thought.

In view of these observations, even those scholars who remain inclined to make use of the *Nachlass* more or less explicitly endorse the principle that Nietzsche’s published views should have absolute priority over those found in the late unpublished notes and that the latter can be properly understood and appreciated only in the light of the former. I find this unqualified “priority principle” questionable, essentially because it fails to appreciate that Nietzsche’s *Nachlass* differs from the unpublished materials left by other philosophers, such as Kant’s *Reflectionen*, for example, in two important respects.

First, as I noted earlier, Nietzsche left us abundant indications that he was hard at work on a project of revaluation of values, a project which, moreover, he considered to be of the utmost significance. Those

of his works many now regard as his mature works (for instance, *On the Genealogy of Morals*), he himself presents as heralds to this comprehensive new project (see GM, III 27). And he describes the latest work he intended for publication (*The Anti-Christ*) as its first installment (see EH, III “The Twilight of the Idols” 3). It seems therefore reasonable to think that at least some of the views elaborated in the *Nachlass* represent not misguided, eventually disavowed ideas, but rather the most advanced stages of his thought. Accordingly, it might sometimes be advisable to read the published works in light of the broad philosophical project laid out in the late portion of the *Nachlass*, rather than the other way around.

Second, it is important to note that the *style* of the unpublished notes is markedly different, for the most part, from that of the published works. The notes are usually written in a straightforward, plain style, almost completely devoid of the refined artifice that characterizes much of the published production. The question of the philosophical significance of Nietzsche’s style is delicate, but I remarked earlier that he himself indicates that his peculiar use of style is a deliberate form of esoterism, an effort to conceal the truths he reveals from those not worthy of them, or not prepared to face them (see BGE 30, 39, 43). From this standpoint, then, the artifice of the published works is meant to mislead and misdirect those readers who are not “entitled” to his insights. In the unpublished notes, by contrast, which were never intended to be seen, he was presumably free to write in a more direct and straightforward style. If we take this suggestion seriously, then it may well be reasonable to seek clarification for the published views in the unpublished notes, rather than the other way around.

Along the same lines, the presentation of ideas in published works is often characterized by a sometimes frustrating brevity. Nietzsche often only alludes to important concepts and theories, which he leaves barely adumbrated. In this respect, the unpublished notes can provide invaluable illumination. They record, sometimes over many pages of detailed reflections, his efforts to articulate his understanding of these concepts and theories, and only the ultimate outcome of these efforts appears in the published books. This is the case, for example, with his conception of nihilism (compare, for example, WP 1–37 and 69n with GS 343, on nihilism and what might overcome it). For this reason, cautious reliance on the unpublished notes might prove very useful and, in some cases at least, even necessary, to form an adequate understanding of Nietzsche’s published views.

For these reasons, I propose to operate here with a qualified version of the priority principle. The priority I will grant the published works is not based on the assumption that they always contain Nietzsche's considered final word, for they may well not. I will simply not accept the views I find in the *Nachlass* to be Nietzsche's considered philosophical thought, unless these views jibe with views explicitly discussed in the published works. Unpublished views jibe with published ones not simply when they are consistent with them, but when they are duplicated, explicitly anticipated, summarized, implied or implicated by them, or otherwise plausibly grow out of them. The ultimate assessment of my use of the *Nachlass* in developing my overall interpretation of Nietzsche's project will therefore depend, in the last analysis, on its exegetical fruitfulness—on how well it enables us to make sense of what Nietzsche does, and declares he intends to do, in his published books.

Nihilism

A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist.

—THE WILL TO POWER, 585

Nihilism is the central problem of Nietzsche's philosophy. Although this view is not new, its nature and implications have not been well understood. One reason is that Nietzsche's conception of nihilism itself remains elusive. The bulk of his analysis of it is confined to unpublished notebooks, where it often remains sketchy and fragmentary. It is, moreover, marred by complications the significance of which is unclear: in the course of his analysis, he flanks the term *nihilism* with no fewer than eighteen different epithets, all of which create the often misleading impression that an important qualification has been introduced.¹ Last but not least, I will show that the core conception of nihilism is itself fraught with a fundamental ambiguity. The objective of the present chapter is to sort out these complications and articulate as clearly as possible Nietzsche's considered conception of the nature and sources of nihilism.

I. The Nature of Nihilism

1. *The Idea of the Meaning of Life*

In its broadest description, nihilism is the belief that existence is *meaningless* (“alles Geschehen [ist] sinnlos” [WP 36]; “dasein [hat] keinen Sinn” [WP 585; cf. 55]). The idea of a meaningful life is surprisingly elusive. It might clarify matters somewhat to begin with a rough distinction between two broad ways of understanding it.

We might first take meaningfulness to be one of number of *specific* values, in accordance with which a life can be evaluated. Typically, the property of meaningfulness is relational: a life has meaning by virtue

of its relation to something else.² Consider some ordinary examples. We might think of the meaning of life by analogy with the meaning of linguistic expressions, specifically their property of bearing a certain (symbolic) relation to things beyond themselves. I might choose a certain profession, for example, in part because it perpetuates a long-standing family tradition. That profession is a good choice not only because it is interesting or lucrative, but also because it relates me to a family tradition and this makes it, as we are prone to saying, “meaningful.” A life can also be meaningful by securing a different kind of relation to the surrounding world. For example, we say that a life was meaningful when it had a significant impact on the course of the world, or made some sort of difference to it. Meaningful lives are distinguished by achievements that left a mark on the history of human culture—such as the lives of artists who created works of great beauty or expressive power, of philosophers who developed new ideas, of politicians who built empires, and so on. Although this is debatable, we might be tempted to add that a life is meaningful only if it makes a *certain kind* of difference, presumably a difference for the better. In this case, the notion of meaningfulness would bear an essential relation to other values.

Meaningfulness in this sense is also typically a quality of *particular* human lives. To be sure, life in general can be considered meaningless in this sense, but usually derivatively, when the requirements of meaningfulness cannot be met by *any* particular life. The magnitude of the universe could be such, for example, that no human life can ever hope to make any significant difference to its course.³ Most important for our purposes here is that meaningfulness is a specific value, distinct from other values, such as moral worth and well-being. A life that has no impact on the course of the world and does not relate to anything beyond itself could nevertheless be righteous and, in some sense at least, happy. And so, a life could be meaningless and still worth living in some other respect.

On the second way of conceiving of it, by contrast, meaningfulness is a *generic* evaluative property. This notion of meaningfulness is typically at stake in the existentialist question, “Does life have meaning?” This question does not ask whether human life possesses a specific value distinct from other (moral, prudential) values that it could also possess. Rather, in asking whether life has meaning, it simply asks whether it is worth living at all. In this case, the idea of a meaningful life is a purely formal concept, the content of which is determined by

the agent's highest values and ideals. As a consequence, a life could not be meaningless and still worth living. Furthermore, the existentialist question typically concerns human life *in general*, not the particular life of some individual. It asks about the value of living a life with the distinctive characteristics of human life: for example, is a life in which suffering and death are unavoidable worth living? And to answer this question positively would be to provide some sort of justification for suffering and death.

The concept of nihilism is most naturally associated with the second interpretation of the idea of a meaningful life. In the first place, in Nietzsche's analysis, the terms *meaningless* [*sinnlos*] and *valueless* [*Wertlos*] are used interchangeably. In other words, the idea of a meaningful life is simply the idea of a life *worth living*, and so nihilism is the recognition of its valuelessness ("nun sieht die Welt werthlos aus" [WP 12]). And Nietzschean nihilism concerns the meaning of life in general: it is the view that "*all* that happens is meaningless" (WP 36; my emphasis).

Nietzsche declares that life is worth living only if there are *inspiring goals*, or goals that inspire to live: accordingly, nihilism may be defined as goallessness: "What does nihilism mean? [. . .] The goal is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (WP 2; cf. 55). Strictly speaking, we must distinguish a goal from its value: the goal designates the *state of affairs* that an action or a process is intended to bring about, whereas the value provides the *reason* why such a state of affairs is worth bringing about. However, in ordinary usage, the terms *goal* and *value* tend to designate *both* the state of affairs intended by an action and the reason for the action. We will, for example, describe democracy as a value, although it also clearly designates a state of affairs. And we will talk of moral goodness as a goal, although it refers also (and perhaps properly only) to the reason why we pursue certain goals.

Nietzsche's own use of these terms is fraught with that ambiguity. His concept of an "ideal," in particular, displays it most clearly: the concept of an ideal designates a valuable goal. The ambiguity appears not to concern Nietzsche because, when he speaks of "goals," he typically has in mind not just any goal sanctioned by our values, but goals the achievement of which is a necessary condition of the realization of those values. From the standpoint of a certain Christian conception of morality, for example, the well-being of others is a necessary goal: one could not renounce it and still be morally good. Accordingly, when Nietzsche speaks of unattainable (necessary) goals, he speaks ipso facto

of unrealizable values.⁴ I will generally follow this practice and speak of goals and values interchangeably. But the distinction will prove useful to distinguish between two basic conceptions of nihilism in his writings.

Finally, it is worth noting that the goals Nietzsche has in mind need not be goals that can be achieved through the actions of an agent, or a group of agents. They may also represent desirable states of affairs, to the emergence of which agents contribute nothing or very little; for example, the Second Coming, which is supposed to result from divine intervention, or the full realization of the Hegelian “world spirit,” which proceeds from a necessary historical process.

To gain a full understanding of Nietzsche’s conception of nihilism, we must bring to light a crucial assumption that runs through all of his discussion of it but is never made fully explicit. A goal makes life worth living only if it inspires the agent to go on living. The assumption concerns the ability of a given goal to *inspire an agent*, which he once calls the ability to “inspire faith” (WP 23). A goal’s ability to inspire depends on two conditions: first, it depends on the agent’s estimation of the *value* of the goal; second, it also depends on the agent’s estimation of the *realizability* of this goal. The goal loses its ability to inspire if one or both of these conditions is not met. Nihilism, then, may have two sources: a devaluation of the goals in the realization of which our life has hitherto found its meaning, or the conviction that these goals are unrealizable.

An agent’s estimation of the *value* of a goal could change in a variety of possible ways. For instance, he might discover that the goal lacks value because its pursuit does not contribute to the realization of his values. For example, his highest values are moral values, and he comes to realize that he wrongly believes that a policy of complete truthfulness is morally good. Nietzsche has a more radical devaluation in mind, however. The agent comes to deem a goal worthless because he no longer subscribes to the values by the light of which he originally endorsed it. For example, he may have correctly believed that the happiness of others is a morally worthy goal, but he now calls into question the value of moral values themselves.

The agent estimates the *realizability* of a goal by asking one basic question: is the world hospitable to its realization, or are there features of the world that make it impossible? This question itself is ambiguous, for the realization of the goal might be either *contingently* or *necessarily* impossible. In other words, are the features of the world that

impede the realization of the goal accidental or essential features of it? A goal is only contingently unrealizable when its realization is impeded solely by the accidental circumstances of a particular agent's life. It is necessarily unrealizable, by contrast, when the factors opposing its realization are essential features of the world, so that no change in the particular circumstances of the agent's life would make a difference.

Nietzsche assumes that goals that are believed to be unattainable (and values thought to be unrealizable) lose their ability to inspire: there is no point in trying to attain the unattainable.⁵ But this does not mean that they lose their value in the agent's eyes. On the contrary, the agent might remain committed to his unrealizable values, but his life loses its meaning.⁶ The meaning of his life, the point of living, so to speak, depends not just on his being committed to certain values or ideals, but also on the belief that the world is hospitable to their realization. The meaning of a person's life is thus a function of two factors: his estimation of the value of his goals, and of their realizability.

2. *Two Senses of Nihilism*

The distinction between two conditions of meaningfulness points to a fundamental ambiguity in Nietzsche's conception of nihilism that has been largely overlooked. By and large, the most prevalent view among recent scholars is that nihilism is a claim about our *values*: "Nihilism: the goal is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer. What does nihilism mean?—that *the highest values devalue themselves* [dass die obersten Werthe sich entwerthen]" (WP 2). Nihilism is the view that all our values are devaluated. To be sure, Nietzsche only speaks here of the devaluation of the so-called highest values, but the criticisms he offers are clearly applicable to all values. As most commentators agree, indeed, the devaluation of which he speaks follows from the recognition that *no value is objective*.⁷

In this regard, they follow closely the contemporary notion of moral nihilism: "Nihilism is the doctrine that there are no moral facts, no moral truths, no moral knowledge."⁸ Nietzsche explicitly endorses this view: moral values, he claims, are "false projections" onto a world that is empty of them (WP 12; GS 301; Z, I 15; BGE 108), and he approvingly refers to the Greek Sophists who maintain that "it is a swindle to talk of 'truth' in this field" (WP 428). Along with moral values, Nietzsche denies the existence of other "moral facts," such as, for example, the freedom of the will, on which judgments of moral praise and blame are supposed to depend (TI, VII 1). And he also rejects the

idea of objective moral reasons, such as those dictated by the “categorical imperative,” which he dismisses as merely “an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of ‘inspiration’—most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract” (BGE 5; cf. 186).⁹

But Nietzsche’s conception of nihilism understood as a claim about values differs from the contemporary notion in one important respect. It is not merely the purely theoretical recognition that facts of a certain (moral, evaluative) kind do not exist, but the practical sense of loss or *disorientation* that proceeds from this recognition: “‘why?’ finds no answer.” Nihilistic devaluation of values indeed follows from the acknowledgment that they lack objective standing: “among the forces cultivated by morality was *truthfulness*: this eventually turned against morality, discovered its teleology, its partial perspective” (WP 5). If there are no objective moral facts for our moral judgments to report, these must be the expressions of a merely subjective “perspective.” And if this is all they are, they lose their normative authority. But this inference rests on the assumption that the legitimacy of our values depends on their objective standing, their independence from our subjective perspectives. I will call this assumption *normative objectivism*. For those who endorse normative objectivism, nihilistic disorientation is therefore the implication of the rejection of the objectivity of the highest values.¹⁰

We may get a better idea of this nihilistic sense of disorientation by contrasting it with the distress caused by thoroughgoing *skepticism*. Thoroughgoing skepticism is the view that, if there are objective facts about value, we are irrevocably denied access to them. A predictable response to skepticism is a feeling of pervasive blindness. There may be a fact of the matter about what the good life is, but we are hopelessly deprived of any access to it. We expect the sense of blindness that results from thoroughgoing skepticism to be a source of distress, which is motivated by a belief in the possible existence of objective evaluative facts.

Nihilistic disorientation, as Nietzsche understands it, is not a response to skepticism but to *anti-realism*: “every belief [. . .] is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world*” (WP 15; Nietzsche’s “true world” may be understood, like the Platonic world of ideas to which it alludes, to include normative facts like the idea of the Good [see WP 585]). The typical response to anti-realism, when it is combined with normative objectivism, is that nothing has value, nothing really matters: “Nothing is true, all is permitted!” (Z, IV 9). It is not

that we lack reliable guidance to the good life, it is rather that there really is no good life to be had. Nothing is to be done or to be avoided, so everything is “permitted.”

In contrast to skepticism, anti-realism results in a complete devaluation of all values, and the only appropriate response it should inspire is indifference. Since there is no fact of the matter—no “truth”—about the nature of the good life, then there is nothing of which we are deprived. And if nothing really matters, it should not matter that nothing matters (see TI, V 6). Yet, Nietzsche characterizes the response to the devaluation of all values as anything but indifference. The nihilist actually *laments* it as a loss: “‘Why did we ever pursue any way at all? It is all the same.’ *Their* ears appreciate the preaching, ‘Nothing is worthwhile! You shall not will!’ ” (Z, III 12 [16]). Of course, he may simply regret having wasted his energies on pursuits he erroneously took to be valuable. But Nietzsche clearly suggests elsewhere that, at bottom, the nihilist deplores the loss of meaning itself, the loss of something to will (see GM, III 28). And he characterizes the distinctive distress the nihilist experiences as a sense of disorientation: “What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?” (GS 125; cf. WP 30: “we are losing the center of gravity by virtue of which we have lived; we are lost for a while.”)

Obviously, nihilistic disorientation cannot be motivated by a belief in the existence of objective values. Nietzsche surmises it is induced by a distinctively human *desire*, indeed a *need*, for meaning, for the existence of values that can motivate the human will: “Gradually, man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfill one more condition of existence than any other animal: man *has* to believe, to know, from time to time *why* he exists; his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life—without faith in *reason in life*” (GS 1; cf. Z, I 15; WP 12, 36). Nihilistic disorientation is a consequence of the frustration of that need: human beings need for their existence to have purpose or meaning, but it proves to be a pointless succession of events.

At the heart of Nietzsche’s thought about ethical normativity, therefore, is the idea that meaning is the object of a natural need. A “natural” need is here simply a need the fulfillment of which is a “condition of existence.” A full acknowledgment of the complete meaninglessness of our existence would lead to “suicidal nihilism” (GM, III 28;

cf. GS 107). I shall propose later an examination of this peculiar need, but it is worth noting the empirical plausibility of the view that human beings do indeed have such a need.¹¹

The wide scholarly consensus over the interpretation of nihilism as a claim about values has effectively masked another conception of nihilism in Nietzsche's work. This other conception is not a metaethical claim about our values but an ethical claim about the *world*, and our existence in it: "it would be better if the world did not exist" (WP 701). In this interpretation, nihilism results not from the devaluation of our highest values, but from the conviction that they cannot be realized.¹² Since nihilism, in this sense, is the conviction that our highest values cannot be realized, I propose to conceive of it as *despair*, since despair is the belief that what is most important to us is unattainable.¹³

Not every form of despair is nihilism, however. To appreciate what is distinctive about nihilistic despair, we must examine more closely the sense of the nihilist's conviction that his values are unrealizable. I noted earlier that values might be *contingently* or *necessarily* unrealizable. A value is contingently unrealizable when it is unrealizable only under the accidental circumstances of a particular agent's life. Suppose that the goal that would give my life meaning is to write the next great American novel, but that I find myself unable to do so by an unfortunate lack of leisure time or literary talent. In this case, my life is meaningless, but that alone does not make me a *nihilist*. For I am not disappointed with life itself, but only with my own life: I still want to live, simply as somebody else. Nihilism, remember, is not the view that someone's particular life is meaningless but the conviction that *life in general* is meaningless. To conclude that life in general, and not just his particular life, is meaningless, the nihilist must believe that the world is necessarily or essentially inhospitable to the realization of his values, so that no change in the particular circumstances of his life would make a difference.

3. *Pessimism and Nihilism*

Contrary to the prevalent interpretation, the bulk of Nietzsche's analyses of the concept of nihilism support an interpretation of it in terms of despair. In fact, the passage about the "devaluation of the highest values" I cited previously is one of few in which nihilism is explicitly presented as a claim about values.¹⁴ By contrast, the view that despair is Nietzsche's primary conception of nihilism is confirmed by much of his unpublished discussion of this concept.

To begin with, it appears to underwrite the distinction Nietzsche draws between “active” and “passive” nihilism (WP 22–23), at least in one plausible interpretation of it. According to this interpretation, the active and passive forms of nihilism constitute different *responses* to the loss of meaning.¹⁵ Passive nihilism is “the weary nihilism that no longer attacks,” or the resignation to a world inhospitable to our values and ideals. By contrast, active nihilism is “a violent force of destruction,” a refusal of this world precisely because it is stubbornly resistant to their realization. Both resignation and destruction imply a continuing endorsement of certain values: resignation is acceptance of a hopelessly evil world, whereas destruction is its annihilation on the grounds that it is hopelessly evil.¹⁶ This interpretation of “active” and “passive” nihilism presupposes a conception of nihilism as a form of despair: nihilism as disorientation, by contrast, implies a disengagement from the very values the endorsement of which underlies resignation and destruction.

The conception of nihilism as a kind of despair finds further support in Nietzsche’s discussion of the relation between pessimism and nihilism. Although he sometimes uses the notions interchangeably, Nietzsche often draws a distinct line between nihilism and pessimism. Nihilism is a “development” of pessimism (WP 37), which is itself “a preliminary form of” nihilism (WP 9). The two senses of nihilism I have just described suggest that the distinction between pessimism and nihilism should take two different forms, depending on which conception of nihilism we consider. An examination of this distinction should help us clarify and enrich our understanding of nihilism in general and of the contrast between disorientation and despair in particular.

In his notebooks, Nietzsche proposes the following definition of pessimism: “*Our* pessimism: the world does not have the value that we believed” (WP 32), by which he evidently means that “the world is worth *less* [than we thought]” (GS 346). And he draws the following distinction between pessimism and nihilism: “*Radical nihilism* is the conviction of the absolute untenability [*Unhaltbarkeit*] of existence as far as the highest values one acknowledges are concerned, together with the *insight* that we do not have the slightest right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that is ‘divine’ or the embodiment of morality [*das leibhaftige Moral*]” (WP 3). This definition of nihilism¹⁷ has two parts. First, from the point of view of “the highest values which one acknowledges,” our existence is “untenable.” This is the pessimistic moment of nihilism: the conviction that our existence in this world will take a turn

for the worse. The second part of the definition describes the distinctively nihilistic moment of nihilism: “the *insight* that we do not have the slightest right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that is ‘divine’ or the embodiment of morality.”

If we think of nihilism in terms of disorientation, the nihilistic moment should be interpreted as follows. The “highest values” in terms of which the pessimist condemns existence are found to lack justification: we have no “right” to them because they do not have, after all, the transcendent “divine” warrant we believed they had, or they do not have existence “in-itself.” In the last analysis, then, the contrast between pessimism and nihilism is this: the pessimist is convinced that things will take a turn for the worse (in this world, at any rate), whereas the nihilist loses his grip on what would be better or worse in the first place.

Nietzsche’s actual formulation, however, makes this reading implausible. The “*insight* that we do not have the slightest right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that is ‘divine’ or the embodiment of morality” appears to be an insight about the *things* that are valuable, rather than about the *values* themselves. In the Christian worldview, for instance, the “beyond” is a place in which our highest values and ideals are realized, or embodied, in which, for example, death and suffering have been eradicated, justice prevails, and so on.¹⁸ If this is correct, the nihilist’s insight is not that our values lack an objective standing that would be secured by their existence in some world “beyond” (such as Plato’s world of ideas), but that we are not justified in positing another world in which they are realized. In other words, nihilism shares the pessimistic judgment over this world: “it would be better if the world did not exist” (WP 701) since it cannot realize our values. But it adds to this judgment the recognition that there is no other world in which these values are realized after all. Nihilism, on this new understanding, is therefore a view not about our values themselves but about the possibility of their realization.

Other descriptions of the difference between pessimism and nihilism are even more unequivocal: “The development of pessimism into nihilism.—[. . .] The repudiated world [*die Verworfenne Welt*] versus an artificially built ‘true, valuable’ one.—Finally: one discovers of what material one has built the ‘true world’: and now all one has left is the ‘repudiated world, and one adds this supreme disappointment to the reasons why it deserves to be repudiated. At this point nihilism is reached: all one has left are the values that pass judgment—nothing

else” (WP 37; cf. WP 12). The opposition between the “repudiated world” and another “‘true, valuable’ one” forms the pessimistic predicament. By the light of our highest values, this world in which we live is evil and ought to be repudiated; but there is (or there is hope of) another world in which our values would at last be realized. The transition to nihilism is not the realization that the pessimist’s values are devaluated. It is, instead, the discovery that this other, “true world” is nothing but a figment of our imagination, a product of wishful thinking, a fabrication “from psychological needs” (WP 12). So, the nihilist accepts the pessimistic repudiation of this world but finds himself compelled to discard the hope for another, better world. As Nietzsche makes it unequivocally clear, nihilism is the recognition of a defect not in our values but in the world itself: “At this point nihilism is reached: all one has left are the values that pass judgment—nothing else.” And he summarizes his considered conception of nihilism crisply: “A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist” (WP 585; cf. 247).

Strictly speaking, nihilism is a “development” of pessimism. But I should point out that Nietzsche sometimes refers to the two notions interchangeably, and even suggests that where one speaks of pessimism, it is often the case that “the name should be replaced by ‘nihilism’ ” (WP 39).¹⁹ Such a close affinity also supports an interpretation of nihilism in terms of despair. For it could not be explained easily if we interpreted nihilism as disorientation: in this case, pessimism and nihilism would rather seem antithetical since pessimism presupposes values that devaluation undermines. If we interpret nihilism as despair, by contrast, the affinity becomes obvious. Nihilism *includes* pessimism as one of its essential aspects: the nihilist shares with the pessimist the conviction that our existence in this world cannot realize our “highest values and ideals.” Unlike the pessimist, however, the nihilist no longer allows himself to indulge in the illusory hope of another world in which those values and ideals will at last be realized. Pessimism and nihilism are closely related, in the last analysis, because nihilism proves to be nothing more than a kind of thoroughgoing pessimism.

The preceding remarks show that the bulk of Nietzsche’s unpublished discussion supports an interpretation of nihilism as despair. Unfortunately, even though it constitutes the most comprehensive and detailed account of nihilism to be found anywhere in his writings, this discussion was never published. But it is reasonable to treat it as the

background against which we should interpret his published statements on nihilism. These published statements are usually terse, and when they are not ambiguous, they tend to confirm the interpretation of it in terms of despair.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra presents nihilism as a form of despair or hopelessness, but the formulations it offers remain ambiguous. For example, those who are despairing lament that “life is no longer worthwhile, all is the same, all is in vain” (Z, IV 11). The general statement of nihilism (“Life is no longer worthwhile”) may here be spelled out in two potentially quite different ways. When it is spelled out in terms of “all is in vain,” it might indicate that all efforts to realize our highest values are bound to fail. But when it is taken to mean that “all is the same,” it could well designate evaluative indifference. The evidence from the *Genealogy* is similarly ambiguous. Nihilism is described there as “the great nausea, the will to nothingness” (GM, II 24), or a “withdrawal from [life], a desire for nothingness or a desire for its [life’s] antithesis, for a different mode of being, Buddhism and the like” (GM, II 21). On the one hand, this nausea and desire for nothingness could be expressions of disorientation, or of the dissatisfaction of the individual whose longing for a sense of purpose or meaning in his life is disappointed (WP 36; cf. 12). On the other hand, it is also possible to regard the “will to nothingness” as a deliberate stance grounded in the judgment that not being is *better* than being. And indeed, in Nietzsche’s eyes, “nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals” (WP, Preface 4). Finally, the Buddhistic disengagement to which the nihilist allegedly aspires is not an acknowledgment of the devaluation of all values but the ultimate consequence of a commitment to a specific value: “The hedonism of the weary is here the supreme measure of value” (WP 155). The nihilist would thus seek withdrawal from the world not because it has disappointed his longing for meaning but because it has proven inhospitable to the realization of certain specific (hedonistic) values.

The fifth book of *The Gay Science* supplies more unambiguous support for the conception of nihilism as despair. In section 346, Nietzsche maintains that the pessimistic conviction that “the world is worth *less*” than we thought ultimately feeds into nihilism. He also observes that this conviction depends on the presupposition that there are “values that were supposed to *excel* the value of the actual world.” There is, in other words, an *unredeemable* opposition between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be. With this opposition, we are presented

with a fundamental dilemma: “Either/Or: ‘Either abolish your reverences or—*yourselves!*’ The latter would be nihilism; but would not the former also be—nihilism?—This is *our* question mark” (GS 346).

The dilemma is this: either we abandon our current values (our “reverences”), in which case “we” ourselves subsist, but perhaps at the cost of losing all normative guidance; or we maintain our values from the standpoint of which our existence in this world (“we” ourselves) deserves to be repudiated. As Nietzsche recognizes without hesitation, the second option is nihilism. In fact, he is even more definite about this in an unpublished version of the same passage: “So we can abolish either our reverences or ourselves. The latter constitutes nihilism” (WP 69n). This corresponds to what I have called nihilistic despair: we have a reason *not to live*, since we are convinced that life will fail to realize our highest values and ideals. Nietzsche acknowledges that the first option, which consists in calling these values into question, may appear to be a form of nihilism as well. However, as I will argue in the course of this book, the project of revaluation is precisely meant to show that abandoning our current “reverences” does not necessarily leave us bereft of normative guidance and so may not result in nihilism.

4. *A Conflict Between Despair and Disorientation?*

I have exposed a fundamental contrast between two conceptions of nihilism we find in Nietzsche. Both versions of nihilism share one basic claim: there is no goal in the realization of which our existence finds meaning. They differ in the ways in which they understand and justify this basic claim. According to Nietzsche, a goal has the ability to inspire (and so to give life meaning) only if two conditions are met: the agent estimates that the goal has *value*, and that it is *realizable*. In nihilism as disorientation, the first condition is not met: the values in terms of which the worth of a goal could be estimated are devaluated. In nihilism as despair, by contrast, it is the second condition that is not fulfilled: our most valuable goals, our highest ideals, prove to be unrealizable.

This ambiguity in Nietzsche’s conception of nihilism is not surprising. Indeed, it tracks an ambiguity in the ordinary statement of nihilism: “life is not worth living.” On the one hand, it may be taken to state that there is in fact no value in terms of which the worth of life could be assessed. In this case, nihilism is a statement of *evaluative indifference*: it is neither good nor bad to exist. On the other hand, the statement could mean that existence does not live up to our values. In

this case, nihilism is a *condemnation* of existence: existence is deplorable, or, as Nietzsche says, this world (and our life in it) “is something that rationally should not exist” (WP 701). According to nihilism as disorientation, there is nothing wrong with the world and something wrong with our values. According to nihilism as despair, by contrast, there is nothing wrong with our values but something wrong with the world.

How are we to make sense of this fundamental ambiguity in Nietzsche’s conception of nihilism? Note, first, that the two conceptions of nihilism not only differ, they also conflict in one important respect. The devaluation of values appears to undermine despair, since we have no reason to trouble ourselves over the world’s being inhospitable to the realization of values we consider devaluated. I argued, in the previous section, that Nietzsche conceives of nihilism primarily in terms of despair, rooted in the conviction that our highest values and ideals cannot be realized. But what are we to make, then, of the other version of nihilism, disorientation, which is also undeniably to be found in his writings, and which conflicts with the conception of it as despair?

In the remainder of this book, I will argue that Nietzsche’s strategy to overcome nihilistic despair is to engage in a “revaluation” of the values that underwrite it. In Chapter 2, I suggest that one inviting form of revaluation consists in showing that the nihilistic values lack the sort of objective standing on which the legitimacy of any value depends. It does overcome despair, since, once again, there is no reason to deplore the unrealizability of values that are deemed illegitimate. However, this strategy proves unsatisfactory, because it trades one variety of nihilism (despair) for another (disorientation). I argue in Chapter 2 that Nietzsche takes his denial of objective values not to imply nihilistic disorientation. If this is true, however, this is also true of nihilistic values: their lack of objective standing no longer counts as an objection against them—it no longer devaluates them. But then we seem to be driven back to nihilistic despair. For this reason, I argue in Chapter 4 that Nietzsche engages in a different form of revaluation, which he places under the aegis of his doctrine of the will to power. Nihilism as disorientation, therefore, is not just part of the crisis Nietzsche sets out to address, it is also the consequence of one strategy by which it could be addressed. I will also suggest in Chapter 2 that in spite of its problematic consequences, this metaethical strategy is not an unfortunate false start in Nietzsche’s campaign against nihilism, but a necessary, if delicate, first stage of it.

5. *The Concept of a “Highest Value”*

We are driven to nihilistic despair by the recognition that our *highest* values cannot be realized. Nietzsche insists on this, presumably, because we would not be driven to nihilism by the unrealizability of values that are not the highest ones we have. In distinguishing between highest and lower values, he invites us to observe that our system of values is organized hierarchically. The “highest values and ideals” are not the only values and ideals we have, but they possess a privileged status in the system, by virtue of which they play an essential role in the genesis of nihilism. In what does this privileged status consist?

At first glance, our highest values seem to be simply those we care most to realize. The impossibility to get what we care most about, however, will not necessarily lead to nihilism. It could induce us to accept a life of lowered expectations, spent in the pursuit of lesser goods. Indeed, if the choice of a goal is a function of its value to the agent *and* of its realizability, then recognizing that our highest goals are out of reach may well lead us to recalibrate our expectations and try to “make the best of a bad situation,” but not to despair. My highest ambition, for example, could be to become a professional musician but, in view of my limited musical talents, I may settle for a different life and be contented by it.

If the impossibility to realize our highest values is to motivate nihilism, they must not simply be those we care most about: making the best of a bad situation is not an option available to the nihilist. Nietzsche is less than ideally clear on this point, but he does offer a fruitful suggestion. What he calls “moral value” is the highest value, a status he explains in the following terms: “everything of value in man, art, history, science, religion, technology must be proved to be of *moral value*, *morally* conditioned, in aim, means, and outcome” (WP 382). In other words, the highest value is a *condition* of the value of lower goods. If moral value is the highest value, then the value of anything else, for example art, lies in the contribution it makes to moral ends: “its highest value (e.g., as art) would be to urge and prepare for moral conversion” (*ibid.*).

In this passage, Nietzsche suggests that the highest value is a condition of the value of the lower goods by virtue of being the *only* value. This is at once implausible and unnecessary. We can preserve the relevant conditional relation without assuming that the lower goods have no independent value. The realization of the highest value is still a condition of the value of lower goods, but the relation between the one

and the others need not be, for example, merely instrumental. In an instrumental relation, the value of the means is fully determined by their relation to the value of the end. In the sorts of cases I have in mind, the lower goods may have independent value. The way in which their value is conditioned by the realization of the highest values must therefore be more complex: the conditioned good is both dependent on and independent from the conditioning one. The conditioned good loses its appeal in the absence of the conditioning good, and yet the value of the conditioned good is not fully determined by its relation to the conditioning good.

Suppose I place value in the development and exercise of my intellectual skills, but my highest ideal is to have rich and deep friendships. My failure to establish such friendships will undermine the value intellectual activity assumes in my eyes. In the absence of friendship, this activity will simply seem pointless to me. Yet, although my intellectual activity has meaning only in the context of an existence in which I enjoy rich and deep friendships, its value remains (in some sense) independent from the value I place on friendship: it does not, for example, reduce to this activity's contributing, instrumentally or otherwise, to friendship.²⁰ Hence, if the highest values condition the value of lower goods, failure to realize the ones precludes the possibility that a life spent in the pursuit of the others could still be worth living.

From the conviction that our highest values cannot be realized, however, it still does not follow that life actually "deserves to be repudiated," or that we should prefer "nothingness" to it. The absence of a good (the failure to realize our highest values) is not necessarily an evil, and so it may justify only indifference, but not condemnation. The absence of a good becomes an evil, however, when this good is the object of an expectation.

A good, that is to say, a realized value, may be the object of an *aspiration* or of an *expectation*. I wish to bring out a particular asymmetry between these two attitudes, which comes to light in the contrasting consequences of their frustration. If an aspiration is unfulfilled, the resulting condition either is less good than it could have been, though perhaps still acceptable, or it is actually not good, but still not positively evil. For example, I can aspire to be wealthy but not think that my failure to become wealthy makes my life unacceptable. Or I can aspire to have friends, and believe that nothing really matters if I fail to form any true friendship. But believing that nothing matters is not yet believing that "nothingness" matters: I do not have a reason

to live a life devoid of friendships, but their absence does not give me a reason *not* to live either, or to prefer not being over being.

I will think otherwise, however, if I *expect* to be wealthy, or to have friends. For the disappointment of an expectation is not simply the absence of a good, it is a positive evil. The poverty and loneliness of my condition, when I expect wealth and friendship, give me grounds to judge that condition unacceptable (or, as Nietzsche says, “untenable,” “deserving to be repudiated”). Indeed, it justifies a condemnation of it: it is better not to live an existence in which poverty and loneliness are inevitable.

The nihilist infers from the claim that his highest values are unrealizable to the claim that “the world is something that rationally should not exist.” This inference holds, in the final analysis, only if we lend the highest values the two characteristics I just described. First, the realization of the highest values must be the object of an expectation. So, this world’s essential inhospitability to their realization counts *ipso facto* as a ground to condemn it. Note, however, that the absence of an expected good that is not a necessary condition of the value of other goods gives us a reason to condemn our condition *only with respect to the lack of that particular good*, but not in every respect. We have not reached full-blown nihilism if we believe that there are respects in which life is still worth living. Accordingly, the highest values possess a second characteristic: their realization must also be a necessary condition of the value of any other good. For it is only in this case that even the successful pursuit of lower goods cannot redeem the impossibility to realize the highest values.

6. *Nihilism: Philosophy or Decadence?*

From one standpoint, Nietzsche conceives nihilism as a *philosophical* problem: “it is an error to consider ‘social distress’ or ‘physiological degeneration’ [. . .] as the *cause* of nihilism” (WP 1). Nihilism is not a psychological condition, the effect of physiological degeneration, nor a socio-cultural phenomenon, a manifestation of social distress. It is, on the contrary, the implication of certain value commitments: “nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals [*die zu Ende gedachte Logik unsrer grossen Werthe und Ideale*]” (WP, Preface 4). A sense of despair and meaninglessness may be the symptom of neuro-chemical imbalance, but Nietzschean nihilism is a position to which we are (“logically”) driven by a commitment to certain values and ideals. Specifically, the modern nihilism Nietzsche con-

fronts is rooted in the values and ideals that make up the Christian-moral interpretation of the world. These are “our” values and ideals because this interpretation has become predominant.

This distinction has some important consequences. First, whereas “physiological” despair can be alleviated with medication or some other form of psychological or physiological treatment, “philosophical” despair can be overcome only by distinctively philosophical means, including philosophical arguments. Second, while it is not possible to suffer from a certain neuro-chemical imbalance without experiencing the feelings of despair symptomatic of it, it is quite possible to hold certain beliefs that imply nihilism but not realize that they do and so not experience corresponding feelings of despair. It is possible to be in a nihilistic predicament without recognizing it. Nihilism, as Nietzsche observes, is a consequence of the “death of God,” and yet many who accept the death of God still fail to appreciate its implications (see GS 125).

By and large, however, actual awareness of nihilism is growing in late modern European culture. Still, the crucial fact that it is the “logical conclusion of our great values and ideals” continues to go unrecognized. Nietzsche calls this “incomplete nihilism”: it is the predicament of those who fail to appreciate “how *complete nihilism* is the necessary consequence of the ideals entertained hitherto” (WP 28). His own insistence on the rational necessity of nihilism, given our values and ideals, constitutes not an *endorsement* of it but an effort to expose the essential role played by the commitment to certain values and ideals in the emergence of nihilism. For this reason, Nietzsche’s self-assigned task is to bring nihilism to completion, precisely in the sense of uncovering its deepest source in the highest values and ideals of European culture (see WP, Preface 3).

From another standpoint, however, Nietzsche appears to contradict himself when he declares that nihilism is not a philosophical problem but the symptom of a physiological condition: “the question whether not-to-be is better than to be is itself a disease, a sign of decline, an idiosyncrasy. The nihilistic movement is merely the expression of physiological decadence” (WP 38).²¹ Note, first, that the philosophical and the physiological conceptions of nihilism may be compatible: nihilism could be both the conclusion of an argument *and* an “expression of physiological decadence.” This is the case, for example, if the argument for nihilism turns out to be only a rationalization of decadence. But we must explain what relation the two conceptions have with one another.

On the face of it, nihilism is a philosophical claim. To show that it is, in the final analysis, not a rational position but an “expression of physiological decadence,” Nietzsche must establish two points. First, he must expose the inadequacy of its rational credentials. Second, he must demonstrate that the nihilist’s “error” is not innocent, but that it is the symptom of a certain physiological condition. For example, if this error lies in the endorsement of certain values, then he must show that it is motivated by physiological or psychological factors associated with decadence. Accordingly, we must treat nihilism as a rational position until its philosophical critique has made possible a diagnosis of its physiological roots.²²

The significance of this diagnosis must not be underestimated, for if nihilism proves to be “merely the expression of physiological decadence,” the prospects of overcoming it must be qualified accordingly. In exposing the physiological roots of nihilism, philosophy would also, ipso facto, expose the limits of its own power to overcome it. For philosophical argument is powerless in the face of physiological decadence.

II. The Sources of Nihilism

1. “*God Is Dead*”

Considered as a philosophical position, nihilism is the “logical conclusion” of an implicit reasoning. As I use the term here, the *sources* of nihilism designate the premises of this implicit reasoning. Nietzsche presents nihilism as the consequence of truthfulness: “This realization is a consequence of the cultivation of ‘truthfulness’—thus itself a consequence of the faith in morality” (WP 3). Strictly speaking, however, the valuation of truthfulness is not a premise of nihilism. Nevertheless, it figures prominently in the genesis of nihilism, insofar as it induces us to discern and acknowledge the truth of its premises.

Nihilism is customarily thought to be a consequence of the death of God: nihilism appears “once the belief in God and an essentially moral order become untenable” (WP 55). Along with the belief in God, a number of related ideas also lose credibility, such as “an essentially moral order,” or a “true, valuable world” beyond this one (WP 37), which Nietzsche also calls a “metaphysical world.” Although it is one of the views most closely associated with his philosophy, Nietzsche says singularly little about the death of God. He does not feel the need to say much about it, apparently, because it is less a new doctrine he introduces than an event he takes to be already widely acknowledged.

Thus, he assumes that his readers, and his interlocutors, are well acquainted with what he describes as “the greatest recent event” (GS 343; cf. GS 125). Still, whatever little he says about the death of God may well prove to be enough.

Considered closely, the formula is calculated to puzzle. It raises immediate questions about both of its terms: *What*, exactly, is dead? And what does it mean for it to be *dead*? By its very nature, God the metaphysical entity cannot die. What is dead, then, must not be God Himself, as it were, but rather something that can be born and die, namely the idea of God or the belief in God. The death of God marks a change not in the metaphysical makeup of the world but in our beliefs about it. This is, indeed, how Nietzsche spells out the meaning of the formula. “God is dead,” he tells us, means that “the belief in the Christian god has become unworthy of belief [*unglaubwürdig*]” (GS 346).

If it is a statement about the belief in God, then the formula “God is dead” may not simply mean that the belief in God has been *refuted*. For this would amount to the assertion that God does not exist, which is not the same as saying that God is dead. Nevertheless, the statement is also more than an expression of skepticism toward the existence of God, an indication that the belief has been merely *suspended*: the belief in God is “dead,” not just questionable. In declaring that God is dead, I want to suggest, Nietzsche asserts that the belief in God has been *discredited*.

When is a belief discredited? To answer this question, we must establish whether there is room for a stance between suspension of belief and disbelief. Disbelief results from the refutation of a belief, or the demonstration of its falsehood. A belief is suspended, by contrast, when neither its truth nor its falsehood has been established. A belief is discredited, it would then seem, when neither its truth nor its falsehood has been established, but also when the possibility of its truth can no longer be taken seriously. Although it is not, strictly speaking, refuted, a discredited belief is nonetheless “unworthy of belief.”

How might we be compelled to no longer take seriously the possibility of the truth of a belief? The most common form of argument Nietzsche employs explicitly draws on the contrast between refuting and discrediting a belief, and it proceeds in two stages. It begins with the recognition that no attempt to establish the truth of the belief in God and a metaphysical world has ever been successful, and indeed, following Kant in particular, *could* ever be successful. But this still leaves open the possibility that the belief is true. And so, the second

stage of the argument consists in producing a reason why this possibility should not be taken seriously (and presumably also in explaining why the attempts at proof have actually been unsuccessful).

To do so, Nietzsche exposes the “human, all-too-human” origin of our belief in God and the “metaphysical world” over which He is thought to preside. As he puts it, “that world is fabricated solely from psychological needs” (WP 12). Many of his psychological speculations about the origin of the belief in God and a metaphysical world are meant to provide compelling explanations for the staying power of these beliefs that appeal neither to their truth, nor even to the possibility of their truth. And he suggests that the more compelling such explanations are, the less reason we have to take seriously the possibility that the belief in God is true.

In some moments of youthful boastfulness, Nietzsche will declare that exposing the origin of “all extant religions and metaphysical systems” in “passion” and wishful “self-deception” “refutes” them (HH, I 9). But he is usually more careful: “how [the belief in God] *originated* can at the present stage of comparative ethnology no longer admit of doubt; and with the insight into this origination that belief *falls away* [*fällt jener Glaube dahin*]” (HH, I 133; second emphasis mine). Better yet, he later explicitly distinguishes the effect of such genealogical investigations on our beliefs and ideals from a refutation of them: “the ideal is not refuted—it *freezes* to death” (EH, III “Human, All-Too-Human” 1).

The following passage offers a particularly clear instance of the argument from origin:

Historical refutation as the definitive refutation.—In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God—today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquired its weight and importance: a counter-proof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous.—When in former times one had refuted [*widerlegt*] the “proofs of the existence of God” put forward, there always remained the doubt whether better proofs might not be adduced than those just refuted: in those days, atheists did not know how to make a clean sweep. (D 95)

In this passage, Nietzsche clearly indicates that debunking the old proofs of the existence of God does not suffice, since it leaves open the possibility that better proofs might eventually be produced. And even if we can demonstrate that no such proof could ever be successful, as Kant did, for example, the resulting agnosticism would still not discredit the belief in God. On the contrary, Nietzsche worries that it

might be thought to provide it with unassailable protection against further attacks: “A secret path to the old ideal stood revealed, the concept ‘*real world*,’ the concept of morality as the *essence* of the world (—these two most vicious errors in existence!) were once more, thanks to a crafty-sly skepticism, if not demonstrable yet no longer *refutable*. . . . Reason, the *right* of reason does not extend so far. [. . .] Kant’s success is merely a theologian’s success” (A 10). The further step Nietzsche proposes to take, then, consists in exposing “how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquired its weight and importance.” And this purportedly should discredit the belief—indeed it makes a refutation (a “counter-proof”) of the belief “superfluous.”

In sum, Nietzsche’s argumentative strategy proceeds as follows. In one variant (see D 95), we find no decisive evidence regarding a proposition p (either for or against p). But we must decide whether to try seeking further evidence in favor of p . If we find reasons not to do it, then p is discredited. Such reasons should presumably make the possible truth of p less likely. For example, if we discover that p is the object of a certain wishful fantasy, this may well give us a reason to take the possible truth of p less seriously and therefore to cease seeking further evidence for p .

In a slightly different variant of the strategy, we find no decisive evidence regarding a proposition p , but this time it is because structural limitations of our cognitive capacities deprive us of access to the relevant evidence: p could be true, we just cannot know. But we are still allowed several possible stances toward p , including a stance of acceptance (see A 10). To rule out this possibility, Nietzsche invites us to ask the following question: if no decisive evidence regarding p is in principle accessible to us, then we might wonder what prompted us to entertain p in the first place. If the answer is that a wishful fantasy moved us to entertain p , then we might well be justified in taking the possibility of its truth less seriously, or perhaps not seriously at all.

A simple analogy should illuminate the idea of discrediting a belief. Suppose a child believes there are ghosts in her room and asks me to take a look. I do, but I find no evidence of ghosts. Of course, this does not mean that there actually are no ghosts: they could have left, or they could be invisible to ordinary observation. Suppose that I then discover that the child was deeply impressed earlier that evening by a scary nighttime game or a horror movie. This discovery, which tells me something about the origin of her belief that there are ghosts in her room, gives me a reasonable ground to stop taking the possibility of its truth seriously.

As Nietzsche sees it, what is true of the belief in ghosts in this example also applies to the belief in God. Although it is not, and perhaps cannot be, refuted, it can be discredited, on the condition that he can provide for it the sort of genealogical account that undermines its credibility. On Nietzsche's own account, the belief in God and in a metaphysical world is a representation of the fulfillment of certain "psychological needs." The sole fact that a certain metaphysical outlook corresponds to a wishful fantasy is not necessarily a reason not to take it seriously. On the contrary, our wish that a belief be true could motivate us to determine whether it actually is true. In the context of the repeated and systematic failure of efforts to establish the truth of a belief, however, its origin in certain "psychological needs" now appears to be the *only* reason we took it seriously in the first place, and that may well be sufficient to justify our not taking it seriously any further. In other words, both the epistemological and the genealogical sides of the argument are necessary to discredit a belief effectively: "as soon as man finds out how that world is fabricated solely from psychological needs, *and* how he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a *true* world" (WP 12; first emphasis mine).²³

I should point out that the claim that God is dead, as I have interpreted it here, is not the only critique of the concept of God Nietzsche has to offer. Some thinkers (arguably Pascal, for example) could well concede everything Nietzsche has said so far and still not agree that we should cease to believe in God. Thus, they may acknowledge that we cannot know whether or not God exists, and that the very idea of God is a contrivance of psychological needs, but then argue that the value of the belief in God lies precisely in its ability to cater to these needs. Although it is a wishful fantasy, the idea of God, or of an afterlife in another, better world, is at the very least a source of great psychological comfort, and so it makes for a better life in this one.

Nietzsche vehemently rejects this position: "The concept of 'God' invented as a counter-concept of life—everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous, the whole hostility unto death against life synthesized in this concept in a gruesome unity! The concept of the 'beyond,' the 'true world' invented in order to devaluate the only world there is—in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality! [. . .] *Ecrasez l'infâme!*—" (EH, IV 8). Far from being beneficial, the fiction of God and the afterlife is in fact extremely harmful. With this line of argument, Nietzsche shifts his focus from the *theoretical* credentials of the belief in God to its *practical* utility. More precisely, the belief in

God and an afterlife now express less a metaphysical view than a certain evaluative stance. And it is this evaluative stance he repudiates. The values reflected by that stance do play a role in the genesis of nihilism (which I will consider in later chapters), but it is very different from the role I have attributed to the death of God. Whereas these values form the *ethical* premise of nihilism, the death of God is its *metaphysical* premise.

The formula “God is dead” thus means that the metaphysical belief in God is now discredited. If discrediting it is to lead to nihilistic despair, the concept of God—and the associated concept of a metaphysical world—must therefore represent a necessary condition of the *possible realization* of our highest values. For example, we could not realize them under the normal conditions of our life in the “natural” world, without divine intervention. Or their realization requires the existence of a metaphysical world, beyond this one, in which alone it is possible, precisely because it differs from the “natural” world in essential respects.

Finally, Nietzsche also observes that the notion of God has a symbolic significance that outreaches the rather specific descriptions I just mentioned: “After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too” (GS 108). The role played by the concept of God may be taken over by other notions. For example, the idea of a necessary historical teleology (to end in the Christian Second Coming or the Hegelian ultimate *Aufhebung*) is a barely concealed secularization of the idea of a divine providence operating in nature (see GS 357).

In this connection, I should also acknowledge that the concept of God may also play a role in nihilistic disorientation. In this case, God represents a guarantee of objectivity, or a source of normative authority for our values. The death of God signifies the loss of normative authority for our values. And in this case, too, other notions—such as pure reason—may assume the role played by the notion of God (see WP 20). The notion of God will appear briefly in this metaethical role in the next chapter but will resume the metaphysical role I have just described in the rest of the book.

2. *The Negation of Life*

“God is dead” expresses the conviction that our highest values and ideals cannot be realized. It may be tempting to think that nihilism

follows directly from the death of God. This is indeed how the Russian nihilists, whose views are the primary source of Nietzsche's conception of nihilism, saw it.²⁴ Nietzsche's seminal insight—and his own distinctive contribution to the analysis of nihilism—is that nihilism follows from the death of God only if we assume an additional, hidden premise. For nihilism is not a necessary consequence of the death of God. Other consequences may follow that “are quite the opposite of what one might perhaps expect: they are not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn” (GS 343).

If it is possible to regard the death of God as a cause for happiness rather than a source of nihilistic gloom, then one may not conclude to the latter without making some further assumption. Without it, Nietzsche insists, the conclusion is not *logically* necessary (cf. WP 599) but carries instead only a kind of *psychological* necessity: “the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in aim- and meaninglessness, is the psychologically necessary affect [*psychologisch-nothwendige Affekt*] once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable” (WP 55).

What must the nihilist assume if he is to be driven to despair by the death of God? Despair, remember, is the conviction that our highest values cannot be realized. As I have suggested, the death of God drives the nihilist to despair because the idea of God, and that of a “true, valuable world” associated with it, represents a necessary condition of the possible *realization* of our highest values. If the realization of our highest values requires the intervention of God, or the existence of another, metaphysical world, then these values must be of a particular sort. Specifically, they must be values that cannot be realized under the conditions of our life in this, the natural, world. They are, accordingly, values from the standpoint of which this life “deserves to be repudiated.” For this reason, I propose to call them *life-negating* values: “We have measured the value of the world according to categories *that refer to a purely fictitious world*. Final conclusion: All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves [. . .] have proved inapplicable [*unanlegbar*] and therefore devaluated the world” (WP 12). A life-negating value is a value the conditions for the realization of which cannot be met by our life in this world: “confronted with morality (especially Christian, or unconditional, morality), life *must* continually and inevitably be in the wrong, because life *is* something essentially amoral—and eventually, crushed by the weight of contempt and the eternal *No*, life *must* then be felt to

be unworthy of desire and altogether worthless” (BT, Preface 4). Strictly life-negating values are, in other words, values that are *necessarily* unrealizable in this world. Nietzsche usually calls “moral” these life-negating and currently dominant (“highest”) values (see WP 1006). If we take a close look at his writings, we find that moral values are life-negating in several different senses. A brief review of these various senses should suffice to show how they are all related to one another and to the primary sense I have just defined.

As I have noted, values are life-negating insofar as our life in this world is, by its very nature, inhospitable to their successful realization (WP 12). But Nietzsche also suggests that moral values are life-negating not just insofar as they underwrite a condemnation of a life that fails to realize them, but also because they are directly intended to condemn life. “*Moral value judgments are ways of passing sentence, negations; morality is a way of turning one’s back on the will to existence.*” (WP 11; cf. CW, Preface: “Morality negates life.”) Indeed, the negation of life is the driving motive of moral evaluations: “*Definition of morality: Morality—the indiosyncrasy of decadents, with the ulterior motive of revenging oneself against life—successfully*” (EH, IV 7; cf. TI, V 4; WP 343). In saying that they are life-negating in this sense, Nietzsche is no longer speaking of the applicability or investability (the word *anlegen* Nietzsche employs in WP 12 can mean “to invest”) of these values in this world; instead, he is making a claim about their *origin* (their motivation). They were invented *in order to* condemn life in this world. I will return to this claim in Chapter 6, but it should suffice for now to remark that even this moral condemnation of life must necessarily evoke and refer back to positive values. If we deplore our life in this world on the grounds that it involves contradiction or change and becoming, then we also aspire to a world free from them, and often wishfully posit its existence: “this world is full of contradiction: consequently there is a world free from contradiction;—this world is a world of becoming: consequently there is a world of being;—all false conclusions [. . .] fundamentally they are *desires* that such a world should exist” (WP 579; cf. EH, IV 4). This ideal of a life free from contradiction and becoming is life-negating in precisely the sense I defined earlier. And the fact that it is born out of hostility to this life simply explains *why* it is life-negating, that is to say, why it is essentially unrealizable by our life in this world.

Nietzsche suggests that moral values can be life-negating, or nihilistic, in yet another sense. Consider, for example, this representative

passage: “My assertion is that all the values in which mankind at present summarizes its highest desideratum are *decadence values*. I call an animal, a species depraved when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it *prefers* what is harmful to it. [. . .] I consider life itself instinct for growth, for continuance, for accumulation of forces, for *power*: where the will to power is lacking there is decline. My assertion is that this will is *lacking* in all the supreme values of mankind—that values of decline, *nihilistic* values hold sway under the holiest names” (A 6).

According to this passage, values are life-negating if compliance with them is harmful to life, that is to say, if it undermines the conditions for its preservation and prosperity. If life demands “being without reverence for those who are dying, who are wretched, who are ancient,” for example, then the commandment not to kill would be life-negating in this sense (GS 26). Along the same lines, if life demands growth and power, as Nietzsche asserts, then turning meekness and compassion into virtues would also be similarly life-negating. Values are life-negating in this sense not because they underwrite a condemnation of life but because their observance brings about its decline.

Clearly, Nietzsche does not have in mind values that are harmful to life merely accidentally, as when we mistakenly assume that compliance with certain practical principles will foster its preservation and prosperity. Moral values are harmful to life by design, because they are motivated by hostility to it. It is no surprise, therefore, if the pursuit of a world in which there is no struggle or contradiction, or in which there is no change or becoming, should involve adopting values that are harmful to life. In other words, it is precisely because they underwrite a condemnation of life that compliance with moral values is also harmful to it. And so, the core notion of a life-negating value remains that of a value that cannot be realized under the conditions of life in this world, and therefore underwrites a condemnation, or a negation, of this life.

The endorsement of life-negating values as his highest values proves to be the implicit assumption that permits the nihilist to infer from the death of God to the claim that life is meaningless. The death of God spells disaster for the nihilist because it means for him that his highest values cannot be realized *at all*. They cannot be realized in this world, since they are life-negating values; and there is no other world in which they can be realized either. Recall Nietzsche’s crisp description of the nihilistic predicament: “A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as

it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist” (WP 585).

3. *Varieties of Negation of Life*

Nihilistic despair depends on the commitment to a specific “interpretation” of existence from the standpoint of specific values. “One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain” (WP 55). Two basic versions of this interpretation of life dominate the Christian-Platonic tradition out of which nihilism develops.

According to the “Platonic” proposal, life in this world, which Plato calls the “world of becoming,” is interpreted as a deceptive *appearance*: “Death, change, age, as well as procreation and growth, are for them objections—refutations even. What is does not *become*; what becomes *is not*. . . . Now they all believe, even to the point of despair, in that which is. But since they cannot get hold of it, they look for reasons why it is withheld from them. ‘It must be an illusion, a deception which prevents us from perceiving that which is [. . .]’ ” (TI, III 1). In this view, the essential features of our life in this world, particularly the fact that it is essentially “becoming,” count as objections against it. Presumably, it is because they make this world inhospitable to the realization of our highest values. From complete despair, fortunately, “an escape remains: to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a *true* world” (WP 12).

On the “Christian” proposal, by contrast, our life in this world is real, and so is the suffering essential to it, but it is a mere *transition* to another form of existence, one that is not only free from the objectionable features of this life, such as “becoming,” but will also make up for them. Nietzsche finds in this idea the essence of Christian asceticism, and indeed of all forms of asceticism (including, for example, Buddhistic asceticism): “The idea at issue here is the *valuation* the ascetic priest places on our life: he juxtaposes it (along with what pertains to it: ‘nature,’ ‘world,’ the whole sphere of becoming and transitoriness) with a quite different mode of existence which it opposes and excludes, *unless* it turn against itself, *deny itself*: in that case, the case of the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence. The ascetic treats life as a wrong road on which one must finally walk back to the point where it begins, or as a mistake that is put right by deeds—that we *ought* to put right” (GM, III 11).

Both proposals share the assumption that our life in this world is meaningless or that its meaning, to the extent that it can be counted as such, lies in its *negation* for the sake of another life in another world that is essentially its opposite. Nietzsche sometimes refers to his general attitude of negation of life as the “ascetic ideal.” Since our highest values cannot be realized under the conditions of our life in this world, and since the good life is elsewhere, then the only appropriate way of living it out is ascetic self-denial: “If one shifts the center of gravity of life *out* of life into the ‘Beyond’—into *nothingness*—one has deprived life of its center of gravity. [. . .] So to live that there is no longer any *meaning* in living: *that* now becomes the ‘meaning’ of life” (A 43). In its Platonic version, asceticism assumes the form of a condemnation of the senses, and a quest for *enlightenment*. And in its Christian form, asceticism is a suppression of the passions and instincts characteristic of life in the natural world in an act of *atonement*. Finally, in both proposals, if the idea of a world beyond this one were to prove an empty fantasy (nothingness), then nihilistic despair would be unavoidable.

III. Overcoming Nihilism

1. *Nihilism and Revaluation*

Nihilism—the claim that life is meaningless—is thus the conclusion of an implicit reasoning that comprises two premises: the death of God, or the conviction that the highest values cannot be realized, and the negation of life, which is the stance motivated by the endorsement of life-negating values. Two possible strategies are therefore open to overcome nihilism: either to question the death of God or to challenge the negation of life. Since Nietzsche accepts the view that the belief in God, and in another life in another world, is discredited, the only strategy to overcome nihilism still available to him is to call the nihilist’s life-negating values into question.

Thus, Nietzsche conjectures that we have become accustomed to interpreting the world in terms of three basic categories (on the meaning of which I shall return in subsequent chapters): the idea that the world proceeds toward a final *aim*, that its multiplicity can be subsumed under an all-encompassing *unity*, and that its essential character is *being* instead of becoming. He argues that nihilism, “the feeling of valuelessness[,] was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of” these categories,

and that “one simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a *true* world” that can be so interpreted. And he then lays out the following strategy for overcoming this nihilism: “Suppose we realize how the world may no longer be interpreted in terms of these three categories, and that the world begins to become valueless for us after that insight: then we have to ask about the sources of our faith in these three categories. Let us try if it is not possible to give up our faith in them. Once we have devaluated [*entwerthet*] these three categories, the demonstration that they cannot be applied to the universe is no longer any reason for devaluating the universe” (WP 12).

And so, showing that the negation of life is nihilism’s hidden premise proves to be of the first importance to Nietzsche since it provides him with nothing less than the opening wedge of his critique of it. It should therefore be no surprise to find him insisting that the most significant source of nihilism is a commitment to certain values and ideals, and that overcoming nihilism will require a revaluation of these values: “For why has the advent of nihilism become *necessary*? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals—because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these ‘values’ really had.—We require, sometime, *new values*” (WP, Preface 4). Indeed, any attempt to challenge nihilism without such a revaluation is bound to fail: “Main proposition. How *complete nihilism* is the necessary consequence of the ideals entertained hitherto. [. . .] Attempts to escape nihilism without revaluating our values so far: they produce the opposite, make the problem more acute” (WP 28). I will return to this point in Chapter 4, but I should note at the outset that, Nietzsche’s demand for “new values” notwithstanding, all the successful overcoming of nihilism requires is a revaluation that shows that life-negating values are not the *highest* values. Since this would inevitably alter the normative standing of other values, however, even such a revaluation might be thought to result in the production of new values (see WP 1006).

Insofar as it is directed against those values that underwrite the negation of life, this revaluation should make the opposite attitude of affirmation of life possible. As I observed in the Introduction, Nietzsche regards the affirmation of life as his defining philosophical achievement. He must therefore, and he often does, stake his place and significance in the history of ideas on the success of his project of reval-

uation, since it alone will make affirmation possible. And the affirmation of life matters to him, ultimately, because he considers nihilism the central problem of his philosophy.

2. *The Importance of Nihilism*

On the interpretation I propose in this book, Nietzsche's overarching philosophical project is to overcome nihilism. The analysis of the nature and sources of nihilism we have now completed enables us to see how this project is not a late development in his thought but one of the earliest and deepest motivations of it. The theme of nihilism—despair over the unrealizability of our highest values—lies at the heart of Nietzsche's earliest book, *The Birth of Tragedy*.²⁵ Tragic art, Nietzsche argues there, was always supposed to provide “a consolation to the Hellene [. . .] whose piercing gaze has seen to the core of the terrible destructions of world history and nature's cruelty; and who runs the risk of longing for a Buddhistic denial of the will. He is saved by art, and through art, life has saved him for itself” (BT 7).

The insight of the tragic (or so-called Dionysian) man is not only that the world in which we live (the world of “nature” and “history”) violates his highest expectations, but also that he is completely powerless to do anything about it: “This is something that Dionysian man shares with Hamlet: both have truly seen into the essence of things, they have *understood*, and action repels them; for their action can change nothing in the eternal essence of things” (ibid.). Nietzsche leaves no doubt that the purpose of tragic art is to stave off the nihilism contained in the “terrible [Dionysian] wisdom of Silenus”: “Miserable, ephemeral race, children of hazard and hardship, why do you force me to say what it would be much more fruitful for you not to hear? The best of all things is something entirely outside your grasp: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second-best thing for you—is to die soon” (BT 3).

Much of the second half of *The Birth of Tragedy* advocates reviving the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy, the “spirit of music,” in order to address the crisis in modern German (and European) culture. This ancient response to a modern problem is appropriate because, it turns out, the modern problem is analogous to its Greek ancestor. Nietzsche initially believed that the Wagnerian musical drama would overcome modern nihilism, but, once he became disenchanted with Wagner, he offered instead his own *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a work explicitly de-

voted to determining the conditions of a new “affirmation of life,” as the beginning (or rebirth) of a form of tragedy. Thus, in announcing this book, he declares: “*Incipit tragoedia*” (GS 342).

Nihilism is simply a new term for an old idea, encapsulated starkly in “the terrible wisdom of Silenus”: the view that it is better not to be, the “will to nothingness.” And although he deplores the residual influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner in a late preface to that book, its objective was at least to alter significantly their pessimistic outlook, to substitute a “*strong* pessimism” for their decadent one (BT, 1886 Preface, 1). And he also notes that, although the book is silent on Christianity, it advocates a “Dionysian spirit” that is already radically “anti-Christian” (BT, 1886 Preface, 3–5). Nietzsche’s enterprise since *The Birth of Tragedy* may be interpreted as a concerted effort to circumscribe more precisely the nature and sources of nihilism and to refine his response to it accordingly.

3. *Nihilism as a Relative Concept*

To interpret Nietzsche’s philosophical project as an attack on nihilism may well seem to misunderstand gravely his philosophical intentions, for he presents himself on more than one occasion as a nihilist or a pessimist. Thus, he speaks of “*our* pessimism” (WP 32), he admits that “I have hitherto been a thoroughgoing nihilist” (WP 25), and he sometimes presents his own position as a particular (“strong”) form of pessimism (BT, 1886 Preface, 1). It might seem easy enough to appease this sort of worry by pointing out that Nietzsche also describes himself as a philosopher who has “lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, *leaving it behind, outside himself*” (WP, Preface 3; my emphasis). But this will not do, for he also declares that such a philosopher is a “perfect nihilist.”

We should observe, in this connection, that Nietzsche recognizes that pessimism and nihilism are *relative concepts*. It is always from the standpoint of certain specific values that one is pessimistic or nihilistic. Consider, for instance, the way in which he understands “*our* pessimism”:

Our pessimism: the world does not have the value we thought it had. [. . .] Initial result: it seems worth less; that it is how it is experienced initially. It is only in this sense that we are pessimists; i.e., in our determination to admit this revaluation to ourselves without any reservation, and to stop telling ourselves tales—lies—the old way. This is precisely how we find the pathos that impels us to seek *new values*. In sum: the world

might be more valuable than we used to believe; we must see through the naïveté of our ideals, and while we thought that we accorded it the highest interpretation, we may not even have given our human existence a moderately fair value. (WP 32; cf. GS 346)

The Nietzschean pessimist is not simply convinced that our existence is doomed to fall short of our ideals and is therefore worthless. He believes, rather, that our existence is bound to fall short of specific, traditional ideals, but *not* that it is therefore worthless. Nietzsche is a pessimist only about the prospects of realizing the *Christian-Platonic* values, but he believes in the possibility of “new values” from the standpoint of which, in fact, “the world might be more valuable than we used to believe.” Likewise, nihilism overcome is nihilism “perfected” in this relative sense as well: from the Christian-Platonic perspective, Nietzsche’s “Antichrist and antinihilist” (GM, II 24) is indeed a “thoroughgoing nihilist.” In sum, in presenting himself as a nihilist, Nietzsche is not endorsing a position so much as he is paying lip service to his (for example, Christian) audience, from whose standpoint some of the positions he advocates (for example, the death of God) will inevitably appear nihilistic.²⁶

Overcoming Disorientation

The highest values in whose service man *should* live [. . .] were erected over man to strengthen their voice, as if they were commands of God, as “reality,” as the “true” world, as a hope and *future* world. Now that the shabby origin of these values is becoming clear, the universe seems to have lost value, seems “meaningless”—but that is only a *transitional stage*.

—THE WILL TO POWER, 7

I. Nihilism and Objectivism About Values

1. *Despair and Disorientation*

The primary form of Nietzschean nihilism is despair over the unrealizability of our highest values. However, Nietzsche also considers another form of nihilism, the disorientation that results from the devaluation of all values. Although he does not explicitly acknowledge this ambiguity in his concept of nihilism, he offers a tantalizing hint about the relation between despair and disorientation: “I fear it is still the Circe of philosophers, morality, that has here bewitched them into having to be slanderers forever—They believed in moral ‘truths,’ they found there the highest values—what else could they do but deny existence more firmly the more they got to know it?—For this existence is immoral—And this life depends upon immoral preconditions: and all morality *denies* life—” (WP 461). The highest values motivate a condemnation of life because they are believed to be “truths.” In challenging their standing as truths, we deprive this condemnation of its legitimacy and we avert nihilistic despair.

I showed in the previous chapter that Nietzsche’s strategy for overcoming despair is a revaluation of those highest values of which it is the logical conclusion. Presumably, the revaluation of the highest life-negating values will effectively overcome nihilism only if it actually *devalues* them: “Once we have devaluated [these highest values], the

demonstration that they cannot be applied to the universe is no longer any reason for devaluating the universe” (WP 12). The devaluation [*Entwerthung*] of the highest values can assume different forms. The metaethical form of devaluation consists in arguing that the life-negating values are devaluated because *all* values are devaluated. A value enjoys normative authority by virtue of possessing a certain standing: it must be objective. The metaethical form of devaluation denies this objective standing to all values. The substantive form of devaluation, in contrast, finds something wrong with the particular content of the life-negating values.

In the present chapter, I consider the metaethical form of devaluation. To devaluate the highest values is, here, to challenge their objective standing and expose their origin in some contingent perspective. If this challenge is successful, nihilistic despair is avoided, since we would no longer have a reason to despair over the unrealizability of values that have become devaluated. This strategy of revaluation is supposed to reach the following “final conclusion”: “All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves and which then proved inapplicable and therefore devaluated the world—all these values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination—and they have been falsely *projected* into the essence of things” (WP 12).

