

• 科学技术文化研究 •

作为心理学概念的强力意志

The Will to Power as a Psychological Concept

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摘要: 在本文中, 我对强力意志的概念进行了一次系统性的探究, 我将它作为一种心理学的概念, 即一种独特的动机。为了界定这个心理学的概念, 我首先回顾了生物学版本的强力意志(它被理解为“生命的本质”)。我接下来论证的是, 最好不要将强力意志视为单一的或最终的人类动机, 而是应当将之仅仅视为一种独特的动机(假如它是普遍存在的), 它的在场可以通过作为强力意志的生命概念来得到解释。我继而对强力的概念与意志的概念进行了周密的分析, 并凭借这个分析理解了尼采归于强力意志的与众不同的特性, 即它的对抗性、活性、不知足性与独立性。自始至终, 我都在尼采自己的观点与19世纪和20世纪的生物学与心理学的观点之间做出了比较。

关键词: 强力意志 生命 支配 能力 内驱力

Abstract: In this paper, I offer a systematic exploration of the concept of will to power, understood as a psychological concept, namely, a distinctive kind of motivation. To circumscribe this psychological concept, I first review the biological version of will to power (understood as “the essence of life”). I then argue that the will to power is not best seen as the sole or ultimate human motivation, but simply as a distinctive, if ubiquitous, motivation, whose presence is explained by a conception of life as will to power. I proceed to a close analysis of the concepts of power and will, and draw on this analysis to understand the distinctive characteristics Nietzsche attributes to the will to power, namely, its antagonism, activity, insatiability, and independence. Throughout, I offer comparisons between Nietzsche’s own views and views from 19th and 20th century biology and psychology.

Key Words: Will to Power; Life; Mastery; Competence; Drive

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The will to power is an undeniably central concept in Nietzsche’s philosophy. It makes its appearance as early as in *Human, All Too Human*, under the designation of “lust for power,” and its importance only grows in subsequent works. It plays an explicitly central role in some works, like *On the Genealogy of Morality*, and it has a significant if more implicit influence in others, where the concept itself may not appear, but its psychological implications are

in evidence. A substantial body of unpublished notes is devoted to its analysis and we know that Nietzsche planned a significant work on it.

In this paper, I focus my inquiries on the will to power understood as a psychological concept. To be sure, Nietzsche frequently characterizes the will to power as a biological concept: it is the “essence of life.” (BGE §§13, 259; GS §349; Z, II §12; GM, III §7; WP §125) And he even goes so far as to present it as

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the fundamental principle of ontology: “This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!” (WP §1067; see BGE §36) The evidence that he holds the latter view, however, is virtually inexistent: WP §1067 is from an unpublished and eventually discarded note; and BGE §36 is an explicitly hypothetical thought-experiment, whose conclusion Nietzsche could not, in any event and by his own lights, have taken seriously (See Clark 2000). I will therefore leave it aside. By contrast, there is strong evidence that he saw the will to power as a fundamental principle of biology. Nevertheless, the biological concept of will to power does not command the same attention as the psychological concept for two reasons. First, I shall suggest shortly that the biological concept of will to power is largely derivative from emerging new ideas in 19th century biology, and not Nietzsche’s original view. Second, Nietzsche is clearly most interested in will to power as a psychological concept. Thus, by far the most detailed and most frequent analyses he offers concern the will to power as a special kind of drive. And the most important use to which he puts the theory of will to power is to explain distinctively human psychological phenomena, including emotional states such as resentment and bad conscience, the feelings of pleasure and displeasure, and evaluative stances such as ascetic self-denial. I shall nevertheless start with a brief review of the biological conception of will to power, because I believe that it is necessary to circumscribe and illuminate the psychological conception of it.

I. Life as Will to Power

Nietzsche frequently describes the will to power as the “essence of life”: “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. ... ‘Exploitation’ ... 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; see also §13; GS §349; Z, II §12; GM, II §12, III §7; A §6; WP §125) As such, the will to power is a characteristic not only of human or animal life, but of plant life as well.

Nietzsche formulates his conception of life in opposition to a longstanding view of it. He refers explicitly to Spinoza who, in his *Ethics*, argues that “each thing, as far as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being” (*Ethics*, part 3, prop. 6). It follows that each thing “is opposed to everything which can take its existence away” (*Ethics*, part 3, prop. 6, dem.). This “law of self-preservation” is the expression of a fundamental principle, in which Spinoza finds the essence of all things, a fundamental force or drive he calls *conatus*. Nietzsche also has Schopenhauer’s concept of the “will to life” in mind. He intimates that the concept of the will to life, taken literally, is incoherent: “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?” (Z II §12) The concept thus is better understood as a tendency to self-preservation: for something that already exists to “will existence” is simply to will the preservation of its existence.

Nietzsche also finds echoes of this conception of life among his contemporaries, especially Spencer and Darwin. Spencer famously coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” to describe the animating principle of life, which Darwin eventually adopted. It is unclear whether Spencer meant the “fittest” to refer to individual members within a species, or to entire species. For our purposes, however, it is the emphasis on survival that caught Nietzsche’s attention. The longstanding view of life, which these thinkers as Nietzsche understands them share, is thus the view that a thing counts as a living organism if the processes and patterns of behavior that characterize it are best explained as aiming at its self-preservation—if they are best described as animated by a tendency or drive toward self-preservation.^①

① The terminology of a “will” or “drive” to self-preservation, with which Nietzsche characterizes the longstanding view of life, and the terminology of “will” to power, with which he formulates his own alternative presents several problems. First, as Richardson (2004: 22) remarks, it implausibly suggests an intentional end-directedness at the heart of life itself, or “mental vitalism, reading mind into all things” (Richardson, 2004: 64). Second, the very notions of “will” and “drive” (or “instinct”) are themselves biological notions and this implies that Nietzsche’s characterization of life is circular. It therefore seems more appropriate to interpret these notions as metaphors for notions like disposition or tendency (e.g., see Janaway, 2007: 159-161).

Nietzsche rejects this view explicitly: “Physiologists should think before putting down the drive to 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.” (BGE §13; see Z II §12) The theory of adaptation, which Spencer defends for example, is best understood in the context of the longstanding view of life since the aim of adaptation is finding ways to ensure the preservation of the organism in a particular set of circumstances. Nietzsche rejects this version of the view as well. Living organisms do not aim to adapt to their circumstances, but to “shape” them: “Life is not the adaptation of inner circumstances to outer ones, but will to power, which, working from within, incorporates and subdues more and more of that which is ‘outside.’” (WP §681) “The essential thing in the life process,” he insists, “is precisely the tremendous shaping, form-creating force working from within which utilizes and exploits ‘external circumstances’—” (WP §647)

His grounds for rejecting this view of life are essentially empirical. He evokes the “unceasing change” observable in the domain of life. If a “law of self-preservation” governed the behavior of living organisms, then this change observable in the domain of life would be inexplicable:

It is simply a matter of experience that change never ceases: we have not the slightest inherent reason for assuming that one change must follow another. On the contrary: a condition once achieved would seem to be obliged to preserve itself if there were not in it a capacity for desiring not to preserve itself—Spinoza’s law of “self-preservation” ought really to put a stop to change: but this law is false, the opposite is true. It can be shown most clearly that every living thing does everything it can not to preserve itself but to become more— (WP §688).

