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Nietzsche's Will to Power as the Principle of Revaluation: Toward a
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Abstract:

This thesis investigates Nietzsche's concept of the will to power as the central principle of his naturalism and as the foundation of his project of revaluation of all values. While the will to power is often taken to be either an ontological thesis about reality as a whole or a psychological claim about human motivation, its precise status remains notoriously ambiguous. My study aims to clarify these ambiguities by situating the will to power in relation to Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will to life, from which Nietzsche both inherits and decisively departs. Whereas Schopenhauer conceives the will as a blind striving for preservation, Nietzsche reconceives willing as an intrinsically expansive and transformative force that manifests not in stasis or self-maintenance, but in the overcoming of resistance and the incorporation of new forces.

On this basis, this study proposes a reconstruction of the will to power that avoids reducing it either to metaphysical speculation or to a single empirical drive. Instead, I interpret it as a dynamic principle of organization and hierarchy among drives, one that discloses the evaluative structure of life itself. By reframing these affective states, Nietzsche redefines the meaning of flourishing as active engagement in struggle, rather than hedonic satisfaction or mere survival.

Furthermore, I analyze the relation of the will to power to other drives, showing how it operates as a first-order, organizing principle that governs their interplay, integration, and sublimation. This relational dynamic underpins Nietzsche's vision of revaluation: values are neither grounded in transcendental norms nor reducible to utilitarian criteria, but arise from the relative strength, ordering, and creative expression of power. Thus, the will to power provides not only a naturalistic explanatory framework for human motivation, but also a normative criterion for distinguishing life-affirming from life-denying modes of existence.

In conclusion, I argue that Nietzsche's naturalism culminates in an ethics grounded in the will to power—a conception of value rooted in the immanent dynamics of life rather than in transcendent standards. Such an ethics resists both Schopenhauerian resignation and Darwinian reductionism, emphasizing instead the cultivation of self-overcoming and the affirmation of struggle as the measure of worth. By grounding normativity in the dynamics of the will to power, Nietzsche provides a framework for rethinking agency, creativity, and evaluation beyond metaphysical or hedonistic foundations, offering a radically new orientation for philosophy after the 'death of God'.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates Nietzsche's concept of the will to power as the central principle of his naturalism and as the foundation of his project of revaluation of all values. While the will to power is often taken to be either an ontological thesis about reality as a whole or a psychological claim about human motivation, its precise status remains notoriously ambiguous. My study aims to clarify these ambiguities by situating the will to power in relation to Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will to life, from which Nietzsche both inherits and decisively departs. Whereas Schopenhauer conceives the will as a blind striving for preservation, Nietzsche reconceives willing as an intrinsically expansive and transformative force that manifests not in stasis or self-maintenance, but in the overcoming of resistance and the incorporation of new forces.

On this basis, this study proposes a reconstruction of the will to power that avoids reducing it either to metaphysical speculation or to a single empirical drive. Instead, I interpret it as a dynamic principle of organization and hierarchy among drives, one that discloses the evaluative structure of life itself. By reframing these affective states, Nietzsche redefines the meaning of flourishing as active engagement in struggle, rather than hedonic satisfaction or mere survival.

Furthermore, I analyze the relation of the will to power to other drives, showing how it operates as a first-order, organizing principle that governs their interplay, integration, and sublimation. This relational dynamic underpins Nietzsche's vision of revaluation: values are neither grounded in transcendental norms nor reducible to utilitarian criteria, but arise from the relative strength, ordering, and creative expression of power. Thus, the will to power provides not only a naturalistic explanatory framework for human motivation, but also a normative criterion for distinguishing life-affirming from life-denying modes of existence.

In conclusion, I argue that Nietzsche's naturalism culminates in an ethics grounded in the will to power—a conception of value rooted in the immanent dynamics of life rather than in transcendent standards. Such an ethics resists both Schopenhauerian resignation and Darwinian reductionism, emphasizing instead the cultivation of self-overcoming and the affirmation of struggle as the measure of worth. By grounding normativity in the dynamics of the will to power, Nietzsche provides a framework for rethinking agency, creativity, and evaluation beyond metaphysical or hedonistic foundations, offering a radically new orientation for philosophy after the 'death of God'.

Keywords: Nietzsche; will to power; revaluation of values; Schopenhauer; drives; ethics; self-overcoming.

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Introduction

Nietzsche's notion of the will to power is one of the most fertile and contested ideas in modern moral and philosophical thought. Its conceptual slipperiness, oscillating between metaphysical pronouncements, physiological imagery, psychological diagnosis, and evaluative prescription, has generated a wide range of readings and, with them, widespread confusion about what Nietzsche intended and what his doctrine can legitimately support. This thesis aims to dispel that confusion by offering a careful, dialectical reconstruction of the will to power that preserves both its descriptive depth and its normative force. I argue that the will to power operates as a biological principle of organismic functioning at the level of drives, and at the same time serves as the fundamental criterion guiding Nietzsche's revaluation of values; from this twin role flows a distinctive, power-centered ethical vision that reconceives pleasure, suffering, and the relation between competing drives.

The project unfolds in three interlocking moves. First, it locates and dissolves the principal ambiguities surrounding the will to power (ch. 1.1), distinguishing problems that arise from Nietzsche's aphoristic style from genuine conceptual tensions. To situate that clarification historically and systematically, I contrast Schopenhauer's will to life with Nietzsche's will to power (ch. 1.2): showing how Nietzsche rejects a merely metaphysical or ascetic valorization of "will" and instead articulates an account in which valuative and biological claims are reciprocally informing.

Second, having cleared conceptual ground, I offer a positive explication of what the will to power is (ch. 1.3), paying close textual attention to Nietzsche's principal late works and secondary literature and to the argumentative moves by which he derives evaluative consequences from a naturalistic anthropology of drives and instincts. This explication serves as the basis for a sustained reappraisal of Nietzsche's account of pleasure and suffering (ch. 1.4): I defend the interpretive claim that Nietzsche does not deny suffering's costs but instead reinterprets its role in relation to growth, overcoming, and the intensification of life.

Third, I examine how the will to power interrelates with other drives (ch. 1.5) and show that its explanatory reach neither collapses into a single motive nor merely redescribes a hierarchy of impulses; rather, it provides a structural criterion for their relative valuation. Building on this anatomy, I will argue that the will to power operates as the fundamental principle of Nietzsche's revaluation of values (ch. 1.6): it supplies the standard by which old moral oppositions are overturned and new evaluative hierarchies instituted. Finally, I draw out the ethical implications of that reconstruction (ch. 1.7), proposing what I call a power-centered ethics—an ethics that

recognizes forms of self-overcoming, creative appropriation, and formative struggle as central moral goods while resisting both crude triumphalism and reductive biologicalism.

Methodologically, the thesis combines close textual exegesis with conceptual analysis and critical engagement with contemporary scholarship. Its contribution is both interpretive and to some extent constructive: it clarifies Nietzsche's intended argumentative architecture and indicates the potential of that architecture to support a nuanced normative alternative to dominant ethical paradigms.

1.1 The Will to Power and Its Ambiguities

At the heart of Nietzsche's philosophical project lies a concept that resists simplification but demands a precise and clarifying encounter: the will to power. This concept forms the core of the structure through which Nietzsche articulates the nature of life, its valuation, and the ideal of human flourishing embodied in the figure of the Overman. For Nietzsche, life in its most fundamental form is inseparable from the will to power. This concept functions in his philosophical structure as a principle with ontological, evaluative, and existential implications. Thus, any serious engagement with Nietzsche's thought must address the will to power as a necessary condition for grasping the depth and radical scope of his revaluation of values. Without a precise interpretation of this concept, any attempt to comprehend Nietzschean ethics, his critique of morality, or his vision of its overcoming remains incomplete. Yet, despite its centrality, the will to power remains one of Nietzsche's most controversial concepts among his scholars. It is precisely this interpretive instability that renders a reexamination not merely justified, but imperative. Before undertaking an interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power, it is essential to address the logical tensions and conceptual ambiguities that have hindered its understanding, for any adequate interpretation must be capable of responding to them with clarity.

One of the ambiguities surrounding the will to power concerns its apparent incompatibility with Nietzsche's broader epistemological commitments, particularly his perspectivism and empiricist tendencies. Nietzsche consistently maintains that all knowledge, including moral judgments and evaluations, is conditioned by the perspective, affective orientation, and interpretive framework of the cognizing subject. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche famously writes: "Against positivism, which halts at phenomena-'There are only facts'-I would say: No, facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact 'in itself': Perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing." (1968, 267) This text summarizes Nietzsche's anti-foundationalist epistemology, according to which knowledge is not a neutral representation of an objective world, but the product of embodied perspectives shaped by instinctual and emotional forces. In this framework, even what we call 'facts' are expressions of competing instincts that impose their own interpretations. Within this structure, truth is understood not as correspondence to an objective order, but as a function of the subject's interpretive perspective.

In light of this, Nietzsche's frequent characterization of the will to power as a universal principle appears problematic. Consider, for example, his remarkable claim: "This world is the will to power-and nothing besides!" (1968, 550) Such statements suggest that Nietzsche is not simply describing a psychological structure but is advancing an ontological doctrine that purports to encompass the

totality of life. This raises a fundamental question: how can Nietzsche support a perspectivist epistemology on the one hand and advance a doctrine that claims to describe the nature of reality on the other? If all knowledge is historically, physiologically, and interpretively mediated—rooted in the shifting structures of embodied life—then any claim concerning the totality of reality, including the will to power, appears liable to contradiction.

What seems particularly necessary here is to clarify whether the will to power is universal or limited? In *Beyond Good and Evil* and some notes, Nietzsche speaks as if all reality, even inorganic matter, is the will to power. "[...] one would have gained the right to determine all efficient force univocally as will to power. The world viewed from inside, the world defined and determined according to its 'intelligible character' it would be 'will to power' and nothing else." (1966, 47, 48) But on the other hand, in many passages (especially in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* and his notes on physiology), he treats it as a principle of life and drives. "Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength; life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results." (1966, 21) This textual evidence requires us to clarify whether the will to power in Nietzsche's philosophy is a universal principle of being or just a principle related to living/psychological phenomena.

However, the tension becomes more acute when we consider Nietzsche's ongoing critique of metaphysics, especially his rejection of abstractions separate from embodied and sensory experience. Nietzsche repeatedly insists that all valid knowledge must be rooted in the phenomenal world—this world—and in the body. He explicitly rejects the concept of the "thing-in-itself" and sees metaphysical structures as signs of decay. However, the will to power seems to transcend the boundaries of empirical verification. It presents itself as a fundamental principle in the whole of life. This gives it the appearance of a metaphysical hypothesis—precisely the kind of theorizing that Nietzsche was directly opposed to.

If a reinterpretation of this doctrine can demonstrate that it functions as a principle of willing within both living processes and human phenomena—particularly at the level of drives and psychology—then the idea may be reconciled with Nietzsche's broader perspectivism and anti-metaphysical commitments. For perspectivism itself arises from the dynamic activity of drives within living beings, grounding interpretation in embodied existence rather than in transcendent or metaphysical realms. As Nietzsche emphasizes, "[...]it is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their for and against" (1968, 267)

Moreover, any interpretation of this doctrine must address a more fundamental and profound ambiguity, one that persists even when it is adapted to fit within the scope of Nietzsche's perspective and naturalism. This deeper concern stems from the common understanding of the concept of "power". In much philosophical and popular discourse, power is often equated with domination—that is, the capacity of one agent to exert control over another, whether an individual, a collective, or the natural world. From this perspective, the will to power is synonymous with a drive to dominate, subjugate, and conquer. This reading has led to some of the most morally disturbing interpretations of Nietzsche's thought, especially its historical connection to fascist ideology. For example, the Nazi regime was often presented as the political realization of Nietzsche's will to power, with its emphasis on domination and the glorification of power. This raises a serious ethical challenge: if Nietzsche's will to power is the fundamental principle for his revaluation of all values, does this mean that he advocates an ethics that affirms domination, conquest, and even cruelty as noble virtues? If so, that would imply Nietzsche both foresaw a development resembling Nazi imperial ambitions and, to some extent, gave it his approval. This ambiguity demands a clarification of exactly what Nietzsche meant by 'will' and 'power'—terms whose everyday connotations can obscure their distinct and redefined function in his philosophical project.

So far, then, Nietzsche seems to endorse three distinct but conflicting commitments in his philosophy:

1. Perspectivism – there is no objective reality independent of perspective; interpretation is not secondary to reality but constitutive of it.
2. Anti-metaphysical empiricism – knowledge must remain grounded in sensory experience, the body, and the phenomenal world; metaphysical speculation must be rejected as an escape from reality or a degeneracy.
3. The doctrine of the will to power serves as a universal principle that explains not only human psychology but also the structure of life.

In sum, these commitments seem to be in tension. If all knowledge is perspective and limited to empirical conditions, how can Nietzsche endorse a theory that claims to describe the fundamental nature of the world? Furthermore, in interpreting the will to power, we are faced with a serious and troubling moral question: If Nietzsche posits the will to power as the fundamental principle for the revaluation of all values, does this entail that he must endorse a moral orientation in which domination, conquest, and even oppression are affirmed as noble virtues? ¹

¹ This particular formulation of the ambiguities surrounding the will to power, though presented in various forms by Nietzsche scholars such as Richardson (1996) and Schacht (1983), is especially indebted to Reginster (2006), particularly his discussions in Chapter 3.