The problem with this strategy is plain: it seems to trade off one form of nihilism (despair) for another (disorientation). We no longer have to deplore the world for being inhospitable to our highest aspirations, but this reconciliation is won at the price of a new loss. We are left bereft of the normative guidance for which Nietzsche believes we have developed a vital need. And so this particular strategy for overcoming despair proves too costly a victory, which confronts him with a new problem in the form of nihilistic disorientation.

We should therefore not be surprised to find that his treatment of the metaethical form of devaluation includes stages that go beyond this devaluation itself and address the nihilistic disorientation it creates. Consider the following programmatic passage: “The highest values in whose service man *should* live [...] were erected over man to strengthen their voice, as if they were commands of God, as ‘reality,’ as the ‘true’ world, as a hope and *future* world. Now that the shabby origin of these values is becoming clear, the universe seems to have lost value, seems ‘meaningless’—but that is only a *transitional stage*” (WP

7). This passage formulates four claims. First, the authority of the highest values depends on a special kind of standing (they must be “commands of God,” or “reality”). Second, these values are found to lack this special standing, and their “shabby origin” is exposed. Third, as a consequence of this devaluation, existence seems “meaningless”: it can only be the object of evaluative indifference, since we no longer have values by the light of which we can evaluate it. Fourth, this form of nihilism is “only a *transitional stage*.” The present chapter examines each of these four claims in detail.

2. *Objectivism*

Exposing the contingent origin of the nihilist’s highest values, and thus challenging their truth, “devaluates” these values, or deprives them of their normative authority, because of a crucial assumption Nietzsche takes the nihilist to make about the nature of normative authority:

The nihilistic question “for what?” is rooted in the old habit of supposing that the goal must be put up, given, demanded *from outside*—by some *superhuman authority*. Having unlearned faith in that, one still follows the old habit and seeks *another* authority that can speak *unconditionally* and *command* goals and tasks. The authority of *conscience* now steps up front [. . .]. Or the authority of *reason*. Or the *social instinct* (the herd). Or *history* with an immanent spirit and a goal within, so that one can entrust oneself to it. One wants to get around the will, the willing of a goal, the risk of positing a goal *for oneself*; one wants to rid oneself of the responsibility. (WP 20)

A goal is worth pursuing, according to the nihilist, only if it enjoys some *agent-external* sanction (see BGE 2). This, in turn, means that the values in terms of which the worth of the goal is estimated must be “unconditional” values. In other words, the nihilist believes that the only legitimate values are unconditional values. And values are unconditional when they come “from outside.” Full understanding of this assumption requires that we determine what it means for a value to have an *external* origin.

The origin of a value is external, apparently, if it is independent of the agent’s will. Much hinges here on what Nietzsche means both by “will” and by “independence.” Consider first the notion of will. It might seem perplexing to find Nietzsche rely here on a notion he appears so explicitly to repudiate elsewhere: “there is no will” (WP 46). But he only repudiates certain conceptions, such as the conception of the will as an efficient (and uncaused) cause in its own right (TI, III 5;

VI 3), or the conception of the will, more relevant to our present purposes, as a faculty that stands over and above the particular drives, inclinations, or other proclivities with which individual agents find themselves, with its own normative agenda in accordance with which it can order and govern them—in other words, the Kantian conception of the will as pure practical reason (WP 387).

On Nietzsche's alternative conception, the will is not something independent from the drives, but something that consists of them. The will, he argues, is "the affect of command" (GS 347; cf. BGE 19): this "affect" is not the cause but the consequence of the ordering of drives. The "will" emerges when a drive becomes dominant and imposes a direction on the multiplicity of drives that are found in the individual. This is why he says that the will is only a "sign" of dominance, rather than its cause (see GS 347). When the drive that was once providing direction has lost its steam, and anarchy threatens to break out among the individual's drives, the will is said to be weak or exhausted. When anarchy finally breaks out, the will is simply lacking since there is no "affect of command" any longer (*ibid.*). Thus, by an individual's existing "will," Nietzsche has in mind the set of the particular drives, inclinations, or other proclivities with which this individual finds himself. As a consequence, the "will" of which he speaks here is fundamentally *contingent*: it is not, in particular, a faculty that stands outside of the individual's drives and is therefore not subject to their variability from one individual to the next.

Values have an external origin when they are *metaphysically independent* from the contingent contents of the human will, that is to say, when their nature is not conditioned by that will. This sort of independence is most evident in the case of divine command theory and Platonic realism. If the value of compassion is a divine decree, or a Platonic Form, then its nature is not affected by the contingent contents of an agent's will. It is also clear in the case of Kantian rationalism, once we keep in mind the sharp distinction Kant draws between the will as an expression of pure practical reason and the inclinations. In emphasizing the independence from the *contingent* contents of the human will, Nietzsche suggests that the relevant notion of objectivity is quite specifically associated with *rational necessity*: if a value is objective, then *any* rational agent is bound by it. It is in virtue of this association that the objectivity of the prevalent "moral values" implies their universal validity (see GS 335) and accounts for the characteristic "dogmatism" of morality (BGE 1, 202).¹

And so, the nihilist's chief assumption—that “the goal must be put up, given, demanded *from outside*—by some *superhuman authority* [übermenschliche Autorität]”—is the claim that a goal has value only if it has objective value in the sense I have just described. The source of the normative authority of our values is thus thought to lie outside the particular inclinations that make up an individual's will: “But up to now the moral law has been supposed to stand *above* our own likes and dislikes: one did not want actually to *impose* this law upon oneself, one wanted to *take* it from somewhere or *discover* it somewhere or *have it commanded to one* from somewhere” (D 108). I call this view *normative objectivism*: the normative authority of a value depends upon its objective standing. Being the object of a divine command would secure such standing, by guaranteeing independence from an individual's contingent will, as would also, for example, possessing objective “reality,” or being a requirement of “pure reason.”

I call *descriptive objectivism* the view that there actually are objective values. Nietzsche focuses primarily on two main forms of descriptive objectivism: Platonic realism and Kantian rationalism. He also mentions divine command theory, but only to dismiss it summarily, without much discussion. The Platonic and Kantian accounts of objectivity represent two distinct conceptions of the source of the universal authority of values. For Plato, values are in no way related to the human “will” but are entities or properties of a certain kind, parts of the metaphysical furnishings of the world, where they wait to be discovered (see Z, I 15). The Kantian account, in contrast, takes values to reflect commitments grounded in the will. But I already pointed out that Kant thinks of the will as pure practical reason, which is shared by all rational agents and exists independently from the “will” in Nietzsche's sense. The latter is constituted by their contingent drives, inclinations, and other proclivities, which it governs, as it were, from the outside (see TI, VI 3; WP 387). Insofar as they are grounded in the Kantian will, values are objective precisely because they are norms binding on all rational agents (see GS 335).

II. The Critique of Descriptive Objectivism

Nietzsche denies that values are objective facts, or properties of things as they are in themselves: “What has *value* in our world 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. Only we have created the world *that concerns man!*—But precisely this knowledge we lack, and when we occasionally catch it for a fleeting moment we always forget it immediately” (GS 301; cf. Z, I 15). When we evaluate, we “really continually *fashion* something that had not been there before” (ibid.). He also denies that there are rationally necessary, and therefore universally binding commitments (BGE 5; A 12; WP 254, 387). Our evaluations are “interpretations” (BGE 108; WP 254), or “projections” (WP 12), and not reflections of the world as it is in itself. We discover that our highest values lack objectivity and expose their “shabby origin,” in partial and contingent perspectives: “*truthfulness*,” he writes, “eventually turned against morality, discovered its teleology, its partial perspective” (WP 5). This view is Nietzschean *perspectivism*, applied to value judgments.

Unfortunately, Nietzsche is somewhat unclear about the role played by perspectivism in the argument against the view that there are objective values. In the programmatic passage I quoted earlier (WP 7), he suggests that the rejection of objectivism is a consequence of perspectivism. But it is not clear how the claim that our value judgments have their origin in the contingent “will” of particular agents could imply that there are no objective values. At most, it might warrant only the skeptical claim that we cannot know whether there are objective values, or what they are. Elsewhere (WP 15), he seems to maintain that perspectivism is, rather, a consequence of anti-objectivism. If there are no objective values, then whatever values we have necessarily bear the subjective tinge of our perspectives. I believe this is Nietzsche’s strategy. We must then ask on what grounds he denies the existence of objective values.

Unfortunately, he does not offer much in the way of explicit arguments against Platonic or Kantian objectivism. He makes at best vague suggestions, or simply alludes to arguments developed by his predecessors. In this section, I will sketch out arguments against Platonic and Kantian objectivism with which Nietzsche was likely to have been familiar, and for which he sometimes indicates his approval.

1. *The Rejection of Platonism*

Platonic descriptive objectivism, remember, is the view that there are facts of a special category, “moral facts,” or properties of a non-natural sort, the most notorious version of which is the Platonic idea of the “good as such” (BGE, Preface). To determine what is valuable is to discover such facts. Nietzsche denies outright the *existence* of such

moral facts: for example, when he sides with the Sophists against Plato in recognizing the “truth that a ‘morality-in-itself,’ a ‘good-in-itself’ do not exist, that it is a swindle to talk of ‘truth’ in this field” (WP 428; cf. GS 301; Z, II 20). Moral judgments are not to be assessed in terms of their “truth,” their correspondence with moral facts, because there are no such facts.

In support of this claim, Nietzsche attributes to the Sophists a first argument that is not particularly compelling. We might call it the *argument from disagreement*:

It is a very remarkable moment: the Sophists verge upon the first *critique of morality*, the first *insight* into morality:—they juxtapose the multiplicity (the geographical relativity) of the moral value judgments;—they let it be known that every morality can be dialectically justified; i.e., they divine that all attempts to give reasons for morality are necessarily *sophistical*—a proposition later proved on the grand scale by the ancient philosophers, from Plato onwards (down to Kant);—they postulate the first truth that a “morality-in-itself,” a “good-in-itself” do not exist, that it is a swindle to talk of “truth” in this field. (WP 428)

They invoke the bewildering variety of different and often conflicting conceptions of the good that have been passed off for morality, to conclude that there are no moral facts. This inference is, of course, invalid. The variety of conceptions of the moral good might simply indicate that there have been many *false* views of morality. Perhaps they point to this variety to suggest that our inability to adjudicate among conflicting conceptions of morality is an indication that there are no facts on the basis of which we could adjudicate. But this would not follow either: our inability to adjudicate such conflicts does not necessarily show that there are no moral facts, just that these facts have so far escaped our grasp. As Nietzsche understands it, this argument purports to show that there is no “moral truth” because he assumes that the alleged truth-makers of moral judgments—the moral facts to which they are supposed to correspond—are *objective* facts. In this chapter, when I speak of moral facts, I will also refer to objective normative facts.

Fortunately, Nietzsche himself seems inclined to a more subtle and more promising type of argument. This argument challenges the suggestion that moral facts are necessary for the best explanation of our moral beliefs in the way that physical facts are necessary for the best explanation of our beliefs about the world.² For the most part, the best

explanation of our beliefs about the world is their truth, that is to say, the fact that the world actually *is* as we believe, and that we stand in a certain causal relation to it. Since they are necessary to the best explanation of our beliefs about the world, we have a reason to posit physical facts in it.

In repeatedly producing explanations of our moral beliefs that dispense with the existence of moral facts, Nietzsche would suggest that such facts are simply not necessary for the best explanation of these beliefs. A naturalistic explanation in subjective psychological terms seems equally plausible. I believe that a certain state of affairs is good, for example, because it fulfills a need or an inclination of mine, or because it elicits pleasant affects in me. Nietzsche's own explanation of the content and motivational force of morality, specifically, is more complicated. Here is a brief outline.

According to him, any morality aims to secure the preservation of a community by requiring its individual members to comply with certain rules (sometimes called "customs"): "Wherever we encounter a morality, we also encounter valuations and an order of rank of human impulses and actions. These valuations and orders of rank are always expressions of the needs of a community and herd" (GS 116; cf. HH 96; D 9). Although this appeal to the needs of the community explains the content of moral values, it does not suffice to explain their peculiar motivational authority. Thus, Nietzsche observes that "if an action is performed *not* because tradition commands it but for other motives (because of its usefulness to the individual, for example), even indeed for precisely the motives which once founded the tradition, it is called immoral and is felt to be so by him who performed it" (D 9). Morality demands unconditional obedience: it ascribes to itself an authority that transcends the interests or inclinations of the individuals bound by it.

But why does morality demand this sort of unconditional obedience? Nietzsche remarks that the preservation of a community against external danger requires the cultivation (at least in some of its members) of "certain strong and dangerous drives, like an enterprising spirit, foolhardiness, vengefulness, craftiness, rapacity, and the lust to rule," which, when the external enemy is appeased or vanquished, come to threaten the internal stability of the community (BGE 201). It cannot suffice, to override these drives, to appeal to the individual's interest in the stability of the community, since this interest is itself the expression of a different drive and so does not possess any higher normative

standing. Hence, the authority of the values that ensure the community's internal stability must appear to transcend drives (see D 108).

This suggestion raises a further question: where does morality find the motivational resources to enforce the unconditional obedience it demands if it is not in the individual's self-interested appreciation of the usefulness of the community? Nietzsche notes that the internal stability of the community is threatened not just by the unchecked drives of its warrior class but by the *ressentiment* of the weaker classes toward them. The survival of the community (or the "herd") also requires measures "against anarchy and ever-threatening disintegration within the herd, in which the most dangerous of all explosives, *ressentiment*, is constantly accumulating" (GM, II 15). The motivational resource to contain *ressentiment* is in fact *ressentiment* itself, Nietzsche argues, when it is redirected onto the agent who is filled with it (*ibid.*). This proves to be the most economical solution, since the affects associated with *ressentiment* are vented while the integrity of the community is preserved.³ Nietzsche also already invokes the mechanism of sublimation to explain how *ressentiment* might motivate the adoption of a morality of compassion and neighborly love (see GM, I 8).

I will not examine the empirical credentials of Nietzsche's naturalistic explanation of our moral beliefs, but I will simply assume that it is good enough as it stands to compete with the alternative non-naturalistic explanation that appeals to moral facts. The sole fact that it forms a competing explanation does not mean that it is better. To show that it is, we need to invoke further considerations. Nietzsche's preference for naturalistic explanations of moral phenomena might be thought to rest on two kinds of consideration. One such consideration is *ontological parsimony* (see HH, I 136). In adopting the psychological explanation of moral beliefs, we avoid committing to the existence of peculiar, non-natural moral facts. This is preferable, presumably, because it reduces the possibility of our being in error about the world (for example, by believing in the existence of moral facts when there are none). Another such consideration is a kind of *explanatory minimalism*. Explanatory minimalism favors an explanation of a certain type of phenomena (such as moral beliefs) in terms that are also applicable to the explanation of a wide range of other types of phenomena over one that appeals to terms tailored exclusively to the moral phenomena for which they are supposed to account. Thus, Nietzsche's explanation of moral beliefs in terms of the operation of social needs

and the internalization of *ressentiment* would be better precisely because these mechanisms can explain a wider range of phenomena than the appeal to moral facts.⁴

2. *The Rejection of Kantianism*

According to the Kantian version of descriptive objectivism, to determine what is valuable is not to uncover certain facts in the world but to determine what we are committed to by the nature of our own will. Value judgments are authoritative—they command “unconditional” obedience—if they are grounded in “pure reasons,” or reasons that are binding on *all* rational agents. Nietzsche produces no argument of his own against Kantian objectivism, but he appears instead to endorse Schopenhauer’s critique of the idea of pure practical reason. Nietzsche regards Kant’s “categorical imperative” as nothing but “a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract” (BGE 5) and concludes that the alleged purity of practical reason is a “*self-deceptive fraudulence*” designed to protect morality against intrusive critical inquiry (A 12; cf. D, Preface 3).

Schopenhauer’s critique of Kant is directed against the very idea of a pure reason. It is the idea of a reason that every rational agent has simply by virtue of being rational, regardless of his contingent desires and inclinations. A pure reason expresses an obligation that is unconditional or absolute. In one famous passage, Schopenhauer denies the very coherence of the idea of absolute obligation: “*absolute obligation* is certainly a *contradictio in adjecto*. A commanding voice, whether coming from within or from without, cannot possibly be imagined except as threatening or promising, and then obedience to it is, of course, wise or foolish according to circumstances; yet it will always be selfish, and consequently without moral value” (BM 4, p. 55).

We cannot make sense of the idea of an obligation the commanding force of which is not ultimately grounded in our inclinations. All obligations, including moral obligations, derive their motivational significance from their relation to some pre-existing empirical disposition (desire, inclination) in the agent. Thus, Schopenhauer declares that “like every motive that moves the will, [. . .] the moral stimulus or motive must indeed be *empirical*” (BM 6, p. 75; cf. WWR, I 65; p. 360). As Schopenhauer is well aware, however, Kant does not simply point out that the notion of unconditional obligation is part of our pre-theoretical conception morality. He also argues that a commitment to

unconditional principles is built into the very concept of rational agency. Schopenhauer attacks precisely this view in a lengthy appendix to *The World as Will and Representation*, which is devoted to a “criticism of the Kantian philosophy.”

In dismissing the notion of unconditional obligation so briskly, and in presenting it as a bastardized version of the “theological morals” of the Decalogue (BM, 5, p. 56), however, Schopenhauer also appears to suggest that the notion is *prima facie* suspicious enough that the burden squarely rests on Kant to make a case for it. Absent a compelling case for it, we thus have a reason to repudiate it. The same presumably goes for the Platonic notion of the “good-in-itself” (BGE, Preface; WP 428). This unfavorable presumption against Platonic realism and Kantian rationalism would explain why Nietzsche takes a refutation of the main arguments in their favor to be sufficient ground for rejecting these views themselves.

Kant argues that a commitment to substantive unconditional principles is built into the point of view of rational agency itself, insofar as the existence of such unconditional principles is a necessary condition of the possibility of rational deliberation. This, of course, does not tell us *what* these principles are. Kant also believes that he can derive, from the idea of acting on unconditional principles alone, a procedure to determine what these principles actually are. This procedure is the universalization procedure, and its formula is the categorical imperative. It is doubtful that Kant was successful in deriving the categorical imperative from the sole idea of acting on unconditional principles, but Schopenhauer’s worries concern an earlier stage of his argument.⁵ He challenges Kant’s claim that adopting the deliberative point of view, or the point of view of rational agency, commits us to unconditional principles in the first place.

Kant develops his argument for unconditional principles in the course of his argument for the rationality of morality, which he formulates in the opening pages of the last chapter of the *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*. This particular argument is not intended to convince a *normative skeptic*, or someone who doubts that we have *any* reason to act, but only a *moral skeptic*, or someone who takes himself to have reasons to act, but doubts he has reasons to act *morally*. The strategy of Kant’s argument consists in showing that anyone who takes himself to have reasons to act, and so adopts the deliberative point of view, is thereby committed to unconditional reasons or principles, and therefore to the categorical imperative.

Schopenhauer's critique focuses on the crucial, opening step of this argument. Kant claims that rational agents are negatively free "from the practical point of view," or that they must necessarily operate "under the idea of freedom" (GW p. 448). In claiming that rational agents are free "from the practical point of view," Kant is not invoking a special concept of freedom but specifying a restriction of the point of view from which agents are free. It is only insofar as we regard ourselves "practically," namely, as *agents* who deliberate about what to do, that we must think of ourselves as free. We are not entitled to the same claim when we consider ourselves "theoretically," as mere *things* in the world.

In deliberating, I make up my mind, or, as Kant's successors liked to say, I "determine myself" on the basis of reason. There is no deliberation, and no self-determination, where there is no freedom. Regarding my will as free, as determinable by me, is *constitutive* of the point of view of deliberation. As soon as I adopt a theoretical 'spectator's stance' on my will, from which it is thoroughly determined by external causal factors, I leave the deliberative stance. For to contemplate passively the struggle for dominance among my various desires is not to deliberate about what to do, and the mere acknowledgment that one of them has finally prevailed is not an act of self-determination.⁶

Let us now consider Kant's argument that the point of view of rational deliberation implies a commitment to pure reasons. What follows is a simplified presentation of this argument as I believe Schopenhauer to have understood it.⁷

1. To be a rational agent is to deliberate about what to do.
2. To deliberate about what to do, I must regard my will as free.
3. To regard my will as free is to regard it, in particular, as not determined by the desires and inclinations I happen to have.
4. The point of view from which I deliberate is therefore independent of these desires and inclinations.
5. Any deliberation requires normative principles by the light of which it is conducted (by which I determine which desires or inclinations to pursue).
6. The standards available from the deliberative point of view must therefore be themselves independent of those contingent desires and inclinations—they must be, in other words, uncon-

ditional or objective principles (“pure reasons”), shared by all rational agents insofar as they are rational.

Here is Schopenhauer’s objection to this line of argument:

Kant starts from the proposition that we are determined not merely by perceptible, but also by abstract, motives, and expresses this in the following manner: “Not merely what excites, i.e., directly affects the senses, determines man’s free choice, but we have a faculty for overcoming the impressions on our sensuous appetitive faculty through representations of what is itself in a more remote way useful or harmful. These deliberations about what is worth desiring in regard to our whole condition, i.e. what is good and useful, rest on reason.” (Perfectly right; would that he always spoke so rationally about reason!) “Reason *therefore* (!) also gives laws which are imperatives, i.e. objective laws of freedom, and which say what *ought* to happen, although possibly it never does happen”! Thus, without further credentials, the categorical imperative leaps into the world, in order to command there with its *unconditioned ought* (WWR, I *Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy*, p. 523).

Schopenhauer begins by noting that, according to Kant, our deliberating agency involves an ability to stand back from our immediate sensuous inclinations, and to determine, from a point of view that is independent of them, what is “worth desiring” in the first place. Kant’s argument then consists in inferring from that initial “proposition” that the deliberative point of view implies a commitment to the existence of “objective laws” or “categorical imperatives.” Schopenhauer objects that this inference is fallacious: it is “a *therefore* that stands [. . .] between two propositions utterly foreign to each other and having no connection, in order to combine them as ground and consequent” (ibid.). To understand why this inference is fallacious, we should consider what makes it seem inviting in the first place.

The rational agent, remember, must see himself as occupying a point of view that is independent from his sensuous desires and inclinations. This suggests to Kant that the deliberative point of view must be an *unconditional* point of view. The deliberating agent appears to occupy a position *outside* his desires and inclinations, and since his deliberation aims to determine what is “worth desiring,” it seems as though the reasons in terms of which he makes that determination should themselves be independent from them. They must therefore be unconditional reasons, or reasons one has solely by virtue of being a rational agent. Kant calls “objective laws” these unconditional reasons, or the principles that articulate them. Accordingly, insofar as you see yourself as a rational agent, you must also see yourself as bound by objective laws.

Schopenhauer questions the inference from (4) to (6). He concedes two basic points to Kant. First, deliberation involves the ability to stand back from one's desires and inclinations, and so to adopt a point of view that is, in some sense, independent of them. And second, deliberation is supposed to determine what is "worth desiring." But he denies Kant's inference that the deliberative point of view must therefore operate on the basis of unconditional principles, or principles that are themselves independent of the agent's inclinations. Kant's inference appears to trade on a confusion on the sort of independence from inclinations deliberation requires. It requires that the agent's will be not *causally determined* by his inclinations. But it does not require that his will also not be *rationally determined* by his inclinations, or that he may not consider his inclinations as reasons in deciding how to act.

Thus, merely prudential reasoning (about what is useful) meets the requirements of practical deliberation insofar as the agent who deliberates still operates "under the idea of freedom." Yet, it does not appeal to unconditional reasons. The prudent individual must, by definition, be able to resist the determination of his will by immediate sensuous impulses, but he does not have to reach for unconditional reasons, or Kantian "objective laws." And there is a sense in which he does decide what is "worth desiring," since prudence recommends that some desires be favored, and others suppressed. But the prudent agent might still decide whether a given desire is worth pursuing by consulting his other desires.

3. *Nihilism*

Nietzsche proceeds to observe that, taken together, normative objectivism and the rejection of descriptive objectivism entail nihilism. "The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that *every* belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world*. Thus: a *perspectival appearance* whose origin lies in us (in so far as we continuously *need* a narrower, abbreviated, simplified world)" (WP 15). To appreciate what Nietzsche means by nihilism in this context, I shall begin by drawing a contrast between two possible versions of perspectivism. In its weaker version, perspectivism is akin to thoroughgoing *skepticism*. We are irretrievably confined to a "*perspectival appearance* whose origin lies in us." What would be false, in this view, is not the "something" considered true (the proposition), but the considering-true itself, understood as taking oneself to have good reasons for "considering-something-true." This considering-true is false if I do not have good reasons for holding a

proposition (for example, a proposition about value) as true. Skepticism is a source of distress, for there may be a fact of the matter about how life should be lived, but the value judgments we have at our disposal are not reliable guides to it. Something might well really matter, but we cannot know what.

Nietzsche, as I noted earlier, inclines toward a stronger version of perspectivism. He agrees that our values lack objective standing, because there is no objective fact about values: “every belief [. . .] is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world*” (ibid.). His is a rejection of descriptive objectivism. Nietzschean nihilism is sometimes supposed to designate this denial that there are objective values in the world. But the form of nihilism about which Nietzsche is ultimately worried designates instead the predicament that is supposed to follow from the rejection of descriptive objectivism, together with the endorsement of normative objectivism. He defines nihilism not just in terms of the fact that our highest values have become devaluated, but also in terms of its disturbing consequence: “the aim is lacking: ‘why?’ finds no answer” (WP 2). For the nihilist, nothing really matters, and this absence of normative guidance is experienced as a loss, a sense of disorientation.

According to the surmise with which I opened this chapter, Nietzsche calls into question the objective standing of all values, including the nihilist’s highest values, in order to overcome the despair at the unrealizability of these values. This strategy appears to run into a significant pitfall: it trades one form of nihilism (despair) for another (devaluation). Not so, Nietzsche insists, for nihilistic disorientation is “only a *transitional stage*.” Indeed, “nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage (what is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all)” (WP 13). In other words, he finds the inference from anti-objectivism to nihilism simply illegitimate, and nihilism, the view that nothing matters, a hasty, if perhaps “psychologically necessary” (WP 55), conclusion.

The following passage makes his own position explicit: “Verily men gave themselves all their good and evil. Verily, they did not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from heaven. Only man placed values in things to preserve himself—he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning. Therefore he calls himself ‘man,’ which means: the esteemer. To esteem is to create: hear this, you creators! Esteeming itself is of all esteemed things the most estimable treasure. Through esteeming alone is there value, and without esteeming

the nut of existence would be hollow” (Z, I 15; cf. WP 36). On the one hand, Nietzsche asserts his rejection of descriptive objectivism: values are not discovered but “created.” But he maintains, on the other hand, that this does not necessarily usher in nihilism by implying that “the nut of existence would be hollow.” Hence, he must believe that one cannot infer nihilism from the rejection of descriptive objectivism without making some sort of erroneous assumption. As we attempt to determine what this assumption is, we find in his writings elements for two very different proposals. The first proposal takes normative objectivism itself, or the assumption that the normative authority of a value depends on its objective standing, to be the erroneous assumption. For this reason, I call this proposal *normative subjectivism*. The second proposal, by contrast, does not reject normative objectivism but claims that the objective values that have been found not to exist can be replaced by fictionalist simulacra of objective values. I call this second proposal *normative fictionalism*. Their differences notwithstanding, both of these proposals follow the same overall strategy, which essentially consists in reconsidering what it means to evaluate—“What is the meaning of the act of evaluation itself?” (WP 254). I now turn to the two versions of Nietzsche’s answer to this fundamental question.

III. Normative Subjectivism

Many commentators agree that Nietzsche rejects descriptive objectivism about values and conclude that he must ultimately deny that there is any objective vindication for his own evaluative position, which is no more than the expression of his particular evaluative taste or sensibility.⁸ But unless Nietzsche also rejects normative objectivism, this view should undermine even his own confidence in these values, and it leaves him open to the charge that he is guilty of the very nihilistic disorientation he claims to overcome. Yet, this is a problem few commentators consider explicitly.

Harold Langsam does just this when he advocates a form of subjectivism.⁹ Normative subjectivism is essentially a denial of normative objectivism: the value of our values does not depend on their objective standing. In particular, the fact that our values are rooted in the contingent perspective formed by our “needs” and “affects,” or even a “particular spiritual level of prevalent judgment,” by which Nietzsche presumably refers to the dominant ideology (WP 254; cf. HH, I 225), does not undermine their normative authority.

In Langsam's proposal, Nietzsche's argument proceeds in two stages. The first stage is to point out that normative objectivism itself represents a value judgment, which is legitimate only if it is objective. Given that the nihilist himself denies the existence of objective values, it follows that his own normative objectivism is illegitimate. If descriptive objectivism is false, then all our values are only subjective inventions, *including* the view that the legitimacy of our values depends on their objectivity. However, this does not imply that we ought to accept normative subjectivism, the view that subjective values are legitimate. And so, Nietzsche must find a way to persuade the nihilist to adopt normative subjectivism, specifically to recognize the value of "created" values. Since there are no objective normative facts to which he can appeal to win the nihilist over, this cannot be a matter of *demonstration*, but is instead one of *seduction*. Thus, Nietzsche endeavors, particularly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, to paint a picture of the creation of values so appealing that it will win the nihilist over.

This clever proposal faces one significant problem, however, for contrary to Langsam's assumption, normative objectivism is not just a value judgment among others. In the Kantian tradition in particular, it is taken to be a commitment built into the very act of making value judgments in general. Nietzsche's argument, as Langsam construes it, ignores this important fact and therefore seems a little too quick. And so, we must consider and assess more closely the grounds of normative objectivism in Kantian metaethics.

Two basic related ideas underwrite normative objectivism in Kant, namely, a certain picture of deliberation and a certain conception of what counts as a complete justification of action. Broadly speaking, Kant maintains that we could not deliberate and produce a complete practical justification without appealing to objective norms. Both of these ideas are subjected to severe criticisms in post-Kantian metaethics, particularly in Schopenhauer's works, and Nietzsche appears to accept and take up these criticisms.

The Kantian notion of unconditional obligation ("pure reason" or "objective law") is presented as necessary to account for some distinctive features of deliberation. When I deliberate, in this view, I stand back from my particular inclinations and decide whether to endorse some of them and allow them to move me to action. In deliberating, therefore, I must see my *self* as something over and above these inclinations, which possesses control over them and has its own normative agenda, so to speak, on the basis of which it ultimately regulates them.

Since this self is a source of norms independent from contingent inclinations, it can only be “pure reason.” And so Kant declares that “the proper self [*das eigentliche Selbst*]” of an agent is precisely his “intelligible self [*Intelligenz*]” (GW pp. 457–458), whereas his inclinations are “alien influences” (GW pp. 446).¹⁰

In sharp contrast to this Kantian picture, Schopenhauer proposes to think of the agent as nothing more than the passive container of contingent inclinations, which move him in one direction or another in accordance with their respective strengths:

The ability to deliberate [. . .] yields in reality nothing but the very frequently distressing conflict of motives, which is dominated by indecision and has the whole soul and consciousness of man as its battlefield. This conflict makes the motives try out repeatedly, against one another, their effectiveness on the will. This puts the will in the same situation as that of the body on which different forces act in opposite directions, until finally the decidedly strongest motive drives the others from the field and determines the will. This outcome is called resolve, and it takes place with complete necessity as the result of the struggle. (FW, p. 37)

As an account of deliberation, this view presents some difficulties, which the Kantian account was precisely designed to avoid. It eliminates any meaningful contrast between the agent who merely *finds himself* doing this or that, and the agent who actually *chooses* to do this or that. Although Schopenhauer continues to speak of “resolve,” it now merely designates the strongest impulse with which the agent finds himself.

For a Kantian, this account does not so much explain deliberating agency as it explains it away. The individual is now the entirely passive receptacle or “battlefield” for the struggle of motives. A genuine resolve requires an active involvement on the part of the agent, which is absent from the mere acknowledgment that one motive has prevailed over the others. In this respect, the Kantian picture seems to be truer to the phenomenology of deliberation. When I deliberate, various inclinations present themselves to me, and it is up to me to take them up and endorse them. If I have the power to accept or reject any of them, and so to exercise some sort of control over them, then I myself must be something over and above them.

As an account of deliberation, Schopenhauer’s picture is inadequate because it retains a crucial aspect of the Kantian picture. He continues to think of the self of an agent as something other than his contingent inclinations, which remain essentially foreign or alien to it. Against the

backdrop of this assumption, his view that those inclinations ultimately determine the agent's will yields the problematic idea that we are passive receptacles in which alien forces are at play, or the inert territory for the possession of which they struggle with each other. Leaving governance of the self to these inclinations is therefore bound to appear to be alienation or loss of self-control.

Nietzsche's own view of the active self-control and self-determination at work in agency takes Schopenhauer's opposition to Kant one important step further, which is apparent in the following passage from a section devoted to the idea of "self-mastery":

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 that we are suffering about the *vehemence* of a drive 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)

In declaring that the intellect will have to "take sides," just after he presented it as an "instrument," Nietzsche cannot mean that it will adjudicate the struggle among the competing drives, thus acting as a substitute for Kant's pure reason. Presumably, he only suggests that the intellect does in some sense have to determine what side to take, but not by appealing to its own independent standards. The passage has a rich content, but what needs pointing out, for our present purposes, is that Nietzsche identifies the self (that to which the first-person pronoun "we" refers) with the drives themselves, and with the intellect only insofar as it serves the drives.

Thus, by claiming that the agent's self is precisely *constituted* by his contingent inclinations, or by the "drives" he happens to have, he dispels the worry that the agent is passive when these inclinations are contending for control of, and ultimately determine, the direction of his life. Nietzsche explicitly denies the existence of the rational will, understood as a separate entity over and above the inclinations the agent happens to have, in terms of which Kant had proposed to define the identity of agents. Far from being independent from inclinations, or "drives," the "will" is in reality nothing but a configuration of them (see WP 46). In this connection, Nietzsche favors political analogies: "In all willing it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying,

on the basis, as already said, of a social structure composed of many ‘souls’ ” (BGE 19). If the self is a “social structure,” or a “commonwealth” of various drives (ibid.), then it is no more passive when these various drives are contending for a controlling say in its direction than a political structure involving different interests (for example, a parliament) is passive when it debates a law.¹¹

The Kantian picture was appealing because it appeared necessary to account for a central aspect of the phenomenology of deliberation. When I deliberate, I stand back from my desires, and I decide whether to endorse or reject them. This seems to imply that *I* am something over and above those desires, and that *I* have some sort of control over them. This control is particularly apparent in those cases in which I decide to override one of my desires. But the Kantian picture is not the only way to account for this aspect of deliberation. Nietzsche offers an alternative explanation: “The will to overcome an affect is ultimately only the will of another, or several other, affects” (BGE 117). My deliberation may induce me to “will to overcome” the motivational pull of a particular affect. But there is no reason to suppose that my deliberation must therefore have been conducted from a point of view that is completely independent from my affects. On the contrary, I can (and for Nietzsche I do) decide to reject the motivational pressure of a given affect from the point of view of “another, or several other, affects.” Deliberation, according to Nietzsche’s alternative picture, is always piecemeal. When I deliberate, I consider *one particular desire* at a time, so that the point of view from which I consider it need not be independent from *all* of my desires.

To be sure, the passages quoted and others beside might be taken to advocate a reductivist account of practical rationality. What appears to us as deliberation and self-determination is in fact nothing more than the play of our drives.¹² But insofar as it is invoked in an effort to avert nihilistic disorientation, this eliminativist picture will not do, since it would rather entrench nihilism. Moreover, some of Nietzsche’s claims about practical reason strongly suggest he is not so much deflating as refiguring it. Thus, in his view, the Kantian theory of practical reason is a “misunderstanding” of it, and his own rejection of that theory is not a rejection of practical reason as such, but an invitation to think of it differently: “The misunderstanding of passion and reason, as if the latter were an independent entity and not rather a system of relations between various passions and desires; and as if every passion did not possess its quantum of reason—” (WP 387).

Besides reiterating the denial of a Kantian conception of reason as

an entity independent from “desires and passions” (as “pure”), the passage also proposes a radical revision of the normative role of those desires and passions. Every one of them possesses “its quantum of reason,” and reason is overall “a system of relations between various passions and desires.” This idea is echoed in the published works as well. For example, *Beyond Good and Evil* describes an individual’s “morality,” understood here as his system of values, as a reflection of “what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other” (BGE 6).¹³

We get a firmer grip on Nietzsche’s alternative conception of practical reasoning by considering a further feature of Schopenhauer’s own view, which is as important as it is easy to overlook. On the Kantian picture, deliberation seems to be about my contingent *inclinations*, rather than about the *world* from the standpoint shaped by these inclinations. And if deliberation is *about* my contingent inclinations, then it seems to the Kantian that it can therefore not be conducted *from* them, but must be conducted from a point of view independent of them.

By contrast, for Schopenhauer, deliberation is about “motives.” Motives are not for him our inclinations themselves, but, rather, determinate features of the world that move us in accordance with the distinctive inclinations that form our “character.” *Character* is a term of art for Schopenhauer: my character is what explains how events move me (affectively) as they do. The distress of others is a motive for me, for example, that is to say, it affects me in a particular way, because compassion is part of my character. Without this character trait, the very same distress would not affect me at all, or in the same way.¹⁴

By making deliberation be about motives, Schopenhauer shifts its focus from the agent’s inclinations, which shape his character, to the world. When I deliberate about whether I ought to help another in distress, my focus is on his distress, and not on my inclination to help. His distress may become salient in my deliberation precisely because I have an inclination to help. But the object of my deliberation is his distress and not my inclination. On the contrary, my inclination shapes the point of view from which I can deliberate in the first place. If I did not have inclinations, in the Kantian picture, I would have nothing to deliberate *about*, whereas for Schopenhauer, I would have nothing to deliberate *from*.¹⁵

In making inclinations the objects of deliberation, the Kantian also treats them as devoid of normative authority. They are passive impulses

awaiting ratification from an independent rational authority. And this is another reason why the Kantian may feel compelled to look for normative authority outside of our contingent inclinations, in something like pure reason. Once we abandon this picture of deliberation and take contingent inclinations to shape the perspective from which deliberation is conducted in the first place, then we may become prepared to recognize that they possess normative significance, and there is no need to look for a source of normativity outside them.

This may well be what Nietzsche has in mind when he declares that each of my “various passions and desires” possesses a “quantum of reason.” Of course, these passions and desires could conflict so that what I ultimately have a reason to do will be a function of the “relations” between them. I shall return to this idea later, but for now I want to note that Nietzsche sides with Schopenhauer and explicitly opposes Kant in this connection: “What is the meaning of the act of evaluation itself? Does it point back or down to another, metaphysical world? (As Kant still believed, who belongs *before* the great historical movement.) In short, did it originate? Or did it not ‘originate’? Answer: moral evaluation is an *exegesis* [Auslegung], a way of interpreting. The exegesis itself is a symptom of certain physiological conditions, likewise of a particular spiritual level of prevalent judgments: Who interprets?—Our affects” (WP 254; cf. BGE 187). Nietzsche denies that our value judgments “point back or down to a metaphysical world.” The parenthetical allusion to Kant suggests that Nietzsche denies in particular that such judgments are made from the standpoint of pure practical reason (which is metaphysical in the broad sense in which Nietzsche often uses that term). Instead, he claims that moral judgments are made from the standpoint of our “affects.” They are, specifically, “interpretations” of the world from that standpoint. If I am of a compassionate disposition, I will judge the sufferings of others objectionable. If I am of a cruel disposition, by contrast, I will interpret these sufferings in a very different way and attribute to them a very different value.

Nietzsche appears to introduce further complexity into his account when he declares that each value judgment is “a symptom of certain physiological conditions.” We should ask first what this claim means, and second what relations these physiological conditions bear to our affects. Symptoms manifest a certain physiological condition insofar as their appearance allows one to infer to the presence of the condition. Nietzsche proposes to understand the symptomatology of evaluation in the following terms: “I understand by ‘morality’ a system of evalu-

ations that partially coincides with the conditions of a creature's life [*Lebensbedingungen*]” (WP 256; cf. 715). By conditions of life, Nietzsche means the conditions necessary for the prosperity of that form of life (its “conditions of preservation and growth” [WP 258]). Individuals in a certain “physiological condition [*Zustand*]” will prosper only if certain “conditions of life [*Lebensbedingungen*]” are met. Systems of value judgments are a part of the conditions of life of individuals, insofar as they will adopt value judgments favoring their specific flourishing or prosperity.

The most obvious way in which they do so is that complying with the value judgments will foster the preservation and growth of individuals of a certain type: “It lies in the instinct of a community (family, race, herd, tribe) to feel that the conditions and desires to which it owes its survival are valuable in themselves, e.g., obedience, reciprocity, consideration, moderation, sympathy” (WP 216). Value judgments may favor the “preservation and growth” of a certain type of life in more than this obvious way. Thus, the moral climate created by the widespread endorsement and observation of these judgments (see EH, II 2–3), especially by *others*, is also essential to the preservation and growth of individuals of this type. For example, “weak” individuals might thrive in a moral climate in which benevolence is valued, precisely because they stand to benefit from the benevolence of others (see GS 21). Hence, value judgments are “symptoms” of certain physiological conditions insofar as the “outcome of their rule” is favorable to individuals who present these conditions (WP 254).

Nietzsche evidently assumes that there is a close relation between “affects” and “physiological conditions.” Presumably, affects simply reflect or manifest certain physiological conditions. For example, anger is a response to the frustration of vital needs, which moves the agent to seek their fulfillment more forcefully, while love is a response to the objects that gratify these needs, which incites the individual to associate with, or simply appropriate, these objects. In evaluating the world from the point of view of their affects, individuals establish a relationship with it that will foster their “preservation and growth.” Thus, when the physiologically weak individual claims that compassion is good, he is in reality (though this is not necessarily his own understanding of what he is doing) pointing to the fact that a compassionate world favors the thriving of individuals of his physiological condition. And so Nietzsche summarizes his “insight”: “all evaluation is made from a

definite perspective: that of the preservation of the individual, a community, a race, a state, a church, a faith, a culture” (WP 259).



I asserted earlier that Kant’s normative objectivism does not rest only on his picture of deliberative agency. A second idea is in fact its primary motivation, and it concerns the concept of justification of action.¹⁶ He believes that a demand for “pure” or “unconditional” reasons, that is to say, reasons that are independent of an agent’s contingent inclinations, is built into our very idea of justification. Specifically, the justification of a practical value judgment is complete only when it is grounded in pure reasons. In its broadest outline, his reasoning proceeds as follows. Practical reflection is intended to determine what we have reasons to do, what choices of ends or courses of action are justified. In other words, it evaluates ends or courses of action according to certain normative principles. Normative principles are principles that, when applied to a given situation, issue in a judgment of what is to be done in it. By its very nature, practical reflection initiates a regressive movement toward ultimate principles. For the question naturally arises whether the principles the agent brings to bear on a situation are the right principles, whether they are themselves justified. The justification is complete, then, only when one reaches a principle that requires no further justification. Let us call this ultimate principle a *sufficient reason*.

Kant claims that only *unconditional* reasons can be sufficient. But his concept of unconditional reason involves a subtle ambiguity. On the one hand, a reason is unconditional when its normative force is not conditioned by anything else. Kant distinguishes two senses in which reasons (or principles) can fail to be unconditional in this sense. A principle can be conditional in two different ways, because the conditions it must meet to secure its normative force come in two main varieties, which I propose to call, respectively, *enabling conditions* and *limiting conditions*.

Enabling conditions are those that must be met for the agent actually to have a reason to *choose* an end or a course of action. Suppose, for example, that I contemplate joining an exercise program. I know that doing so will be beneficial to my health. But if the value I place on my health is subordinate and dependent on the value of some other end (for example, feeling well), then I have a reason to adopt the first end

only if I have the second. In this case, the value I place on this further end (feeling well) is an enabling condition of the normative force of invoking my health as a consideration to justify joining the exercise program. For if I did not value feeling well, the health consideration would not carry the same rational force for me: the value of the final end quite literally confers normative force to the instrumental end.

Limiting conditions, by contrast, are those that must be met by an agent who already has an independent reason to choose an end or a course of action, but where this reason has legitimate authority only if the end or the action it supports does not violate other normative priorities. Suppose, for example, that I value feeling well for its own sake (I have it as a final end). There may still be a question whether there are other normative priorities that would be violated by my acting toward that end. For instance, I may have other ends whose realization I consider more important, or the pursuit of my own well-being may violate some of my moral commitments. Such conditions are merely limiting because they do not enable or contribute positively to the normative force of the reasons I have to act in a certain way (such as pursuing the end of feeling well), but they affect it by placing certain limitations on it. We might say that they concern only the permissibility of the end or course of action, and ensuring that the choice of a certain end or course of action is merely permissible does not, by itself, give the agent any reason to choose it.

It is evident that sufficient reasons, or reasons that put an end to the regress of justification, must be unconditional in the general sense I just described, that is to say, they must not depend on further enabling or limiting conditions. But Kant also calls “unconditional” reasons that are *rationally necessary*, namely, reasons such that any agent who fails to accept them is thereby irrational. A reason is unconditional in this sense when its normative force does not depend on some non-rational condition, by which I mean a condition such that an agent could fail to meet it and still be rational. When reasons are grounded in desires and inclinations, or in particular interests and concerns, they are rationally contingent. For they are binding only on those agents who possess similar desires and inclinations, or share the relevant interests and concerns. And having these is not a rational requirement.

The Kantian conception of justification is distinctive not in claiming that sufficient reasons must be unconditional in the first sense (they do not depend on further enabling or limiting conditions), but in including the *further* claim that sufficient reasons must also be unconditional in

the second sense I defined (that is, they are *rationally necessary*). In other words, when Kant claims that it is in the very nature of practical justification to involve a demand for “the unconditioned,” the “unconditioned” represents not only a principle or consideration that stands in no need of further justification, but also a rationally necessary principle. Schopenhauer flatly rejects this view: “Thus the principle of *sufficient* ground or reason always demands only the completeness of the *nearest or next condition*, never the completeness of a *series*. [. . .] The demand of the principle of sufficient reason is satisfied completely in each given sufficient reason or ground. [. . .] It follows from this that the essential nature of reason by no means consists in the demand for an unconditioned; for, as soon as it proceeds with full deliberation, it must itself find that an unconditioned is a non-entity [*ein Unding*]” (WWR, I *Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy*, pp. 482–483) The present passage focuses on reason understood as a *theoretical* faculty, which produces *explanations* and not, as here, on reason understood as a *practical* faculty, which produces *justifications*. But since theoretical reason and practical reason are structurally analogous for Kant (*ibid.*, p. 514), we may extend the claim made here about theoretical reason, *mutatis mutandis*, to the case of practical reason.¹⁷

In the theoretical realm, the “unconditioned” designates an explanatory principle that does not itself require any further explanation (for example, a first uncaused cause, or God). Schopenhauer’s claim is not easy to make out, but it apparently amounts to this. Reason’s demand for explanation does not produce the notion of an “unconditioned,” or an ultimate explanatory principle, because “the demand of the principle of sufficient reason is extinguished completely in each given sufficient reason or ground. It at once arises anew, since this reason or ground is again regarded as a consequent; but it never demands immediately a series of reasons or grounds” (*ibid.*, p. 483). I will not attempt a full examination of this argument here but will simply bring out the feature of it I wish to exploit and adapt to the case of practical reason. The crucial idea, in this connection, is this: if I want to know why a given event happened, mentioning the event that is its “nearest or next [causal] condition” constitutes a sufficient explanation for it. I may also want to know why this other event took place, but that is an altogether *different* question, not one that was implied when I asked for an explanation of the first event.

Let me now adapt Schopenhauer’s remark on theoretical reason to the case of practical reason. We must first ask what the “uncondi-

tioned” designates in the practical realm. Since Schopenhauer explicitly *distinguishes* a “sufficient reason” from an “unconditioned” reason, we should assume that the latter must refer to reasons that are “pure,” or independent of contingent inclinations and therefore rationally necessary. And Schopenhauer’s claim would be that, just as theoretical reason can fulfill its explanatory purpose without invoking supra-sensible entities, so can practical reason produce a complete, or sufficient, justification without appealing to pure reasons.

As I propose to understand it, the central idea of the argument is the following: once we have invoked a certain consideration to justify a value judgment, the question of the justification of that consideration does not arise, unless we have actual substantiated grounds to call it into question. The claim that a quest for unconditional principles is not implied by the nature of our faculty of reason would amount to a claim that such a quest would not, in fact, necessarily be rational. How might this be?

A complete justification must end in *sufficient* reasons, or considerations whose normative force no longer depends on further considerations. That seems right. Kant’s contention is that only rationally necessary reasons can be sufficient. To deny this contention is to claim that a justification can be complete, even though it does not end in an appeal to “unconditioned” principles. In other words, the principle one invokes to justify an action may be a sufficient reason—insofar as it stands in no need of further justification itself—without being a necessary one.

The first step in the argument is to recognize that Kant may be driven to the view that sufficient justification must appeal to pure reasons in part by the assumption that inclinations have no sufficient normative force on their own without ratification by pure reasons. But I take Schopenhauer to assume that the contingent inclinations I invoke in deliberating possess *prima facie* sufficient normative force. The significance of attributing *prima facie* sufficient normative force to a consideration is this: justification requires me to call its normative sufficiency into question *only if* I actually have substantive reasons to challenge it. In the absence of reasons for doubt, the consideration constitutes a sufficient reason, and the justification is complete, even if the consideration is not a rationally necessary one. Put simply, his objection to Kant is the following: if the consideration is contingently rational, the question of its justification *might* arise, but it *need not*, insofar as there is no rational necessity that it should. Its contingency, in other words, does not necessarily undermine its normative force.

For example, suppose I contemplate joining an exercise program and want to know whether I have a reason to do it. My initial answer is that I do because regular exercise will contribute to my health. This is a *prima facie* sufficient reason. Suppose now that my commitment to my health proves to be limited or challenged by other commitments I have, such as the commitment to the well-being of my family, or to high-level intellectual achievement. These competing commitments give me a reason to ask whether the invocation of benefits to my health does indeed suffice to justify my joining the program. After all, the time and energy devoted to exercise would limit my availability to my family, or to my work. I now invoke my aspiration to feel good as a reason. This aspiration arguably accommodates my commitments to the well-being of my family and to high-level intellectual achievement because, let us suppose, honoring both of these commitments actually requires that I feel reasonably good. I would presumably be less effective at ensuring the well-being of my family or producing high-level intellectual work if I did not feel good. The aspiration to feel good is also a *prima facie* sufficient reason. In the absence of additional competing commitments, there is simply no reason to ask questions about *its* justification. It would not be a requirement of reason to do so, since it would consist in raising questions about an aspiration, which I have *no reason* to raise.

To ask for the justification of a judgment is, in effect, to consider it questionable. It is rational to challenge a judgment in this way only if there actually are *substantiated* reasons to consider it questionable (that is, reasons other than the unsubstantiated, blanket skeptical supposition that it could be wrong). Given that these reasons are rooted in other commitments the agent happens to have, it is a purely *contingent* matter whether this agent actually has such reasons, and therefore whether a given value judgment is fully justified or not.¹⁸

In insisting that evaluation is ultimately rooted in the agent's "passions and desires," in his "affects," or in a "particular spiritual level of prevalent judgments," Nietzsche primarily seeks to bring out the *contingency* of value judgments. The talk of "perspective" itself is evidently intended to underscore the contingency of these judgments. Although Nietzsche often emphasizes the *psychological* components of perspectives, such as "drives," "needs," "affects," and "passions and desires," he also suggests that they have *historical* or *ideological* components as well, such as a "particular spiritual level of prevalent judgments" (WP 254; cf. HH, I 225; BGE 20, 186). Historical or ideological "traditions" are made up not of brute drives but of elaborate

systems of beliefs and values, and they shape agents' perspectives as much as desires and passions do. Nietzsche remarks how the objectivists' demand for "pure reason" attests to "their lack of historical sense, their hatred of even the idea of becoming, their Egyptianism" (TI, III 1). "They think," he continues, "they are doing a thing *honor* when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterni*—when they make a mummy of it." The authority to which such a justification appeals must therefore also be independent of the agent's historical predicament, which consists of his particular "tradition" or dominant ideology.¹⁹

The worry aroused by contingency is the following. Assuming a given judgment is justified in the terms of a particular perspective, there seems room to ask what reasons I have to adopt *that* perspective, as opposed to some other one. I might be tempted, in other words, to invoke the very *contingency* of the perspective as a ground to question its normative authority. Since I could have found myself with a different perspective, why should I comply with this particular one? Questions seem bound to arise about the justification of the perspective itself.

We may, on the one hand, concede that perspectives *can* be called into question, provided that this inquiry be conducted in an essentially *piecemeal* fashion. I might raise questions about *some aspects* of the perspective, and answer them by invoking *other aspects* of it. The question of justification in this case remains *within* the perspective. And so it is compatible with the view that perspectives alone supply the terms in which I can ask whether a certain view is justified or not. We may not, on the other hand, raise *wholesale* questions about the justification of a perspective. Thus, I may not gather up *all* the components of my perspective, and ask, from the outside as it were, whether I should subscribe to them in the first place. This question is incoherent, for I lose my grip on what would even count as an answer to it. As soon as I leave my perspective, I deprive myself of the terms in which not only to answer, but also to raise, questions about justification.

Nietzsche appears to point to this sort of idea in a number of passages. One of the most significant, if somewhat perplexing, is from *The Twilight of the Idols*: "For a condemnation of life by the living is after all no more than the symptom of a certain kind of life: the question whether the condemnation is just or unjust has not been raised at all. One would have to be situated *outside* life [. . .] to be permitted to touch on the problem of the *value* of life at all: sufficient reason for understanding that this problem is for us an inaccessible problem. When we speak of values we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish

values” (TI, IV 5; cf. II 2). The passage begins with two ideas we have discussed already, which concern what, in Nietzsche’s view, evaluating amounts to. The first is that one simply cannot evaluate unless one occupies a “definite perspective,” and the second is that this perspective is, at least in part, shaped by affects that reflect a certain “physiological condition.” These two ideas are here combined in the claim that all evaluation necessarily takes place from “the perspective of life.”

The “perspective of life” provides the conditions of the very possibility of evaluation: to stand “*outside* life” is to deprive oneself of the means to make any value judgment. For this reason, one cannot evaluate life itself. To understand this claim, it is necessary to remember that the “life” whose value cannot be judged designates here the *perspective* from which evaluation alone is possible, and not life as a *sequence of events and experiences*, which can of course always be the proper object of an evaluation. Judgments about the value of life must here be understood to be judgments about life as the perspective. Such judgments require stepping “outside” of this perspective, which makes evaluation simply impossible. Nietzsche is therefore right to declare that “in themselves such judgments are stupidities” (TI, II 2), and that one could not, in any event, even raise the question of their justification (whether they are “just or unjust”).

Nietzsche sometimes adopts the idea of “spiritual fatality” to represent at once the contingency and the inescapability of perspectives: “But at the bottom of us, really ‘deep down,’ there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions. Whenever a cardinal problem is at stake, there speaks an unchangeable ‘this is I;’ about man and woman, for example, a thinker cannot relearn, but only finish learning—only discover ultimately how this is ‘settled in him’ ” (BGE 231; cf. 20). The normative objectivist is bound to find the inescapability of contingent perspectives *disorienting*, since it denies him a point of view from which he could establish the objective standing of any value.

Nietzsche rejects this picture of disorientation because it presupposes that our true self as rational, deliberating agents transcends such contingent perspectives. In his eyes, on the contrary, our contingent “moral prejudices” are inescapable because they shape our practical identities:

“Thoughts about moral prejudices,” if they are not meant to be prejudices about prejudices, presuppose a position *outside* morality, some point beyond good and evil to which one has to rise, climb, or fly—and in the present case at least a point beyond *our* good and evil, a freedom from

everything “European,” by which I mean the sum of the imperious value judgments that have become part of our flesh and blood. That one *wants* to go precisely out there, up there, may be a minor madness, a peculiar and unreasonable “you must”—for we seekers for knowledge also have our idiosyncrasies of “unfreedom”—the question is whether one really *can* get up there. (GS 380; cf. BGE 6)

Nietzsche invites us to take this question very seriously. He does appear, in the remainder of the section, to answer that one *can* go beyond one’s morality. But he qualifies this answer significantly when he concludes that, to go beyond “his” good and evil, the individual must overcome “not only his time but also his prior aversion and contradiction *against* this time.” He proceeds to suggest that one may hope to reach a position “outside” one’s morality only by reasoning one’s way out of it *from within*, and by renouncing the unreasonable “madness” of simply contradicting it and attempting to leap out of it altogether. To claim that the “moral prejudices” that shape our perspective have “become part of our flesh and blood” is to say that we are identified with them. We are not so identified, however, in the sense that “we” exist somehow apart from them and have chosen to identify with them through some act of radical (non-rational) choice. Rather, we find ourselves responsive to those prejudices simply by virtue of being who we are: “we” simply are agents who answer to, and reason in terms of, these particular values.

Perspectives are inescapable, then, but this inescapability is to be understood as transcendental in a radical sense: they are conditions of possibility, rather than limitations. They supply the concepts in which we form judgments, as well as the standards in which we reason about them. We cannot escape our perspectives precisely *because* they provide the terms in which we think and reason: “*We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language*; we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation. *Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off*” (WP 522). Stepping outside of these terms or going beyond “the sum of imperious value judgments that have become part of our flesh and blood” to ask for their justification is “madness,” for it is stepping outside the conditions of rational thought altogether. Nietzsche also claims that this is “nonsense,” because by so doing, we would lose our purchase on the *very idea* of justification.²⁰ On this view, we have no intelligible notion of justification beyond answerability to the standards of our perspectives. In asking whether our perspectives themselves are

justified, we must no longer conceive of justification in terms of answerability to their standards, since *they* are now required to do the answering. We are thereby emptying our concept of justification from its content, and we lose our grip on the objectivist's worry about the legitimacy of our perspectives themselves. In fact, demanding a justification for our perspectives themselves, as the objectivist does, is nonsense, for we must *already* recognize the authority of our perspectives to find this demand intelligible in the first place.²¹ We can intelligibly raise and answer doubt about a particular judgment only within the framework of our perspectives, but we cannot intelligibly raise and answer doubt about this framework itself.

If we have no intelligible notion of non-perspectival value judgment, then we cannot conceive either of a contrast between the judgments we make from our perspectives and those we would make, if only we could get “there,” from a point of view outside of them. As a consequence, we also lose our grip on the nihilist's notion of perspectives being limiting—a point Nietzsche may be taken to appreciate, however hesitatingly, when he concedes that “we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation.” In Nietzsche's eyes, then, the normative objectivist labors under the fantasy that, if we could only abstract from the contingent “conditions” imposed by our perspective upon our judgments, we would then be left with an undistorted, unadulterated representation of “the good as such.” The implication of Nietzsche's normative subjectivism, however, is, rather, that we would be left with no evaluative judgment at all.

IV. Normative Fictionalism

The fictionalist strategy to avoid nihilistic disorientation differs from the subjectivist strategy insofar as it does not deny normative objectivism: the value of a value still depends on its objectivity. Since Nietzsche denies the existence of objective values, nihilistic disorientation seems inevitable. He suggests that we avert it by engaging in *make-believe* in objective values, or imagining that there are such values. This is normative fictionalism, an interpretation of Nietzsche's metaethics recently revived by Nadeem Hussain.²²

Fictionalism about values typically combines claims about the semantics of value judgments, the metaphysics of value, and the functional role of evaluation. Fictionalism assumes a *cognitivist* semantics for value judgments—they have the semantic appearance of reports on

putative objective facts—and an *anti-realist* metaphysics of value—there are no objective values. Some scholars have recently argued that Nietzsche (and his contemporaries) is primarily concerned with the metaphysics of values and holds no explicit view about the semantics of value judgments.²³ But fictionalism requires him to have views on both matters: in particular he must endorse a cognitivist semantics about value judgment. Nietzsche, it is true, makes no explicit claim about the semantics of value judgments, but we should consider that he may nevertheless be implicitly committed to one.

He is quite explicit on the metaphysical standing of values: they are not objective facts. This metaphysical claim is intended as a *criticism* of the prevalent view of values. Accordingly, he must assume that values actually tend to be conceived as objective facts, and this in turn suggests that judgments about them must be seen as expressing *beliefs*, or truth-apt propositional attitudes. Of course, he could regard this semantic conception of value judgments as a simple mistake spawned by the deeper metaphysical mistake about the nature of values. And it would be easy enough to recognize, once the latter mistake is exposed, that these judgments are not expressions of beliefs at all, but simply expressions of taste, affect, or other evaluative attitudes. But Nietzsche offers some considerations that indicate that the cognitivist semantics presupposed by fictionalism may be more than a readily dispelled appearance. For one thing, he insists that metaphysical assumptions are often generated by linguistic practices. So, realism about values may well be a naïve or hasty inference from the fact that value judgments have the semantic appearance of reports on objective facts. The metaphysics would then be a consequence of the semantics, and the plausibility of the latter would not depend on the former. For another thing, Nietzsche sometimes suggests that the motivating power of value judgments might depend on the fact that they are presented as reports on objective normative facts (see WP 461)—an important point on which I shall return in this section. If the power to motivate is an essential feature of value judgments, then we must assume that their semantic appearance is cognitivist.

Metaphysical anti-realism and semantic cognitivism combine into an *error-theory* about value. Value judgments are “false projections” (WP 12), insofar as they present as objective fact what is merely subjective invention: “We who think and feel at the same time are those who really continually *fashion* something that had not been there before: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, per-

spectives, scales, affirmations, and negations. [. . .] But precisely this knowledge we lack, and when we occasionally catch it for a fleeting moment we always forget it again immediately” (GS 301). To evaluate is to give color to a world that is, in itself, evaluatively colorless. Nietzsche describes this activity of coloring in terms of a “projection” or “imposition” of evaluative predicates onto a world that is essentially valueless: “We have thought the matter over and finally decided that there is nothing good, nothing beautiful, nothing sublime, nothing evil in itself, but that there are states of soul in which we impose such words upon things external to and within us” (D 210; cf. GS 301; cf. HH, I 16; WP 12).

On some occasions, he suggests that this evaluative projection is guided by our affects. We form certain affective responses to states of affairs, which we proceed to represent as objective properties of them. For instance, a state of affairs that inspires disgust, or some other kind of “con-attitude,” is judged to be wrong or evil. Our evaluations are here guided by our affects, and they are creations only in a rather attenuated sense (see D 119; WP 254). On other occasions, Nietzsche considers a different model, according to which our evaluative projections are no longer guided by our affects, but are full-fledged creations that in fact shape them. “Whence come evaluations? Is their basis a firm norm, ‘pleasant’ and ‘painful’? But in countless cases we first *make* a thing painful by investing it with an evaluation. [. . .] We have invested things with ends and values [. . .] (thus nothing is valuable ‘in itself’)” (WP 260; cf. D 35). All affects are associated with sensations of pain or pleasure. In being guided by our affects, our evaluations would thus ultimately be guided by “pleasant” or “painful” sensations. But Nietzsche suggests here that evaluations actually determine what is pleasant or painful “in countless cases.”

To this error-theory, he adds the further claim that evaluations play an important functional role in spite of their falsehood: “But the value of a command ‘thou shalt’ is still fundamentally different from and independent of such opinions about it and the weeds of error that may have overgrown it—just as certainly as the value of a medication for a sick person is completely independent of whether he thinks about medicine scientifically or the way old women do. Even if a morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not as much as touch the problem of its value” (GS 345). The value of our values lies in their function, namely, they fulfill specific needs: “*The necessity of false values.*—One can refute a judgment by proving its

conditionality: the need to retain it is not thereby removed” (WP 262). Value judgments present themselves as reports on alleged objective or “unconditional” facts. By showing that there are no such facts and that value judgments are therefore “conditionally” related to the perspective of certain physiological conditions, one does “refute” them. But the usefulness of these judgments is independent of their truth and so it must be assessed by a standard other than their truth. Thus, Nietzsche invokes their usefulness in fostering “the preservation and growth” of the (human) species as a ground for their value: “The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating” (BGE 4).

It is crucial to remark that, for Nietzsche, although the usefulness of value judgments does not depend on their truth, it actually depends on our *taking* them to be true: “What is the criterion of a moral action? (1) its disinterestedness, (2) its universal validity, etc. But this is arm-chair moralizing. One must study peoples to see what the criterion is in every case, and what is expressed by it: a belief that ‘such a scheme of behavior [e.g., ‘Thou shalt not steal’] is one of the first conditions of our existence.’ Immoral means ‘bringing destruction.’ Now, all the communities in which these propositions are discovered have perished” (WP 261). As soon as a community becomes aware that its values are not objective but only reflections of contingent conditions of existence, they lose their usefulness and it perishes. In other words, it would appear that the value of values lies in their effectiveness as conditions of life, but that this effectiveness depends on ignorance of that very fact! The realization that my moral judgments are false would therefore effectively undermine their ability to contribute to my “preservation and growth”: “That a great deal of *belief* must be present; that judgments may be ventured; that doubt concerning all essential values is *lacking*—that is the precondition of every living thing and its life. Therefore, what is needed is that something must be held to be true—not that something *is* true” (WP 507).

In other words, it may well be that what ultimately justifies my compliance with moral imperatives is their function in my self-preservation, but it cannot be what *motivates* this compliance. This view is perplexing. Why could I not endorse my value judgments no longer because they are true but because they are useful? Indeed, in so doing I might precisely heed an injunction Nietzsche made at an early stage

of his campaign against morality. Having acknowledged that “errors” form “the basis of all moral judgments,” he added an important qualification: “It goes without saying that I do not deny—unless I am a fool—that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided or resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done or encouraged—but I think that the one should be encouraged and the other avoided *for other reasons than hitherto*” (D 103). I should no longer exhort myself and others to comply with the judgment that stealing is wrong because God commands it, for example, but because such compliance will help, for example, to secure a social order from which we all stand to benefit.

Nietzsche resists this simple pragmatism, in my view, because he holds the view that what is useful is not just the policies themselves (for instance, “Thou shalt not steal”), but the belief that they represent objective normative requirements, the authority of which is not conditioned by contingent inclinations, needs, or interests. This would explain why exposing their relation to such factors would necessarily undermine their effectiveness as conditions of life. We then need to understand why taking our values to be objective is necessary for them to fulfill their functional role in our self-preservation. Two distinct proposals can be gathered from Nietzsche’s writings, each of which suggests a particular justification for it.

On the first, *narrow* proposal, only those individuals Nietzsche calls the “weak” must take their values to be objective. They must believe that benevolence, for example, is an objective moral requirement, which is independent of contingent feelings and inclinations or contingent beliefs about value that agents have. They must hold this meta-ethical belief because they need to convince *others*, particularly the strong, to be benevolent toward them, since they are often too weak to defend against the strong, or simply to fulfill some of their own basic needs. Presumably, they will not manage to persuade the strong unless they present benevolence as a requirement the authority of which transcends and overrides the feelings and inclinations of the strong, as well as their beliefs about value (which may not include an inclination to, or a valuation of, benevolence) (see GS 21). This sort of dogmatism is characteristic of the prevalent “herd morality” Nietzsche attacks: “*Morality in Europe today is herd animal morality*—in other words, as we understand it, merely *one* type of human morality beside which, before which, and after which many other types, above all *higher* moralities, are, or ought to be, possible. But this morality resists such a

‘possibility,’ such an ‘ought’ with all its power: it says stubbornly and inexorably, ‘I am morality itself, and nothing besides is morality’ ” (BGE 202; cf. WP 275). In addition, Nietzsche also maintains that the weak *themselves* need to believe in the objectivity of moral requirements. The reason is that he conceives of weak individuals as unintegrated selves, whose drives anarchically conflict with one another (see WP 46). They are incapable of “positing ends for themselves,” and need “an external regulation to constrain and steady them” (A 54), just as individuals in the throes of runaway passions, compulsions, or addictions regain some sense of agency only by surrendering to some higher power. And objective, “unconditional,” normative requirements represent one relevant kind of external regulation (see WP 20).²⁴

On the second, *broad* proposal, by contrast, *all* agents must take their values to be objective if they are to be useful. This proposal rests on the idea that the primary function of values is to make life meaningful (see Z, I 15). An agent takes his life to be meaningful when the various activities, experiences, and events that constitute it form a coherent and valuable whole. For example, agents will deem their life meaningful if they can come to see it as serving a purpose they judge good. As Nietzsche acknowledges, the question of the meaning or justification of existence arises with particular poignancy when it includes significant amounts of *suffering* (see GM, III 28). This extreme case vividly illustrates why the agent must regard his values as objective. Suppose you justify your suffering on the ground that it is atonement for the original sin, or because it is a source of psychological insight. Suppose, then, that you come to see the story of the original sin or the value of psychological insight not as objective facts but as expressions of merely subjective attitudes. Would you then still be able to find in such considerations a meaning for your suffering? It is tempting to think not, and to agree that the ability of a value to justify and give meaning to a life depends on the fact that the agent whose life it is takes the value to be real or objective.

Human beings need their life to have meaning. Since nothing is really (objectively) valuable, they are threatened with nihilistic disenchantment. The fictionalist proposes to avert nihilism simply by “creating” values, and Nietzsche finds the paradigmatic model for this creation in the artistic practice of make-believe:

Our ultimate gratitude to art.—If we had not welcome the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us through science [. . .] would be utterly unbearable. *Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide.