Nietzsche does not specify what he means by “change.” To understand his point, we must therefore resort to conjecture. Perhaps, his reasoning goes as follows. If the life manifested in species and individuals were a drive toward self-preservation, we would eventually reach a kind of equilibrium in which a variety of species and their individual members in

a determinate environment could harmoniously meet the demands for their self-preservation. As a result, the change would come to an end in the biological domain. But it does not, and the best explanation for this state of affairs is that the life manifested in species and individuals is not a drive toward self-preservation but a will to power. This hypothesis explains why the sort of equilibrium described above has not—and indeed cannot—be achieved.

We might also surmise that he has in mind the change associated with the phenomenon of growth (the actual growth of organisms and its consequences, such as the appropriation or destruction of weaker organisms by stronger ones, or the deterioration in organisms resulting from unmanageable expansion). The crucial empirical fact is that living organisms continually appropriate, subjugate, or exploit their environment in a way that appear to exceed what is strictly required for their self-preservation. Thus, a tree does not transform only as much of the environment as is required for its preservation; it grows by appropriating into its service ever greater portions of the environment (see WP §704). As Nietzsche points out, this relentless appropriation leads either to growth, or to destruction, but not to self-preservation, which can therefore not be its motivation:

One cannot ascribe the most basic and primeval activities of protoplasm to a will to self-preservation, for it takes into itself absurdly more than would be required to preserve it; and, above all, it does not thereby ‘preserve itself,’ it falls apart— The drive that rules here has to explain precisely this absence of desire for self-preservation. (WP §651)

The unceasing drive to grow observable in living organisms may be explained in terms of adaptation theory: circumstances are constantly changing and organisms would not preserve themselves if they did not constantly find new ways to adapt to them. Growth, in other words, might be adaptive and so serve the aim of self-preservation. In response to this objection, Nietzsche points out that growth tends to be maladaptive and to threaten self-preservation: “the really fundamental instinct of life ... aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation.” (GS §349; see Z II §12) The larger the tree (to return to

that example), the more complex the requirements of its preservation become, and therefore the greater its vulnerabilities.

Given these observations, it is perplexing that the longstanding view of life, particularly adaptation theory, would have gained the currency it enjoys. Nietzsche surmises that it reflects the influence of a certain evaluative bias, the “democratic idiosyncrasy” that has taken hold and influenced theorizing even in the “apparently most objective sciences,” such as biology:

Under the influence of the above-mentioned idiosyncrasy, one places instead “adaptation” in the foreground, that is to say, an activity of the second rank, a mere reactivity; indeed, life itself has been defined as a more and more efficient inner adaptation to external conditions (Herbert Spencer). Thus the essence of life, its will to power, is ignored; one overlooks the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations, new directions, although “adaptation” follows only after this; the dominant role of the highest functionaries within the organism itself in which the will to life appears active and form-giving is denied. (GM, II §12)

The operation of “spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces,” when successful, often creates a kind of harmony between the organism and its environment that looks like the adaptation of one to the other. But to interpret this operation as the “more and more efficient inner adaptation to external conditions” is tendentious, since it could also be the imposition on these external conditions of a form that makes them suitable to serve the organism. Given the evidence we just reviewed against adaptation theory, the choice of it could well be the consequence of a particular bias. Nietzsche suggests that this bias is evaluative—the “democratic prejudice” against exceptional individuals, or individuals of the “higher type.” Great individuals are typically not well adapted to their environment, and therefore less well suited to survive in it: “The richest and most complex forms—

for the expression ‘higher types’ means no more than this—perish more easily: only the lowest preserve an apparent indestructibility.” (WP §684) From the perspective of adaptation theory, these “higher types” must be seen as biological malfunctions or aberrations. From the perspective of the theory of will to power, by contrast, these types appear no longer as the consequence of biological malfunction, but as a normal and arguably higher (if maladaptive) manifestation of those of expansive, form-giving forces that constitute the very essence of life.^①

As I noted in the beginning, Nietzsche simply borrows this view of life as will to power from 19th century biologists such as, primarily Maximilian Drossbach and William Henry Rolph.^② Drossbach recognizes the autonomy of the “movement” of life, but describes the force animating this movement as “striving after higher development”: “The being moves not because it ... is pushed or driven but rather because it strives to develop itself.”(Drossbach 1884, 45) He also makes it clear that this striving is the animating principle of life in general: “And this goes, too, for the so-called processes of growth and blooming in plants, etc. Here too is a being which builds and alters these forms of interaction in its striving after higher development.”(Drossbach 1884, 48) Nietzsche explicitly identifies Drossbach’s “striving for development” with his concept of will to power(Schmidt 1988, 470). Nietzsche also read Rolph’s *Biologische Probleme* with great interest. In that work, Rolph explicitly criticizes the conception of life in terms of the aim of self-preservation, using a language that finds strong echoes in Nietzsche’s own writings: “the struggle of existence no longer takes place over existence, it is no struggle for self-preservation [kein Kampf um Selbsterhaltung], no struggle for the ‘acquisition of the indispensable needs of life,’ but rather a struggle for increased acquisition [um Mehrerwerb].”(Rolph 1884, 97)

This review of the biological conception of will to power should be useful in two respects. First, by using the same term, Nietzsche presumably indicates that the biological and psychological varieties of will to power share important conceptual

^①Nietzsche also takes this democratic prejudice to motivate the biological priority accorded to the species over the individual in Darwinian theory (TI IX §14; WP §685).

^②I here follow the work of Ian Dunkle (2017) and rely on his translations of the works of these two authors.

characteristics. Hence, what he says about the will to power as biological principle may be transposed, with appropriate modifications, to the psychological phenomenon. Second, the conceptual connections between the two forms of will to power have sometimes led to outright confusion between them. Thus, there has been a tendency to assume that the psychological variety of will to power possesses certain features, even though they are features Nietzsche attributes explicitly only to the biological variety. In particular, the characterization of will to power as “the essence of life,” though a biological claim, has been taken to suggest that the will to power understood as a motivational state enjoys a privileged, central place in human psychology. I shall thus begin my analysis of will to power understood as a psychological notion with an examination of this claim.