Nietzsche scholars have made various attempts to resolve some of these tensions. One of the most radical is advanced by Karl Löwith, who contends that a coherent interpretation of Nietzsche's thought is possible only if the concept of the will to power is abandoned altogether, as it is too ideologically precarious and conceptually unstable to serve as the foundation of a systematic philosophy. (Löwith, 1997)

On the other hand, some scholars have attempted to limit the ontological scope of the will to power. For example, Brian Leiter interprets it primarily as a psychological hypothesis. On this reading, Nietzsche is not making a metaphysical claim about the nature of reality, but rather a descriptive account of human motivation and behavior. (Leiter, 2002) Although this interpretation permits a certain compatibility between Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical epistemology and his appeal to the will to power, such a psychological reduction incurs a significant cost: it strips the concept of its broader philosophical function as a criterion of value and as a conceptual structure through which Nietzsche rethinks life, morality, and becoming.

Walter Kaufmann, a central figure in the postwar revival of Nietzsche studies, likewise concedes that the will to power involves a desire for control, but interprets this control chiefly as self-mastery. For Kaufmann, Nietzsche's ideal is not the tyrant or conqueror, but the autonomous individual who imposes creative order upon the chaos of his own instincts and psychic drives. (Kaufmann, 1974) Here, too, Kaufmann diminishes the concept's biological, ontological, and evaluative dimensions by reducing it to an ideal of autonomous self-regulation.

John Richardson also accepts that Nietzsche's conception of power involves a form of domination, but emphasizes that the dominated beings are not external individuals but internal forces—the instincts, drives, and psychic tendencies within the individual. For Nietzsche, health and power, he argues, lie in the creation of a productive internal hierarchy, where stronger drives organize and structure weaker drives. (Richardson, 1996) While Richardson's introspective approach rightly distances itself from reductive interpretations that equate the will to power with mere external domination, it risks compressing Nietzsche's evaluative framework into an overly structuralist account of internal drive management. Nietzsche's ideal figures are characterized less by the disciplined subjugation of internal forces than by their capacity to harness conflicting drives in ways that produce novel forms of life and new evaluative standards. In this sense, a model that privileges internal control risks overlooking the productive chaos, overflow, and emergent creativity that Nietzsche repeatedly identifies as central to the flourishing of higher types. Richardson's reading, therefore, may inadvertently flatten Nietzsche's conception of normativity, transforming a fundamentally generative and risk-laden process into a stabilized architecture of psychic health.

Maudemarie Clark offers another interpretation, one that challenges the assumption that Nietzsche equates power with domination at all. Instead, she emphasizes a more instrumental reading of power. In this view, the will to power is not a drive to rule over others, but a secondary phenomenon—an attempt to increase one’s ability to realize one’s values and ideals. (Clark, 1990) While this reading rightly emphasizes the normative dimension of Nietzsche’s concept, it carries the risk of reducing the will to power to a merely instrumental function. By positing it as a general capacity to pursue a set of goals, Clarke’s account shifts toward a kind of relativism, in which the will to power merely makes possible the realization of any goal and value to which the agent is committed. This raises a deeper concern: if the will to power refers simply to the effective pursuit of one’s own goals—regardless of their content—it is not clear why Nietzsche would have elevated it to a central tenet of his philosophy or used it as a standard for reevaluating values.

These interpretive discussions show that the will to power is neither politically neutral nor merely descriptive; rather, it has profound implications for ethics, authority, and the justification of values in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Also, to clarify the reevaluation of values in Nietzsche’s philosophy, which rests upon this concept, it is essential to articulate with conceptual precision what he means by the will to power. Such a clarification must preserve the full philosophical richness of the term and avoid any oversimplification and reductionism that would obscure its multifaceted normative and descriptive significance.

1.2 Schopenhauer's Will to Life versus Nietzsche's Will to Power

A crucial point of departure is the historical and philosophical context from which Nietzsche's concept of the will to power arises. It does not emerge in isolation within his philosophy, but rather in response to the metaphysical doctrine of Schopenhauer's will to life. For Schopenhauer, the will is the blind and irrational essence of all reality, which reveals itself in all organic endeavors and constitutes the inner metaphysical ground behind the phenomenal world. In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer introduces will as the underlying reality of all existence: "Will and effort are its whole essence" (1969, 312) Schopenhauer's metaphysical system is based on three main claims, which can be summarized as follows:

- First, a metaphysical force—will—underlies all reality.
- Second, this will is fundamentally directed toward the preservation and continuation of life.
- Third, since this effort is endless and insatiable, life is inherently characterized by suffering and despair.

It should be emphasized that Schopenhauer's will is not a purposeful agent but a blind, striving force that cannot be actualized through any specific end or goal. As he writes: "Will is completely without need of a final goal or destination. It always strives, because striving is its only nature[...] Therefore, such striving is incapable of ultimate satisfaction" (1969, 308). In short, this will is an endless, self-driven force whose essence is constant striving, making ultimate satisfaction impossible.

Having outlined Schopenhauer's concept of the will to life, it is necessary to distinguish it clearly from Nietzsche's will to power and to examine the points of divergence, in order to clarify how Nietzsche reconceives the nature and function of the will. Nietzsche seems to inherit Schopenhauer's insight into the primacy of the will, but he reconfigures its structure, function, and ontological position. Instead of seeing the will as an irrational compulsion toward mere existence and self-preservation, he redefines it as an active, formative, and self-overcoming force. In general terms, Nietzschean will is a will not to preserve but to expand; not to endure suffering but to overcome it. Nietzsche's conception, then, appears both in the continuation of Schopenhauer's voluntarism and in the radical opposition to its metaphysical conclusions. In other words, what distinguishes Nietzsche is not the rejection of the centrality of the will, but the naturalistic transformation and demetaphysicalization of its structure.

It is important here to clarify how Nietzsche demetaphysicalizes the Schopenhauerian conception of the will, and subsequently, how he naturalizes it, along with the theoretical and

philosophical implications of this reinterpretation. Nietzsche's remarks in *Beyond Good and Evil* are illuminating for our discussion. He writes:

"Suppose nothing were 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down or up to any other reality besides the reality of our drives, for thinking is merely a relation of these drives to each other: is it not permitted to make the experiment and ask the question whether this 'given' would not be sufficient for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or "material") world? I mean, not as a deception, as mere appearance," an 'idea' (in the Sense of Berkeley and Schopenhauer) but as holding the same rank of reality as our affect, as a more primitive form of the world of affects in which everything still lies contained in a powerful unity [...] Suppose, finally, we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of one basic form of the will, namely, of the will to power, as my proposition has it; suppose all organic functions could be traced back to this will to power and one could also find in it the solution of the problem of procreation and nourishment-it is one problem-then one would have gained the right to determine all efficient force univocally as will to power. The world viewed from inside, the world defined and determined according to its 'intelligible character'-it would be 'will to power' and nothing else." (1966, 47, 48)

The first point to note is how Nietzsche develops his explanation: the living organism is constituted primarily by its drives and instincts, while what we call objectivity arises only as a secondary perspective — a derivative form of interpretation rather than a fundamental ground. In this aphorism, which opens with a thought experiment, Nietzsche envisions a form of self-orientation that diverges from Descartes. While Descartes begins with the thinking subject to establish certainty, Nietzsche critiques the privileging of rational cognition over the dynamic, affective, and instinctual aspects of life. Instead of grounding knowledge and being in an abstract, rational mind, he urges an approach that starts with the realm of instincts and drives as constitutive of experience.

Accordingly, A key insight for understanding how Nietzsche demetaphysicalizes the will is that, from the outset, he reconceives thought not as a rational, immaterial process capable of accessing metaphysical or objective truth, but as a relational manifestation of drives. That is, human thought is never a neutral spectator of the world in order to reach a fixed, metaphysical truth, but rather a battlefield between opposing internal forces (desires, instincts, impulses). This is also consistent with his broader naturalistic psychology, in which consciousness is a secondary or superficial phenomenon arising from deeper physiological and instinctual layers. The crucial point here is that Nietzsche rejects readings of the world as illusion—such as Berkeley's idealism or Schopenhauer's metaphysics of representation and volition—and does not reduce the material world to mere projection. Instead, he wants to place the two concepts of "material" and "instinctual" on the same ontological level, where both are manifestations of force or will. What emerges from this account

is a kind of naturalistic monism, meaning that if all life processes (instincts, desires, functions such as reproduction and nutrition) can be reduced to one basic type of will, namely the will to power, then we have a single explanatory principle for psychological and biological activity. In sum, Nietzsche's will to power demetaphysicalizes the concept of will by rooting it in naturalistic processes. Nietzsche's will is neither a transcendent nor noumenal substratum; rather, it is a multifaceted, biological and psychological, immanent structure of becoming that effectively replaces both the 'thing-in-itself' and Schopenhauer's fixed metaphysical will.

Nietzsche's divergence from Schopenhauer can also be traced to a fundamental philosophical issue: the nature of the will. Specifically, this divergence turns on whether the will is structurally singular or plural. Resolving this question is crucial for the aims of this thesis, as it illuminates Nietzsche's conception of subjectivity, power, and the organization of the will, as well as its relation to valuation—issues that can only be fully understood through careful engagement with this problem. In this regard, Nietzsche writes: "Philosophers are accustomed to speak of the will as if it were the best-known thing in the world; indeed, Schopenhauer has given us to understand that the will alone is really known to us, absolutely and completely known, without subtraction or addition. But again and again it seems to me that in this case, too, Schopenhauer only did what philosophers are in the habit of doing—he adopted a popular prejudice and exaggerated it. Willing seems to me to be above all something complicated, something that is a unit only as a word, and it is precisely in this one word that the popular prejudice lurks [...] In all willing, it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis, as already said, of a social structure composed of many souls." (1966, 25) The key point here is that where Schopenhauer presents the will as a single, blind, and fundamental, unified metaphysical force, Nietzsche challenges this very unity. For Nietzsche, the concept of 'will' is not self-evident but rather a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, one that has been distorted by the simplifying constraints of language. The apparent unity of the will conceals its complex internal structure. Nietzsche provocatively describes the will as a social structure of drives and emotions—a dynamic plurality rather than a metaphysical monad.

Moreover, he emphasizes that in every act of the will, there is an internal distinction of forces: one that commands and another that obeys. The will is therefore a "relation"—a hierarchy within itself rather than a single metaphysical constant. More precisely, Nietzsche moves from a metaphysical unity in Schopenhauer to an internal plurality. It is on this basis that Nietzsche argues that by collapsing the multiplicity of drives into a single, undifferentiated Will, Schopenhauer reifies what should be understood as a process and thereby negates the internal tensions and hierarchies that make willing possible in the first place. Whereas Schopenhauer turns willing into an object —

“the Will” — Nietzsche emphasizes willing as an activity, a dynamic interplay of commanding and obeying forces. The cost of Schopenhauer’s move, Nietzsche maintains, is the obliteration of the active structure of willing, its agonistic and hierarchical character.

This brings us to a deeper insight in Nietzsche’s philosophy: the genealogical emergence of hierarchy. At the heart of willing — and therefore of life itself — lies a relation between dominant and subordinate forces; willing is never neutral or equal. Thus Nietzsche transforms the concept of will from a single metaphysical principle into a relational field of forces, a process of interpretation, struggle, and self-overcoming that makes continuous becoming possible.

While the previous analysis highlights and provides explanations for the multifaceted nature of the will in Nietzsche, it ultimately leads to a more fundamental question about the difference between Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's conceptions of the will: why, for Nietzsche, is the will oriented not toward preservation and survival, but toward power? To answer this question, this aphorism of Nietzsche is illuminating: "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." (1978, 115) Nietzsche argues that the will is oriented toward a qualitatively distinct aim—namely, the attainment of power—rather than mere preservation of life. A potentially revealing point is the question that Nietzsche repeatedly formulates: What does a will want? Should not be understood as a search for a goal, a motive, or an object for this will. What a will wants is an affirmation of its difference. At the heart of this shift is a subtle but powerful critique of the idea that a being can meaningfully will its continued existence. The key point, and where Nietzsche sees the incoherence, lies in the fact that what is already real and exists does not want to remain so, but simply is. The will, if it is to have any direction, must go beyond the mere preservation of the status quo. Thus, Nietzsche sees the "will to life" as a repetition or misreading of what the will actually does. The key distinction, then, lies in the direction and intensity of the will. Accordingly, for Nietzsche, the will is therefore expansive and active, aimed beyond mere survival, toward the continuous overcoming of resistances.

At this point, it is necessary to examine the role of power within the structure of the will. Power, for Nietzsche, is not something that can be achieved, nor a motive that drives the will forward. Rather, it is the constitutive principle of the will itself - that which distinguishes its inner activity. The term "power" does not name an external goal of the will, but refers to the inherent tendency of the will itself to intensify and reconfigure itself (the form and intensity of the will). It is this that impels the will to overcome its present state, rather than merely preserve it.

The question that arises here is why power ought not to be conceived as a representable goal. Interpreting power as an external goal for the will stands in opposition to Nietzsche's project of reevaluating values. More precisely, such an interpretation subjects the will to predetermined cognitive conditions—that is, to the very values that define what is legitimate and desirable within a given moral order. In this framework, 'power' becomes synonymous with familiar markers such as wealth, prestige, status, or recognition. However, this conception of power reduces the will to a desire to be subsumed within an existing evaluative structure—that is, to a drive to affirm oneself according to values that are external rather than self-generated. In such frameworks power is derived from the system of values that one seeks to acquire or secure. It is a will to conform to or appropriate something that is already considered legitimate. Here, the will is no longer creative, but dependent and directed toward an externally given value, and becomes merely a means of reproducing the social order and existing values.