But now there is a counterforce against our honesty that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the *good* will to appearance. [. . .] As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be *able* to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon. (GS 107; cf. GS, Preface 5; 299; GM, III 25)

To be effective, this creation of values requires a suspension of disbelief, and so a curbing of the “will to truth,” for the realization that there are no objective values is “a consequence of the cultivation of ‘truthfulness’ ” (WP 3). Since we need objective values for our lives to have meaning, this realization is likely to “lead to nausea and suicide.” The recourse to artistic make-believe in objective values would be Nietzsche’s proposed remedy to nihilism. And the effectiveness of artistic make-believe indeed requires that we curb our will to truth, as those who have indulged it excessively know only too well:

There are a few things we know too well, we knowing ones: oh, how we learn to forget well, and to be good at *not* knowing, as artists! And as for our future, one will hardly find us again on the paths of those Egyptian youths who endanger temples by night, embrace statues, and want by all means to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons. No, this bad taste, this will to truth, to “truth at any price,” this youthful madness in the love of truth, have lost their charm. [. . .] Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, worlds, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial—out of profundity. (GS, Preface 4)

This view enjoys considerable textual support, but it faces equally considerable difficulties. The first is created by Nietzsche’s own insistence that, his notorious reservations about the will to “truth at any price” notwithstanding (GS 344), we should remain “honest” or “truthful.” For instance, he berates the Christians precisely for their lack of truthfulness, in particular concerning the standing of their values (A 50–55). To resolve this apparent conflict, we must appeal to a theme that runs through his writings since *The Birth of Tragedy*, namely, that the illusions of art are acceptable provided they are “honest,” or “conscious.”

Unfortunately, this proposal appears to solve an exegetical problem by replacing it with a philosophical one. Can illusions really be effective, can they captivate and motivate us, and so fulfill their intended function, if we know them to be illusions? Does not this knowledge

precisely undermine them? Nietzsche's frequent allusions to artistic make-believe (GS 299), and to children's inventive play (Z, I 1; BGE 94) are presumably meant to point out that self-conscious illusions can in fact captivate. The philosophical challenge is to explain how they do. Nietzsche's talk of the usefulness of "false" beliefs, or the "cult of the untrue," might be interpreted as demanding a kind of self-deception or deliberate ignorance of the fictionalist. Hussain notes that there are different kinds, or perhaps degrees, of self-deception. At one end of the spectrum, there is complete deception, whereby the agent takes his value judgments at their cognitivist face-value and completely forgets that the values in which he believes are illusions of his own making. Nietzsche explicitly objects to this sort of dishonest lie and distinguishes it from "art, in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience" (GM, III 25). He might therefore have in mind a milder form of deception, which consists simply in deliberately keeping attention away from conflicting evidence. It is quite deliberately that the Greeks "stop at the surface." This form of self-deception does not require that the agent completely forget that values are his own inventions, and allows him to keep this fact in mind, but only at the periphery of his consciousness, and not at its center. For if he were to continuously dwell on this fact, it would indeed be virtually impossible for him psychologically to sustain the illusion. An agent who engages in this milder form of self-deception would thereby be captivated by illusions he knows to be illusions.

Hussain's proposal is not devoid of difficulties. For one thing, we still need to understand why Nietzsche insists that we *ought to know* that our values are illusions—why, that is, he continues to demand truthfulness from us. He does not address this question explicitly, but his own claim that the fanatical cultivation of truthfulness required by morality is the source of nihilism points to an answer. Nihilistic disenchantment sets in when the will to truth goes unchecked and is applied to all beliefs without discrimination. To avert nihilism, we must become more careful and discriminating in our truthfulness. In particular, we should curb it in the case of value judgments. As soon as we forget that value judgments are illusions, they become fair game for the "severe suspicion" (GS, Preface 4) of the truthful individual, who is bound to expose their falsehood. In so doing, this sort of critical inquiry will inevitably focus his attention on their falsehood, which will just as surely undermine their ability to captivate him. And so, we need to remain aware (at some level) that our value judgments are

illusions precisely in order to protect them from intrusive inquiry by an unchecked will to truth. We must remember, in other words, that what our fictions mask “is kept concealed for good reasons” (GS, Preface 4).

The fictionalist must therefore entertain a peculiarly ambiguous relationship to his values. He must take them seriously, all the while remembering that they are a contrivance of his own imagination. But it is precisely this that might be thought to create another difficulty for Hussain’s proposal. Belief does not seem to be the sort of attitude that is subject to our direct control. We form beliefs in response to evidence we find compelling. In the absence of compelling evidence, and a fortiori in the presence of conflicting evidence, we cannot simply *decide* to believe that something is the case. This is not to say that we cannot ignore or repress conflicting evidence. But Nietzsche demands that we somehow remain aware of the evidence against our moral beliefs, and this awareness of their falsehood seems to make it impossible to maintain these beliefs. “Profundity” is what makes us “superficial” because we must know the truth in order to cultivate the “untrue,” or deception. We must, in other words, continuously remember the “good reasons” why the truth should be kept concealed (*ibid.*). The suggestion that this awareness does not really threaten the belief because it can remain only peripheral is simply not persuasive, particularly in view of the important role it is supposed to play in the regulation of the will to truth.

A possible solution to this difficulty consists in invoking a distinction between believing and a different propositional attitude, which is *imagining* in a belief-like way.²⁵ Imagining in a belief-like way bears significant similarities to believing in the ordinary way, but it is also different from it in an important respect. It is similar insofar as, like believing, it can inspire emotion and induce motivation (perhaps when it is combined with other attitudes, like desires, including the imagined counterparts of ordinary desires). It is also similar insofar as it can be combined with other imaginings (or even other beliefs) to produce inferences. The relation between imagining and motivation is crucial, since my imagining that there are objective values would provide no defense against nihilistic disorientation unless it were capable of infusing my life with a sense of purpose by giving me something to “will.” Much would have to be said about the connection between imagination and motivation, but empirical evidence suggests that it holds.²⁶

The main difference between imagining in a belief-like way and believing appears to be that the former attitude involves no real commitment to the truth of its content. “Imaginings,” as Nietzsche sometimes calls them (TI, VII 1), are not simply falsehoods or beliefs in inexistent realities. A child engrossed in his play may imagine himself a Trojan warrior, and this imagining may motivate pretend actions and emotions on his part: he subscribes to a warrior code of ethics, and he is saddened by the death of Hector. If his older brother derides him for imagining himself a Trojan warrior, he may well feel embarrassed, but it will not be for holding a false belief, for he certainly is well aware that he is no Trojan warrior and only make-believes he is one. He might feel embarrassed for other reasons, such as for having allowed himself to live, for a moment, in a world of fantasy in which he possesses traits that in reality he does not, or perhaps cannot. The derision, in this case, is of fantasy and not of deception or ignorance.

In the final analysis, then, imaginative beliefs are not susceptible to defeat by conflicting real evidence. In this view, the fictionalist can remain safely aware that there really are no objective values, since his belief in such values is not a real belief but a belief-like imagining.

This proposal puts in a new light the stance Nietzsche describes as the “cult of the untrue.” It is ordinarily understood as the view that it is acceptable to be deceived or ignorant, or to hold as true beliefs that are false or insufficiently justified. The fictionalist, in this view, has a real belief that there are objective values, but this belief is false. There can be no genuine “cult” of the untrue unless the agent is at once aware that this belief is false and yet not troubled by that awareness. But we saw that that is a tall order. In the alternative proposal, by contrast, the “cult of the untrue” is *not* a cult of deception but a cult of *illusion*, or our imaginative ability to create fictional worlds and, to some extent, live in them. If imaginative beliefs can inspire motivation and care as much as real beliefs do, then the Nietzschean fictionalist does not need real beliefs to provide meaning to his life. And he need not be deceived at all insofar as he would be fully aware that his values are fictions or “appearances.” From its introduction in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the concept of appearance is not equivalent to that of false belief, or deception, but to that of illusion. Illusions can lead to false beliefs or deception, but they need not do so. Appearances are fictions that can unproblematically be known to be such precisely because they were never intended as claims to truth or knowledge.

To acquire “the good will to appearance,” which this cult of the untrue requires, in this view, is to challenge the “moral” view that it

is not acceptable to allow at least some parts of our lives to be lived in a fictional world, or a world of “appearances.” The truthfulness Nietzsche opposes would then be the requirement not just to know the truth, but to *live* in it. It is the moralistic belief that there is something reprehensible, perhaps objectionably weak or indulgent, or suspiciously escapist in allowing oneself to wallow in fantasy or make-believe. It is, in other words, the view that one ought instead to face up to reality, no matter how horrifying or inhospitable to our needs and aspirations it might be, and that “appearances” (or fictions) always ought to be dissolved by uncompromising honesty.

In any event, the fictionalist stance is distinguished by a peculiar ambivalence toward values, for which Nietzsche offers an elegant description:

Precisely because we are at bottom grave and serious human beings [. . .], we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish, and blissful art, lest we lose the *freedom above things* that our ideal demands of us. It would mean a *relapse* for us, with our irritable honesty, to get involved entirely in morality and, for the sake of the over-severe demands that we make on ourselves in these matters, to become virtuous monsters and scarecrows. We should be *able* to stand *above* morality—and not only to *stand* with the anxious stiffness of a man who is afraid of slipping and falling any moment, but also to *float* above it and *play*. (GS 107)

The fictionalist stance toward morality described here differs in one important respect from the *irony* advocated by a number of post-modernist thinkers. For the ironist, recognizing the contingency of current values is an opportunity for emancipation: since they are not objective, they lose their claim to be taken seriously and may be replaced by new values of one’s own making. But the temptation of what Nietzsche calls “dogmatism” persists: to grant these new values an authority of which they are as much deprived as the old ones, and to succumb again to the “spirit of gravity” (Z, I 1). And so “*the* problem of ironist theory,” which is also Nietzsche’s problem for this view, “is the problem of how to overcome authority without claiming authority.”²⁷ The fictionalist stance Nietzsche advocates is different. *Its* problem is not so much the temptation of dogmatism (although Nietzsche is certainly concerned about that: the honesty he continues to demand would in this case be meant to ensure that we do not eventually take our fictions to be realities) as the nihilism threatened by the rejection of descriptive objectivism. Nietzschean fictionalism is in fact an attempt to *preserve* precisely some of the seriousness the postmodern ironist seems intent on dissolving. For without some sort of “serious” en-

agement with them, our moral fictions would be ineffective at fostering preservation and growth: “A man’s maturity—consists in having found again the seriousness one had as a child, at play” (BGE 94).

The fictionalist is akin to the participant in a game, who, as any good participant should, takes its rules and goals very seriously, can be fully engrossed in them, and so becomes susceptible to various appropriate emotional and motivational states. It matters to him that he successfully achieve the game’s objectives, and he feels indignant when others break the rules, guilty when he breaks them himself, and the like. He is not simply a fool, however, insofar as he does not take his imaginings to be realities and remains aware that it is just a game.

Precisely such access to that sort of reflective stance raises a fundamental question: Why should we indulge in illusions of evaluative facts, or why should we “play the normative game” in the first place? Nietzsche appears to answer that playing this game is a condition of preservation and growth: “Only man placed values in things to preserve himself—he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning” (Z, I 15). But this only raises a further question: What is the value of such preservation? The fictionalist’s ability to interrupt his engagement in the game of evaluative make-believe must involve the ability to ask whether this is a game worth playing in the first place (and whether, in particular, it warrants curbing the “will to truth” to allow the illusion to persist).

But what normative resources does the fictionalist have to answer this question? He recognizes that all values are fictions of his own invention. As a consequence, when he stands back from the game of normative make-believe in which he has been engaged, and asks whether this is a game worth playing, he seems to have no normative resource to call upon, for he needs to appeal to a value that may not itself be a fiction, since it is intended to determine whether he should allow himself to become captivated by fictions of this sort in the first place.

Nietzsche appears aware of this difficulty. He suggests that the creation of values simply answers to a vital need of human beings, and that nihilism is the dissatisfaction that results from the frustration of that need. But he also observes that this explanation does not amount to a justification of created values, for it does not answer the question of whether the presence of a need for meaning constitutes a reason (gives us the right, so to speak) to engage in evaluative make-believe:

The philosophical nihilist is convinced that all that happens is meaningless and in vain; and that there ought not to be anything meaningless and in vain. But whence this: there ought not to be? From where does one get *this* “meaning,” *this* standard? At bottom, the nihilist thinks that the sight of such a bleak, useless existence makes a philosopher feel *dissatisfied*, bleak, desperate. Such an insight goes against our finer sensibility as philosophers. It amounts to the absurd valuation: to have any right to be, the character of existence *would have to give the philosopher pleasure*. (WP 36)

Does Nietzsche have a solution for this difficulty? We must first remark that the question of whether one should play the game of normative make-believe is ambiguous. It could be understood as a *metaphysical* question: Is there a *fact of the matter* with regard to whether the game should, or should not, be played? And the answer to this question is clearly negative. Neither this version of the question nor its negative answer should trouble the fictionalist, however, since he denies from the start the metaphysical reality of all values. As a consequence, the question appears to be a challenge to fictionalism only if it is understood as a *normative* question: What *should* I do, play the game or not? But *this* version of the question should not worry the fictionalist either, for if all norms are fictions, then the (normative) question of whether we ought to allow ourselves to become captivated by them can be intelligible *only within* the context framed precisely by such norms. We must already take some of the normative make-believe for granted to find the question meaningful in the first place. We may, within the game, ask *piecemeal* questions about the value of this or that aspect of the game, but we cannot coherently ask the *wholesale* question of whether we should play the game altogether. For we already answer the question by the sole fact of raising it. Nietzsche indicates that the question of the value of evaluative make-believe can only arise within it when he has Zarathustra make this deliberately perplexing declaration: “To esteem is to create: hear this, you creators! Esteeming itself is of all esteemed things the most estimable treasure” (Z, I 15). It is only from the standpoint of “esteemed things” that the very act of estimation that originally confers their value on them can become itself “estimable.”

IV. The Limits of Metaethics

1. *The Nature of Normativity*

Nihilism understood as disorientation results from the endorsement of normative objectivism (the normative authority of a value depends on its objective standing) and the rejection of descriptive objectivism (there are no objective values). Nietzsche proposes to avert nihilistic disorientation by raising afresh the question, “What is the meaning of the act of evaluation itself?” (WP 254). What does it mean to evaluate? And what sorts of things are values?

According to fictionalism, evaluating is not simply discovering objects or properties of a peculiar sort. It rather consists in creating fictions of such objects, and then acting “as if” they really do exist. A fictionalist account of evaluation involves, to begin with, a claim about the *existence* of values. Thus, Nietzsche’s arguments against descriptive objectivism, though allusive at best, suggest that considerations like explanatory minimalism and ontological parsimony ought to lead us to deny the existence of objective values. Fictionalism about value, however, also owes us an account of the *nature* of values. After all, we must have *some* idea of what kinds of things objective values would be if they did exist, in order to be able to act “as if” there are such values. Unfortunately, Nietzsche has little to offer on the nature of objective values.

The subjectivist version of his strategy to avert nihilistic disorientation proposes an account of the nature of values, in which they are no longer thought to be objective facts. Essentially, he declares that our values are “interpretations” done from the viewpoint of our “affects,” or our “passions and desires.” In this respect, he appears once again to follow Schopenhauer closely, who defines *good* as follows:

We will now trace the meaning of the concept *good*; this can be done with very little trouble. This concept is essentially relative, and denotes the *fitness or suitability of an object to any definite effort of the will*. Therefore anything agreeable to the will in any one of its manifestations, and fulfilling the will’s purpose, is thought of through the concept *good*, however different in other respects such things may be. [. . .] [I]n short we call everything good that is just as we want it to be. [. . .] The concept of the opposite [. . .] is expressed by the word *bad*, more rarely and abstractly by the word *evil*, which therefore denotes everything that is not agreeable to the striving of the will in each case. (WWR, I 65, p. 360)

Schopenhauer is here making a claim about what it means to evaluate, to say that something is either good or bad. And he declares that some-

thing is good if it favors the satisfaction of our desires and bad if it impedes it. To justify a judgment that “X is good” for an agent simply requires determining whether or not the agent has a desire whose satisfaction is favored by X. And so the source of evaluation is to be found in the agent’s existing desires.

At first glance, this account faces difficulties in its own right. In defining values in terms of desires, it does not so much explain the normativity of values as it explains it away, for it appears to erase all meaningful difference between merely feeling inclined toward an end and judging that we ought to pursue it. Nietzsche suggests a hint toward a solution when he declares that our “desires and passions” already possess a “quantum of reason.” Unfortunately, he does not spell out this suggestion, which remains ambiguous. Desires could possess a “quantum of reason” insofar as my desiring an end involves my believing that it is valuable in some way, where this value is independent of the fact that I desire it. In other words, my desire for the end presupposes a belief in its value and would disappear if I were to lose that belief. This view of the normative significance of desires is clearly not Nietzsche’s, at least insofar as he follows Schopenhauer, who maintains that the value of an end depends ultimately on the fact that it is desired.

If an object is good insofar as it is capable of gratifying a desire then desires are, in and of themselves, reasons. They do not simply direct our attention to reasons to secure possession of their objects, which are independent of the desires themselves. Rather, they themselves *constitute* reasons to pursue those objects.

This view attributes normative significance to the desires themselves. And so, we no longer have to explain what distinguishes a value from a desire, as we do when we take values to be independent of desires. But we now require a new account of the motivational conflict we are prone to describe as a conflict between values and “mere” desires or passions. Nietzsche offers some indication of what such an account might be when he suggests that a desire can be “ranked” according to the “relations” it bears with the rest of our “desires and passions” (see WP 387). Unfortunately, he does not specify what sorts of relations he has in mind.²⁸ But desires with better relations, so to speak, than other desires with which they conflict would have a higher normative ranking, and thus would stand to them as what I ought to do against what I am “merely” inclined to do. Although Nietzsche barely sketches out this sort of account, I rely on it further later.

2. *Metaethics and Despair*

Nietzsche's views on metaethics therefore remain ambiguous. I will say a little more about them in Chapter 4, but I want for now to bring out an important implication of these views for his project to overcome nihilistic despair, which shows their limits and suggests why we might not need to resolve their ambiguity. Nietzsche believes that he has found a way to avoid nihilistic disorientation, be it through subjectivism or fictionalism. This overcoming of disorientation, however, brings back the problem of despair. For if the value of our values no longer depends on their actually having objective standing, then neither does the value of our highest values. And the essential inhospitability of this world to their realization becomes again a source of despair.

The subjectivist strategy to avoid nihilistic disorientation denies normative objectivism: the value of our values does not depend on their objective standing. Presumably, this is also true of those life-negating values of which nihilistic despair is the logical conclusion. Hence, showing that these values are not objective but the reflection of subjective attitudes does not really devalue them, and therefore it does not relieve us from the despair they are bound to induce.

The fictionalist strategy does not reject normative objectivism, but it still denies that there actually are objective values. It avoids disorientation by advocating a practice of make-believe in objective values. Supposing, then, that all moralities are games of make-believe, it seems as though one is as good as any other. If the functional role of a morality—what Nietzsche calls its “value”—is to give our life a sense of purpose or direction, for example, the old Christian morality should do as well as any other. And indeed, Nietzsche acknowledges that, for a long time, it did just that (see GM, III 28; WP 55). Their fictional character alone can therefore not explain his insistence that the old Christian values are harmful, that we ought to reject them and adopt new values in their stead.

Subjectivism and fictionalism might each provide a way of averting nihilistic disorientation, but they are of no help against nihilistic despair. To overcome despair, we require an altogether different kind of revaluation for the highest life-negating values, which is no longer *metaethical* but *substantive*, insofar as it critically engages with the actual content of the life-negating values. The remainder of this book is therefore devoted to Nietzsche's substantive ethical thought.

The limits of Nietzsche's metaethical views for understanding his project of revaluation should not incline us to conclude that our ex-

amination of them has been a superfluous detour. As I will argue later, his substantive revaluation of life-negating values must be conducted from the standpoint of a certain evaluative principle. This principle is the will to power. A revaluation in terms of it will carry no weight unless we can be persuaded of its value. The detour through metaethics has provided some important clues as to what could count as a justification for the claim that the will to power is good. If any such justification is to be found at all, we now know where to look for it.

Subjectivism implies, for example, that we can never establish a priori whether a given value judgment is justified or not. To do so, we must look into the contents of the perspective from which this justification is demanded. To establish the value of what Nietzsche calls the will to power, for example, we must simply demonstrate that it is a desire, which we have and which enjoys relevant and supporting relations with other elements of our evaluative perspective.

The justification of the value of power in the case of fictionalism looks to be more complicated. From one view, it could well amount to much the same thing as in subjectivism. Remember that to question meaningfully the normative credentials of a given fictional value, I must invoke other equally fictional values. In other words, the revaluation of old values is part of the game of normative make-believe, and it can only take place *within it*. It is, so to speak, a new play in the old game, which must be grounded by its norms. The only difference with subjectivism is not *what* these norms are, nor how they may be used to establish the value of power, but simply that they are now imagined to have objective standing.

In another view, revaluation from the standpoint of fictionalism is not simply a new play in the old game, but rather the invention of a new game altogether. The “creation of values” is not simply the application of old evaluative predicates to new objects, but the introduction of new evaluative predicates. Nietzsche sometimes explains the need for such radical changes by pointing to modifications in the conditions of life that values are supposed to reflect: “feelings about values are always behind the times; they express conditions of preservation and growth that belong to times long gone by; they resist new conditions of existence with which they cannot cope and which they necessarily misunderstand” (WP 110). Special individuals might come along and create new values better suited to these new conditions of life. The need for new values and their effectiveness are explained by an appeal to conditions of life, but it is not justified by them. The success of reval-

uation, in this view, does not depend on whether the principle in terms of which it is conducted (the will to power) has been justified, but whether it has managed to captivate or seduce Nietzsche's intended audience. And this, in turn, appears to depend on whether it is adequately suited to its new conditions of life.²⁹

Whatever strategy we ascribe to Nietzschean revaluation in the end, it will require persuading its audience of the value of the will to power by exploiting contingent facts about this audience—facts perhaps as diverse as its evaluative tastes and sensibilities, its affects and needs, its desires and passions, its conditions of life, or its ideological perspectives. However he proceeds, Nietzsche must appeal to such facts, and the only question that is left open by our investigation of his meta-ethical views is whether this appeal carries normative or merely seductive force.

The Will to Power

That I must be struggle and a becoming and an end and an opposition to ends—ah, whoever guesses what is my will should also guess on what *crooked* paths it must proceed.

Whatever I create and however much I love it, soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it.

—THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA, II 12

Most of Nietzsche's later works are explicitly related to his project of a "revaluation of all values." *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for instance, offers three "preliminary studies" for such a revaluation (EH, III "On the Genealogy of Morals"), and *The Anti-Christ* is its first installment (EH, III "The Twilight of the Idols" 3). And the notebooks from the last two years of Nietzsche's productive life offer a large number of more or less detailed sketches for a major book devoted to this project. If we are to believe the various plans for its execution Nietzsche left us, as well as the parts of it he actually completed, the project of revaluation is supposed to take place under the aegis of the *will to power*. Thus, the title of Nietzsche's late book project is most often: "The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values" (GM, III 27; cf. WP 69n). Some of the projected plans for the book present the will to power as the "principle" or "standard" of this revaluation (for instance, KSA 7[64]; WP, 391; cf. Preface 4, 674). And *The Anti-Christ*, which undertakes this project in earnest, opens with a repudiation of traditional conceptions of happiness and the claim that the good is "all that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man" (A 2). The main objective of the present chapter is to offer an interpretation of the doctrine of the will to power.

Few of Nietzsche's ideas have been more maligned. The most explicit recent forms of discontent concern the theoretical standing and scope of the doctrine. In declaring that the will to power is the objective "essence of life" (BGE 259; GM, II 12; A 6), or even of the "world"

(WP 1067), Nietzsche appears to be making a claim about what the world is “in itself.” The special standing this confers to the doctrine places it in conflict with the strictures of both his perspectivism and his empiricism. On the one hand, if all knowledge is perspectival, it is partial and bears an ineradicable subjective tinge, and so no theory may claim to capture the objective and complete “essence” of the world. On the other hand, Nietzsche also maintains that any legitimate claim to knowledge must be based on sensory evidence, but the degree of generality and abstraction of the doctrine of the will to power risks dissolving any possible link to empirical evidence and so deprives it of epistemic legitimacy. Various proposals have been made to resolve these apparent conflicts.¹

Nietzsche also often gives the doctrine an all-encompassing metaphysical scope. He presents the will to power as “the essence of life,” and he once declares that “*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!*” (WP 1067). Besides inviting charges of anthropomorphism, the doctrine in this form has also appeared to be just another instance of the wild-eye speculation not untypical in nineteenth-century German metaphysics, which simply does not merit serious attention. To appease this sort of discontent, some scholars have proposed to view the will to power as a doctrine about human motivation, the study of which belongs to empirical psychology (BGE 23).²

The deepest and most enduring source of discontent, however, affects the doctrine even when its standing has been reconciled with both perspectivism and empiricism, and when its scope has been limited to human psychology. It is created by a particularly inviting interpretation of power in terms of *control*, or *domination* (as in “an agent has *power over* someone or something”). To will power, in this interpretation, is to seek to control or dominate. The implications of this interpretation (for example, Nazi expansionism is a form of the will to power) have proven deeply embarrassing to scholars otherwise favorably disposed toward Nietzsche’s ideas.³

This interpretation is not embarrassing, however, insofar as it is a *descriptive* psychological theory, which presents the desire to dominate as the fundamental human motivation. This view is certainly disturbing to those who want to believe that human beings are capable of genuine compassion, for example, but it should hardly be embarrassing to Nietzscheans themselves. After all, it has the seductive patina of tough-minded realism. The view is embarrassing because Nietzsche also claims to find in the will to power the “principle” of new ethics, indeed

an ethics superior to the prevalent Christian morality. In this interpretation, Nazi expansionism is not only a phenomenon Nietzsche could have predicted, but also one of which he would have approved.

It is this sort of embarrassment that has led some scholars, such as Karl Löwith, to articulate a comprehensive interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy which aims to show that it is coherent and compelling even with the notion of the will to power left out altogether.⁴ Others have preserved the doctrine but tried to sanitize it by downplaying or suppressing its disturbing features. Walter Kaufmann, for example, agrees that the will to power is a will to control, but he points out that the control Nietzsche advocates is primarily *self-control*.⁵ John Richardson also endorses the view of power as domination but introduces other crucial qualifications. For example, he maintains that the dominating and dominated entities are not persons but drives; and he argues that the form of domination favored by Nietzsche is "mastery," which precludes troubling forms of coercion or repression, rather than "tyranny," which includes them.⁶

Others still, like Maudemarie Clark, follow a different strategy altogether. They suggest that the notion of power should primarily be understood not as control and domination but as *capacity* (as in "an agent has the *power to achieve* some end"). To will power is therefore to seek to acquire or develop certain capacities. Clark proposes to understand the will to power as a second-order desire for the capacity to satisfy our first-order desires. Such a capacity might involve various forms of control and domination, but it does not essentially consist of them.⁷

All these interpretations admittedly draw on claims Nietzsche does make in connection with the will to power. But they are also guilty of one fundamental error. They take a common, indeed perhaps inevitable, *by-product* or *consequence* of the pursuit of the will to power to be what the will to power *consists of*. A proper appreciation of this fact, in my view, will not only enable us to achieve a much deeper understanding of this crucial idea, it will also go a long way toward explaining how Nietzsche could plausibly have come to see in the will to power the principle of his revaluation of all values.

The notion of the will to power did not develop in a vacuum. It took form against the backdrop of Schopenhauer's philosophy: Nietzsche presents his concept of the will to power as a substitute for the Schopenhauerian concept of the "will to live" (see Z, II 12; WP 1067). The concept of the will to live is, in turn, the touchstone of Schopenhauer's

pessimism, a doctrine in which Nietzsche found a paradigm of the very nihilism for which the doctrine of the will to power is designed as a remedy. I believe that placing the doctrine of the will to power, and indeed the whole critique of nihilism, in the context of a response to Schopenhauerian pessimism will prove very fruitful. Accordingly, I begin with a study of pessimism.

I. Schopenhauer's Pessimism

1. *Philosophy and Experience*

It is not possible to appreciate the significance of Schopenhauer's metaphysical speculations on the essence of life without understanding their method. He explicitly contrasts his conception of this method with the view that metaphysics is an a priori discipline: "it had been assumed beforehand that metaphysics and knowledge *a priori* were identical. [. . .] I say that the solution to the riddle of the world must come from an understanding of the world itself; and hence that the task of metaphysics is not to pass over experience in which the world exists, but to understand it thoroughly" (WWR I *Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy*, pp. 427–428).⁸

Metaphysics seeks to "understand experience." Although Schopenhauer is not quite explicit about this, he seems to use the notion of "experience" in a relatively wide sense. It includes, as a matter of course, different varieties of empirical knowledge, such as not only the outer experience of objects in space and time, but also the inner experience of the "will," which is manifested in a certain experience of one's own body but cannot be perceived in space and time. And it also designates the sort of experience one can acquire through a long life. Experience in the first sense designates our acquaintance with a fairly confused mass of perceptual data. In contrast, experience in the second sense constitutes not simply a large amount of the first, but rather a kind of distilled *précis* of it, in which it comes already sorted out, in the form of very general observations.⁹

I am inclined to attribute to Schopenhauer the second as well as the first concept of experience for a number of reasons. For one thing, many of the observations he invokes to support his metaphysical speculations are of a very general nature: for example, the observation that happiness is, by and large, unattainable in this life. This is the sort of observation that requires more than mere acquaintance with objects in space and time, or with my own body as a kind of willing. Moreover, more than most philosophers, Schopenhauer deliberately seeks confir-

mation or support for his metaphysical views in many sources from world literature, in which individuals recorded their own experience in the sense I am considering now. Finally, the generality of metaphysics itself requires that experience be understood “thoroughly”: the broader one’s acquaintance with the world, the more “experience” one has, the better supported one’s metaphysical speculations about it.

This methodology, which consists in grounding metaphysics in experience, is based on a fundamental assumption, namely, that the thing-in-itself “manifests itself [*sich darstellt*]” in the phenomenal world, if perhaps in obscure ways. This assumption underlies Schopenhauer’s conception of the method of philosophy: “Now philosophy in our sense tries to become more closely acquainted with the thing-in-itself. The means to this are partly the bringing together of outer and inner experience, partly the arrival at an understanding of the whole phenomenon by discovering its meaning and connection—comparable to the reading of hitherto mysterious characters of an unknown writing. On this path, philosophy proceeds from the phenomenal appearance to *that which appears*, to that which is hidden behind the phenomenon; thus τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά [*ta meta ta physika*, the things beyond the physical world]” (PP 21; pp. 18–19). The metaphysician begins his investigation into the essence of life by gathering general observations about it. Such observations he takes to reveal the appearance or the manifestation of that essence. He then asks what the essence of life must be like for it to assume this appearance, or to become manifested in this way. Somewhat surprisingly, Schopenhauer’s conception of metaphysics implies that it is susceptible to *empirical* criticism: if one can produce compelling empirical evidence that contradicts the general observations on which he rests his metaphysical speculations, they lose their credibility. This may be a reason why Schopenhauer so fastidiously produces page after page of empirical observations as well as evidence from world literature (including not only philosophy, but also novels, poetry, essays, religious texts, and so on). These sources are meant to buttress the empirical foundation of his metaphysics. Even if we accept Schopenhauer’s general observations, however, disagreement can still arise on their interpretation. Thus, Nietzsche will in fact accept a number of Schopenhauer’s general observations but, as I will argue, challenge his interpretation of them.

2. Pessimism

Schopenhauer’s pessimism is the view that happiness is impossible: “Everything in life proclaims that earthly happiness is destined to be frus-

trated or recognized as an illusion. The grounds for this lie deep in the very nature of things” (WWR, II ch. XLVI; p. 573). Pessimism thus rests on two fundamental claims: an ethical claim on the nature of happiness, and a metaphysical claim on the “nature of things,” which is supposed to explain why happiness is impossible.

Let us first consider the ethical basis of pessimism. Schopenhauer ostensibly defines happiness in terms of desire satisfaction: happiness is “a final satisfaction of the will, after which no fresh willing would occur, [. . .] an imperishable satisfaction of the will [*eine finale Befriedigung des Willens, nach welcher kein neues Wollen einträte, [. . .] ein unzerstörbares Genügen des Willens*],” a “permanent fulfillment which completely and forever satisfies its craving,” or a “contentment that cannot again be disturbed [*Zufriedenheit [. . .], die nicht wieder gestört werden kann*]” (WWR, I 65, p. 362).

Philosophers usually distinguish between a conception of happiness in terms of desire satisfaction and a hedonistic conception, according to which happiness is pleasure or the absence of pain. On the first view, getting what we want makes us happy even if it provides little or no pleasure. And even if we derive pleasure from the sole fact of getting what we want, this pleasure is incidental and not essential to happiness. On the second conception, all we want, as it were, is pleasure. Although he ostensibly characterizes it in terms of desire satisfaction, Schopenhauer’s conception of happiness is ultimately hedonistic: happiness is pleasure, or at least the permanent absence of pain.

Schopenhauer believes that happiness, understood as the absence of pain, consists of the satisfaction of all desires, because of his conception of the relation between pain and desire. Specifically, he seems committed to two claims about pain and desire. The first and most explicit claim is that desire implies pain. If the mere occurrence of a desire is inherently painful, then happiness, the absence of pain, requires the satisfaction of all desires. But this only shows that the satisfaction of desires is a necessary condition of painlessness, not a sufficient one. For there could be pain that is independent of any of our desires. But Schopenhauer is also committed, if only implicitly, to the view that pain implies desire: there is no pain without desire. And this commitment explains why he takes the satisfaction of all our desires to be not only necessary but also sufficient to achieve painlessness. Let us consider these two claims more closely, beginning with the second.

3. *Pain and Desire*

I take Schopenhauer to be committed, if only implicitly, to the second claim that *pain implies desire*, because two of his views suppose that pain is not merely a particular quality of experience. First, he maintains that the satisfaction of desires is not only necessary but sufficient to achieve a condition of painlessness. He himself offers no explicit reason for this view. But the most inviting and compelling reason is precisely the observation that pain is not a particular phenomenal quality that all experiences of pain would have in common. If we compare, for example, the painful experiences of losing a child, of having indigestion, or of failing an exam, we will be hard pressed to find a distinctive phenomenal quality all these experiences have in common. Nevertheless, they all must share some characteristic by virtue of which they are all *painful*. The most obvious such characteristic is their relation to our desires: all pain is, when experienced, unwanted. Hunger would be painful, for example, not simply by virtue of being a distinctive kind of sensation, but also by constitutionally involving a desire for the elimination of that sensation.

Second, Schopenhauer endorses some version of the Buddhistic doctrine of cessation of desire, or, as he himself calls it, the “negation of the will,” or “complete resignation.” According to this doctrine, we can become free from pain without altering the felt qualities of the painful experience, but simply by suppressing the desire that is an essential constituent of it. You can eliminate the pain of hunger, for example, not by eating but by suppressing, through something like ascetic mortification, the desire that is constitutive of it. In this case, the sensations associated with hunger persist, but they are no longer experienced as painful.

Schopenhauer also maintains explicitly that *desire implies pain*: “of its nature the desire is pain [*der Wunsch ist, seiner Natur nach, Schmerz*]” (WWR, I 57, pp. 313–314). We may assume, from the outset, that a desire is a source of pain only so long as it is not satisfied. Schopenhauer sketches out an argument for this view in passages like the following: “The basis of all willing, however, is need [*Bedürftigkeit*], lack [*Mangel*], and hence pain [*Schmerz*], and by its very nature and origin, it is therefore destined to pain” (WWR, I 57, p. 312; cf. 38, p. 196). And again: “This great intensity of willing is in and by itself and directly a constant source of suffering, firstly because all willing as such springs from lack, and hence from suffering” (WWR, I 65, p. 363).

All desire is born from need or lack. In Schopenhauer's paradigmatic examples of thirst and hunger, we imagine that the organism needs water or food. It signals this need to consciousness by generating an experience of pain. Pain is a specific signal, the function of which is to put the organism in motion to fulfill the need. This specific function is reflected in the very structure of pain: it consists of a certain sensation together with a desire to eliminate it. The sensation makes a certain need manifest and the desire to eliminate this sensation induces the individual to fulfill that need.

I call this version of the argument the *argument of origin* because it rests on a view of the origin of all desires. It is because it has its origin in a need, which is made manifest in consciousness in the form of pain, that desire implies pain. The chief shortcoming of this view is the implausibility of the claim that *all* desires are born from pain. Some desires could be born from pleasure, for example, or from the recognition of the intrinsic value of their object.

Schopenhauer denies that objects possess intrinsic value: "in short we call everything good that is just as we want it to be. [. . .] The concept of the opposite [. . .] is expressed by the word *bad*, more rarely and abstractly by the word *evil*, which therefore denotes everything that is not agreeable to the striving of the will in each case" (WWR, I 65, p. 360). If an object is good by virtue of being wanted, then its value depends on desire and cannot elicit it.

But it seems as though desires could be born from pleasure, just as they are born from pain. Just as an experience of pain constitutionally involves a desire for its termination, an experience of pleasure would involve a desire for its reproduction or perpetuation. My (unsatisfied) desire to terminate a painful experience is a source of pain in a quite obvious way: the painful experience continues. In contrast, my (unsatisfied) desire to perpetuate or reproduce a pleasurable experience does not seem to be a source of pain in this obvious way. For the frustration of this desire could imply only that the pleasurable experience has ended, but not necessarily that a painful experience has taken its place. It could presumably be a state that is neither pleasurable nor painful.

To resolve this difficulty, we must appeal to Schopenhauer's controversial claim that pleasure is essentially "negative," namely, that it is only the experience of the absence of pain: "All satisfaction [*Befriedigung*], or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive. It is not a gratification [*Beglückung*] which comes to us *sui generis* [*ursprünglich*] and of itself

[*von selbst*], but it must always be the satisfaction of a desire [*Wunsch*]” (WWR, I 58, p. 319; cf. 67, p. 375). In occurring only in the satisfaction of a pre-existing desire, pleasure consists in the feeling that results from the elimination of pain: it is essentially *relief*. If pleasure is the experience of the absence of pain, then to desire pleasure is nothing other than to desire the absence of pain. Insofar as a desire is built in the experience of pleasure, it is a desire for continued relief from pain, not a desire for the perpetuation or reproduction of a positive new experience.

This negative conception of pleasure might be thought to be a shortcoming of this view, for it hardly seems plausible that pleasure occurs only in the satisfaction of some pre-existing desire. Pleasures can come unbidden, as when I delight at the sight of an unexpectedly beautiful scenery. Schopenhauer concedes that unbidden pleasures of this sort undeniably occur, but he continues to hold that even such pleasures are negative. Aesthetic pleasures, such as the delight I just mentioned, do not result from the satisfaction of a pre-existing desire, but they consist nevertheless in the *cessation* of desire. What is pleasurable about aesthetic contemplation is not that some particular desire is satisfied but that the individual is, if only for a moment, detached from his desires in general, which no longer agitate and torment him. Here is how Schopenhauer describes aesthetic pleasure: “The storm of passions, the pressure of desire and fear, and all the miseries of willing are then at once calmed and appeased in a marvellous way. For at the moment when, torn from the will, we have given ourselves up to pure, will-less knowing, we have stepped into another world, so to speak, where everything that moves our will, and thus violently agitates us, no longer exists” (WWR, I 38, p. 197).

The argument of origin depends on the claim that all desires are born from need, and therefore from pain. There is little doubt that this is Schopenhauer’s official argument for the claim that desire implies pain. But it is worth noting that he also sometimes seems inclined toward a different form of argument, which I will call the *argument of affective dissonance*. This argument, which does not depend on the negative conception of pleasure, appears in passages like the following: “all striving springs from lack, from dissatisfaction with one’s own state [*aus Mangel, aus Unzufriedenheit mit seinem Zustand*], and is therefore suffering so long as it is not satisfied” (WWR, I 56, p. 309).

I begin with three observations concerning this passage. For one thing, “striving” denote, the actual *pursuit* of a desire, not the desire

itself. Striving, in particular, is more than desiring: it is an action, and not just a disposition to act. Furthermore, although “striving” is not an instance of desire, it is nevertheless motivated by a desire, which can be considered its source or “basis.” Since Schopenhauer claims explicitly that striving springs from a “lack,” it is then reasonable to suppose that he takes desire and lack to be closely related. This leads me to a final observation concerning the notion of “lack.” I experience something as lacking not only when I do not have it, but also when my not having it is a source of actual “dissatisfaction” or “pain.” This compels us to ask by virtue of what my not having something is a source of pain. The answer now appears evident: my not having something is a source of pain *because I desire it*. To lack something is to experience a discrepancy between my actual state, in which I believe I do not have a certain object, and a possible state, in which I do. I presumably would not experience this contrast as a discrepancy (indeed, I might not experience the contrast at all) unless I desired the object in question.

The key idea is that the sole occurrence of a desire, whatever its origin, is a source of pain because it induces me to experience my actual condition as “dissatisfying” or “lacking.” The presence of the desire thus creates a kind of affective dissonance, a psychological tension, whereby I stand at odds with my condition. And this tension, which persists so long as the desire remains unsatisfied, is a source of pain or displeasure.¹⁰

Suppose that an experience of pleasure induces in me a desire to reproduce or perpetuate it, and that I cannot satisfy it. According to the argument of affective dissonance, the unsatisfied desire should be a source of pain. But the frustration of the desire to perpetuate an experience of pleasure means only that the pleasurable experience has ended, but not necessarily that a painful experience has taken its place. Hence, the pain caused by the frustration of desire cannot be a return of the pain that induced a desire for its elimination, as was the case in the argument of origin. The pain is now caused by the mere occurrence of a desire, regardless of its origin.

This view might admittedly seem strange, but it is not entirely implausible. It receives unexpected support from some forms of sophisticated ethical hedonism, which recommend moderation, particularly in the quest for new pleasures. New pleasures bring with them new desires for their perpetuation and reproduction, and therefore fresh possibilities for frustration. The experience of a new pleasure I cannot

reproduce would make my life appear “lacking” or “dissatisfying” for missing it. A pleasure not known, by contrast, is a pleasure not missed. Schopenhauer offers a relevant observation along these lines: “In proportion as enjoyments and pleasures increase, susceptibility to them decreases; that to which we are accustomed is no longer felt as a pleasure. But in precisely this way is the susceptibility to suffering increased; for the cessation of that to which we are accustomed is felt painfully. Thus the measure of what is necessary increases through possession, and thereby the capacity to feel pain” (WWR, II ch. XLVI, p. 575).

More serious difficulties arise when we consider the case of pain. Suppose I experience a state as painful. This means (given Schopenhauer’s commitment to the view that pain implies desire) that I have a desire for that state to end. In the present view, the frustration of this desire is painful not just because it means that the painful state I desire to eliminate endures, but also because this desire alone brings with it a fresh kind of displeasure.

What does it mean to say that desire alone, regardless of its origin, is a source of displeasure? It means that the sole frustration of a desire is a cause of displeasure, independently of what the subject is deprived of. According to the argument of origin, the frustration of a desire is a source of pain because it implies that the need causing the pain, itself causing the desire, remains unfulfilled. According to the argument of affective dissonance, this frustration is a source of displeasure in its own right.

Schopenhauer does not clearly distinguish between the two arguments because he takes all desires to be born from pain, and so to aim at its elimination. But he seems nonetheless committed to the distinction between two kinds of displeasure. Suppose I experience pain. This means that I have a desire for that pain to end. The frustration of that desire generates two kinds of displeasure. There is, first, the persistence of the pain I desire to eliminate; but there is also, second, the frustration I experience at not getting what I want, regardless of what that is. For example, I could suffer both from the pain of a burn *and* from the frustration of my desire to get rid of it.

He tends to call “suffering [*Leiden*]” the displeasure caused by the sole frustration of a desire: “all suffering is simply nothing but unfulfilled and thwarted willing” (WWR, I 65, p. 363). And by “pain [*Schmerz*],” he tends to refer to the type of displeasure that comes unbidden, in the sense that it is not caused by the frustration of some pre-existing desire, but constitutionally involves a new desire. Other

types of displeasure can be understood either as resulting from a pre-existing desire, or simply constitutionally involving one. As we shall see shortly, for example, Schopenhauer conceives of “boredom” as a kind of suffering.

Suffering, which results from resistance to the satisfaction of pre-existing desires, is therefore only one variety of displeasure among others. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer accords it a privileged position: he defines happiness, which requires the elimination of all forms of displeasure, in specific contrast to *suffering*. “We call its [the will’s] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, *suffering* [Leiden]; its attainment of the goal, on the other hand, we call *satisfaction* [Befriedigung], well-being, happiness” (WWR, I 56, p. 309, cf. 65, p. 363). This is not surprising: even though suffering is not identical with displeasure in general, the elimination of suffering implies the elimination of displeasure in general. For the elimination of suffering implies the satisfaction of all desires, and there can be no displeasure of any variety unless some desire remains unsatisfied.

4. *The Negative Character of Happiness*

Pessimism is the view that happiness, understood as the permanent absence of pain, is impossible. It must therefore rest on metaphysical rather than merely empirical grounds, which would at best show happiness to be highly unlikely. Thus, producing a large number of “definite instances” of unhappiness would not suffice, as “such a description might easily be regarded as a mere declamation on human misery [. . .], and as such it might be charged with partiality, because it started with particular facts” (WWR, I 59, p. 323). For this reason, Schopenhauer wants to seek a “philosophical demonstration” of pessimism “at the very foundation of the nature of life.”

In particular, he finds in the very nature of the human will the elements of two main arguments for pessimism. Each argument follows a very different strategy. The first argument, which I will consider in this section, does not deny that all of our desires can be satisfied but aims to show that the pleasure we take at this satisfaction cannot be permanent. The second argument, which I shall consider in a later section, will actually show that the satisfaction of all of our desires is impossible. Each argument, moreover, draws on an important feature of human willing.

The first argument is based on what Schopenhauer calls the “negative” character of pleasure or happiness: “all happiness is only of a

negative, and not a positive nature, and [. . .] *for this reason* it cannot be lasting satisfaction and gratification, but always delivers us only from pain or lack” (WWR, I 58, p. 320, my emphasis). To appreciate this argument, we must start with two opening observations.

The first concerns an ambiguity in the notion of satisfaction [*Befriedigung*]. On the one hand, satisfaction simply designates securing possession of the object of desire. On the other hand, it is the pleasure that derives from the possession of this object (in which case Schopenhauer tends to use terms like “gratification [*Beglückung*]” or “happiness [*Glück*]” or “contentment [*Zufriedenheit, Genügen*]”). This leads us to the second observation. It is clear that happiness, for Schopenhauer, is a kind of experience, and so must consist of satisfaction in the second sense, which is the pleasure derived from the possession of the object of desire. This distinction has one important implication. In denying the possibility of happiness in this first argument, Schopenhauer actually does not deny that we can secure possession of the objects of our desires, but he does deny that such possession can give us *permanent* pleasure or gratification. This assumption is crucial to a proper appreciation of his first argument for the claim that happiness is impossible—it is a denial of the possibility of permanent gratification. Let us examine how he infers this claim from the negative character of pleasure or happiness.

Happiness is negative in the following sense: “All satisfaction [*Befriedigung*], or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive. It is not a gratification [*Beglückung*] which comes to us *sui generis* [*ursprünglich*] and of itself (von selbst), but it must always be the satisfaction of a desire” (WWR, I 58, p. 319; cf. 67, p. 375). Given the ambiguity of the notion of satisfaction I just noted, this claim admits of two possible interpretations. If we define satisfaction as *securing possession* of the object of one’s desire, then it is negative insofar as the point of acquiring the object is simply the “deliverance from a pain, from a need [for this object].” There is no “positive” benefit to possessing this object beyond the elimination of the need for it. If, by contrast, we define satisfaction as *gratification*, then it is negative insofar as it is not *experienced* directly and “of itself,” but only as the absence of pain. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for the notion of a “positive” satisfaction. Satisfaction in the first sense would be positive insofar as the point of acquiring the object of one’s desire is grounded in the object itself (its intrinsic value), rather than in its removing a need. And sat-

isfaction in the second sense is positive insofar as the enjoyment of the possession of an intrinsically valuable object “comes to us *sui generis* and of itself”: it does not have to result from the removal of a pre-existing pain.

Since Schopenhauer defines happiness in terms of pleasure or gratification, we should understand accordingly his claim that all satisfaction is only negative. For the sake of clarity, I will restrict my use of the term *satisfaction* to designate the possession of the object of a desire, and will use the term *gratification* to refer to the enjoyment derived from that possession. With all these definitions and distinctions in place, we may now turn to Schopenhauer’s inference from the negative character of happiness to the view that it is impossible.

Gratification cannot be lasting because it consists only of the experience of the absence of pain: “For desire, that is to say, lack, is the precedent condition of every pleasure; but with the satisfaction, the desire and therefore the pleasure cease; and so the satisfaction or gratification can never be more than deliverance from a pain, from a need” (WWR, I 58, p. 319). This argument looks simple enough: desire is a condition of the possibility of gratification; as soon as the desire is satisfied, it disappears and, with it, gratification itself. Hence happiness, which consists of such a gratification, is fleeting at best. The whole argument hinges on the claim that desire (and so pain) is the “precedent condition of every pleasure.” Initially, Schopenhauer relies on his thirst and hunger analogy. Drinking, for example, never gives pleasure “of itself”: it does so only for someone who is thirsty. So soon as thirst is quenched, drinking no longer provides any pleasure.¹¹ Hence, thirst is a condition of taking pleasure in drinking.

The case of thirst, however, provides merely an intuitively compelling illustration of this claim, not an explanation for it. Schopenhauer eventually recognizes this difficulty and proposes the following explanation:

We feel pain, but not painlessness; worry, but not freedom from worry; fear, but not safety and security. We feel the desire as we feel hunger and thirst; but as soon as it has been satisfied, it is like the mouthful of food which has been taken, and which ceases to exist for our feelings the moment it is swallowed. We painfully feel the loss of pleasures and enjoyments, as soon as they fail to appear, but when pains cease even after being present for a long time, their absence is not directly felt, but at most they are thought of intentionally by means of reflection. For only pain and lack can be felt positively, and therefore they proclaim themselves

[*kündigen daher sich selbst an*]; well-being, on the contrary, is merely negative. (WWR, II ch. XLVI, p. 575; cf. PP, 149, pp. 291–292)

In this passage, Schopenhauer attempts to make his case by appealing to a peculiar asymmetry between the experience of pleasure and the experience of pain. Whereas the pains from which our desires spring are felt directly and “positively” (“they proclaim themselves”), pleasure is experienced only “negatively” as the elimination or the absence of pain. Thus, we become aware of our well-being only when it is gone and we feel pain again, or when we remember the pain that preceded it. For this reason, gratification cannot be the object of a “direct feeling,” but merely of a “thought,” namely, the “reflective” recognition that we are not in pain. The peculiar nature of the experience of pleasure, which Schopenhauer calls its “negative” character, therefore explains why the experience of pain is a condition of its very possibility. Moreover, it also explains why happiness, as lasting gratification or contentment, is impossible. The experience of pleasure depends indeed on the memory of the pain that is now removed. This memory is bound to fade, as happy times go on, and with it the experience of gratification on which it depends. This experience can therefore not be permanent but on the contrary must be disturbed time and again in order to be possible at all.

Two natural objections arise against this argument. First, granting the relativity of pain and pleasure, we might object that it is equally plausible to argue that the asymmetry goes the other way: pleasure is the “positive” feeling, of which pain is simply the “negation.” But such a view would have some troubling implications. If we take pain to be relative to pleasure in the way Schopenhauer takes pleasure to be relative to pain, then the feeling of pain would presumably fade at the same rate as the memory of the pleasure it negated. This seems implausible: pain, in Schopenhauer’s words, would continue to “proclaim itself” even if the memory of pleasure had completely evaporated. Moreover, in the alternative view now under consideration, pain would not be the object of a direct feeling, but only of a reflective apprehension, the recognition that pleasure is no longer felt. But this is also implausible, since pain appears to be the very paradigm of a direct feeling.¹²

The second objection to Schopenhauer’s account consists in denying the relativity of pleasure and pain. Both can be the objects of a direct feeling, and both can be experienced “positively,” independently of each other. It is crucial to Schopenhauer’s theory that pleasure cannot

be experienced “positively.” Consider again the case in which a pleasure is experienced even though no apparent pain is removed. I can be pleasantly surprised by a beautiful scenery, a delicious dish, or a recreational drug, even if there is no prior pain which these experiences eliminate.

We might of course reply that, in such cases, the pleasure brings into sharp relief a pain of which the agent had only a dim awareness. The feeling of pleasure makes the agent own up to the misery of her existence, and it is to be explained by the contrast with this misery. My unexpected enjoyment of beautiful scenery would be nothing over and above the realization of what I had been missing. This reply may seem suspiciously *ad hoc*, but it fits in well with Schopenhauer’s conception of aesthetic pleasure, for example. Aesthetic pleasures can come unbidden, insofar as they do not result from the satisfaction of some pre-existing desire. But they still constitute a relief from desires, which here consists of a detachment from desires in general (see WWR, I 38).

5. *The Nature of Human Willing*

This first argument for pessimism gives some important clues to Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of the human will. In accordance with his method, we must ask the following question: What property must we assign to human willing to account for the essentially negative character of gratification, and the resulting impossibility of happiness? To understand the conception of human willing presupposed in Schopenhauer’s negative conception of happiness, we should draw a distinction between two kinds of desire: *object-based* desires are based on a recognition of the intrinsic desirability of their object; *need-based* desires are based on an endogenous need—they do not depend on the desirability of their object, which, on the contrary, depends on them. The negative conception of happiness presupposes that all desires are need-based. Schopenhauer presents thirst and hunger as paradigms of human desire. I do not become thirsty because I recognize that drinking water is intrinsically desirable. Rather, drinking water becomes desirable only because I am thirsty.

This distinction implies a difference in the *desirability* of the objects of the two kinds of desire. The object of a need-based desire is desirable insofar as it is needed, whereas the object of an object-based motivated desire is desirable intrinsically. As a consequence, the desirability of the object of a need-based desire is relative to the presence of the relevant need (for example, drinking has no appeal if I am not thirsty), but the

object of an object-based desire remains desirable even once its possession is secured (owning and enjoying an intrinsically valuable object will not take away its appeal).

Finally, the distinction between two kinds of desire implies another difference, crucial for Schopenhauer's purposes, concerning the *conditions of their satisfaction*. Since the desirability of the object of a need-based desire lies entirely in its being desired, the pursuit of the need-based desire can only aim at the elimination of the pain associated with it, and not at the possession of its object as such. For the possession of the object has no point other than eliminating that pain. This implication is crucial because it opens up the possibility that the elimination of pain, which is the ultimate aim of the pursuit of need-based desires, could be achieved in some other way than through securing possession of their object. Thus, as Schopenhauer will argue (see Chapter 4), *detaching oneself* from the desire not only does succeed in eliminating the pain associated with it, it is in fact the only way to do so once and for all. If I can manage to disarm my desire to eliminate the pain, then, since pain implies desire, the pain will vanish. The same does not go for object-based desires, however: since we desire these objects because they are intrinsically desirable, there is no way to get what we want in pursuing them other than through securing their possession. In other words, for object-based desires there is no acceptable alternative to satisfaction.

Schopenhauer points to this last feature of need-based desires when he observes that their satisfaction can only be “negative,” or the “deliverance from a pain, from a lack.” The conception of desires as object-based, by contrast, would imply a “positive” notion of satisfaction. Since the object of desire has value independently of its being desired by the subject, its possession would gratify the subject, whether or not he actually had a prior desire for it.

Schopenhauer believes that the “willing and striving” that defines human life ought to be understood on the model of a “thirst” or “hunger,” that is to say, as need-based desire. He favors such a conception not because he believes that is the right analysis of our concept of desire, but because he believes that it is required to account for the negative character of the experience of pleasure and ultimately for the impossibility of a lasting happiness.¹³

6. *The Argument from Boredom*

We may now turn to Schopenhauer's second argument for pessimism. This argument follows a different strategy. The first argument essentially argued that even if we concede that all of our desires could be satisfied, we still could not derive permanent gratification from that, for the very possibility of gratification depends on periodical bouts of pain. The second argument rejects the concession granted by the first: happiness is impossible because the satisfaction of all our desires is impossible. The essentials of this argument are sketched out in the following passage:

Willing and striving are [life's] whole essence, and can be fully compared to an unquenchable thirst. The basis of all willing, however, is need [*Bedürftigkeit*], lack [*Mangel*], and hence pain [*Schmerz*], and by its very nature and origin, it is therefore destined to pain. If, on the other hand, it lacks objects of willing, because it is at once deprived of them again by too easy a satisfaction, a fearful emptiness and boredom come over it; in other words, its being and its existence itself become an intolerable burden for it. Hence its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents. This had been expressed very quaintly by saying that, after man had placed all pains and torments in hell, there was nothing left for heaven but boredom. (WWR, I 57; p. 312; cf. 38; p. 196)

Schopenhauer first notes that human beings have all kinds of desires, which are painful so long as they remain unsatisfied. He evidently takes this to be uncontroversial. The crux of the argument lies in a second claim, namely that human beings are susceptible to boredom, and in the related view that human life “swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom.” To appreciate the significance of this claim, we must ask what kind of state boredom is, and what our susceptibility to it shows about us.¹⁴

Schopenhauer's analysis of boredom begins with three important observations. He first remarks that boredom sets in when all our occurrent determinate desires are satisfied, and no new desire “appears on the scene” (WWR, I 57; p. 314). Second, he insists that boredom is a singularly unpleasant state, which we are prepared to go to great lengths to escape: “Boredom is anything but an evil to be thought of lightly; ultimately it depicts on the countenance real despair” (WWR, 57, p. 313). Third, he points out that the distinctive displeasure we experience when we are bored is one of frustration: we feel as though something is still lacking, or left to be desired.¹⁵ Thus, he describes

boredom as an “empty longing [*leeres Sehnen*]” (WWR, I 58, p. 320), by which he means a “longing without a determinate object [*Sehnen ohne bestimmtes Objekt*]” (WWR, I 29, p. 164), or “the pressure of will itself, without recognized motive [*der Willensdrang selbst, auch ohne erkanntes Motiv*]” (WWR, I 65, p. 364).

This last observation circumscribes the central difficulty the analysis of boredom must confront. If boredom sets in when all occurrent determinate desires have been satisfied, and no new desire has yet occurred and demanded satisfaction, how could the displeasure characteristic of it result from the frustration of a desire? As Schopenhauer describes it, boredom is a state in which the agent, having achieved some particular goal, continues to will, this time without any determinate intentional focus. It is as though the satisfaction of the determinate desire(s) is somehow unsatisfying. And this raises the following question: Why does the attainment of a determinate goal not suffice to fulfill the will, so that it persists in the form of an “empty longing”? He proposes the following answer: “The goal was only apparent; possession takes away its charm” (WWR, I 57, pp. 313–314). The attainment of a goal is not satisfying, and leaves us bored, because the goal was “only apparent.” This lapidary answer is ambiguous. So, we should begin by contrasting two possible interpretations of it.

I might, for example, be convinced that I really want to earn a medical degree, but then experience a feeling of diffuse dissatisfaction or “emptiness” when I actually reach that goal. A natural, if complex, explanation for this feeling goes as follows: earning the medical degree is not what I really wanted after all, it was not my “real” goal. My real goal, let us suppose, was to secure the esteem of my parents. This goal, however, is unconscious: I could not admit it to myself, for example, because it would mean acknowledging the distressing fact that I did not have the esteem of my parents *already*. And this is an acknowledgment that my strong need for this esteem might motivate me to avoid. If earning the medical degree leaves my parents indifferent, I will find little satisfaction in it because my parents’ esteem, not the degree itself, is my real goal. But, unaware as I am that it is my real goal, my dissatisfaction will remain diffuse and unintelligible to me.

This reading is afflicted with two shortcomings. First, it does not rule out the possibility that certain goals are “real” (in the example above, securing my parents’ esteem would be my real goal). And if some goals are real in this sense, then one could achieve a gratification that would not be followed by boredom, a possibility Schopenhauer denies.

Second, and more significantly, the feeling of “emptiness” described in this example is not plausibly characterized as boredom. The two states are, I think, phenomenologically distinct. The diffuse dissatisfaction I experience at obtaining the medical degree when this does not secure my parents’ esteem involves a sense that something is still lacking, but something of a *determinate*, if unknown, nature. In contrast, when I am bored, I have all the determinate objects I wanted, and although I have the sense that something is lacking, it is not the sense that something determinate is lacking.

An adequate account of boredom, then, must explain this sense that something *indeterminate* is lacking. Schopenhauer offers the following proposal: “The will dispenses entirely with an ultimate aim and object. It always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such striving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction; it can be checked only by hindrance, but in itself it goes on forever” (WWR, I 56, p. 308). The will goes on pressing, even after a determinate goal has been attained, because it is ultimately aimless, so that no determinate goal can ever satisfy it. The determinate goal it realizes is “only apparent” not because another determinate goal is its real goal, but because it has no goal at all.

I believe that this view is misleading, however, for it conflicts with Schopenhauer’s claim that human willing (or desiring) is an essentially intentional state and therefore requires an intentional object. Indeed, the idea of a willing without an object makes no sense: “When a man wills, he wills something; his will is always directed to an object and can be thought of only in relation to an object” (FW, p. 14; cf. WWR, I 29, p. 163). But how, then, are we to make sense of the idea of an “aimless striving” (WWR, I 29, p. 164)? Consider that the notion Schopenhauer introduces to characterize this blind, aimless willing is the “will to live.” This notion merits our attention. For you might recall that Schopenhauer defines life in terms of willing: “Willing and striving are its whole essence” (WWR, I 57, p. 312). The “will to live,” therefore, is a *will to will*. This idea is also intimated in the passage I am considering at present. In declaring that the will “strives because striving is its sole nature,” Schopenhauer suggests that the will simply wants to will—it is, so to speak, a desire to desire. Boredom results from the frustration of this peculiar desire. We are bored, he in fact declares, when we “lack objects of willing.” When we are bored, we are not lacking the determinate objects of particular desires, but we are rather lacking objects *to* desire.

This account of boredom is borne out by the distinctive phenomenology of this state. A bored individual will complain that “he has nothing to do.” Obviously, he does not mean that he is under no *obligation* to do anything: this would be leisure, not boredom. He means rather that he has no *inclination* or *desire* to do anything. Nothing arouses his interest; nothing engages his will. As Schopenhauer says, he “lacks objects of willing.” The bored individual, moreover, does not desire anything determinate: he merely desires something to desire, but nothing in particular. Any fresh desire will do. Boredom is a desire in search of an object, a desire to desire again: this is why it arises only when occurrent determinate desires have been satisfied.

The possession of the objects of these determinate desires takes away their charm, on this view, not because these objects were not suited to satisfy those desires, but because their possession eliminates the desire. In other words, the appeal of the object of a determinate desire has two distinct sources: it is appealing by virtue of its ability to fulfill a certain need, and it is also appealing by virtue of arousing desire. In this latter case, we might say that it is appealing by virtue of being appealing. Once its possession is secured, the object does not lose its first appeal—it continues to fulfill a certain need. But in fulfilling this need, it eliminates the desire and so loses its second appeal.¹⁶

From Schopenhauer’s reflections on the susceptibility to boredom emerges the following picture of human willing. Human beings obviously have many *first-order* desires for determinate objects (for instance, fame, wealth, food and shelter, and so on). But their susceptibility to boredom reveals that they also have a *second-order* desire, a desire whose object is (or includes) a desire.¹⁷ This structure of human willing in first- and second-order desires shows why a final and complete satisfaction of all desires (happiness) is impossible. The satisfaction of first-order desires for determinate objects, which eliminates ordinary pain, necessarily implies the frustration of the second-order desire to have (and pursue) (first-order) desires, and therefore boredom, and vice versa. (In fact, the desire to desire is a desire for both pain and frustration. The desire to desire is a desire for pain, since all desire comes from pain. Moreover, the desire to desire is also a desire for obstacles to satisfaction, since the desire necessarily disappears as soon as it is satisfied.) Since both kinds of desire can never be satisfied together, human life “swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom.”

II. What Is the Will to Power?

1. *The Critique of Schopenhauer*

Nietzsche explicitly presents his concept of will to power as an alternative to the will to live, which he finds implausible: “Indeed the truth was not hit by him who shot at it with the word of the ‘will to existence’: that will does not exist. For, what does not exist cannot will; but what is in existence, how could that still want existence? Only where there is life is there also will: not will to life but—thus I teach you—will to power” (Z, II 12). At first glance, the objection is too facile to be persuasive. Surely, those targeted by Nietzsche’s critique did not mean that something that does not exist actually wills its own existence; rather, they meant that something that does already exist wills its *continued* existence, its self-preservation. As a consequence, Nietzsche’s proposal to replace the will to live with the will to power seems premature.

The second part of the passage suggests a different objection, one that applies precisely to this qualified view. Nietzsche challenges the received idea that all living beings, including human beings, aim to preserve and perpetuate their own existence. He invokes the empirical fact that some of the time at least, human beings seem to esteem something more highly than their own survival (including that of their species), and are indeed prepared to risk their life “for the sake of power.” Thus, he remarks: “The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at *the expansion of power*, and, wishing for that frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation” (GS 349; cf. WP 688).¹⁸

It is unclear whether these passages, and the notion of “will to life [*Wille zum Leben*]” to which they allude, concern Schopenhauer. They could be read with at least equal plausibility as a critique of a certain version of Spinozism (BGE 13) or of a (misleading) interpretation of Darwinism (TI, IX 14), according to which the driving biological force is the instinct for self-preservation. A closer link between Schopenhauer’s “will to live” and Nietzsche’s will to power may be, in my view, found elsewhere.

The conception of the “will to live” in terms of a second-order desire is only adumbrated by Schopenhauer. It is Nietzsche himself who makes this second-order structure fully explicit in his appropriation of Schopenhauer’s idea. Thus, of the world described, in very Schopen-

hauerian terms, “as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness,” he declares: “This, my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying [. . .], without goal, unless the joy of circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself—do you want a *name* for this world? A *solution* for its riddles? [. . .]—*This world is the will to power—and nothing else!*” (WP 1067). Although it was eventually discarded, this note provides a crucial clue to Nietzsche’s appropriation of Schopenhauer’s conception of the will. It is, he tells us, “without goal, *unless the joy of circle is itself a goal*”: supposing that the idea of “circle” refers to the cycle of desires and satisfactions, the “goal” of the will to power is, in the last analysis, willing itself (see Z, III 12[19]). It has, in other words, the basic structure of a second-order desire.

Moreover, Nietzsche also develops and refines the idea of a second-order desire to desire in crucial respects. Although he does not himself apply his notion of will to power to the explanation of boredom, we may get an initial grip on some of the refinements he proposes by returning to it. To begin with, the bare desire to have desires, on which Schopenhauer’s own account relies, does not adequately explain our susceptibility to boredom. We can be bored even when we have a determinate desire: for example, we can be bored while we are locked up in a jail cell, even though we very much want to get out. When we are bored, we do not complain that we have nothing to desire, but rather that we have nothing to *do*. The desire whose frustration is a source of boredom is therefore more specifically a desire not just to have, but also to *pursue* desires. We want desires, in other words, because they give us something to do. And our desire to get out of jail has precisely become unable to give us something to do, since there is nothing we can do to satisfy it.

We can also be bored, moreover, even when we are engaged in the pursuit of desires, namely, when this pursuit consists only of unchallenging activities. And so the desire on which the susceptibility to boredom depends is a desire to confront challenges, or resistance, in the pursuit of a determinate desire. The sole presence of obstacles or resistance will not suffice to dispel boredom, arguably, if we do not really have the desires with the satisfaction of which they interfere. Hence, we must actually have the desires whose satisfaction is challenging.

To these qualifications, Nietzsche adds a final one, which is no longer

related to the explanation of boredom but is of the first importance. Although we might occasionally want desires we are powerless to satisfy, most commonly we want not only to confront resistance, but also to *overcome* it. Since power is what we experience in the successful overcoming of resistance, Nietzsche calls “will to *power*” this desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of determinate desires.

2. *The Nature of the Will to Power*

What, then, is the will to power? In his published writings, Nietzsche describes it in deliberately provocative terms: “Life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation—but why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages? [. . .] ‘Exploitation’ does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect or primitive society: it belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life” (BGE 259). Note first that “appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker,” and so on are here described as “consequences” of the pursuit of the will to power, which suggests that they might not be what that pursuit consists of. And indeed, in explicating these terms in his notes, Nietzsche explicitly emphasizes the idea of overcoming resistance, which he presents as their common defining feature: “But all expansion, incorporation, growth is striving against something that resists; movement is essentially tied up with states of displeasure; that which is here the driving force must in any event desire something else [than happiness] if it desires displeasure in this way and continually looks for it.—”(WP 704). “Expansion, incorporation, growth,” Nietzsche suggests, “is striving against something that resists.” The will to power is therefore the will to “striving against something that resists.” Since striving against is an effort to overcome, we might say that the will to power is the will to overcoming resistance.

In the last passage, 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. Furthermore, the will to power is not simply a will to *resistance*, the desire

for a condition in which some determinate desire is perpetually frustrated by resistance or obstacles to its fulfillment. There would be no “expansion, incorporation, growth” unless the striving was eventually successful. The will to power, in the last analysis, is a will to the very *activity of overcoming resistance*—“the will’s forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way” (WP 696), or “the game of resistance and victory,” which consists of “a little hindrance that is overcome and immediately followed by another little hindrance that is again overcome” (WP 699).

Thanks to this initial characterization, we can begin to sort out the complexities of Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power. Two important ideas need to be brought out, the first of which is the paradoxical claim that the will to power “desires displeasure.” To understand this idea, however, we must examine more closely the structure of the will to power. The distinctive structure of this will most clearly comes out of a consideration of its relation to other desires or drives. I begin by examining five different conceptions of this relation, all of which are ultimately unsatisfactory, and then propose my own view.