II. Will to Power As Motivation

Nietzsche sometimes seems to present the will to power as the central principle of psychological theory: psychology, he declares, should be understood as “morphology and the doctrine of development of the will to power” (BGE §23). Many scholars take this to imply that a desire for power is the ultimate human motivation. For example, as Ivan Soll argues, Nietzsche’s central thesis is “that a will to power is the deepest and most general motive of human behavior, that the ultimate goal of all human striving is the acquisition and increase of power.”^①

In this interpretation, Nietzsche would offer his will to power psychology as an alternative to psychological hedonism, which takes the desire for pleasure and the aversion for pain to be the ultimate human motivation. According to psychological hedonism, what motivates human beings to eat, for example, is their aversion for the pain of hunger; what motivates them to have sexual intercourse is their desire for the pleasure of it; and what motivates them to acquire knowledge is the painful anxiety that accompanies doubt and ignorance. According to

Nietzsche’s will to power psychology, by contrast, what motivates all these kinds of behavior is the desire for power: the hunger drive is “an application of the original will to become stronger” (WP §702); the sex drive is a manifestation of the “lust for possession” (GS §14); and “the so-called drive to knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer” (WP §423; see BGE §230).

In their most extreme form, these views are instances of motivational monism: all human motivations—such as hunger, sex, and curiosity—would reduce to one fundamental motivation, be it the desire for pleasure or the will to power. But the desire for power (or for pleasure) may be the ultimate human motivation without being the only one. For example, the claim that “the so-called drive to knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer” (WP §423) need not be understood as that claim that the will to knowledge just is a form of the will to power. It could simply be the claim that the will to knowledge is instrumentally ordained to the end of power: we desire knowledge because it is a means to acquire or increase power. Likewise, we may desire knowledge as a means to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

The notion that the will to power psychology is intended as an alternative to psychological hedonism runs into a significant problem, which I will call the problem of formalism. Power is not like pleasure: while pleasure designates an end that can be substantively specified on its own (for example, as a distinctive kind of sensation), the concept of power designates a purely formal end, which gets a determinate content only from its association with other ends the agents desires or values.^② This rules out any interpretation of will to power psychology as the view that the desire for power is the ultimate human motivation. Power cannot be the only object of desire, and if power is a formal end, then the agent’s desires for other ends are not simply means to the acquisition or increase of power, but they rather determine its content. The relation of these other desired ends to the end of power is not instrumental, but constitutive.

John Richardson has proposed to resolve the

^① Soll (1994: 168); this is a long-standing view, going back to Kaufmann (1968: 206).

^② See Schacht (1983: 242), Richardson (1996:19-23), Clark (1990: 210-2), and Reginster (2006: 129-132). Although it makes no difference here, it is worth noting that recent conceptions of pleasure that associate it with desire satisfaction also turn it into what I called here a formal end (e.g., see Schroeder, 2004: chapter 3)

problem of formalism by presenting the will to power as a structural feature of all drives (Richardson 1996, 21ff.). In this view, each drive aims at a specific end, which gives its distinctive identity, but it also aims at power, a characteristic it shares with all other drives: “every drive wants to be master.” (BGE §6) Richardson is careful to avoid too psychological an understanding of “wants to be master” in this context, and proposes to interpret it as a metaphorical way of referring to the drives’ purposiveness—their “tendency” or “directedness” toward power. It is tempting to suppose that the mastery of other drives toward which each drive allegedly tends is a kind of prevalence over them that allows for the maximal achievement of its distinctive end. Thus, the sex drive “masters” the hunger drive when it is strong enough to motivate the agent to ignore his hunger, so to speak, in order to seek sexual gratification. Richardson rejects this conception because it instrumentalizes power: in this view, power would not be an end of each drive, alongside with its distinctive end; rather, the tendency toward power could be fully explained by the drive’s aiming at its distinctive end. For example, it would simply be because the sexual drive aims at sexual gratification that it tends toward mastery over other, competing drives. The notion that power is a special, structural end of all drives requires a different conception of power, for which Richardson introduces the idea of a drive’s “development.”

The “development” of a drive is an increase in the complexity of the activity it motivates. A drive “masters” other drives not by suppressing them, but by incorporating them in the pursuit of its own distinctive end. The mastering drive does not prevent the mastered drives from pursuing their own distinctive end but somehow incorporates them into the pursuit of its distinctive end. The resulting relation is not purely instrumental, in that the dominant drive does not simply allow the mastered drives to pursue their own distinctive ends so long and insofar as it serves the pursuit of its own distinctive end. In fact, according to Richardson, the incorporation of the mastered drives results into a modification of the mastering drive’s distinctive end. For example, the sex drive of an individual might enroll, in the effort at seducing another, the collaboration of the drive to knowledge, focused on learning as much as possible about this other, or of the artistic drive, by aiming to create an

attractive appearance for the other. In the process, the distinctive end of seduction of the sex drive gains new complexity. Its end is no longer seduction tout court, but seduction through knowledge and the creation of beauty, the pursuit of which requires the sex drive to eschew forms of gratification that do not also involve the achievement of these subordinate ends.

This interesting interpretation faces some significant difficulties. Some are exegetical. For one thing, there is very little direct and unambiguous textual evidence to support it. For another thing, the view that will to power is a structural feature of all drives ignores Nietzsche’s frequent descriptions of it as one drive among many, particularly in the *Genealogy* (see, e.g., GM II §2; III §18). Furthermore, these exegetical difficulties are compounded with philosophical difficulties.

Presumably, one chief reason to posit the will to power as a structural property of all drives is that it is required for the best explanation of a common psychological phenomenon. This is the fact that the drives of an individual tend to combine into the kind of complex hierarchical motivational structures I just described, in which the individual’s pursuit of the distinctive end of his dominant drive is modified by its incorporation of subordinate drives. It is far from clear, however, that the best explanation of this phenomenon requires positing the will to power as a structural feature of all drives. It may suffice to suppose that drives drive, that is to say, they exert a motivational pressure on the organism that persists until it behaves in ways that gratify them. Each drive operates under determinate circumstantial constraints, including the strength of the competing drives soliciting the organism and the opportunities for gratification the external environment provides. The presence of such constraints might suffice to explain how drives that simply drive toward their distinctive ends combine into the complex motivational structures described earlier. Thus, an individual may eschew certain forms of sexual gratification because his knowledge drive and his artistic drive are strong enough (and opportunities for their gratification are available) to motivate him to refrain from a gratification of the sex drive that would take place at their expense. Positing will to power as a structural property of all drives appears superfluous.

Paul Katsafanas advocates for a variant of the

view that the will to power is a property of all drives. He conceives of power as a distinguishing feature of the activity of confronting and overcoming resistance in the pursuit of some end. He argues that Nietzsche anticipates the Freudian distinction between the object and the aim of a drive, and maintains that while its object may vary, its aim is not the achievement of its distinctive end, but the expression of the drive in activity (Katsafanas 2013, 169ff.). This in turn motivates the thought that the drive must seek resistance to its ‘satisfaction,’ in the sense of the realization of its end, for it is the presence of such resistance that ensures its continuing activity. The aim of a drive is therefore the activity of confronting and overcoming resistance, in terms of which he understands the Nietzschean concept of power.