Moreover, contrary to metaphysical and theological traditions—which conceive of the will as a striving for a fixed goal or good—Nietzsche explicitly links the will to creation, which is essentially impermanent and creative. "Will, that is the name of the liberator and joy-bringer; thus I taught you, my friends." (1978, 139) also, "To will liberates, for to will is to create: thus I teach. And you shall learn solely in order to create." (1978, 206) The will is creative and liberating, demonstrating that it is not bound by fixed values or external ends. In this sense, its creative power entails a principle of impermanence: the will does not conform to predetermined standards, such as an external notion of power, but instead constitutes its own evaluative criterion.² On this basis, the will to power can manifest in a diverse range of activities aimed at distinct ends. Nietzsche, for instance, suggests that humans can realize the will to power through pursuits as varied as the acquisition of knowledge, the creation of art, and the practice of ascetic discipline.³ Power, then, is not a determinate goal in competition with other goals that the agent may pursue. The ascetic manifests the will to power by overcoming his body's resistance to suffering; the artist overcomes the inherent difficulties of transforming a blank canvas into a painting; the scientist overcomes the obstacles and challenges inherent in his quest for understanding.

² For further and broader discussions on why Nietzschean power resists any formulation as a determinate or representable goal, see (Deleuze, 1983). My account in this section adapts some aspects of Deleuze's analysis of this problem.

³ Nietzsche, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Second Treatise, analyzes the ascetic ideal and its role in giving meaning to human suffering. He observes that human beings—particularly priests—channel their drives, instincts, and frustrations into disciplined activities, thereby transforming their powerlessness into a structured expression of will. Although Nietzsche's discussion is situated within the ascetic context, this dynamic extends to other human endeavors: the pursuit of knowledge, artistic creation, and similar activities can likewise be understood as expressions of the will's striving for articulation, mastery, and intensification.

1.3 What is the will to power?

We may now turn to a careful conceptual analysis of Nietzsche's frequently stated claim that 'everything is the will to power.' What does it signify for beings to possess a 'will to power'? Is Nietzsche employing the German term 'Macht' in its colloquial sense, or does it carry a more specific philosophical meaning?

Nietzsche, as Richardson shows, applies 'will to power' in its most primary sense to sub-personal forces — drives, instincts, 'quanta of power' — rather than to individual selves; the personal sphere is a later, more complex manifestation. In this view, the will to power originates at the most elementary level of life and expresses itself through the constant effort to overcome resistance, to establish form, and to expand capacity. Since, for Nietzsche, every organism is fundamentally a complex configuration of competing drives, individuals can be described as expressions of the will to power only secondarily and derivatively. Therefore, Understanding Nietzsche's ontology of power requires starting not with individuals or political actors, but with the intrinsic dynamics of life itself. (Richardson, 1996)

In this regard, it is helpful to begin with a selection of Nietzsche's remarks on the will to power. His descriptions of this concept are often expressed in language that remains largely ambiguous. He associates power with a family of terms such as "expanding," "overcoming," "dominance," and "shaping." He writes that the will to power is "will's forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way." (1968, 370) Also, "The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore, it seeks that which resists it." (1968, 346) "The will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance." (1968, 370) "[Power or force] is a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs". (1989, 45) Taken together, these aphorisms indicate that the will to power is most coherently understood as a principle of becoming, intrinsically oriented toward process rather than toward a predetermined end. Within this framework, 'victory' is not to be understood as the attainment of definitive domination, but rather as the continuous process of confronting and surmounting resistance—a dynamic through which progressively greater expressions of power are enacted.

A similar dynamic is evident in another passage from Nietzsche's writings: "This, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, [...] without goal, unless the joy of the 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 all its riddles? [...] This world is the will to power and nothing besides!

And you yourselves are also this will to power and nothing besides." (1968, 550) This passage should not be interpreted as a metaphysical thesis claiming a single, fundamental essence for all things. Rather, it is more appropriate to read it as an ontological and evaluative claim about the structural principles and dynamic character of life. Nietzsche's association of "eternal self-creation" and "eternal self-destruction" depicts a world in constant flux, devoid of fixed or final goals—unless, as he provocatively points out, "the joy of the circle is itself a goal." In this context, the image of the circle, while it can refer to eternal recurrence, also, on this interpretation, implies the structure of the will: A cyclical process in which desire and longing give rise to effort; effort encounters resistance; resistance, once overcome, yields mastery and satisfaction; and satisfaction, in turn, engenders new desires, thereby perpetuating the cycle.

The will to power, therefore, is not the striving for any particular fixed external goal. Nietzsche explicitly denies the existence of a final or ultimate goal. He famously claims that "the world is not an organism at all, but chaos" (1968, 379). This claim is not merely rhetorical. For Nietzsche, the world lacks any fixed, teleological, or ultimately rational structure. The world is in a constant state of "becoming," never fixed in a final or intelligible form, and thus can never arrive at any fundamental "truth" in the Hegelian or metaphysical sense. As he puts it, the world is "As a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth, for there is no truth." (1968, 330) This conception of reality as ever-changing and non-teleological challenges any metaphysical view of the world as inherently rational, orderly, or divinely ordained.

The question that arises here is, then, where does the will to power fit into such an account of the world? To understand this, we need to reflect a little on Nietzsche's concept of chaos.⁴ He is not suggesting that reality is devoid of structure, but rather that it does not conform to inherited metaphysical or religious ideals of order. "What he is saying about the world is that it does not have the character of a fixed and immutable order of being, or of a moral order, or of a unified and coordinated organism, or of an orderly development unfolding in accordance with an inner or preordained purpose, or of a complex of processes and events occurring in accordance with a system of natural or rational laws, or of an organization answering to our idea of beauty, our logic and reason, or our needs and desires. In short, it neither constitutes nor manifests any of the sorts of order we are accustomed to think it has or are disposed to desire it to have." (Schacht 1983, 196) In short, Nietzsche rejects the idea of a world that is inherently meaningful, knowable through reason, or designed for human understanding. Just as he argues that life has no intrinsic moral value

⁴ Nietzsche's notion of "chaos" has been most systematically analyzed by Richard Schacht. What follows draws on his exposition in (*Nietzsche*, 1983), especially Chapter 4.

by traditional metaphysical standards, he insists that the world itself appears chaotic when judged by the same criteria.

At this point, Nietzsche's conception of the will to power comes into view, revealing a position far more nuanced than a mere declaration of nihilism. He does not confine his account of worldly chaos to a nihilistic regression from the dictum 'God is truth' to the fanatical conviction that 'everything is a lie' and 'everything is meaningless'. Nietzsche's rejection of metaphysical order does not entail an embrace of relativism. His invocation of 'chaos' functions strategically—to unsettle entrenched frameworks—yet it is accompanied by an equally strong concern for what may be affirmed once such frameworks are abandoned. Thus, after declaring that "the world does not have the value we thought it had," he immediately adds that "the world might be far more valuable than we used to believe." (Nietzsche 1968, 22) From this perspective, calling the world "chaos" is a rejection of traditional notions of order, 'Stop telling ourselves tales —lies— the old way', but not of all forms of intelligibility or value.

That is to say, the world lacks order in the sense of a divinely ordained purpose, rational design, or fixed moral structure. Nietzsche does not dissolve order into an anything-goes relativism; rather, he proposes an ontological reconfiguration: order is not a pre-existent metaphysical substrate but an emergent, relational structure constituted by forces, drives, and power relations.⁵ This relational ontology is dynamic and contingent—it resists metaphysical fixation—yet it supplies intelligible criteria for assessment, since certain configurations of relations promote life, creativity, and strength while others diminish them. Nietzsche's appeal to "chaos" therefore functions both as a critique of metaphysical certainties and as the starting point for reconceiving order in terms of life, becoming, and evaluative standards grounded in relations rather than absolutes.

With this explanation in mind, the will to power is a structural feature of life itself: This conception defines the will as a continual process of self-transcendence—surpassing its present form and reorganizing existing conditions. In other words, power here designates the element of the differentiating relation. Power, then, is not what the will wants, but rather that which enacts the willing within the will itself. However, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between the will and the will to power. The will is what can, in a way, be the expression of a capacity. But the will to power is what wills, the structuring tendency that drives the will towards intensity, reinforcement, and domination. A force that constantly overcomes its current state, resists stagnation, and moves

⁵ By 'relational' I mean an ontology in which entities and values are constituted by networks of relations and forces; this should not be read as moral or epistemic relativism, since Nietzsche's account permits differential evaluation of perspectives according to life-affirming criteria.

beyond itself. As John Richardson says "The claim that we will is not a claim about what we will; It is rather a claim about how we will. (Richardson 1996, 21) In this sense, it is a will that wills itself – not in the sense of repetition, but in the sense of self-overcoming. It does not return to the same point, but moves in a creative circle in which each completion is the beginning of a new ascent. It is then understandable that what Nietzsche resists is not purposiveness in the literal sense, but the metaphysical notion of ends as fixed, final, or static goals. He criticizes teleological frameworks that posit a predestined goal, the attainment of which ends effort – and thus stops the dynamic flow of becoming.

Here, it must be made clear why the will transcends its present state and form of activity? Why should it not be content with the present kind of willing and remain in the same cycle of present desire? It is here that Nietzsche mentions a concept called 'pathos'.⁶ "The will to power not a being, not a becoming, but a pathos, the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerg." (1968, 339) In this concise and subtle statement, Nietzsche claims that the will to power is not a being (Sein), not a becoming (Werden), but a pathos—a term that requires careful philosophical interpretation. The Greek word 'pathos' usually refers to feeling, passion, or suffering. Nietzsche uses it not in the sense of passive emotionality, but as a primary emotional tension—a felt intensity that ontologically precedes any conceptual structure. Thus, Nietzsche presents the will to power not as a substance (a metaphysical "thing") or even as a teleological process (becoming towards a goal), but as a dynamic and emotional state – a sense of effort, tension, and differential force. In this way, we can formulate pathos as:

- Not a being (because it is not a static substance),
- Not a becoming in the teleological sense (because it does not move towards a fixed goal),
- But an emotional state that intensifies becoming and volition, and is the fundamental intensity of life in the structure of the will, and the element that causes the transcendence of the current cycle of volition.

More broadly, the will to power can be understood as manifesting itself in the very sensibility of the will. This renders the will to power ontologically productive: it is not merely one entity among others but the generative principle through which beings emerge, persist, and transform. Rather than remaining caught within the metaphysical opposition of being and becoming, the will to power operates as the underlying force that both constitutes and reconfigures these categories

⁶ Deleuze offers a detailed account of the concept of "pathos" in relation to the will to power in (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 1983). He links "pathos" to the notion of "force," describing it as the quality of force, that is, the affective tone or sensitivity through which one force encounters another.

themselves. An important point to avoid misunderstanding is that when Nietzsche calls the will to power pathos, he means that this feeling is not directed towards a representable object (such as “power” or “self-preservation”), but rather within the very essence of the act of will and effort. This willing and striving has a completely non-instrumental quality, in the sense that it is not subordinate to ends; rather, it expresses the intensity of life and will itself. Nietzsche’s use of pathos here also reflects his anti-essentialism, anti-teleology, and his desire to think of life and value beyond metaphysical categories. This point is thus in line with Nietzsche’s critique of mechanistic or moralistic accounts of life and subjectivity. He replaces the Descartes subject or Schopenhauerian metaphysical will with a multiplicity of opposing drives, and their qualitative intensity—their pathos—becomes the real force of life.

Nietzsche thus rejects the idea that drives are neutral forces awaiting a higher principle to assign them ends. As Richardson convincingly argues and elaborates in his book, each drive is already oriented, and its power lies in the intensification of this orientation. Sexual desire, for instance, manifests power not in addition to its object but through the very force with which it pursues it. (Richardson, 1996) This view undermines the notion of a unitary will governing the psyche from above, instead presenting the individual as a dynamic multiplicity of drives whose shifting interplay defines both stability and transformation. The sexual drive, for example, does not aim at power in the abstract and then choose sexuality as a means to that end. It already values and seeks a certain kind of sexual power. Similarly, the drive to eat does not become a sexual impulse for the sake of more power. The drives remain on their specific paths - they aim to strengthen, deepen, and overcome resistances in their areas of action.

From this perspective, Nietzschean power is fundamentally different from goals such as pleasure or political control. Pleasure can be seen as a general, first-order goal that can be produced by many activities (eating, sex, rest) while remaining conceptually distinct from them. Power, by contrast, cannot be abstracted from the activity it intensifies. In other words, every act of the will presupposes a particular orientation, and the will to power describes the “how” of expressing that orientation more fully, not the “why” of choosing it. (Richardson, 1996)

But here a problem arises: if, within an organism, a drive were ever to be fully satisfied, the result in practice would appear to be a kind of stagnation born of that very satisfaction. Here, a rethinking of the concept of teleology is needed. Our usual concept of teleology assumes that drives seek the complete satisfaction of their inner goals and that their effort ends when that goal is achieved. In this model, satisfaction is conceived as a stable state: a point of stillness at which the drive ceases its activity or maintains it in repetition. However, Nietzsche’s philosophy challenges

this assumption. The will to power does not aim at stillness; it is not fulfilled by the mere attainment of a goal, but by heightening the very process of striving—by overcoming resistance and deepening its own activity in an unending becoming. We can see this logic at work even in the most familiar drives—such as hunger or lust. These drives operate cyclically: satisfaction is temporary, vitality fades, and then they are gradually revived as the goal reappears. Each cycle renews the effort and with it the opportunity to carry out a more intense or effective search. This repeated arc of desire, resistance, and conquest contains a primitive form of power. However, Nietzsche sees this kind of intracyclic repetition as worthless. For him, real power lies not in the repetition of familiar patterns but in their transformation. The more important form of growth is not within the cycle but between cycles and after each satisfaction. A transformation of the structure of the drive itself. Rather than simply satisfying a need over and over again, the drive reconfigures its form of expression—it elevates the entire pattern of activity to a higher level.

Here lies an important point: as discussed, the goal of Nietzsche's will to power is to break habitual patterns and evolve new forms. This is where, in a broader sense, the difference between the Darwinian instinct of self-preservation and the Schopenhauerian will to life and the Nietzschean will to power becomes more apparent. In the first two cases, the drives basically strive in cycles of habitual patterns simply to maintain the status quo, a primary effort that the drive itself has. This cycle of desire, resistance, and satisfaction is also present in its most rudimentary form—a state that merely survives and preserves the existing order, marked by a passive contentment and a longing for comfort, exemplified in Nietzsche's portrayal of the Last Man.