First, Nietzsche’s claim that the will to power is the “essence” of life has seemed to some to suggest that the doctrine should be understood as a form of reductionism, according to which all human drives¹⁹ may be reduced to forms of the will to power. Some of his own writings encourage the reductionist reading. For example, he describes the sex drive as “a lust for possession” (GS 14). He presents hunger as “an application of the original will to become *stronger*” (WP 702). And we are told that “the so-called drive to knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer” (WP 423), or to “appropriate the foreign” (BGE 230). The implication of this reductionism is that the will to power could not be distinguished from other drives since they all are, ultimately, its own manifestations (see WP 675).

But Nietzsche does distinguish between the will to power and other drives. For example, he describes it as the Greeks’ “strongest instinct” (TI, X 3), or the “strongest, most life-affirming drive” (GM, III 18) and often speaks of the “lust for power” as one among many desires (see HH, I 142; EH, IV 4). This suggests a second view, namely, that the will to power is merely one drive among others. This view, however, is belied by Nietzsche’s insistence that it is an essential human motivation, which raises the question of how the will to power could at once be one drive among others and occupy a privileged position in human psychology.

The third view, developed by Maudemarie Clark, proposes to answer this question by inviting us to conceive the will to power “as a second-order desire for the ability to satisfy one’s other, or first-order desires.”²⁰ If it is a second-order desire, the will to power requires the existence of other, first-order, desires for the sake of which power can be sought. This interpretation nicely explains the privileged position of will to power in comparison with other drives. Different human beings could have different drives, but they will all have the will to power, simply by virtue of having drives, because the occurrence of a certain desire will naturally spawn a desire for the “power” to satisfy it.

Clark’s proposal is eminently sensible, but precisely this might already be thought to constitute an exegetical weakness. If the will to power is just the (second-order) desire for the capacity to gratify one’s (first-order) desires, it is difficult to understand how Nietzsche could have claimed so much importance and originality for this notion. This proposal is also afflicted by more serious problems. For instance, it cannot make sense of Nietzsche’s insistence that the will to power is, by its very nature, an *indefinite* striving, or a perpetual growth or self-overcoming (WP 125, 689, 1067). If all we want in wanting power is the ability to satisfy our desires, we could in principle come to a point where our will to power is completely fulfilled, namely, when we have actually secured sufficient means to satisfy our given desires. It is, of course, possible that the satisfaction of some desires requires an indefinite striving for power. But then, indefiniteness is only an accidental feature of the pursuit of power, a function of the particular desires it is made to serve, and not, as Nietzsche clearly thinks, an essential feature of it. Furthermore, it is hard to see how, on this instrumental interpretation, the will to power could provide the principle or the core value of a new ethics (see A 2). The capacity to satisfy one’s desires would not possess any value unless the objects of at least some of these desires were independently valuable, and so the value assigned to this capacity derives from the value granted to those objects. In fact, Nietzsche goes so far as to declare that when the will to power is considered a mere “means” to something else, it is thereby “debased” (WP 707; cf. 751).²¹

A fourth possible view of the relation between the drives and the will to power consists simply in inverting the instrumental relation I just discussed. Each drive has its own distinctive specific end, which defines it as the particular drive it is. Power no longer designates the means necessary to achieve a drive’s specific end, but it now is the

generic end of each drive, to which the achievement of its specific end is merely a means. For example, knowledge is not a form of power, and power is not just the capacity to acquire knowledge, but knowledge would be a means to secure power.

In this view, power is a determinate end that can be characterized without reference to any of the specific ends of drives, such as knowledge, the achievement of which is only a means to it. Presumably, power is here to be conceived as a relation that obtains between a dominating agency and a dominated agency. An agency is dominated when its specific ends and activities are either suppressed or subordinated by the dominating agency. But such a characterization of power remains purely formal, and here lies the problem: what precisely is that power to which the pursuit of knowledge, or of the specific end of *any* other drive, would be a mere means? That knowledge can be a means to secure power seems obvious enough: my knowledge of you might give me some power over you, in the sense that it might enable me to influence your behavior. But what is here the recipient of the power achieved by means of knowledge, and in what does that power consist? It is plausible to suppose that it is another drive of mine, say the drive to seduce, which my knowledge of your character enables me to gratify more effectively. By hypothesis, however, power cannot be characterized in terms of successful seduction, since like the specific ends of all other drives, seduction is supposed to be only a means to power, and power is itself a condition whose determinate content must be describable without any reference to it. As a consequence, it becomes difficult to see how power could be characterized if it is not by reference to other drives and their specific ends.

This very difficulty inspires the last account of power and its relations to other drives I wish to consider here. We owe it to John Richardson, who has offered the most suggestive and illuminating interpretation of the will to power in recent literature. According to this interpretation, each particular drive has its own specific end, and each drive also wills power. The will to power is not, however, the tendency built into every drive to secure the necessary means to achieve its specific end. And it is not the ultimate motivation of every drive, the final end for the sake of which it pursues its specific end. Rather, the will to power designates something about the *manner* in which it pursues its specific end.²² What does it mean for a drive, like the drive to knowledge, to pursue power in connection with the pursuit of its own end? Richardson distinguishes between two possible answers to this ques-

tion. A drive can will power either as the *maximal achievement* of its specific end, or as the *development* of that end (and of the specific pattern of activity involved in pursuing it).

The drive to knowledge aims at maximal achievement when it aims at acquiring as much knowledge as possible. Richardson rejects the conception of power as maximal achievement of a drive's specific end apparently on the ground that it assumes that there could be a final state of achievement, and therefore a final satisfaction of the will to power, which Nietzsche explicitly denies: the pursuit of the will to power has the form of an indefinite growth (see WP 125, 689). Richardson accordingly favors a conception of power as development.

The development of the specific end (and distinctive activity) of a drive consists essentially of its *mastery* over other drives (BGE 6; WP 481). The chief characteristic of mastery (in contrast to another form of domination that Nietzsche calls "tyranny") is that the mastering drive does not deprive the mastered drives of their own ends and activities, but rather integrates them into the pursuit of its end. This integration is such, moreover, that the specific end of the dominant drive may become modified accordingly, by becoming enriched or refined with the ends of the mastered drives. For example, the desire to seduce might enroll the desire to know and the desire to please to the service of its end, which might then cease to be merely the end of seduction and become the end of seduction through knowledge and aesthetic appeal. And mere seduction, which does not marshal the activities of inquiry and artistic creation, would then lose its appeal. Along these lines, Nietzsche remarks that the specific ends of drives can be "sublimated" or "spiritualized" in still more far-reaching ways (see BGE 189; GM, I 8; TI, V 1; WP 312).

Richardson's account is very suggestive, but it is not without its shortcomings. In particular, it leaves out a claim Nietzsche makes explicitly and repeatedly about the will to power and which my own account emphasizes, namely, that the will to power *seeks* resistance. For instance, he declares that for those who possess the strength to satisfy it, the will to power is manifested as "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; cf. WP 656, 702–704; my emphasis). This omission has an important, if subtle, implication.

On Richardson's account, a drive's "desire to become master" simply is a tendency to develop its distinctive activity or its specific end, and this involves mastering other drives. The pursuit of this mastery may

encounter resistance, and indeed it necessarily will since other drives also desire to be master. Its will to power therefore compels the drive to overcome resistance, but overcoming this resistance is here only an instrumental requirement of development: if the drive could achieve a higher level of development without having to overcome such resistance, its will to power would still be equally satisfied. Nietzsche's claim that the will to power is a "thirst" for resistance clearly suggests, however, that the will to power cannot be satisfied unless it confronts and overcomes resistance. Richardson's account explains why its will to power requires that a drive (and the agent whose drive it is) should be prepared to confront and overcome resistance in order to achieve a higher level of development, but it does not explain why it would actually induce the drive (or the agent) to "thirst" for such resistance in order to confront and overcome it. In other words, Richardson fails to note a crucial ambiguity in the notion of a "desire to become master." It could designate a desire to the satisfaction of which overcoming resistance is a necessary means. Or it could designate a desire for the overcoming of resistance itself. In the first case, which is Richardson's view, pursuing the desire requires being prepared to overcome whatever resistance presents itself, but certainly not deliberately seeking it. In the second case, which is the view I think we should favor, pursuing the desire requires actually and deliberately seeking resistance to overcome.

Moreover, there is little unambiguous textual evidence that Nietzsche's talk of "power," "growth," or "incorporation" can be interpreted in terms of Richardson's concept of development. It is not clear, for example, that "mastery" and "incorporation" as he understands them are ultimate ends themselves, instead of simply more effective instruments of sheer domination than "tyranny" and "suppression." It is, by contrast, quite explicitly that he characterizes power in terms of overcoming resistance. I do not deny that a drive, or an agent, may undergo the kind of development of which Richardson speaks, but it will only be a by-product, or consequence of the activity of overcoming resistance, in which the nature of power ultimately resides. Finally, it is worth noting that when Nietzsche puts forth the will to power as the basis for his revaluation of life-negating values, it is the definition of power as overcoming of resistance that he explicitly invokes (see A 2). And we shall see later that the claim that this particular concept of power is the object of an important human aspiration supplies the key to his strategy for overcoming nihilistic despair.

In my view, then, the will to power is the will to the overcoming of

resistance. This definition dictates a particular conception of the relation between it and other drives. So defined, the concept of power is, in and of itself, devoid of any *determinate content*. It gets a determinate content only from its relation to some determinate desire or drive. Something constitutes a resistance only in relation to a determinate end one desires to realize. For example, a recalcitrant puzzle is an obstacle to the desire to understand, and the strength of an opposing player is resistance against the desire to win. Accordingly, the will to power cannot be satisfied unless the agent has a desire for something else than power. This is the view I favor. The will to power therefore has the structure of a *second-order desire*: it is a desire whose object includes another (first-order) desire. It is, specifically, a desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of some determinate first-order desire.

This conception of the will to power explains why it cannot be the only drive, but it does not make quite clear (as Clark's account did) why it should be the "essence" of life, or at least an essential fixture of human psychology. As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Clark's view is rather complex. She maintains, on the one hand, that the will to power is an essential fixture of human psychology, insofar as any particular first-order desire spawns the second-order desire for the power to satisfy it. On the other hand, she also argues finely that Nietzsche's claims that "life" or "the world" is essentially will to power must be expressions of his values rather than of his beliefs about the nature of reality. But she does not specify why this latter claim should not apply to Nietzsche's view of human psychology as well, why, that is to say, his claim that the will to power is an essential human motivation is not itself "a vision of life from the viewpoint of his values."²³ This could be chalked up to the fact that her analysis of the will to power allows for a plausible account of its centrality in human psychology. Since I disagree precisely with this analysis, I am inclined to propose the following qualification.

Nietzsche certainly considers that the will to power is an important motivation that is necessary to explain a significant range of psychological phenomena that appear distinctively human. I have already indicated how the notion explains the susceptibility to boredom, and I will show, at the end of this chapter, how it is also necessary to account for cruelty and asceticism and their surprisingly multifarious manifestations in human behavior. I would like to suggest that, when he 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.

3. *The Paradox of Will to Power*

Let me now turn to the paradoxical claim that the will to power “desires displeasure” or “suffering.”²⁴ To make sense of this strange view, it will help to consider it against the backdrop of Schopenhauer’s conception of suffering in terms of resistance to satisfaction: “We call its [the will’s] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, *suffering* (Leiden)” (WWR, I 56, p. 309). As our examination of Schopenhauerian pessimism revealed, the aspiration to happiness ultimately amounts to the aspiration to eliminate all suffering. This is where Nietzsche radically departs from Schopenhauer: “Human beings do not seek pleasure and avoid displeasure. [. . .] What human beings want, what every smallest organism wants, is an increase of power; driven by that will they seek resistance, they need something that opposes it—Displeasure, as an obstacle to their will to power, is therefore a normal fact [. . .]; human beings do not avoid it, they are rather in continual need of it [. . .]” (WP 702; cf. 656). The will to power, insofar as it is a will to the overcoming of resistance, must necessarily also will the resistance to overcome. Since suffering is defined in terms of resistance, then the will to power indeed “desires displeasure.”

We can find in Nietzsche’s writings two possible justifications of the claim that the satisfaction of the will to power requires dissatisfaction. Most commonly, the will to power involves a desire for resistance by virtue of being a desire for *power*, which requires actively seeking resistance to overcome. But on some occasions, Nietzsche also suggests that the will to power involves a desire for resistance simply by virtue of being a second-order desire, or a desire to *desire*. In this view, the will to power would be, in part, a desire to be moved or stirred by a desire, and being so moved requires that the latter desire remain, if only for a moment, unsatisfied. To have (and experience the pull of) a desire, in other words, requires resistance to its satisfaction for, as Nietzsche remarks, “*wanting* to have always comes to an end with *having*” (GS 363).

In either case, however, one might be tempted to think that this dissatisfaction need not cause displeasure, or a *feeling* of dissatisfaction. For example, Kierkegaard’s seducer simply wants to enjoy the stirrings

of his desire for Cordelia, but he does not particularly care to satisfy this desire. Indeed, he defers gratification for as long as possible and seems rather disappointed when it can no longer be postponed. The seducer thus seems able to fulfill his desire to desire and be thoroughly contented by it.²⁵

This superficial interpretation of the seducer's predicament is confused. For it assumes that it is possible simply to desire to have desires without also desiring to be moved to pursue their determinate objects. The confusion bears on the nature of what it is to have a desire. To have a desire just *is* to be moved to satisfy it. I cannot have a desire for some determinate object and be indifferent to its possession. In other words, I cannot have a desire and not suffer from its frustration. Hence, the desire to desire cannot be satisfied without causing the agent significant displeasure, for its satisfaction requires that the agent have an unsatisfied desire.

Nietzsche is fond of bringing out certain sorts of difficult ideas in short, aphoristic statements. By urging his readers to read his aphorisms very "slowly," and "ruminate" them (D, Preface 5; GM, Preface 8), he invites them to consider that their surface meaning might conceal a deeper, often more perplexing one. In one such aphorism, he declares: "In the end one loves one's desire and not what is desired" (BGE 175). On the face of it, the statement is rather straightforward: we ultimately want the stirrings of desire, not what the desires are for. On further reflection, however, it appears that this claim cannot, strictly speaking, be true. The desire to have desires (the "love" of desires) is the desire to be stirred by some desire. But one cannot be stirred by a desire unless one actually cares about (one might say "loves") its determinate object. As a consequence, one cannot "love one's desire" without also loving "what is desired."

The two features of the will to power I have been describing—that its satisfaction requires that the agent desire something else than power, and that its satisfaction requires displeasure—combine to give it a complex, indeed paradoxical, structure, of which Nietzsche is keenly aware. The will to power is a will to the overcoming of resistance. Since resistance is always defined in relation to determinate ends, the desire for resistance to overcome cannot be satisfied unless the agent also desires these determinate ends. For obstacles to the realization of these ends will not count as resistance for the agent, and so will not cause him suffering, unless he actually desires these ends. Yet, in willing power, he must also desire resistance to their realization. And so the agent

who wills power must want *both* certain determinate ends *and* resistance to their realization: “That I must be struggle and a becoming and an end and an opposition to ends²⁶—ah, whoever guesses what is my will should also guess on what *crooked* paths it must proceed. Whatever I create and however much I love it, soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it” (Z, II 12; first emphasis mine).

A passage from the notebooks articulates an even more radical version of the paradox and also alludes to the opposition to Schopenhauer: “It is *not* the satisfaction of the will [*die Befriedigung des Willens*] 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” (WP 696; cf. 656; GS 56).

If we assume that Nietzsche defines pleasure here, like Schopenhauer, in terms of desire satisfaction,²⁷ then the central claim of this passage is, I believe, clear enough: the will is not satisfied unless it is dissatisfied (“unless it has opponents and resistance”). By contraposition, the claim is that the satisfaction of the will implies dissatisfaction. In attempting to elucidate the significance of this paradox, we ought to proceed carefully. We should begin by distinguishing two versions of the paradox. In the weaker version, the claim is that the satisfaction of the will to power implies *some* dissatisfaction in the agent (though not necessarily dissatisfaction of the will to power itself). On the stronger version, the claim is that the satisfaction of the will to power implies *its own* dissatisfaction.

Consider the weaker version of the paradox: the satisfaction of the will to power implies *some* dissatisfaction. This follows from the definition of the will to power as the will to the overcoming of resistance that I discussed earlier. Willing power implies willing to have determinate desires *and* resistance to their satisfaction. Thus, an agent’s will to power is satisfied when he has determinate desires that are dissatisfied (when there is resistance against their satisfaction). On this reading, the paradox involved in the claim that “the satisfaction of the will implies dissatisfaction” is resolved simply by assuming that the terms in opposition have different referents. Thus, we assume that, in the first instance, “satisfaction” is of the second-order desire to pursue determinate first-order desires (the will to power), while in the second instance, “dissatisfaction” is of some determinate first-order desire. Al-

though this weaker reading is supported by other texts in Nietzsche, the present passage clearly invites the stronger reading: the satisfaction of the will to power implies *its own* dissatisfaction. How might we make sense of this stronger version of the paradox?

To do so, we must first remember that the will to power is not a bare desire to desire, which would amount to a desire for some determinate end and for *resistance* to its realization. The will to power is, rather, the desire for the *overcoming* of resistance in the pursuit of a determinate desire. The will to power will not be satisfied unless three conditions are met: there is some first-order desire for a determinate end, there is resistance to the realization of this determinate end, *and* there is actual success in overcoming this resistance. But then, the conditions of the satisfaction of the will to power do indeed imply its dissatisfaction. The overcoming of resistance eliminates it, but the presence of such resistance is a necessary condition of satisfaction of the will to power. Hence, the satisfaction of the will to power implies its own dissatisfaction, in the sense that it necessarily brings it about.

I may put the same point in yet another way. Power, for Nietzsche, is not a state or a condition, but an activity, the activity of confronting and overcoming resistance. Now, we may distinguish between the desire for the *activity* of pursuing a determinate end and the desire for the *determinate end* of that activity. Nietzsche apparently believes that to be genuinely engaged in an activity one must actually care about realizing its determinate end. So, the desire for the activity is, at least in part, a desire to desire its end. Hence, the desire for activity will not be satisfied unless the agent also is moved by a desire to achieve its end, and this implies that the agent will strive to achieve this end and will not be satisfied until it is achieved. But the achievement of its end also brings the activity to a close. Hence, the pursuit of the desire for activity implies a pursuit of the end of this activity which, when successful, brings the activity to a close, and so frustrates, as it were, the very desire that motivated it in the first place.

Some of Nietzsche's favorite metaphors to describe the pursuit of power nicely illustrate this distinctive character of the pursuit of power. They include, most notably, the Greek "agon (contest)" (KSA, I pp. 783–792; cf. D 38; TI, II 8, IX 23) and "war" (Z, I 10; TI, IX 38; EH, I 7; A 2). Consider now what Nietzsche urges on those who pursue power in the case of war: "You should love peace as a means to new wars—and the short peace more than the long. [. . .] Let your work be a struggle. Let your peace be a victory!" (Z, I 10).²⁸ Let us interpret

this claim in terms of the more general analogy with competitive games, which is common to both metaphors.²⁹

In the passage I just quoted, Nietzsche points to a peculiar paradox that affects playing competitive games. To bring out this paradox, we might imagine that Nietzsche would subscribe to the Olympic motto, “It is not the winning, it is the taking part that counts”—provided, however, we treat it as one of his aphorisms, whose surface meaning conceals a different one. On the face of it, the statement is straightforward enough: all that matters, or all that should matter, is the taking part, the playing. From another viewpoint, however, the statement is false. For one cannot really “take part” or compete unless one actually cares about winning—that is, unless winning matters to one. Nietzsche’s conception of the pursuit of power therefore requires a distinction of viewpoints. For the agent who contemplates playing a game, it may well be that all that matters is participation. But for the agent who is engaged in the game, winning must matter, since having this motivational focus is precisely what constitutes his engagement in the game. Protagonists do not really play, therefore, unless they do everything they can to achieve victory. But in achieving victory they also deprive themselves of a game, frustrating thereby their desire to play: “Alas, who was not vanquished in his victory?” (Z, III 12[30]). So, since those who desire to play must necessarily care about winning, they should also want their victory to be short lived and to be an opportunity for new games.

What is the implication of this full-blown paradox for the pursuit of power? Nietzsche describes it in the following terms: “Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it” (Z, II 12). He also characterizes the pursuit of power as a perpetual cycle of “creation” and “destruction” (see Z, I 17, II 2, III 12; WP 1067). He who wills power must not, strictly speaking, destroy what he has created, or hate what he loved. Rather, he must “overcome” what he loved or created. His will to power soon induces him to find any given creative achievement, any attained object of a determinate desire, no longer satisfying, no longer enough. The agent in pursuit of power does not seek *achievements*, so to speak, but *achieving*. But he cannot simply undo what he has done and do it again: since the resistance to doing it has been overcome already, overcoming it again would no longer count as genuine achieving. Living according to the will to power is not living the life of a Sisyphus. What he needs are fresh, new, perhaps greater challenges. And this explains

why the pursuit of power assumes the form of *growth*, or *self-overcoming*. Life, Nietzsche frequently tells us, is will to power, and of life he says: “To have and to want to have more—*growth*, in one word—that is life itself” (WP 125; cf. 704). “And life itself,” he has Zarathustra proclaim, “confided this secret to me: ‘Behold,’ it said, ‘I am *that which must always overcome itself*’” (Z, II 12).³⁰

Consider one of Nietzsche’s most common examples: the will to power as it relates to the desire to know. It requires the overcoming of resistance to knowledge and understanding, as in the actual resolution of problems and discovery of new worlds. But such achievements will ultimately leave the will to power dissatisfied and looking for more resistance to overcome. Obviously, it would hardly satisfy the will to power to go over problems that have already been solved, or travel again through worlds already discovered. What it needs, rather, is new problems to solve and worlds as yet unknown to discover. Thus, the satisfaction of the will to power in the pursuit of knowledge necessarily produces a continuous *growth* in knowledge. It is also a perpetual “self-overcoming,” where self-overcoming must be understood not as overcoming of the self³¹ but as overcoming of the *overcoming* itself, the movement whereby the individual in pursuit of power, having attained a certain level of achievement, proceeds to outdo itself.

In claiming that the conditions of the satisfaction of the will to power bring about its dissatisfaction, then, Nietzsche is not saying that the pursuit of the will to power is self-defeating or self-undermining. It is plainly possible to satisfy the will to power—one only has to engage in the successful overcoming of resistance. What I have called the strong paradox of the will to power is meant to reveal one of its most distinctive features, namely that it is a kind of desire that does not allow for *permanent* (once-and-for-all) satisfaction. Its pursuit, on the contrary, necessarily assumes the form of an indefinite, perpetually renewed striving (see GS 310). Insatiability is an essential feature of the will to power.

The analysis of the will to power I have just developed explains why it is tempting, if misleading, to *define* power either in terms of *control* or *domination*, or in terms of *ability* or *capacity*. Increased control or domination, or developed abilities or capacities, are natural and frequent *consequences* of the pursuit of power. To be successful, the effort to overcome resistance will indeed require ever greater abilities and capacities, and when successful, it will result in some sort of increased control and domination. But, as I have argued, it would be a mistake

to see in those common and perhaps necessary consequences of the pursuit of power its very essence.

4. *The Psychology of Will to Power: Two Case Studies*

On the Genealogy of Morals is a book ostensibly devoted to exposing the psychological origins of modern morality. Specifically, Nietzsche shows how the cardinal phenomena of morality—the distinction between good and evil, bad conscience, and asceticism—are all rooted in the will to power. If they are compelling, these “psychological studies,” as Nietzsche calls them (EH, III “Genealogy of Morals”), should provide support to the view that the will to power, as I have described it here, is indeed an important human motivation. Since I discuss Nietzsche’s account of the origin of the distinction between good and evil in Chapter 6, I will focus here on the other two studies, which examine, respectively, cruelty and asceticism.³² I will argue that each of these studies may be fruitfully considered as a criticism and improvement of Schopenhauer’s own account of these phenomena, and that the concept of the will to power in terms of which Nietzsche explains them is very precisely the concept I have analyzed in the previous section.

It might be perplexing that Nietzsche should try to establish the importance of the will to power as a human motivation by showing that it is necessary to explain psychological phenomena that are as apparently marginal as cruelty and asceticism. But he never tires of pointing out that cruelty and asceticism are, in fact, not marginal phenomena. On the contrary, they are far more central to our psychological life than our squeamish sensibilities may be prepared to recognize, and they assume the most unexpected guises. To mention only one notorious example, Nietzsche describes the desire to know as a form of cruelty: “Indeed, any insistence on profundity and thoroughness is a violation, a desire to hurt the basic will of the spirit which unceasingly strives for the apparent and superficial—in all desire to know there is a drop of cruelty” (BGE 230; cf. 231).

I. Cruelty. The phenomenon of cruelty, along with analogous experiences of taking pleasure in the sufferings of another (revenge, Schadenfreude [malicious joy at the misfortune of others], and the like) poses a problem for Schopenhauer’s brand of psychological hedonism. According to this view, the ultimate motive of all human action is the avoidance of pain. But it is hard to see, at first glance, how the infliction of suffering on another could be motivated by the desire to avoid pain

in oneself. Schopenhauer concedes that making others suffer might be a necessary means to secure a certain end; for example, I might have to torment others in order to get something I want from them. But he insists that these are not cases of cruelty, for in an individual's cruelty "the suffering of another is no longer a means for attaining the ends of his own will, but an end in itself" (WWR, I 65, p. 363; cf. BM 14, pp. 136 and 145). Thus, the phenomenon of cruelty and associated phenomena pose a challenge to the explanatory adequacy of psychological hedonism. Schopenhauer attempts to meet this challenge with the following suggestion: "Since man is a manifestation of the will illuminated by the clearest knowledge, he is always measuring and comparing the actual and felt satisfaction of his will with the merely possible satisfaction put before him by knowledge. From this springs envy: every privation [*Entbehrung*] is infinitely aggravated by the pleasure of others, and relieved by the knowledge that others also endure the same privation. [. . .] The calling to mind of sufferings greater than our own stills their pain; the sight of another's suffering alleviates our own" (WWR, I 65, pp. 363–364). According to this suggestion, psychological hedonism can accommodate cruelty and other, comparable phenomena by appealing to the observation that "the actual and felt satisfaction of his will" may be affected by a reflective comparison of it "with the merely possible satisfaction put before him by knowledge." Thus, suffering, which is the experience of deprivation, may be aggravated by the sight of the well-being of others. Conversely, the comparison of our own deprivation with the greater deprivations of others might alleviate our own suffering. In sum, suffering is deprivation, and deprivation is partly a function of "knowledge" insofar as we feel deprived in proportion to what we believe we could have. Hence, the contemplation of the comparatively greater sufferings of others is a source of relief since it can make us feel less deprived.

This explanation is adequate for phenomena such as *Schadenfreude*, but it seems less convincing for cases like revenge and cruelty, for two reasons. First, revenge and cruelty consist not just in the *contemplation* of the sufferings of others, as does *Schadenfreude*, but in the *inflicting* of suffering upon them (BM 14, p. 136). There is, presumably, enough misery in the world that we could always find others more miserable than we are without having to make them miserable ourselves. Of course, there are also many who are better off than we are and might constitute painful reminders of our deprivation. We might, accordingly, want to make them suffer as well. But even this observation will not

suffice, for Schopenhauer himself remarks that cruelty will not rarely be found in individuals who are already far better off than most people (“in the Neros and Domitians, in the African Deys, in Robespierre, and so on” [WWR, I 65, p. 364]). So, the relief we experience by comparing our pain with the (greater) pain of others does not convincingly explain the distinctive pleasure we take at *making* others suffer, since we can be tempted to cruelty toward others who already are considerably worse off than we are.

Second, there is Schopenhauer’s claim that cruelty is a “delight at the suffering of another which has not sprung from egoism but is disinterested.” Cruelty, he declares, is in fact analogous to compassion insofar as it “too is without self-interest,” and differs from it only insofar as it “makes its ultimate aim the *pain* of another,” rather than his well-being (BM 16, p. 145). He apparently believes that an individual bent on cruelty could deliberately *thwart* his own self-interest and live a life of misery in order to make others suffer. However plausible we find this suggestion, the fact that Schopenhauer accepts it weakens even more the explanatory force of his psychological hedonism. If there is no limit to the amount of pain the cruel individual is prepared to endure in order to inflict pain on others, then it is hard to see how his cruelty could be motivated ultimately by the desire to diminish his own pain by comparing it with the pain of others.

Schopenhauer himself never owns up to these difficulties. But his explanation of cruelty already acknowledges implicitly the shortcomings of his brand of hedonism. The cruel individual, he writes, “seeks indirectly the alleviation of which he is incapable directly, in other words, he tries to mitigate his own suffering by the sight of another’s, and at the same time recognizes this as an expression of his power” (WWR, I 65, p. 364). Incapable of alleviating his pain “directly” by the satisfaction of his desires, the cruel individual attempts to do so “indirectly” by inflicting greater pain on others. Schopenhauer, however, feels the need to supplement this explanation with a conjecture, which he never develops himself, but which Nietzsche takes to point to a correct account: the cruel individual is ultimately motivated by a *will to power*.

Nietzsche’s most thorough analysis of cruelty is located in the context of an investigation of the notion of punishment. He argues that, at its inception, the idea of punishment was understood as *compensation*, analogous to the repayment of a debt. Thus, the inflicting of pain on the perpetrator of a crime was a form of compensation for the

victim. He marvels at the strangeness of this idea: “Let us be clear as to the logic of this form of compensation: it is strange enough. An equivalence is provided by the creditor’s receiving, in place of a literal compensation for an injury (thus, in place of money, land, possessions of any kind), a recompense in the form of a kind of *pleasure*—the pleasure of being allowed to vent his power freely upon one who is powerless, the voluptuous pleasure ‘*de faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire,*’ the enjoyment of violation. [. . .] The compensation, then, consists in a warrant for, and title to cruelty” (GM, II 5; cf. 6). There are, as it turns out, two strange features in this conception of punishment. One is “the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* and can actually be paid back, even if only through the *pain* of the culprit” (GM, II 4). In other words, every injury and every compensation may be converted into the universal currency of pain and pleasure: thus, the loss of possessions, or of a loved one, has its equivalent in a specifiable amount of the pleasure we take at making the perpetrator suffer.

The strange feature of cruelty Nietzsche is most anxious to examine is precisely that which Schopenhauer’s psychological hedonism could not adequately explain: the idea that we could take pleasure at “*making suffer*” (GM, II 6; the emphasis is Nietzsche’s). The conjecture Nietzsche offers, following Schopenhauer’s inadvertent suggestion, is that *making* others suffer, in contrast to the mere contemplation of their sufferings, increases the feeling of power. To shore up the connection between cruelty and the will to power, Nietzsche brings out two interesting observations. First, he remarks: “This enjoyment will be the greater the lower the creditor stands in the social order, and can easily appear to him as a most delicious morsel, indeed as a foretaste of higher rank. In ‘punishing’ the debtor, the creditor participates in a *right of the masters*: at last he, too, may experience for once the exalted sensation of being allowed to despise and mistreat someone as ‘beneath’ him” (GM, II 5). Conversely, someone who is already powerful will find less gratification in making others suffer and might thus become more inclined to mercy: “it goes without saying that mercy remains the privilege of the most powerful man” (GM, II 10). Both of these observations are best explained by the assumption that the pleasure taken in “*making suffer*” is essentially an increase of the feeling of power. The increase is greater for those who are less powerful than those they make suffer, and lower, or perhaps even nonexistent, in those who already are (or feel) more powerful (whence their inclination to mercy).

Cruelty is gratifying, therefore, not just because we merely contemplate another's suffering but because we *make* him suffer and, in the process, experience an increase in our feeling of power: "to practice cruelty is to enjoy the highest gratification of the feeling of power" (D 18). This explanation of cruelty remains compatible with a conception of power in terms of control or domination. A subtle feature of cruelty shows why we should rule it out. Why is making another *suffer* necessary to generate an increase in the feeling of power? Why is seeing to it that he does something we want him to do (without the infliction of suffering) not sufficient to shore up our sense of power over him? The answer, I think, is found in the analysis of the concept of power I presented in the previous section.

Power, for Nietzsche, designates a *process of overcoming resistance*, and not simply a state in which our will encounters no resistance. Making others suffer is a form of the will to power insofar as it necessarily involves overcoming the resistance their will is bound to oppose to the prospect of suffering. If others do what we want them to do because they happen to want the same thing themselves, they oppose no resistance, and we experience no increase in the feeling of power. Cruelty promises such an increase, by contrast, because it promises resistance to overcome, namely, the will of the other, which necessarily rebels against the suffering inflicted upon it.³³ This may help to explain why when the powerful are cruel (the Neros, the Domitians, and so on), they tend to reach for paroxysms of cruelty: already powerful, they must create greater resistance in others by threatening them with greater sufferings, in order to derive an increased feeling of power from the infliction of such sufferings.

II. *Asceticism.* While cruelty is, from the point of view of Schopenhauer's brand of psychological hedonism, simply hard to explain, asceticism, understood as the voluntary infliction of suffering upon oneself, is downright incomprehensible. It is difficult enough to see how making *others* suffer could be motivated by the desire to avoid or alleviate pain in oneself; but it makes absolutely no sense to claim that making *oneself* suffer is also motivated by that desire. How could one derive relief from one's own suffering by inflicting more of it on oneself?

Schopenhauer assigns a prominent role to asceticism in his doctrine of the "denial of the will to live" and resignation. The nature of this role, however, is left quite unclear. As we shall see in the next chapter,

resignation is the state in which the will itself has been renounced, and the satisfaction of the concrete desires that manifest it has become a matter of indifference. Asceticism, by contrast, is *voluntary* deprivation, or the deliberate denial of satisfaction of one's basic needs. On the one hand, asceticism is "the phenomenon by which this [resignation] becomes manifest" (WWR, I 68, p. 380), while on the other, practices like "voluntary and complete chastity" constitute "the first step in asceticism or the denial of the will to live" (*ibid.*). Thus, asceticism is now an expression of resignation, or even resignation itself, and now a preparation for it.

In the next chapter, I will argue that, in the most compelling interpretation of Schopenhauer's view, resignation is a state induced *directly* by a fully appropriated knowledge of the "essential vanity" and "contradiction" of the will to live: it does not seem possible for someone to be convinced of the vain and conflicted character of the will and continue to will nevertheless. In the context of this interpretation, neither of the two views of asceticism I just distinguished makes much sense. Asceticism cannot be resignation itself, or a manifestation of it, for the ascetic remains *concerned* to deny satisfaction to desires to which the fully resigned individual has become utterly indifferent. And it is hard to see how *voluntary* deprivation could induce resignation: how can I become convinced of the impossibility of satisfying my desires, if *I* am myself responsible for their continued frustration? Thus, asceticism is already difficult to explain in Schopenhauer's own terms.

Nevertheless, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche proposes a "scientific" explanation of asceticism that still borrows its terms from Schopenhauerian psychological hedonism. Far from aiming at a negation of the will to live, the "self-torture" to which ascetics subject themselves is "a means by which these natures combat the general enervation of their will to live (their nerves): they employ the most painful stimulants and cruelties so as, at least for a time, to emerge out of [. . .] boredom and torpor" (HH, I 140; cf. 142). But Nietzsche's discussion there is already shot through with allusions to a special motive—a "lust for power"—underlying asceticism. For example, he writes: "The most usual means the ascetic and saint employs to make his life nonetheless endurable and enjoyable consists in occasionally waging war and the alternation of victory and defeat. To this end, he requires an opponent, and he finds him in the so-called 'enemy within.' He exploits especially his tendency to vanity, to a thirst for honors and

domination, then his sensual desires, in an attempt to see life as a continuous battle and himself as a battlefield” (HH, I 141; cf. 138, 142).

To explain how this “continuous battle” staves off boredom and provides some sort of pleasure or enjoyment, Nietzsche introduces the peculiar idea of “pleasure in *emotion as such*” (HH, I 140). Apparently, he believes that the experience of strong emotions, regardless of their particular content, is the source of a certain kind of enjoyment. He contrasts this pleasure with the “boredom” of the individual whose “enervation” has made him incapable of being moved or engaged by most “stimulants”: confronted with the dullness of boredom, even painful emotions eventually look appealing. The “pleasure” we take even at painful emotions, in other words, lies in the fact that they spare us the unpleasantness of boredom.

The psychological hypothesis of “pleasure in emotion as such” is unsatisfactory, however, because it still fails to explain *asceticism*. The effort to stave off boredom by means of strong emotions does not require that these emotions be painful ones, such as the emotions associated with ascetic self-denial: wounded vanity, humiliation, and the feelings associated with the frustration of sensual desires. Obviously, that would merely replace one kind of pain with another, and Schopenhauer’s psychological hedonism seems to rule out this particular strategy: if we are to distract ourselves from the torments of boredom through the experience of powerful emotions, hedonism only permits that they be pleasant ones. If the emotions of ascetic self-denial are to constitute a permissible strategy to avoid boredom, we must suppose that such emotions are in fact *pleasurable*. The task, then, becomes that of explaining why these emotions of self-denial, though undeniably painful, remain appealing nonetheless.

Eventually, Nietzsche comes to recognize that the creation of conflict, which he originally interpreted as a means to generate strong emotions, should in fact be understood as an opportunity for increasing the feeling of *power*. The ascetic does not take pleasure at painful emotions because they are emotions, nor, obviously, because they are painful, but because in subjecting himself to them, the ascetic overcomes a certain resistance in himself and increases his feeling of power.

Both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer contrast strictly *ascetic* self-denial from a kind of *instrumental* self-denial. In the latter case, the voluntary deprivation is simply a means to the achievement of some further end, whereas in the former, the deprivation is the end itself (WWR, I 68,

pp. 380–381 and GM, III 8–11). Nietzsche emphasizes the eminently paradoxical character of ascetic self-denial:

For an ascetic life is a self-contradiction: 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; 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-constitutedness, decay, pain, mischance, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, self-mortification, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice. All this is in the highest degree paradoxical: we stand before a discord that *wants* to be discordant, that *enjoys* itself in this suffering. (GM, III 10; cf. TI, V 3)

Just as cruelty was seeking the suffering of others not as a means but as an end in itself, asceticism is seeking one's own suffering not as means but as an end in itself. There is nothing paradoxical in depriving oneself of something as a means to get something else; but there is something "paradoxical in the highest degree" in depriving oneself for the sake of deprivation.

Asceticism, Nietzsche suggests, is "cruelty towards [oneself]" (GM, III 10) and offers the same explanation of its appeal as he did for that of cruelty. The ascetic derives his pleasure not from the pain he inflicts upon himself but from the inflicting itself. Asceticism is appealing because it promises an *increase in the feeling of power*—not through overcoming the resistance of the will of others, but, this time, through overcoming the resistance of one's own will. What is at stake in all the forms of "cruelty turned *against oneself*," Nietzsche declares, is "growth, in one word—or, more precisely, the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increased power" (BGE 230; cf. D 113). The ascetic enjoys his self-inflicted suffering not as suffering but as a victory over himself.

Cruelty and asceticism are best explained by the desire to overcome resistance, but resistance to the achievement of what particular end? In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche does not clearly distinguish between the formal concept of power as the overcoming of resistance and a substantive concept of power as the domination of others. One could have the domination of others as a determinate end and also will the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of this end. What matters for my present purposes is that cruelty (and therefore asceticism) cannot be explained *solely* by the desire to dominate others. This desire could arguably be satisfied without *making others suffer*. For example, I could

establish my domination over others by offering them bread and games. To make others *suffer* is to ensure they will oppose resistance to my desire to subjugate them. Hence, cruelty must be motivated by the desire to have resistance to overcome in the pursuit of domination. Since I can presumably achieve self-mastery without making myself suffer, the same goes for asceticism.

Overcoming Despair

What is good?—All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man.

—THE ANTI-CHRIST, 2

On the face of it, the project of a revaluation of all values is eminently paradoxical. A revaluation presupposes values in terms of which it is conducted, but it seems that if we are to reevaluate *all* (or, as Nietzsche sometimes says, the “highest”) values, we deprive ourselves precisely of all possible terms of revaluation. By calling all values into question, we seem to be left with no value to underwrite this revaluation. Any adequate interpretation of Nietzschean revaluation must include a resolution of this paradox.

Nietzsche declares that the “principle [*Prinzip*]” or “standard [*Maßstab*]” of the revaluation of values is the *will to power*: it is, in particular, the “standard by which the value of moral evaluation is to be determined” (WP 391), where “moral” values are precisely the dominant values of which nihilism is the consequence. Unsurprisingly, the book he planned to write until the very end of his productive life is often given the title “The Will to Power. Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values” (GM, III 27; cf. WP 69n). And *The Anti-Christ*, which he considered the first installment in the execution of this project (see EH, III “The Twilight of the Idols” 3), opens with a repudiation of traditional conceptions of happiness and the claim that the good is “all that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man” (A 2; cf. 6). Furthermore, it is quite explicitly by virtue of his will to power, as I have characterized it in the previous chapter, that the “human of the future” will be able to reevaluate the ideal out of which nihilism inevitably grows: “this human of the future who will redeem us from the previous ideal as much as from that *which had to grow out of it*, from the great disgust, from the will to nothingness” must be strong, and therefore “a *different* kind of spirit than likely to appear

in this present age: spirits strengthened by wars and victories, for whom conquering, adventure, danger, pain have become a need” (GM, II 24). A proper understanding of the project of revaluation, then, must account for its connection to the doctrine of the will to power.

The present chapter attempts to meet each of these two challenges. In the first section, I consider several proposals designed to solve the paradox of a revaluation of all values and proceed to develop a view that draws on my exploration of Nietzsche’s metaethics in Chapter 2. In the second section, I argue that in borrowing from Schopenhauer his conception of the prevalent values and ideals to be revaluated, Nietzsche indicates that the focus of his revaluation is the *condemnation of suffering*. The concept of will to power is the principle of this revaluation because it alters dramatically our understanding of the place and significance of suffering in human life. In the third section, I describe Nietzsche’s actual execution of his project of revaluation—I focus on his critique of the “morality of compassion” and of the conception of happiness as “contentment” or “resignation,” as well as on his elaboration of the ideal of human greatness. And in the fourth section, I examine the contribution of *genealogical inquiry* to the revaluation of values.

I. On the Possibility of a Revaluation of *All* Values

Nietzsche describes his project as “a revaluation of *all* values.” This is perplexing in two respects. We might wonder, in the first place, why Nietzsche wants to reevaluate *all* values, since, as I have argued, he is really interested in the revaluation of the “*highest* values,” in particular the so-called moral values, of which nihilistic despair is “the logical conclusion.” He notes that a revaluation of the highest values actually amounts to a revaluation of all values: “Moral values have hitherto been the highest values: would anybody call this into question?—If we remove these values from this position, we alter *all* values: the principle of their order of rank hitherto is thus overthrown” (WP 1006). The highest values, remember, condition the value of all other values, in the sense that the realization of a lower value has no value unless these highest values are themselves realized. If the highest values are overthrown, then it is indeed the value of all values, or their “rank” in our hierarchy of values, that is altered.

The project of a revaluation of all values is perplexing in another respect as well: its very possibility is questionable. A revaluation pre-

supposes values in terms of which it is conducted: Nietzsche maintains that the “principle” of his revaluation is the will to power. But it seems that if we reevaluate all values, we deprive ourselves precisely of all possible terms of revaluation. In particular, we seem to deprive ourselves of the means of establishing the value of power.¹ In sum, the problem is the following. Revaluation presupposes a principle in terms of which it is conducted. This principle cannot be one of the existing (“old”) values, since they are to be reevaluated. Nietzsche claims that the principle of revaluation is *power*. If power is not one of the existing values, then where does it come from?

One possible solution to this difficulty consists in supposing that by “all values,” Nietzsche really and only means all (first-order) *substantive* values, or values bearing directly on how life should be lived. The value of power would then have to be established independently of all existing substantive values. The value of power could be established through a combination of (second-order) *metaethical* considerations, concerning the source of the normative authority of values, with relevant *descriptive* considerations. The scholarly literature supplies the elements for four variants of this strategy.

I call the first variant *ethical voluntarism*. The metaethical consideration on which it rests is a certain interpretation of Nietzschean perspectivism, according to which the absence of “moral facts” removes all rational constraints on what values we may, or may not, legitimately choose to hold. Ethical voluntarism maintains not only that values are arbitrary choices, but also that the normative authority of these values lies in their being willed by the agent whose values they are. This voluntarism would thus give Nietzsche the license to declare (“create”) power a value, and to reevaluate all (traditional) values by its light.² For instance, a section in which he rejects the idea of “universal [practical] law” concludes with the following exhortation: “Let us therefore limit ourselves to the purification of our opinions and valuations and to the *creation of our own new tables of what is good*, and let us stop brooding about the ‘moral value of our actions!’” (GS 335). And he who creates new values “breaks tablets and old values” (Z, III 12[26]).

A second variant is *ethical fictionalism*. Fictionalism also involves the claim that the dominant values do not enjoy objective standing, but are instead subjective creations. They are central elements in an elaborate game of make-believe of our own invention. We are therefore not bound to those values by objective fact or by the requirements of practical reason, but we are free to alter them and, so to speak, to change

the rules of the game, or simply to play another game altogether. Unlike voluntarism, fictionalism rejects the claim that the normative authority of values has its source in the agent's will. Their normative authority depends here on the (now fictional) objective standing we take them to have.

The third variant is *ethical naturalism*, with its distinctive metaethical principle that a conception of how human beings ought to live (the human good) is derived from a conception of what they are (human nature). Nietzsche would infer his claim that the good for human beings is power from his distinctive conception of human nature in terms of the will to power. This view of the good would in turn underwrite a revaluation of all currently dominant (Christian) values, which may well themselves be grounded in a form of ethical naturalism but are based on a mistaken conception of human nature.

The fourth variant is a version of (Humean) *motivational internalism*. The metaethical core of internalism is the view that an agent has a reason to act only if she has a desire that will be served or furthered by her so acting. This principle, together with the claim that human beings do desire power, would lead to the conclusion that power is a good. Nietzsche would then have to demonstrate that power is a value of a high enough rank to serve as the principle of a revaluation of other values, such as the dominant Christian values.

The third and fourth variants might seem to rest on the same metaethical principle, namely, that it cannot be right to say that an action "X is valuable for an agent A" when X is alien to anything A cares or could care about. But the statement "X is valuable for A" is ambiguous. In the case of motivational internalism, the statement can be paraphrased as follows: "A has a reason to accept the judgment 'X is valuable.'" According to motivational internalism, then, A cannot have a reason to accept "X is valuable" unless X serves or furthers a preexisting desire of A. In the case of ethical naturalism, by contrast, the statement can be paraphrased as follows: "X is in A's best interest, or conducive to A's happiness or flourishing." According to this proposal, then, X cannot be in A's best interest, or contribute to A's happiness or flourishing, unless X bears an appropriate relationship to A's nature. It follows that X can be good for A (in the sense required by ethical naturalism) without being good for A (in the sense required by motivational internalism). This is true when, for example, the agent has no desire to fulfill some of the requirements of his own nature.

This distinction is easily overlooked in the case of Nietzsche, pre-

cisely because he appears to define human nature in terms of a certain kind of *desire*, the will to power. But the distinction should be kept in mind. Power is good for human beings either because of a view of the constraints on practical reason (an agent has no reason to pursue power unless he has a desire for power), or because of a view of the constraints on an account of the human good (power is good for an agent only if it bears the appropriate relation to his nature). In other words, motivational internalism bears on the *justification* of value judgments and places no substantive constraints on their content, whereas ethical naturalism bears on the *content* of value judgments, by placing substantive constraints on it. Naturally, the latter also bears on the justification of these judgments, since one can appeal to facts about human nature to assess a conception of the human good.

I now propose to consider each variant in more detail. I begin with ethical voluntarism, a view with a persistent grip on many readers of Nietzsche. It is important to note that ethical voluntarism consists of two distinct claims. First, in saying that values are “created,” the voluntarist makes both a claim about their *metaphysical standing*—they are arbitrary inventions—and a claim about their *normative authority*—it has its source in the agent’s own (arbitrary) will. Taken together, these two claims would give Nietzsche the license to do and undo values at will, and so to deny “moral” values simply by refusing them his endorsement.

Here is a representative statement of ethical voluntarism: “The Nietzschean term ‘value’ [. . .] carries this idea that our ‘values’ are our creations, that they ultimately repose on our espousing them. But to say that they ultimately repose on our espousing them is to say that they issue ultimately from a radical choice, that is a choice which is not grounded in any reasons. For to the extent that a choice is grounded in reasons, these are simply taken as valid and not themselves chosen.”³ The chief difficulty with voluntarism is philosophical and lies with the claim about normative authority. It provides less an explanation than a dissolution of it. For the very idea of normative authority contains the notion of legitimate constraints on the will and its changeable whims. But if the authority of a value depends on the sole fact that we will it, then nothing can ever legitimately constrain our will, since any demand that opposes it is thereby deprived of any authority.

The second variant, ethical fictionalism, avoids precisely this difficulty. The fictionalist accepts the voluntarist claim about the meta-

physical standing of our values: they are our own inventions. But he does not accept the claim about normative authority. On the contrary, the necessity of making believe in the objective standing of values to enable them to play their normative role in our psychological economy is rooted in the assumption that their normative authority cannot have its source in our subjective will.

Both the voluntarist and the fictionalist proposals present values, the new as well as the old, as arbitrary inventions in the sense that they are ultimately the product of a “choice which is not grounded in any reasons.” If values are arbitrary inventions, then the revaluation of existing values is as arbitrary as these values themselves. In other words, neither voluntarism nor fictionalism can provide a reason why Nietzsche would want to replace moral values with the value of power, or, for that matter, to replace old values with any new ones at all. They can only conceive of it as an arbitrary shift. As I will suggest later in this chapter, however, Nietzsche’s revaluation of values seems to be more than an arbitrary shift in ethical perspective.

Some commentators avoid the problem of arbitrariness by attributing to Nietzsche a form of ethical naturalism, according to which the way in which human beings *ought to live* (the human good) is derived from what they *are* (human nature).⁴ In this view, descriptive metaphysics supplies the foundations of normative ethics: it is by virtue of its connection to human nature that the value of power would be justified. Nietzsche sometimes appears to hold such a view: “There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power” (WP 55). At the heart of this proposal is the idea that *good* must be defined *functionally*, in terms of the fulfillment of a function.

By defining goodness functionally, this proposal dodges two basic objections to which ethical naturalism is liable. First, naturalism is open to the charge that it precludes discriminating evaluation. If a thing is good by virtue of what it is, then everything is good, since it necessarily is what it is. But a function admits of differential fulfillment, so that it is possible to discriminate among different degrees of value. Individuals could simply fail to fulfill the function, or be more or less good at fulfilling it. Second, ethical naturalism is also liable to the charge of naturalistic fallacy, which consists in deriving a normative conclusion from purely descriptive premises. If human nature is defined in terms of a particular function (the pursuit of power), however, and goodness

is defined in terms of the fulfillment of that function, then value already infuses being, and there is no gap to bridge from the latter to the former. As one commentator puts it tersely: “This ‘is’ already means ‘should be’ for Nietzsche, and it makes no strict sense to ask how he ‘derives’ the latter from the former.”⁵

The chief problem with this proposal is familiar, and it lies in the functional characterization of goodness. I take this to be a *critical* claim: the criterion of anything being good is that it fosters “preservation and growth” (WP 258) (or power). If this were indeed the criterion of goodness, then the further question of whether preservation and growth are themselves good, and worth fostering, would be meaningless. But it is not. Granting that all beings are essentially will to power, it seems perfectly meaningful to ask whether there should be beings that are good at achieving power in the first place. Hence, this functional definition of the good is insufficient.

A modified version of ethical naturalism looks more promising. It rests not on a functional definition of the good but on the substantive claim that any adequate conception of the good for human beings should be responsive to their nature; for example, to their most essential needs and desires.⁶ A conception of the human good that ignores the demands of human nature would be, for that very reason, implausible. Nietzsche appears to advocate precisely this version of naturalism when he deplores the fact that “hitherto all valuations and ideals have been based on *ignorance* of physics or were constructed so as to *contradict* it” (GS 335).⁷ He argues here that certain conceptions of the human good are objectionable *on the ground* that they fail to take (human) *nature* (“physics”) into account. Such a view may also be thought to ground his critique of morality: “*Anti-natural* morality, that is virtually every morality that has hitherto been taught, revered and preached, turns on the contrary precisely *against* the instincts of life” (TI, IV 4).

This version of ethical naturalism does not dodge the charge of naturalistic fallacy by claiming that value infuses nature. Rather, to a purely descriptive premise about what human nature is (it is essentially will to power), it adds a distinctively *normative* premise, namely, the claim that the good for human beings should answer to their nature (such as their essential needs and desires). It is not liable to the charge of naturalistic fallacy, because it does not derive a normative conclusion from purely descriptive premises.

However, the attribution of even this modified version of ethical nat-

uralism to Nietzsche faces one fatal objection. He himself expresses serious skepticism about the ability of any conception of human nature to ground a conception of the human good. He does so, for example, in the following passage, directed against the Stoic claim that their ethics is “according to nature”:

In truth, the matter is altogether different: while you pretend rapturously to read the canon of your law in nature, you want something opposite, you strange actors and self-deceivers! Your pride wants to impose your morality, your ideal, on nature—even on nature—and incorporate them in her; you demand that she should be nature “according to the Stoa,” and you would like all existence to exist only after your own image—as an immense eternal glorification and generalization of Stoicism. [. . .]

But this is an ancient, eternal story: what formerly happened with the Stoics still happens today too, as soon as any philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise. Philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the “creation of the world,” to the *causa prima*. (BGE 9; cf. GS 301)

To be sure, the passage might be taken to suggest that only the Stoics got human nature wrong. But Nietzsche presents their story as an “eternal story,” which continues to happen to this day, and includes presumably his own claim to find human nature in the “will to power.” Hence, far from serving as a ground for value judgments, their conception of human nature is, instead, ultimately an expression of them (cf. BGE 5, 6, 22).⁸ Insofar as this truth applies to his own ethical views, we would have to conclude that Nietzsche does not value the pursuit of power because the will to power is an essential feature of human nature, but that he describes human nature in terms of will to power because he already values the will to power. And so this version of ethical naturalism cannot, in the last analysis, answer our fundamental question: Why do we value the will to power?

This leaves us with the internalist strategy of revaluation. The meta-ethical principle distinctive of this strategy is often called motivational internalism: something cannot be valuable for an agent unless the agent is capable of caring about or desiring it. The normative authority of a value judgment therefore depends on contingent psychological features of the agent to whom it is addressed, such as his needs and desires, his patterns of affective response, and his inherited “moral prejudices” (GS 380), or “a particular spiritual level of prevalent judgments” (WP 254), all of which form his evaluative perspective.

To establish the legitimacy of power as the principle of revaluation, it is necessary to show that human beings do desire it. Nietzsche makes such a claim frequently (Z, II 12; GS 349; BGE 13, 259; GM, II 12), including about those who ostensibly *deny* the value of power (GM, I 10, III 13; WP 55, 401, 461). But this will not suffice, for if the will to power is just one desire among others, it may not possess sufficient normative weight to become a legitimate principle of revaluation. For this reason, it is very tempting to argue, as some scholars have done, that for Nietzsche human beings desire ultimately *only* power. But this view faces two considerable difficulties. First, I have already noted that Nietzsche's claim that the will to power is the "essence of life" may be less a descriptive than a covertly evaluative claim, which therefore cannot be invoked as the descriptive basis of an internalist argument. Second, Nietzsche himself suggests that the will to power is a desire among others, and that it may even occasionally be absent (A 6; EH, IV 4).⁹

Nevertheless, power may possess the required normative weight without being the only thing human beings ever care for or desire. Nietzsche certainly believes that the will to power is a human motivation far more common than suspected, perhaps because it can assume surprising and unexpected guises. He needs to show that, when compared to other desires, it occupies a sufficiently high normative rank. The rank of the will to power could be a function of its prominence in human psychology, a prominence which his sustained efforts to expose the nearly ubiquitous operation of the will to power in human activities could be taken to establish. He also suggests that the rank of a desire is a function of its "relations" to other passions and desires (WP 387): thus, the better a desire's relations with other desires, the higher its rank.¹⁰ In this view, the privilege granted to the value of power would be contingent on the perspective in which it garners support, just as the revaluation of the predominant life-negating values would ultimately amount to a reconsideration of their standing in the perspective in which they appear dominant.

The relevant perspective is what Nietzsche sometimes calls "our" perspective, that is to say, the perspective in which Christian/Platonic values appear dominant and in which nihilism threatens (see GS 344). The possibility of this strategy of revaluation depends on the assumption that our evaluative perspective is not fully coherent, but remains rife with conflict. Nietzsche implicitly acknowledges this condition when he offers, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, a timely reminder that,

with respect to the so-called master and slave moralities, “there are still places where the struggle is as yet undecided” (GM, I 16). In other words, the distinctive values of “master morality,” in which power and distinction figure prominently (BGE 260), have not entirely lost their hold on us and so may still be invoked in an effort to reevaluate the predominant life-negating “slave” values, such as compassion and happiness as the absence of suffering. Since these dominant values are largely hostile to Nietzsche’s new ethics of power, we should hardly be surprised to find him appeal, in order to make his case for it, to components of our evaluative sensibilities whose influence, though undeniable, is unexpected and unrecognized.¹¹

I favor the internalist interpretation of Nietzsche’s strategy in part because it fits in with the normative subjectivism to which, as I showed in Chapter 2, he sometimes appears to incline. I also favor it because he himself explicitly alludes to one variant of this strategy when he describes what going “beyond good and evil” amounts to. Considering the traditional oppositions of value it is the business of reevaluation to reexamine, such as the opposition between selfishness and selflessness, he declares:

[O]ne may doubt, first, whether there are any opposites at all, and secondly whether these popular valuations and opposite values on which the metaphysicians put their seal, are not perhaps merely foreground estimates, only provisional perspectives, perhaps even from some nook, perhaps from below, frog perspectives, as it were, to borrow an expression painters use. For all the value that the true, the truthful, the selfless may deserve, it would still be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness and lust. *It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to, and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things—maybe even one with them in essence. Maybe!* (BGE 2; my emphasis)

This strategy of reevaluation is internalist, since it proposes to invoke the “metaphysicians’ ” own conception of what is good as a ground for challenging their conception of what is evil. This variant of the internalist strategy differs from the one I considered above insofar as it does not bring out aspects of their perspective to support a reevaluation of their dominant values. Rather, it attempts to show that the very considerations that actually underwrite the positive valuation of the things called “good” (for example, selflessness) can also be invoked to justify a positive valuation of the things called “evil” (selfishness).¹²

This passage is worth mentioning because it is one of the few in which Nietzsche explicitly articulates a strategy for this project of revaluation, and that strategy is, equally explicitly, internalist.

All the views I have considered so far attempt to establish the *normative privilege* of the value of power, in terms of which Nietzsche proposes to conduct his revaluation of life-negating values. But Brian Leiter has recently argued that “Nietzsche does not believe his own evaluative perspective enjoys any privilege over the morality he revalues.”¹³ His valuation of power would merely express his own idiosyncratic evaluative taste, for which there is no arguing, so that the intended audience of his revaluation, which he is at great pains to circumscribe, could only include those who share that taste, since only they could presumably be won over by his panegyric on power.

It is certainly true, even in the internalism I have described, that if the Christian-Platonic perspective, in which the nihilistic, life-negating values are prevalent, is entirely foreign to Nietzsche’s own evaluative perspective, in which power occupies pride of place, then his revaluation of the former can amount to no more than the insistent expression of the latter, and it can claim no privileged normative standing. But I have suggested that Nietzsche does not regard his own evaluative perspective, or the perspective of his intended audience, to exclude as entirely foreign the Christian-Platonic perspective. Indeed, the very fact that he considers his revaluation necessary to rescue his intended interlocutors from Christian morality suggests that he believes them to be responsive to it. “Our” perspective, as he sometimes presents it, is one in which Christian moral values are pre-dominant, but in which other motivational elements that are not necessarily compatible with them continue to exercise an often unrecognized influence (see GM, I 16).

Nietzsche can therefore not merely dismiss Christian values as somehow foreign to his interlocutors’ evaluative sensibility. In this connection, there are reasons to doubt that this evaluative sensibility simply is the expression of patterns of affective response, which are themselves determined by the “fixed psycho-physical constitution” of the person.¹⁴ Although he often maintains that our value judgments are determined by our affective make-up (WP 254), he also acknowledges that they can sometimes also determine it: “Whence come evaluations? Is their basis a firm norm, ‘pleasant’ and ‘painful’? But in countless cases we first *make* a thing painful by investing it with an evaluation.” (WP 260; cf. D 35) Value judgments can “become instinct” (A 29), and we should

therefore expect two thousand years of Christian moral judgments to have had some impact on the affective make-up of even those to whom Nietzsche addresses his ethical exhortations, indeed even on Nietzsche's own make-up.

As a consequence, although he can reasonably hope that a vigorous and seductive panegyric on power will appeal to some aspects of the evaluative sensibility of his interlocutors, he cannot expect that it will suffice to outweigh the persistent influence of Christian values on them. These values have presumably become as much a part of their evaluative perspective as the value of power has, and so he needs to show his interlocutors that the standing of the latter in their evaluative perspective is such that it can support a critique of the former. He must, in other words, produce an actual *argument*, along the internalist lines I have described, that challenges the dominance of Christian moral values. And if he is successful in producing such an argument, then there is no reason why he should not believe, as his rhetoric often suggests that he does, that his ethics of power deserves some sort of normative privilege, at least within the confines of the evaluative perspective of a late modern European for whom nihilism has become a real threat.

Before we proceed to Nietzsche's revaluation itself, we should remember what it needs and does not need to accomplish. According to the argument of the present book, revaluation is a strategy to overcome nihilism. Nihilism is a consequence not just of the endorsement of life-negating values, but of their being considered the highest values. To succeed in overcoming nihilism, then, the revaluation of these values need not establish that they are not values *at all*, it need only show that they are not the *highest*.

II. The Problem of Suffering

Nietzsche's first attempt at a revaluation of values—the type of devaluation I discussed in Chapter 2—was aptly characterized as a *metaethical* revaluation, since it did not require that we specify the *content* of the values subjected to revaluation. In contrast, the strategy of revaluation I propose to examine in the present chapter should be called *substantive*, for it is directed at the *content* of the values themselves. To understand Nietzsche's revaluation of the nihilist's highest values, we must now find out what these values are.

Nietzsche designates the system of “great values and ideals” that

form the normative core of nihilism by the name “morality”: “Moral values have hitherto been the highest values” (WP 1006). However, he also uses the term *morality* to designate any code of conduct generally: for example, he calls “master morality” the system of values he opposes to the “morality” he criticizes (BGE 260; GM, I). Unless I indicate otherwise, I will simply use the term *morality* to designate the system of values at which he directs his attacks. This morality does not designate some historically or theoretically determinate morality (such as Christian morality, or utilitarianism). It refers instead to a cluster of views that share a substantive normative core, which cuts across various historically or theoretically determinate moralities, such as ancient hedonistic “eudaimonism,” Christian morality, utilitarianism, or Buddhist ethics, to mention some of the most significant varieties.

In proposing to reevaluate moral values, Nietzsche is not asking whether compassion, for example, is really a moral requirement. On the contrary, he accepts as correct a certain account of what morality requires. Rather, he asks whether the fundamental principle by which morality grants value to compassion in the first place is acceptable. He is asking not whether compassion is morally good but whether compassion is good by virtue of being morally good. This fundamental principle (or set of principles) is supposed to form the normative core of morality and is the focus of Nietzsche’s reevaluation of it.

Nietzsche credits Schopenhauer for recognizing the nihilistic consequences of the death of God: “As we thus reject the Christian interpretation and condemn its ‘meaning’ like counterfeit, Schopenhauer’s question immediately comes to us in a terrifying way: Has existence any meaning at all? [. . .] What Schopenhauer himself said in answer to this question was—forgive me—hasty, youthful, only a compromise, a way of remaining—remaining stuck—in precisely those Christian-ascetic moral perspectives in which one had renounced faith along with the faith in God. But he posed the question [. . .]” (GS 357; cf. WP 17).

In insisting that our rejection of the “Christian interpretation” confronts us with “Schopenhauer’s question,” Nietzsche indicates what he understands to be at stake in that question: the place and significance of suffering in human existence. The problem of suffering is, in Schopenhauer’s view, the deepest and most abiding human concern. Indeed, it is the driving motivation of philosophy itself: “Undoubtedly it is the knowledge of death, and therewith the consideration of the suffering and misery of life, that give the strongest impulse to philosophical re-

flection and metaphysical explanations of the world” (WWR, II ch. XVII).

The rejection of the “Christian interpretation” has “terrifying” implications simply because this interpretation gave an answer to the problem of suffering—it gave suffering a meaning: “Nihilism appears at that point, not that the displeasure at existence has become greater than before but because one has come to mistrust any ‘meaning’ in suffering, indeed in existence. One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain” (WP 55; cf. GM, III 28). Once it is seen from the standpoint of “the goodness and governance of a god” (GS 357), the Christian argued, suffering could be justified as atonement and preparation for a life free from suffering, a “bridge to that other mode of existence” (GM, III 11). As soon as this interpretation is discredited, as it is by Schopenhauer’s “unconditional and honest atheism,” the question of the meaning of life confronts us again.

Schopenhauer’s own pessimistic answer to this question, however, “remains stuck” in the Christian moral perspective because, even though he denies the existence of the providential Christian God, he continues to subscribe to the Christian view that suffering is evil and to the ideal of a life free from suffering. And so, absent the hope of another life free from suffering, the inescapability of suffering in this one becomes for him “sufficient to establish a truth that may be expressed in various ways [. . .] namely that we have not to be pleased but rather sorry about the existence of the world; that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; that it is something which at bottom ought not to be” (WWR, II ch. XLVI, p. 576; cf. WP 35, 701). In other words, Schopenhauer rejects the “Christian dogma” (the existence of God and of another world) but not “Christian morality” (GM, III 27).

Thus, his condemnation of suffering shapes both his distinctive account of morality in terms of compassion (BM 15) and his conception of “happiness” or the “highest good” as the absence of suffering (WWR, I 65). Although Nietzsche does not conceive of the nihilist’s life-negating values exclusively in terms of Schopenhauer’s conception of morality and happiness, I believe that he nonetheless finds in the latter a paradigm of the former. Thus, his critique of morality is quite specifically directed at the “morality of compassion” (GM, Preface 5), and the conception of happiness with which he customarily contrasts

his own is “resignation” (A 1; Z, III 5[2]). It should therefore be useful to get better acquainted with Schopenhauer’s views on these matters.

1. *The Morality of Compassion*

Schopenhauer’s moral theory grows out of his critique of Kant’s influential account of the nature of morality. This account is built on two fundamental observations: first, the claims of morality are universally binding, and second, the moral value of an action depends on its motivation (GW pp. 389–390). On the basis of these two observations, Kant claims to be able to derive the “supreme principle of morality,” namely, the “categorical imperative.” Schopenhauer accepts both of Kant’s initial observations, but he rejects the theory he built upon them. He argues instead that the supreme principle of morality is *compassion* (BM 16).¹⁵

Compassion is a disposition to deplore the sufferings of others, and so to avoid causing suffering to them and to try to alleviate their sufferings whenever possible. To make a virtue out of compassion is in fact to declare that suffering is something that ought to be deplored and eliminated. And so morality, in Schopenhauer’s conception of it, is itself an expression of the belief that suffering is evil. This is, in any event, quite explicitly how Nietzsche understands it, when he maintains that the prevalent “morality of compassion” ultimately rests on a wholesale condemnation of suffering: “[I]f you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, worthy of annihilation, and as a defect of existence, then it is clear that besides your religion of compassion you also harbor another religion in your heart that is perhaps the mother of the religion of compassion: the *religion of comfortableness*. How little you know of human *happiness*, you comfortable and benevolent people, for happiness and unhappiness are sisters and even twins that either grow up together or, as in your case, *remain small together*” (GS 338; cf. D 174; BGE 202).

Moreover, it is by virtue of resting on this condemnation of suffering that the “morality of compassion” is essentially life-negating and ultimately nihilistic: “One has ventured to call compassion a virtue [. . .]; one has gone further, one has made it *the* virtue, the ground and origin of all virtue—only, to be sure, from the viewpoint of a nihilistic philosophy which inscribed *Negation of Life* on its escutcheon—a fact always to be kept in view. Schopenhauer was within his rights in this: life is denied, made *more worthy of denial* by compassion—compassion is *practical* nihilism. [. . .] compassion persuades to *nothingness!*”

[. . .] Schopenhauer was hostile to life: *therefore* compassion became for him a virtue” (A 7; cf. GM, Preface 5; TI, V 4). This is a little perplexing, for the valuation of compassion does not necessarily entail a wholesale condemnation of suffering. Making a virtue of compassion, after all, commits only to the claim that the sufferings of *others* should be alleviated, not necessarily one’s own. However, Schopenhauer’s distinctive articulation of this account of morality actually rests on a condemnation of *all* suffering, because the view of compassion he defends presupposes that one takes one’s own suffering to be as deplorable as that of others.¹⁶ Indeed, he argues that caring about the pain of others is an extension of caring about one’s own pain. The possibility of compassion rests on an “identification” with the other whose pain it is:

How is it possible for *another’s* weal and woe to move my will immediately, that is to say, in exactly the same way in which it is usually moved by my own weal and woe? Obviously only through the other man’s becoming *the ultimate object* of my will in the same way as I myself otherwise am, and hence through my directly desiring *his* weal and not *his* woe just as immediately as I ordinarily do *my own*. But this necessarily presupposes that, in the case of *his* woe as such, I suffer directly with him, I feel *his* woe just as immediately as I ordinarily feel only my own [. . .]. But this requires that I am in some way *identified with him*, in other words, that this entire *difference* between me and everyone else, which is the very basis of my egoism, is eliminated to a certain extent at least. (BM 16, pp. 143–144)

Identification alone does not provide the agent with a reason to attend to the pain of others. How, indeed, does the fact that I recognize the pain of another as, in some sense, *my own* give me a reason to attend to it? What else, besides identification, must be true for me to have a motive to attend to the pain of the other with whom I identify? I must, presumably, regard *my own* pain as worth attending to. It is because I consider my own pain worth alleviating that the identification of the pain of another as, in some sense, “my own” makes it worth alleviating as well.