Katsafanas supports this interpretation by first noting that this view of drive was quite widespread in Nietzsche’s time, and finds its most explicit articulation in Freud. This, however, is incorrect. The orthodox view, as Freud articulates it, is that drives aim not at activity, but at “satisfaction,” understood as the removal of “stimulation.” This orthodox view applies particularly well to what Freud regards as a paradigmatic drive, hunger.^① While Nietzsche perceptively recognizes that some drives do aim at activity, including, as I shall show shortly, the drive for power, he does not believe that all do. His view of the “gratification” of a drive is quite pluralistic, including “exercise of its strength, or discharge of its strength, or the saturation of an emptiness” (D §119). This suggests that he is prepared to recognize different species of drives, some perhaps operating in accordance with the orthodox model Freud described and aiming at “the saturation of an emptiness,” and others operating according to a different model where they aim at the “exercise of [their] strength.”

The notion that the will to power occupies a privileged, central place within human motivational psychology thus seems very problematic. I suspect that it results from the confusion between the biological and psychological varieties of will to power. I noted that Nietzsche frequently presents the will to power as the “essence” of life: this claim evidently concerns the biological concept of will

to power. As far as I am aware, he does not make any such claim about the psychological concept, except perhaps the claim with which we began, that psychology should be understood as “morphology and the doctrine of development of the will to power” (BGE §23). But this claim may admit of a different interpretation altogether. Recall that Nietzsche argues that this view accounts for the empirical facts in the biological domain better than the prevalent conception of life in terms of a “drive toward self-preservation” (BGE §13). Thus, he claims: “the really fundamental instinct of life ... aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation.” (GS §349; see Z II §12) Such tendency toward the “expansion of power” is manifest not just in the growth of individual organisms, or of their species, but also in the expansion of the dominion of life over inorganic nature (WP §§ 125, 704). In this perspective, describing psychology as the study of the form and development of the will to power is not necessarily representing the will to power as the ultimate human motivation, or as a motivational characteristic of all drives. It could simply mean that a proper understanding of human psychology—for example, understanding why human beings are equipped with their characteristic motivational repertoire—requires locating it in the broader biological context.

Thus, in the longstanding conception of life Nietzsche rejects, the sex drive, the hunger drive, and the knowledge drive would all be explained in terms of the fundamental principle of self-preservation. Human beings are equipped with these motivations because their influence on their behavior makes them more likely to survive or preserve themselves. Schopenhauer’s explanation of the sexual drive supplies a good example. From a psychological perspective, this drive aims at sexual pleasure, but from a biological perspective it aims at reproduction, and therefore at the survival of the species. Importantly, for Schopenhauer, this biological aim is not—at any rate, need not be—psychologically registered. Reproduction is not—or need not be—what motivates sexual activity; sexual pleasure is. But we need to locate the sexual drive so understood within

^① “The aim of a drive is in every instance satisfaction, which can only be obtained by abolishing the condition of stimulation in the source of the drive.” (Freud, SE XIV, 122)

the broader biological context to understand why it is part of the motivational endowment of human beings. Nietzsche's approach to psychology would be similar. A conception of life as will to power supplies a better explanation of the character of our motivational repertoire. If we conceive of life as aiming at self-preservation, he suggests, it becomes difficult to see why human beings would be prone to "the affects of hatred, envy, covetousness, and the lust to rule" since these are often as likely to undermine self-preservation as to foster it. From the perspective of a conception of life as will to power, by contrast, these motivational states can more naturally be seen "as conditions of life, as factors which, fundamentally and essentially, must be present in the general economy of life" (BGE §23).

This approach allows us to make sense of the fact that Nietzsche frequently describes the will to power as one drive among others. In fact, it helps to explain why the human motivational repertoire includes a desire for power. If life is will to power, and human psychology is a part of life, then it should be designed to foster the human organism's tendency toward power (see WP §704). This apparently includes equipping human beings with a "lust to rule," or a will to power now understood as a particular kind of drive.^① I now turn to an examination of this special motivation. I begin with an analysis of the distinctive object of this motivation, proceed with an analysis of its stance toward it, and conclude with a review of its salient characteristics.

III. What is Power?

To gain power is to "impose one's own form" on the surrounding world (BGE §259; see GM II §12,18). This expression is ambiguous. On the one hand, "imposing one's own form" refers to the fact that the form imposed on the environment reflects or expresses the identity of the agent, specifically the values that constitute her "will." On the other hand, the form the

environment assumes counts as "one's own" simply if it is attributable to the effectiveness of one's agency. It does not matter what this form is, only that the surrounding world bears it as a consequence of the effective organization or transformation by the agent of its disparate raw materials.

The ambiguity of the expression "one's own form" corresponds to a fundamental ambiguity in the concept of power. Power may first be understood as 'power over' something or someone, in which case it evokes the ideas of dominion or mastery, control, or dominance. But power may also be understood as 'power to' achieve some goal or perform some task, in which case it brings to mind the ideas of capacity, competence, or effectiveness. Nietzsche has both in mind: he associates power now with "mastery" or "dominion" [Herrschaft] (e.g., GM II §6; III §§13, 15) and now with "competence" [Tüchtigkeit] (A §2).^②

The two senses are connected in Nietzsche's considered concept of power. To see how, consider the following passage:

But [all being] shall yield and bend for you. Thus your will wants it. It shall become smooth and serve the spirit as its mirror and reflection. That is your whole will, you who are wisest: a will to power—when you speak of good and evil too, and of valuations. You still want to create the world before which you can kneel ... Your will and your valuations you have placed on the river of becoming ... that betrays to me an ancient will to power. (Z II §12)

To want power is to want the world to conform—to "yield and bend"—to one's will, that is to say, to be hospitable to the realization of the ends one values (WP §260). This evokes the idea of dominion or mastery. Conformity of world to will is necessary for dominion, but it is not sufficient for it. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden live in a world that largely reflects their values, including 'higher' values, such

^① Richardson (2004: 39) explores in some detail the possibility that the will to power could be "a disposition that was selected for a certain result." But he regards it as a view Nietzsche entertains only "sometimes" and is not his dominant view (see 46-65).

^② The scholarly literature tends to emphasize one or the other concept of power without noting their essential connection. The interpretation of power in terms of domination or mastery is the most common, though the conception of mastery is subject to great variation: compare, for example, Stern (1979: 114-125) and Richardson (1996: 28-35). The interpretation of power in terms of capacity is much less common: see Clark (1990: 211).

as beauty. But they evidently do not have dominion over it: the conformity of the Garden to their values is a product of the effectiveness of God's will, not their own. Conformity of world to will is evidence of dominion, then, only if it is the product of the effective exercise of their agency. Power is not just a matter of the world bearing "one's own form," but of its bearing it as a result of one's "imposition" of it. There is no 'power over' the world, accordingly, without the 'power to' transform it in accordance to one's will. The will to power, then, is a desire for the conformity of the world to my will insofar as this conformity is an achievement, or a product of the effective exercise of my agency.