The question, then, is how—without resorting to the anthropomorphizing of drives—it is possible for this process to occur, and for the habitual patterns of the desire cycle to be disrupted and surpassed. The answer to this question lies in the concept of 'resistance'.⁷ Nietzsche conceives of power not as an isolated force that can be exercised independently, but as something that arises only within relations of tension. Power becomes visible when it encounters what resists it; without such resistance, there is nothing against which its activity can be measured or intensified. In this sense, resistance is not a mere external hindrance to the will, but a constitutive element of its very operation. The drive to surpass oneself depends upon obstacles, since it is only through opposition that it acquires direction and force. A world entirely without friction would undermine the will to power rather than actualize it, for it would remove the very conditions through which striving and self-overcoming become possible.

⁷ I follow Bernard Reginster's emphasis on the constructive role of 'resistance' in accounts of the will to power; see (Reginster, 2006), especially Chapters 3 and 4.

Thus, when Nietzsche describes will to power as "will's forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way." (1968, 370), his language of 'mastery' should not be taken to mean the mere removal of obstacles. Rather, it refers to an activity in which resistance is taken up, engaged with, and integrated into the agent's unfolding structure of abilities. What is 'mastered' is not simply an external hindrance but a field of challenge that calls forth the reorganization and intensification of one's powers.

In this sense, goal-directed striving functions as a framework within which resistance is encountered and metabolized; the value of the activity derives less from the goal itself and more from the transformative interplay between the agent and what opposes them. Thus, the will to power manifests as a mode of self-expansion grounded in the active appropriation of resistance, rather than as a simple drive toward success or satisfaction.

1.4 Revaluation of pleasure and suffering in Nietzsche's will to power

The theme of resistance within the will to power reveals an important shift in Nietzsche's treatment of pleasure and suffering. Instead of aligning pleasure with the fulfillment of desire, Nietzsche reverses the common psychological view that satisfaction ends striving. He explicitly rejects what he calls a "superficial theory," according to which pleasure results from the will's completion: "It is not the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure (I want to fight this superficial theory—the absurd psychological counterfeiting of the nearest things—), but rather the will's forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way. The feeling of pleasure lies precisely in the dissatisfaction of the will, in the fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance." (1968, 370)

On this reading, dissatisfaction is not a sign of failure but the very precondition of self-overcoming. What the will to power seeks is not quietude or repose, but fresh obstacles through which its strength can be tested and magnified. Pleasure, in turn, is nothing other than the affective response that accompanies this intensification: it appears when resistance has been challenged and overcome, when power feels itself expand.

This perspective clarifies Nietzsche's defense of suffering. Hardship, conflict, and even humiliation are not to be lamented but valued, since they provide the occasions for growth. He provocatively claims in several places that he wishes suffering—illness, loneliness, humiliation—for his friends, not out of cruelty, but out of the belief that such experiences can be conditions for the deepest growth. His notorious statement in *The Antichrist* makes this point plain: "What is good?—whatever increases the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself." (1976, 45) Painful experiences, far from undermining life, create the conditions for its enhancement.

Nietzsche returns to this theme when he observes that the ordinary disquiet of our instincts—hunger, sexual desire, or the impulse to movement—should not be seen as life-denying. Rather, these states invigorate: "The normal dissatisfaction of our drives, e.g., hunger, the sexual drive, the drive to motion, contains in it absolutely nothing depressing; it works rather as an agitation of the feeling of life, as every rhythm of small, painful stimuli strengthens it, (whatever pessimists may say). This dissatisfaction, instead of making one disgusted with life, is the great stimulus to life." (1968, 370) In this sense, dissatisfaction does not diminish but sustains vitality. It keeps the will in motion, pushing it beyond its present form, and thereby deepens the experience of pleasure. The more demanding the resistance, the greater the possibility for an overcoming that yields joy—not

through passivity or the cessation of desire, but through the active exertion and transformation of the self.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify what is meant when we say that the will to power “desires” suffering and discontent: does it literally desire them, and if so, in what sense or form? To understand the contradictory nature of Nietzsche's conception of the will to power, it is useful to contrast it with Schopenhauer's concept of suffering. Schopenhauer describes suffering as an obstruction to the satisfaction of the will: "We call the obstacle that stands between the will and its temporary goal suffering." (1969, 309) From this point of view, the desire for happiness essentially entails the desire to eliminate suffering - that is, to eliminate all obstacles that stand between the will and its realization.

Nietzsche fundamentally rejects the notion that the telos of life is ease or rest achieved by eliminating all obstacles and attaining what is desired. "Man does not seek pleasure and does not avoid displeasure [...] Pleasure and displeasure are mere consequences, mere epiphenomena; what man wants, what every smallest part of a living organism wants, is an increase of power. Pleasure or displeasure follow from the striving after that; driven by that will, it seeks resistance, it needs something that opposes it. Displeasure, as an obstacle to its will to power, is therefore a normal fact, the normal ingredient of every organic event; man does not avoid it, he is rather in continual need of it; every victory, every feeling of pleasure, every event, presupposes a resistance overcome." (1968, 373) Thus, an increase in power occurs only through the presence of resistance and its overcoming. Accordingly, suffering—understood as resistance to the will—is not a mere unfortunate byproduct of life, but an essential condition for its intensification. Therefore:

- At its core, the will to power expresses itself through confrontation: it seeks out and asserts itself against obstacles.
- What we ordinarily call “suffering” is simply how this resistance is felt in lived experience, as the tension of striving against hindrance.
- For that reason, the will to power cannot be separated from suffering; striving and desire inevitably involve it, since without resistance there is nothing to overcome.

A similar paradox recurs in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche writes: "I must be struggle and becoming and an end and an opposition to ends. [...] Whatever I create and however much I love it, soon I must oppose it and my love; thus, my will wills it." (1978, 115) This text illuminates a central implication of Nietzsche's conception of the will to power, which is that it never culminates in a final state of rest or fulfillment. Any attainment is temporary. Each act of creation, mastery, or achieved goal is immediately unsettled by the will's own tendency to push beyond its present form.

The will to power, then, should not be seen as a possession or a completed state of strength, but as a dynamic process in which power grows through the ongoing confrontation with resistance. This process can be sketched as a recurring sequence:

1. A drive or instinct sets its aim upon a particular object or outcome.
2. That striving inevitably encounters resistance, whether from other drives within the self or from external circumstances.
3. In overcoming these challenges, the will expresses and magnifies itself, producing both a sense of mastery and a renewed impulse toward further striving.

What matters, however, is that the moment of satisfaction does not bring closure. Instead, it initiates a new phase of striving, since the will requires renewed resistance in order to remain active. Nietzsche's conception of the will to power is therefore best grasped not as a possession one can hold onto, but as an ongoing movement that continually re-creates itself through cycles of desire, opposition, and temporary fulfillment.

In this light, dissatisfaction is not a flaw but the very mark of vitality. To treat satisfaction as final—resting content with what has been achieved—would amount to extinguishing the will's energy. Each fulfilled aim undermines itself, for it abolishes the resistance against which the will measures its strength.⁸ Thus, "satisfaction" paradoxically interrupts the will's activity, halting the struggle that defines its essence. Power, then, is not a fixed condition but a relation, enacted in the interplay of striving, contending, and overcoming. The will to power names precisely this restless process of self-transcendence, in which suffering is not an unfortunate byproduct but the indispensable medium through which life exerts and heightens itself.

Here, it is necessary to examine the consequence of this paradox that lies at the heart of Nietzsche's conception of the will to power. In this regard, this part of Nietzsche's aphorism offers a clue to the implications of this view: "Whatever I create and however much I love it, soon I must oppose it and my love; thus, my will wills it." (1978, 115) This statement captures the fundamental tension of the will to power: the creations and victories of the will must ultimately be negated or overcome.

For the will to power, achievements are never final but only provisional stages in a continuing process of self-overcoming. Once a goal is reached, the will does not rest; it immediately converts

⁸ In this section, I draw on Reginster's analysis of 'resistance' in the will to power and its implications for suffering and pleasure in Nietzsche's philosophy, and I follow his general framework in contrasting this with Schopenhauer's account of suffering (Reginster 2006, especially chapters 3 and 4).

that attainment into the ground for further striving and so effectively transcends or negates the prior success. Hence, the will to power is a principle of becoming, not of being: its fulfilment consists in the ongoing continuation of overcoming, not in any lasting end-state. "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." (Reginster 2006, 137) Accordingly, once a task is completed and its cycle fulfilled, it ceases to be a genuine test of power—its mere repetition would be empty and devoid of meaning.

This logic of self-overcoming, as Reginster (2006) makes clear with an example, can be clearly seen in Nietzsche's analysis of the desire to know. For Nietzsche, knowledge is not the impartial search for truth, but the manifestation of the will to power. Knowing is an act of overcoming resistance: resistance to confusion, error, the unknown. But once a problem is solved, it is no longer a real challenge. The will to power thus pushes the knower beyond any level of understanding attained, to deeper and more difficult problems. This will is not satisfied by retracing old paths or confirming what is already known. It seeks novelty, difficulty, and resistance. Thus, the will to power is not self-destructive but self-destabilizing. It resists certainty, closure, and satisfaction. Its structure is inherently endless. From this perspective, Nietzsche's claim is not that the will to power undermines itself, but that its satisfaction lies in its own permanent "discontent." It is a desire that cannot—and should not—be permanently satisfied.

1.5 The Relation of the Will to Power to Other Drives

To deepen our understanding of Nietzsche's will to power, it is crucial to examine its relationship to other human drives. This relationship provides insight into the distinctive structure of the will to power and how it functions not as an instinct among others but as something fundamentally different. In what follows, I will attempt to examine several interpretive positions on this relationship—particularly reductionist, pluralist, and instrumentalist readings—and offer a critical response that points toward a more appropriate account.

First: The will to power may be understood as the principle underlying all instincts and desires, which are ultimately its manifestations. Yet this interpretation faces a conceptual difficulty: if every drive is ultimately reducible to the will to power, then the boundary between this will and the individual drives dissolves, collapsing Nietzsche's psychology into a monolithic principle that risks erasing the very distinctions needed to explain the diversity of motivations.

Second: The second path that can be considered is to present the will to power as merely one instinct among others, an interpretation that emphasizes Nietzsche's plurality of drives. While this position preserves psychological diversity, it struggles to account for Nietzsche's broader normative ambitions. If the will to power is merely one drive among others, it becomes unclear how it could occupy the central role Nietzsche assigns it—as the organizing principle of life, action, and value.

Third: The third view, developed by Maudemarie Clark, suggests that the will to power should be understood as a second-order desire, that is, the desire to be able to satisfy first-order desires. In this view, the will to power arises not independently but in response to the needs of other, more fundamental drives. She argues that all individuals, insofar as they have desires, have a will to power; and since the satisfaction of every desire requires effectiveness or influence, the will to power, as a means, arises in this way. (Clark, 1990)

But this utilitarian view has several major problems: first, if the will to power is merely a second-order or instrumental desire, then it becomes subordinate to other, supposedly more fundamental, instincts, and this is in direct conflict with the importance that Nietzsche attributes to it. Second, and more significantly, this interpretation overlooks one of the will to power's most decisive features: its inherent limitlessness. If the will to power were merely a means to satisfying first-order desires, it would lose its function once those desires were fulfilled. Nietzsche's account rejects this. The will to power does not terminate in instrumental satisfaction; its activity is intrinsically unending. In his philosophy, the will to power is affirmed not as a means to some further goal, but as an end in itself—indivisible from life and from the very structure of valuation.

Fourth: A fourth possible interpretation is to reverse the instrumental relationship proposed by Maudemarie Clark. From this perspective, it is not that the will to power makes possible the satisfaction of individual drives, but rather that these drives themselves are subordinate to a more fundamental goal: power. Each drive—whether for knowledge, pleasure, or self-preservation—is reinterpreted not as an end in itself but as a functional mechanism in the broader pursuit of power. In this framework, power becomes the ultimate end to which all drives are subordinate.

While this inversion may at first seem to restore a kind of unity to Nietzsche's account of the will to power, it seems to have serious problems. Most fundamentally, by reducing all drives to mere means in the pursuit of a fixed goal called "power," this view undermines one of the most crucial features of Nietzsche's account: its dynamic, self-overcoming nature. Nietzsche repeatedly insists that the will to power is not oriented toward a fixed goal or a static final state, but is defined by perpetual striving, expansion, and overcoming, functioning as the fundamental principle of life itself. Once power is conceived as a final, determinate, and static end, the will's fluidity, multiplicity, and capacity for continual self-transcendence—it's very ceaseless activity—are forfeited.