Identification with others is in turn possible because the difference between my self and others is merely apparent. “In ourselves,” so to speak, we are all one and the same. Schopenhauer exploits Kant’s claim that space and time, by virtue of which things as we know them are individuated, are subjective forms of cognition that apply only to the phenomenal world, and not to things as they are in themselves: “Accordingly, if plurality and separateness belong only to the *phenomenon*,

and if it is one and the same essence that manifests itself in all living things, then that conception that abolishes the difference between ego and non-ego is not erroneous; but on the contrary, the opposite conception must be. [. . .] [I]n fact, compassion is the proper expression of that view. Accordingly, it would be the metaphysical basis of ethics and consist in *one* individual's again recognizing in *another* his own self, his own true inner nature" (BM 22, pp. 209–210).

In grounding compassion in this metaphysical monism, Schopenhauer manages to preserve the universal validity of morality. He assumes that everyone wants to avoid suffering and combines this prudential egoism with the metaphysical insight that I am one in essence with others, and therefore that their suffering is also my own. Whatever reason I have to alleviate my suffering is ipso facto a reason to alleviate theirs. Schopenhauer condemns egoism not because it seeks to escape suffering but because it is guilty of a kind of metaphysical blindness, which makes it ultimately inconsistent. The egoist fails to realize that the boundaries separating one individual from others are mere appearances. In allowing others to suffer, worse still in causing suffering to others, he does not see that, at bottom, he himself is the victim of that suffering (see WWR, I 65, pp. 365ff.).

Schopenhauer's claim that morality is grounded in a condemnation of suffering is by no means uncontroversial. In particular, it departs from the dominant Kantian account of morality, according to which the distinguishing mark of true moral worth is not a condemnation of suffering, but a respect for the value of rational agency in oneself and in others, which for Kant takes the form of a concern not to make an exception of oneself in one's policies of action. Kant presents his moral theory as a philosophical regimentation of our "ordinary rational knowledge about morality" (GW p. 393). He believes that its superiority over other theories lies in its ability to account for our pre-theoretical moral intuitions. Schopenhauer objects on precisely this point: Kant's moral theory fails to do justice to some of our basic pre-theoretical beliefs about morality.

Kant claims that our moral beliefs and practices are driven by a valuation of rational agency. For this reason, the categorical imperative, which is the practical expression of this valuation, is the "supreme principle of morality." He offers several formulations of this imperative but declares that an agent will do better "if in moral judgment he follows the rigorous method and takes as his basis the universal for-

mula of the categorical imperative: Act according to that maxim which can at the same time make itself a universal law” (GW pp. 436–437). For acting out of respect for rational agency implies never making an exception of oneself in the conduct of one’s life, a requirement this formula is precisely intended to articulate. The other formulations are intended to “secure acceptance for the moral law” by bringing it “closer to intuition” (ibid.).

The formula of universal law provides a procedure, which applies to the maxims of actions and determines their moral standing. We must, to appreciate Schopenhauer’s critique of Kant, attend to some of the details of this procedure. The precise statement of the universal law formula is as follows: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (GW p. 421). Kant specifies that, when it is applied to a maxim of non-benevolence (for example, a policy of not helping others in need to spare myself inconvenience), the test of whether I “can will” a maxim to be a universal law is a test of volitional consistency: could I *consistently will* a world in which everyone acts on that maxim? And he argues that a maxim of non-benevolence is not consistently universalizable. In a world in which needed help is not guaranteed, I may find myself deprived of assistance when it is required for the realization of my ends. In willing such a world, I fail to will at least some of the means necessary to my ends and I am therefore guilty of practical inconsistency. According to the procedure, any non-universalizable maxim is morally prohibited, and its opposite is morally required. Kant thus concludes that benevolence is a moral duty.¹⁷

Schopenhauer agrees that helping others in need, and generally alleviating the sufferings of others, is *the* paradigmatic moral activity. Any moral theory worth its salt must therefore accommodate this pre-theoretical intuition. Kant’s theory, in particular, should demonstrate that a maxim of non-benevolence fails the test of consistent universalizability. But Schopenhauer argues that it is unsuccessful precisely on this point. Consider the beginning of his discussion:

Thus it is said that that maxim which I *can will* all would act in accordance with, is the actual moral principle. My *being able to will* is the hinge on which the given order or instruction turns. But what *can* I really will, and what not? To determine what I can will in the above respect, I obviously again need a regulation; [. . .]. Now where is this regulation to be sought? Certainly nowhere but in my egoism [. . .]. The direction

contained in Kant's supreme rule for finding the real moral principle thus rests on the tacit assumption that I can will only *that* which is to my greatest advantage. Now in determining a maxim for general observance, I must necessarily regard myself not merely as the always active part, but also as the *eventualiter* and sometimes *passive*. From this point of view, therefore, my *egoism* decides for justice and philanthropy not because it desires to *practice* these virtues, but because it wants to *experience* them. (BM 7, p. 89)

Schopenhauer evidently exploits Kant's idea that I cannot consistently will a world in which everyone acts in accordance with a maxim of non-benevolence, because in such a world *my own ends* will be thwarted. He seems to conclude that compliance with the categorical imperative is a simple matter of prudence. And morality is reduced to the kind of prudence Kant was at pains to sharply distinguish it from.

So construed, however, the objection gravely misunderstands Kant's position. On a straightforward reading of it, even if the application of the categorical imperative does involve an appeal to prudence, it does not follow that compliance with the categorical imperative is itself a matter of prudence. And this point holds in at least two respects. Imagine first an agent who contemplates acting on a maxim of non-benevolence and is concerned only with the question of whether this is a prudent course of action. All he needs to ask, then, is what will happen if he fails to help in the *actual* circumstances in which he finds himself—will it turn out to his advantage or not? He does *not* need to ask what would happen *if* everyone acted in the same way: this question is completely irrelevant to his prudential calculations. So, it may well be true that the appeal to prudence plays a role in the procedure of universalization, but an agent must care about more than prudence to subject his maxim to the procedure in the first place: he must care about morality.

This point holds in another respect as well. Schopenhauer appears to suggest that I have a reason to want a world in which everyone acts according to a maxim of benevolence because *I stand to benefit* from that universal benevolence. It is no doubt true that I stand to be harmed in a world in which the maxim of non-benevolence is universalized. But it certainly does not follow that my acting only on a maxim of benevolence will keep me out of harm's way—for example, by securing a world in which I will actually enjoy the help of others whenever I need it.

On the construal just considered, then, the objection simply misfires.

But at the end of his discussion, Schopenhauer indicates that his objection was actually of a very different sort, at once deeper and more damaging. Here is the relevant concluding passage:

It is perfectly clear from this explanation that that fundamental rule of Kant is not, as he incessantly asserts, a *categorical* imperative, but in fact a *hypothetical* one. For tacitly underlying is the *condition* that the law to be laid down for my *action*, since I raise it to one that is *universal*, also becomes the law for my *suffering*, and on this condition I, as the *eventualiter passive* part, certainly *cannot will* injustice and non-benevolence. But if I do away with this condition and, confident perhaps of my superior mental and bodily strength, always think of myself as the *active* and never as the *passive* part, with the maxim that is to be chosen as universally valid, then, assuming there is no other foundations of morality but the Kantian, I can very well will injustice and non-benevolence as a universal maxim, and accordingly rule the world “upon the simple plan / That they should take, who have the power, / And they should keep, who can” (Wordsworth). (BM 7, p. 91)

On this version of the objection, the appeal to prudence is problematic because, in depending on it, the procedure of universalization cannot guarantee universal validity for the results of its application. The imperatives it delivers would therefore not be categorical, but merely hypothetical. Why is this? The universalization procedure is designed to establish whether maxims of action are morally acceptable or not, by determining whether any agent could consistently will a world in which they are universalized. The procedure issues in pronouncements about *moral* permissibility and obligation, which should therefore be universally valid. If benevolence is a moral obligation, then it should be the case that *no* rational agent could consistently will a world in which a maxim of non-benevolence is universalized. But Schopenhauer denies that precisely this is the case.

Consider a maxim of non-benevolence: its universalization yields a world in which people who need help will at least sometimes fail to receive it. This generates a contradiction for those agents who have ends for the realization of which they might need the help of others. But—and here is the objection—not all agents necessarily have ends for the realization of which they need the help of others. As Schopenhauer suggests, some agents might enjoy such “superior mental and bodily strength” that they will never need the help of others. For *those* agents, there would be no practical inconsistency in willing a world in which everyone acts on a maxim of non-benevolence. And for those

people, non-benevolence would therefore be permissible. But then it is not true *for everyone* that willing a universalized maxim of non-benevolence implies a contradiction, and so it is not true for everyone that non-benevolence is impermissible.

The imperative of benevolence would thus be “hypothetical” insofar as it would be binding only on those agents who are likely to need the help of others. We could presumably try to reply that human powers are finite, and so that human beings might at least sometimes need the assistance of others in order to realize their ends. But this will not help. For one thing, Schopenhauer could amend his initial proposal and suggest, for example, that some agents might decide in advance to give up any end the realization of which would require the help of others, on the ground that the benefits of a policy of non-benevolence outweigh the loss of those ends. For another, Kant insists that moral obligations are binding on *all* rational agents, not just on human beings. But it seems as though some rational agents at least could consistently will a world in which no one helps anyone else: God, for example, will never need help in order to realize His ends. In the last analysis, the practical inconsistency of willing a maxim of non-benevolence depends on certain empirical considerations, such as limited strength or the ability to achieve ends. And this makes the duty of benevolence “hypothetical,” since it is revealed to be conditioned by “the circumstances of the world in which man is placed,” from which, as Kant insists, true moral obligations are supposed to be independent (GW p. 389). Schopenhauer concludes that Kant’s moral theory is thoroughly inadequate since it fails to account for the moral value of benevolence, which he regards as a paradigmatic moral duty.

In a later chapter of *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer brings out additional pre-theoretical intuitions about morality, for which Kant’s moral theory also appears unable to account. They are intended to demonstrate that our moral beliefs and practices are driven not by the idea that the fundamental evil is, as Kant believed, to make an exception of oneself in the manner in which one acts, but rather by the idea that suffering is evil. Three of Schopenhauer’s observations in this connection deserve brief mention. The first is the case of moral horror at the description of particularly malicious or cruel acts. The horror at such acts, Schopenhauer points out, is often expressed in the form of a question: “How is it possible to do such a thing?” He proceeds to analyze the content of this ordinary reaction as follows: “What is the meaning of this question? Is it: How is it possible to have so little fear

for the punishments of the future life? Hardly. Or: How is it possible to act according to a maxim that is so absolutely unfitted to become a general law for all rational beings? Certainly not. [. . .] The sense of that question is certainly only this: How is it possible to be so utterly bereft of compassion? Thus it is the greatest lack of compassion that stamps a deed with the deepest moral depravity and atrocity. Consequently, compassion is the real moral incentive” (BM 19, pp. 169–170). What motivates the moral horror we experience at particularly depraved acts is not the sense that someone made an exception of themselves but, rather, a condemnation of suffering.

Schopenhauer presses this same point when he observes that we make a *moral* difference between the evil of defrauding a rich man of a certain sum of money and defrauding a poor man of the same sum. We find the latter *morally worse* than the former. But on Kant’s theory of morality, the evil of these two acts is equivalent, since each would be an action based on a morally impermissible maxim of false promising, and so in equal violation of the moral law. In Schopenhauer’s view, one act is morally worse than the other because it causes greater suffering. So, he concludes: “We see that the material for self-reproach and the reproach of others is furnished not directly by violation of the law, but primarily by the suffering thereby brought on another” (BM 19, p. 173).

Finally, and no doubt more controversially, Schopenhauer also claims that cruelty to animals is a moral wrong. And Kant’s theory, which grounds morality in rational agency, cannot easily account for this intuition, if indeed it can account for it at all. Animals, after all, do not deserve the moral consideration due to rational agents (BM 19, p. 175ff.). But if we take compassion for all that suffers to be the basis of morality, then even animals become proper objects of moral consideration, since they are sensitive to pain.

2. *Happiness as Resignation*

Nietzsche disparages views of happiness that associate it with the condemnation of suffering. Thus, his criticisms explicitly target hedonism and utilitarianism (BGE 225), the Christian ideal of another life free from suffering, and the ethics of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*’s “last men,” who reject “love,” “creation,” and “longing” (Z, Prologue 5) in favor of “wretched contentment, the ‘happiness of the greatest number’ ” (Z, IV 13). But it is against the Schopenhauerian concept of ascetic resignation that he eventually chooses to contrast his own conception of

happiness (A 1; cf. Z, III 5[2]). It may seem strange to place the ascetic conception of happiness in the same rubric as hedonistic, utilitarian, or Christian conceptions of happiness, and a fortiori, to present it as a paradigmatic instance of the condemnation of suffering. After all, Schopenhauer describes the ascetic life as a life of “voluntary suffering.” Closer examination of his doctrine of resignation should, once again, dispel our perplexity.

At the heart of Schopenhauer’s pessimism is the view that human life is essentially an “unquenchable thirst,” a lack that can never be fulfilled. This makes for a singularly bleak picture:

No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines; but it is always like the alms thrown to a beggar, which relieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we never obtain lasting happiness or peace. [. . .] Thus the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus. (WWR, I 38, p. 196)

Human life is essentially “willing and striving,” and “[n]o possible satisfaction in the world could suffice to still its craving, set a final goal to its demands, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart” (WWR, I 65, p. 362; cf. II ch. XLVI, p. 573).

However, this passage suggests that it is only “so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires” that a lasting happiness eludes us. In other words, it is only so long as we conceive of happiness in terms of the *satisfaction* of our desires that we are doomed never to achieve it. This suggests that happiness might still be achievable, albeit by a radically different path. Happiness, remember, is the condition in which we are once and for all free from pain, a “contentment which cannot again be disturbed.” The passage intimates that we might achieve a lasting freedom from pain by detaching ourselves from our desires. In other words, it points to what Schopenhauer calls the “negation of the will to live.”

The negation of the will consists not in its final satisfaction, but in detachment from it. Schopenhauer calls it “resignation,” a concept we must examine carefully. Ordinarily, to be resigned does not mean that I cease to desire a certain object, but only that I accept that it is out of my reach and therefore renounce its *pursuit*. As Schopenhauer understands it, by contrast, to be resigned requires not only that I re-

nounce pursuing a desire, but also that I become indifferent to whether or not it is satisfied, and this amounts to renouncing the *desire* itself. Schopenhauer sometimes calls the latter “complete resignation” and characterizes it as a state of “will-lessness.” We get a firmer grasp of this distinction by attending to the contrasting reactions the resigned individual would have to the unexpected satisfaction of his desire. In the ordinary case, this unexpected satisfaction of the desire would still be welcome, whereas, in the case of “complete resignation,” it would be met with indifference.

Schopenhauer must characterize resignation as a “negation of the will” if it is to provide an alternative form of happiness, a permanent deliverance from pain. It is of the essence of pain, remember, to constitutionally involve a desire for its cessation. Merely renouncing the pursuit of a desire will not do, since it is not renouncing the desire itself, the torment of which is only compounded by the conviction that it cannot be satisfied. The pain effectively disappears, by contrast, if we manage to renounce the desire itself. How does one achieve such “complete resignation”?

Schopenhauer finely observes that resignation is not achieved “by intention or design”: “that *self-suppression of the will* [*Selbstaufhebung des Willens*] comes from knowledge, but all knowledge and insight as such are independent of free choice, that denial of willing, that entrance into freedom, is not to be forcibly arrived at by intention or design, but comes from the innermost relation of knowing and willing in man; hence it comes suddenly as if flying in from without [*wie von aussen angeflogen*]” (WWR, I 70, p. 404). The negation of the will is not something one does *intentionally*—for example, as a result of recognizing the impossibility of complete or permanent satisfaction. It is, rather, a state induced directly by this recognition alone: it “comes from the innermost relation of knowing and willing in man.” Knowledge can affect the will directly: for example, the realization that a goal is hopelessly out of reach will induce, in and of itself, the renunciation of its pursuit. To be sure, we do sometimes deliberately give up the pursuit of certain desires. But in these sorts of cases, we recognize that the difficulty involved would draw energy and resources away from other pursuits. Giving up is therefore not so much resignation as it is a matter of prudence. When the renunciation is motivated not by prudence but by the sole conviction that our desires cannot be satisfied, then it may well appear in the manner described here.

I have so far spoken only of resignation in the ordinary sense. An-

other sort of knowledge is required to produce “complete resignation,” or the “negation” of the will itself. For although the belief that the circumstances of the world are inhospitable to the satisfaction of our desires might well induce the agent to abandon their pursuit, it is hard to see how it could also make him renounce the desires themselves. To be led to this radical form of renunciation, the agent must recognize that there is something wrong not only with the circumstances of the world but with the will (his desires) itself: “the denial of the will-to-live, which is the same as what is called complete resignation or holiness, always proceeds from that quieter of the will; and this is the knowledge of its inner conflict and its essential vanity, expressing themselves in the suffering of all that lives” (WWR, I 68, p. 397).

The satisfaction of the will is doomed not to produce lasting happiness because of the very structure of the *will*, “its inner conflict and its essential vanity”: “He knows the whole, comprehends its inner nature, and finds it involved in a constant passing away, a vain striving, an inward conflict, and a continual suffering” (WWR, I 68, p. 379). Once the essential vanity and contradiction of the will is fully appreciated, it induces “the denial of the will to live, which is the same as what is called complete resignation.” The “inner conflict” of the will results, on the interpretation I have developed, from its being structured by first- and second-order desires, the respective pursuits of which conflict directly with one another. If I believe that my will is frustrated by a recalcitrant world, I will be induced to renounce its pursuit, all the while cursing the world that resists it. But if I become convinced that my frustration results from the very nature of my will, then I will be induced to renounce that will itself (and perhaps, in a sense, to reconcile with the world, which is no longer to blame for my misery).

If knowledge of the hopelessly conflicted structure of the human will “quiets” or “negates” the will to live, those who continue to “affirm” life, in contrast, must do so out of ignorance. In other words, he who denies life knows or understands something that he who affirms it does not: “A man who [. . .] had not come to know, through his own experience or through a deeper insight, that constant suffering is essential to all life; who found satisfaction in life and took perfect delight in it; who desired, in spite of calm deliberation, that the course of his life as he hitherto experienced it should be of endless duration or of constant recurrence; and whose courage to face life was so great that, in return for life’s pleasure, he would willingly and gladly put up with all the hardships and miseries to which he is subject [. . .]. This is for

knowledge the viewpoint of the complete *affirmation of the will-to-live*” (WWR, I 54, pp. 283–284).¹⁸ So, Schopenhauer insists that the negation of the will is not, indeed cannot be, suicide. For the suicide still fails to understand the real source of his misery. He remains motivated by a sensitivity to suffering, he still wills to live: “The suicide still wills life, and is dissatisfied merely with the conditions on which it has come to him” (WWR, I 69, p. 398). He who has achieved the negation of the will to live, by contrast, will have no reason to commit suicide, since he will have become utterly indifferent to life’s sufferings and to the frustration of the will that is a consequence of its very essence.

Even if resignation is a state that comes to us “flying in, as if from without,” the question arises nonetheless of whether it is a good state to be in. Should we welcome or deplore our susceptibility to it? Schopenhauer evidently believes that resignation is a welcome state. We must now try to identify the grounds of this belief. We should begin with his analysis of the concept of good:

This concept is essentially relative and denotes the *fitness or suitability of an object to any definite striving of the will*. Therefore everything agreeable to the will in any one of its manifestations, and fulfilling the will’s purpose is thought through the concept *good* [. . .]; in short, we call everything good that is just as we want it to be. Hence a thing can be good to one person, and the very opposite to another. [. . .] Accordingly, *absolute good* is a contradiction; highest good, *summum bonum*, signifies the same thing, namely in reality a final satisfaction of the will, after which no fresh willing would occur; a last motive, the attainment of which would give the will an imperishable satisfaction. (WWR, I 65, p. 360)¹⁹

This passage is not devoid of obscurity. Schopenhauer seems to endorse a definition of the concept of good as relative to a “definite” effort of the will, by which he means the pursuit of a particular goal. So what is good for one may well be different from what is good for another, depending on what particular goal each pursues. To say that the idea of an *absolute good* is a contradiction is to say, simply, that there is nothing that is good for everyone. The relativity of the concept of good to the will also excludes the idea of a *highest good*, which he defines as a “final satisfaction.” It is not simply the relativity of the good to the will that precludes final satisfaction, however, but, as I argued, the relativity of the good to an essentially *contradictory* will. And so the reason why there is no highest good cannot be the same reason why there is no absolute good. The conflation of the two

notions in the remainder of his discussion is therefore a source of confusion.

Schopenhauer complicates matters further by qualifying his rejection of the idea of an absolute, or highest, good:

However, if we wish to give an honorary, or so to speak an emeritus, position to an old expression that from custom we do not like entirely to discard, we may, metaphorically and figuratively, call the complete self-effacement and denial of the will, true will-lessness, which alone stills and silences for ever the pressure of willing, which alone gives that contentment which cannot again be disturbed, [. . .] the absolute good, the *summum bonum*, and we may regard it as the only radical cure for the disease against which all other good things, such as all fulfilled wishes and all attained happiness, are only palliatives, anodynes. (ibid.)

It is hard to see what difference using the concept of absolute or highest good merely “metaphorically” might make. This qualification in the use of the concept of good, I think, is meant to address the following difficulty. Schopenhauer’s initial characterization of the good stands in an obvious conflict with his endorsement of resignation. If the good is what fulfills particular goals of the will, then resignation, which is the renunciation of all willing, and so of all particular goals of willing, cannot be “good.” The passage presently under consideration suggests a way of resolving this difficulty.

In broad outline, Schopenhauer argues that what the will “really” strives for is not any particular goal but deliverance from pain, an aim for which the attainment of particular goals is ultimately ill suited. It is because the will itself ultimately aims at deliverance from pain that “will-lessness,” which effectively eliminates pain, “stills and silences for ever the pressure of willing.” In this view, resignation would be the absolute good, not in the sense that it is not relative to the aim of the will, but in the sense that, since it answers to what the pursuit of *any* particular desire is really after, namely, the elimination of pain, it is good for everyone.

To understand the motivation behind this proposal, we must recall a central feature of Schopenhauer’s conception of human desire, or “willing,” as need-based. In this conception, remember, the object of a need-based desire derives its appeal from the fact that its possession fulfills a need: it is itself devoid of intrinsic value. The appeal of drinking, for example, derives from the fact that it delivers me from the discomfort of being thirsty, not from the intrinsic value of drinking. Accordingly, the object of my thirst cannot “really” be the possession and consumption of water, but the elimination of the pangs of thirst.

This observation led us to distinguish between two ways of understanding how the satisfaction of a desire is gratifying: either, it is gratifying *because of the object* whose possession it secured, or it is gratifying *insofar as it eliminates the pain* that is associated with the desire. If the value of an object lies in its being needed, then it has no intrinsic worth. And if the object of desire has no intrinsic worth, then securing its possession can be gratifying only because it eliminates the pain associated with the need, and not by virtue of its own worth. Accordingly, on Schopenhauer's conception, the satisfaction of a desire can be gratifying only insofar as it eliminates a pain. And since this is true of *any* desire, the elimination of pain is, indeed, an "absolute good."

Furthermore, the need-based character of all human desires allows Schopenhauer to distinguish between two ways in which they could be, so to speak, fulfilled. Either one might *satisfy* the desire (secure possession of its object), or one might *deny* the desire (achieve detachment from it). The latter option is not allowed only if the object of a desire has intrinsic worth: in that case, the desire cannot be fulfilled unless the agent has secured possession of its object. Schopenhauer argues that the satisfaction of the will cannot, given its conflicting structure, achieve a definitive deliverance from pain: the possession of the object of a determinate desire does not, for example, eliminate the "pressure of willing [*Willensdrang*]," which assumes the form of boredom. Since the point of willing and striving is the elimination of pain, and the satisfaction of desires fails to do that, the only remaining option is the denial of the will. Such denial amounts to a detachment from the desires. An agent is detached from his desires when it is a matter of indifference to him whether or not they are satisfied.

In the passage I am considering, Schopenhauer explicitly compares the satisfaction of the will with its negation, intimating that both are strategies enacted in the pursuit of the same final end—the complete deliverance from pain—and declares the latter to be more effective at achieving it than the former. The negation of the will is a "cure," whereas satisfactions of desires can be at best mere "palliatives, anodynes." On this interpretation, his endorsement of the negation of the will, would be, in the last analysis, a matter of simple practical reasoning. The will is essentially need-based, which implies that what the pursuit of all desires really aims at is the elimination of the pain associated with them; what is good is what serves the aim of the will; the structure of the will is such that the satisfaction of desires cannot eliminate pain; resignation is most effective at eliminating pain; therefore resignation is the highest good.²⁰

II. The Ethics of Power

Identifying the value of suffering as the focus of Nietzsche's revaluation, as I propose to do here, has considerable exegetical advantages. Besides accounting for the ubiquitous preoccupation with the problem of suffering in his writings from the very beginning, it provides a neatly circumscribed target for his famous critique of morality. As he sees it, indeed, it is distinctive of the prevalent morality to be grounded in a wholesale condemnation of suffering: "Whether it is hedonism or pessimism, utilitarianism or eudaimonism—all these ways of thinking that measure the value of things in accordance with pleasure and pain [. . .]. You want, if possible—and there is no more insane 'if possible'—to abolish suffering" (BGE 225; cf. GS 338; WP 957).

However, focusing on the value of suffering might also seem to ignore much of the complexity of Nietzsche's actual concerns. As is well known, he levels insistent attacks on egalitarianism, peacefulness, social utility, extirpation of the instincts, democracy, and so on. Are all these attacks really to be reduced to questions about the value of suffering? I believe that, to a certain extent at least, Nietzsche thought so. Suffering, as I take him to understand this notion, is the experience of dissatisfied longing or desire. And all of the targets of his attacks mentioned above have in common the concern to avoid this experience at all costs. This is fairly evident for peacefulness and the extirpation of the instincts, both of which may be thought to refer to conditions akin to Schopenhauer's "complete resignation." The point is not quite so clear for the ideals of egalitarianism, democracy, or social utility, but there are some suggestions that Nietzsche saw the desire to "abolish suffering" as one possible inspiration for these ideals as well. For example, he once denounces the socialist dream of the "perfect state" (in which, presumably, social utility is maximized) in the following terms: "The Socialists desire to create a comfortable life for as many as possible. If the enduring homeland of this comfortable life, the perfect state, were really to be attained, then this comfortable life would destroy the soil out of which great intellect and the powerful individual in general grow" (HH, I 235). I will not pursue this question further, but I hope that subsequent discussions throughout the remainder of the book will go some way toward establishing the centrality of the problem of suffering in Nietzsche's revaluation, even if some of his other concerns, as they develop, cannot always neatly be shown to be manifestations or offshoots of it.

Focusing Nietzschean revaluation on the value of suffering has an-

other significant exegetical advantage. It helps to explain why Nietzsche came to see in the will to power the guiding principle of that revaluation.²¹ The doctrine of the will to power radically alters our conception of the role and significance of suffering in human existence. If, in particular, we take power—the overcoming of resistance—to be a value, then we can see easily how it can be the principle behind a revaluation of suffering. Indeed, if we value the overcoming of resistance, then we must also value the resistance that is an ingredient of it. Since suffering is defined by resistance, we must also value suffering.

Nietzsche, then, claims that power is good, and he invokes it to reevaluate the role and significance of suffering in human life, and particularly its relation to human happiness:

What is good?—All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man.

What is bad?—All that proceeds from weakness.

What is happiness?—The feeling that power *increases*—that a resistance is overcome.

Not contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war; *not* virtue but proficiency (virtue in the Renaissance style, *virtù*, virtue free of moralistic acid). (A 2)

In fact, he explicitly presents his conception of power in terms of the overcoming of resistance as the core of his response to pessimism: “The normal dissatisfaction of our drives, e.g., hunger, the sexual drive, the drive to motion, 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 (whatever pessimists may say). This dissatisfaction, instead of making one disgusted with life, is the great stimulus to life” (WP 697).

But what sort of value is power? Nietzsche proposes the following characterization: “A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcoming; behold, it is the voice of their will to power. Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever 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” (Z, I 15). Nietzsche observes that we take the *difficulty* of an achievement to contribute to its value. And he claims that this is the implication of a commitment to the value of overcoming resistance. At its core, the ethics of power is intended to reflect the value we place on what is difficult or, as we might prefer to say, challenging.

A brief observation should provide an initial illustration of the

manner in which the commitment to the value of difficulty may have shaped certain aspects of our ethical sensibilities. It is surprising how so many readers of Nietzsche readily accept his notorious claim that “whatever can be common always has little value” (BGE 43). For such a claim certainly does not go without saying. If we take “common” to imply easy access, then why should something be of lesser value simply by virtue of being easily accessible? The ethics of power provides a straightforward answer: it involves little resistance to overcome, and therefore not much of a challenge.

Nietzsche’s ethics of power raises a number of questions. Even though he himself does not address many of these questions explicitly, I would like to consider briefly some of the most obvious ones. This should enable us to anticipate and dispel some difficulties that are bound to arise when we turn to the actual execution of the revaluation of values from the standpoint of this ethics of power.

1. *Power, Strength, and Weakness.* The first question we should consider is the following: Is the difficulty that contributes to the value of an achievement *absolute* or *relative*? Specifically, is that difficulty a function of the strength or weakness of particular agents, or not? Does what is difficult to some, who are relatively weak, contribute to the value of their achievement, if it is not difficult (or not as difficult) to others, who are relatively stronger? Since the difficulty of an achievement consists in the degree of resistance against it, the issue is here simply that of the relation between resistance on the one hand and strength and weakness on the other. We might be tempted to accept two claims about this relation. The first (*A*) is that resistance is relative to the strength or weakness of the agent—in other words, what is high resistance to a weak agent is low resistance to a strong agent. The second (*B*) is that strength and weakness designate the agent’s capacity to overcome resistance.

Taken together, these two claims have one problematic implication, namely that no achievement can ever be truly *great*. Any successful achievement demonstrates that the agent had the capacity to overcome resistance to it. This shows—by *B*—that the agent was strong. Now, this also shows—by *A*—that the resistance to this achievement was low, since the degree of resistance is relative to the agent’s capacity to overcome it. Any achievement that was not difficult is not a great achievement—by the definition of greatness in terms of power. Hence, no achievement can ever be great.

Nietzsche, who clearly believes that some achievements are genuinely

great, must find this implication unacceptable, and therefore reject either *A* or *B*. Nietzsche urges us to reject *A*, for it has, in and of itself, an unacceptable implication, namely that the same achievement could be both great and not great. According to *A*, what constitutes high resistance for the weak would not constitute high resistance for the strong. Accordingly, the same achievement would be great for the weak (insofar as they would have had to overcome higher resistance for it), but not so great for the strong. Once again, Nietzsche, whose ethical elitism is no secret, would most likely reject this implication. Moreover, *B* is eminently plausible, for it is hard to see what strength and weakness could possibly be, if they are not defined in terms of the capacity to overcome resistance: “The strength of those who attack can be measured in a way by the opposition they require” (EH, I 7). Hence, we must conclude that resistance is not a function of the strength and weakness of individuals, but is defined independently of them.

2. *Two Kinds of Resistance.* A second significant question raised by the ethics of power is the following: What sort of difficulty is relevant to value—only the difficulty intrinsic to the nature of the achievement, or perhaps also difficulty extrinsic to the nature of the achievement? By *intrinsic* resistance, I mean resistance that has two characteristics. First, it is *pertinent* insofar as it is created by the specific requirements of the end one pursues. Second, it is *essential*, insofar as it is resistance anyone who engages in the pursuit of this end would have to confront, regardless of their particular circumstances. For example, Beethoven’s musical achievements had to overcome the intrinsic resistance involved in breaking with traditional harmony, developing new forms of musical expression, struggling to articulate complex new musical ideas, and so on. These difficulties are both pertinent, because they belong to the very nature of musical innovation, and essential, since anyone who engages in musical composition will have to face them.

By *extrinsic* resistance, I have in mind two types of obstacles. First, some obstacles are *non-essential* but still *pertinent* to the pursuit of a particular end. For example, Beethoven’s deafness constituted a resistance to his ability to write music that is pertinent, insofar as it is created by the requirements of musical composition (a mathematician, for example, might not be comparably affected by deafness). But it is also accidental, insofar as it is not an obstacle all composers would have to face. Second, some obstacles are *neither essential nor pertinent* to the pursuit of some particular end. Thus, obstacles of this sort might include Beethoven’s precarious financial situation, his isolation, the re-

sistance of a conservative public to his innovations, or the opposition of conflicting aspirations to his desire to write music.

The two kinds of resistance presumably make different contributions to the value of an achievement. To appreciate this difference, consider the following case. Suppose that two scientists make the same discovery. But while one had to spend a lifetime of investigation, the other stumbled upon it by chance. The discovery was, in a sense, more difficult for one than for the other. Does this make a difference to the value of their respective achievements? Do we admire the first scientist more than the second, even though the content of their achievements is the same? I am inclined to think that we are of two minds in this connection. On the one hand, we regard their achievements as equivalent. But this does not (necessarily) imply that the difficulty of the achievement did not contribute to its value. It merely implies that only *intrinsic* difficulty is taken into account, and this difficulty was the same for both.²² On the other hand, we might also be inclined to admire the first scientist more than the second, because he had to overcome *extrinsic* difficulty as well. Thus, our admiration for Beethoven grows deeper when we learn of his deafness or loneliness.

We would still like to know exactly what difference overcoming extrinsic resistance makes to the value of an achievement. It is unlikely to make it a greater achievement. Thus, would Beethoven's music been any less great, if he had turned out not to be deaf or lonely? Or would the first scientist's discovery have been a less important step in the advancement of knowledge if he had stumbled upon it easily and by chance? More promising in this connection is the suggestion that we ought to distinguish between a great *achievement* and a great *individual*. Thus, the first scientist, unlike the second, had to demonstrate certain qualities of character, such as discipline and perseverance. And those qualities make him a great scientist, in the sense that they are likely to lead him to further discoveries. The second scientist could also be a great scientist but, as things stand, we have no reason to think so from the sole fact of that discovery he made, since he did not have to demonstrate the qualities of character that would prepare him to make further discoveries. To be a great scientist, great scientific achievements are necessary, but they are not sufficient. The presence of certain qualities of character, which make the achievement more than a mere matter of luck, seems also required.

3. *The Value of Difficulty.* We still have to determine the nature of the contribution that difficulty makes to the value of an achievement.

Whence the third question raised by Nietzsche's ethics of power: Is difficulty *sufficient* or merely *necessary* to the value of an achievement? It is fairly clear that the sole fact that an activity involves difficulty does not make it valuable. Eating twenty-five pies in one sitting is difficult, but that hardly makes it a valuable achievement, let alone a great one. It must therefore be the case that the content of an activity possesses a determinate value, which is independent of the fact that it involves the overcoming of resistance. Accordingly, there must be constraints on what kind of achievement is a candidate for greatness. Nietzsche does not say what these constraints are, only that they do not necessarily coincide with (what we consider) *moral* constraints.

Nietzsche's lack of specificity on this matter may well seem to be a significant shortcoming of his ethical thought. In particular, it may suggest that the embarrassment felt by most scholars about his ethics of power is legitimate after all. This embarrassment, remember, was grounded in the view that if power is a value, then Nazi expansionism, horrifying as it was, would nonetheless have been good. Even in the new interpretation of the concept of the will to power I developed in the previous chapter, Nazi expansionism remains a form of the will to power, for it certainly involved much overcoming of resistance.

I wish to put this issue to rest with two remarks. Note, first, that in my account Nazi expansionism is no longer simply will to power, but will to power applied to the particular first-order desire to dominate and control others. And this implies that Nazi expansionism is objectionable not (at least not simply) by virtue of being *will to power*, but rather because it results from a particular first-order desire, in connection to which the will to power is exercised.²³

To rule out the value of Nazi expansionism, Nietzsche would have to specify what first-order desires are acceptable opportunities for the pursuit of power—in particular, he would have to show that the desire to dominate and control others at the heart of Nazi ideology is not such an acceptable opportunity. As I conceded earlier, Nietzsche does nothing of the sort. This omission may be explained, and justified, in the light of his broader philosophical objectives. The target of his revaluation is the life-negating condemnation of suffering, and its manifestations in the morality of compassion, and the conception of happiness as contentment or resignation. For this general revaluation of the role and significance of suffering in human existence, establishing the value of power suffices. The further question of how we determine those ends in connection with which it is acceptable to pursue power

is without a doubt an important question. But it is not a question Nietzsche's general project of overcoming nihilism is required to answer. And this may well be why he shows little interest in it.²⁴

4. *Power Alone as an End in Itself*. On some occasions, however, Nietzsche appears to offer an answer to this very question. He suggests that providing an opportunity for power is what determines the value of a determinate end: "You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I say unto you: it is the good war that hallows any cause" (Z, I 10). Even more explicitly, he declares: "What is the objective measure of value? Solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power" (WP 674; cf. 855). This presupposes that power alone can be an end in itself. I argued in Chapter 3 that power is always pursued in connection with a determinate end, other than power itself, which gives resistance a determinate content. According to this view, power is an end that is always parasitic upon the pursuit of another end. If I did not desire anything else than power, then I could not pursue power either. The question I wish to raise here is the following: Are the determinate ends in connection to which power is pursued merely opportunities for the bare overcoming of resistance, which thus proves to be a self-standing end? Or is power never a self-standing end, but it can only be power with regard to some other determinate end (for example, intellectual power, or artistic creative power, and so on)?

Could I, for example, seek resistance in the pursuit of knowledge, while caring not really about knowledge, but only about establishing my power through the overcoming of resistance to it? If this were possible, then power would be a non-parasitic end and the determinate end would become a kind of optional, opportunistic, and purely instrumental end. For example, I might set out to write a groundbreaking philosophy book not because I care about philosophy, but because I want to establish my intellectual power. It would not matter, apparently, *what* I overcome resistance *for*, so long as I overcome resistance. My desire to overcome resistance would motivate me to pick some determinate end as a mere pretext to overcome resistance.

One might object that one would still have to explain why I care to establish power in *this* particular respect (say, intellectual power), rather than in another. This objection is hardly persuasive, for one could reply that, since power is a formal end, one needs to pick some determinate end with respect to which one can seek it—and any such end will presumably do. In this view, I do not experience an intellectual puzzle as resistance because I care about knowledge; rather, I care

about knowledge because it allows me to define some resistance against which to strive.

I can see two reasons to challenge this view. First, if the nature of the determinate end did not matter, then we would no longer be able to rule out as frivolous, disgusting, or simply ridiculous achievements such as that of eating twenty-five pies in one sitting. To avoid this implication, there ought to be constraints in the choice of determinate ends in connection with which to pursue power. We could argue that other ends, such as the pursuit of knowledge, are better simply because they somehow offer greater opportunities for the overcoming of resistance. But I doubt that such an argument could be made compelling. Hence, we must assume that standards other than the value of power must be brought to bear on the selection of determinate ends, and so that one must actually *care* about ends other than power alone.

Second, in the view I am considering, the pursuit of power would not require that one actually *desire* any determinate end besides power itself. Is this the case? Could I not really care about philosophical truth but enjoy the exercise of looking for it just because it is a challenge? Nietzsche apparently believes that it is a condition of my participation in any activity that I care about its determinate end. Thus, when I *contemplate* an activity, I may care only about the activity itself and not its end, but full *participation* in this activity requires that I care about its end. Now, presumably it is psychologically difficult—indeed perhaps impossible—to make myself care for *any* particular end by an arbitrary act of will. Hence, it is likely that my ability to participate in an activity depends on my already and independently caring about its end.²⁵

5. *Valuing Enemies*. Nietzsche never tires of emphasizing one important feature of his ethics of power: “It consists in profoundly grasping the value of having enemies” (TI, V 3). If power lies in the overcoming of resistance, then the commitment to the value of power implies that we must actively seek resistance. In one of his most provocative metaphors, he has Zarathustra declare that we should think of ourselves as “warriors” who actively seek enemies: “We do not want to be spared by our best enemies, nor by those whom we love thoroughly. So let me tell you the truth! [. . .] You should have eyes that always seek an enemy” (Z, I 10).

Even this, however, is not enough. The commitment to the value of power also implies that we must choose the sort of resistance that offers the greatest challenge, or, as Zarathustra urges his disciples, you must

seek worthy enemies: “I love the valiant; but it is not enough to wield a broadsword, one must also know against whom. And often there is more valor when one refrains and passes by, in order to save oneself for the worthier enemy. You shall have enemies who are to be hated, but not enemies to be despised: you must be proud of your enemy; thus I taught once before” (Z, III 12[21]).

Nietzsche acknowledges the limits of even the strongest of men, however. No one can fight all the fights. And so, his ethics of power recommends a special kind of prudence in the choice of the fights one takes up. This prudence is not the “virtue that makes small” of these “lower men” who make a virtue out of avoiding fighting at all costs (Z, III 5[2], IV 13). It is, on the contrary, a diametrically opposite kind of prudence, which looks not just for a fight, but for a good fight. For instance, the war Zarathustra frequently exhorts his disciples to wage is essentially a war for *knowledge*: “your war you shall wage—for your thoughts” (Z, I 10). And in waging this war, he urges them not to waste their energies on unworthy opponents, who raise only lame or dimwitted objections to their novel ideas: “For the worthier enemy, O my friends, you shall save yourselves; therefore you must pass by much—especially much rabble who raise a din in your ears about the people and about peoples. Keep your eyes undefiled by their pros and cons! There is much justice, much injustice; and whoever looks on becomes angry. Sighting and smiting here become one; therefore go away into the woods and lay your sword to sleep” (Z, III 12[21]).

The worthier the enemy, the greater—or, as Nietzsche also likes to say, the “nobler”—the achievement of vanquishing him: “How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies! [. . .] For he desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and *very much* to honor!” (GM, I 10; cf. III 7; EH, I 7; WP 770).²⁶ Zarathustra takes this idea even further. If friendship contributes to happiness, and happiness lies in the overcoming of resistance, then the relation that defines friendship could well be conflictual: “In a friend one should have one’s best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him” (Z, I 14). And indeed, this attitude extends to the relationship to oneself: “We adopt the same attitude toward the ‘enemy within’ ” (TI, V 3), a strategy Nietzsche already detected at the heart of asceticism (HH, I 141; GM, III 10).

III. The Revaluation of All Values

If the interpretation of Nietzsche's project of revaluation I have developed so far is correct, a close examination of his actual execution of it should confirm two central claims. The first is that the ultimate object of revaluation is the role and significance of suffering in human existence. And the second is that revaluation is driven by the ethics of power. Indeed, as I now propose to argue, Nietzsche's rejection of the morality of compassion and of the ideal of happiness as contentment (or resignation), as well as his elaboration of the ideal of human greatness, constitute a revaluation of suffering informed by the value granted to the will to power.

1. *The Revaluation of Compassion*

Nietzsche develops a variety of criticisms against the morality of compassion. For example, he rejects the metaphysical monism on which it depends in Schopenhauer's version of it (GS 99; cf. D 133).²⁷ But he articulates his two most basic objections against the morality of compassion in section 338 of *The Gay Science*: compassion is not good for the agent who is its object, and it is not good for the compassionate agent himself. Let me begin with the first objection. Although some scholars continue to maintain that Nietzsche's revaluation of compassion is a wholesale rejection of it, this interpretation is no longer tenable. For one thing, we can no longer ignore that Nietzsche clearly advocates certain forms of compassion and benevolence. For example, in the section under consideration, he attacks the morality of compassion on explicitly altruistic grounds: it is not good *for those who suffer* (cf. EH, I 4). Elsewhere, he also argues that compassion has value but that its value depends on the character of the compassionate *agent* himself: "a man who is by nature a *master*—when such a man has compassion, well, *this* compassion has value! But what good is the compassion of those who suffer! Or those who, worse, *preach* compassion!" (BGE 293).

Nietzsche's assessment of the value of compassion is therefore highly qualified, but the exact nature of this qualification remains a source of puzzlement.²⁸ Placing the revaluation of compassion in the broader context of the revaluation of suffering sheds, in my view, considerable light on this very issue. Consider, to begin, why Nietzsche thinks that compassion can be harmful to the individual who is its object: "our dear compassionate friends [. . .] wish to *help* and have no thought

of the personal necessity of distress, although terrors, deprivations, impoverishments, midnights, adventures, risks and blunders are as necessary for me and for you as are their opposites. It never occurs to them that, to put it mystically, the path to one's heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell" (GS 338).

In other words, he objects to compassion when it ignores the value of suffering to the agent, and compassion is bound to be so ignorant, he proceeds to argue, when it considers "suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, worthy of annihilation, and as a defect of existence." Along the same lines, he fears that compassion might also undermine an individual's ability to achieve "greatness": "sometimes compassionate hands can interfere in a downright destructive manner in a great destiny" (EH, I 4). As I will argue shortly, Nietzsche defines greatness in terms of power, or the overcoming of resistance, so that there cannot be greatness without suffering. The compassion that seeks to eliminate all suffering indiscriminately is thus bound to undermine the prospects of greatness.

Nietzsche does not simply deny all value to compassion, however, but instead proposes a radical reevaluation of it. He explicitly contrasts it with the ordinary concept of compassion:

Whether it is hedonism or pessimism, utilitarianism or eudaimonism—all these ways of thinking that measure the value of things in accordance with *pleasure* and *pain* [. . .] are ways of thinking that stay in the foreground and naïvetés on which anyone conscious of *creative* powers and an artistic conscience will look down upon not without derision, not without compassion. Compassion with *you*—that, of course, is not compassion in your sense [. . .]. *Our* compassion is a higher and more farsighted compassion: we see how *man* makes himself smaller, how *you* make him smaller—and there are moments when we behold *your* compassion with indescribable anxiety, when we resist this compassion—when we find your seriousness more dangerous than any frivolity. You want, if possible—and there is no more insane "if possible"—to *abolish suffering*. And we? It really seems that *we* would rather have it higher and worse than ever. Well-being as you understand it—that is no goal, that seems to us an *end*, a state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible—that makes his destruction *desirable*. 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)

The proper object of compassion is not the sufferings of others, and the properly compassionate attitude is not motivated by a desire "to abolish suffering." The correct conception of the happiness of others,

which is supposed to direct compassion, is not the elimination of suffering, but it is the “enhancement of man” brought on by “creative powers and an artistic conscience,” which require “the discipline of suffering.” Far from seeking to abolish suffering, Nietzsche’s own brand of compassion “would rather have it higher and worse than ever.” This remains genuine compassion, however, insofar as it is driven by a concern to benefit the other: “But if you have a suffering friend, be not a resting place for his suffering, but a hard bed as it were, a field cot: thus you will profit him best” (Z, II 3).

In explicit contrast with Schopenhauer’s view, Nietzschean compassion is not (at least not necessarily) aroused by the suffering of others, nor does it imply a condemnation of it: “*My kind of ‘compassion.’*— This is a feeling for which I find no name adequate: I sense it when I see precious capabilities squandered [. . .]. Or when I see anyone halted, as a result of some stupid accident, at something less than he might have become. [. . .] This is a kind of ‘compassion’ although there is really no ‘passion’ I share” (WP 367). Compassion is a response not primarily to suffering, but to missed opportunities. Indeed, compassion can be a proper response to people who do not suffer in any way, but lead very comfortable lives, when such lives involve the squandering of “precious capabilities” or the “mediocrity” brought on by “wretched contentment.” And so, Nietzschean compassion may be aroused by the *lack* of suffering. And this, presumably, is a consequence of his conception of happiness. “Our happiness,” as he sometimes calls it, is not opposed to misery or suffering, but involves it as an essential “ingredient”: “happiness and unhappiness are sisters and even twins that either grow up together or [. . .] *remain small* together” (GS 338). The lack of suffering (of “unhappiness”) implies the lack of true happiness.

It is worth noting that none of this implies that Nietzsche’s own brand of compassion cannot be aroused by the sufferings of others. Still, it will no longer be a response to suffering *as such*, but to the suffering that causes “precious capabilities” to be “squandered,” or “halts” someone at “something less than he might have become.” Nietzsche is mindful of the fact that even the strongest individual cannot fight all the fights, and that some challenges might provide better opportunities for growth and overcoming than others. But he largely ignores such complications in his focus to debunk morality’s wholesale condemnation of suffering.

Nietzsche describes his second objection to the morality of compas-

sion in the following terms: “Indeed, those who now preach the morality of compassion even take the view that precisely this and only this is moral—to lose one’s *own* way in order to come to the assistance of the neighbor. [. . .] All such arousing of compassion and calling for help is secretly seductive, for our ‘own way’ is too hard and demanding and too remote from the love and gratitude of others, and we do not really mind escaping from it [. . .]” (GS 338).

Unfortunately, Nietzsche leaves it entirely unclear what “one’s *own* way” is supposed to be. He offers some clues elsewhere, however—specifically, he claims that compassion may be an impediment to the greatness of the compassionate individual: “The overcoming of compassion I count among the *noble* virtues: as ‘Zarathustra’s temptation’ I invented a situation in which a great cry of distress reaches him, as pity tries to attack him like a final sin that would entice him away from *himself*. To remain the master at this point, to keep the eminence of one’s task undefiled by the many lower and more myopic impulses that are at work in so-called selfless actions, that is the test, perhaps the ultimate test, which a Zarathustra must pass—his real *proof* of strength” (EH, I 4). The general idea is clear enough: there are values (“noble” or “masterly” values) that compete with “moral” values, thereby challenging their claim to be the “highest values.”

The present (internalist) strategy of revaluation consists in drawing attention to areas of our ethical sensibilities (or “perspectives”) that have been ignored because of the pre-dominance of Christian “moral” values, but not suppressed altogether. Besides what we regard as our “official” highest values (for example, compassion, happiness as absence of suffering), Nietzsche exposes the continuing influence on our value judgments of “unofficial” values that compete with the official ones, challenging in effect their status as the highest values, namely, the “noble” or “masterly” values of “power” and “distinction” (BGE 260, 265, 270; GM, I 11). The conflict between the demands of compassion and those of power proves to be one of those “places” where, between a “master morality” and a “slave morality,” “the struggle is as yet undecided” (GM, I 16). We might imagine Nietzsche devising the following sort of test for our ethical intuitions. Given the choice between a world in which there are great achievements, but in which much human suffering goes unrelieved, and a world in which much or all human suffering is relieved, but few or no great achievements exist, would we choose the latter, “moral” world over the former “immoral” one? Nietzsche invites us to consider that this question is likely to find

us torn with ambivalence, precisely because we are responsive to the claims of greatness.

Nietzsche is fully aware of the disturbing implications of this position, and he does not shy away from them: “*What belongs to greatness.*—Who will attain anything great if he does not find in himself the strength and the will to *inflict* great suffering? Being able to suffer is the least thing; weak women and even slaves often achieve virtuosity in that. But not to perish of internal distress and uncertainty when one inflicts great suffering and hears the cry of this suffering—that is great, that belongs to greatness” (GS 325; cf. 28). At first glance, this passage is deeply offensive to our ethical sensibilities. But two observations should make us begin to see that it may not be easily dismissed.

Note, first, that Nietzsche does not claim that “the strength and the will to *inflict* great suffering” on others is what greatness *consists in*. He only says that this “belongs” to greatness, that is to say, it is a *necessary* condition of it, but not a sufficient condition. Moreover, to say that greatness requires “the strength and the will” to inflict suffering does not imply that greatness is always and inevitably achieved at the expense of the sufferings of others. Nietzsche’s claim, rather, is that there may be circumstances in which the claims of greatness conflict with the claims of the “morality of compassion,” and that it is not clear, in these circumstances, that the latter should override the former.

There is, of course, a difference between *ignoring* the suffering of others and actually *inflicting* it on them. Greatness might plausibly sometimes require the former, but does it also demand the latter? Two observations suggest that it could. First, in some cases at least, the refusal to help another in distress could itself be a cause (and so an infliction) of additional suffering. My misery pains me, and so does your reluctance to alleviate it. Second, one of the paradigmatic forms of the will to power is competitive activity, the very purpose of which is for one competitor to inflict suffering on the other—if only by thwarting his desire to win.

It is also worth emphasizing that Nietzsche’s great individual is not necessarily callously indifferent to the sufferings of others. He may, on the contrary, be quite sensitive to them, and inclined to lend his assistance, so that it may cost him much to leave them unattended, when greatness demands it. Nietzsche himself never tires of pointing out that compassion often constitutes a “temptation” (Z, IV; EH, I 4) or a “danger” (GS 271), an enticement to take leave of our “own way,” “for our ‘own way’ is too hard and demanding” (GS 338). Thus, the

refusal to comply with the demands of morality is not always a matter of succumbing to “temptation,” which as in the present case may well be to do just what morality requires. The refusal to comply with moral demands may rather be motivated by the commitment to certain non-moral values. Greatness makes an actual *claim* on us, and it is as such a claim that it may conflict with the claims of morality. When the great individual does not yield to the “cry of the suffering of others,” he is not moved by a sociopathic impulse, he is responsive to a value.

2. *The Concept of Greatness*

Our admiration for certain kinds of human “greatness” or “perfection”—for individuals who represent “the advancement and prosperity of man in general”—stands in an often unacknowledged conflict with our allegiance to morality. These values make a claim on us, from the standpoint of which we might be led to call into question moral values themselves:

One has taken the *value* of these “values” as given, as factual, as beyond all question; one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing the “good man” to be of greater value than “the evil man,” of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of man in general (the future of man included). But what if the reverse were true? What if a symptom of regression were inherent in the “good,” likewise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living *at the expense of the future*? Perhaps more comfortably, less dangerously, but at the same time in a meaner style, more basely?—So 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, Preface 6)

This passage draws a connection between the “advancement and prosperity of man in general,” human “greatness” or perfection on the one hand, and “power” on the other. But it does not explain or establish it. I now want to attend to this connection.

In the most general terms, Nietzsche finds in creativity the paradigm of greatness:

Such men of great creativity, the really great men according to my understanding, will be sought in vain today and probably for a long time to come; until, after much disappointment, one must begin to comprehend *why* they are lacking and that nothing stands more malignantly in the way of their rise and evolution, today and for a long time to come, than what in Europe today is called simply “morality”—as if there were no other morality and could be no other—the aforementioned herd-animal

morality which is striving with all its power for a universal green-pasture happiness on earth, namely for security, absence of danger, comfort, the easy life [. . .]. The two doctrines it preaches most often are: “equal rights” and “sympathy with all that suffers”—and it takes suffering itself to be something that must absolutely be abolished. (WP 957; cf. Z, I 12; BGE 44, 212)

This unpublished passage brings together two important ideas that are echoed frequently in Nietzsche’s other writings: the definition of greatness in terms of creativity, and the idea that the main impediment to creativity is a morality founded on the condemnation of suffering. The ethics of power provides a plausible link between these two ideas. By characterizing greatness in terms of creativity, Nietzsche also invites us to think of it in terms of power, or the overcoming of resistance, for he regards creativity as a paradigmatic manifestation of the will to power. This in turn is supposed to explain why an ethics of compassion and contentment, which rests on the repudiation of suffering, poses a threat to the very possibility of greatness.

But is creativity plausibly understood as a form of the will to power? I should note, at the outset, that the concept of creativity is ambiguous. On the one hand, creativity denotes a special skill or quality possessed by some individuals, something like the inventiveness they display in resolving problems or overcoming difficulties. On the other hand, individuals are sometimes said to be creative when they *value* creative activity. Individuals who are creative in the first sense are simply *good* at creative activity, but they do not necessarily value it. Their creativity could be for them mere expediency, a skill called upon to resolve certain problems when they present themselves. Such individuals are creative enough to take on whatever difficulties might present themselves to them, but they do not necessarily relish them or seek them out. The individual who is creative in the second sense, by contrast, values creative activity itself, and so will deliberately seek out limitations to challenge, difficulties to overcome, or boundaries to cross.

We typically attribute creativity to artists, of course, but also to individuals engaged in many other kinds of activity: scientists, businessmen, politicians, and the like. Nietzsche emphasizes the case of artistic creation because artists are not simply inventive individuals who overcome limitations or difficulties only when they have to, but they actively look for them because they value creative activity itself. The artist, in other words, is creative not only in the first sense, but in the second as well, and this is the sense in which creativity is a manifestation of the will to power. Although the artist is the paradigmatic

instantiation of this concept of creativity, scientists, businessmen, politicians, and the like could be creative in this sense as well. The creative individual, as Nietzsche proposes to conceive of him, deliberately seeks to confront and break boundaries, to expand the domain of human experience, to overcome limitations hitherto unchallenged, or to vanquish resistance perhaps once thought unassailable. And if greatness is creativity, then greatness is power: “One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the greatest resistance is constantly being overcome” (TI, IX 38; cf. Z, Preface 4; III 12[19]).

If we look closely at Nietzsche’s discussion of greatness, however, we are bound to notice a perplexing ambiguity. On the one hand, his paradigmatic exemplars of greatness are individuals who are great at some determinate activity: thus, Beethoven was a great *composer*, and Shakespeare was a great *writer*. In this case, the greatness of these individuals consists in their challenging successfully musical or poetic conventions, in their expanding the expressive resources of their respective media, and (perhaps) in their overcoming the inertial resistance of a public accustomed to the very conventions they shatter. On the other hand, Nietzsche also suggests that what makes these individuals great is not, or not only, these achievements, but a distinctive condition of their *soul*: “Precisely this shall be called *greatness*: being capable of being as manifold as whole, as ample as full” (BGE 212). In the soul of a great individual, many different drives and points of view are unified and organized into a coherent whole. This is indeed the salient characteristic of all those individuals we have come to consider “great,” such as Shakespeare: “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” (WP 966; cf. 928, 933; TI, IX 49).

What is the relation between these two concepts of greatness? The short answer is that great achievements require great souls. The deliberate quest for resistance to overcome, for limitations to challenge will necessarily spawn “an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states,” in which consists, according to Nietzsche, “the enhancement of the type ‘man,’ the continual ‘self-overcoming of man,’ to use a moral formula in a supra-moral sense.” (BGE 257; cf. Z, III 12[19]). To see this, consider the following example.

The individual who aspires to great intellectual achievements, for example, will actively seek new problems or unexplored areas of inquiry as so many challenges to confront. Thus, the great intellect will tend to be skeptical, he will learn to recognize problems or limits to existing knowledge, so as to exercise himself against them: “One should not let oneself be misled: great intellects are skeptics. Zarathustra is a skeptic. [. . .] A spirit which wants to do great things, which also wills the means for it, is necessarily a skeptic” (A 54; cf. 50; HH, Preface 4). And being a skeptic, for Nietzsche, is to risk confrontation: “But the ability to contradict, the attainment of a good conscience when one feels hostile to what is accustomed, traditional, and hallowed—that is still more excellent and constitutes what is really great, new, and amazing in our culture” (GS 297; cf. D 370).

But such deliberate confrontation is bound to spawn resistance within the soul of that individual himself, in the form of fear of uncertainty or isolation, discouragement, conflicting inclinations, or simply psychological inertia. For intellectual greatness to be possible, then, the drives expressed in these forms of resistance must be mastered—the individual must overcome or manage the ever greater psychological tensions his pursuit of ever greater challenges will inevitably generate. In other words, the individual must have greatness of soul if he is to produce great works.

Now that we have clarified the concept of greatness, we may turn to the relation Nietzsche sees between creativity, which paradigmatically characterizes it, and suffering. It has almost become a commonplace to find a relation between the creativity of the great individual and his suffering, a commonplace Nietzsche wholeheartedly endorses: “Creation—that is the great redemption from all suffering, and life’s growing light. But that the creator may be, suffering is needed” (Z, II 2). His view is distinctive and original, however, precisely in its conception of the nature of this relation. Thus, it is far from enough to say, as one recent commentator does, that for Nietzsche “great achievements (certainly great artistic achievements) seem to grow out of intense suffering.”²⁹ We need to know more about the relationship of creativity to suffering.

Consider Nietzsche’s primary example of a creative genius, Beethoven. According to the commonplace, suffering was a necessary condition of his creativity. Supposing this is so, it is still not clear that this fact would suffice to justify a full-blown reevaluation of suffering.³⁰ We might, for example, imagine Beethoven compelled to suffer for the sake

of his creativity because he lived in a conservative society, in which creative individuals were isolated, or even opposed and persecuted. This Beethoven could coherently deplore his suffering, even as he acknowledged its necessity for the sake of creativity, and aspire to a world in which one does not have to suffer in order to be creative. He could, in other words, continue to subscribe to the condemnation of suffering, yet without abandoning his commitment to the value of creativity.

If the value we ascribe to creativity is to underwrite a full-blown reevaluation of suffering, we need a different explanation of the necessity of suffering for creativity. Specifically, this necessity must not be merely *accidental*, a function of the contingent circumstances of the world in which the creative individual finds himself. Suffering must rather be an *essential* condition of the possibility of creativity, and the question is how it could be. Nietzsche's concept of the will to power supplies an answer. If creativity is a paradigmatic instance of the will to power, then suffering, in the form of resistance, proves to be an essential ingredient of creativity. Nietzsche's characterization of creativity in terms of power shows that it is no accident that one must suffer in order to be creative: he who wants to be creative must welcome resistance, and therefore suffering, for overcoming resistance is precisely what being creative *consists in*. Beethoven was great not just because he wrote beautiful music, but because he deliberately sought to press the boundaries of his medium, to break free from some of the conventions that governed it, and to expand its expressive potential. From the point of view of the ethics of power, suffering is no longer a necessary evil, it is an ingredient of the good.³¹

3. *The Revaluation of Happiness*

Nietzsche's revaluation is not limited to the central moral value of compassion. He relies on his ethics of power to reevaluate other virtues, the concept of justice, and even non-moral values, such as beauty.³² But I want to turn here to his revaluation of the other major life-negating ideal that lies at the source of nihilism, namely, the conception of happiness as the absence of suffering.

Nietzsche opens *The Anti-Christ*, which he presents as the beginning of the actual execution of the revaluation of values, with a surprising claim: "We have discovered happiness" (A 1). Clearly, he has in mind "a new happiness," which he also presents as "my happiness," or "our happiness." He contrasts it with the prevalent conception of happiness,

for which he does not conceal his contempt. He defines his own new conception explicitly in terms of the will to power: “What is happiness?—The feeling that power *increases*—that a resistance is overcome. *Not* contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war; *not* virtue, but proficiency (virtue in the Renaissance style, *virtù*, virtue free of moralic acid)” (A 2; cf. D 60; Z, IV 13; WP 1023) In contrast, he characterizes the happiness he rejects in terms of “wretched contentment” (Z, P 3; IV 13), “resignation” (Z, III 5[2]; A 1) or even “surrender” (D 60; Z, IV 13).

The central difference between these two conceptions is the place they assign to *suffering*. The traditional conception, which Nietzsche rejects, is defined in opposition to suffering. It is, indeed, simply “the *absence of suffering*” (GM, III 17), which comes in a variety of guises. The most obvious are “pleasure” (BGE 212), or “contentment” (A 2). But the same ideal animates the “*English* happiness” of “comfort and fashion” (BGE 228; cf. 44; WP 464), and “resignation” (A 1) or the “deep sleep” advocated by “Indian philosophers” (GM, III 17). In the latter, as Nietzsche puts it, “the hedonism of the weary is here the supreme measure of value” (WP 155).

In contrast, suffering is an essential ingredient of Nietzsche’s conception of happiness in terms of power. The pursuit of power is necessarily accompanied by suffering (WP 112), and so is, in particular, the paradigmatic form of this pursuit, creativity: “fundamentally, however, the eternal-creative appeared to me to be, as the eternal compulsion to destroy, associated with pain” (WP 416; cf. Z, II 2). Nietzsche’s conception of happiness is therefore not simply non-hedonistic, a feature it shares with other conceptions, such as the view that happiness consists in the satisfaction of desires. It is also, we might say, *anti-hedonistic* insofar as it presents suffering as an essential ingredient of happiness.³³

Nietzsche exposes another fundamental contrast between his “new happiness” and the traditional conception of it. He introduces it by distinguishing conceptions of happiness as “activity” and “passivity”:

The “well-born” simply *felt* themselves to be the “happy” [. . .]; and as full human beings, overloaded with strength [*Kraft*] and therefore *necessarily* active, they likewise did not know how to separate activity out from happiness, for them being active is of necessity included in happiness (whence *eu prattein* takes its origin)—all of this in opposition to “happiness” on the level of the impotent [*Ohnmächtigen*], oppressed, those

festering with poisonous and hostile feelings, in whom it essentially appears as narcotic, anesthetic, calm, peace, “Sabbath,” relaxation of mind and stretching of limbs, in short, *passively*. (GM, I 10).

The overcoming of resistance is essentially an *activity*. Insofar as happiness lies in such overcoming, then it can only be experienced in being active. Moreover, the overcoming of resistance requires strength, so that this form of happiness is possible only for those who are strong enough. For the weak, by contrast, little successful overcoming of resistance is possible. In fact, their very weakness induces them to resent resistance as such. They become accordingly inclined to think of happiness in terms of “passivity,” the cessation of activity: “resignation” (“the happiness of the weaklings” [A 1]), or “wretched contentment” (the “small happiness” or “happiness of the greatest number” [Z, III 5(2); IV 13]).

Since activity consists in confronting and overcoming resistance, Nietzsche provocatively describes it as “war” or “proficiency [*virtù*]” (A 2). The weak, to whom this sort of activity is denied, prefer to represent their happiness as “rest,” or “peace,” or “satiety”: “Happiness appears to them, in agreement with a tranquilizing (for example, Epicurean or Christian) medicine and way of thought, pre-eminently as the happiness of resting, of not being disturbed, of satiety, of finally attained unity, as a ‘sabbath of sabbaths,’ to speak with the holy rhetorician Augustine who was himself such a human being” (BGE 200). And therein lies the second important contrast. In the form it assumes in the ethics of power, happiness not only is not a *state* of rest, tranquility, or satiety, but it also *cannot be* such a state for several reasons. First, as we saw, happiness is conceived as an activity. Second, while on the traditional conception happiness is a state that can (and indeed must) be achieved once and for all, Nietzsche’s new happiness lies in a *specific* kind of activity that precisely precludes this sort of satiety. Insofar as this sort of happiness is experienced in the activity of confronting and overcoming resistance, it will never be a state that is reached once and for all. For so soon as the resistance is actually overcome, the activity comes to an end, and so does the happiness it creates. Impermanence, or “becoming,” is therefore an essential feature of Nietzsche’s “new happiness.”

The last issue I wish to consider here concerns Nietzsche’s ambiguous characterization of happiness now as the “feeling of power,” and now as “power itself” (A 2). Is his conception of happiness subjectivist, in other words, or objectivist? Does it consist of a merely subjective state

in the agent, or of an objective state of affairs outside of him? Nietzsche acknowledges this difference between *feeling* powerful and *being* powerful, for example, in connection with experiences of intoxication: “Here the experience of intoxication proved misleading. This increases the feeling of power in the highest degree—therefore, naively judged, power itself” (WP 48; cf. HH, I 545). Nietzsche, however, never denies that the feeling of power is a necessary component of happiness, but only that such a feeling is not a sufficient component of it. Happiness is feeling powerful when one really is powerful. There is no happiness for one who lacks the feeling of power, but conversely there is no genuine happiness for one whose feeling of power is deceptive.

IV. Genealogy and Revaluation

Among Nietzsche’s works, *On the Genealogy of Morals* has come to assume a privileged position. This book contains highly provocative investigations into the origins of morality. And it is the most systematic treatment of the subject to be found in his writings. These characteristics have unfortunately encouraged many to look in that work for Nietzsche’s last word about morality. In particular, they have attempted to construct a *critique* of morality out of the genealogical investigations he offers in it. In the Preface, Nietzsche does announce that he is interested in two basic questions: “under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? and what value do they themselves possess?” (GM, Preface 3, cf. 6) And so, the book has been thought to develop a novel form of *critique*, which seeks to assess the *value* of moral value judgments by determining their *origin*.³⁴

This estimation of the significance of the *Genealogy* is excessive in two respects. Nietzsche explicitly declares that genealogical inquiry into the origins of morality is not a critique of it, but only a means to such a critique, and a dispensable means at that. Thus, he observes that a genealogical investigation of morality has only a limited critical import: “The inquiry into the *origin* [Herkunft] of our evaluations and tables of the good is in absolutely no way identical with a critique of them, as is so often believed: even though the insight into some *pudenda origo* certainly brings with it a *feeling* of a diminution in value of the thing that originated thus and prepares the way to a critical mood and attitude toward it” (WP 254, cf. 69n.; GS 345). Presumably, a certain value judgment is not necessarily objectionable because it is found to have an objectionable origin (“*pudenda origo*”). At best, such a dis-

covery might make us suspicious toward it, but it is not itself a criticism—it only “prepares the way to a critical mood and attitude toward it.” Since he forbids any *direct* critical inference from genealogical inquiry, Nietzsche is not liable to the charge of genetic fallacy. A moral truth would be no less a truth, for example, for having been discovered through immoral means, or stumbled upon by a mind filled with *resentiment*.

