

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 *Diomysian* 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

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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 these determinate ends 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. What-
ever 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 *pair* 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 rôle, 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. II, 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.