Fifth: Richardson's interpretative view is in some way a combination of the last two views, namely that each drive has both a specific goal and, at the same time, a deeper will to power - that is, each drive not only pursues its own goal (e.g. hunger for nourishment, curiosity for knowledge), but also seeks to intensify and maximize its own activity, which expresses its power. The point is that Richardson rejects the notion that the goal is the maximum attainment of goals, arguing instead that Nietzsche identifies power with development. (Richardson, 1996) Richardson's objection seems to be based on the assumption that if the will to power aims at maximum attainment, the goal is complete, the cycle of desire and will is closed, and it implies a final, static state. However, for Nietzsche, the will to power is not forever satisfied by the attainment of a goal; it seeks its goal in the most intense, difficult, and resistant way possible—not in order to rest in its realization, but in order to surpass it. Accordingly, development is not the goal of the drive, but rather a by-product of its striving for its maximum expression.⁹

Sixth: Bernard Reginster's influential reading — shared in important respects with John Richardson — frames Nietzsche's will to power as the maximal realization of the internal teleology of discrete drives: each drive seeks not merely the satisfaction of its proximate aim but the

⁹ I have derived and adapted the first five views on the relationship between the will to power and other drives from (Reginster, 2006), Chapter 3, pp. 126–133. The structure of these five positions and the general formulation of their arguments are based on his discussion, though I have summarized and reformulated them. I have also incorporated and expanded upon Reginster's criticisms of these views with my own critical remarks. The sixth view presented here represents my interpretation of Reginster's own account as developed in Chapter 3 and 4 of his book, followed by my critique of all six views in general and of Reginster's account in particular.

enlargement and consolidation of its power, and apparent conflicts between drives are resolved when the victorious drive reorganizes and subsumes rivals into its own structure. (Reginster, 2006) This is an attractive and psychologically sophisticated picture: it explains the unity of the subject as a hierarchical organization of drives, and it preserves a coherent sense in which drives properly “want” their own maximal expansion. But, compelling as it is descriptively, it is philosophically insufficient once we ask whether this account can do the heavier theoretical work Nietzsche asks of the will to power — in particular, whether it can ground self-overcoming and the kind of qualitative reevaluation of values that Nietzsche repeatedly insists is required.

The core problem is twofold. First, Reginster’s model keeps the will to power within a bounded psychological frame: it is the internal teleology of drives taken to their extreme. But Nietzsche’s rhetoric and argumentative aim — epitomized by Zarathustra’s claim that “man is something to be overcome” — point to a principle that is ontologically and evaluatively more radical than the mere maximization of existing drives. A purely intrapsychic maximizer can explain intensification and reorganization, but it cannot by itself account for real novelty — the emergence of qualitatively new aims, standards, and ways of valuing that contradict or revise the very teleologies that brought the agent into being. If the will to power were only the perfected telos of whatever drive is dominant, Nietzsche’s project would collapse into a conservative circularity: drives maximize themselves, reorganize competitors, and then keep repeating that loop.

Second, this “saturation” problem exposes a structural gap in Reginster’s model. Suppose a drive reaches its maximal expression — what then? Two inadequate options present themselves if we remain within Reginster’s terms: (a) the drive repeats its pattern *ad infinitum* (mere cyclical satiation), or (b) the drive extinguishes once its aim is perfectly met (stasis). Neither option captures Nietzsche’s doctrine of self-overcoming. Nietzschean self-overcoming requires an account of how the surplus of power produced by satisfaction, tension, or conflict is redirected into transformation — how the form and direction of striving itself are altered. This is not simple integration; it is a reconfiguration that can turn a drive’s energy toward novel ends (for example, sexual impulse sublimated into artistic creation that judges, revalues, and thereby creates new norms). The decisive element is not organizational subsumption but transmutative reorientation — a recursive process in which drives are not just re-ordered but re-made.

A more philosophically adequate rendering of Nietzsche’s will to power, therefore, should treat it as a dual-aspect, meta-dynamic: both a pervasive biological tendency (the drive to expand and exert form-giving force) and an evaluative principle that continually measures, reconfigures, and creates new forms of valuation. On this view the will to power is not the telos contained within

particular drives but the principle that adjudicates and transforms teleologies themselves. It is, in other words, meta-teleological: its “aim” is not the repetitive satisfaction of a prior aim but the production of ever-higher, qualitatively different expressions of power — new organizations of drives, new intensities, new standards of worth. The process is recursive: assertion → saturation/tension → transmutation → renewed assertion at a higher level. Such a model preserves Reginster’s insight that drives seek expansion and that organisms organize their internal forces; but it adds the crucial capacity for novelty and normative reevaluation that Nietzsche needs to make sense of “overcoming.”

This reframing explains the significance of the *Übermensch* as an ideal: not merely a better-organized set of drives but a new evaluative architecture in which the will to power creatively refashions drives into forms that affirm and multiply life in qualitatively new ways. In short, Reginster’s psychological integration is a necessary descriptive step, but, without being supplemented by a theory of transformative reevaluation — a theory that treats the will to power as the engine of reorientation and creation rather than as the terminal aim of already-formed drives — it cannot bear the full weight of Nietzsche’s philosophical project.

Moreover, these interpretations converge on the view that what ultimately matters in the will to power is not the particular object of desire—for each drive has its own specific aims, shaped by its inherent mode of operation—but rather the manner of pursuit: the intensity with which it is willed and the capacity to overcome resistance. In such views, the value of a drive lies not in the content of its goal but in the degree of power with which it is lived and expressed. However, these approaches leave a fundamental problem unresolved: if the will to power operates merely as an intensification of whatever each drive already wills, how can it also function as the foundational principle in Nietzsche’s project of reevaluation of all values—a project that is inseparably bound to the content of what is willed, not merely its degree of intensity? If the will to power is conceived only as the amplification of a drive’s pre-given aim, then its scope risks being reduced to a purely descriptive psychology of motivation.

What remains unexplained on such accounts is how this principle can also underwrite Nietzsche’s demand for the creation of new values — a task that concerns not just how strongly we will but what is taken to be worth willing in the first place. To capture this dual function, the will to power must be read as more than an explanatory schema for drive dynamics; it must also be understood as the generative standard by which Nietzsche articulates the transformation of values themselves. We must therefore consider the will to power as something more than the claim that each drive has both its own specific purpose and a deeper, underlying will to power. If the will to

power were nothing more than the repeated maximization of dominant drives, it would remain trapped in a closed-loop structure of instinctual refinement and satisfaction. But Nietzsche imagines something much more radical: a will that does not simply want more, but wills differently—a transformation of the very structure of the will. In other words, the will to power, as its own organizing force, is able to break the existing cycle of desire (will) by changing what is desired—not just how it is desired. With this in mind, the will to power must be understood as a principle that disrupts and reconfigures the horizon of evaluation of drives, goals, and values.

This brings us to the key concept of sublimation in Nietzsche's philosophy, which has often been overlooked by Nietzschean scholars. Nietzsche does not always use the precise German term "sublimation" (sublimierung) which later became prominent in Freudian psychoanalysis, but he frequently describes the underlying process using a wide range of terms such as *Umwertung* (revaluation), *Vergeistigung* (spiritualization). In Nietzsche's philosophy, "sublimation" refers to the transformation of raw instinctual energies into higher, more complex, and more life-giving cultural, intellectual, and artistic expressions—without destroying their underlying force. In short, it is the redirection of drives in accordance with the will to power— not their negation or suppression, but their reconfiguration into forms that embody greater strength, mastery, and complexity.

The will to power plays a role here that is essential to the formation of the concept of sublimation, namely, that drives do not disappear when they are "controlled"; rather, the will to power seeks to reconfigure them into new forms that serve the growth and advancement of life. "Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm." (Nietzsche 1968, 267) Every drive, Nietzsche insists, expresses a "lust to rule" — a perspectival force that seeks to make its mode of valuation normative. When a so-called "lower" drive is sublimated it is not extinguished but reconfigured: its affective intensity and vector are retained while their aims are transformed by a higher organising activity of the will to power. Thus the combative thrust of aggression may be channelled into the artist's ruthlessness of form — to break conventions, and to impose a strict aesthetic discipline; likewise, the libidinal energy of sexuality may be transmuted into a creative intellectual fecundity — an eroticized desire for generation of thought, imagery and insight. Sublimation, then, is an inner conquest: an inward turn of the will to power that reorganizes instinctual force into more complex, culturally and personally elevated forms while preserving the drive's original intensity and goal-directedness.

The key point is that Nietzsche distinguishes sublimation from repression. Repression sees the drive as harmful and life-denying, negating or stifling it. Sublimation, in contrast, transforms the energy of the drive into a higher form without losing its intensity. This spiritualization is not a "moral

purification” but a redirection of the same raw forces into creative or life-enhancing channels. It is here that the will to power assumes the role of transforming the chaotic contradictions of instincts into a novel, higher-order organization. This perspective allows us to regard the will to power as a superstructural principle—a formative tendency, or what we might call a meta-drive—without reducing it to mere instrumental function. In this view, drives such as hunger, sexuality, or social attachment serve as the raw materials of human psychology. Yet under the influence of the will to power, they are transformed into something more intense, more structured. The will to power imparts form and hierarchy, organizing them into a complex, often conflicting unity.¹⁰

¹⁰ "Conflicting unity" designates the dynamic coherence produced by the will to power through the organization of antagonistic drives. Nietzsche conceives unity not as the absence of conflict but as its structural transformation: the self (or organism) persists only as a hierarchy of tensions continually asserting and resisting domination.

1.6 The Will to Power as the Fundamental Principle of the Revaluation of Values

The concept of the will to power has now been largely clarified, yet one question remains: in what sense can it function as Nietzsche's fundamental principle in the revaluation of values? Does the revaluation not also concern the content of the will—what is willed and what ought to be willed? Here, we must examine Nietzsche's concept of value and valuation in order to align it coherently with his conception of the will to power. Nietzsche rejects conventional moral standards and instead places value in his broader ontological perspective: reality and becoming itself are the will to power. He writes: "There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power, assuming that life itself is the will to power." (1968, 37) Elsewhere, he asks: "What is the objective measure of value? Solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power" (1968, 356) In other words, Nietzsche's "revaluation" involves applying a standard of value by which the worth of things regarded as "values" can be critically assessed.

A particularly appropriate point of departure for this discussion is the following passage, in which Nietzsche articulates one of the central themes of his philosophy: "Man has repeated the same mistake over and over again: he has made a means to life into a standard of life; instead of discovering the standard in the highest enhancement of life itself, in the problem of growth and exhaustion, he has employed the means to a quite distinct kind of life to exclude all other forms of life, in short to criticize and select life. I.e., man finally loves the means for their own sake and forgets they are means: so that they enter his consciousness as aims, as standards for aims." (1968, 195) It is here that he notes that man has 'turned the means of life into the standard of life.' That is, the means of survival (e.g., truth, morality, asceticism) are elevated to absolute values even when they negate life. The result is a denaturalization of values—a reversal of the hierarchy of life.

Thus, Nietzsche's project of naturalizing values involves replacing reactive, life-denying ideals with principles that affirm growth and vitality. In other words, in classical metaphysics, values are conceived of as things that descend from a transcendent source—God, reason, or the ideal—and impose value on the world from above. Nietzsche's project, by contrast, is to reverse this direction. Rather than extracting value from an external or supernatural source, he seeks to create value from within life itself. His movement is from the inside out, not from the top down.¹¹

Accordingly, any rigorous reading of Nietzsche's project must address how he conceptualizes

¹¹ In classical accounts (Hobbes, Descartes), "nature" designates an external realm of necessity or mechanism opposed to rational or spiritual agency. Nietzsche redefines this relation by internalizing nature: the human being is a fragment or expression of nature's self-overcoming forces. Hence, his naturalism entails not only a rejection of transcendence but a transformation of what "nature" means—no longer external mechanism, but the immanent activity of drives, affects, and growth.

value in terms of the will to power. This is particularly pressing because Nietzsche does not merely describe values; rather, the worth of any given “value” is inseparable from the quality of the will to power it embodies—whether this will is affirmative or negative, and to what degree. He evaluates all other values in terms of this principle. Hence, Nietzsche assigns power a privileged normative status. Yet it remains unclear why power itself should occupy this privileged position—why it should not also be subject to evaluation and potential rejection. This question becomes particularly pressing in light of Nietzsche’s claim that there is no objective reality governing what is valuable.

In ordinary moral discourse, we encounter a host of evaluative prescriptions: one should tell the truth, show compassion, or uphold equality. These rules present themselves not merely as preferences but as binding demands, claiming a right to regulate conduct by setting limits on what we may or must do. The pressing question for Nietzsche is what justifies this supposed authority. Rather than accepting such norms at face value, he challenges us to scrutinize the grounds on which they rest, asking why they exert their hold over us and what conditions enable them to function as guiding principles.

Nietzsche’s call for a reevaluation of values poses a central philosophical challenge: what does such a reevaluation actually involve? ¹² To reassess a value means to scrutinize the legitimacy of the authority we grant it. Consider, for instance, the value of honesty. To reevaluate honesty would not simply mean asking whether people generally approve of it, but rather whether honesty truly merits the normative weight it carries in our practices. One might ask: Is honesty intrinsically valuable? Do we have adequate grounds for esteeming it? Does every agent have compelling reason to act in accordance with it? Questions of this sort highlight that critical reflection on values always proceeds in relation to some standard of appraisal. Within a utilitarian framework, for example, honesty might be defended in terms of its contribution to maximizing collective well-being. In other evaluative traditions, a different principle would serve as the touchstone.

In each case, reevaluation presupposes a principle that is itself exempt from evaluation. "The standard by which the value of moral evaluation is to be determined. The fundamental fact that has been overlooked: the contradiction between 'becoming more moral' and the elevation and strengthening of the type of man. Homo natura. The will to power." (1968, 210) Nietzsche here specifies the conditions for reevaluation, asserting that the guiding “principle” of such reevaluation is the will to power. He urges a critical examination of our values to determine their relation to this

¹² For this analysis of what Nietzsche’s reevaluation of values entails, I draw on Katsafanas’s treatment of this topic in *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism* (2013).

principle: values that conflict with the will to power should be rejected, whereas those that are concordant with it should be affirmed.

Nietzsche's reliance on the will to power becomes clearer when we realize that he analyzes a range of terms, including health, flourishing, and life, in terms of power. "What if the reverse were true? What if a symptom of regression were inherent in the "good," likewise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living at the expense of the future?" Making clear that these claims about health and flourishing must be interpreted in terms of the will to power, he continues: "So that precisely morality would be to blame if the highest power and splendor actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained? So that precisely morality was the danger of dangers?" (1989, 20) Nietzsche's emphasis on "power" in this passage indicates that, when he examines the effects of morality on human flourishing, his primary concern is with its consequences for the will to power.