In the Preface to the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche also claims that, even though a genealogical inquiry is not yet a critique of moral values, it may nevertheless be necessary for it: “for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances under which they grew, under which they evolved and changed (morality as a consequence, as symptom, as mask, as tartufferie, as illness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, as remedy, as stimulant, as restraint, as poison), a knowledge of a kind that has never existed or even been desired” (GM, Preface 6). Genealogical inquiry into the origin of morality provides the sort of knowledge that is required for a critique of it, but it is not *itself* such a critique.³⁵

But what sort of necessary knowledge might the genealogy give us? Consider first what standards Nietzsche proposes to bring to bear on the critique of moral values: “Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plenitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?” (GM, Preface 3). The description of these standards remains here strikingly vague and unhelpful. But it includes a crucial clue in the phrase “will of life,” which designates, in Nietzsche’s vocabulary, the will to power (see BGE 259; GS 349). The value of moral values, therefore, is measured by the standards of the ethics of power. As Nietzsche asks later in the Preface, do they promote or thwart “the *highest power* [höchste Mächtigkeit] *and splendor* actually possible to the type man” (GM, Preface 6)?

To understand Nietzsche’s methodology, we must recall an important aspect of his conception of moral judgments. The value of a value judgment does not depend on its truth, but on whether or not they contribute to the “prosperity of human beings.” Nietzsche maintains that human beings will create the values that are favorable to their prosperity. Different “physiological” types of human beings will therefore create different moral codes, whose prevalence favors their interests. Those Nietzsche calls “the weak,” for example, will create a

moral code in which compassion is the cardinal virtue, precisely because their very weakness makes them unable to overcome their own suffering and forces them to depend on the compassionate benevolence of others (see GS 21; BGE 260; I return to this issue in Chapter 6). In the climate in which such a code pre-dominates, by contrast, the energies of “the strong” risk being either squandered on the care for the weak, or sapped by the guilt incurred for failing to help them. These energies are therefore diverted from the pursuit of greatness.

Genealogical inquiry into the origins of morality contributes to its critique if we take these “origins” to tell us something about the distinctive causal effects of the climate in which such morality prevails. Knowledge of origins tells us precisely this if it exposes the “physiological type” of the presumed creators of the moral code. And indeed, Nietzsche’s genealogical investigation of the prevalent “Christian” morality reveals that it is born out of “physiological degeneration” and “weakness” or “impotence.” The culture in which this morality predominates is therefore likely to be deleterious to the strong, and therefore to the “prosperity of human beings” generally. While Nietzsche calls “slave morality” the moral code favorable to the weak, he calls “master morality” that which is suited to the strong. The distinctive trait of “master morality” is precisely that it values power and suffering: “In the foreground, there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow [. . .]. The noble human being honors himself as one who is powerful” (BGE 260; cf. WP 957). This is in stark contrast with the hedonism of Christian “slave morality”: “Christianity, with its perspective of ‘blessedness,’ is a mode of thought typical of a suffering and feeble species of man. Abundant strength wants to create, suffer, go under” (WP 222).³⁶

Determining whether a moral code has its origin in strength or weakness is, Nietzsche tells us, but one way to uncover the facts about a moral code that are relevant to its critique. Thus, in the Preface, he declares quite explicitly that the genealogical investigations upon which he is about to embark are “only one means among many” to carry out his critique of morality (GM, Preface 5). One might instead simply attend to the effects the prevalence of a certain moral code has on culture *here and now*. Do the pre-dominant values promote or thwart “the advancement and prosperity of human beings in general”? In fact, and this should be particularly troubling to those who grant a privileged position to the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche occasionally suggests that

its investigations may be entirely superfluous. For far from needing to uncover the origins of a moral code to understand the effects of its prevalence in a culture, it may be our understanding of these effects that allows us to infer the code's origins: "Formerly one said of every morality: 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' I say of every morality: 'It is a fruit by which I recognize the *soil* from which it sprang' " (WP 257).³⁷

We should note that the internalist strategy of revaluation, which was discussed in the beginning of this chapter, suggests another interpretation of the critical import of Nietzsche's genealogical investigations. These investigations would aim to show that the Christian condemnation of power (and the corresponding valuation of equality and neighborly love) have their "origin" in the very desire for the power they ostensibly condemn (see Z, II 7; GM, III 18; cf. WP 179). Nietzsche would then invoke this fact to show that the Christians have a stronger commitment to the value of power than they are themselves prepared to acknowledge, a commitment that could even be strong enough to ground an internal challenge against those values they proclaim to be their highest.

So understood, genealogical investigations would simply be one way to identify the particular contents of the Christian evaluative perspective, in order to mount an internal critique of the life-negating values that appear dominant in it. But it would not be a new form of ("genealogical") critique at all. In particular, the fact sometimes emphasized by Nietzsche that morality has an immoral *origin* (see WP 461) would have, as such, no critical import.

The Eternal Recurrence

But all joy wants eternity—wants deep, wants deep
eternity.

—THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA, IV 19

The eternal recurrence is “the fundamental conception” of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a book Nietzsche regards as his highest achievement (EH, III 1, Preface 4). In one of his latest books, he also identifies himself as the teacher of the eternal recurrence: “I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysos—I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence” (TI, X 5). Yet, for all its importance, the doctrine is also one of the most difficult and mysterious in a body of works that includes many difficult and mysterious views. According to a venerable scholarly tradition, the idea of the eternal recurrence should be understood in the context of a campaign against nihilism.¹ It is, specifically, the centerpiece of a new ethical ideal of “affirmation of life” Nietzsche puts forward in opposition to the nihilist’s negation of life: “the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable” (EH, III *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 1; cf. BGE 56).

In keeping with much of the scholarship, I will take the following text to provide the pivotal formulation of the doctrine:

The greatest weight.—What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!”

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never

have I heard anything more divine.” If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate confirmation and seal? (GS 341)

The idea of the eternal recurrence is invoked to formulate a thought experiment: how would you react if “this life, as you now live it and have lived it [recurred] once more and innumerable times more [. . .] all in the same succession and sequence”? The purpose of this thought experiment is to determine whether you are life-affirming or life-negating. You affirm life if you react with joy to the prospect of its eternal recurrence, and you “*crave nothing more fervently.*” You negate life, by contrast, if this prospect is cause for despair. To advocate the affirmation of life, then, is to exhort compliance with a distinctive ethical imperative: live your life so as to become able to welcome its eternal recurrence.²

Much has been written about this mysterious and recalcitrant doctrine. I will not here pretend to offer an exhaustive and compelling account of it that avoids all the shortcomings and preserves all the insights of existing interpretations. But I do believe that we might still learn something new and illuminating about the doctrine if we place it in the context of the interpretation I have so far developed in this book. To this end, I propose to attend to two specific questions. First, what exact role does the concept of the eternal recurrence play in the characterization of the ideal of affirmation of life? Second, what is the nature of the relation Nietzsche draws between the concept of the eternal recurrence and the project of a revaluation of values?

I. Eternal Recurrence and the Affirmation of Life

The concept of eternal recurrence may be thought to play two distinct possible roles in the characterization of the ideal of affirmation of life. In what I will call its *theoretical* role, the eternal recurrence denotes directly, or indirectly helps to bring out, a particular *property of the life* to be affirmed. In defining the affirmation of life as the ability to welcome its eternal recurrence, Nietzsche acknowledges that it is a demanding ideal (“the greatest weight”). It is demanding in this theoretical view not because affirming anything is difficult but because affirming a life with that particular property is. In its *practical* role, by

contrast, the eternal recurrence tells us something about what sort of practical stance or attitude *affirmation* is, rather than about the life to be affirmed. The affirmation of life is a demanding ideal, in this view, because of the nature of affirmation itself.

The following analogy illuminates the contrast between the theoretical and the practical conceptions of the eternal recurrence. People sometimes express their valuation of a particularly satisfying moment in their life by wishing that this moment would never end. Suppose I urge you to live the next moment of your life in such a way that you are able to wish that it would never end. I could urge you to do so because the moment *will*, in fact, never end, and if you want to have no regret over your life you should be prepared to deal with that fact. This would be the theoretical interpretation. More typically, however, in exhorting you to live a moment so that you are able to wish it would never end, I am in fact exhorting you to live that moment in such a way that you become able to adopt a certain attitude toward it. This is what I call the practical interpretation. I am invoking your ability to wish that the moment would never end as a way to characterize the kind of attitude I want you to be able to adopt toward it. Thus, wishing the eternity of a moment is taking it to possess a kind of perfection, such that it would make sense for you to want nothing about it ever to change.

Likewise, when Nietzsche urges us to live our life so as to become able to welcome its eternal recurrence, he may simply ask us to heed the fact that it will, in fact, recur eternally. This would be the theoretical interpretation of the doctrine. On the practical interpretation, by contrast, he would invoke the concept of eternal recurrence to describe a particular attitude he wants us to achieve toward our life—“affirmation.” From this practical standpoint, the important question is no longer whether I can establish that my life will eternally recur (or other relevant facts about that life which the idea of eternal recurrence is designed to bring out), but what the invocation of the eternal recurrence tells us about the nature of affirmation.

The contrast between the theoretical and the practical interpretations is also a contrast between two views of what is relevant to the *justification* of the claim that, in order to affirm life, I ought to live it so as to be able to desire its eternal recurrence. On the one hand, if we conceive of the eternal recurrence theoretically, then affirming life requires welcoming its eternal recurrence because it is a property of that life. If it turned out that life did not possess the relevant property, the

ideal of affirmation of life would no longer require me to comply with the imperative. If we conceive of the eternal recurrence practically, on the other hand, the ideal of affirmation of life *alone* requires such compliance because the concept of eternal recurrence indicates something about the nature of affirmation itself. It tells me what sort of attitude I am expected to adopt toward my life, regardless of what properties it has.

If we turn to the issue of the relation between the affirmation of life and the revaluation of values, we are presented with two possible interpretations. The pivotal formulation of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence presents it as the centerpiece of a test, or an experiment: Could you “*crave nothing more fervently*” than the eternal recurrence of your life? A most inviting and common view of this experiment is that it purports to determine the extent to which our life has realized the values we happen to have, *whatever these are*. So, when I ask whether I would welcome the eternal recurrence of my life, I simply ask whether I have any regrets about the way in which it has unfolded. And this is in turn supposed to amount to the question whether, in light of the values I happen to have, that life has proved good enough to make the prospect of its eternal recurrence desirable. In this view, the ideal of affirmation of life is a purely *formal* ideal inasmuch as its determinate content is supplied by whatever values I happen to have. Affirmation, in this view, is a matter of the successful *realization* of these values, not of their revaluation. In contrast to this formal interpretation, the ideal of affirmation could also be viewed as a *substantive* ideal inasmuch as its achievement is not a matter of realizing whatever values I happen to have—instead it requires that I comply with specific values, or with a specific range of values. In this case, affirmation may well require a *revaluation* of the values I happen to have.

I first conduct a detailed critical survey of four major distinctive interpretations of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. All of them reject the purely cosmological interpretation of the doctrine, and I begin with a brief rehearsal of the main arguments against it. All the interpretations I consider combine, in various ways and to varying degrees of coherence, both a theoretical and a practical side. On the theoretical side, the eternal recurrence designates some property of life that is meant to explain the difficulty involved in affirming it. On the practical side, most regard the affirmation of life, defined as the readiness to live it all over again, as a purely formal ideal. It is the ordinary exhortation to make sure that our life realizes our values and aspirations suffi-

ciently, so that we are left with no regrets about it. Some interpretations (Löwith and Clark) do suggest that the affirmation of life may be a more substantive ideal, insofar as it requires some sort of reevaluation, but their conceptions of neither the nature nor the grounds of this reevaluation adequately capture Nietzsche's intentions.

After reviewing and criticizing these interpretations, I will proceed to articulate a proposal of my own in contrast to them. My proposal is decidedly *practical*: the eternal recurrence tells us something about the nature of affirmation, rather than about the life to be affirmed. I will also argue that Nietzsche's invocation of it is not meant to underwrite a purely formal exhortation to have no regret about our lives by realizing our values in it to the greatest extent possible, whatever these values happen to be. It is rather a *substantive* invitation to live up to certain specific values. And it is precisely by virtue of this substantive ethical content that living in accordance with the eternal recurrence, and therefore affirming life, is not possible for those who reject those specific values.

II. Interpretations of the Eternal Recurrence

1. *The Eternal Recurrence as Cosmology*

The idea that the eternal recurrence plays a primarily theoretical role is inspired by the fact that Nietzsche sometimes presents it as a *scientific theory*, specifically a cosmology according to which everything that is has already been and is fated to be again, exactly as it was.³ It is therefore natural to think that he argues that one should live one's life so as to welcome its eternal recurrence precisely *because it will recur* eternally. This proposal makes the truth of the cosmology of the eternal recurrence crucial, since absent a proof of it, there is no reason to live one's life so as to welcome its eternal recurrence. The practical importance of the eternal recurrence thus depends essentially on its scientific soundness. This proposal raises a number of considerable difficulties. For one thing, Nietzsche's alleged cosmological "proof" of the eternal recurrence (WP 1063–66) is fatally flawed.⁴ For another, this proof, and indeed the cosmological interpretation of the eternal recurrence that rests upon it, is strictly confined to his unpublished notes.⁵ Of course, Nietzsche may have been unsatisfied with his putative proof in its current state. Or he may simply have been waiting for another occasion to publish it, when he was struck down by illness. Such conjectures become moot, however, when we consider two further facts.

First, Nietzsche insists that his doctrine of the eternal recurrence is a radically novel idea. Considered as a cosmological doctrine, however, it is hardly new: besides some notable precedents in ancient Greek philosophy, such as writings by Heraclitus and some Stoics, the view is also advocated, in one form or another, by Heine and Schopenhauer. Indeed, even the primary argument Nietzsche offers to support it is strikingly similar to one found in the work of Lucretius.⁶ His insistent belief in the novelty of his doctrine therefore invites us to challenge the assumption that he regarded it as a cosmology.

Most conclusive, in the end, is the fact that Nietzsche deemed the doctrine worthy of presentation in his published works *without* any argument for its truth as a cosmological doctrine. The effectiveness of the thought experiment described in the text I quoted earlier (GS 341) depends only on the purely hypothetical *supposition* that the eternal recurrence is true. The significance of the idea must therefore be independent of its truth as a scientific claim.

2. *The Eternal Recurrence and the Futility of Choice*

In contrast to subsequent scholars, Löwith (1997) takes the eternal recurrence to be a metaphysical doctrine, specifically one that implies metaphysical *fatalism*. It is at once the forward-looking view that my life as it is now will recur indefinitely many times and the backward-looking view that it has already been, just as it is, indefinitely many times (Z, III 2, 13). Its present occurrence is the repetition of a sequence of events that has occurred already in exactly that form, and is thoroughly fated.

Nietzsche's injunction to live as if the eternal recurrence is true proves to be, as a consequence, deeply paradoxical: it is an injunction to live as if we did not have any choice. Considered simply as an injunction, it seems to presuppose that our future is open and that we are free to comply with the injunction. If we consider its particular content, however, it enjoins us to live as if our future is already fated, and we are not free to comply with the injunction. Löwith summarizes the problem as follows: "how can one [. . .] will something that excludes and renders superfluous, through the irrevocability of its fatality, every willing [. . .]?"⁷ Löwith claims that this paradox is deliberate and constitutes our most important clue to the philosophical motivation animating Nietzsche's doctrine.

In his view, the injunction is designed not to incite us to will anything (including to will the eternal recurrence of our life), but to make us

own up to the futility of all willing. “Willing” the eternal recurrence is not the willing of an open future, but a reconciliation with fate, or “*amor fati*”—strictly speaking, a state in which “the will no longer wills anything.”⁸ I “love” my fate, in this view, not by somehow bending it to my will but by renouncing the will to which that fate is recalcitrant. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence is thus intended to show us that the affirmation of life is a state of “will-lessness.”

Löwith characterizes “*amor fati*,” the affirmation of life, in the following passage: “‘Loving’ the absolute or fatal necessity is no longer a willing but [. . .] a condition in which the will no longer wills anything [. . .]. The accident of being-there—the accident that is deprived of its innocence by the belief in willed, purposeful creation of Being out of the nothing—is ‘redeemed’ in *amor fati*, because Zarathustra-Dionysus grasps precisely in accident what in the whole is as it must be [*wie es sein muss*].”⁹ The proposal is unfortunately obscured by Löwith’s failure to distinguish explicitly between *metaphysical* and *normative* necessity (and contingency). Once we introduce this distinction, we can see that the proposal involves two stages. In the first stage, I come to realize that my existence is a mere “accident”: it is not the product of a “purposeful creation” (for example, by God), which would justify it, or give it meaning. It is, so to speak, normatively contingent. In the second stage, the thought of the eternal recurrence is supposed to overcome the ensuing nihilistic distress by making me see my existence as metaphysically necessary—it “in the whole is as it must be.” The recognition of this metaphysical necessity is then supposed to usher in reconciliation with my existence, or *amor fati*, by inducing complete resignation, or will-lessness.

Two features of Löwith’s account deserve emphasis. First, Löwith does not present metaphysical necessity as a substitute for normative justification: the fact that the course of my life is fated does not make it worth living. It makes it impossible for me not to live it out, but it gives me no reason to “will” to do so. Second, the renunciation of willing is not a deliberate decision, motivated by the recognition that willing is futile. If it were, then willing would not be futile after all, and there would no longer be a reason to renounce it. Hence, the state of will-lessness, in which *amor fati* consists, “can no longer be the goal of a willing but can only be an event and a metamorphosis that happens of itself.”¹⁰

To affirm life, in Löwith’s view, is nothing more than to have no regrets about it. Given that the course of my life is metaphysically fated

and therefore indifferent to my “goals and purposes,” the only way to eliminate any conflict between the will that “posits” them and the necessary course of my existence is to achieve a state of will-lessness by abandoning these goals and purposes. This may well appear to be a kind of revaluation: to affirm life is not a matter of finding new ways of realizing my goals in a recalcitrant world; instead, it is a matter of renouncing these goals. But Nietzschean revaluation is not just a renunciation of the old goals, it is also the adoption of new ones. And this observation already points to some of the deep difficulties, both philosophical and exegetical, marring Löwith’s interpretation.

I will review three such difficulties. First, the idea of the eternal recurrence, when it is interpreted strictly, does not imply metaphysical fatalism at all. All the doctrine of the eternal recurrence implies is that, whatever my life will turn out to be, an exactly identical life has already occurred indefinitely many times. But that does not tell me that what *my* life will turn out to be is already fated. In other words, the fact that all the possible lives I could live have already been lived, indefinitely many times, does not determine *which* of these possible lives I will actually live. Indeed, the doctrine of eternal recurrence may well allow that it remains up to me which life I live.¹¹

Second, the indifference of an inexorable fatality to my “goals and purposes” puts my will in conflict with that fatality. My renunciation of willing truly reconciles me with fate only if it is a renunciation of these goals and purposes themselves or, in Löwith’s own words, “a freedom from all goals and purposes, from every for-the-sake-of.” To put the same point in another way, my existence is redeemed once I renounce willing not because it fulfills a goal or purpose that justifies it, but because the very preoccupation with such justification vanishes.

But it is hard to see how the metaphysical fatalism implied by the idea of the eternal recurrence would dissolve the preoccupation with justification, by making me renounce the goals and purposes in terms of which I define the content of that justification. It may be *pointless* for me to worry about the justification of my existence if I believe it could not be different,¹² but it is not *groundless* to do so. The indifference of an inexorable fatality to my “goals and purposes” might incite me to renounce their *pursuit*, but not necessarily these goals and purposes *themselves*. In renouncing their pursuit, I simply renounce fighting a losing battle, but I may coherently continue to deplore my fate all the same, and with good reason.

Finally, Löwith’s interpretation of *amor fati* in terms of a kind of will-lessness does not sit well with Nietzsche’s own characterizations

of it. As I just suggested, although Löwith's concept of will-lessness is intended to designate a state of indifference, living in accordance with the thought of the eternal recurrence can justifiably motivate nothing more than resignation. And resignation certainly does not amount to the "love" in terms of which Nietzsche describes the affirmation of life: we may well be resigned to a life we do not love.¹³ Indeed, resignation means accepting an existence we would have preferred to be different. As such, it remains a form of the "negation of life" (see WP 23). Nietzsche quite explicitly insists on the distinction between loving one's fate and merely bearing or accepting it: "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it [. . .] but *love* it" (EH, II 10; cf. WP 1041).

Moreover, even if we grant Löwith's view that living in accordance with the thought of the eternal recurrence does induce *indifference* toward one's fate, rather than resignation to it, the basic problem persists. For it is equally hard to see how such indifference could amount to the kind of love Nietzsche calls for. To love one's fate, in Nietzsche's view, is not just not to disapprove of it but actually to approve of it—it is not simply not saying no, it is actually saying yes to life (GS 276; EH, II 10; WP 1041).

Löwith's account garners most of its support from Nietzsche's description of the affirmation of life as love of fate or fatality. If we interpret the talk of fate in terms of metaphysical fatalism, then the affirmation of life can amount to nothing more than reconciliation with the fatality of its course. However, Nietzsche's own use of the notion of fate appears free from such radical metaphysical commitment. The "fatality" we must learn to love may plausibly be thought to refer to "what is necessary in things" (GS 276), and more specifically to "the necessity of those sides of existence hitherto denied" (WP 1041). Fatality, in other words, designates only certain features of our existence that are essential and therefore necessary to it, even though we might deplore them. In the context of the pessimism of Schopenhauer, who also advocates "will-lessness" as a way out of it, suffering is an inevitable feature of our life in this world. Affirming this life therefore requires affirming ("loving") that inevitable suffering as well.

3. *The Eternal Recurrence and the Importance of Choice*

In an interpretation diametrically opposed to that of Löwith, Ivan Soll (1973) suggests that, far from seeking to undermine choices in ex-

horting us to live as if the eternal recurrence were true, Nietzsche would in fact attempt “to increase our sense of the significance of the choices we make.”¹⁴ If I believe that the world is to return just as it is, over and over again for all eternity, then whatever decision I make now acquires “the greatest weight” since I will have to live with its consequences (or rather re-live its consequences) for the rest of eternity. The effectiveness of the thought of the eternal recurrence presupposes not its actual truth but only the logical possibility of its truth: it must not be incoherent.

Like Löwith, Soll accepts a purely formal conception of the affirmation of life. Unlike Löwith, however, the challenge posed by the prospect of eternal recurrence is met not by reevaluating (or devaluating) our values but by taking greater care in their implementation. If I have to live with the consequences of my choices for all eternity, then those hasty, ill-advised choices in which I sometimes allow myself to indulge might become unacceptable. Indeed, the prospect of an eternity of consequences might well suggest that none of my choices, however minute, may any longer be considered insignificant and without meaningful implication for the affirmation of my life.

Soll puts forth this interpretation because of its *prima facie* intuitive appeal, but he himself finds it riddled with intractable problems. He argues that living as if the eternal recurrence were true *cannot*, in fact, “increase the significance of our choices,” for two distinct reasons. The first problem lies in the fact that the eternal recurrence is *of the same*: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself” (GS 341). To have this characteristic, the eternal recurrence must be a *supra-historical phenomenon*. If something recurs within the same historical cycle, it cannot be exactly the same, if only because it recurs at a different time, under different circumstances. This fact has critical implications for Nietzsche’s conception of the practical consequences of the eternal recurrence.

The thought of the eternal recurrence places “the greatest weight” on my choices because they are revealed to be choices the consequences of which I will have to re-live again and again. If I have made, and continue to make, choices with good consequences, then the thought

will cause elation, since it presents me with the prospect of continuing to enjoy those beneficial consequences indefinitely. But if I have made, and continue to make, regrettable choices, it will drive me to despair, for comparable reasons. Once we fully appreciate its supra-historical character, however, neither elation, nor despair, but only *indifference*, is an appropriate response to the eternal recurrence.

The eternal recurrence concerns me only because I fear, for example, that *I* will have to relive the same pains and failures over and over again, for all eternity. I have a reason to worry about future experiences of pain and failure only if they are *my* experiences. But to be my experiences, they would have to be related to what I am now in some appropriate way. The one-one identity which the eternal recurrence secures between “Bernard” in one cycle of the recurrence and “Bernard” in the next, identical cycle does not seem to be the appropriate sort of relation. For “Bernard” in the next cycle may be my exact Doppelgänger, but it is not *me*. It seems reasonable for me to worry about myself in some future cycle only if there is some sort of *continuity* (for example, psychological continuity in the form of a memory link) between my current self and the self re-experiencing the same pains and failures.¹⁵ But if this later self is continuous with my current self in this way, it is not *the same* as my current self, in the relevant sense. It is rather my current self, *together with* the new properties (for example, the new memories) acquired in its development and transformation through a continuous sequence of events. The continuity required to make my concern about the experiences of my future self reasonable is broken by the supra-historical character of the eternal recurrence. As a consequence, I have absolutely no reason to be concerned about the experiences of my self in recurring cycles of my life, since the self in those cycles is *not my self* in the relevant sense.¹⁶

Soll also notes a second way in which the injunction to live as if the eternal recurrence were true actually deprives our choices of their significance. The thought of the eternal recurrence, according to which we are enjoined to live, is not merely the forward-looking view that my life as it is now will recur indefinitely many times; it is also the backward-looking view that it has already been, just as it is, indefinitely many times (Z, III 2, 13). Combined with the causal determinism he believes Nietzsche accepts, Soll takes this to imply that its present occurrence is the mere repetition of a sequence that has occurred already, and therefore is thoroughly fated. Naturally, since the present occurrence of our life is not continuous with its past occurrences, we cannot

remember what choices we made then and still have, so to speak, to make them.¹⁷ Even if living according to the thought of the eternal recurrence implies that I do not remember the particulars of previous occurrences of my life, it also implies that, whatever its particular content, the course of my life is determined. And the awareness of this general fact, which compliance with the imperative entails, suffices to undermine the significance of my choices in my own eyes.¹⁸

Soll does not present these objections as reasons to doubt that the proposed view is the correct interpretation of Nietzsche's idea, but rather as reasons to reject Nietzsche's view, which he takes his account to represent adequately. However, I can see two reasons to suspect that Nietzsche would not have endorsed the view Soll attributes to him, at least not without some significant qualifications.

In the first place, it is doubtful that Nietzsche was confused in just the ways Soll exposes. I noted earlier that Lucretius was one of the ancient philosophers to have advocated a variant of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. As it turns out, Lucretius also already anticipated Soll's primary objection in his own discussion of the eternal recurrence.¹⁹ Since Nietzsche was acquainted with the work of Lucretius, he is likely to have been aware of this objection, and therefore unlikely to have endorsed the objectionable view Soll attributes to him. Moreover, Soll does not explain why, according to the view he attributes to Nietzsche, we should take seriously *all* of our choices, or at least more of them than we would if we did not contemplate the prospect of the eternal recurrence. Why, in other words, should we contemplate this prospect in the first place in making our choices? And why may I not allow myself the indulgence of some unconsidered, hasty choices?

As it turns out, Nehamas and Clark are both indebted to Soll's interpretation, but they are also aware of its difficulties. Nehamas's account addresses the second of these difficulties, by attributing to Nietzsche a metaphysical view that explains why every single choice we make, however minute, has essential consequences for the possibility of the affirmation of our life. And Clark's proposal is designed explicitly to solve the first difficulty, by arguing that the problem of the coherence of wishing the eternal recurrence of my life disappears if we adopt a suitably unrealistic interpretation of this concept.

4. *The Eternal Recurrence and the Self*

Nehamas (1985) acknowledges the difficulties afflicting the cosmological interpretation and argues instead that "the eternal recurrence is

not a theory of the world but a view of the self.”²⁰ In his proposal, the concept of eternal recurrence is intended to bring out important facts about the identity of a self (or a life) that account for the distinctive difficulty of affirming it. Specifically, Nietzsche only endorses a *conditional* statement, the antecedent of which is this cosmological doctrine: “If my life were to recur, then it could recur only in identical fashion.”²¹ Hence, “if we were to have another life it would necessarily have to be, if it were to be *our* life at all, the very same life we have already had.”²² This conditional claim implies that everything about my self, or my life, is equally essential to what it is. Note that this implication depends only on the truth of the conditional, which is itself independent of the truth, or even the possible truth, of its antecedent.

Nehamas also concedes that the idea of the eternal recurrence is meant to serve a practical purpose: the willingness to repeat my life attests to my affirmation of it. But he conceives of this affirmation in purely formal terms, as approval or absence of regrets. My willingness to repeat my life is the purely formal indication that it has lived up to my expectations, whatever these happened to be. His proposal focuses squarely on certain distinctive metaphysical features of the life to be affirmed, and it is primarily intended to account for one striking claim Nietzsche makes about the affirmation of life: “Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you have said Yes too to all woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said ‘You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!’ then you wanted *all back*” (Z, IV 19[10]). As Nehamas reads it, this passage states that the affirmation of one aspect of a life commits to the affirmation of the whole of it. He then proceeds to show how this claim presupposes a certain conception of the self, which the idea of the eternal recurrence is intended to bring out.

On the face of it, the relevant view of the self is an instance of a very general metaphysical view Nehamas attributes to Nietzsche, according to which “strictly speaking all properties are equally essential to their subjects.”²³ For ease of reference, I will call this view *essentialist egalitarianism*. In the particular case of the self, the view is that every aspect of my self is equally essential to my identity. Essentialist egalitarianism disallows a common (and tempting) gambit in the evaluation of my life. I may not dismiss some aspect of it, of which I disapprove, on the ground that it is not essential to it (that I would still be *me*, my life would still be *my* life, even without that aspect).

Such a stringent demand might seem to make the affirmation of life

an impossible ideal for the simple reason that many aspects of my life are out of my control. And if only one of those aspects over which I have no control proves regrettable, then I cannot affirm my life. For example, Nietzsche singles out the unchangeable nature of my past: “Powerless against what has been, [he] is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that it cannot break time and time’s covetousness, that is the will’s loneliest melancholy. [. . .] To recreate all ‘it was’ into a ‘thus I willed it’—that alone I should call redemption. [. . .] All ‘it was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident—until the creative will says to it, ‘But thus I willed it.’ Until the creative will says to it, ‘But thus I willed it; thus I shall will it’ ” (Z, II 20).

The injunction to live my life so as to become able to approve of every last aspect of it might seem unreasonable, if many of these aspects are forced upon me by circumstances. How can I possibly come to “will backwards,” that is to say, will aspects of my life that lie in the past, irretrievably beyond my reach? To circumvent this difficulty, Nietzsche draws a crucial distinction between a fact and its significance: although many facts about my life may escape my control, their significance remains within it. Such control is in turn possible because the significance of a fact essentially depends on its relations with other facts and is therefore subject to modification as these relations change.

This distinction derives its plausibility from the observation that no aspect of a life possesses a determinate significance in and of itself, independently of its relations to other aspects. A particular event that assumes a certain importance in the context of one life might be comparatively unimportant in the context of another. And the significance of one event in the course of one life might change as that life progresses, and the context in which this event is placed alters accordingly. I will call this view *normative contextualism*.²⁴

If we now return to Nietzsche’s example, we can see that, although my past cannot be undone, its significance is always yet to be determined, precisely because it depends on its relation to my future. I cannot change the fact that I once received an unsatisfactory mark on an exam, for example, but the significance of this fact remains to be determined. Whether it is a regrettable failure or a welcome character-building experience depends on that past’s relation to a certain future. Since the future is yet to be determined, so is the significance of the past: “I taught them [. . .] to create and carry together into one what in human beings is fragment and riddle and dreadful accident; as cre-

ator, guesser of riddles, and redeemer of accidents, I taught them to work on the future and to redeem with their creation all that has been” (Z, III 12).

Nietzsche calls “redemption” this process of shaping the future so as to alter the significance of the past. Nehamas’s discussion suggests, if only implicitly, two possible models of redemption. According to the first model, we must secure a future such that it will justify *this* particular past. In this case, the past places substantive constraints on what the redeeming future must be. The “tremendous moment” of which Nietzsche sometimes speaks must be tailored to the deplorable events it is meant to redeem. For example, I can use my personal sufferings as an inspiration to write a thoughtful book about the burdens of human existence. And writing such a book would give those sufferings a justification appropriate to them.

It is tempting to adopt an instrumental view of this model of redemption. Writing a thoughtful book about the burdens of existence would possess intrinsic value, and suffering would be valuable derivatively, by being a necessary condition of the possibility of writing the book. But Nehamas attributes to Nietzsche a contextualist view of redemption. According to contextualism, nothing is intrinsically good, and the value of anything depends on its relation to everything else. As a consequence, in the example I am considering, we may not consider that writing possesses intrinsic value, by virtue of which it can redeem suffering that was used to inspire it. Rather, the particular significance of writing *depends* on the presence of suffering. Presumably, writing, let alone writing about the burdens of human existence, might have no such significance for one who has not endured comparable suffering. In sum, *both* the suffering and the writing derive their significance from the relation they bear to each other: sever this relation, and each loses that significance.

According to the second model of redemption, the future needs to have no determinate connection to the past in order to redeem it. It need not be specifically tailored to redeem some particular regrettable past, but it must simply be such as to create a context in which this particular past becomes insignificant. Some events or experiences that assumed great significance for the child, for example, might fade into comparative insignificance for the adult.

In summary, Nehamas’s account of the eternal recurrence rests on two distinct views. Essentialist egalitarianism is the claim that every aspect of a life (or a self) is equally essential to what it is. It implies

that I may not dismiss as inessential any aspect of my life in my assessment of it. Normative contextualism is the view that the significance of some aspect of a life is determined by the context formed by at least some other aspects. From the combination of these two views, it follows that the context in which the significance of any part of my life is determined must include every part of it.

Nehamas invokes these two views in order to account for the striking claim Nietzsche makes about the affirmation of life, which I mentioned earlier (Z, IV 19 [10]). To affirm one aspect of my life is necessarily to affirm all of it, because the significance of that particular aspect is determined by its relation to the context formed by all the other aspects of it. To repudiate part of this context would therefore necessarily alter the significance of the aspect that is affirmed, possibly making it no longer worthy of affirmation.

On Nehamas's account, the doctrine of the eternal recurrence is supposed to explain why affirmation is an all-or-nothing affair—why I cannot affirm my life without affirming *every aspect of it*. The doctrine supplies the required explanation by underwriting essentialist egalitarianism. It is that egalitarianism that makes the affirmation of life such a demanding ideal, for it implies that no aspect of my existence, however minute, falls outside the purview of its evaluation. Essentialist egalitarianism, however, does not require a revaluation of my values, it simply places more stringent demands on their realization. For all its appeal, this tantalizing interpretation is not without its problems. I will mention two problems here, and return to the issue of revaluation later.

First, the normative contextualism Nehamas attributes to Nietzsche undeniably possesses *prima facie* plausibility. It seems true that a particular event, which assumes a certain determinate significance in the context of one life, would take on a very different significance in the context of another. All that is required to explain this observation, however, is a *moderate* contextualism, according to which the determinate significance of one aspect of my life depends on its relations with *some* other aspects of it. But Nietzsche's essentialist egalitarianism appears to commit him to a more *radical* contextualism, according to which the determinate significance of one aspect of my life depends on its relations with *all* other aspects of it. This radical contextualism is much less plausible: one fewer hair on my head surely would make no difference to the significance of all other aspects of my life.

Although some of Nietzsche's formulations do seem to make affirmation an all-or-nothing affair (see GS 341; Z, III 13), they might

plausibly be regarded as hyperbolic statements of a different view. The passage that is central to Nehamas's interpretation is a case in point. It does end with an apparently very strong conclusion, namely, the claim that welcoming the eternal recurrence of one's life is to "want *all* back." But it opens and closes with a special emphasis on the ability to affirm even "woes": "Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you have said Yes too to all woe. [. . .] and to woe you say: go, but return!" (Z, IV 19[10]). And this invites an alternative reading: Nietzsche might be taken to suggest not so much that *every* aspect of my life matters to its affirmation, as simply that *even woeful* ones do. I do not truly affirm my life, in other words, so long as I remain unable to affirm even its woeful aspects. The primary challenge of the affirmation of life would therefore be to determine how to affirm these aspects of my life.

Second, Nehamas's proposal is also afflicted by one particularly evident problem. Essentialist egalitarianism explains the idea of recurrence (of the same), but it does not explain why the recurrence must also be *eternal*. All that matters to this proposal is a consideration of the condition under which my life could recur—even just *once*—and still be *my* life. But the eternity of the recurrence is, in Nietzsche's view, essential to it and therefore calls for an alternative account of it.

5. *The Eternal Recurrence and the Evaluation of Life*

Maudemarie Clark's proposal is designed to solve the primary problem of coherence raised by Soll. The problem, remember, is that the prospect of the recurrence of my life cannot possibly affect me, and induce me to take my choices more seriously, because the recurring life cannot be *mine* in the relevant sense. This problem disappears, she argues, if we cease to construe the talk of eternal recurrence realistically and allow ourselves to construe it "unrealistically."²⁵ In this proposal, Nietzsche is asking us to imagine (unrealistically) the eternal recurrence as being continuous with our current life. The test of the eternal recurrence should be understood by analogy with a very ordinary question we often ask ourselves when we attempt to assess events in our past: Would I go through this again? (For example, Would I marry this person all over again?) A proper answer to this question presumably depends on the condition that I know something now I did not know then, a condition precluded by a realistic understanding of the eternal recurrence. My answer to this question, dependent as it is on my current knowledge of how my life has turned out, shows how well dis-

posed I am toward it. And the reliability of the test is evidently not undermined by its lack of realism. In fact, if I were to respond to the question by quibbling over its coherence, I would justly be suspected of evading the issue (and perhaps of inclining to answer the question in the negative). And so, the unrealistic interpretation of the eternal recurrence seems to provide a good test of affirmation.

This proposal has considerable intuitive appeal, and it is also a decidedly practical interpretation, insofar as the concept of the eternal recurrence is here invoked to characterize what the affirmation of life amounts to, rather than a particular property of that life. There is no denying the plausibility of characterizing the affirmation of life in terms of the willingness to live it all over again. But if we accept this characterization without further qualification, we continue to think of the affirmation of life as a purely formal ideal: to realize it, I do not need to reevaluate my values and aspirations but I must only make sure that those I happen to have are sufficiently realized in my life that I am left with no regrets about it. And it is doubtful that this purely formal interpretation of the role of eternal recurrence in the affirmation of life does justice to Nietzsche's philosophical intentions. In particular, it appears unable to fulfill the *selective* function he assigns to it.

Nietzsche presents the eternal recurrence as "a doctrine [. . .] powerful enough to work as a breeding agent: strengthening the strong, paralyzing and destructive for the world-weary" (WP 862; cf. 462). Presumably, the "world-weary" are those who are disappointed or disenchanted by "worldly" life, and they are so disappointed, presumably, because it fails to realize their values and ideals. They regard our life in this world as an "error" (GM, III 11), or a "disease" (GS 340), something we have a reason to condemn. The thought of the eternal recurrence is supposed to paralyze with despair those who so condemn life.

Let us consider the paradigmatic example of Christianity and ask whether (and how) the prospect of the eternal recurrence, as Clark proposes to understand it, would throw a Christian into despair. Suppose, then, that a Christian is confronted with the demon's challenge. In determining how he feels about his life, he will presumably take into account not only the brief segment of it he lives in this world, but also the infinite bliss that awaits him in the other. If we construe the challenge posed to the Christian in the same way as Clark does the question of whether I would marry my spouse all over again, then it is not clear that he should be driven to despair. To answer informatively the ques-

tion of whether he would live his life over again, the Christian does not have to regard the prospect of a recurrence of the miseries of his earthly life as actual, or even possible, any more than when I am asked whether I would marry my spouse all over again, I must believe that I actually have the option to do so. I am only asked to evaluate our life together as it has unfolded. Likewise, the Christian is simply asked to evaluate a life that, in the best case at least, includes a finite moment of misery and an eternity of bliss. In doing so, obviously, it is not clear that he would, or should, deplore it.²⁶

Partly in response to this difficulty, Clark also offers a different and now *theoretical* account of the eternal recurrence. The concept is no longer simply evoked to characterize the nature of affirmation, it now describes a property of the life to be affirmed. Much like the life of Sisyphus, our existence is an endless cycle of repetitions of the same activities. Human history perpetually repeats itself.²⁷ And in a life with that property, the Christian hopes for *infinite* bliss are dashed. For the possibility of repetition entails that no portion of a life can be infinite. With this additional feature, the demon's challenge now requires the Christian to imagine that whatever available heavenly bliss there is would always be periodically interrupted by the return of the miseries of our earthly life. And *this* prospect might well prove unbearable to him.

If we combine its practical and theoretical sides, Clark's proposal does show that we cannot welcome the prospect of eternal recurrence—of a life consisting of the endless repetition of the same activities—without a reevaluation of at least some of our values. If we hold on to the Christian aspiration for “ultimate peace,” for example, we will be unable to affirm life, since it consists of “the eternal recurrence of war and peace” (GS 285). Unlike Löwith, she acknowledges that the relevant kind of reevaluation does not just consist of a devaluation of the old values, it also includes the creation of new ones. But her views of both the motivation and the nature of this reevaluation still stand in need of significant qualification. I thus turn to Nietzsche's conception of the relation between eternal recurrence and reevaluation.

III. Eternal Recurrence and Reevaluation

1. *The Necessity of Reevaluation*

Nietzsche explicitly declares that living in accordance with the eternal recurrence requires a reevaluation of values: “Means of enduring it: the

reevaluation of all values. No longer joy in certainty but in uncertainty; no longer ‘cause and effect’ but the continually creative; no longer will to preservation but to power [. . .]” (WP 1059). It is unclear what Nietzsche means by “enduring” the idea of the recurrence here, but it is safe to assume that it at least designates the ability to live in accordance with it. And to live in accordance with this idea, one needs a reevaluation of values, which involves, in particular, achieving “freedom from morality” and reassessing the significance of “pain” and “uncertainty” in human existence (WP 1060).

Löwith’s interpretation of the eternal recurrence argues for the need of a qualified reevaluation of values. In his view, the thought of the eternal recurrence is intended to induce a state of resignation. To achieve such a state, however, I do not require “new” values, I only need to give up the “old” ones. However, the required reevaluation of values is in fact a renunciation of them, motivated ultimately by the conviction that they cannot be realized. And we saw that this falls far short of what Nietzsche calls a reevaluation.

The interpretations of the eternal recurrence developed by Soll and Nehamas do not provide a clear account for the necessity of a reevaluation. According to the proposal Soll considers, the doctrine is an entreaty to take *all* of my choices seriously. This does not require that I reevaluate my values at all, but simply that I allow none of my choices to fall outside the scope of their application. Nehamas suggests that living up to the thought of eternal recurrence is just having no regrets about my life and regarding it as “justified”: “a life is justified only if it comes to be accepted in its entirety. The mark of this is the desire to repeat this very life, and so everything else in the world as well, in all eternity. This means that we should want nothing in that life and the world to be in any way different.”²⁸ The eternal recurrence, in this view, is a gambit Nietzsche uses to reveal that every aspect of my life (and indeed of the entire world) is equally essential to it. To affirm any of it is therefore to affirm all of it. I cannot be happy with a part of my life without being happy with the whole of it. But this only shows how difficult the affirmation of life is, not (or, not necessarily) that it requires that I adopt new values. To be sure, in Nehamas’s view, a full-blown affirmation of my life is also an affirmation of “its most detestable and most horrible details.” But their affirmation does not require that I abandon the standards by which I find them detestable and horrible. It only demands that I manage to “redeem” them, for example by creating a context in which they precisely cease to be detestable and

horrible. And so, even if this redemption requires me to reevaluate the detestable and horrible details of my life, it does not demand that I reevaluate my values themselves.²⁹

Clark's interpretation has one significant merit over those preceding it, since it shows how living in accordance with the eternal recurrence requires a reevaluation of values. But problems still mar what she says both on the motivation and on the nature of this reevaluation. Consider first the issue of *motivation*. On her view, the affirmation of life seems to remain a purely formal ideal, and the necessity of reevaluation is a consequence of the nature of life, and not just of the nature of affirmation itself. To affirm life simply is to have no regret about it and so to be willing to re-live it over and over again. To have no regrets, I must ensure that my values are realized to the greatest extent possible. It is only if the world is essentially inhospitable to the realization of the values I have (as it is when they are life-negating values) that the affirmation of life requires a reevaluation of these values. This view of the motivation of reevaluation has some peculiar implications. Note, for example, that if the motivation for the reevaluation of values is the world's inhospitability to their realization, then reevaluation looks to be counter-adaptive: if you cannot have what you value, value what you have. Reevaluation then resembles the reevaluation motivated by *ressentiment* Nietzsche describes elsewhere (GM, I) in terms that certainly suggest disapproval. Moreover, the formal interpretation of the ideal of affirmation, we should remark, is at pains to explain the novelty and importance Nietzsche attributes to it. Who would find novel or controversial the exhortation to live life so as to have no regrets about it? And if this is indeed all Nietzsche is exhorting, why do so in terms of a doctrine as potentially confusing as the eternal recurrence?

Clark's interpretation of the *nature* of the reevaluation required to live in accordance with the eternal recurrence is also in need of qualification and development. As she sees it, the individual who contemplates the prospect of eternal recurrence "cannot imagine his goals as ever really achieved. Whatever he achieves will come undone, and he will need to redo it."³⁰ As a consequence, the individual who values life only as a means to some goal will despair at the prospect of the eternal recurrence, for it implies that his goal will never be achieved once and for all. By contrast, for the individual who values the *activity* of pursuing a goal—who is "joyfully willing to engage in the same activities again and again, even if one had no hope of the goal being

finally achieved”—the prospect of the eternal recurrence will be a source of joy, since it promises an indefinite repetition of this activity. If Sisyphus is to affirm his life, for example, he ought to value the activity of pushing the rock up the mountain, rather than the goal of standing it on top of it.

This is dubious. Even when it is interpreted as an endless repetition of experiences and activities, the eternal recurrence does not preclude the realization of goals as such, as Clark appears to suggest. It only rules out the realization of *certain* goals, namely, those that consist of some sort of *permanent* state (paradigmatically, the Christian’s eternal life). Nothing in this conception of the eternal recurrence makes it impossible for me to realize my dream of playing a certain sonata flawlessly at least once, for example. Even Sisyphus manages to get the rock on the top of the mountain—he just cannot make it stay there once and for all.

2. *Eternal Recurrence Refigured*

Some interpreters of Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal recurrence believe that it is intended to exclude the idea of “another life” in “another world.” It is precisely because it expresses this intention that the doctrine would assume such a peculiar form. Arthur Danto, for example, declares: “But that doctrine does, Nietzsche seems to feel, rule out the possibility of *another* and *different* life.”³¹ Nehamas appears to concede the same point when he insists that the doctrine of the eternal recurrence implies that “this life and this world are the only life and the only world there are.”³²

There is significant evidence that Nietzsche thought of the eternal recurrence as a rejection of the Christian doctrine of the eternal life. Thus, he presents *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which the doctrine of eternal recurrence plays a central role, as a “fifth gospel” that must presumably replace Christian doctrine. And the book’s central exhortation is to remain “faithful to the earth”: “I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! [. . .] To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth” (Z, Prologue 3).

We should first observe that the idea of the eternal recurrence does not simply rule out “the possibility of *another* and *different* life,” but specifically the idea of an *eternal* life. To see this, it suffices to attend to both features of the idea of the eternal recurrence, namely, the fact

that it is *eternal*, and the fact that it is a *recurrence*. What can we learn, first, from the fact that a life is eternal? One feature of eternity that may go unnoticed is the fact that, if our life is eternal, it is also the *only* life we have: there cannot be another one after it, as it were. So, living according to the thought of the eternal recurrence implies living under the assumption that we have only one life.

In asking us to contemplate the prospect of the eternal *recurrence* of our life, the demon is also, in effect, asking us to think of it as finite. The doctrine of recurrence invites us to think of our life as a finite segment in an ever-revolving cycle, which, intuitively at least, must itself be a finite cycle if it is to *revolve* at all (WP 1066). A life could not recur, presumably, if it were infinite: it would simply go on forever. If we combine these two ideas, as Nietzsche does, then we may conclude that the *eternal recurrence* expresses the thought that our only life is also a finite life. Those who aspire to an eternal life would understandably be driven to despair by such a prospect: “Everything becomes and recurs eternally—escape is impossible!—[. . .] The idea of recurrence as a selective principle” (WP 1058). To “*crave nothing more fervently*” than the eternal recurrence of our life, by contrast, would be to welcome its finitude. This is, for example, a clear implication of the following passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “Living on earth is worth while: one day, one festival with Zarathustra, taught me to love the earth. ‘Was *that* life?’ I want to say to death. ‘Well then! Once more!’ ” (Z, IV 19). The passage makes clear that willing the eternal recurrence of our earthly life is to welcome its finitude, since it acknowledges, and affirms, the ineluctability of death.

Although it provides useful insights into the concept of the eternal recurrence, this analysis remains unsatisfactory. For one thing, if the acknowledgment of finitude were all Nietzsche had in mind, the appeal to the obscure idea of the eternal recurrence would be needlessly cumbersome and confusing: why not simply urge us to live so as to welcome the finitude of our existence? Furthermore, this analysis treats the doctrine as a theoretical view of our existence: if our life is in fact caught in a cycle of eternal recurrence, then there can be no other life for us. I believe we should prefer a practical interpretation of the doctrine, according to which it is invoked to formulate a practical imperative and to point to a specific substantive ethical ideal. I now turn to this practical interpretation and consider the following question: what ideal motivates the exhortation to live one’s life so as to be able to will its eternal recurrence?

Two initial steps are required to develop this interpretation. The first step is to reconsider the concept of eternity, as it operates in the Christian ideal of an eternal life. The concept of eternity is often understood in terms of infinity: the eternal life is a life that never ends. In contrast, Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence would be meant to remind us of the finiteness of our life in this world. But the concept of eternity may also assume another meaning: eternity is to be understood as *permanence* (which implies infinite duration, but is not necessarily implied by it). Something is eternal inasmuch as it escapes the temporal order, which is the order of "change" or "becoming." In objecting to the aspiration for the eternal life, which is characteristic of Christianity but is also shared by a great many philosophers since Plato, Nietzsche is in fact objecting to their valuation of permanence, or "being," and their corresponding devaluation of "becoming": "Death, change, age, as well as procreation and growth, are for them objections—refutations even. What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is* not . . . Now they all believe, even to the point of despair, in that which is" (TI, III 1; cf. GM, III 28).

The second step toward my practical interpretation of the eternal recurrence is to reconsider its ethical significance. To affirm life, Nietzsche tells us, is to "*crave nothing more fervently*" than its eternal recurrence. And he suggests that the link between affirmation and eternity is to be found in "joy," of which affirmation presumably is the expression: "But all joy wants eternity" (Z, IV 19).³³ Joy is a pleasant state, to be sure, but it differs from other forms of pleasure. We speak, for example, of joyless pleasures. It is difficult to define precisely the difference between joy and pleasure, but it seems that I can derive pleasure, but not joy, from experiences that leave something, perhaps even much, to be desired. Even more, it is possible for me to disapprove of the object of my pleasure, and indeed of the pleasure I take in it, and still take pleasure in it. But it does not seem possible to disapprove of the object of my joy, or of my joy itself, and still take joy in it. Nevertheless, joy is not simply pleasure taken at an experience of which I approve. Joy, rather, requires that the experience at which it is taken be (or be perceived to be) *perfect*, and wishing the eternity of the joyful moment is precisely a way of expressing this sense of perfection. It is unreasonable to wish the eternity of a moment that is not fully satisfying, or that leaves something to be desired, for wishing such eternity is in effect declaring that nothing about that moment should ever be changed.

In introducing the strange idea of the eternal recurrence, I believe that Nietzsche is inviting us to distinguish between two ways in which eternity can be wished: it can be wished either as permanence (and infinite duration), or as eternal recurrence. A close examination of this contrast should reveal something important about the concept of the eternal recurrence and its role in the definition of the ideal of affirmation.

Of a particularly happy moment, we do sometimes declare that we wish that it would never end. Generally, such a wish is meant to express how perfect, how fully satisfying, that moment is. We could not reasonably wish to be stuck for all eternity in a moment that leaves something to be desired. If we look more closely, however, such a wish often also involves further, largely unrecognized, assumptions. First, wishing the eternity of a moment is typically a response to a distinctive quality of its perfection: it is a source of *permanent* satisfaction, a kind of perfection that, at the very least, would not be altered or corrupted by permanence. It would make no sense to wish for the permanence of a satisfaction that cannot, by its nature, sustain it. Wishing the eternity of a moment may also be the expression of a second assumption. It indicates that a satisfaction is not perfect—that it still leaves something to be desired—simply by virtue of lacking permanence, of being subject to change. Thus, in ordinary cases, the wish for the eternity of a moment is often already tinged with the regretful anticipation of its end.

Compare now the attitude expressed in wishing not the eternity but the eternal recurrence of a moment. Here, too, the invocation of eternity is meant to express how perfect, how fully satisfying, that moment is. It would make no sense to wish for the eternal repetition of a moment that is not fully satisfying, or leaves something to be desired. The crucial difference, as I noted earlier, is that in wishing the eternal recurrence of that moment, I acknowledge that its perfection is impermanent. This in turn can mean two things. First, it means that there are perfections that are not altered by their impermanence. Second, and more radically, it suggests that there are perfections to which impermanence might actually be essential. These perfections are such that permanence would actually undermine them. So, the wish for the eternal recurrence of a moment is not only suited to the expression of impermanent perfections, it is also *not* suited to the expression of satisfactions whose perfection requires permanence. For the repetition would necessarily disrupt their permanence.

What sorts of perfection can be impermanent, and perfect, at least in part, by virtue of their impermanence? Remember that the impermanence Nietzsche opposes to eternity designates generally the character of what belongs to the temporal order, the character of “becoming,” by which he means a temporally extended process that involves change. In exhorting us to live in accordance with the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche would therefore be exhorting us to recognize a certain substantive value, namely the value of “becoming.” One cannot express the value of becoming by wishing its eternity, for one cannot coherently wish the permanence of what essentially involves change. One can, by contrast, coherently wish the eternal recurrence of becoming.

And so to live in accordance with the eternal recurrence requires a reevaluation of the condemnation of becoming. And if we ask what sort of value could underwrite a reevaluation of becoming, Nietzsche offers his ethics of power. For becoming is an essential feature of the will to power, a paradigmatic manifestation of which is creative activity: “Creation—that is the great redemption from all suffering, and life’s growing light. But that the creator may be, suffering is needed and much change. Indeed, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators. Thus are you advocates and justifiers of all impermanence” (Z, II 2; cf. II 12).

The Christian ideal of the eternal life, by contrast, takes permanence to be an essential feature of perfection: “Contempt, hatred for all that perishes, changes, varies—whence comes this valuation of that which remains constant? [. . .] Happiness can be guaranteed only by being; change and happiness exclude one another” (WP 585). Hence, those who embrace this ideal, or similar ideals, could not live in accordance with the eternal recurrence. They could not answer affirmatively the question, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” (GS 341).

We should be clear on the precise sense in which Nietzsche intends the doctrine of the eternal recurrence to oppose the Christian ideal of an eternal life. The emphasis is not so much on the *duration* of life, whether it is finite or infinite. As I have interpreted it in fact, the desire for the eternal recurrence is compatible with the desire for life to go on indefinitely. Accordingly, living in accordance with the eternal recurrence is not necessarily acknowledging the fact that our earthly life is finite, but it is affirming the fact that this life is made up of temporally extended and finite processes, or that it is essentially *becoming*. The

Christian demand for an eternal life is objectionable not because it aspires to an infinite life, but because it aspires to a life free from change and becoming. And to embrace the ideal of affirmation framed by the doctrine of the eternal recurrence is to adopt values by the light of which impermanence and becoming prove to be desirable.

Living in accordance with the eternal recurrence is the “highest” form of affirmation possible. As we saw, I live in accordance with the eternal recurrence if I come to regard my life as perfect, as leaving nothing to be desired. This is a demanding ideal, which is presumably achieved only rarely. But it is *achievable* in the first place only if I hold no life-negating values, for if my life were assessed by the light of such values, it would necessarily leave something to be desired. This is why a revaluation of these values is a condition of the very possibility of the affirmation of life.

As Nietzsche sometimes likes to describe it, this revaluation consists in the rejection of the currently dominant “old values” of (Christian) morality, and their replacement by the (somewhat misleadingly called) “new values” of his ethics of power. The discussion of the eternal recurrence focuses attention on the devaluation of becoming, but it is in light of its relation to suffering that becoming is devaluated (for example, by making any *permanent* satisfaction impossible). For Nietzsche, the condemnation of suffering is the normative core of nihilism. Accordingly, his “new values” must be such that an agent assessing from their standpoint a life in which suffering is inevitable *could* come to see it as perfect, as leaving nothing to be desired. This places some rather exacting constraints on what Nietzsche’s revaluation of suffering must accomplish, or on what sort of redemption his ethics of power must make possible for it. A revaluation in accordance with these constraints, together with its practical implications, form the substance of what he calls tragic or Dionysian wisdom.

Dionysian Wisdom

“Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified.*—”

—ECCE HOMO, IV 9

Nietzsche concludes *Ecce Homo*, his intellectual testament, with a last, anxious plea for understanding: “Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified.*—” (EH, IV 9). The figure of Dionysus symbolizes the “affirmation of life,” whereas “the Crucified,” an expression which conventionally designates the Paulinian conception of Christ, represents the negation of life: “Christianity [. . .] is nihilistic in the most profound sense, while in the Dionysian symbol the ultimate limit of affirmation is attained” (EH, III, “The Birth of Tragedy” 1). The strategic location of these words unequivocally indicates that Nietzsche regards the affirmation of life as his defining philosophical achievement. We truly “understand” him only when we understand what the affirmation of life amounts to.

He clarifies and elaborates on the crucial opposition between Dionysus and the figure of the “Crucified” in the following note:

Dionysus versus the “Crucified”: there you have the antithesis. It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom—it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering—the “Crucified as the innocent one”—counts as an objection to this life, as a formula for its condemnation.—One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case, it is supposed to be the path to a holy existence; in the latter case, being is counted as *holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering. The tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying to do so. The Christian denies even the happiest lot on earth: he is sufficiently weak, poor, disinherited to suffer from life in whatever form he meets it. The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from

life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction. (WP 1052)

The significance of this contrast between Dionysus and the “Crucified” is to be found in their similarities. Both are essentially suffering gods, whose stories are ones of martyrdom and resurrection. The basic difference between them lies in the meaning of their suffering. The Christian point of view counts suffering as an objection against life, and it is thereby a life-negating point of view. The Dionysian point of view, by contrast, regards suffering as desirable, and this makes it a life-affirming point of view. Furthermore, Nietzsche remarks that sufficient strength is a condition of the possibility of affirmation, whereas the life-negating condemnation of suffering is a contrivance of weakness. In the present chapter, I propose to examine these two ideas—the contrast between affirmation and negation, and its relation to strength and weakness—in detail.

I. Suffering and the Affirmation of Life

1. *The Value of Suffering*

In his attempts to characterize the affirmation of life, Nietzsche is often anxious to distinguish a genuine affirmation of life from other attitudes that are only sham forms of it: “My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but *love* it” (EH, II 10). This passage contrasts a genuine affirmation of life (the “love” of it) with two other attitudes one might adopt toward suffering, which we might call respectively *resignation* and *concealment*. Resignation is the acceptance of aspects of life we deplore but recognize to be inevitable (for example, suffering). Concealment, by contrast, designates the effort to mask the necessity of those deplorable aspects. Concealment is arguably a sham form of affirmation, and Nietzsche describes (at least) two varieties of it.

First, we may conceal suffering through *idealism*: we do not simply ignore it, but reduce it to an appearance, or a mere “idea” without reality: “an escape remains: to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a *true* world” (WP 12). Suffering is no more than an illusion from which we can be liberated by proper enlightenment. Second, we might conceal suffering

through *counter-adaptation*. This is the distinctive strategy of those Nietzsche calls the “omni-satisfied”: “Verily, I also do not like those who consider everything good and this world the best. Such men I call the omni-satisfied. Omni-satisfaction, which knows how to taste everything, that is not the best taste. [. . .] Always to bray Yea-Yuh—that only the ass has learned, and whoever is of his spirit” (Z, III 11; cf. III 10[2], IV 17). These “omni-satisfied” individuals conceal the reality of suffering, or the reality of resistance and frustration, by being, as it were, relentlessly non-confrontational and adaptable. They are never dissatisfied or frustrated, because they always manage to convince themselves that what they get is what they want, and that what they fail to get they did not want anyway. Nietzsche alludes to this infinite adaptability when he claims that such characters have a taste for “everything,” or, which comes to the same, no taste at all.

In the case of resignation, the individual deplors his life, even as he resigns himself to it, because he acknowledges the inescapability of suffering in it. In the case of omni-satisfaction, by contrast, the individual values his life, but only because he conceals the necessity of suffering in it. In other words, both resignation and concealment continue to depend on the old, life-negating condemnation of suffering. This clearly implies that a true affirmation of life requires a reevaluation of suffering: “The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence—my formula for this is *amor fati*. It is part of this state to perceive not merely the necessity of those sides of existence hitherto denied, but their desirability; and not their desirability merely in relation to the sides hitherto affirmed (perhaps as their complement or precondition), but for their own sake, as the more powerful, more fruitful, *truer* sides of existence, in which its will finds clearer expression” (WP 1041). The contrast drawn in *Ecce Homo* between resignation and love is spelled out here in terms of the contrast between perceiving the *necessity* of those sides of existence hitherto denied, and perceiving their *desirability*. Presumably, those sides of existence “hitherto denied” include the necessity of suffering. It is not enough to acknowledge the necessity of suffering, one must also recognize its desirability.

Nietzsche proceeds to distinguish two ways in which suffering could be found desirable. It may be desirable either “in relation to the sides hitherto affirmed (perhaps as their complement or precondition),” or “for its own sake.” Presumably, something is a “complement” of a good if it is an inevitable by-product or consequence of it. And some-

thing is a “precondition” of something good if it is a means or condition of it. If I value creativity, and I recognize that suffering is a necessary complement or precondition of it in my present circumstances, then I must acknowledge its value. But this, according to Nietzsche, does not suffice for the affirmation of life. I must value suffering not simply conditionally, but “for its own sake.”

The revaluation of suffering from the standpoint of the ethics of power, by contrast, shows that suffering is not merely a complement or precondition of the good (Nietzsche’s “new happiness”), but a *constituent* of it. As Nietzsche sees it, the good lies in the activity of overcoming resistance—it is the will to power. From the standpoint of the ethics of power, suffering is not just something that, under the circumstances of this world, individuals have to go through in order to be happy; it is rather part of what their very happiness *consists of*. To find desirable the overcoming of resistance is also to find desirable the resistance to be overcome. Insofar as it is an “ingredient” of happiness, suffering must be recognized as desirable for its own sake (WP 694).

A true affirmation of life thus demands that suffering be valued for its own sake, and not just conditionally. This demand may well seem excessive. Why is it not sufficient for the affirmation of life that it provides compensation or redemption for the sufferings that are inevitable in it? This attitude is more than the resigned acceptance of them, and it does not conceal or alter them through counter-adaptation. And indeed, Nietzsche is sometimes taken to argue that creativity or other sorts of goods are intended as *compensations* for suffering. In redeeming this suffering, they make it possible for us to cease counting it as an objection against existence, and therefore to affirm it. This proposal, to be sure, does not make affirmation depend on a full-fledged revaluation of suffering, since suffering is still seen as something for which we require compensation. Life, we might say, is affirmed here only *in spite of* the suffering in it.

We cannot attribute this conception of redemption to Nietzsche, however, if only because it presupposes a view of suffering and its relation to affirmation that looks suspiciously similar to the Christian doctrine of redemption. And Nietzsche’s opposition to Christianity bears fundamentally on the role and significance of suffering in human existence (see WP 1052). But we need to know why the idea of compensation, as it figures in the Christian doctrine of redemption, cannot suffice to make a genuine affirmation of life possible.

Much in this issue hinges on how we understand the notion of com-

pensation. We might begin by contrasting two conceptions of compensation according to the particular way in which, in each of them, the compensating good can relate to the suffering for which it compensates. This relation is *metaphysically contingent* when the existence of the good is independent of the occurrence of the suffering. I am compensated, in this case, simply when I get my share of goods, where what counts as “my share” is relative to the amount of suffering I had to endure. My access to these goods is not conditioned by my undergoing the sufferings, and I feel compensated when the former somehow outweigh the latter, in which case they in some sense make up or compensate for them. The relation is *metaphysically necessary*, by contrast, when the existence of the good depends upon the occurrence of the suffering, insofar as the latter makes the former possible. The availability of the compensating goods is then conditioned by the sufferings for which they compensate.

A first difficulty with the first conception of compensation (in terms of which the Christian conception of redemption may be understood) is that it presupposes a common value currency by means of which the compensating goods and the sufferings can be measured. And it is hard to see what such a currency could be. It is sometimes assumed that finding genuine love or friendship can compensate for lack of wealth, for example. But can wealth compensate for the loss of love? And how much wealth would be required? Even utilitarians who propose pleasure as the common value currency acknowledge that pleasures (or pains) of different *qualities* may not be commensurable.

Moreover—and here lies a second and more serious difficulty—it is unclear whether *any* amount of compensation in this sense can make a life worthy of genuine affirmation. Our examination of the doctrine of eternal recurrence in the previous chapter suggested that, in the best case, to affirm life is to have no regrets about it. Given that access to the compensating goods is independent of the occurrence of the sufferings for which they are supposed to compensate, these sufferings remain regrettable in principle. Even though the happy moments of my life outweigh the unhappy ones, I can coherently deplore the latter and wish that my life had been spared them altogether.

For this reason, the second conception of compensation looks more promising, for in this case the compensating goods would not have been possible without the occurrence of the sufferings for which they are supposed to compensate. If I value the possession of these goods, then I cannot coherently deplore the occurrence of the sufferings that

made them possible. And if I affirm my life on the grounds that it afforded me these goods, then I must also affirm the sufferings necessary for them. But this is precisely the view Nietzsche seems to reject (WP 1041).

To see how even this view remains defective, let us consider once more the one good Nietzsche singles out to redeem suffering, namely, creativity (see Z, II 2). The necessity of suffering for creativity can be accidental or essential. We might imagine it necessary for an artist to suffer for the sake of creativity if he lives in a conservative society, in which innovative individuals are isolated, or perhaps even opposed and persecuted. The necessity of suffering for creativity is here a function of *accidental* circumstances, and the creative individual thrown in such circumstances can coherently deplore his suffering, even as he acknowledges its inevitability, and aspire to a world in which one does not have to suffer in order to be creative. We might say that, in this case, the relation of necessity that suffering bears to creativity is a *limiting*, rather than enabling, relation.

Suffering can therefore be truly redeemed by creativity only if it is *essentially* necessary for it, that is to say, only when the suffering is an *enabling* necessary condition of the very possibility of creativity. What this proposal now needs is an account of the way in which suffering is essentially necessary for creativity. It is not easy to think of an alternative account that is as plausible and compelling as Nietzsche's conception of creativity in terms of the will to power. From the standpoint of the ethics of power, suffering cannot be coherently deplored, and it cannot be deplored because it is an essential constituent of the good. In the final analysis, then, the rhetoric of "compensation" or "redemption" on which Nietzsche sometimes continues to rely to characterize the affirmation of life must be interpreted carefully. Properly understood, Nietzschean redemption involves, unlike the Christian redemption, a radical reevaluation of suffering that demonstrates its essential contribution to intrinsic goods, like creativity.

As I have described it so far, Nietzsche's view on the value of suffering remains sketchy and in need of considerable qualifications. Without such qualifications, its plausibility can quickly become questionable. We should recall, for example, that suffering is the experience of resistance to the satisfaction of desires. Any desire that, for one reason or another, is not immediately satisfied becomes a source of suffering in this sense. Accordingly, the suffering Nietzsche claims to be desirable for its own sake will include as much the struggles of

artistic creation or the frustrations of inquiry as the difficulties in fulfilling other longings, such as the longing for love. In saying that suffering is valued for its own sake, furthermore, it is important to remember that is not valued *by itself*, but only as an ingredient of the good. The good life involves not only resistance (and therefore suffering), but also its overcoming.¹

I should acknowledge that Nietzsche considers that pain, as well as suffering, can be a source of affirmation. As I have used the term strictly, *suffering* refers to the displeasure that results from resistance to the satisfaction of our desires. Pain, by contrast, need not result from the frustration of pre-existing desires, but it certainly spawns a desire, since it is composed of a state (for example, a sensation) and a desire for its termination. This creates a difficulty. We understand how willing power, the overcoming of resistance, is also willing suffering, the resistance to overcome. But we cannot invoke this idea to reevaluate pain. And yet, Nietzsche clearly values pain, and he values pain from the standpoint of his ethics of power.

He sometimes presents pain as a kind of stimulant for the will to power. More precisely, it provides an opportunity for that will to exercise itself. To make sense of this suggestion, it suffices to consider another necessary condition for the pursuit of power. The will to power requires not only resistance to overcome, but also a determinate desire, in terms of which this resistance can be defined. If I desired nothing, I would have no opportunity to pursue power. I would, as Schopenhauer observed, succumb to boredom. Schopenhauer also maintains that all desires are born from a *need*, which is made manifest to consciousness in the form of an experience of pain. All desires, in other words, come from pain. Hence, insofar as it involves a desire to desire, the will to power requires pain as one of the conditions of its satisfaction. By spawning new desires, indeed, pain offers an escape from boredom:

The craving for suffering.—When I think of the craving to do something, which continually tickles and spurs those millions of young Europeans who cannot endure their boredom and themselves, then I realize that they must have a craving to suffer and to find in their suffering a probable reason for action, for deeds. Neediness is needed! Hence the politicians' clamor, hence the many false, fictitious, exaggerated "conditions of distress" of all sorts of classes and the readiness to believe in them. These young people demand that—not happiness but unhappiness should approach *from the outside* and become a monster so that afterward they can fight a monster. (GS 56)

To be sure, Nietzsche speaks here of “suffering,” not pain, but he describes it as a stimulant to action rather than, as I have in using the term more strictly, a response to the frustration of action. This terminological difficulty aside, the general thrust of the passage is clear enough. We might seek pain, or “neediness,” precisely because, in spawning a desire, it gives us something to do, a challenge to meet, a “monster” to fight. It delivers us from boredom and could well, to that extent at least, become a source of “happiness,” as Nietzsche remarks in concluding the section (cf. GS, Preface 3, 318).²

Whether we consider the suffering that is an ingredient of the pursuit of power or the pain that is a stimulant or an opportunity for it, however, we cannot ignore the extreme stringency of Nietzsche’s ideal. Surely, ordinary human beings will not welcome all resistance, or any pain, as an opportunity for the pursuit of power. Writing this book, for example, is difficult enough that I might resent having to struggle with illness, a precarious financial situation, or a troubled family, even if, under different circumstances, they are challenges I might conceivably welcome. When the book is done, for example, I might turn to the troubles in my family with secret relish, as they offer a fresh opportunity for creative activity. But much unexpected pain and suffering might actually undermine whatever prospect for greatness I might have had. Only beings with exceptional strength could fight all the fights, enjoy them all, and manage greatness throughout.