The human predicament is the predicament of Adam and Eve after their fall from the Garden of Eden. The world in which they now live is raw, indifferent, even recalcitrant to their will. They now have to "earn their bread by the sweat of their brow"—they have to suffer, struggle, and work in order to make it conform to their will, for "the earth has not begun to be fruitful without work" (WP §224). For this reason, as Nietzsche notes, their will to power must be an essentially creative drive. For in such a world, imposing their "own form" to the environment—imposing their "will" and "valuations" "on the river of becoming"—is not primarily a matter of applying pre-existing rules or procedures in the manipulation of its raw materials. It is a matter of discerning what form can be imposed onto what raw materials in the first place—what value can be extracted from them—and then discerning what concrete procedures are effective in imposing that form on them. In fact, the creativity required here resembles in important ways the creativity of the artist—for example, the creativity a Michelangelo demonstrates in recognizing that a formless block of marble could be transformed into the David, and then finding concrete ways of imposing that form on it.

IV. What is a Will to Power?

Nietzsche calls the will to power a "will," a

fact that has not garnered the attention it deserves from commentators. Nietzsche calls many kinds of motivation 'wills,' but relatively few of these kinds of motivations he calls 'wills' also count as "drives" in his psychology. The will to power is also described as a "drive," as is, most notably, the "will to knowledge," or "will to truth." This invites the conjecture that the "will to power" and the "will to knowledge" designate drives of a special kind, which differs in some significant respects from other kinds of drives, such as the hunger drive.

The best-known varieties of drive psychology around Nietzsche's time model their conception of drive on basic biological drives like hunger, which they consider paradigmatic.^① According to this conception, a drive is aroused by an internal (endosomatic) stimulation caused by a physiological need, which is perceived as painful, and it motivates engagement in a consummatory activity towards an appropriate object, which is designed to remove the stimulation. This model applies especially well to the paradigmatic case of hunger: a physiological change (such as lowering of blood sugar levels below a certain threshold) is manifested in the form of unpleasant sensations (the 'pangs' of hunger), which induce the organism to interact with the external world in ways designed to eliminate these sensations.

The drives Nietzsche calls 'wills' display a strikingly different phenomenology. Consider first the will to knowledge, which Nietzsche also identifies as curiosity.^② At first glance, curiosity is a desire to know or to understand. While it certainly is that, we get a glimpse into the nature of this desire when we observe that curiosity can be disappointed in not just one but two ways. My curiosity about some object is disappointed not only if I fail to achieve knowledge or understanding of it, but also if I realize that it no longer offers anything to know or to understand. Thus, curiosity can be disappointed by the absence of problems or questions as much as by their recalcitrance to resolution. Curiosity has an aura of paradox: it is both a desire to know or to understand and a desire for their being obstacles to knowledge and

① Freud offers the classic formulation of this orthodox conception of drives (see 1957: 117-149) but its main elements can already be found in Schopenhauer.

② On this point and on the Nietzschean analysis of curiosity, see Reginster (2013).

understanding—the mysterious, problematic features of an object by virtue of which it can stimulate curiosity.

The satisfaction of curiosity does not consist in the removal of stimulation but on the contrary in the maintenance or even intensification of it. This is because the stimulation of curiosity, unlike the stimulation associated with hunger, is experienced as pleasant. It is for this reason that the ‘satisfaction’ of curiosity evokes a certain ambivalence: when my desire to know or understand its object is satisfied, I am also deprived on the pleasant stimulation of our curiosity by the exposure to its puzzling or mysterious features. So, the ‘satisfaction’ of curiosity typically leaves me not in a state of restful contentment—as is the case when hunger is satisfied, for example—but in a peculiar state of motivational restlessness we identify as ‘boredom.’ Boredom is plausibly understood as a (frustrated) desire for stimulation. This suggests that, in the case of curiosity, arousal is independent from stimulation. I am bored because my curiosity is aroused, but not stimulated; my curiosity then motivates me to seek stimulation, in the form of some puzzle or problem that will excite it.

The will to power displays a similar phenomenology. It is obviously a desire to be effective in making the world bend to my will, by actually achieving my goals. Like curiosity, however, the will to power can be disappointed in two ways. It is disappointed if I fail to achieve my goal, but also if I actually achieve it: it is therefore a desire both to achieve a certain goal and for there to be obstacles or resistance to the achievement of that goal: “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.” (Z II §12) Thus, Nietzsche observes that the satisfaction of the will to power—the successful achievement of a goal—does not leave me contented, but saddled with a kind of dissatisfaction: “Alas,” he has Zarathustra exclaim, “who was not vanquished in his victory?” (Z III §12[30]) This kind of dissatisfaction can also be identified as boredom, a state in which the will to power is aroused but not stimulated, and motivates me to seek stimulation in

the form of fresh opportunities to demonstrate my power.^①

Our analysis so far shows why the will to power and the will to knowledge are instances of a distinctive kind of drive, but it does not yet explain why Nietzsche found it appropriate to call drives of this kind ‘wills.’ It is tempting to suppose that this appellation is inspired by another feature of the phenomenology of these drives: their arousal feels, in some respects, voluntary, in the sense that it is independent from external or internal stimulation. Curiosity may be aroused by stimulation originated in the external environment, to be sure, but it need not be. In some cases, as we saw, curiosity may actually motivate me to seek stimulation in her environment, even when none is present at hand. Likewise, the arousal of curiosity does not seem attributable to internal stimulation resulting from some change in the individual’s physiology, in the way the arousal of the hunger drive is. This relative independence from external or internal stimulation might also account for the fact that I am able to disregard the demands of my curiosity at will, so to speak, for example when I am weary, which is not the case with other kinds of drives, such as hunger.

V. The Motivational Characteristics of Will to Power

The preceding analysis of the will to power allows us to make sense of the intriguing characteristics Nietzsche attributes to it.

1. A first characteristic of the will to power is its essential antagonism, which refers to the fact that its satisfaction requires the confrontation and overcoming of resistance against it: “the will to power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore it seeks that which resists it” (WP §656; see GM I §13). This antagonism appears to be in part a consequence of its character as will. A “will” is a kind of drive that motivates activity that aims at perpetuating or intensifying, rather than removing, stimulation. Thus, my curiosity motivates me to look for objects that will stimulate or excite it. Now, an object fails to excite

^①I develop an analysis of boredom in specific connection to the will to power in Reginster (2006: 120-125)

curiosity if it offers nothing to know or to understand, for example because it is cognitively transparent. My curiosity will therefore direct me toward objects that are cognitively opaque—about which there is something to discover, but which also present obstacles or resistance to discovery. The same goes for the will to power. It maintains stimulation by pursuing ends whose realization requires the confrontation and overcoming of “opposition” or “resistance.” Thus, Nietzsche observes, the will to power is satisfied only if “it has opponents and resistance” (WP §696).