Thus, according to Nietzsche, we revalue a value by examining the relationship between value and power. "If the value conflicts with power, it is to be rejected; if it promotes power, it is to be accepted. [...] Usually, when we discover inconsistencies between two values A and B, we have three options: rejecting A, rejecting B, or striking a compromise. But with power, Nietzsche maintains that things are different: the only possible response to a discovery of conflict is to reject the value that conflicts with power." (Katsafanas 2013, 152) Power thus occupies a unique normative rank: it is the standard by which all other values can be measured, challenged, or rejected, but it itself resists such scrutiny.

The difficulty, as commentators have long pointed out, is explaining why Nietzsche treats power in this way. For while he often appears to deny the existence of any ultimate or privileged standpoint in matters of value, he simultaneously accords the will to power precisely such a privileged position. This tension has been at the heart of interpretive debates in the secondary literature.¹³ For Nietzsche categorically denies the existence of objective truths about what is valuable. He writes: "There are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena. (1966, 85) Rather, Nietzsche tells us that all values are created by humans. For example, he writes: "Whatever has value in our world now does not have value in itself, according

¹³ The interpretive literature divides roughly between those who ascribe to Nietzsche a systematic metaphysics of power (e.g., Heidegger 1961; Kaufmann 1950) and those who emphasize his anti-metaphysical or perspectival commitments (e.g., Katsafanas 2016; Leiter 2002; Richardson 1996). Among the latter, Paul Katsafanas offers an influential constitutivist account linking Nietzsche's conception of power to value-creation. My formulation of the present problem and its underlying ambiguity draws on his discussions in *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism* (2013), especially Chapter 6, Section 1.2, and on his article "Deriving Ethics from Action: A Nietzschean Version of Constitutivism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 83, no. 3 (2011): 620–660.

to its nature—nature is always value-less but has been given value at some time, as a present, and it was we who gave and bestowed it. Only we have created the world that concerns man!" (1974, 242) Nietzsche, therefore, believes that all values are created by human activity and, consequently, that there is no objective reality about what is valuable.

This denial of objectivity seems to contradict Nietzsche's insistence that power has a privileged normative status. After all, the claim that there are no objective values implies that there are no limits to what can be valued. If all values are created, there seems to be no reason to prefer the will to power to any other value. In short, Nietzsche accepts the following three claims about value: first, that power is endowed with a distinctive normative authority; second, that no objective or metaphysically grounded values exist; and third, that all valuations emerge from human activity. Taken together, these positions appear unstable. For if there are no objective standards, and every value is in some sense produced, why should power rather than any other humanly created value serve as the fundamental principle of evaluation?

The interpretive puzzle, then, is how to make sense of Nietzsche's seemingly incompatible commitments. One could attempt to dissolve the problem by discarding one of the claims: for example, by reading Nietzsche as denying that the will to power has any privileged normative role, or by construing him as secretly endorsing an objective conception of value. Yet neither option is persuasive. The textual evidence is far too substantial to support the first, and the second runs directly against Nietzsche's sustained critique of metaphysical objectivism.

The more promising line is to treat Nietzsche's position as an attempt to hold together three theses that only appear to be in conflict: that there are no objective values, that values are human creations, and that the will to power nevertheless enjoys a distinctive normative force.¹⁴ The reconciliation depends on showing that the will to power is not merely one value among others, contingently posited, but rather a structural condition of valuing itself. If it can be demonstrated that every act of willing already embodies this principle, and that we, as natural beings, enact it in the very structure of our willing and desiring—that is, that the will to power constitutes the immanent form of our volitional life—then its universal validity follows: we are bound to it not by deliberation or convention, but by the necessity of our nature and by the intrinsic character of our evaluative activity. On this reading, the will to power is simultaneously descriptive and normative—it names the constitutive drive behind our volitions and also provides the criterion by which

¹⁴ See (Katsafanas, 2011). While Katsafanas advances a constitutivist reading of Nietzsche's philosophy, my analysis departs from this trajectory: although his work provided initial inspiration for connecting the will to power to value, I do not adopt his constitutivist framework in the later stages of my argument.

competing values can be appraised and reconfigured.

What is clear so far is that Nietzsche gestures toward a naturalized standard of value—one rooted in life, growth, activity, and, ultimately, in the dynamics of power itself. This establishes an ambiguous yet fertile terrain, situated between perspectival interpretation and ontological grounding, which demands closer examination. Accordingly, it is necessary to determine with precision what “power” signifies as a value within Nietzsche’s positive framework of valuation. A productive point of departure for examining this lies in his hierarchy of values, which presupposes that some forms of life are higher, richer, and more life-affirming than others. Such rankings carry an implicit imperative: one ought to live in a manner that enhances or expresses these higher forms of life. Given that Nietzsche identifies “power” as the essential characteristic of life, and the will to power as its inner principle, it appears plausible to extract from this insight a practical criterion: namely, that life ought to be lived in ways that express, intensify, and expand power.

This criterion should not be conflated with a simplistic utilitarian injunction to maximize power in a purely quantitative sense. For Nietzsche, power is not reducible to domination, instrumental utility, or measurable augmentation. Rather, it denotes a dynamic structure of self-overcoming, characterized by the integration of resistance. It encompasses not merely the intensity of the will, but also its style, quality, and organization.

Accordingly, what is of primary significance is not the sheer accumulation of power, but the manner in which such power is exercised—through the configuration of life, the constitution of the psyche, and physiological forms that underlie it. Building on this foundation, we can now proceed to a careful examination aimed at demonstrating that, although values are created, there exists a singular value—the will to power—to which we are inevitably committed. This analysis will be conducted on two levels: first, by addressing why power is privileged and the grounds for our commitment to it as a core value; and second, by clarifying the precise nature of power within Nietzsche’s value structure.

The question posed for the first part is straightforward: why does Nietzsche privilege power? That is, what justification does he provide for elevating power to the status of the highest good? The answer is found in Nietzsche’s assertion that reality itself is the manifestation of the will to power. If every being is essentially a locus of this principle, a normative implication appears to follow: insofar as we are such beings, the pursuit of power emerges as a natural directive. In this sense, Nietzsche’s ethics can be understood as a derivation of the “ought” from the “is.” “There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power, assuming that life itself is the will to

power." (Nietzsche 1968, 37) From this, it can be concluded that Nietzsche grounds his theory of value in the very structure of the organism itself.

However, the situation is more complex. Nietzsche does not simply extract values from ontology in the conventional sense.¹⁵ Rather, his ontology is already laden with evaluative content. He does not start with a neutral, factual description of beings and then add values later. Instead, the notion of the will to power is inherently normative. "Values are not just based on the power ontology but infused throughout it; they're made a part of it, by the very sense of 'being' or 'essence' that ontology intends. Nietzsche posits will to power as an essence whose 'realization' is a matter of degree: his deepest valuative scale is the dimension of these degrees. So it's not a 'brute fact' that every being does will power; it is will to power, because it ought so to will. Or the power ontology really commends power to us as a good or goal, as our 'essential end', not because we all do strive for it, but because we should. Thus 'is' already means 'should be' for Nietzsche." (Richardson 1996, 152)

So, in a way, this Nietzschean perspective on becoming and reality is not an objective, neutral description of what is; it is rather an expression in advance of what ought to be. In other words, Nietzsche is not saying that all beings pursue power as a fact, and therefore we should value power. In Nietzsche's framework, "is" already implies "ought." Thus, the will to power is not simply a descriptive thesis about natural drives; it is also a normative ideal that implicitly evaluates beings according to the extent to which they embody this striving.

Moreover, Nietzsche's normative claim is not arbitrary. He does not predetermine the value of power, nor does he derive it solely from abstract reasoning. Rather, he maintains that the will to power provides the most psychologically accurate and explanatorily adequate account of human motivation. "Nietzsche doesn't assign this end to all beings just willfully, as a value posited a priori, in thorough independence from 'the facts'. He finds grounds within beings, including those who pursue different ends, for attributing this end to them and for judging them by it. He tries to show that those who will different things than power have been thwarted from it and twisted aside toward a distorted image or version of it." (Richardson 1996, 152) Thus, Nietzsche's genealogical method aims to demonstrate that conventional values—such as altruism or humility—are, in fact, sublimated or reactive expressions of the will to power. This is most evident in his critique of slave morality: values like compassion and self-sacrifice are not genuinely neutral, but rather

¹⁵ (Richardson, 1996), offers a comprehensive and systematic account of how Nietzsche's ontology is value-laden. My discussion of the relation between ontology and the hierarchy of values in Nietzsche's philosophy draws on and adapts his analysis, particularly from chapters 1, 3, and 3.1.

manifestations of a limited or reactive will to power—a will that is denied direct affirmation and thus assumes concealed or inverted forms.

This psychological analysis is central to Nietzsche's attempt to reconcile the gap between reality and value. Nietzsche's assertion that power constitutes the fundamental good is not grounded in a universal desire for power as such, but rather in the observation that even those who profess to reject power remain motivated by it. If power is indeed the fundamental structure of our will then Nietzsche can claim to be an objective good, in a sense similar to what Thomas Nagel might describe: not simply what I happen to want, but what I would want if I stepped back from my conditional desires and saw myself more clearly.¹⁶ Power, in this sense, is what remains when I discard the illusions imposed by accepted morality. It is what I must affirm, not because I have been told to, but because it defines who I am.

Seen in another light, the practice of objective evaluation can be understood as an attempt that seeks to rise above the narrow confines of personal preference and present itself as impartial. If this standpoint is applied to Nietzsche, it may be tempting to interpret his emphasis on power as an attempt to identify a standard that no longer reflects the contingent inclinations of any particular agent. On this reading, 'power' functions not as the expression of an individual perspective but as a putatively universal measure of value, one that claims to transcend the arbitrariness of subjective interest. Power would thus seem to acquire a normative authority that exceeds the point of view of the one who affirms it.

But this attribution runs the risk of distorting Nietzsche's project. First, as Richardson (1996) shows, Nietzsche denies the possibility of complete neutrality or value-free judgment. He argues that our apparent neutrality, our sympathy for others, and even our acceptance of universal moral principles are often masks for deeper instincts of self-interest, resentment, or weakness. Second, and more importantly, Nietzsche insists that we should not aim to go beyond our subjective perspective—not because we are incapable of doing so, but because doing so would undermine our health, strength, and vitality.

In this way, Nietzsche reconceptualizes the relationship between ontology and normativity: the will to power constitutes both what we are and what we must be—not by external imposition, but through necessity and the vitality inherent in life itself. With respect to the nature of power within

¹⁶ Nagel, in works such as *The View from Nowhere* (1986), argues that stepping back from one's subjective, contingent desires allows one to discern reasons for action that are not merely arbitrary or contingent, but hold across a more universal perspective on one's life.

Nietzsche's value-structure, it should be emphasized—consistent with the earlier discussion of the will to power—that power operates as a principle of growth and differentiation, rather than as a static end-state or predetermined telos. In contrast to pleasure—which is typically conceived as a relatively uniform state, largely invariant across individuals—Nietzschean power is essentially formative. It denotes the intensification, organization, and expansion of what is uniquely one's own. Power, in this sense, acquires distinct content depending on the individual's drives, capacities, and style of existence.

The individualized character of power also reveals the source of a familiar tension concerning Nietzsche's treatment of values. For values ordinarily function as guides to action, yet Nietzsche offers remarkably few prescriptions. Since power is always dependent on the structure of a particular life—its motives, history, instincts, and possibilities—Nietzschean values cannot be stated as general principles. They are addressed not to a general rational agent, but to a single, embodied individual, situated in a specific historical and psychological context.

In this sense, Nietzsche radicalizes what is already implicit in self-referential ethical systems. For example, even hedonism leads each individual to pursue his own pleasure, which may vary in temperament. But Nietzsche's concept introduces a deeper qualitative change: the structure of the will itself becomes individual. Power is not simply something I experience—as I do with pleasure—but something that defines me, through which I differ from others and from my previous self.

That is to say, Nietzsche's ethics is not primarily concerned with what is willed, but with how and from where it is willed. What is “good” is determined not by isolated, conditional desires but by an ongoing process of reevaluation whereby the organism reorganizes its disparate drives into a stronger, more integrated coherence — a differentiated unity that preserves multiplicity while subordinating and reconfiguring its elements toward greater expressive power.¹⁷

This logic is echoed to some extent in the “desire satisfaction” theories of egoism, which also deny the existence of a fixed good in favor of whatever the individual desires.¹⁸ But Nietzsche departs from such models in at least three crucial respects. First, Nietzsche's emphasis on distinction means that not all desires or drives are equal. He emphasizes the cultivation of those drives that

¹⁷ By “unity” I do not mean homogeneity or suppression of difference; I mean an integrative coherence — a hierarchically structured ordering or reconfiguration of drives in which previously disparate impulses are reorganized and subordinated so that the whole attains greater expressive power.

¹⁸ This disagreement between Nietzsche's logic of power and ‘desire-satisfaction’ theories is discussed in detail by John Richardson in *Nietzsche's System* (1996). The three points of disagreement outlined here are adapted from his analysis in Chapter 3.1.3, ‘What Power Is?’

distinguish the individual—that express a form of life that is not reducible to others. These are not simply the drives that we consciously experience, but those that belong to the deeper structure of the individual's personality, those that resist herd formation and are separate from inherited or reactive patterns. Identity, in this sense, is not a given, but something that is constructed through the active refinement of such individual drives.

Second, this emphasis on individuality makes Nietzsche's project psychologically difficult, for the desires most readily available to us—those articulated through established moral codes, cultural conventions, and inherited language—are typically reactive rather than original. Nietzsche suggests that authentic power cannot be attained by simply following these received impulses; it requires a deliberate process of unlearning, a critical resistance to drives molded by external authority or social expectation. Because language itself tends to crystallize what is common and average, the desires it conveys most easily are often those least capable of expressing true individuality.