And so, although Nietzsche’s revaluation does show that the sole presence of pain and suffering in human existence does not necessarily count as an objection against it, it does not show that particular instances of pain and suffering can never make us wish for a better life. That is certainly true, but we should not lose sight of what his revaluation has actually accomplished. In wishing for a better life, at least, we will no longer aspire to something like the Christian heaven or the Buddhist nirvana, that is to say, a life utterly devoid of pain and suffering, in which we do not have to work or struggle to satisfy our desires, a life of “comfortableness” (GS 318, 338; cf. Z, Prologue 3).

2. *Adam’s Fall, Socratic Ignorance, and the Faustian Bargain*

Nietzsche’s revaluation of values is most compelling if we keep in mind the broad character of his target: he aims to debunk the wholesale condemnation of suffering, which he finds to be deeply entrenched in our ethical sensibilities. For instance, it shapes the foundational myth of Christian culture, the myth of the fall of Adam and Eve:

God created man happy, idle, innocent, and immortal: our actual life is a false, decayed, sinful existence, an existence of punishment—Suffering, struggle, work, death are considered as objections and question marks against life, as something that ought not to last; for which one requires a cure—and *has* a cure!—From the time of Adam until now, man has been in an abnormal state. [. . .] The *true* life is only a faith (i.e., a self-deception, a madness). The whole of struggling, battling, actual existence, full of splendor and darkness, only a bad, false existence: the task is to be redeemed from it. “Man innocent, idle, immortal, happy”—this conception of “supreme desiderata” must be criticized above all. (WP 224; cf. GS 340)

As the book of Genesis tells it, Adam and Eve began their lives in the Garden of Eden, a place in which we imagine their needs and desires satisfied easily, the very moment they arise. When they were expelled from the Garden, they learned that, as part of their punishment, they would now have to work or struggle to ensure the satisfaction of those needs and desires: “you shall gain your bread by the sweat of your brow.”³ In other words, they would have to overcome resistance to fulfill them. In claiming to find in this punishment the very essence of his “new happiness,” Nietzsche assumes a decidedly “anti-Christian” posture.⁴

His interest in the myth of the fall of Adam also suggests another ground for his opposition to Christianity. To see it, we should now focus on the sin, rather than the punishment. And the sin, as it turns out, is also an expression of the will to power, the desire to overcome limitations or transgress boundaries. In the present case, the will to power is exercised in connection with the desire to know. For the original sin is a sin of curiosity: Adam and Eve wanted to eat the fruit from the “tree of knowledge,” despite God’s explicit prohibition, indeed, perhaps because of it.

As it happens, one of Nietzsche’s most frequent examples of the will to power is the will to power in connection with the desire to know. His preferred analogy, in this connection, is that of the great discoverer who embarks on uncharted waters, in search of new worlds (GS 124, 289, 343). He praises those individuals who maintain a skeptical stance (A 54; GS 297), who deliberately will look for riddles to solve and like to “experiment” (GS 319, 324; BGE 42), individuals, that is to say, who value knowledge not for the security of its possession, but for the challenges—and the dangers—of its quest:⁵ “And knowledge itself: let it be something else for others; for example, a bed to rest on, or the way to such a bed, or a diversion, or a form of leisure—for me it is a

world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. *Life as a means to knowledge*—with this principle in one’s heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too. And who knows how to laugh anyway and live well if he does not first know a good deal about war and victory?” (GS 324; cf. BGE 230).

In sum, Nietzsche wants his “seekers of knowledge” to be “human beings who are bent on seeking in all things for what in them must be *overcome*,” a demand he justifies, once again, in terms of images inspired by his ethics of power: “For believe me: the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is—to *live dangerously!* Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and with yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you seekers of knowledge!” (GS 283).

The will to power of the seeker of knowledge spawns in him more than skeptical restraint, it creates an attraction for everything that is problematic—

the *will* henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly and quietly than one had questioned heretofore. The trust in life is gone: life itself has become a *problem*. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one gloomy. Even love of life is still possible, one loves life differently. It is the love for a woman that causes doubt in us.

The attraction of everything problematic, the delight in an *x*, however, is so great in such more spiritual, more spiritualized men that this delight flares up again and again like a bright blaze over all the distress of what is problematic, over all the danger of uncertainty, and even over the jealousy of the lover. We know a new happiness. (GS, Preface 3; cf. 324; BGE 57)

In this praise for ignorance and uncertainty, and for the problematic character of life itself, Nietzsche finds himself close to Socrates, indeed perhaps closer than he acknowledges.

Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward Socrates is well known. He deplores the decadence for which he holds Socrates responsible, but also marvels at the fascination he managed to exercise on the Greeks, whose “strongest instinct” was “the will to power” (TI, X 3). Here is his diagnosis of the source of this fascination: “I have intimated the way in which Socrates could repel: it is therefore all the more necessary to explain the fact *that* he exercised fascination.—That he discovered a

new kind of *agon*, that he was the first fencing-master in it for the aristocratic circles of Athens, is one reason. He fascinated because he touched the agonal instinct of the Hellenes—he introduced a variation into the wrestling-matches among the youths and young men” (TI, II 8). In other words, Socrates fascinated the Greeks because he turned his own life into a distinctive and highly compelling manifestation of the will to power. And he offers a particularly striking description of it in his own public apology.

Standing trial for his life, he delivers a speech in his own defense, which seems marred by a central contradiction.⁶ On the one hand, he claims not to know anything (21d), and insists, in particular, that he has no knowledge about the good life to teach others (33b). On the other hand, however, he knows enough to maintain that “it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue everyday [. . .] for the unexamined life is not worth living for man” (38a). Socrates declares that he only knows that he does not know anything, and yet he acts as if he knows quite a bit. Can he be saved from contradiction?

To resolve this apparent contradiction, we should begin by observing that Socrates does not seem much troubled at all by his admitted ignorance. On the contrary, he appears to welcome it, and declares that awareness of one’s ignorance, recognizing that one does not know what one actually does not know, indeed is wisdom, and is a condition preferable to the naïveté of those who think they know when they in fact do not (21d, 22e). The question is why this self-conscious ignorance is indeed preferable to the illusion of knowledge. One obvious answer is that we avoid error, and that a life free from error is better than a life filled with false knowledge.

But how does Socrates, who claims to know nothing about the good life, know *this*? Why isn’t he worried that, in claiming that it is better not to be deceived, he obviously contradicts his emphatic declaration that he has nothing to teach about the good life? Why does this particular view of the good life escape his uncompromising skepticism? Why does he not even acknowledge, at the very least, that this view remains questionable and in need of argument—since, after all, ignorance and illusion could be sources of bliss?

Socrates addresses none of these questions, and this should move us to look for a less obvious answer to the question of why self-conscious ignorance is better than erroneous claims to knowledge. Self-conscious ignorance is better, I submit, not because it saves us from error, but because it opens up new avenues for examination and discussion. On

the interpretation I am proposing here, Socrates's relentless quest to expose uncertainty and ignorance in beliefs about the good life does not conflict with his own view that the only good life is the examined life. It is rather *motivated by it*.

Consider closely his definition of the good life: "it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue everyday and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for man" (38a). It is tempting to interpret this definition as an exhortation to examine the nature of the good ("virtuous") life in order to find out what it really consists of, and then to apply this knowledge in the conduct of our lives. In living an unexamined life, we risk operating with the wrong conception of what it is and, therefore, of damaging the quality of our own lives. But this is precisely *not* what Socrates says: the greatest good is not, as this interpretation would lead us to expect, to *practice* virtue, but to *discuss* it, and to discuss it, moreover, not until one finds a definitive answer but "every day." In other words, Socrates appears to value less the *knowledge* that successful examination would eventually produce than the *activity of examining* itself.

We become able to understand why Socrates is not very troubled by his uncertainty and his admitted ignorance, but rather welcomes them. Recognizing that you do not know opens up new opportunities for examination, whereas the belief that you know, justified or not, puts an end to it. And so, from the perspective of this view of the good life, it is no surprise to find that everything in Socrates' own life is devoted to exposing ignorance and creating uncertainty, rather than to producing positive knowledge.

His famous inner "voice" only raises doubts about what he was planning to do, but never offers any positive suggestion about what he should do instead (31d). And his inquiries all reveal that his interlocutors' claims to knowledge are counterfeit, but they do not offer much correct knowledge in their stead (21d ff.). Furthermore, his attempts to solve the oracle's riddle, the suggestion that no one is wiser than he is, lead him only to the realization of his own ignorance (*ibid.*). Finally, his vocation as a "gadfly" is described in similarly negative terms: Socrates does not think that his value to the city is to bring citizens closer to some positive knowledge, but only to demolish the sham knowledge they think they have (30e).

In the final analysis, Socrates exposes false knowledge not so much out of love for the truth as for the love of inquiry, not out of a desire

for discovery but for the thrills of the search. And if there is a heaven, a life after death, he hopes that it will not be a place in which all his questions are finally answered, in which he will at last achieve the knowledge that has eluded him in this life. He rather wishes it to be a place that presents him with the opportunity to pursue his examination further in discussions with interesting characters who have long been dead. For instance, he declares himself particularly eager to engage in a discussion of the good life with Odysseus and Sisyphus, both men we would expect to have much to say about the nature of the good life (and indeed about the value of overcoming obstacles).

In the Socratic view of the good life, ignorance and uncertainty are valued, as is the problematic character of existence itself. Hence, it proves to be similar to the Nietzschean ideal of a life animated by the desire for overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of knowledge. A life without uncertainty and ignorance, a life that is free from problems to solve, riddles to guess, or new worlds to discover, could not possibly be worth living, since it would be a life devoid of challenges for the seekers of knowledge. By contrast, to “ultimately prefer even a handful of ‘certainty’ to a whole carload of beautiful possibilities [. . .] this is nihilism and the sign of a mortally weary soul” (BGE 10).

Although Nietzsche’s “anti-Christian” credentials hardly need further buttressing, it is worth noting that the principle of his revaluation, the idea of the will to power, is remarkably anticipated by that most influential demonic figure from nineteenth-century German culture, Goethe’s *Faust*. In the original version of the legend, Faust gives Mephistopheles disposal of his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of pleasure. In Christopher Marlowe’s version, he becomes more demanding—he now asks for twenty-four years of pleasure, power, and knowledge. In contrast to these rather predictable demands, Goethe’s Faust makes a surprising series of requests:

Faust: Poor sorry Devil, what could you deliver?
 Was human mind in lofty aspiration ever
 Comprehended by the likes of you?
 Do you have food that does not satisfy? Or do
 You have red gold that will run through
 The hand like quicksilver and away?
 A game that none may win who play?
 A girl who in my very arms
 Will pledge love to my neighbor with her eyes?
 Or honor with its godlike charms

Which like a shooting star flashes and dies?
 Show me the fruit that rots right on the tree,
 And trees that every day leaf out anew!

Though ready to oblige, Mephistopheles remains incredulous, and Faust must insist:

Mephistopheles: Such a demand does not daunt me,
 Such treasures I can furnish you.
 But still the time will come around, good friend,
 When we shall want to relish things in peace.
Faust: If I ever lie down upon a bed of ease,
 Then let that be my final end!
 If you can cozen me with lies
 Into a self-complacency,
 Or can beguile me with pleasures you devise,
 Let that be the last day for me!
 [. . .]
 If I to any moment say:
 Linger on! You are so fair!
 Put me in fetters straightaway,
 Then I can die for all I care!⁷

What Faust wants most of all, that for which he is ready to sell his soul to the devil, is not, according to Goethe, a life of ease, complacency, and pleasure, in which all his desires are satisfied once and for all—a condition “so fair” that it leaves nothing to be desired. On the contrary, Faust wants most of all to pursue desires that are never satisfied. Some of the examples suggest that he simply wants unsatisfiable desires (“food that does not satisfy,” “a game that none may win who play”). By and large, however, he does not demand desires that are, strictly speaking, unsatisfiable. He does want to get the gold, the girl, and the honors, but he also wants their possession to be fleeting. He wants, in other words, never to be satisfied *once and for all*, but to be moved by desires that are perpetually rekindled, like “trees that every day leaf out anew.”

This remarkable idea is at the heart of the dispute between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. The latter saw in the “lofty aspiration” Faust attributes to the human mind no less than the cause of the impossibility of happiness. But Nietzsche finds in Faust’s strange request an essential clue to the true nature of human happiness—indeed, he defines his concept of the “Dionysian” in terms of it: “the soul that, having being, dives into becoming; the soul that *has*, but *wants* to want and

will; the soul that flees itself and catches up with itself in the widest circles; the wisest soul that folly exhorts most sweetly; the soul that loves itself most, in which all things have their sweep and countersweep and ebb and flood—’ *But that is the concept of Dionysus himself*” (EH, III “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” 6; cf. Z, III [19]).

As Schopenhauer conceives of it, happiness is the condition in which all of our desires have been satisfied once and for all, a condition in which, quite literally, nothing is left to be desired. The paradigm for this conception of happiness is the Christian eternal life in heaven.⁸ As we are prone to imagine it, life in heaven represents a condition in which all of our desires are satisfied once and for all. The very desire to desire, which Faust describes as “human mind in lofty aspiration,” precludes precisely the possibility of such complete and permanent contentment. In demanding satisfaction for it, Faust is indeed selling his soul to the devil for he is, quite literally, renouncing the eternal bliss of heaven. And so, in defining his ideal of affirmation in terms of a similar aspiration Nietzsche would be, very much like Faust, striking a bargain with the devil.

3. *Dionysus and Tragic Wisdom*

In the preface to *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche declares: “I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus” (EH, Preface 2). He finds in the myth of Dionysus nothing less than an exemplary representation of his ideal of affirmation of life. I would now like to show that the features that drew him to the myth of Dionysus are precisely those that resonate with his ethics of power, which underwrites his revaluation of life-negating (Christian) values.⁹ In particular, I would like to suggest that the distinctive characteristics of Dionysus’ life are characteristics of the *creative life*.

In Nietzsche’s eyes, creativity is the paradigmatic manifestation of the will to power. As I have proposed to understand the term here (in Chapter 4), *creativity* designates the central feature of a life devoted to the *value* of creative activity. Individuals who are creative in this sense are not (or not just) merely good at meeting the challenges that present themselves to them, but they will deliberately seek out such challenges. Nietzsche devotes a significant portion of his ethical investigations, especially but not exclusively in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, to identifying the characteristics a creative life would have to assume. And he makes, in this connection, a number of surprising claims, each of which he also applies to the myth of Dionysus.

Unsurprisingly, one of these claims is that *the valuation of creativity implies a valuation of suffering*: “Creation—that is the great redemption from all suffering, and life’s growing light. But that the creator may be, suffering is needed” (Z, II 2). To live a creative life is precisely to seek out resistance to overcome, and it is therefore to seek out suffering. I have already pointed out that the concept of Dionysus is that of “the soul that, having being, dives into becoming; the soul that *has*, but *wants* to want and will” (EH, III “The Birth of Tragedy” 1). And I have argued that the desire “to want and will” implies a desire for resistance and therefore for suffering.

And so, we should not be surprised to find Nietzsche describe the Dionysian attitude precisely in terms of a radical revaluation of suffering: “For it is only in the Dionysian mysteries, in the psychology of the Dionysian condition, that the *fundamental fact* of the Hellenic instinct expresses itself—its ‘will to life.’ [. . .] In the teachings of the mysteries, *pain* is sanctified: the ‘pains of childbirth’ sanctify pain in general—all becoming and growing, all that guarantees the future, *postulates* pain. . . . For the eternal joy in creating to exist, for the will to life eternally to affirm itself, the ‘torment of childbirth’ *must* also exist eternally” (TI, X 4; cf. EH, III “The Birth of Tragedy” 4). Nietzsche sounds here the central theme of his ethics of power, namely, the necessary relation of creativity to suffering, or more precisely the “pains of childbirth,” by appealing, as he is prone to do, to the traditional relation between procreation and the myth of Dionysus.

But here, his investigation of suffering, particularly Dionysian suffering, reveals further complexity. The “pangs of childbirth” refer to the suffering involved in the overcoming of resistance characteristic of creative activity, a form of suffering the truly creative individual welcomes. But the creative individual is also susceptible to another form of suffering, which Nietzsche finely characterizes in his well-known discussion of romanticism: “*What is romanticism?*—Every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of sufferers: first, those who suffer from the *over-fullness* of life—they want a Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight—and then those who suffer from the *impoverishment of life* and seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anaesthesia, and madness” (GS 370). Those who suffer from the “*over-fullness* of life” presumably have an excess of strength or

energy that seeks to be discharged in the confrontation of resistance. The suffering, in that case, is akin to the restlessness of boredom. Such individuals want challenges, or resistance against which to exercise their “overflowing” energy. Those who suffer from the “*impoverishment* of life,” by contrast, are too weak to overcome resistance to their pursuits. They resent not only this resistance to the satisfaction of their desires, but also the desires themselves, inasmuch as they impel them to confront that resistance. They accordingly aspire to “rest, stillness, calm seas.”

The second claim Nietzsche offers about the creative life is that *the valuation of creativity implies a valuation of loss*. If the good is creative activity itself, rather than its final products, then the creator should have no qualm leaving them behind, inasmuch as they mark the end of particular spells of creative activity. Indeed, he *must* leave such products behind in order to seek new opportunities for creation: “Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must oppose it and my love: thus my will wills it” (Z, II 12). And yet Nietzsche’s very terminology here suggests that opposition to one’s realized creative goals will be ambivalent at best: we do not love them less for opposing them. Indeed, Nietzsche describes as “bitter” the abandonment of old achievements: “there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators” (Z, II 2). This might seem perplexing, for to value creativity is to value less the particular products of creation than the activity of creation itself.

The peculiar structure of the pursuit of the will to power supplies a possible resolution to this perplexity. Genuine engagement in creative activity, remember, is constituted by a desire for its particular end. I am truly engaged in the activity insofar as I care to realize its end. The desire for this end and the efforts deployed in pursuing it presuppose and foster an attachment to it. In other words, the creative individual cannot love creative activity without loving the particular products of this activity, the works themselves. But his very love for creative activity also requires him to leave behind his creative achievements, to “oppose” them. This, Nietzsche suggests, does not mean that he ceases to love them, so that letting go of them is experienced as a “bitter” loss. In other words, a commitment to creative activity both induces in the individual a love for his creations and demands that he abandon them. Hence, he can never rest content with one particular achievement without renouncing this commitment. We might say that the goal of a particular spell of creative activity, once achieved, conserves its value

in one respect (for example, it is good by virtue of fulfilling a particular expressive need), but it loses value in another respect (it can no longer motivate creative activity).

The distinctive mark of the Dionysian attitude Nietzsche emphasizes most often is “the *joy even in destroying*” (EH, III “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” 8; cf. WP 853). He specifies, moreover, that the Dionysian individual must welcome the destruction of even what is considered “noble” and “good”: “*My first solution: Dionysian wisdom. Joy in destruction of the most noble and at the sight of its progressive ruin: in reality joy in what is coming and lies in the future, which triumphs over existing things, however good. Dionysian: temporary identification with the principle of life (including the voluptuousness of the martyr)*” (WP 417).

There is a common tendency to read, in passages like this one about the future, the promise of some mysterious new good, which will be much better than any good until now. And the prospect of this mysterious new good is a source of joy. But if we ask what this new good consists of, we find disappointingly little: the advent of an undefined “new dawn” or of the no less enigmatic “overman.”¹⁰ This apparent lack of determinate content has invited the conjecture that Nietzsche deliberately refrained from advocating a substantive ethics. Much of the argument of the previous three chapters suggests, on the contrary, that interpretations of this sort look for Nietzsche’s substantive ethical pronouncements in the wrong places. We take joy, he declares, “in what is coming [. . .], which triumphs over existing things, however good”—in other words, we enjoy the endless process of overcoming in which the pursuit of the will to power (“the principle of life” in the earlier passage) necessarily consists. It is not that existing things are not good, and could be improved upon, but it is rather that our will to power insatiably impels us to move on to further creative opportunities. This focus on the future is thus less an expectation of progress or of a coming golden age than the affirmation of *becoming* itself: “The affirmation of passing away *and destroying*, which is the decisive feature of a Dionysian philosophy; saying Yes to opposition and war; *becoming*, along with a radical repudiation of the very concept of *being*” (EH, III “The Birth of Tragedy” 3; cf. TI, X 5).

The affirmation of becoming itself demands an orientation toward the future, but it does not (or not necessarily) require regarding the past as defective or lacking in value. This is why Nietzsche takes such care in characterizing the distinctive ambivalence of the creative (Dio-

nysian) individual toward those past achievements he loves (be they his own, or those of his predecessors). Thus, he finely observes that the desire for destruction could have very different motives, and therefore a very different significance: “The desire for *destruction*, change, and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future (my term for this is, as is known, ‘Dionysian’); but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged, who destroy, *must* destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them” (GS 370). The destructiveness of the Dionysian individual differs from the destructiveness of the resentful weak individual insofar as it involves no condemnation or devaluation of what it destroys. The creator who seeks to produce new music, which might supplant the old, need not regard the old music as bad or deplorable. His “over-fullness” compels him to seek new creative challenges, and so to leave past creative achievements behind. But he may well continue to value and appreciate them, even as he aims to surpass them. And so, we might say that his destructiveness remains compatible with the affirmation of what it destroys. By contrast, the weak individual destroys out of spite and vindictiveness. His destruction implies a condemnation of what it destroys.

This distinction resolves a difficulty Nietzsche acknowledges in a passage where he assimilates Dionysus with Zarathustra: “The psychological problem in the type of Zarathustra is how he that says No and *does* No to an unheard-of degree, to everything to which one has so far said Yes, can nevertheless be the opposite of a No-Saying spirit” (EH, III “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” 6). The difficulty is to explain how a character who engages in destruction and negation to an unprecedented degree could also personify “the eternal Yes to *all* things” (ibid.; my emphasis).¹¹ And the answer is, once again, to be found in the ethics of power. For the strong, creative type, negation is a necessary part of the creative process, and although the negation of past achievements is required by the perpetuation of this process (GM, II 24), it will nevertheless be felt as leaving something valuable behind. Indeed, Nietzsche himself often grants value even to those practices and ideas he most vehemently condemns, if only as opportunities for polemics.

The third claim Nietzsche makes about the creative life, which directly follows from the second, is that *the valuation of creativity implies a valuation of impermanence (or becoming)* (and specifically, the impossibility of a final, once-and-for-all satisfaction). Nietzsche presents Dionysus as the “tempter god,” who perpetually creates new hopes,

new longings, and new dissatisfaction: “The tempter god [. . .] from whose touch everyone walks away richer, not having received grace and surprised, not as blessed and oppressed by alien goods, but richer in himself than before, broken open, blown at and sounded out by a thawing wind, perhaps more unsure, tenderer, more fragile, more broken, but full of hopes that as yet have no name, full of new will and currents, full of new dissatisfaction and undertows—[. . .] namely, no less a one than the god *Dionysus*, that great ambiguous one and tempter god” (BGE 295).

Valuing creativity is valuing a specific type of activity, that of confronting and overcoming resistance. The valuation of this sort of activity implies a valuation of becoming and impermanence: “there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators. Thus are you advocates and justifiers of all impermanence” (Z, II 2). The reason for this is to be found in Nietzsche’s understanding of creativity in terms of the will to power. The will to power, remember, has a paradoxical structure: its satisfaction brings about its own dissatisfaction. To satisfy the desire for the activity of overcoming resistance in the pursuit of some determinate end, one must be moved to achieve that determinate end, that is to say, to eliminate all the resistance to its realization. But once that resistance is eliminated, the activity comes to a close, and the desire for activity finds itself frustrated, and sets out to seek new objects. This paradoxical structure brings to light the most distinctive feature of the will to power: it is a kind of desire that does not allow for *permanent* (once-and-for-all) satisfaction. This is the central ambiguity Nietzsche identifies in the figure of the “tempter god”: in continuously inspiring new indeterminate hopes (“hopes that as yet have no name”), it also fosters new dissatisfaction.

It is therefore no surprise that his valuation of the creative life leads Nietzsche to claim to have discovered a “new happiness” (GS, Preface). In the most prevalent conception of it, happiness is essentially a *state*, “the happiness of resting, of not being disturbed, of satiety, of finally attained unity, as a ‘sabbath of sabbaths’ ” (BGE 200). Happiness, from the standpoint of the ethics of creativity, not only is not, but cannot be, a state at all. Insofar as this sort of happiness is experienced in the *activity* of confronting and overcoming resistance, it will never be a state that is reached once and for all. For as soon as the resistance to the realization of some determinate end is actually overcome, the activity comes to end, and so does the happiness it brings. And so the Dionysian life is “a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no

weariness” and a perpetual cycle of creation and destruction (WP 1067).

The last, and perhaps most distinctively “tragic” characteristic of the creative life is that *it implies an acceptance of ultimate personal failure*. Creative activity is, for Nietzsche, the primary source of what he calls joy. And of joy he declares: “You higher men, for you it longs, joy, the intractable blessed one—for your woe, you failures. All eternal joy longs for failures. For all joy wants itself, hence it also wants agony” (Z, IV 19[11]). The will to power of the creative individual induces him to seek ever greater or newer challenges, which are bound to subject him to ever greater or newer risks, and given his finite strength, lead him ultimately to failure and frustration. For it is inevitable that, under the sway of that will, he should eventually be driven to confront limitations he is not strong enough to overcome, and the resistance of which will break or defeat him. And so, in the end, the pursuit of the creative life does not only preclude any final, once-and-for-all satisfaction, it is also destined to end in failure.

Nietzsche repeatedly presents Dionysus as the very incarnation of the “tragic” view of life, and Dionysian wisdom as a “tragic” wisdom (EH, III “The Birth of Tragedy” 1–3; GS 370). *The Birth of Tragedy* presents Oedipus as a quintessential tragic hero (BT 9) and emphasizes a particular feature of his life: his obsessive quest for the truth (about his own fate) only brings him misery. The lesson of this tragedy according to that work is that “wisdom, and particularly Dionysian wisdom, is an unnatural abomination” (ibid.), which must be “transfigured” by Apollonian illusion, a transfiguration that involves, as in the case of Oedipus himself, a kind of voluntary blindness. *The Birth of Tragedy* focuses on that element of the story and proposes this particular remedy, because at that time Nietzsche has not yet developed the doctrine of the will to power and has only the illusions of art to prescribe as an antidote for those who have “looked boldly into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and [are] in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will,” that is to say, those who have achieved “Dionysian wisdom” (BT 7). Tragic wisdom, at that early stage, thus prescribes eschewing the Dionysian depths and remaining at the Apollonian surface with its beautiful appearances—being, in other words, “superficial—*out of profundity*” (GS, Preface 4).

In his later works, by contrast, tragic wisdom ceases to be (partly) Apollonian and becomes a fully Dionysian wisdom.¹² The affirmation

of life no longer requires that we avoid what *The Birth of Tragedy* characterizes as the “insight into the horrible truth” of our condition (BT 7). We are now capable of contemplating this truth without being driven to nihilistic despair by it because the revaluation made possible by the doctrine of the will to power actually enables us to welcome and affirm it. The tragedy truly “begins,” Nietzsche declares, when Zarathustra “began to go under” and teach that very doctrine (GS 342). But we still need to understand exactly in what sense Zarathustra’s teaching underlies a new, purely Dionysian conception of tragic wisdom.

We get some useful clues from a consideration of further aspects of the tragedy of Oedipus that Nietzsche downplayed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Two aspects are particularly worthy of mention. First, Oedipus’ life is tragic because it is doomed to a woeful fate. And second, this woeful fate is sealed by his very own decisions and actions, quite specifically, his efforts to escape that fate and live a happy life (themselves motivated by what Sophocles calls his ὕβρις [hubris, excessive presumption]). Nietzsche’s Dionysian conception of a tragic life possesses analogous features. Like Oedipus, Nietzsche’s Dionysian man is doomed to a woeful fate. And again like Oedipus, he is driven to this fate by his quest for a good life. But there are important differences.

In the first place, in Nietzsche’s view the instrument of fatality is no longer the agent’s ὕβρις, his conviction that he can escape his fate, but his will to power. And in the second place, while the relation of Oedipus’ ὕβρις to his ineluctable misery is only *accidentally* necessary, the link of the Dionysian man’s will to power to his own woeful fate is *essentially* necessary. It is only by virtue of contingent historical circumstances that Oedipus’ decision to leave Corinth and his adoptive parents led him to Thebes and the fatal altercation with his real father, Laios. Under different circumstances (for example, if Laios had not attempted to escape his own fate by abandoning Oedipus when he was an infant), the same decision might not have had the same consequences. In contrast, it is by its very nature that the pursuit of the will to power by an agent with finite strength eventually drives him to failure. For the will to power is essentially insatiable, and it induces the agent to seek out ever newer and greater challenges, meeting which requires ever greater expenditures of strength, until that ineluctable moment when this strength runs out, the resistance can no longer be overcome, and the challenge remains unmet.¹³ The woeful fate to which his very pursuit of the good life dooms the Dionysian individual is

therefore ultimate frustration, or self-destruction in a losing struggle. Nietzsche's Zarathustra professes his deepest love for this individual who embraces that fate: "I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus perishes" (Z, I 17).

4. *The Overman*

For all its prominence in the Nietzschean lore, the concept of the overman has a rather brief career in his writings. Its appearance is confined to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and Nietzsche later acknowledges that it is a rather misleading concept (EH, III "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" 6). And, indeed, its elucidation has caused grief to generations of scholars. I will confine myself here to a modest ambition, namely, to show how this concept admits of a fairly natural interpretation in terms of the ethics of power, of the value placed on the overcoming of resistance.

I begin with Nietzsche's own statement of the doctrine:

I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All beings have so far created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. [. . .]

Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! (Z, Prologue 3)

Leaving aside the allusion to evolutionary theory, the general thrust of the doctrine is clear enough. The overman is the "meaning of the earth" insofar as it represents an ideal the pursuit of which does not entail the negation of our earthly life, but on the contrary permits to affirm it. And this ideal is an ideal of "overcoming": the "secret of all life" is that "war for power and more power [. . .] are present even in beauty" (Z, I 7).

Remaining faithful to our earthly life is therefore to press for new "overcomings," and this apparently means eventually overcoming the current state of our own humanity. Therein lies greatness: "What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* and a *going under*" (Z, Prologue 4). To understand the significance of the idea of the overman, it is crucial to attend to a feature of Zarathustra's attitude toward it that is as peculiar as it is overlooked. Zarathustra does not profess his love for

the *overman* himself. Instead, he directs his profession of love to a long list of characters who, in many varied ways, *long for and prepare the way* for the overman, but are not themselves overmen (ibid.). And those who long for the overman are precisely those who are committed to overcoming, including eventually overcoming themselves: in other words, those who will power, the “creators.”

This is precisely how Zarathustra summarizes his profession of love, aptly enough in the section entitled “On the Way of the Creator”: “I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself” (Z, I 17). In teaching the overman, he is not describing a determinate goal we ought to achieve. He is advocating overcoming, and to overcome essentially is, in a sense, to create over and beyond oneself. *Longing* for the overman is what a commitment to the creative life implies. Nietzsche never offers a substantive characterization of the overman, because it represents the indeterminate, ever-receding formal objective of the individual who, by virtue of engaging in the pursuit of power, is perpetually in search of new challenges to meet, of new overcomings.¹⁴

II. Weakness and Negation of Life

1. *Ressentiment*

In Chapter 1, I observed that, although Nietzsche regards nihilism as a philosophical problem—it is “the logical conclusion of our highest values”—he also describes it as “the expression of physiological decadence,” or “a disease, a sign of decline, an idiosyncrasy” (WP 38; cf. TI, II 1). The apparent conflict between these two claims dissipates once we consider that the life-negating “highest” values, of which nihilism is the logical conclusion, are themselves a product of physiological degeneration, or of what Nietzsche most generally calls “weakness” (GS 48, 370; WP 44). Weakness itself is not decadence, but it is the source of decadence, and the most extreme form of decadence is nihilism.

The idea that there is another, metaphysical world beyond this one is a contrivance of weakness: “General insight: it is the instinct of life-weariness, and not that of life, which has created the ‘other world.’ Consequence: philosophy, religion, morality are *symptoms of decadence*” (WP 586). And this invention of another world is motivated by the desire to escape the suffering that is inevitable in this one: “It was suffering and incapacity that created all afterworlds—this and that brief madness of bliss which is experienced only by those who

suffer most deeply. Weariness that wants to reach the ultimate with one leap, with one fatal leap, a poor ignorant weariness that does not want to want any more: this created all gods and afterworlds” (Z, I 3).

Nietzsche very pointedly chalks off the fiction of “afterworlds” not just to suffering, but to suffering and “incapacity [*Unvermögen*].” Since he uses *suffering* and *pain* somewhat interchangeably, he could be speaking either of the displeasure caused by resistance to the satisfaction of our desires, or simply of displeasure born from need, which constitutionally involves a desire that might require the confrontation of resistance in order to be satisfied. To those incapable of overcoming this resistance, those who “do not want to want any more,” pain and suffering become unbearable and induce them to aspire to another world, “a world in which one does not suffer” (WP 585; cf. GM, III 28). This fateful act of the weak is therefore an act of *revaluation*. Indeed, the concept of another, metaphysical world, and the related concept of God, are simply the expression of this revaluation or, more precisely, of this devaluation of life in this world: “The concept of ‘God’ invented as a counter-concept of life—everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous, the whole hostility unto death against life synthesized in this concept in a gruesome unity! The concept of the ‘beyond,’ the ‘true world’ invented in order to devaluate the only world there is—in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality!” (EH, IV 8; cf. TI, IX 34; A 18).

The weak devalue suffering because they are incapable of overcoming it, or the resistance and obstacles that cause it. By contrast, “abundant strength wants to create, suffer, go under” (WP 222). And so, along with suffering, the weak also devalue the will to power. Weakness alone, however, does not suffice to explain the devaluation of the ends it makes one incapable of achieving. It could just as well induce resignation. To bring about devaluation requires other psychological traits that combine with weakness to trigger a distinctive psychological mechanism Nietzsche identifies as *ressentiment*. Thus, the devaluation of suffering and the invention of another, metaphysical world are ultimately born out of *ressentiment*: “to imagine another, more valuable world is an expression of hatred for the world that makes one suffer: the *ressentiment* of metaphysicians against actuality is here creative” (WP 579).

The *Genealogy of Morals* produces a detailed analysis of *ressentiment* and its impact on evaluation. Nietzsche starts his analysis by

refining a distinction between the types of the “master,” or “noble,” and the “slave,” which he introduced and developed in previous works (HH, I 45; BGE 260). We know from these earlier descriptions that the noble masters consider some form of superiority a natural entitlement: “the noble felt themselves to be men of a higher rank” (GM, I 5; cf. 6; BGE 257–258). Nietzsche’s use of the notions of “master” and “slave” is ambiguous, however. They designate now socio-political categories, and now character types. The noble masters desire *political* superiority *qua* noble in the socio-political sense, but we will see that their valuing political power is not essential to their possessing a noble character. Nietzsche makes clear that nobility as a type of *character* is “the case that concerns us here” (GM, I 5).¹⁵ Accordingly, I will consider the socio-political categories of master and slave simply as parts of the illustration of an essentially psychological view that makes use of the same notions to denote specific character types.

To the earlier distinction between noble and slaves, the *Genealogy* adds a new, crucial refinement: he suggests that, *within* the noble class, two subgroups compete for political superiority, namely, the “warriors” and the “priests.” Leaving aside the question of the historical plausibility of this example (Nietzsche alludes to the war between the Romans [“warriors”] and the Jewish [“priestly”] people [GM, I 16]), I want to draw out some of its psychological lessons. The important fact is that the priests, who are physically “weak” and “unhealthy,” are defeated by the “powerful physicality” and “overflowing health” of the warriors, and consequently develop a pervasive sense of “impotence [*Ohnmacht*]” (GM, I 6–7). Some features of the example deserve to be emphasized.

First, the salience of *physical* strength and weakness is a purely contingent aspect of Nietzsche’s example. The weakness of the priests creates their feeling of impotence only because they hold it responsible for their loss of political superiority. The noble warriors seem to be generally intellectually deficient, or in any case inferior in that respect to their rivals, the priests (GM, I 7). But this does not spawn a feeling of impotence, because they do not see this deficiency as the incapacity to realize their values—indeed they do not seem to regard it as a weakness at all. But there is no reason to think that, in different circumstances, the feeling of impotence could not be created by intellectual, rather than physical, weakness.¹⁶

Second, the feeling of impotence is not a temporary state of mind caused by an accidental reversal of fortune. It must rather have become

an essential feature of one's self-assessment: the agent sees himself as irremediably weak, instead of temporarily lacking the strength he customarily has. Although Nietzsche is unclear on this issue, his analysis of *ressentiment* appears to presuppose that the priest believes he has tried *everything* to regain power and failed. Accordingly, he sees his defeat not as a fluke but as evidence of a *constitutional* impotence (GM, I 6), which appears to be, for that very reason, "incurable" (GS 359). It therefore inhibits any further attempt to recover political power.

Finally, the priest evidently cannot accept his impotence. His weakness does not eradicate his "lust to rule," but only "represses" it and makes it "more dangerous" (GM, I 6).¹⁷ Furthermore, rather than subsiding, as it would in the case of resignation, the hatred the priest harbors towards his victorious rivals, the warriors, "grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions" (GM, I 7).

From this overview of Nietzsche's example, we can gather the fundamental features of *ressentiment*. It is a state of "repressed vengefulness" (*ibid.*), which arises out of the combination of the following elements. First, the "man of *ressentiment*" desires to live a certain kind of life which he deems most valuable: thus the priest, as a member of the master class, wants political superiority. Second, he comes to recognize his complete inability to fulfill this aspiration: he becomes "inhibited" by his weakness. Yet, and this is the third element, he retains his "arrogance" or his "lust to rule" (GM, I 6), or, as Nietzsche also says, his "will to power" remains "intact" (GM, III 15; cf. GS 359). He remains committed to political superiority, in other words, and cannot resign himself to his inability to achieve it.

It is this third feature that distinguishes *ressentiment* from other related attitudes. The soul of the "man of *ressentiment*" is torn by a tremendous tension between his desire to live the life he values and his belief that he is unable to satisfy it. But this tension may spawn a variety of different attitudes. I can think of two obvious ways of alleviating it, and *ressentiment* differs from both of them.

First of all, the agent who is convinced of his impotence could simply resign himself to it. Such a resignation would have to be quite radical: it would not simply consist in relinquishing one way of life he values but feels incapable of living to adopt another which he finds just as valuable. It is rather the renunciation of the kind of life he wants *most* and the acceptance of the shame or complete frustration that goes with this sort of unredeemable failure. An important feature of the priest's psychological predicament makes resignation to political inferiority all

but impossible. As a member of the noble class, the priest *expects* to enjoy political superiority. Expectations, as I understand the notion in this context, are essentially relative to the agent's estimation of himself. An agent might believe that a certain sort of life is worth living and yet not expect to be able to live it, because he has a very low estimation of himself, of his abilities and standing. Such is the attitude of the slave: "not at all used to positing values himself, he also attached no other value to himself than his masters attached to him" (BGE 261). Thus the slave accepts his masters' high estimation of the noble life *and* their low estimation of him, and therefore never even forms the expectation to live the life his masters value. The characteristically slavish attitude is resignation to a worthless way of life. But the priests are noble, and like other noble, they "feel themselves to be of a higher rank" (GM, I 5). Accepting their impotence and inferiority is practically impossible for them precisely because it clashes with their most fundamental expectation.¹⁸

Another obvious way to resolve the tension would be to reevaluate the desires that we are unable to satisfy, through a process I will call reflective reevaluation. We reflectively abandon a desire when we realize, upon reflection, that it is not really worth satisfying. In this case, the frustration of the desire is merely the occasion (not the ground) for its reevaluation, which is justified, in good faith, in terms of other desires on which we place a higher value. Yet, the priest of the *Genealogy* arguably cannot reflectively abandon the values of the nobility. The explanation for this might simply be that no better way of life can present itself to his reflection. Reflective reevaluation, I just suggested, is guided ultimately by those values that are most central to the agent's system of values (and therefore most difficult to give up reflectively). We might assume that, in Nietzsche's own example, political superiority is so central an expectation of noble morality that it is unlikely to be the object of a reflective rejection: after all, *it* will usually be the standard for the revision of other values found to be incompatible with it.

The "man of *ressentiment*," the priest of Nietzsche's example, cannot alleviate the tension between his desire for political superiority and his felt inability to satisfy it in any of the two obvious ways I just described. What, then, is left to the individual in the throes of *ressentiment*? The priests, Nietzsche writes, "in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical reevaluation of their enemies' values, that is to say, an act of the *most spiritual revenge*."

For this alone was appropriate to a priestly people, the people embodying the most deeply repressed priestly vengefulness" (GM, I 7). So, the "man of *ressentiment*" has recourse to a quite peculiar form of revaluation, which I will call *ressentiment* revaluation.¹⁹

Someone who wants political power above all but loses it through defeat will naturally seek revenge as a way to restore his challenged superiority. But in the "man of *ressentiment*" vengefulness has become "repressed" or "submerged" (GM, I 7; cf. 10). The source of this repression is the feeling of impotence: *ressentiment*, Nietzsche writes, is "the self-deception of impotence" (GM, I 13). In the example we have been considering, the repression of vengefulness in effect follows from a repression of the desire for political superiority.

Repression must be carefully distinguished from the *control* or *extirpation* of this desire as it may be commanded by its reflective revaluation, and from the *renunciation* in which the acceptance of one's inability to satisfy it consists. Repression, as Nietzsche appears to understand it, is the ultimate compromise of the person who has a desire, believes he is unable to satisfy it, but neither (reflectively) abandons it nor resigns himself to his impotence. The consequence of this repression, or perhaps, rather, its manifestation, is the revaluation by the "man of *ressentiment*" of the desire he feels unable to realize. Since the notion of *ressentiment* revaluation is rather complex, I find it illuminating to contrast it with some phenomena that are closely related to it but from which it must be distinguished, namely, so-called sour grapes revaluation and reflective revaluation.

At first glance, *ressentiment* revaluation might seem akin to the revaluation illustrated by Aesop's famous fable of the fox and the sour grapes.²⁰ Unable to reach the grapes it covets, the fox attempts to get rid of its feeling of frustration by persuading itself that the grapes were sour and so were not what it wanted anyway. Nietzsche's emphasis on the spiritual character of the priest's revenge might suggest that he imitates the fox. He might tell himself that the physical superiority of the warriors does not constitute genuine power. "I do not wage war," we might imagine him proclaiming, "because physical superiority is not a mark of real power, which lies rather in spiritual achievements." In this case, the priest would not change his desires, nor would he believe he cannot, ultimately, satisfy them. His revaluation would only concern *what will bring about that satisfaction*: as not all grapes are sweet, so not every form of power is "real" power. Though he is not deceived about what desire he wants to satisfy, he might be deceived about what will and will not satisfy it.

But in fact the priest's revaluation is far more radical than the fox's. As a result of his defeat at the hands of the warriors, he denies the value of political superiority altogether. And by the same token he condemns all the attitudes that help to secure and sustain it, namely, the lust to rule, arrogance, hatred, envy, revengefulness, and the like. In other words, the *values themselves* are changed. If the fox were to emulate this revaluation, it would have to say not that the grapes are sour but rather that sweetness itself is evil. The priest, in this view of his revaluation, need no longer be deceived about what will satisfy his desire for superiority, for, since he devaluates this desire, his failure to satisfy it no longer matters to him. He now judges superiority over his fellow humans an unworthy goal, and he begins instead to preach the value of neighborly love and political equality.

Though he is not deceived about how to fulfill his aspirations, the priest is nevertheless still deceived, this time about what his aspirations really are. For his devaluation of political superiority is not a reflective abandonment of it. Unlike reflective revaluation, *ressentiment* revaluation is not motivated by the rational recognition that certain attributes, like political superiority, really do not have the value that was hitherto attributed to them. Rather, it is driven by the way in which the "man of *ressentiment*" relates to political superiority: he wants it, but feels unable to secure its possession, and yet he cannot accept his impotence and particularly the shame or frustration it causes him. Nietzsche's central insight consists in seeing in *ressentiment* revaluation a strategy to relieve this tension.

Essentially, the revaluation relieves the "man of *ressentiment*" of his feeling of impotence by devaluating an aspiration he regards himself as unable to realize anyway: "When the oppressed, downtrodden, outraged exhort one another with the vengeful cunning of impotence: 'let us be different from the evil, namely good! And he is good who does not outrage, who harms nobody, who does not attack, [. . .]'³—this, listened to calmly and without previous bias, really amounts to no more than: 'we weak ones are, after all, weak; it would be good if we did nothing *for which we are not strong enough*' " (GM, I 13).

As this passage clearly suggests, *ressentiment* revaluation is intended to *vindicate* the "man of *ressentiment*" in his own eyes, to alleviate the shame caused by his sense of impotence by passing off his weakness as virtue. Presumably, this revaluation is effective in fulfilling this function only if he fully appropriates and internalizes the new values and actually defines the meaning of his existence in terms of their successful realization. And on this score, Nietzsche's account leaves us with two

difficulties. First, we need an explanation of the manner in which an agent who wants something above all, such as political power, but feels utterly incapable of securing its possession, could come to adopt the very opposite values and redefine himself in terms of them. And second, Nietzsche's own view suggests that the "man of *ressentiment*" in fact never really abandons his old aspiration for political power and presents his devaluation of it as an oblique and last-chance strategy to regain it.

Nietzsche offers no explicit answer to the first difficulty beyond an appeal to the extraordinary powers human beings seem to possess to deceive themselves. But the psychological mechanisms involved could be quite complex. In the first place, the psychic tension generated by frustration might reach a threshold at which it triggers a mechanism of counter-adaptive preference formation precisely designed to alleviate it.²¹ Counter-adaptive preference formation can assume different shapes. For example, it can consist in ceasing to prefer what one cannot have and coming to prefer something else one can have. For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* breeds a specific kind of counter-adaptation, which he characterizes in terms of the primacy of negation: "slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside,' what is 'different,' what is 'not itself'; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye [. . .] is of the essence of *ressentiment*" (GM, I 10). It consists not only in abandoning the preference for what one cannot have, but also in coming to prefer its very opposite—for example, equality and neighbourly love instead of political superiority. In the second place, the new preference might then call to action a need for vindictory self-understanding, which consists in rationalizing one's preferences by coming to judge their objects valuable.²²

To be fully effective, *ressentiment* revaluation requires that the agent fully internalize the new values he creates. But precisely this creates a serious problem for an important aspect of Nietzsche's account I have so far left out. He argues that the *ressentiment* revaluation of political power has a strategic purpose: it is meant to allow the priests to regain the political power they lost to the warriors and have felt otherwise unable to recover. Indeed, he presents the frustrated desire for power itself as the driving force behind its own devaluation: "You preachers of equality, the tyrannomania of impotence clamors thus out of you for equality: your most secret ambitions to be tyrants thus shroud themselves in words of virtue. Aggrieved conceit, repressed envy [. . .] erupts from you as a flame and as the frenzy of revenge" (Z, II 7; cf.

GM, III 18 on the relation between this desire and the valuation of compassion).

According to this strategic interpretation, *ressentiment* revaluation would be predicated upon the paradoxical hope that turning away from the frustrated desires and pursuing the very opposite values somehow will at last bring about the satisfaction of those desires: “these weak people—some day or other *they* too intend to be strong, there is no doubt of that, some day *their* kingdom too shall come” (GM, I 15). *Ressentiment* revaluation is thus the priest’s way of gratifying his desire for political superiority *in spite of his conviction that he does not have what it takes to satisfy it*: “The will of the weak to represent *some* form of superiority, their instinct for devious paths to tyranny over the healthy—where can it not be discovered, this will to power of the weakest!” (GM, III 14). And so, Nietzsche can succinctly summarize the distinctive nature of *ressentiment* revaluation: “Masterstroke: to deny and condemn the drive whose expression one is, to display continually, by word and by deed, the antithesis of this drive—” (WP 179). The “man of *ressentiment*” professes to act according to some ideals, but he is in fact motivated by desires he claims to be incompatible with the realization of these ideals. The very devaluation of political superiority, which *ressentiment* motivates, turns out to be a last-ditch effort to regain it.

This strategic interpretation of *ressentiment* revaluation faces considerable difficulties. Either, on the one hand, the priests never really believe that they cannot satisfy their desire for political superiority, and so they need not suppress it. Instead, they merely pretend to embrace the opposite values of love and equality in order to trouble the consciences of their rivals, the warriors, and so to regain the upper hand. But it is hard to see, in this view, how they could expect the warriors to take these new values seriously enough to be troubled by them.²³ Or, on the other hand, the priests (perhaps) believe that they can induce the warriors to take these new values seriously only if they internalize them fully themselves: it takes conviction to breed conviction. Supposing this variant of the strategy is successful, however, and the priests manage to regain political superiority (which they eventually do: see GM, I 16), they now must find it impossible to enjoy it with a good conscience, since it is unequivocally condemned by the new values they have internalized. Indeed, the very success of the revaluation makes it strategically pointless: once they have abandoned the value of political superiority, the priests have no reason to employ this revaluation as a

strategy to regain it. These difficulties (and related others as well) incline me to favor the view (often emphasized by Nietzsche himself) according to which the priest become convinced of their impotence and turn to reevaluation to obtain relief from their shame or frustration.

2. *The Ascetic Ideal*

The analysis of *ressentiment* in the first essay of the *Genealogy* is confined to the particular example of the struggle for political power between the “priests” and the “warriors.” But Nietzsche discusses a broader application of this mechanism in the third essay, in connection with life-negating values in general. The ideal that expresses the negation of life is the “ascetic ideal.” Nietzsche distinguishes the ascetic ideal from instrumental asceticism. Instrumental asceticism simply consists in depriving oneself of some satisfaction for the sake of another. It is characteristic, for example, of the philosopher who must eschew certain comforts to secure optimal conditions for the pursuit of philosophical inquiry but who “does *not* deny ‘existence’ ” (GM, III 7). The ascetic ideal, by contrast, underwrites a wholesale devaluation of existence in this world:

The idea at issue here is the *valuation* the ascetic priest places on our life: he juxtaposes it (along with what pertains to it: “nature,” “world,” the whole sphere of becoming and transitoriness) with a quite different mode of existence which it opposes and excludes, *unless* it turn against itself, *deny itself*: in that case, the case of the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence. The ascetic treats life as a wrong road on which one must finally walk back to the point where it begins, or as a mistake that is put right by deeds—that we *ought* to put right. (GM, III 11)

And this devaluation is motivated by an extreme form of *ressentiment*:

For an ascetic life is a self-contradiction: here a *ressentiment* without equal rules, that of an unsatiated instinct and power-will that would like to become lord not over something living, but over life itself, over its deepest, strongest, most fundamental preconditions; an attempt is made here to use energy to stop up the source of energy; here the gaze is directed greenly and maliciously against physiological flourishing itself, in particular against its expression, beauty, joy. [. . .] This is all paradoxical in the highest degree: we stand here before a conflict that *wants* itself to be conflict, that *enjoys* itself in this suffering and even becomes ever more self-assured and triumphant to the extent that its own presupposition, physiological viability, *decreases*. (ibid.)

Like any form of revaluation born out of *ressentiment*, the ascetic ideal is a complex stance. It is not a reflective abandonment of the values it condemns, such as the value of “struggle,” of the confrontation of resistance and suffering—the value of power in Nietzsche’s special sense of that term: “If anything is unevangelic it is the concept hero. Precisely the opposite of all contending, of all feeling oneself in struggle has here become instinct: the incapacity for resistance here becomes morality (‘resist not evil!’: the profoundest saying of the Gospel, its key in a certain sense), blessedness in peace, in gentleness, in the *inability* for enmity” (A 29; cf. 30–35; GM, I 14). Ultimately, the ascetic ideal represents the aspiration to a certain form of happiness, namely, “‘happiness’ at the level of the impotent, the oppressed, and those in whom poisonous and inimical feelings are festering, with whom it appears as essentially narcotic, drug, rest, peace, ‘sabbath,’ slackening of tension and relaxing of the limbs, in short *passively*” (GM, I 10). To those who lack the strength to overcome it, suffering becomes unacceptable, and only a life utterly devoid of it is worth living.

Nietzsche thus relies on his analysis of *ressentiment* to show how the nihilistic condemnation of suffering is a contrivance of weakness. The ascetic ideal, however, was not intended as a source of nihilism, but as a strategy to avert it. It was invented to make life worth living for the weak, by giving their suffering a meaning: “The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far—and *the ascetic ideal offered man meaning!* [. . .] In it, suffering was *interpreted*; the tremendous void seemed to have been filled; the door was closed to any kind of suicidal nihilism” (GM, III 28). And on this “moral world view,” the sufferings inevitable in this life are understood as a sentence, serving which would earn us access to “a quite different mode of existence” free from them. In this context, Nietzsche’s objection to the ascetic ideal is not that it was born out of *ressentiment*, but rather that it failed to achieve precisely what it was intended to achieve. By assuming the form of an unconditional will to truth, for example, it eventually led its advocates to discredit the ideas of God and another, metaphysical world (GM, III 27), without which “suicidal nihilism” became unavoidable.

3. Nietzsche’s “Philanthropy”

I believe we can exploit Nietzsche’s investigation into the psychological origins of life-negating values to shed some light on the most disturbing

of his ethical views. He concludes an important passage in which he redefines the good life in terms of his concept of power with a chilling declaration: “The weak and ill-constituted shall perish: first principle of *our* philanthropy. And one shall help them to do so” (A 2). I will not attempt a full defense of this passage, but I believe that, by locating it in the context of the previous discussion, it might prove to be a little less offensive than it appears.

Why does Nietzsche consider it a matter of “philanthropy” to help the weak perish? In the most common interpretation, the weak corrupt the strong by persuading them to embrace the virtues of compassion and benevolence that conflict with the pursuit of great achievements.²⁴ In this case, his form of philanthropy is directed to *humanity in general*, or at least to those Nietzsche considers “higher human beings,” and it motivates a concern to secure the conditions to bring about “the *highest power and splendor* actually possible to the type man” (GM, Preface 6). Nietzsche certainly holds that view, but it does not suffice to justify the claim that this requires the *destruction* of the weak. In fact, he himself sometimes prescribes only segregation of the weak from the strong to achieve this goal (see WP 287).

In the alternative interpretation I propose, “philanthropy” is not directed to humanity in general, or only to those who risk being corrupted by the weak, it is directed instead to *the weak themselves*. It is a matter of philanthropy to help them perish because no life can be worth living for them, even by their own lights. On the one hand, their commitment to a life-negating conception of happiness inevitably leads them into nihilistic despair, or at best to the sort of complete detachment that, even in Buddhist doctrine, makes the distinction between being alive and being dead all but meaningless. If they seek to avert nihilistic despair by adopting Nietzsche’s life-affirming ethics of power, on the other hand, then their weakness will make their pursuit of power a source of relentless frustration, and breed more despair: “If the suffering and oppressed lost the faith that they have the right to despise the will to power, they would enter the phase of hopeless despair” (WP 55). Indeed, it is this very despair that induced them to repudiate the ethics of power in the first place.

However they might conceive of it, the good life therefore eludes the “weak and ill-constituted,” and it is indeed philanthropy, rather than cruelty or self-interest, to spare them a life that is bound to be miserable. In other words, Nietzsche’s principle of philanthropy advocates

not eugenics but euthanasia. Even so, however, the view continues to disturb, for reasons very similar to those that trouble the opponents of euthanasia. For one thing, his advocacy of euthanasia does sometimes appear to serve a troubling eugenic program (see, for example, TI, IX 36). For another, he often acts as if weakness is a matter of “constitution,” as if it is therefore “incurable,” and as if he simply knows when an individual is thus “ill-constituted.” Even if we subscribe to his ethics of power, we are likely to be far more reluctant to endorse his praise of euthanasia—which includes, it is worth noting, self-inflicted “free death [. . .] at the right time” (Z, I 21)—because the notion of weakness, or of what he also calls “physiological degeneration,” involves deep and perhaps intractable metaphysical and epistemological problems. When, for example, does a physiological state form an incurable constitutional defect? And how can we know that even such constitutional defects preclude any possibility of a good life, even one that consists of the overcoming of resistance? And so, although we might be prepared to accept the principle behind Nietzsche’s “philanthropy,” these metaphysical and epistemological misgivings would surely place stringent limitations on our actual application of it.

But we should recognize that the principle of this philanthropy is not altogether offensive. The difficult debates over certain forms of euthanasia, for example, suggest that we are prepared to consider that, under certain conditions, a life may no longer be worth living. Nietzsche simply has a specific view of what makes life worth living, from the standpoint of which the condition he calls “weakness” precludes it.

4. *The Question of Ethical Elitism*

Nietzsche’s distinctive brand of “philanthropy” runs counter to a view sometimes attributed to him, according to which he accepts a kind of relativism about the good life, or happiness. I observed earlier that Nietzsche invokes two types of human beings—the “weak” and the “strong”—in connection with a characterization of two types of happiness. This might point to a kind of relativism about happiness. There is no one life that may be regarded as the most desirable for all human beings. Rather, there are different conceptions of happiness for different types of people.

Nietzsche indeed insists, on more than one occasion, that the life that is good for the strong is *not* good for the weak, and vice versa (GS 120; BGE 30; WP 287). He clearly disapproves of the existence of

the “weak,” which he describes as the “lower men,” but he would not deny that a certain kind of happiness is accessible to them. And if this is true, then his commitment to their demise could hardly be described as philanthropic, in the sense in which I have defined the term. However, I do not believe that Nietzsche is ultimately a relativist with regard to happiness. He concedes that there are different types of people, but he denies that there are different conceptions of the good life. There is only *one* kind of happiness, and his philanthropy is based on his conviction that the weak are not capable of it.

For one thing, he never relativizes the notion of the human good to one or another type of man. On the contrary, he always speaks of “the advancement and prosperity of *man in general* [in Hinsicht auf den Menschen überhaupt],” or of “the *highest power and splendor* actually possible to *the type man* [des Typus Mensch]” (GM, Preface 6; first and last emphases mine). For another thing, the distinction between “higher” and “lower” men, and the categories of “strength” and “weakness” that underlie it, is interpreted more plausibly as underwriting a contrast between *capacities* to have a good life rather than between different *types* of good life. Specifically, in contrast with those who are strong, those who are weak are not able to overcome resistance and so to enjoy the distinctive happiness found in that activity. Nietzsche, therefore, would be not a relativist, but an ethical *elitist*: there is only one good life for human beings, and some human beings are more capable of achieving it than others. This elitism, moreover, allows us to make relatively easy sense of Nietzsche’s claim that “morality” is “hostile to life” itself, and not just to the life of the “higher men.” In being detrimental to the “higher men,” “morality” would simply be inimical to a good *human life*, since only the higher men are capable of human excellence (EH, IV 7; cf. TI, V 4).

Admittedly, Nietzsche insists that it would not be *good* for lower men to strive after the happiness that is possible for the higher men. Given their “physiological” weakness, this pursuit would prove to be detrimental to them, perhaps even fatal. In claiming that this life would not be good for them, it appears that Nietzsche must rely on a different concept of happiness, one that is suited to the lower men. Two passages in particular are often invoked in support of this ethical relativism. The first is from *Beyond Good and Evil* and concerns Nietzsche’s “philosophers of the future”: “But they will certainly not be dogmatists. It must offend their pride, also their taste, if their truth is supposed to be

a truth for everyman—which has so far been the secret wish and hidden meaning of all dogmatic aspirations. ‘My judgment is *my* judgment’: no one else is easily entitled to it—that is what such a philosopher of the future may perhaps say of himself” (BGE 43).

It is tempting to read this passage as advocating a form of relativism. There is no “truth for everyman,” and there may be different “truths” for different types of men. But the end of the section suggests a very different interpretation: “In the end it must be as it is and always has been: great things remain for the great, abysses for the profound, nuances and shudders for the refined, and, in brief, all that is rare for the rare.—” (ibid.). When Nietzsche insists that there is no truth for everyone, he does not mean that there is no universal truth, but only that not everyone is “entitled” to the truth: “great things remain for the great.” As he insists repeatedly in nearby sections, it is not good for everyone to know the truth, but that does not make it the truth any less (BGE 30, 39, 272).

The second passage seems an even less equivocal endorsement of relativism: “My philosophy aims at an ordering of rank: not at an individualistic morality. The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd—but not beyond it: the leaders of the herd require a fundamentally different valuation for their own actions, as do the independent, or the ‘beasts of prey,’ etc.” (WP 287). At first glance, this passage appears to claim that it is actually not good for the lower men to live by the code favorable to the good of the higher men. This again seems incompatible with elitism because of the assumption that, in claiming that it is not *good* for the lower men to live by the code that favors the higher men, Nietzsche must be relying on a different conception of the good, which is suited to the lower men. Truthfulness, for example, would not be good for the lower men, because the good of men of that type might actually be thwarted by truthfulness.

But this assumption is incorrect. It may well be that the unqualified pursuit of truthfulness could, for certain types of people in certain circumstances, undermine the possibility of their achieving any measure of *truthfulness* at all. For example, learning the truth could, for people of a certain type in certain circumstances, wreak such psychological havoc as to damage severely their very capacity to be truthful. It is, in other words, *the very ideal of truthfulness*, together with a consideration of facts about type and circumstances, which grounds restraints on its own pursuit. “What do *you* know,” Nietzsche once asks, “of

how much falsity I shall *require* if I am to continue to permit myself the luxury of *my* truthfulness?" (HH, I Preface 4). Hence, a certain conception of the good life can, given certain facts about type and circumstances, require limitations on its own pursuit. There is no need to invoke a different conception of the good life to make sense of this.

III. Conclusion

The affirmation of life results from a reevaluation of the nihilist's life-negating values. We must, in conclusion, confront one remaining question: is the success of this reevaluation a sufficient or merely a necessary condition of affirmation? If the reevaluation were a sufficient condition of it, the affirmation of life would consist simply of a change in the way in which it is *viewed*. And it would also be an affirmation of life in its general, necessary features—for the reevaluation is of "what is necessary" in it. Many passages in Nietzsche's writings certainly support this view. Consider, for example, the following note: "It is here I set the *Dionysus* of the Greeks: the religious affirmation of life, life whole and not denied or in part; (typical—that the sexual act arouses profundity, mystery, reverence)" (WP 1052). The parenthetical allusion to sex indicates that by "life" Nietzsche means life in general, rather than someone's particular life. The sexual drive is indeed an essential feature of life in general: the life-negating Christians condemn it, whereas the cult of Dionysus places great value on it. And sexual metaphors sometimes refer, in Nietzsche's writings, to the kind of creative activity that paradigmatically instantiates the will to power (see, for example, WP 699).

Yet, Nietzsche also suggests, pointedly in his own case, that the affirmation of life is an affirmation of the particular, contingent ways in which it has unfolded. Consider the opening words of *Ecce Homo*: "I looked back and I looked forward, and never saw so many and such good things at once. [. . .] The first book of the *Revaluation of All Values*, the *Songs of Zarathustra*, the *Twilight of the Idols*, my attempt to philosophize with a hammer—all presents of this year, indeed of its last quarter! *How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life?*" (EH, Epigram). Evidently, Nietzsche is here speaking of *his* own life, and he expresses his gratitude for the particular ways in which it has turned out (for example, the fact that it has produced "such good books").

Curiously, Nietzsche never seems troubled by this ambiguity. Indeed, he never even explicitly acknowledges it. He may, of course, have

simply overlooked it. But I rather believe that the reason why he never draws a distinction between affirming life in general and affirming it in particular must be found in the very ethics that makes such an affirmation possible. To affirm life *in general* is to recognize that those necessary aspects of it “hitherto denied” are “desirable for their own sake.” Thus, the ethics of power welcomes the inescapability of suffering in human life. It would consider wretched an existence in which there is no resistance to overcome, no challenges to be met—that is to say, an existence completely devoid of suffering.

The revaluation based on Nietzsche’s ethics of power only makes it possible not to deny life in general on the grounds that suffering is inevitable in it. But to affirm one’s particular life, more is required. The ability to overcome resistance is a function of essentially contingent factors, such as what Nietzsche calls the “strength” or “weakness” of the agent, or the circumstances in which a particular activity is carried out, namely, the nature and amount of resistance opposed to its successful completion. As a consequence, the success at overcoming resistance and achieving power is also essentially contingent. In underwriting the affirmation of life with his ethics of power, Nietzsche effectively maintains that life is worth affirming only if it involves enough actual *overcoming* of resistance. Whether any given life does is a function of the particular contingent circumstances of that life. In the last analysis, then, the affirmation of life depends not only on a change in the general way in which it is viewed, but also on the particular way in which it is *lived*.

In many ways, Nietzsche’s own life, and in particular the manner in which he practiced philosophy, exemplifies the life-affirming ideal he advocates. As he conceives of it, philosophical greatness consists in challenging hallowed and deeply entrenched views (what he often calls “the ideal”), and in setting off to discover new worlds of ideas. And few philosophers have been more successful in doing both than he has. His books are either severe polemics against traditions that reach back thousands of years, in which case he had to be a philosophical “warrior,” or they blaze trails to unexplored new worlds, for which he must have become a philosophical “discoverer.”

Whatever form his philosophical will to power assumes, it is no wonder that he should feel tremendous gratitude for a life that was otherwise marred by illness and loneliness. And it is no wonder that he should describe the rewards of a lifetime of inquiries with the following words:

And now, after we have long been on our way in this manner, we argonauts of the ideal, with more daring perhaps than is prudent, and have suffered shipwreck and damage often enough, but are, to repeat it, healthier than one likes to permit us, dangerously healthy, ever again healthy—it will seem to us as if, as a reward, we now confronted an as yet undiscovered country whose boundaries nobody has yet surveyed, something beyond all the lands and nooks of the ideal so far, a world so overrich in what is beautiful, strange, questionable, terrible, and divine that our curiosity as well as our craving to possess it has got beside itself—ah, now nothing will sate us anymore! (GS 382)

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Notes

Introduction

1. *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1996), p. 324.
2. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* was completed later, but it is a compilation of texts about Wagner that had been written, and published, previously. The manuscript for *The Anti-Christ* (written in September 1888) was completed before *Ecce Homo* (finished in December 1888). However, in the chapter of *Ecce Homo* devoted to an overview of his works, Nietzsche only alludes to *The Anti-Christ*, where it is presented as the first installment of his project of “revaluation,” but he does not discuss it (see “Twilight of the Idols” 3). We may therefore conclude that he deliberately held off its publication until *Ecce Homo* was in print, and that it must be “the *first* book of the *revaluation*” that is mentioned in the letter to Overbeck.
3. This approach is particularly common in recent Anglo-American scholarship. Schacht (1983) offers the most comprehensive thematic approach. Other instances of this approach include Clark (1990), who concentrates on the themes of truth and knowledge (I should note that Clark touches on other major themes in Nietzsche, but her approach is not systematic in the sense relevant here); Poellner (1995) also takes this approach. Others still focus on Nietzsche’s views in ethics (for example, Berkowitz [1995]), and many discuss, in books or in articles, even more specific aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy, such as his concept of the eternal recurrence, or of genealogy, his metaethics, and so on.
4. Nehamas (1985), for example, argues that Nietzsche’s thought is driven by his doctrine of perspectivism. By contrast, Richardson (1996) suggests that the doctrine around which all of Nietzsche’s philosophy is organized is the will to power.
5. In the first half of the nineteenth century, this systematic ambition animates

the enterprise of then-influential philosophers such as K. L. Reinhold, J. G. Fichte, G. W. F. Hegel, and A. Schopenhauer.

6. This is the case with Nehamas (1985), chapter 3, but also with interpretations that emphasize the anti-metaphysical or anti-realist strains in Nietzsche's thought, such as, for example, Kofman (1972).
7. This is the case with Richardson (1996). Conversely, an interpretation that focuses on the eternal recurrence, such as that of Löwith (1935/1997), overlooks entirely the doctrine of the will to power.
8. For example, Clark (1990), Anderson (1994), Poellner (1995), and Richardson (1996) examine ways in which Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power can be reconciled with his perspectivism.
9. The idea that Nietzsche seeks to overcome nihilism is not new. It can be found, for example, in Löwith (1978, 1997); Schacht (1983), chapter 6; and Pippin (forthcoming). I substantially differ from these authors in the manner in which I conceive of the role and development of this idea in Nietzsche's philosophy.
10. See Nehamas (1985), chapter 1.
11. Admittedly, the deliberate esoterism of Nietzsche's style might mislead even careful readers and obscure for them the real content of his thoughts. As I will argue shortly, this observation grants support to a wider use of the unpublished notes than has been allowed in recent scholarly literature.
12. I take this to be the main lesson of the detailed and penetrating analysis found in Clark (1990). However, some scholars do take Nietzsche's views on truth and perspectivism to have radical and counterintuitive implications. See, in particular, Anderson (1998).
13. A noteworthy and illuminating exception is Gemes (1992).
14. This view is particularly popular among so-called post-modernist readings of Nietzsche. Most scholars believe that Nietzsche's apparent reticence to offer substantive ethical views can be attributed to metaethical commitments, primarily his anti-objectivism (for example, Nehamas [1985]). In the recent literature, Leiter (2002) is a noteworthy exception. However, even Leiter does not explore the substance of Nietzsche's new values in much detail, in all likelihood because, like other scholars, he takes these new values to represent only their author's personal idiosyncrasies.
15. So Heidegger (1979) declares: "What Nietzsche himself published during his creative life was always foreground. [. . .] His philosophy proper was left behind as posthumous, unpublished work" (p. 9).
16. The worries about the status of *The Will to Power* as a book are nicely articulated in Bernd Magnus (1988). Magnus' discussion draws on earlier research by Hollingdale (1965), pp. 260–272 and 294–299, as well as Montinari (1982).
17. The one noteworthy exception is the increasing importance Nietzsche places on the will to truth in a late conception of his project (KSA 13: 18 [17]). This does not so much signal a change in his conception of nihilism and the overcoming of it, however, as an appreciation of the role played by the will to truth in the emergence of nihilism (cf. WP 3; GM, III 27).