The essential antagonism of the will to power is also a consequence of the character of power. Nietzsche often presents the “feeling of power,” and not simply power, as the aim of the will to power: we want not only power, but also the experience of power (e.g., A §2). This is not to suggest that, when it comes to the satisfaction of the will to power, there is no significant difference between feeling powerful and being powerful. Nietzsche explicitly distinguishes between the two, for example in the case 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) While experiencing a feeling of power is not sufficient for the satisfaction of the will to power, it is nevertheless necessary for it. Presumably, a desire the agent seeks to satisfy will not stop exercising its motivational pressure until she believes that it is satisfied. Hence, from the agent’s own perspective, the desire does not count as satisfied unless she experiences it as such. For this reason, when we talk of the satisfaction of a desire, we often mean at once the objective fact of possession of the desired object and the subjective consciousness of this fact.

This observation helps to understand the essential antagonism of the will to power. The mere conformity of the world to the agent’s will, evident for example in the fact that her ends are realized in the world, cannot suffice to elicit a feeling of power, because it might not be a consequence of her effective agency; it could just as well be the product of luck, or of an accommodating environment. It is only when

the environment resists her will to realize that end, and she manages to overcome this resistance, that the realization of the end can elicit in her a feeling of power or effective agency.^①

2. The essential activity of will to power refers to the fact that it can be satisfied only in activity, and not in a state of rest: “It is not the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure (...), but rather the will’s forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way.” (WP §696) We find further explicit evidence for this view in Nietzsche’s conception of happiness. He draws a stark contrast between two basic views of happiness. In one view, “happiness should not be sundered from action—being active was necessarily with them a part of happiness,” while in another, happiness “appears as essentially narcotic, drug, rest, peace, ‘sabbath,’ slackening of tension and relaxing of limbs, in short passively” (GM, I §10). The latter evidently refers to the widespread conception, according to which happiness is a pleasant state, which can be experienced passively. Nietzsche links the former view of happiness as activity, which he favors, to his conception of it in terms of the “feeling of power”: “What is happiness?—The feeling that power increases—that a resistance is overcome.” (A §2) This suggests that the feeling of power essentially supervenes on activity.

This essential activity, too, appears to be a consequence of the fact that the will to power is a “will.” Just as we should expect a drive aiming at the removal of stimulation to find satisfaction in a state of rest, we can expect a drive aiming at the perpetuation or intensification of stimulation to find satisfaction not in rest, but in continuing activity.^② To see precisely why, we must return to the earlier observation that the conditions of satisfaction for “wills” are peculiarly ambivalent. The satisfaction of curiosity, for example, requires the achievement of knowledge or understanding, but it also requires resistance to knowledge and understanding, in the form of problems or puzzles. In addition to a desire to know or understand, curiosity also includes “the attraction of everything problematic” (GS Preface §3).

① Nietzsche identifies only a particularly important necessary condition. For a discussion of other conditions, see Bradford (2015: chapter 3).

② See White (1959: 321-2) for subsequent discussion of this view.

We can make sense of this ambivalence if we think of curiosity as aiming at an activity, namely, the activity of inquiry—as being a “passion for seeking the truth,” rather than simply for “possessing” it (HH I §633). I cannot be engaged in inquiry if I have no interest in knowing the truth. But I cannot be engaged in inquiry—in seeking the truth—if that truth is evident or already in my possession.

Analogous considerations account for the essential activity of the will to power. On the one hand, I cannot be engaged in effective creative activity if I have no interest in the successful achievement of its end; so my will to power would be disappointed if I did not achieve my particular ends. On the other hand, my will to power finds satisfaction in its continuing stimulation, which requires there to be resistance to the achievement of my end, and thus motivates the continuing activity required to overcome it.

The essential activity of the will to power may also be a function of the character of power itself. Nietzsche observes that happiness, when it is traditionally conceived as rest, contentment, or pleasure, can be experienced passively: think for example of the experience of a pleasurable sensation. Insofar as it involves the experience of effective agency, by contrast, power can be experienced only in activity. Even when, from the comfort of my couch, I fancy myself powerful, I still have to picture myself as engaging in some form of activity in which the effectiveness of my agency is on display.

3. The will to power also displays an essential insatiability: to will power is “to have and to want to have more—growth, in one word” (WP §125; cf. WP § 696, 704). It motivates “insatiable appropriation” (WP §660), and the “higher types,” who exhibit high levels of will to power, appear inaccessible to contentment: the urge to shape or give form in evidence in a Napoleon or a Beethoven seems relentless and insatiable. Insatiable desires are not simply unsatisfiable; they can be satisfied, but no amount of satisfaction is ever enough. In the case of the will to power, insatiability assumes a particular form, which we may discern by contrasting it with a more familiar sort of insatiability, which is often associated with greed.

Greed is insatiable when a person is quite

successful in amassing wealth but can never experience any amount of it as sufficient to quench her desire for it. There might be different explanations for this. For instance, insatiability may be a consequence of (psychological or hedonic) adaptation: once a person becomes accustomed to a new level of wealth, it loses its ability to elicit an experience of satisfaction. Or wealth is conceived as an essentially perfectible good, that is, a good of which having more is always better and of which there is always more to have. This sort of insatiability is rooted in the sense that what one has acquired is not good enough—either because it has lost its ability to satisfy as a consequence of adaptation, or because it is essentially perfectible.

As Nietzsche conceives of it, the insatiability of the will to power is different. What spurs the quest for more is not the sense that what one has achieved is not good enough; on the contrary, the individual animated by that desire may well find a particular achievement good enough on its own terms. Thus, Nietzsche says of the individual motivated by the will to power that she must learn to take “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.” (WP §417; my emphases) So, it is not the lack of value of the achievement that causes dissatisfaction with it, since the agent must learn to take leave of achievements, “however good” or “noble” she judges them to be.

The insatiability of the will to power is in part a consequence of its character as “will.” Like other drives of this kind, the will to power has peculiarly ambivalent conditions of satisfaction. On the one hand, my will to power is not satisfied unless I actually manage to achieve my ends. On the other hand, it is also a “will,” which finds satisfaction in continuing stimulation, and this requires there to be resistance to the achievement of my end, and therefore continuing activity in order to overcome it. For my will to power, then, being satisfied in one respect—effectively realizing my ends—is being dissatisfied in another—the pursuit of this particular end is no longer stimulating. Therein lies the insatiability of the will to power: the successful completion of a bout of creative activity does not leave it satisfied, in the sense of sated and quiescent, but on the contrary restless, already spurring the agent to seek new opportunities

to exercise her creative effectiveness, though not, as Nietzsche pointedly remarks, because she deems her present creative achievements not good enough: “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)

The insatiability of the will to power may also be seen as a consequence of the character of power. In Nietzsche’s conception of it, the achievement of power is a creative achievement. It is a matter of giving “shape” or “form” to a raw and often recalcitrant world to make it “reflect” one’s values. The association of power with creative effectiveness has an important implication. To see it, let us consider a distinction between effectiveness and efficiency.^① Efficiency is a quality of the performance of a determinate given task in the production of a determinate given outcome in accordance with determinate given standards. With sufficient practice, a person can become an efficient craftsman, for example. Thus, efficiency is a kind of competence a person can be taught, and eventually come to possess. Effectiveness, by contrast, is linked to creativity and inventiveness, that is, the ability to discern what value could be extracted from what raw materials and through what procedures. Effectiveness is therefore not a competence an agent can be said simply to possess: the qualities and operations that made for effectiveness in the context of one bout of creative activity may not be applicable—and count as effectiveness—in the context of a different bout of creative activity. For similar reasons, effectiveness cannot be taught either.