Third, Nietzsche understands power not as the satisfaction of desires but as their transformation and intensification, altering the very structure of the will. Desires are not ends to be fulfilled, but dynamic forces to be organized and redirected. He's theory is a second-order evaluative framework in which one's impulses should not simply be acted upon, but rather cultivated, sharpened, disciplined, and thus elevated. Power, then, is not about satisfying what one already wants, but about becoming a being who can will more authentically. In other words, A life based on power is not a life that satisfies pre-given desires, but a life that produces new desires through the discipline, integration, and refinement of instincts.

With this in mind, Nietzsche's conception of value, resists the idea of a shared endpoint for moral development. In contrast to ethical systems like utilitarianism or Kantianism, which seek convergence around universal norms, Nietzsche envisions progress as an ever-widening differentiation. What emerges is a perspectival yet non-relativist framework: Nietzsche concedes the inevitability of perspective while insisting that some perspectives are demonstrably more life-affirming, more powerful, and therefore more truthful than others insofar as they track the structural dynamics of the will and the drives of the organism. The value of power is not 'objective' in the sense of being neutral or impartial; it is objective only to the extent that it mirrors the constitutive form of our willing and thereby discriminates flourishing forms of life from degenerate ones.

From this claim, a crucial consequence emerges: if normativity is grounded in the dynamic structure and expressive power of particular life-forms, then normative authority is inherently distributed rather than unified, and any notion of a single, universal end becomes both conceptually

unintelligible and practically undesirable within Nietzsche's framework. This insight underpins the fundamentally individualistic character of Nietzsche's ethics and explains his resistance to ethical systems that seek convergence around a single set of universal norms. In this sense, perspectivism and individualism are mutually reinforcing: the perspectival criterion provides the standard by which perspectives—and the life-forms that instantiate them—are assessed, while the individualistic framework accounts for why such evaluation necessarily produces a pluriform, rather than unitary, moral horizon.

Yet this divergence also raises a critical question about the coherence of Nietzsche's normative vision, that is to say, if we accept that:

- The will to power constitutes the fundamental principle of volition, and
- All acts of willing are directed toward goals, and every goal entails a valuation,
- Then, there must exist some form of criteria by which the overarching framework of human volition and goal-setting can be oriented.

In other words, even within a perspectival and pluralistic ethics, the will to power requires an internal logic of directionality to prevent evaluative arbitrariness and to account for the selective differentiation of life-forms according to their capacity to affirm, intensify, and expand their power.

Prior to assessing whether a coherent ethic can be grounded in the will to power, one must first examine how valuation operates at the level of the drives, for it is only by understanding this drive-level activity that we can see how such valuations are instantiated in human beings as instinctual creatures and how they shape the structure of human volition.

Nietzsche consistently denies that drives encounter a neutral world and later impose value on it. As he writes: "It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their for and against." (1968, 267) In this way, Nietzsche destabilizes the very notion of perception and valuation as neutral or impartial cognitive acts, showing instead that they are always mediated and structured at the level of drives.¹⁹ "It cannot be doubted that all sense perceptions are permeated with value judgments (useful and harmful, consequently, pleasant or unpleasant)." (1968, 275) As Richardson notes, a drive's activity "polarizes" the world around it. "Each drive's end-directed activity already 'polarizes' the world toward it, giving everything a significance relative to it. So, for example, the sex drive views the world as inspiring or requiring a sexual response; the world appears with erotic potential as its meaning or sense." (Richardson 1996, 36)

¹⁹ See Christine Daigle, *Nietzsche as Phenomenologist: Becoming What One Is* (2021) for a systematic defense of the claim that Nietzsche anticipates phenomenological themes and the reasons behind calling him a 'proto-phenomenologist.'

This point directs us toward a closer examination of the relationship between the will to power, valuation, and Nietzschean perspectivism. As we have seen, the specific content of a drive—its goal, its interpretive orientation, and the meaning of its activity—can be grasped only from within the perspective that constitutes it. In other words, although all drives share the same formal structure (will to power), their content is irreducibly perspectival. On this view, Nietzsche's ontology of power underlies, and indeed generates, his doctrine of perspectives. Yet this raises an often overlooked issue: how exactly the perspectives Nietzsche attributes to drives relate to the will to power, and how both jointly participate in the activity of valuation. The task, then, is to clarify the precise sense in which perspectival interpretation, evaluative responsiveness, and the will to power function as mutually constitutive dimensions of Nietzsche's account of value.

We may now relate these three cases at the level of individual drives.

(1) **Perspectivism.** Nietzschean perspectivism underscores that all teleological striving is inseparable from an intentional orientation: a drive is not a blind or mechanical force but is accompanied by a point of view directed toward an object, goal, or interpretive horizon. By virtue of its inherent striving, every drive embodies a distinct perspective—a specific orientation toward its aim and a corresponding interpretation of the environment as facilitating or obstructing its pursuit.

(2) **Evaluation.** Consequently, instincts do not merely react; they perceive, discriminate, and selectively respond to features of their surroundings. Evaluation is embedded in this process. For Nietzsche, patterns of attraction and aversion constitute an interpretive and evaluative engagement with the world, whether conscious or unconscious. Valuation, therefore, arises directly from the way a drive interprets the world from within its own perspective.

(3) **Will to Power.** What remains to be clarified is how these perspectival and evaluative features of drives belong to a single explanatory structure. Nietzsche's conception of the will to power provides precisely this unity. On a naturalistic reading, the will to power is not an additional drive nor a metaphysical substrate standing behind drives; it designates the structural principle that explains why drives strive, why they adopt perspectives, and why they evaluate. A drive's orientation toward growth, expansion, and the overcoming of resistance expresses this principle at its most basic level: its perspective is the interpretive form this striving takes, and its evaluative judgments articulate what counts as an increase or diminishment of its activity. In this way, the will to power supplies the underlying dynamic that links striving to interpretation and interpretation to valuation, showing that the evaluative character of drives is not an accidental add-on but the structural expression of their tendency toward enhanced power. This framework clarifies how Nietzsche can hold that values

arise from embodied, drive-structured agents while avoiding both psychologistic reduction and metaphysical inflation.

Given this account of drives as intrinsically evaluative, the question of normativity must likewise be approached from within the structure of the will itself. Thus, from the perspective of Nietzschean psychology, if we accept that the inner life of the organism is fundamentally constituted by the will to power, the task of valuation must be understood as the systematic alignment of evaluative frameworks with the constitutive dynamics of life. What ought to be valued is therefore determined immanently by the structural realities of the organism, such that normative authority derives not from external prescription but from the capacity of actions and ends to express and expand the constitutive principle of the will to power.

We now extend the analysis from individual drives to the human being conceived as a value-generating whole, in order to investigate how perspectival interpretation and the will to power converge in the very activity of valuation. What overarching telos might humanity posit for itself—one capable of functioning simultaneously as the source and the standard of its values? In order to approach Nietzsche's account of the human being in its entirety, we must first resolve an important preliminary question: how does the will to power relate to the grounding of value? It would be a mistake to assume that Nietzsche regards the will to power as a strict principle from which all values must be directly deduced in order to be defensible. His position contrasts sharply with the dominant ethical models in the philosophical canon, which typically assume that legitimate norms can be traced back to a single, foundational source. Kantian ethics, for instance, insists that the whole of morality can be derived from the categorical imperative, understood as the supreme law of rational agency. Utilitarianism adopts a comparable structure, maintaining that every moral judgment is to be tested against the requirement to maximize overall happiness or utility. In both traditions, particular norms are valid only insofar as they can be shown to follow from this fundamental principle.

To illustrate, take the normative judgment "Generosity is morally commendable." Within a Kantian framework, this claim would hold only if it could be shown to follow from the categorical imperative. From a utilitarian perspective, it would be justified solely if endorsing generosity led to the greatest overall benefit. If Nietzsche's ethical approach were similarly structured, one might expect that every legitimate normative claim could be deduced directly from the will to power. However, this expectation is misplaced: as Katsafanas shows "We are not going to be able to derive claims such as 'lying is wrong' and 'murder is wrong' from facts about will to power; there is no way

of moving from the idea that we aim to encounter and overcome resistance to the idea that we should not lie, or that we should not murder." (2011, 648–649) ²⁰

With this in mind, it becomes necessary to clarify the concept of value, to situate it within Nietzsche's broader value structure, and subsequently to analyze its relationship to the will to power as it manifests itself in humans. Our inquiry may appropriately commence with a direct examination of the question concerning the nature of value. For Nietzsche, values are simply objects of valuation: "Only through valuation does value exist, and without valuation the bead of existence would be hollow." (1978, 59) In other words, to claim that something is valuable is to assert that we, as humans, assign value to it.

For Nietzsche, however, these valuations can either affirm life or deny it, depending on how they influence the will to power. To value something is to experience a particular kind of emotional response to it and to make specific judgments about it. Accordingly, the nature of these emotions and judgments varies according to the type of object or situation being evaluated.

Take, for example, the value of courage. To regard courage as important involves assessing whether one has reason to act bravely, recognizing and approving behaviors that exemplify courage, cultivating it in one's own conduct, and experiencing dissatisfaction or regret when one fails to meet this standard. In Nietzsche's framework, courage is not conceived as an abstract, immutable ideal; rather, it encompasses a network of evaluations, emotional responses, and practices that orient an individual toward acting courageously.

From this Nietzschean perspective on value, we can identify two closely interrelated dimensions. First, the will to power operates as the structural ground of human drives and of the individual as a whole. It manifests as a forward-moving, self-overcoming tendency that, when encountering resistance, surpasses previous configurations, thereby orienting itself toward the progressive transformation and enhancement of the individual's existing structure. Crucially, this forward thrust is not blind: its realization requires a determinate aim, and the articulation of such an aim is itself an act of valuation. Second, to assert that something is a value is to affirm that it is worthy of being valued—a stance that encompasses both a specific affective orientation and a network of evaluative judgments. Together, these dimensions constitute a coherent framework for understanding and assessing values: any proposed aim or value must be consistent with, and directed by, the underlying dynamics of the will to power.

²⁰ Paul Katsafanas, in his article 'Deriving Ethics from Action: A Nietzschean Version of Constitutivism' (2011), argues that a direct inference from the will to power to ethical conclusions is not possible in Nietzsche's philosophy.

It is on this basis that Nietzsche introduces the notion of human progress, contrasting it with Christian values, which he regards as fundamentally opposed to the enhancement of life, so much so that he famously calls them the "danger of dangers." The question then arises: what, for Nietzsche, constitutes human progress? Progress is not a collective march toward an abstract ideal; rather, it is a form of valuation that enables the overcoming of the existing type of human being. As he writes: "Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?" (1978, 12) This overcoming is formed evolutionary - from ape to man and then to superman - but this movement is not biological evolution in the Darwinian sense; it is rather an intensification of the will to power in the creation of higher, more integrated, and more life-affirming forms.

But the question now is how are these higher forms formed and according to what form of valuation? We could say that man is progressing if his valuation is in line with the will to power, but this is too broad a framework and fundamentally fails to provide us with the necessary clarity. If we accept Nietzsche's psychological claim that our inner life is already structured by the will to power, then the task of valuation becomes one of aligning our value systems with this principle, rejecting life-denying norms, and cultivating the conditions for ongoing self-overcoming.

The most productive way to align valuation with the will to power is through Nietzsche's ideal of the *Übermensch*—the embodiment of human flourishing that, in accordance with the will to power, transcends the current form of humanity. For Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* represents the natural consequence of life's inherent tendency toward self-overcoming, exemplifying the realization of higher forms of valuation. "I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All beings so far have created something beyond themselves, and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment." (1978, 12)

The concept of "overcoming," which is the basic principle of the will to power and also the key concept in the overman, needs explanation here. Nietzsche's verb is *überwinden* (*Über*-beyond + *winden*-to twist, wrestle), which conjures up not passive improvement but active struggle and transformation. *Überwinden* is not the same as "to improve". It does not mean polishing an existing form, but its negation and reconfiguration into something new. The image is combative: grappling with a limitation until one twists oneself beyond it. It involves resistance and integration—what is overcome is not thrown away, but reconstructed into a higher form.

When Zarathustra declares that "Man is what must be overcome," he refers to the existing constellation of instincts, values, and cultural forms as a transitional stage in human development.

Overcoming entails an internal revaluation—a fundamental transformation of the evaluative framework that currently defines man. Nietzsche's genealogical analysis of values demonstrates that every dominant form of life embodies a hierarchical ordering of values; to overcome a given form of humanity is to overturn and reconfigure these values from a higher perspective, one that is more fully aligned with the will to power.

To complete the image of the overman, Nietzsche invites us to consider its opposite: The Last Man. This figure represents the endpoint of humanity that has given up the struggle to overcome itself. His defining characteristic is not cruelty or ignorance, but contentment - a carefully cultivated comfort that avoids any kind of danger, hardship, or creative tension. By seeking only comfort and security, the Last Man extinguishes the very dynamic that defines the will to power: the restless drive to transcend oneself through resistance. "I show you the last man. What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star? Thus asks the last man, and he blinks. [...] They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth. Becoming sick and harboring suspicion are sinful to them; one proceeds carefully." (1978, 17)

The last man's comfort is not innocent - it is a sign of a deeper refusal. By avoiding struggle, he rejects the fundamental movement of overcoming. The will to power exists in a largely latent state, its energies directed primarily toward the preservation of homeostasis rather than the expansion or intensification of capacities. In this regard, the last man exemplifies the death of the will—not through overt repression or coercion, but through a deliberate and calculated acquiescence to mediocrity. This condition reflects a profound attenuation of life's inherent dynamism, wherein the structural principle of self-overcoming is supplanted by a complacent equilibrium.