18. The first published mention of *The Will to Power* as a projected book is found in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (III 27) where it is accompanied by the subtitle *Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*. Several of the unpublished plans for the book bear the same title and subtitle.
19. Nietzsche alludes to the project of revaluation without mentioning the will to power in the letter I quoted earlier from November 13, 1888, and in *Ecce Homo*, whose final proofs Nietzsche reviewed around Christmas that same year. Hollingdale (1965) argues that Nietzsche also eventually abandoned the project of revaluation, but the philological evidence he produces to support this claim is extremely thin and inconclusive. Moreover, given that Nietzsche spent the last two years of his productive life gathering abundant notes for this project and elaborating at least twenty-five plans for its execution, some of them quite detailed, one would expect to find in his notes or letters clear philosophical evidence that he abandoned it. But, to my knowledge, none is to be found.

1. Nihilism

1. White (1987) provides a list of them.
2. Nozick (1989), chapter 15.
3. Nagel (1979) discusses this view.
4. I will argue shortly that nihilism results from the recognition that our goals are out of reach. Presumably, nihilism would not follow if we could pursue other goals to live up to our values. The unattainability of certain goals leads to goallessness only if these goals are necessary to the realization of our values.
5. It might be objected that many ideals that are not, strictly speaking, realizable nonetheless do not lose their ability to inspire. For example, one might be convinced that social justice can never be made to prevail and still be inspired to pursue it. In this case, however, it is possible to assume in the first place that such a conviction is not firm (that is to say, one is not absolutely sure that the victory of social justice is impossible, even though it looks rather unlikely in the current state of things). In the second place, it might be that the goal that continues to inspire is not to achieve a state in which social justice prevails absolutely but to achieve a state in which *as much social justice as possible* prevails.
6. Nihilism therefore denies the principle that *ought* implies *can*. We should, however, distinguish between two senses of *ought*: the *ought* of obligation and the *ought* of desirability. The *ought* of obligation figures in practical imperatives addressed to agents. This is the case in which *ought* does indeed imply *can*: for it makes no sense to hold someone to an obligation he simply is unable to fulfill. The *ought* of desirability figures in ethical judgments in general, and it may be applied to the world, and not just to agents. If we believe in the value of social justice, we might say that the world ought to be more just. This sort of *ought* does not necessarily imply *can*: for it makes sense to deplore the fact that the world is radically inhospitable to the realization of certain values.

7. Consider this representative sample of mostly recent literature. Schacht (1973) defines nihilism “as the doctrine that there are no objectively valid axiological principles” (p. 65). Gillespie (1995) takes Nietzschean nihilism to be “the result of the fact that the highest values devalue themselves” (p. 174). In his summary of Nietzsche’s philosophy, Larmore (1996) describes nihilism as “the realization that there are no objective values” (p. 82). In the view of Langsam (1997), “[N]ihilism is equivalent to the claim that there are no legitimate values in the world” (p. 235). And Havas (1995) claims that nihilism “should be understood as the state one may be said to be in when nothing truly matters to one,” which he specifies as a state in which “one, in effect, value[s] nothing” (Preface, p. xiv).

The current prevalence of the interpretation of nihilism as devaluation might be due to the conjecture that Nietzsche borrowed the notion from Russian literature, particularly Ivan Turgenev and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Kuhn (1992, chapter 1) argues that Nietzsche adopted the term primarily from Turgenev’s novel *Fathers and Sons* (1861/1972), rather than, as it had previously been argued by some prominent Nietzsche biographers, from Paul Bourget’s *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1895). “A nihilist,” one of the protagonists of *Fathers and Sons* declares, “is a person who does not take any principle for granted, however much that principle may be revered.” This elicits the following reply from another character: “We shall see how you manage to exist in a void, in an airless vacuum” (p. 94). Dostoyevsky’s consecrated formula, “If God is dead, everything is permitted!” (from *The Brothers Karamazov* [1880]) is echoed by Nietzsche with one of his own: “Everything is false! Everything is permitted!” (WP 602; Z, IV 9). In associating the death of God with permissibility, both formulae suggest that God represents the justification of the values by the light of which certain ends were forbidden.

8. Harman (1977), p. 11ff. See also MacKie (1977), chapter 1, where it is called, somewhat misleadingly, “moral skepticism.”
9. It is worth noting that devaluation may result not just from a loss of objective standing, but also from a kind of fragmentation. In accepting the value of values other than those sanctioned by the prevalent (Christian) morality, we eventually find ourselves with conflicting and incommensurable values: “the synthesis of values and goals (on which every strong culture rests) dissolves and the individual values war against each other: disintegration” (WP 23). This fragmentation of our conception of the good is bound to generate a sense of devaluation as well. Fragmentation is a problem, however, only because there is no objective *ordering* of the conflicting values. Hence, we may regard it as a special case of the non-existence of certain objective normative facts.
10. Leiter (2002) argues that Nietzsche accepts the objectivity of what he calls “prudential” values (pp. 106–112). Prudential value is defined in terms of the flourishing of beings of a certain type: whatever is conducive to their flourishing (which is only a certain state or a certain mode of functioning

they can achieve) is “good” for beings of that type. The normative significance of such prudential values is, however, very limited. For one thing, it cannot by itself provide the sort of normative guidance to which the nihilist aspires. For flourishing can indeed provide such guidance only if it is itself valuable, and, unlike the values it underwrites, its value cannot be a prudential value. For another thing, it is also worth asking whether prudential values can be values at all, whether they can possess real normative significance, without assuming the non-prudential value of flourishing itself. In any event, nihilistic devaluation follows from the claim that no *non-prudential* value has objective standing, a claim to which Nietzsche is undeniably committed.

11. Frankl (1984) offers particularly poignant, if anecdotal, evidence for this view when he reports that the prisoners with the best chance of survival in concentration camps were those who succeeded in giving their life a purpose or meaning. And he developed a new form of psychotherapy predicated on the existence and centrality of this need.
12. To my knowledge, only White (1987) in recent literature explicitly recognizes that nihilism sometimes designates a form of despair for Nietzsche, although he does not acknowledge the contrast between this view and the prevalent view (i.e., disorientation). Müller-Lauter (1971) also defines nihilism as a discrepancy between “needs” and the “inadequacies of existing reality,” but he offers a purely “physiological” characterization of the ensuing “disgust with the world” (p. 41). Finally, although Schacht (1983) defines nihilism officially as a claim about values, he shifts to talk of it as a claim about the world’s inhospitability to their realization without, however, explicitly acknowledging that this is a shift to a different concept of nihilism (see esp. chapter 6).
13. White (1987) distinguishes nihilistic despair (to which he refers with Nietzsche’s phrase “radical nihilism”) from religious nihilism and complete nihilism. What he calls “religious nihilism,” however, seems to me to designate what Nietzsche refers to as pessimism. “Complete nihilism” is the nihilism that results from what White calls the “devaluation of the values.” However, it does not seem to be equivalent to what I have called disorientation. It is difficult to say what it is, because White’s characterization of it is unfortunately marred by inconsistency. On the one hand, the complete nihilist, whose values have been “devaluated,” is “left with *nothing at all* [i.e., no value]” (p. 33), while on the other he is also one who “deifies becoming and the apparent world as the only world, and calls them good” (p. 35), which seems difficult for someone with no values in terms of which to make such evaluation.
14. The location of this text in the opening section of *The Will to Power* permits no inference concerning its importance, since that alleged work is a creation of editors, not of Nietzsche himself.
15. See Gillespie (1995), p. 179; White (1987), pp. 36–37.
16. The distinction between active and passive nihilism, it should be noted,

admits of a different interpretation. On this alternative interpretation, they are not merely responses to the loss of meaning, they represent two ways in which this loss *comes about*. This distinction is made in terms of a difference in “strength of spirit.” Although it is not clearly defined by Nietzsche, this notion appears closely linked to the agent’s estimation of his own powers and capacities. Strength of spirit is depleted, for example, when the agent believes that he cannot do much of anything. As such, it bears some kinship with the concept of self-confidence.

Active nihilism is the condition of the spirit who has outlived her current goals or ideals: they do not inspire her because she is *too strong* for them—they have become insignificant. “[A]ctive nihilism. It can be a sign of *strength*: The energy of the spirit has grown so great that *previous* goals [. . .] are insufficient. [. . .] On the other hand, a sign of *insufficient* strength now to go on productively to *posit* a goal, a why” (WP 23). Active nihilism is still nihilism—goallessness—however, because it only has “relative strength”: it has enough strength to destroy current goals for which it has become too strong, but not enough to create new ones to replace them. The adolescent, for example, has outgrown the goals of his childhood but is typically (if momentarily) left without the ability to “posit” new goals to which he could devote his developing powers.

By contrast, *passive nihilism* is the condition of the spirit who is no longer inspired by her current goals and ideals because she is too weak for them. They are, in her eyes, too lofty. “[P]assive nihilism: as a sign of weakness: the strength of the spirit can be tired, exhausted, so that the previous goals and values are insufficient and no longer inspire belief” (ibid.). The person whose strength is depleted resigns herself to an existence she knows to be worthless. It is worth emphasizing again that when the passive nihilist loses his “belief” in his values, he does not withdraw his *endorsement* of them, but only acknowledges the futility of his efforts to realize them.

I do not know, at this stage, what to make of this alternative. It suffers from one significant weakness: its central notion, the idea of “strength of spirit,” is not adequately defined by Nietzsche. For this reason, I will leave it aside and limit myself to what remains the most straightforward interpretation of the distinction.

17. Nietzsche calls it “radical nihilism” in the text, and some commentators believe that this qualification is significant. The description of nihilism offered here, however, is identical with descriptions he proposes elsewhere for “nihilism” *simpliciter* (see WP 37). For this reason, I think that this particular qualification may be ignored here.
18. The “in-itself” may be interpreted in the same way: the idea is that suffering and death are merely appearances of a condition that, in itself, is devoid of suffering and death (see WP 12).
19. Buddhism, for instance, is now a variety of pessimism (WP 82; GS 346), and now the paradigm of nihilism (WP 1, 23, 55). And Schopenhauer’s pessimism is sometimes presented as a paradigm of full-blown nihilism.

20. Nietzsche speaks as if there may be several “highest” values and ideals, which creates a difficulty. If a highest value is one whose realization is a condition of the value of anything else, how are we to think of cases in which one supposedly highest value is realized but another is not? Does the failure to realize the latter undermine the value of the realization of the former? Nietzsche does not consider this difficulty because he appears to think that it does not apply to his view. As we will see in Chapter 4, he singles out *one* basic value as the highest, namely the view that suffering is evil.
21. We find descriptions of nihilism as “the expression of physiological decadence” in Müller-Lauter (1971), chapter 3; see also Richardson (1996), pp. 65–66.
22. In Chapter 6, I will return to the view that nihilism is an expression of decadence.
23. Freud (1927) develops a similar pattern of argument (cf. chapters 6 & 7).
24. “If God is dead,” as Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* famously has it, “everything is permitted.” See Kuhn (1992).
25. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche sometimes labels as “pessimism” the predicament which he will later prefer to call “nihilism.” In view of the close affinity I have discussed between pessimism and nihilism, this is not so surprising and it should not induce us to think that the problem which Nietzsche addresses in that book is fundamentally different from nihilism.
26. I should acknowledge that, on some (rare) occasions, Nietzsche uses the term *nihilism* to designate despair at the unrealizability of *his own* life-affirming values. “For this is how things are: the diminution and leveling of European man constitutes *our* greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary. [. . .] Here precisely is what has become a fatality for Europe—together with the fear of man we have also lost our love of him, our reverence for him, our hopes for him, even the will to him. The sight of man now makes us weary—what is nihilism today if it is not *that?*—We are weary of *man*” (GM, I 12). Note that even this description assumes that nihilism is a kind of discouragement or despair (a *weariness*) at the unrealizability of our values.

2. Overcoming Disorientation

1. Since Nietzsche’s time, a number of theories have been developed, according to which the good is objective insofar as it is binding on all agents, and yet conditioned by the contingent contents of the human will. According to a common form of utilitarianism, for example, the good depends on what agents would desire if they were to subject their current contingent desires to review under ideal epistemic conditions (full information and perfect rationality). And some versions of constructivism describe the good as what a community of agents with determinate but contingent desires would agree on under certain conditions of deliberation. Unsurprisingly, Nietzsche does

- not consider these views, but it is worth noting that the objectivity of values in these theories does not rest on metaphysical independence from the contingent contents of the human will and so does not imply rational necessity.
2. Harman (1977) offers a classic statement of this line of argument (pp. 6ff). Mackie's argument from *queerness* adds the point that normative facts would be unable to do the work of explaining practical judgments they are intended to do. Reasons or practical qualities would have to be very different from the qualities involved in psychophysical causation: the "fact" that promises ought to be kept, for example, differs in this regard from the fact that the sun is shining. And so no clear sense could be made of how such "queer" facts would causally affect the mind and explain beliefs about them. See (1977), pp. 38–41.
 3. Nietzsche's account here bears some obvious resemblance to the famous theory elaborated in Freud (1930).
 4. I borrow the term *minimalism* from Williams (1994). Leiter (2001) offers a detailed discussion of best explanation arguments for and against moral realism, with particular reference to Nietzsche. He suggests that naturalistic explanations should be preferred because they possess the virtues of *consilience* (what I called "explanatory minimalism") and *simplicity* (which includes what I called "ontological parsimony") to a greater degree than the competing non-naturalistic explanation. He also notes that simplicity is only a virtue when it does not come at the expense of consilience. Some of this discussion is reproduced in his treatment of Nietzsche's concept of methodological naturalism (2002, chapter 1).
 5. Kerstein (2002) has offered the most comprehensive exploration to date of the derivation of the categorical imperative.
 6. This important Kantian idea is not easy to circumscribe. Here is a brief elaboration of it. I cannot be causally determined to act from a norm because the relevant relation of the norm to my action is not causal, but logical. The norm makes sense of my action, or it justifies it, but it does not supply its causal determinant. I can act *in accordance with* a norm while recognizing no authority to the norm, but I cannot act *from* the norm without doing just that. To take a certain consideration as the norm on the basis of which I determine myself to act is no longer to treat it as a lever in the causal network, with determinate and predictable effects on my behavior. And this implies, accordingly, not treating myself either as an element in that causal network as well, and my behavior as susceptible to causal determination by that norm. Arguably, this amounts to regarding myself as *free*.
 7. This presentation of the argument is simplified because it omits Kant's analysis of the concept of freedom in terms of "negative" and "positive" freedom. This omission should not harm our understanding of Schopenhauer's objection to Kant's argument. For a detailed presentation of this argument, see Hill (1992).

8. Two of the most prominent (if quite different) versions of this view are articulated by Nehamas (1985) and Leiter (2002).
9. Langsam (1997). See also Havas (1995) for a variant of this strategy.
10. “When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all of your desires, something which is *you*, and which *chooses* which desire to act on. This means that the principle or law by which you determine your actions is one that you regard as being expressive of *yourself*” (Korsgaard [1996], p. 100).
11. Blackburn (1998) exploits this very analogy to make the same general point I am here attributing to Nietzsche: “The self is no more *passive* when our concerns are contending for a controlling say in our direction, than a parliament is passive when it debates a law. It is only on the model that debars desires and inclinations, however cautious, however prudent and refined, from any part in *constituting* the self that we seem passive in the face of them” (p. 251). Nietzsche pursues the political analogy further to develop a kind of characterology, a typology of selfhood. To different kinds of political structures (“anarchy,” “tyranny,” “mastery,” and so on) correspond different kinds of selves (see my work on this point [2003b]).
12. For a particularly clear version of this sort of account, see Leiter (2002), esp. chapter 3.
13. Once again, it may be tempting to read this passage as a eliminativist account of moral norms: they are nothing more than the expression of drives. However, Nietzsche’s use of the notion of an “order of rank,” which he takes to be a decidedly normative notion (see HH, Preface 7), makes this eliminativist reading questionable.
14. “Motivation,” Schopenhauer writes, is “causality which passes through cognition” (FW, p. 32). This definition is simply meant to mark off motivation from other kinds of causality by noting that the exercise of its causal force requires that the agent be aware of it. But as with any type of causality, the relation between the cause and the effect—what allows the cause to produce its effect, so to speak—is the “character.” Thus, it is no doubt true that I would not be moved to help others if I were not aware of their distress. But my *awareness* of that distress alone, without my compassionate character, would not move me either.
15. Of course, we may seem sometimes to take our desires and concerns to be the objects of deliberation. For example, we might ask, “Should I have a desire to be wealthy?” But, upon reflection, this appears to be just a way of inviting agents to pay closer attention to the objects of those desires. When I ask whether I should really desire wealth, I am in fact asking questions about what is attractive or appealing about wealth itself, rather than about my having this sort of desire. To be sure, there are special cases in which the question is really less about the object of the desire than it is about having a desire, regardless of its object. For example, someone might offer me a large sum of money if I manage to form the desire to move to

Buffalo, New York. I can deliberate about whether I should form this desire without being at all concerned about its object. But these peculiar cases are the exception, not the rule.

16. This idea is proposed by Reath (1989), and I am indebted to his exploration of it.
17. Korsgaard (1996) succinctly describes the parallelism between practical and theoretical reason in Kant: “Justification—the giving of practical reasons for ends and actions—is in one sense subject to the same fate as explanation—the giving of theoretical reasons for events. Reason seeks the ‘unconditioned,’ as the basis for an account (justification or explanation) that provides a sufficient reason” (p. 117).
18. This idea is discussed by Larmore (1996), esp. pp. 55–64. Larmore, however, would disagree that this is Nietzsche’s idea (see pp. 79–88).
19. The contingency of reasons might well explain why Nietzsche remains so vague about what perspectives are supposed to be and says very little about how they can be individuated. Perspectivism is a repudiation of the idea of “pure reason”: this means that there are no reasons that every rational agent is necessarily committed to accepting simply by virtue of being a rational agent and regardless of his or her contingent perspective. Accordingly, there is no a priori way of determining what reasons an agent may have, for example, for acting in a certain way, no a priori way, that is, of determining the contents of an agent’s deliberative point of view, or perspective. To the extent that it is possible, then, the individuation of perspectives can only be done through the observation of the agent’s behavior: patterns of action, explicit declarations, and the like. Since this process of empirical observation is necessarily open-ended, so is any determination of the boundaries of a perspective. I discuss this and other related issues in Reginster (2000a).
20. In this regard, the sense in which perspectives are transcendental is more radical than the sense in which Kant intends his categories of the understanding and forms of sensibility to be transcendental. These make knowledge possible for us precisely by limiting it to the phenomenal world, but we (supposedly) retain some intelligible contentful notion of a knowledge that would not be so limited and would represent things as they are in themselves. In contrast with Kant, Nietzsche denies that we have an intelligible contentful notion of non-perspectival knowledge of the world, or the good, as they are in themselves (see GM, III 12; BGE Preface), and he concludes that the idea that perspectives are limiting is also incoherent (see TI, IV). See Clark (1990) for a construal of this argument in the case of theoretical judgment.
21. Havas (1995) defends a similar view, particularly in regard to Nietzsche’s attack on Socratism: “On Nietzsche’s view, then, meaningful [. . .] speech requires a willingness to submit oneself to precisely the sorts of conditions from which Socrates would try to detach us. In this sense, we cannot stand outside culture in the way Socratism supposes we must if we are to engage in rational criticism” (p. 10).

22. Hussain (forthcoming). Although the fictionalist reading of Nietzsche was originally proposed by Vaihinger (1924), pp. 341–362, I am much indebted to Hussain’s careful construal of Nietzschean fictionalism. Unlike Hussain, I take Nietzsche’s anti-realism to be only a denial of *objective* values.
23. See Leiter (2000).
24. I develop this idea in detail in my article “What Is a Free Spirit?” (2003b). I evoke there the following analogy: to overcome compulsions that literally tear individuals (for example, alcoholics) apart, recovery programs often invite them to place themselves in the hands of a higher power.
25. I am indebted to Jonathan Ichikawa for this suggestion.
26. On this very issue, see Currie (2002). Szabo Gendler (2003) also discusses this issue and reports suggestive empirical research on pretense-based motivation both for children and adults. For instance: “In a widely reported study performed by Rozin and Nemeroff, adults were presented with two bottles, and invited to pour sugar into each one. Subjects were then asked to affix a ‘sugar’ label to one bottle, and a ‘sodium cyanide’ label to the other. Although subjects were happy to report that both bottles contained the same thing, namely sugar, and happy to concede that the choice of labels was purely arbitrary, many nonetheless showed a marked reluctance to eat from the bottle labeled ‘cyanide’ ” (p. 132).
27. Rorty (1989), p. 105. See also Nehamas (1985).
28. A model of practical rationality along such lines is articulated by White (1991), chapter 7. White and I have both been influenced in discussions of this idea by Akeel Bilgrami. The type of relation relevant to the normative ranking of a desire is a relation of “reinforcement.” Reinforcement comes in several varieties. Perhaps the most common of reinforcement relations is the relation of two (or more) desires that are especially easy to pursue together. Desires that bear this relation to one another can be said to be *complementary*. Complementarity must be distinguished from mere *compatibility*. Two desires are compatible when the satisfaction of the one does not preclude or interfere with the satisfaction of the other. Complementarity adds to compatibility considerations about how and to what degree the pursuit of one desire affects the prospects of satisfying the other. Thus, two desires are complementary if they are particularly easy to pursue together, or if the pursuit of the one facilitates the pursuit of the other.

Complementarity must thus be contrasted with a number of other possible relations among desires, namely, inconsistency, tension, and indifference. As we are about to see, all of these relations have in common that the pursuit of one desire actually does not complement the pursuit of the other. This is clearest in the case of inconsistency: two inconsistent desires simply cannot be satisfied together (for example, my desire to spend my summers in Maine and my desire to spend my summers in California). This is also clear in the case of desires which, though not inconsistent, are nevertheless in tension with one another. Consider, for example, my desire for an active social life and my desire for high scholarly achievement. It is easy enough to imagine

how the pursuit of one desire will quickly come to interfere with the pursuit of the other, or simply how pursuing both desires concurrently will soon become difficult. Finally, we can also imagine pairs of desires in which the pursuit of one neither facilitates nor hinders the pursuit of the other (for example, the desire to exercise regularly and the desire to develop one's appreciation of music).

In the case of complementary desires, pursuing or satisfying one to some extent promotes or facilitates satisfying the other. One obvious way in which this happens is when satisfying one desire has consequences that facilitate the satisfaction of the other (for example, regular exercise will relieve stress and increase energy, thereby facilitating the pursuit of high scholarly achievement). Another way in which this happens is when the most consuming activities of someone in pursuit of two desires will serve both simultaneously (for example, the desire to write this book and the desire to exercise my intellectual faculties).

29. This may be why Pippin (2005) thinks that it is impossible to give a principled answer to the question of why some new values take, while others do not, and why the successful creator of values must possess an acute sensitivity to conditions of life that simply may not be codifiable.

3. The Will to Power

1. Kofman (1972), pp. 133–145, and Nehamas (1985), chapter 3, both attempt to reconcile the privileged ontological standing of the will to power with Nietzsche's perspectivism. Anderson (1994) proposes an elegant, if speculative, resolution of the apparent conflict between the generality and abstraction of the doctrine and Nietzsche's empiricism.
2. Cf. Kaufmann (1974), p. 204; Clark (1990), p. 209. Clark admits that Nietzsche often presents the will to power as the fundamental principle of biology, or even ontology (e.g., GS 349; Z, II 7, 12; BGE 13, 36, 257; A 6; WP 1067). But she argues in detail elsewhere (2000) that we should "interpret statements that seem to make such claims as expressions of his values rather than of his beliefs about the nature of reality" (pp. 119–135). She also maintains that the will to power is for Nietzsche "the most important second-order drive and the one that is essential to our constitution and experience of ourselves as agents" (*ibid.*), the study of which pertains to psychology, "the doctrine of the development of will to power" (BGE 23). I agree with Clark that Nietzsche's claim that "the will to power is the essence of life" "gives us a vision of life from the viewpoint of his values" (see Chapter 4), but I do not see why this should not apply to human psychology as well. I return to this issue later in this chapter.
3. Stern (1979) offers a representative statement of this interpretation (esp. pp. 114–125).
4. Löwith (1997).
5. Kaufmann (1974), pp. 213–216.

6. Richardson (1996), esp. p. 28–35.
7. Clark (1990), pp. 211ff.
8. As Schopenhauer understands it, a priori knowledge includes not just the sort of metaphysics Kant rejects (the science of the supra-sensible), but also the sort of metaphysics he accepts (a transcendental investigation into the conditions of the possibility of experience). For an account of the role of Schopenhauer's method in his rejection of the latter, see Guyer (1999), pp. 93–137.
9. Such observations are articulated in statements of inductive generalizations, akin to those encapsulated in so-called popular wisdom (for example, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” or “Money does not buy happiness”). The appeal to this kind of experience is not new in philosophy. Aristotle, for example, is sometimes thought to depend on it.
10. Cartwright (1988) briefly discusses and criticizes this account of the painfulness of desire (esp. pp. 57–58).
11. At least, I will assume (as does Schopenhauer) that this is so in the “normal” case. I shall leave aside the complications created by the fact that, for humans at least, food and the eating of it come to assume a large variety of symbolic roles that imply that eating food can afford pleasure even to someone who is not hungry.
12. This is debatable. For example, one could become so accustomed to certain forms of lasting discomfort as to lose awareness of them and be made aware of them again only by their removal. Note, however, that this is arguably possible only if the discomfort is fairly minor.
13. For some standard objections to Schopenhauer's account of the will, and its relation to his pessimism, see Janaway (1999), pp. 318–343. I think that the force of some of these objections can at least be blunted once we remark that Schopenhauer's metaphysics is intended as an “understanding” of general lessons of experience.
14. For more on the importance of boredom in Schopenhauer's philosophy, see Raymond (1979). Young (1987) also briefly notes the importance of boredom in the argument for pessimism, but he does not develop this remark (esp. p. 59).
15. I should note that Schopenhauer appears to offer a different account of boredom in a later work, according to which it is the recognition that the objects of our desires are devoid of *intrinsic worth*: “Their satisfaction [of needs and wants] is hard to attain and yet affords him nothing but a painless state in which he is still abandoned to boredom. This, then, is positive proof that, in itself, existence has no value; for boredom is just that feeling of its emptiness” (PP 146, p. 287). The value of the objects we desire is extrinsic insofar as it lies in their ability to extinguish the pain inherent in the desire for them. They accordingly lose their value the moment the desire is eliminated. This is why they cease to be interesting to us soon after we assume possession of them. But it is harder to see why, on this account, we should experience the subsequent loss of interest as boredom, which is an un-

pleasant state, unless we suppose, as Schopenhauer himself does in his earlier account, that we actually want to be interested.

16. I owe this distinction to Jorge Fernandez. In general, my construal of Schopenhauer's argument from boredom has much benefited from conversations with Fernandez.
17. Migotti (1995) characterizes the two notions of willing in Schopenhauer in terms of "empirical" and "transcendental" willing, but he does not specify clearly what this distinction amounts to, nor what relation the two types of willing bear to one another (esp. p. 647).
18. Elsewhere, Nietzsche offers a more ambitious argument against the doctrine of self-preservation: "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—life itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*. In short, here as everywhere else, let us beware of *superfluous* teleological principles—one of which is the instinct of self-preservation (we owe it to Spinoza's inconsistency). Thus method, which must be essentially economy of principles, demands it" (BGE 13).

In the first part of the passage, Nietzsche invokes the fact of experience mentioned previously to support his contention that life is will to power, and not to self-preservation. Since the "discharge" of one's strength (the expression or exercise of "power") often results in firming up one's position in one's environment, and so improves one's survival chances, it is easy to fall prey to the error that it was somehow intended to do so. It is, in other words, an instance of "the error of mistaking cause for consequence" (TI, V 1). Positing a fundamental will to self-preservation is such an error, Nietzsche argues, for two reasons. One of these reasons is implicit, and it refers back to the argument from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Self-preservation looks to be fundamental because it is a "frequent" but not inevitable result of the will to power: experience shows that human beings are, at least sometimes, motivated to do things *in spite of* the threat to their self-preservation. The other reason is essentially methodological, and it might be thought to be related to the first. Given that self-preservation does not seem to be the only motive force of human behavior, we might wonder whether we should not favor an explanation in terms of will to power on grounds of *explanatory economy*: this principle underlies an account not only for the phenomena hitherto explained by appeal to "an instinct of self-preservation," but also for those phenomena that cannot be so explained. For a discussion of this and other arguments against the primacy of self-preservation, see Schacht (1983), pp. 239–242, and Anderson (1994).

19. Not all desires are "drives" for Nietzsche. Drives are, rather, *generic desires*, such as the desires for food, sex, knowledge, and so on. The pursuit of a generic desire, such as the desire to know, will typically induce *specific desires*, such as the desire to read some particular book. But these specific desires are not appropriately characterized as "drives."

20. Clark (1990), p. 211.
21. It is worth noting that in Clark's interpretation, it seems possible to desire power independently of its relation to any *particular* first-order desire, as when we seek to increase our control over the environment and to develop our capacities generally. But her interpretation remains "instrumental" insofar as it maintains that the desire for power makes no sense if we consider it independently of its relation to first-order desires *in general*.
22. Richardson (1996), pp. 21ff.
23. Clark (2000), p. 119.
24. Nietzsche appears to be even less rigorous than Schopenhauer in his use of terms: I will assume, in the remainder of this discussion, that he uses "displeasure [*Unlust*]" and "suffering [*Leiden*]" interchangeably.
25. Kierkegaard (1987), p. 301ff. The seducer's conception of love bears a strong analogy to the medieval ideal of "courtly love" (see Hunt [1994], pp. 131–144). We also find clear echoes of it in some of Nietzsche's own musings about romantic love (GS 363).
26. The term *Widerspruch* used here usually denotes a conceptual or rational contradiction. It thus differs from the term *Widerstand*, which Nietzsche uses to denote the resistance to the realization of an end. In the present passage, then, Nietzsche appears to claim that willing power implies endorsing an end and rejecting it at the same time—instead of desiring both the end and obstacles to its realization. Note, however, that willing both an end and obstacles to its realization is tantamount to endorsing the end and rejecting it, for one cannot coherently endorse an end and will opposition to its realization. Thus, using the example of a competitive game, I want to win the game, but at the same time, I want strong opponents who will jeopardize my ability to win the game, and this latter want may seem to contradict the first.
27. Nietzsche sometimes proposes to redefine pleasure in terms of the "feeling of power" and argues that pleasure and displeasure are not opposites: "Pleasure"—as a feeling of power (presupposing displeasure)" (WP 657; cf. 661, 699, 1023). This definition fits in well with Schopenhauer's conception of pleasure in terms of desire satisfaction. For example, I take pleasure in drinking water because I am thirsty. As soon as my thirst is quenched, however, I can no longer enjoy drinking. In this sense, the feeling of pleasure "presupposes displeasure." Moreover, as I have defined the term here, power is the overcoming of resistance to the satisfaction of some determinate desire. Drinking when I am thirsty is overcoming resistance (however much there may be) to the satisfaction of that desire, so that it makes sense to associate pleasure with the feeling of power. However, Nietzsche's view remains peculiar in one respect: unlike Schopenhauer, he argues that pleasure consists not in the removal of displeasure but in feeling one's power in successfully removing displeasure. This claim is of course contentious, but my use of the doctrine of the will to power does not ride on it.
28. It is worth noting that, as the rest of the section makes clear, Nietzsche has

- in mind here wars waged for thought and knowledge, or wars of the spirit, rather than the bloodbaths the word customarily evokes.
29. Hatab (1998) recognizes the value of the analogy with competitive sport but seems to think of the value of competition (i.e., of the pursuit of power) in instrumental terms (e.g., it sharpens useful skills).
 30. Heidegger (1979) also emphasizes this feature of the will to power (p. 60). See also Granier (1966) for a development of the Heideggerian interpretation. Granier in particular has the merit of insisting that the will to power is not to be understood as a will to domination, but a will to “self-overcoming” (see pp. 389ff.) But his presentation remains a paraphrase, rather than an explanation, of Nietzsche’s texts. And he presents self-overcoming as the goal of the pursuit of the will to power, whereas I see it as the shape this pursuit must necessarily assume.
 31. Kaufmann’s blandly moralistic interpretation of self-overcoming in terms of the restraint of unbridled passions is an instance of this interpretation. See Kaufmann (1974), pp. 213–216.
 32. Soll (1994) argues that Nietzsche’s analysis of cruelty and asceticism in the second and third essays of the *Genealogy* may be understood as attempts to demonstrate the shortcomings of psychological hedonism and the superiority of a psychology of the will to power. I agree with the negative part of Soll’s claim: if Nietzsche’s analyses are plausible, then psychological hedonism must be false, since not all human motives reduce to seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. In contrast to Soll, I place Nietzsche’s analyses in the specific context of his critique of Schopenhauer, and I take them to illustrate the motivational importance of the will to power in the particular conception of it I articulate in the present chapter.
 33. Nietzsche appears to anticipate this sort of point in the following passage: “Benefiting and hurting others are ways of exercising one’s power upon others; that is all one desires in such cases. One hurts those whom one wants to feel one’s power, for pain is a *much more efficient means to that end* than pleasure; pain always raises the question about its origin while pleasure is inclined to stop with itself, without looking back” (GS 13; my emphasis). Pain is more likely than pleasure to make the individual who suffers it attempt to determine its origin, presumably, because it is essentially something that goes *against his will*. This early observation does not constitute Nietzsche’s ultimate view, however, perhaps because it is plagued by two problems. First, it is not evident that the individual who experiences pleasure would not have a reason to identify its origin precisely because it *satisfies* his will. Second, it is not clear why the acknowledgment of others is necessary for my enjoyment of an increased feeling of power: the behind-the-scenes manipulator enjoys such an increased feeling of power, presumably, without the acknowledgment of others.

4. Overcoming Despair

1. This is, for example, how Sleinis (1994) describes the problem (pp. xiii–xxi).
2. Larmore (1996) offers a particularly crisp statement of this view (pp. 79–

- 88). Somewhat qualified versions of the view can also be found in Langsam (1997) and Nehamas (1985), especially chapter 7.
3. Taylor (1982), p. 118. Nietzsche sometimes invites this interpretation that values are arbitrary, or the product of a radical (ungrounded) choice. “*Genuine philosophers*,” he writes, “*are commanders and legislators*: they say, ‘*thus it shall be!*’ They first determine [*bestimmen*] the Whither and For What of man” (BGE 211; cf. 260; Z, I 1). In determining “the Whither and For What of man,” the philosophers would presumably determine what will *count* as a reason to do something in the first place. Accordingly, this determination itself cannot be based on reasons: it can only be a radical choice.
 4. In the Christian tradition, this essentially Aristotelian view is taken up and amplified most significantly by Thomas Aquinas. For a useful presentation and defense of Aquinas’ ethical naturalism, see Stump and Kretzmann (1991), who summarize Aquinas’ position as follows: “Human goodness, like any other goodness appropriate to one species, is acquired in performing instances of the operation specific to that species, which in the case of humanity is the rational employment of the rational powers. [. . .] [W]hat is good for a thing is what is natural to it, and what is unnatural to a thing is bad for it. So, he says, the good is what is according to nature, and evil is what is against nature” (pp. 103–104).
 5. Richardson (1996), p. 152. Schacht (1983) also attributes a form of ethical naturalism to Nietzsche (pp. 348–349 and 398–399).
 6. Soll (1994) makes a similar proposal when he suggests that, for Nietzsche, “what has true value for us can only be what corresponds to our deepest and truest needs and what ultimately satisfies our most general and ineluctable desires” (p. 170).
 7. If we take “physics” to be the investigation of the natural world, which is, moreover, the only world there is (as opposed to metaphysics), then Nietzsche is in effect demanding that our values and ideals be responsive to our “nature.”
 8. See again Clark’s detailed case for this view (1990, especially chapter 7; 2000). Nietzsche also emphasizes the bifurcation between the natural and the normative in his attack on what he takes (erroneously) to be the Darwinian concept of a “struggle for life”: “Supposing, however, that this struggle exists—and it does indeed occur—its outcome is the reverse of that desired by the school of Darwin, of that which one *ought* perhaps to desire with them: namely, the defeat of the stronger, the more privileged, the fortunate exception. Species do *not* grow more perfect” (TI, IX 14).
 9. Leiter (2000) offers a detailed discussion and critique of the internalist argument. Unlike Leiter, I do not believe that the success of this argument depends on Nietzsche’s endorsement of the “strong descriptive thesis” that “it is only power that persons ever aim for or desire” (p. 284).
 10. For elaboration on one possible relevant notion of relation (which I call “reinforcing relation”), see Chapter 2, note 27.
 11. Foot (1973) might be thought to attribute this sort of strategy to Nietzsche

when she declares: “[I]t does make sense to say that *we value* strong and exceptional individuals [. . .]. We do find patterns of reaction to exceptional men that would allow us to see here a valuing rather similar to valuing on aesthetic grounds, even if it is one for which we have no special name. I am thinking of the interest and admiration which is the common attitude to remarkable men of exceptional independence of mind and strength of will” (p. 163).

12. I have attempted to show how Nietzsche executes this variant of the internalist strategy in connection with the opposition between egoism and altruism in Reginster (2000a, 2000b).
13. Leiter (2000), p. 291.
14. This appears to be the view that follows from the “theory of types” Leiter (2002) attributes to Nietzsche (p. 8).
15. The English words *pity* and *compassion* have importantly different connotations: *pity* evokes condescension towards the sufferer, while *compassion* emphasizes solidarity with the sufferer. Both terms, however, are used to translate a single German word, “Mitleid.” Though Schopenhauer uses it exclusively in the restricted sense of *compassion*, Nietzsche sometimes intends it in both senses, including in relation to Schopenhauer. Since I am here concerned exclusively with his critique of compassion as Schopenhauer understands it, I have always translated “Mitleid” as “compassion.” For other Nietzschean criticisms of *compassion* and *pity*, see Nussbaum (1994).
16. It is worth noting that Nietzsche sometimes speaks not just of the “morality of compassion,” but of the “morality of *shared* compassion,” evidently to emphasize that this conception of morality is motivated by a “deadly hatred of suffering generally” (BGE 202).
17. For slightly different versions of this construal of the application of the procedure to benevolence, see O’Neil (1989), pp. 81–104 and Korsgaard (1996), pp. 77–105.
18. I should note that Schopenhauer is not entirely consistent in holding the view that the affirmation of life is necessarily based on ignorance of its essence. In the passage I quoted previously, Schopenhauer says that “the denial of the will-to-live [. . .] always proceeds from [. . .] the knowledge of its inner conflict and its essential vanity.” But the text is ambiguous on the exact meaning of “always”: does it suggest that denial always proceeds from knowledge because the latter is a *sufficient* condition of the former or merely a *necessary* condition? If knowledge is only a necessary condition of denial, then it is possible to affirm life in spite of it. In the following passage, Schopenhauer appears to suggest that it is: “The will affirms itself; this means that while in its objectivity, that is to say, in the world and in life, its own inner nature is completely and distinctly given to it in representation, this knowledge does not in any way impede its willing. [. . .] The opposite of this, the *denial of the will-to-live*, shows itself when willing ends with this knowledge [which] becomes the *quieter* of the will, and thus the will freely abolishes itself” (WWR, I 54, p. 285).

19. Schopenhauer presents this analysis of the concept of good as a direct consequence of his view that all desires are need-based: “[a man] would then first know a thing to be *good*, and in consequence will it, instead of first *willing* it, and in consequence calling it *good*. According to the whole of my fundamental view, all this is a reversal of the true relation” (WWR, I 55, p. 292).
20. There are some significant problems with Schopenhauer’s doctrine of resignation. First, I have already mentioned the difficulty in linking this doctrine with asceticism, the practice of voluntary suffering (see Chapter 3). Second, it is unclear how resignation can be an adequate answer to pessimism. There are several problems here. First, it depends on the claim that all human desires are need-based, which is controversial at best. Second, since “willing and striving” form the “essence of life,” their renunciation may well appear to be a complete annihilation: “the denial and surrender of all willing, and thus a deliverance from a world whose whole existence presented itself to us as suffering, this now appears to us as a transition into empty *nothingness*” (WWR, I 71, pp. 408–409). Schopenhauer hastens to add that the concept of nothingness must here be understood relatively, rather than absolutely—as *nihil privativum* instead of *nihil negativum*. It is only from the standpoint of our attachment to the world (and the will to live) that resignation looks to be annihilation. Once we break free from this attachment, it is the world itself that looks to be “nothing.” But he simply means that the negation of our essence entails not our complete annihilation but a radical conversion, a change in our very essence, which he calls, borrowing a phrase from the mystical tradition, a “transcendental transformation.” However, the evident difficulty he has in offering a clear description of it raises the suspicion that this transformation so alters human nature that it is not only no longer recognizably human, but also no longer recognizably anything. This may explain why Nietzsche ignores the distinction between the two senses of *nothingness* and continues to regard the doctrine of resignation as little more than the Christian fantasy of another world under a different guise. It is still a mere “nothingness” that is trying to pass itself off as something. Finally, and perhaps most decisively, Schopenhauer insists that happiness is an experience, namely the experience of the absence of pain. But the essentially negative character of this experience implies that it cannot be lasting. This problem, presumably, affects resignation as well, which therefore proves not to be the “cure” Schopenhauer takes it to be.
21. The idea that the will to power is the basis of revaluation is of course not new. See, e.g., Schacht (1983), especially chapter 6. I substantially differ from Schacht in the manner in which I fill in these contours, particularly on the nature of the will to power and its precise role in the revaluation of values.
22. If the intrinsic difficulty of an achievement was *not* the same for both individuals, then we would be inclined, I think, to attribute to them *different* achievements. Thus, it certainly was a greater achievement for Beethoven to

write his kind of music when he did (i.e., given the technical development of his medium, the musical sensibilities of his time, and so on) than it would be for someone *today* to write music of the same kind and quality as Beethoven's (which may explain why we regard mere imitation, however skillful, as a defect in a work of art). This implies that what we count as an achievement might consist of more than just the *end-product* (e.g., a particular piece of music), and include something of the *circumstances* of its production. The same presumably goes for scientific discoveries: Ptolemy's system remains a great scientific achievement, even if it has now become discredited, because of the level of intrinsic difficulty he had then to overcome. So, the intrinsic difficulty of an achievement may be relative, but not to the strength and weakness of the individual achiever.

The question of whether extrinsic difficulties belong at all among the circumstances relevant to the value of the *achievement* is more difficult. At the very least, if they do belong there, their contribution would have to be conditioned by the amount of intrinsic difficulty that is overcome. Thus, if Beethoven's music had not been that (intrinsically) great to begin with, learning of the extrinsic difficulties he had to overcome would arguably make little or no difference in our estimation of its value.

23. There might be cases in which it is the combination of will to power with a certain determinate desire that is objectionable. For instance, neither the desire for wealth nor the desire for the overcoming of resistance, is, when each is taken by itself, objectionable. But they might well seem to become objectionable when they combine into insatiable greed.
24. This observation illustrates one sense in which Nietzsche's philosophy is systematic and one sense in which it is not. It is *not* systematic in the sense in which a system is required to supply answers to all possible philosophical questions, at least all the questions pertaining to the domain the philosophical investigation of which is claimed to be systematic. But Nietzsche's philosophy *is* systematic nevertheless in the sense that his philosophical views are not haphazard but organized around a particular issue, or project, namely, the project of overcoming nihilism.
25. It is worth noting that Nietzsche sometimes also presents the desire to be moved or stirred by another desire as a basic aspect of the will to power (see GM, III 28; EH, III "The Birth of Tragedy" 1, on "wanting to want" or "longing to long"). If this is so, then the will to power cannot be satisfied unless I am actually moved by something other than power.
26. My interpretation of this passage differs from that offered in Pippin (1997). Pippin takes the master's desire for an enemy to evince a concern for the recognition of others, a concern he takes to be characteristic of "modernity." Modernism is also nihilism, which Pippin understands roughly in terms of what I called, in this book, "disorientation." I argued that disorientation is a consequence of normative objectivism, the view that values are legitimate only if they are universally binding. The desire for recognition apparently is, on Pippin's view, a driving motivation of normative objectivism. Nietz-

- sche's continued concern for recognition would then show that his stance toward "nihilism" is ambiguous and his overcoming of it incomplete (pp. 346ff.). I interpret this passage from the perspective of Nietzsche's new ethics of power: the love of enemies is a consequence of the will to power. I also take the primary form of Nietzschean nihilism to be a kind of philosophical despair, which an appeal to this ethics is supposed to overcome successfully.
27. Simmel (1907/1986, chapter 3) discusses this issue in detail. He points out how Schopenhauer's monism rests on a fallacious inference from the a priori character of space and time, which account for individuation and multiplicity, to the claim that the thing-in-itself is not subject to spatio-temporal differentiation.
 28. Foot (1973, 1994) notes that Nietzsche praises only the egoism of the "strong" or "ascendant life" but admits perplexity over what this is supposed to mean.
 29. Leiter (2002), p. 132. Leiter's discussion of creativity and the higher man is very useful, but limited by his failure to identify the exact nature of the relation between creativity and suffering in Nietzsche (a failure due, in my view, to his perplexity over the nature and importance of the will to power).
 30. I return to the issue of what Nietzsche counts as a full-blown revaluation of suffering in greater detail in Chapter 6.
 31. If the value Nietzsche grants creativity is to justify suffering, then creative achievements must be not only objectively, but also subjectively difficult (i.e., a cause of suffering). But we cannot assume that what is objectively difficult will always be subjectively difficult as well. Some of Beethoven's musical creations might have been objectively difficult, though relatively easy for someone with his ability. But even creative individuals with considerable abilities are induced by their will to power to seek ever greater challenges, some of which will eventually prove subjectively difficult for them. And so, in this way at least, suffering is an essential ingredient of creativity.
 32. For instance, he suggests that the pursuit of power requires a temperament suited to "solitude" (Z, I 17; BGE 212, 284; EH, I 8), "independence" (BGE 41, 201, 212), "self-confidence" (BGE 287), "generosity" (Z, I 22), the adventurous spirit he calls "experimentation" (BGE 42; HH, Preface 4), and of course "courage" (Z, II 12; BGE 205, 276, 284). The ethics of power occasionally invites rather significant revisions of the nature of certain virtues, like courage. As Hunt (1993) remarks, in Nietzsche's theory of virtue, "courage includes a positive desire to face danger" (p. 86). On the critique of justice, see Z, II 7; cf. GM, II 11; TI, IX 37. And on the revaluation of beauty, see Z, II 7; GM, III 6; TI, IX 11, 20; WP 800.
 33. Nietzsche's conception of happiness in terms of the successful confrontation of difficulty finds interesting validation in some well-publicized empirical research in the psychology of happiness. For instance, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) finds that subjects report being happiest when they are engaged in an activity in which their level of skill is challenged by an appropriate level

of difficulty. If the activity proves too difficult, they grow anxious, and if it proves too easy they become bored. See especially chapter 4.

34. Here are a few examples of this approach. Geuss (1981) suggests that Nietzsche develops a new form of “genetic criticism,” which consists in uncovering the immoral origin of a moral code (pp. 44–45). Nehamas (1985) suggests that in exposing the contingent origins of moral value judgments, Nietzschean genealogy impugns their claim to objectivity (chapter 4). I believe that both of these approaches are guilty of the genetic fallacy. I also maintained (1997) that Nietzsche articulates a new form of critique in the *Genealogy*, but claim that it escapes the charge of genetic fallacy if we consider that the target of this genealogical critique is not the value *judgments* themselves, their truth or the scope of their validity, but the *agent* who makes them out of *ressentiment*, particularly his psychological economy. I now believe that the genealogy does not articulate a new form of critique.
35. Leiter (2002) makes a similar observation about the limits of the *Genealogy* for a critique of morality, which was noted by Nietzsche himself, but opts to focus on this book nevertheless because it has become, for better or for worse, the *locus classicus* of Nietzsche’s critique of morality (see pp. 176ff.).
36. The *Genealogy* also investigates the origin of metaphysical assumptions necessary for moral evaluation, such as free will, the scrutability of motives, and the equality of all human beings. Leiter (2002) offers the most comprehensive account of the genealogy’s contribution to the critique of morality. His account of the genealogical method, however, remains somewhat tentative. See my review of his book (2003a).
37. On some occasions, Nietzsche will explicitly deny *any* significance to the knowledge of origins: “*The more insight we possess into an origin the less significant does the origin appear*” (D 44; cf. GM, II 12). But the concept of origin of which he speaks on these occasions is “Ursprung,” whereas the kind of origin the genealogy seeks to uncover is “Herkunft.” The latter is also translated as “descent” and points to the transmission of an atavism, whereas the former merely designates a particular point in time at which a given code came into existence (GM, II 12). Foucault (1984) discusses this and related issues in detail.

5. The Eternal Recurrence

1. Löwith (1997); Kaufmann (1974); Magnus (1978); Clark (1990).
2. Löwith (1997) introduces the idea that the doctrine of eternal recurrence underwrites an ethical imperative, and Magnus (1978) develops it. See also Deleuze (1961).
3. In the *Nachlass*, the cosmology of the eternal recurrence is presented as the view that the world is “a circular movement of absolutely identical series [. . .] that has already repeated itself infinitely often and plays its game *ad infinitum*” (WP 1066). Formulations of this view can also be found in the published works. For example, Zarathustra’s *animals* attribute it to him: “Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally, and we

- ourselves, too; and that we have already existed an eternal number of times, and all things with us. [. . .] I myself belong to the causes of the eternal recurrence. I come again with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent—not to a new life or a better life or a similar life: I come back to this same, identical life” (Z, III 13). And Zarathustra himself entertains it, but only as a hypothesis: “Must not whatever *can* happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before?” (Z, III 2).
4. The central argument is given its clearest expression in *The Will to Power*: “If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force—and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless—it follows that [. . .] it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time, every possible combination would be realized” (WP 1066). By making a further assumption of determinism, Nietzsche then concludes to “a circular movement of absolutely identical series.” Simmel develops the classic criticism of this argument in (1907, p. 250ff.; 1986, p. 170ff.). He supposes a universe with three wheels of the same size, rotating on the same axis at different speeds. He also supposes an initial state in which marks on the circumference of each wheel are lined up. He proceeds to note that if the second wheel rotates at twice the speed of the first, and the third has a speed $1/\pi$ the speed of the first, the three marks will never line up again. Nehamas discusses additional problems in (1985), chapter 5.
 5. There are some apparent exceptions. Zarathustra offers the cosmological version of the eternal recurrence (Z, III 2), but he does so in purely hypothetical terms. When the dwarf, his interlocutor, asserts in response that “time itself is a circle,” Zarathustra retorts angrily, if obscurely, that he is making things too easy for himself. Furthermore, this discussion of the cosmological version of the doctrine is located in the context of its practical significance: it is a question of summoning the courage to say, “Was *that* life? Well, then! Once more!” The most rigorous published formulation of the cosmology of eternal recurrence comes from the mouth of Zarathustra’s animals (Z, III 13). They attribute the view to him, but he himself never explicitly endorses it. Clark offers a detailed survey of relevant texts (1990, pp. 254–266).
 6. Lucretius (1951), p. 88; DRN, III 855ff.
 7. Löwith (1997), pp. 87ff. Magnus also discusses this difficulty in (1978), pp. 111ff.
 8. Löwith (1997), p. 57.
 9. Löwith (1997), pp. 79–80.
 10. Löwith (1997), p. 80. The “freedom from all goals and purposes” may not be “the goal of a willing” for other reasons as well, which Löwith neither distinguishes nor clearly spells out. For example, we must consider that the “metamorphosis” whereby we achieve *amor fati* can only “happen of itself,” because our future is metaphysically fated, and such a transformation must therefore be itself a fatality *outside our deliberate control*.
 11. I am indebted to Harold Hodes for bringing this issue to my attention. The

sense that the doctrine of the eternal recurrence implies metaphysical fatalism may have its source in the implicit assumption of determinism, which is often built into accounts of the doctrine. Löwith might wish to argue that a strict construal of the doctrine should include this assumption, of course, but this would hardly help his exegetical case. For if metaphysical fatalism is the point, one must wonder why Nietzsche would obscure matters by evoking it under the confusing guise of the idea of the eternal recurrence, rather than through a straightforward appeal to the idea of determinism.

12. Even this is questionable. Metaphysical fatalism does not, *as such*, make my normative preoccupations pointless. To think so would rest on the assumption that metaphysical necessity is incompatible with normative necessity. This assumption is wrong: the world could be necessarily what it ought to be. If that is the case, we might want to know it.
13. Magnus' (1978) suggestion that *amor fati* is a matter of "accepting responsibility" for one's past is afflicted with the same problem (p. 150).
14. Soll (1973, p. 322).
15. I should note that the standard of rationality on which Soll's proposal depends is prudential self-interest. I might of course have reasons to attend to the pain of my Doppelgänger, but this would be no different than attending to the pain of another, so that reasons of this kind would not necessarily be grounded in prudential self-interest.
16. The view that it is psychological *continuity*, rather than one-one *identity*, that underwrites our concern with our future self is advanced and defended in Parfit's classic paper (1975). Williams (1975) has argued against Parfit that I have reasons to worry about the experiences of a self that bears no *psychological* continuity with me, provided it stands in a certain sort of *physical* continuity with me. This should not weaken Soll's objection, however, because physical continuity is broken by the supra-historical character of eternal recurrence as much as psychological continuity is. It is worth noting that there are other ways in which the doctrine of eternal recurrence, when it is rigorously understood, makes our choices insignificant. For example, since there is presumably no *causal* connection between the present occurrence of my life and its later recurrence, my present choices can have no impact on my future life.
17. This is how Magnus (1978) proposes to circumvent this difficulty: "In the absence of memory of previous states I am free to choose my own destiny" (p. 157).
18. Deliberation and concerns over any given choice are pointless if I believe that what I will choose has already been determined. A brief analogy might help to bring this point out. Suppose we think of fate by analogy with an omnipotent, omniscient god who sees to it that the world keeps repeating itself in a sequence that only he knows. If a choice we contemplate, indeed if our very contemplation of this choice, does not fit in the sequence, he makes sure we neither make the choice nor even contemplate it. Conceiving of ourselves as puppets in the hands of such a god will deprive our choices

of significance, even if we do not know what particular future this god has in store for us.

19. Lucretius (1975), p. 88; DRN III, 855ff.
20. Nehamas (1985), p. 151.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
24. Strictly speaking, Nehamas (1985) offers a different argument for this contextualism. To put matters simply, Nehamas's brand of contextualism is not the *normative* contextualism (or contextualism about significance) to which I have appealed here, but it is a kind of *descriptive* contextualism (or contextualism about essence). He takes Nietzsche to be committed to this descriptive contextualism by the claim that "a thing is the sum of its effects" (p. 159). This claim is a variety of *relationalism*: all the properties of a thing must be relational since they are supposed to be "effects" on other things. This variety of relationalism implies that the identity of a thing is a function of its relations to other things. And this in turn implies that the value of a thing depends upon its relation to other things. Consider. If a certain aspect of my life is good, it must be by virtue of its natural properties. If these properties are essentially relational, then the value of this aspect of my life is a function of its relation to other things. If a thing is good by virtue of being tall, for example, and it is tall only in relation to other things that are smaller, then the value of the thing is determined by the relation it has with the smaller things. (Nehamas also argues that, for Nietzsche, this relationalism is universal in reach: a change in one thing implies a change in everything. Hence, the value of one thing depends on its relations to everything else.)

There is no doubt that Nietzsche did consider this variety of relationalism. It is less clear, however, that he was committed to it. For one thing, the discussion of it is largely confined to unpublished notebooks, and for another its coherence is questionable. According to this view, all the properties of a thing are its "effects" on other things. This apparently implies that the effects it has on other things *constitute* the properties of that thing. In other words, it is not by virtue of its properties that the thing can have effects on other things, it is by virtue of its having effects on other things that it has properties. This view seems confused. It is surely by virtue of its properties that a thing can affect other things, and not by virtue of its effects on other things that it has properties. Its effects might *indicate* what properties a thing has, but they do not *constitute* them. Given the implausibility of this variety of relationalism, I have attempted to reconstrue the essentials of Nehamas's position without relying on it.

Relationalism remains popular with those interested in Nietzsche's metaphysics (e.g., Poellner [1995], Richardson [1996]). But I know of no compelling account of it, because basic problems often remain unanswered. Richardson, for example, only mentions "tallness" as a paradigmatic rela-

tional property. This raises two significant problems. First, it suggests some potential confusion about the sense in which a property can be relational. On the one hand, a property is relational if it can be expressed only by a two-place predicate (e.g., “being the son of” or “being taller than”). On the other hand, a property is relational not insofar as it can only be expressed by a two-place predicate but because its attribution to a thing requires that it be related to another thing (e.g., “tall” is relational not because it is a two-place predicate, but because its attribution to something requires relating it to something else, for purpose of measurement or comparison—for this reason, we might prefer to say that tallness is a *relative* property). Another problem is that even though tallness is easily enough conceived as a relational (or relative) property, it is less clear how “treeness,” for example, would be relational. In a review of recent work on Nietzsche’s metaphysics (2001) I discuss relationalism and some of its difficulties.

25. Clark (1990), pp. 266–270.

26. For one thing, the infinite bliss of heaven ought to dwarf the finite miseries of this life into comparative insignificance. For another, one might even want to argue that the value of life in heaven contextually *depends* upon its relation to our life on this earth. Accordingly, if the Christian is prepared to welcome the recurrence of heavenly bliss, then he must also be prepared to welcome the context that gives this bliss its significance.

Nehamas (1985) suggests that despair is the Christian’s necessary response to the demon’s challenge because he assumes that the challenge in effect forbids the Christian to take the prospect of another life in heaven into consideration (p. 157). This assumption is in turn based on a certain construal of the sense in which the Christian’s other life is “other.” Essentially, the Christian idea of another life amounts to the idea of *re-living my* current life, only without the pains and evils of it. Given Nietzsche’s view of the self, however, this is impossible because a life with those alterations could not be still *my* life. The problem with this construal is plain: the Christian does not think of the “other life” as a *recurrence* of this life, without the pains and evils of it, but as a *continuation* of it. Some alterations occur (some physical properties change or are lost, for example), but continuity is ensured by the survival of the soul. Indeed, in at least some versions of Christian doctrine, continuity is required by the very idea of divine justice: what sort of eternal life we have, whether bliss or damnation, is a function of our merit in this one. And the notion of merit is applicable only on the assumption of continuity of our self from this life to the other.

27. Perhaps in keeping with her “unrealistic” reading, Clark conceives of the eternal recurrence as an *intra-historical* phenomenon. This is how Schopenhauer construes it: “The true philosophy of history thus consists in the insight that, in spite of all these endless changes and their chaos and confusion, we yet always have before us the same, identical, unchangeable essence, acting in the same way today as it did yesterday and always” (WWR, II ch. XXXVIII, p. 444). And Nietzsche sometimes appears to understand it in a

similar way, although not in his considered, published versions of it (e.g., WP 55). Note that, besides this theoretical version of eternal recurrence, Schopenhauer also anticipated what I have called the practical version of it. Thus, he describes the man who affirms his will to live as one “who desired, in spite of calm deliberation, that the course of his life as he had hitherto experienced it should be of endless duration and constant recurrence” (WWR, I 54, pp. 283–284).

28. Nehamas (1985), p. 159.
29. It is important to remark, in this connection, that contextualism is primarily a view about *significance*. We might be tempted to take significance to be equivalent to value. Thus, whether an event is good or bad is a function of the context in which it occurs. But I think it is more plausible to preserve the distinction: the context affects the significance of an event, but not necessarily its value. An event may be bad, for example, but insignificant. Thus, my cutting my finger is both bad and significant when I am a helpless child, while it is still bad, but not nearly as significant, when I have become a self-sufficient adult. To say that it ceases to be bad in the latter case, just because the context has changed, is jarring and unnecessary. Thus, it is not simply the value of a given event, but its significance, that determines its worthiness to be affirmed. Note that, in one common interpretation of it, the Christian concept of redemption implies a distinction between value and significance. Bad things (e.g., sins) require redemption, and redemption arguably does not turn them into good things, but it alters their significance.
30. Clark (1990), p. 272.
31. Danto (1973), p. 321.
32. Nehamas (1985), p. 157.
33. The German word that Kaufmann translates as “joy” is *lust*, but it can be (and actually is on occasions by Kaufmann himself) translated as “pleasure.” The German *lust* is in fact ambiguous. I preserve its translation as “joy” in the passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* because I believe the context favors it. In particular, although joy certainly is a species of pleasure, the connection with a wish for eternity I discuss here seems to be a distinctive phenomenological characteristic of joy, but not of pleasure in general.

6. Dionysian Wisdom

1. Suffering, in contemporary parlance, has *contributory value*. Contributory value is typically distinguished from instrumental value through the observation that activities can have contributory value when they are part of an intrinsically valuable life, and contribute to its value, even though they are not means to it. Suffering has only contributory value, however, insofar as it does not suffice to make a life valuable. As a consequence, an agent can welcome the fact that life offers challenges, and opposes resistance, while deploring at the same time his particular inability to meet those challenges or overcome that resistance. This is, incidentally, the very predicament of

Schopenhauer's suicidal individual: "The suicide still wills life, and is dissatisfied merely with the conditions on which it has come to him" (WWR, I 69, p. 398).

2. I should note that Nietzsche considers other ways of establishing a relation between pain and happiness as he conceives of it. For example, he suggests that pain and happiness are often associated because the capacity for one is also a capacity for the other. Presumably, the kind of sensibility that makes us capable of enjoying exquisite pleasures makes us proportionally sensitive to a wider range of pains (e.g., GS 302). He also conjectures (in a way reminiscent of Schopenhauer) that our capacity for happiness is a direct function of our experience of pain. The knowledge of life's miseries that the latter gives us makes us more apt to appreciate, and therefore enjoy, its blessings (e.g., GS 303). But conjectures of this sort are found mostly in Nietzsche's earlier works, and starting with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, they give way to the conception of the role and significance of suffering found in the doctrine of the will to power.
3. *The New English Bible*, Gen., 3:17–19.
4. Although Christianity is the paradigmatic life-negating culture, it is not the only one: "With my condemnation of Christianity, I should not like to have wronged a kindred religion which even preponderates in the number of its believers: *Buddhism*. They belong together as nihilistic religions" (A 20). Buddhism differs from Christianity insofar as it is more "realistic" in recognizing freedom from suffering as its highest aspiration: "it no longer speaks of 'the struggle against *sin*' but, quite in accordance with actuality, 'the struggle against *suffering*'" (ibid.; cf. GM, III 18).
5. Nietzsche draws this contrast between "the pathos of *possessing* the truth" and "the pathos of seeking the truth" (HH, I 633; cf. GS 347).
6. Plato (1975).
7. Goethe (1965), v. 1675–1702.
8. Schopenhauer also considers the Buddhistic nirvana as another version of this conception of happiness. It is not a state in which all desires have been satisfied once and for all, as is presumably the Christian heaven, but a state of detachment from all desires, and therefore indifference to their frustration. But he also argues that Buddhistic detachment is the only way in which we can hope to achieve complete deliverance from suffering, and he even suggests that the Christian ideal is best understood in that perspective.
9. Graves (1958) offers a useful overview of what we know of the myth of Dionysus but does not attempt an analysis of its significance. Such an analysis is offered in Otto's classic work (1965). Otto brings out many of the features of the myth Nietzsche's appropriation of it exploits. Thus, he repeatedly emphasizes the paradoxical character of Dionysus, for instance, his being both human and divine (he is the son of Zeus and Semele, a mortal woman), and his being described at once as a "suffering, dying god" (as a child, he is torn apart and actually devoured by the Titans) and as the "joyful one" (he is the god of ecstasy). He also notes how the cult of Dionysus is associated with challenging boundaries and conventions (for ex-

- ample, social conventions regarding proper behavior). The cult is also associated with creative processes (notably, sexuality and the cycle of seasons). Otto was well-acquainted not only with Nietzsche's own take on the myth but with interpretations of it by some of Nietzsche's contemporaries, such as Willamowitz and Rohde.
10. For a recent version of this line of interpretation, see Gooding-Williams (2001) who suggests that the overman represents a desirable future condition that is achieved through overcoming, which is only a means to it: "Keeping in mind that by 'man' Zarathustra means Christian-Platonic man, we may take him to be saying that the overman is a kind of human being that, though it has yet to be, may be in the future" (p. 65). It is symptomatic that Gooding-Williams offers no clear explanation of the nature and desirability of that future condition.
 11. Deleuze (1961) discusses this issue in detail, although in the context of an interpretation very different from mine (pp. 201ff).
 12. This shift of emphasis in Nietzsche's conception of the tragic preoccupies a certain strand of French scholarship. Here are a few representative examples. Deleuze (1961), chapter 1, argues that the central opposition is not between Dionysus and Apollo but between Dionysus and Socrates, thus echoing Nietzsche's hostility to "dialectic." Granier (1966), pp. 538ff., suggests that by leaving behind the Apollo-Dionysus duality and concentrating on Dionysus, Nietzsche is signaling his break with Schopenhauerian idealism. Pautrat (1971), finally, invokes a Derridean deconstruction of dichotomies to account for Nietzsche's abandonment of the Apollo-Dionysus dichotomy. My own interpretation of this important conceptual shift in Nietzsche is very different from those developed by these scholars.
 13. This interpretation remains admittedly tentative. Surely, it is possible for some individuals never to confront a challenge they cannot meet. For example, they can circumvent *quantitative* limitations of strength through *qualitative* variations in the challenges they choose to confront. Or they may simply die before they meet a resistance they cannot overcome. However, Nietzsche should be assumed to make a point about the internal logic of the pursuit of power by agents endowed with finite strength. For these agents, the *prospect* of ineluctable eventual failure, at least, is very real.
 14. I therefore disagree with Clark (1990), who argues that the doctrine of the overman represents a life-negating residue in Nietzsche's thought, a desire to escape "earthly life": "His demand that the Übermensch be the meaning of our lives establishes human life as something to be overcome" (p. 273). On the view I propose, to say that the overman is the meaning of life is rather to say that *overcoming* itself, rather than reaching some determinate state beyond human life, is what makes life worth living.
 15. One consequence of this fact is worth noting. The socio-political predicament of the agent who exemplifies a character type might (but need not) contribute to his developing a character of that type. A slave from the socio-political standpoint might well develop a noble character.
 16. Nietzsche explicitly suggests that certain forms of Christianity (presumably

some varieties of fideism), which involve the condemnation of certain intellectual virtues, precisely result from *intellectual* impotence (see A 52 et seq.; GS 359; WP 154). Accordingly, *ressentiment* could conceivably give rise to very different revaluations, depending on the circumstances. This also suggests an important distinction between two concepts of power. In the example, Nietzsche speaks of *political* power, but the impotence that gives rise to *ressentiment* designates the incapacity to get what one wants, whether it is political power or some other end. The example of political power in the first essay of the *Genealogy* has certainly played a significant role in encouraging the interpretation of power in terms of control and domination, which I criticized in Chapter 3.

17. As we shall see shortly, Nietzsche uses the concept of repression in a roughly Freudian sense, according to which the repressed state becomes unconscious but does not cease to exert psychological influence.
18. The notion of expectation is introduced to explain why the priest and the slave react differently to their inability to satisfy a desire they nonetheless share. The agent's estimation of himself, which fosters or undermines expectations, must be understood in terms of a feeling of *entitlement*, which is related to a general conception of an "order of things." The priest expects to share in the attributes of nobility because it is somehow in the "order of things" that he should. The slave does not develop such an expectation, for precisely the same reason, since he accepts the noble conception of the "order of things." Unfortunately, Nietzsche offers no account of the origin of this feeling of entitlement: he only distinguishes psychological types in terms of its presence or absence.
19. I have assumed that Nietzsche's "priest" is the personification of the "man of *ressentiment*." This is controversial because, on more than one occasion, Nietzsche declares that *ressentiment* revaluation is a "*slave revolt*" (GM, I 10). I believe that the "slave revolt in morality" is the work of Nietzsche's priests, however, and that he saw a profound affinity between the "priestly type" and *ressentiment*. I defend this claim in my work (1997).
20. I am indebted to Scheler (1961) for this comparison.
21. On the mechanism of counter-adaptive preference formation, see Elster (1983). And on Nietzsche's conception of the mechanism of self-deception, see Bittner (1994).
22. I owe the idea of vindictory self-understanding to Wallace (forthcoming).
23. Wallace (forthcoming) develops this and related objections to the "strategic interpretation" of *ressentiment* revaluation and proposes a subtle and interesting alternative "expressive interpretation" in terms of a vindictory rationalization of the *ressentiment* the slaves feel towards those who have what they want when they feel structurally deprived of it. In contrast to Wallace, my own account (1997) emphasizes the alleviation of shame or frustration as the function of revaluation.
24. For instance, Deleuze (1961) offers a version of this view in chapter 2.

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