Hence, a person’s creative effectiveness is put back into question, at least to some degree, in every new creative undertaking, in a way a craftsman’s efficiency is not put back into question every time he sets out to exercise his craft. While the anxiety a person can feel about her efficiency, in advance of the performance of a given determinate task, may

be assuaged by the thought that she has performed it efficiently before, the anxiety she feels about her creative effectiveness can typically not be assuaged by a similar thought. Since no achievement, no matter how good she deems it to be, can be evidence that she possesses effectiveness, and therefore power, it cannot suffice to satisfy her desire for it.^②

4. Nietzsche regards the will to power as a motivationally independent drive, which can compete with, and “dominate,” other drives: for example, it is “the dominant drive” of the sovereign individual (GM II §2). Motivational independence is more than mere distinctness. If the will to power were only the desire to have the world conform to my will, it would not be a distinct motivation, for desiring to realize one’s valued ends in the world just is valuing these ends, not something distinct from it. What makes the will to power a motivation distinct from the desire to realize my valued ends is the element of achievement: when I will power I do not only want the world to conform to my will, I also want this conformity to be my achievement, or a product of the effective exercise of my agency. The will to power is a distinct motivation in virtue of being a desire for effective agency. This desire for effective agency is motivationally independent not just insofar as it is distinct from other desires but also insofar as it not instrumentally or prudentially connected to them.^③

This is perplexing, for it is natural to think that we desire effective agency just because and insofar as we desire other ends this agency would be effective at realizing. But Nietzsche explicitly claims that willing power is not a matter of willing the means necessary to the realization of our ends. For instance, he describes as “debasing” or “belittling and defaming” of the will to power to describe its object as a mere means to achieving other ends, such as “honor” or “pleasure” (WP §§707, 751; cf. §675).

① On this distinction, see Drucker (2002: 191-206); in specific connection to Nietzsche, see Cohen (2014: 234).

② This is not to deny that in many cases, effective agency is a matter of efficiency. But effectiveness remains the primary concern, for two reasons: first, the procedures efficiently applied to produce specific ends are themselves the product of creatively effective agency; second, the circumstances of the world are unpredictable enough that the merely efficient application of known procedures in the pursuit of pre-determined ends is often insufficient to achieve power. Even the most efficient craftsmanship typically requires a measure of creative effectiveness.

③ Clark (1990: 211) suggests that, while the origin of the interest in power—understood as “effectiveness”—is instrumental, it can become an independent motivation. But she offers no evidence or explanation for this emancipation.

Moreover, the antagonism of the will to power makes no sense on an instrumental conception of it. If the will to power is conceived as a purely instrumental desire, it is hard to see why its satisfaction would require the confrontation and overcoming of resistance. To achieve those other ends, resistance might have to be overcome, but it should hardly be sought. The instrumental conception of the will to power does not fit any better with the notion that it is essentially insatiable. Willing the means necessary to one's ends does not always require indefinite "willing to be stronger, willing to grow." If the strength one already possesses is instrumentally sufficient to realize one's existing ends, growing stronger is not required. Far from being an essential feature of the will to power, indefinite growth would be necessary only when the ends for the realization of which power is instrumentally necessary are essentially perfectible ends, such as goods of which having more is always better and of which there is always more to have.

What, then, are Nietzsche's grounds for claiming that we have an interest in effective agency that is independent from the desires such agency would be effective in satisfying? It is relatively easy to think of non-instrumental manifestations of the will to power. Young children will sometimes badger their parents for a piece of candy, in which they lose interest as soon as it is given to them. This suggests that the badgering was not motivated by hunger or by a desire for sweets: arguably, it was rather motivated by the desire to test the effectiveness of their agency in their (social) environment. Naturally, we might suppose that they did so out of prudence: their desire to test the effectiveness of their agency could be motivated by the implicit recognition that a desire for food or for sweets, or indeed any other desire for the satisfaction of which they could have to rely on their parents' cooperation, might arise in the future.

A prudential conception of the will to power may account for the essential antagonism of the will to power: strengthening one's skills by taking on challenges today may be seen as a way of preparing oneself for any resistance the environment might oppose to the satisfaction of one's desires tomorrow. This prudential interpretation of the will to power may

also suffice to explain its insatiability.^① The prudential quest for power would be indefinite because, unable as we are to predict with full confidence what the conditions of living well will be in our future, and what measure of power securing them will require, we cannot presently rest satisfied with any determinate amount of acquired power.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche rejects even this prudential conception of the will to power. To support his view of it as motivationally independent, he deploys a variety of considerations designed to show that a significant range of human behavior is best explained simply and directly in terms of a drive for power that is self-standing, rather than instrumentally or prudentially ordained to the service of other drives. These considerations are often sketchy and ambiguous, but they are tantalizing, and they anticipate substantial findings from subsequent empirical psychology. I will here limit myself to two lines of argument.

According to one line of argument, Nietzsche concedes that the successful pursuit of effective agency may have prudential benefits, but denies that prudence is its motivation. The prudential usefulness of effective agency for the satisfaction of basic biological needs, for example, is more plausibly seen as "only one of the indirect and most frequent results" (BGE §13). He may well have in mind the relevantly analogous case of the sexual drive described by Schopenhauer (WWR II xlv). While the function of sexual behavior is reproduction, its motivation is sexual pleasure. Likewise, effective agency may have the function of improving the prospects of self-preservation without this being the motivation for developing and exercising it. The successful development and exercise of effective agency produces a pleasure that cannot be reduced to that derived from the satisfaction of the basic biological needs this exercise makes possible.

Nietzsche anticipates here on findings from subsequent empirical psychology, which supply strong evidence for a motivationally independent will to power. A number of psychological experiments and observations demonstrate the existence of a motivation toward effectiveness, which could be explained neither in terms of anxiety reduction—

① For a version of this view, see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter IX.

② For a review of these empirical data, see White (1959).

as when the development and exercise of capacities is motivated by indeterminate fear, rather than apprehension of a determinate threat to the gratification of existing drives, and therefore amounts to a kind of general prudence—nor even in terms of secondary reinforcement—as when the gratification of a basic drive creates a secondary drive toward the development and exercise of the capacities that were perceived to have made this gratification possible. These experiments suggest that a great deal of human behavior is best explained in terms of the motivation to demonstrate effective agency alone, independently of any other existing drive such agency would be effective at gratifying.^②

Some psychologists therefore proposed that we should add an “instinct for mastery” to the traditional repertoire of drives.^① In his detailed summary of this research, psychologist Robert White calls it a “competence motivation,” or also, rather unfavorably, “effectance motivation.” (White 1959; see also Woodworth 1958) Like Nietzsche, White explicitly concedes that effective agency is useful for the satisfaction of biological drives, but argues that this satisfaction is best seen as the by-product of an independent drive for effective agency, which only aims at producing the “feeling of efficacy” that supervenes on competent or effective activity:

In order to forestall misunderstanding, it should be pointed out that the usage here is parallel to what we do when we connect sex with its biological goal of reproduction. The sex drive aims for pleasure and gratification, and reproduction is a consequence that is presumably unforeseen by animals and by man at primitive levels of understanding. Effectance motivation similarly aims for the feeling of efficacy, not for the vitally important learnings that come as its consequence. If we consider the part played by competence motivation in adult human life we can observe the same parallel. Sex may now be completely and purposefully divorced from reproduction but nevertheless pursued for the pleasure it can yield. Similarly, effectance motivation may lead to continuing exploratory

interests or active adventures when in fact there is no longer any ... need for it in terms of survival. In both cases the motive is capable of yielding surplus satisfaction well beyond what is necessary to get the biological work done. (White 1959: 323)

As an important ground for holding this view, Nietzsche himself produces the observation that the will to power can, and not infrequently does, motivate imprudent behavior: “the really fundamental instinct of life ... aims at the expansion of power, and, wishing for that frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation” (GS §349). A quest for power governed by prudence could well motivate the taking of certain calculated risks. But not all the risks motivated by the will to power will be so calculated: it is hard to think of a plausible consideration of long-term prudence to justify Edmund Hillary’s project to climb Everest, for example. Furthermore, by attributing the will to power to all animal forms, Nietzsche may be taken to suggest that it can be found in circumstances in which it is simply implausible to suppose its motivation to be long-term prudence. Thus, the deliberate search for resistance to confront and overcome has been observed in young children and in animals, to which the motive of long-term prudence cannot plausibly be attributed (Woodworth 1958, 78).

In fact, there are reasons to believe that the exercise of effective agency may be disrupted by prudential motives. Since the motive of prudence is concerned with the future prospects of self-preservation and well-being, it creates a climate of heightened anxiety and motivational intensity, which may interfere with the exercise of effective agency: too much prudential concern would likely have impeded Hillary’s quest for Everest. As a matter of empirical fact, long-term prudence is just as likely to motivate withdrawal and passivity as the kind of active engagement characteristic of the exercise of effective agency (White 1959, 316).

In a second line of argument, Nietzsche argues that the human susceptibility to certain affects, especially the affect of resentment, is best explained in terms of a motivationally independent will to

^① See Hendrick (1943). The notion of an independent drive toward power increasingly gained importance in post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory, especially the Kleinian school and Kohut (1966).

power. In broad outline, resentment is the affect of suppressed vengefulness, which means that it is a response to frustration, or to the failure to realize some willed (and therefore valued) end. For example, the resentment of the “priests” (GM I §§7-10) is aroused by the frustration of their desire for political and social superiority. Common responses to the failure to realize a valued end include regret or disappointment, or distinctively moral emotions when circumstances make them appropriate, such as resentment or indignation. Regret and disappointment are responses that focus on the value of the end that went unrealized, while resentment and indignation are responses that focus on the agent’s entitlement to it. Resentment clearly differs from these, in my view, in virtue of being focused on the agent’s inability to get what he wills. In other words, resentment is a response neither to the loss of a good nor to the violation of one’s right to it, but to a lack of power: it bears an essential connection to the “feeling of impotence” (GM I §§7, 10, 13, 14). Resentment is thus a response to frustration understood as an injury to the feeling of power, and it motivates actions designed to restore the injured feeling of power.

Nietzsche believes resentment to be a thoroughly normal response to challenges to the effectiveness of one’s agency. This means that everyone is susceptible to it, and not only those he calls the “weak and impotent”: “Resentment itself, should it appear in the noble man, consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore does not poison: on the other hand, it fails to appear at all on countless occasions on which it inevitably appears in the weak and impotent.” (GM, I §10) When it “appears in the weak and impotent,” resentment is combined with a “feeling of impotence” and motivates a devaluation of the ends that the agents are unable to realize. Consider again Nietzsche’s example of the priest. His resentment is aroused by his inability to secure the political or social supremacy he covets. Unable to consummate this resentment “in an immediate reaction,” he devalues political and social supremacy. Nietzsche leaves no doubt about the

meaning of this devaluation: “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).

When it is motivated by resentment, the purpose of revaluation is thus the restoration of the agent’s injured feeling of power. This effect of resentment could not be explained unless we supposed him to have an interest in being an effective agent that is independent of his interest in the ends his agency would be effective at realizing. The devaluation of such ends would make no sense if his interest in effective agency (manifested in resentment) were dependent on his interest in those ends.^①

On reflection, the motivational independence of the will power is not all that surprising or counter-intuitive. Nietzsche sometimes describes the will to power as ambition, and resentment as “the gnawing worm of injured ambition” (GM III §8). Ambition displays precisely the kind of independence I take him to attribute to the will to power. To be ambitious is to want to go far or to achieve, and I can describe myself, or others, as ambitious, as wanting to go far or to achieve, without knowing in what specific domains I, or they, will achieve.

6. Finally, Nietzsche is eager to show that the will to power is a natural motivation, rather than the artifact of certain cultural conditions. Eager though he may be to establish this view, his case for it is largely indirect and allusive. One line of argument rests on his attribution of this motivation to animals: “every animal [...] instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximum feeling of power” (GM III, §7). Here, too, he anticipates on subsequent studies in comparative ethology, which bring out evidence of the presence of such a motivation—including the deliberate quest for risk and difficulty—in animals:

Such phenomena are, of course, well known in man: in the liking for dangerous sports or roller

① There may be other motivations to devalue ends one cannot achieve: for example, to alleviate the pain caused by the sense of deprivation this causes. In this case, the explanation of the devaluation is an aversion to the pain of deprivation, rather than a desire for power. It is only if devaluation is motivated by a resentment that it is evidence of the motivational independence of the will to power.

coasters, where fear is deliberately courted, and in the addiction to bridge or golf or solitaire, vices whose very existence depends upon the level of difficulty of the problems presented and an optimal level of frustration. Once more, when we find such attitudes toward fear and frustration in animals, we have a better basis for supposing that we are dealing with something fundamental. (Hebb and Thompson 1954: 551)

To bolster the credentials of the will to power as a ‘natural’ motivation, Nietzsche sometimes alludes (mostly implicitly) to another line of argument, which exhibits the logic of the emerging evolutionary biology. He insists that suffering is an inescapable feature of the human condition, which he takes to be a consequence of the fact that human beings live in a world that is recalcitrant their will. As I argue elsewhere, suffering is the experience by agents of a challenge to the effectiveness of their agency (Reginster forthcoming). It would therefore make good biological sense for human beings to be equipped with a self-standing interest in the effectiveness of their agency. On this point, too, Nietzsche anticipates on later empirical findings (e.g., White 1959, 316).

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