Accordingly, if the will to power designates life's fundamental drive to intensify, differentiate, and reorganize itself, then valuation functions as its general grammar: to value is to select, rank, and orient oneself toward forms of greater power. The overman exemplifies this process by transforming resistance into creation and actively revaluing inherited norms. By contrast, the last man converts rank into comfort, reducing value to mere preference and stifling the formative potential of life. To affirm the will to power, therefore, is to endorse the ongoing revaluation of values. Flourishing, on this view, is fidelity to becoming: the courage to undergo transformation, to refuse static satisfaction. Such valuation operates simultaneously within the internal economy of motives and on the scale of the human being as a whole, structuring the tension between current values and the potentialities of what we might yet become.

In conclusion, within Nietzschean thought, the will to power constitutes the fundamental principle of life, understood as the intrinsic drive of existence to expand, overcome, and reorganize itself. Values, accordingly, are not external mandates or universal prescriptions; they are the concrete expressions of life's tendency toward self-overcoming. This framework renders valuation and the will to power inseparable: to affirm the will to power is simultaneously to engage in the continual reconfiguration of values, such that what is deemed valuable is precisely that which amplifies the capacity for self-transcendence, converts resistance into a source of strength, and harmonizes diverse drives into a coherent and flourishing mode of existence. Thus, the normative task of Nietzschean philosophy is neither the enforcement of external rules nor the recovery of abstract ideals, but the cultivation of an evaluative horizon that manifests life's inherent dynamism and enables humanity to surmount its present condition.

1.7 Towards a Power-Centered Ethics

Considering the discussions in the previous section, the present task is to determine whether a coherent ethic can be articulated on the basis of the will to power. If so, in what form does such an ethic present itself; what conceptual and practical limits attend it; and how does it differ, in substance and structure, from rival ethical doctrines? The following locates Nietzsche's critique of modern moralities, and develops the positive core of a Nietzschean evaluative framework while acknowledging its constraints.

A productive point of departure for articulating a positive ethical framework in Nietzsche's philosophy is to begin by analyzing its antithesis—namely, the modern forms of ethics and valuation that he explicitly repudiates. "Whether it is hedonism or pessimism, utilitarianism or *endaemonism*, these ways of thinking that measure the value of things in accordance with pleasure and pain, which are mere epiphenomena and wholly secondary, are ways of thinking that stay in the foreground and naivetes on which everyone conscious of creative powers and an artistic conscience will look down not without derision, nor without pity. [...] we see how man makes himself smaller, how you make him smaller—and there are moments when we behold your very pity with indescribable anxiety, when we resist this pity. [...] You want, if possible—and there is no more insane "if possible" to abolish suffering. And we? It really seems that we would rather have it higher and worse than ever. Well-being, as you understand that is no goal; that seems to us an end, a state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible, makes his destruction desirable." (1966, 153)

This criticism can be rendered philosophically precise in two related moves. First, Nietzsche diagnoses a mistaking of symptom for cause: affective states (pleasure and pain) are treated as the ultimate explanantia of value when, on his view, they are derivatives—outcomes or signals that arise from deeper physiological and instinctual configurations. Second, Nietzsche interprets the attempt to abolish pain as a symptom of degeneration: an instinct that has ceased to affirm life's productive tensions and, instead, seeks comfort and reduction of resistance. The proposed abolition of suffering is thus not merely a mistaken policy goal; it is for Nietzsche an index of a weakened evaluative perspective that has lost contact with life's dynamism.

Two clarificatory points will help to sharpen the critique. (1) To say that pleasure and pain are "secondary" is not to deny their causal efficacy in motivating behaviour; rather, it is to deny that they are the normative ground from which value and meaning intrinsically flow. (2) The critique is not an argument for suffering per se: Nietzsche resists the simple equation 'pain = good.' He insists

rather that certain painful conditions can be constitutive of higher forms of life and hence may be instrumentally necessary for value-creation.

If pleasure and pain are not primitive normative data, what is? Here is where will to power comes in, Nietzsche introduces the will to power as an explanatory and evaluative idea: a biological and evaluative tendency for intensification, overcoming, and the augmentation of capacities. Construed as such, the will to power is a thesis about the criteria by which we should judge the worth of practices, dispositions, and institutions: those that facilitate increases in strength, responsiveness, creativity, self-mastery, and flourishing—understood in a non-hedonistic sense—are valuable; those that attenuate these capacities are disvaluable.

This move can be made dialectically tight. If values are to be grounded in life, and if life exhibits certain recurrent formal features—adaptation, differentiation, resistance, and growth—then a norm that tracks and promotes those features has a strong claim to being an immanent ground of evaluation. The will to power functions as a candidate criterion because it captures the idea of life as dynamic self-enhancement rather than static pleasure-maximization or the mere avoidance of pain.

Several consequences follow. First, pain can acquire a complex normative profile: it is sometimes a condition for growth (as a stimulus for reconfiguration and strengthening), sometimes merely destructive. Second, a Nietzschean criterion evaluates not outcomes according to aggregated subjective states, but the quality of capacities realized in agents—their degree of autonomy, creativity, and power of affirmation.

But the next step is to ask how this helps us to frame Nietzschean positive ethics in the valuation of actions. The central claim I wish to develop is this: Nietzschean positive ethics does not evaluate actions by reference to the maximization of pleasure or the minimization of pain; rather, it asks whether an action enhances, intensifies, and expands life. On this view the criterion of value is not hedonistic utility but the capacity to affirm existence — including its pains and hardships — in such a way that life is made richer, stronger, and more expressive.

To make this plausible we must answer a more specific question: what does it mean to say that "power" in the Nietzschean sense is a value? In what respect does power seem valuable, and why should it function as an evaluative standard? Answering this requires us to move beyond a schematic identification of value with mere difficulty (an interpretation defended in various forms by contemporary commentators such as Bernard Reginster and others) and to propose an account that simultaneously (a) is faithful to Nietzsche's texts and idiom, and (b) supplies a defensible

standard of evaluation compatible with a naturalistic framework and with Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power.

Nietzsche's passage is a useful point of departure: "A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcoming; behold, it is the voice of their will to power. Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to people; Whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good, and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult, they call holy." (1978, 58) Two features of this passage deserve emphasis. First, Nietzsche describes a collective evaluative practice: the moral registers of a people record what they esteem. Moral norms are thus not abstract, ahistorical imperatives but social inscriptions of what a community recognizes as expressive of its power. Second, the evaluative criteria are not metaphysical axioms but responses to achievement, intensity, and scarcity: the praiseworthy is tied to what a people experiences as a difficult or rare attainment — to what manifests as an increase in the community's power or excellence.

Reading this paragraph merely as the thesis that "difficulty equals value" captures an important kernel of truth, but it also risks flattening Nietzsche's claim. The language Nietzsche uses — conquests, voice, will to power, sacred — gestures toward a richer evaluative ecology: values are not simply scalar measures of difficulty but are ways in which a people narrativizes and sacralizes certain modes of intensification and achievement. Difficulty functions as a salient index of value rather than as a unique source of value.

Here, I aim to distinguish my position from Bernard Reginster's influential interpretation, which emphasizes overcoming resistance and grounds value in Nietzsche's philosophy in what he identifies as "challenging": "At its core, the ethics of power is intended to reflect the value we place on what is difficult or, as we might prefer to say, challenging." (Reginster 2006, 178). More broadly, I want to interrogate a widespread interpretive move in recent Nietzsche scholarship—one taken up, in different ways, by both Reginster and Paul Katnaffakas—which treats resistance or difficulty as the primary ground of value in Nietzsche's thought. On this "difficulty-as-value" reading, what resists the agent is prized precisely because surmounting resistance manifests and exercises power: overcoming a more formidable obstacle counts as a clearer, more convincing demonstration of power, and therefore the object or goal overcome is considered more valuable (Reginster, 2006; Katnaffakas, 2013). This interpretation is attractive because it aligns neatly with a functional account of the will to power: values, so conceived, aim to generate occasions in which power can be displayed, tested, and increased. Yet, when pressed, this account proves unstable: it is either explanatorily impoverished or normatively unacceptable. I isolate three central objections.

First, equating value with mere difficulty collapses Nietzsche's evaluative vocabulary into emptiness. If difficulty alone suffices to make something valuable, the interpretive framework becomes silent about what is actually prized. Anything that is hard to attain—regardless of its qualitative character—would be elevated. Such a result sits uncomfortably with large swathes of Nietzsche's texts in which he praises distinctive kinds of activity and dispositions—life-affirming creativity, the cultivation of higher types, forms of nobility and generosity—that are not simply hard but are judged good because they enhance or instantiate particular kinds of strength. A purely difficulty-based criterion therefore fails to capture the content of Nietzsche's normative commitments.

Second, difficulty frequently has a merely contingent or oppressive provenance. Hardness can be produced by arbitrary or cruel external constraints—scarcities, coercion, unjust institutions—rather than by any intrinsic worth of the sought object. If difficulty deriving from injustice or deprivation were sufficient to confer value, then scarcity produced by oppression would acquire a spurious sanctity. Nietzsche's own analyses of the ascetic ideal and of resentment suggest the opposite diagnosis: suffering and scarcity can be instruments of life-denial and reactive valuation, not reliable signs of excellence. In short, the mere fact that something is rare or difficult because of adverse conditions does not by itself license its elevation to the status of the valuable.

Third, the difficulty is agent-relative. What is arduous for one organism or character type may be trivial for another. To identify value with difficulty without qualification risks a perverse relativism: the weak will be required to esteem what the strong accomplish with ease. Nietzsche's perspectivism does allow for type-relative valuations, but it does not thereby reduce value to idiosyncratic or purely subjective tastes. Any satisfactory Nietzschean account must show how perspectival differences are intelligible within an evaluative economy that remains discriminating rather than arbitrary.

Taken together, these objections show that a "difficulty-alone" theory is both explanatorily weak and normatively unstable. However, the problems do not imply that resistance plays no evaluative role in Nietzsche; rather they indicate that the role of difficulty must be articulated more precisely.

Nietzsche's Beethoven example shows that difficulty and resistance can intensify our admiration for an achievement, but they are neither the ground nor the decisive condition of its value. Knowledge of Beethoven's deafness may strengthen our affective response to his life-story; what, for Nietzsche, ultimately commands admiration is the work's capacity to transcend and reconfigure the existing form of its field—music itself. In other words, the evaluative principle

operative here is not simply “difficulty overcome” but the production of a new form or standard: the kind of formal and expressive transformation that alters what counts as possible or excellent within a domain. The value resides in the work’s qualitative power to shift boundaries and create new evaluative horizons. Difficulty and resistance are enabling conditions — they often accompany and shape the activity of overcoming — but they are not sufficient. The content of an achievement (its formal, expressive or world-revising import) must be counted as having value independently of the mere fact that it was hard to achieve.

Accounts that attribute value primarily to difficulty, treat effort or costly struggle as the explanans: an achievement is valuable because it was hard. Nietzsche’s account, by contrast, offers a two-level explanation. On the proximate level, difficulty can function as a signal that a substantial overcoming occurred and so can increase admiration. On the deeper, normative level, value is grounded in what the overcoming achieves: the creation, intensification, or reconfiguration of expressive forms and capacities. This explains why trivial but onerous labors (e.g. pointless endurance tasks) normally do not attract the kind of valuation given to great works of art or philosophical innovation.

Reading Nietzsche’s evaluative vocabulary through the will-to-power framework makes this contrast explicit. The will to power, construed as Nietzsche’s proposed evaluative principle, privileges activities that increase form, strength, and the range of what can be affirmed or enacted in the world. Value-tracking is therefore not a matter of tallying obstacles overcome but of assessing whether an activity issues in a net enlargement or re-ordering of expressive and normative possibilities. Beethoven’s achievement is paradigmatic because it institutes new possibilities for musical expression; his work thereby embodies an increase in ‘power’ understood as formative capacity.

Also, as we discussed, at the level of the drives, Nietzsche describes a dynamical process: drives issue in desires, encounter resistance or limits, and — when they overcome those limits in a formative way — produce novel configurations of aims and intensities. Overcoming is not merely the removal of an obstacle; it is a transformation in which the agent (or practice) incorporates the resistance into a higher-order power. The value we attribute is the residue of that transformation: the new pattern of force, form, or meaning that did not exist prior to the overcoming.

A useful test can help us here; if the mere presence of difficulty sufficed, then any uniformly difficult task would be counted as equally valuable. But intuition and practice deny this: the difficulty of climbing a mountain with no further consequence is not morally or aesthetically equivalent to creating a symphony that alters musical practice. Conversely, if Beethoven’s deafness were absent

but his pieces were the same, we would still judge them great. This thought-experiment supports the claim that the content and formal power of an achievement — its capacity to revalue — are primary.

Accordingly, I suggest the following reconstruction. Nietzschean value operates on three interconnected axes: Expressive augmentation: something is valuable insofar as it increases the expressive capacities of life — its range of affects, forms of activity, and capacities for self-assertion and creation. Value, on this account, tracks an organism's (or a culture's) ability to generate richer patterns of living and to transform its environment in ways that expand the domain of possible excellence.

Intensive achievement: as Reginster correctly emphasizes, difficulty and rarity are significant because they index intensive achievements ²¹ — that is, states or performances that require heightened capacity, concentration of force, or novel organization of drives. Difficulty thus functions epistemically: it signals that an achievement required a higher order of power, and therefore counts as praiseworthy within a perspective that prizes intensification.

Affirmative integration: what counts as valuable must be capable of being affirmed in a way that integrates suffering and hardship into a life-enhancing narrative. Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes the idea that a life worth living does not evade suffering but transfigures it. Therefore, a practice or action is valuable if it can be incorporated into an affirmative stance that intensifies the capacity to say "yes" to existence in its plurality.

These axes together allow us to preserve the insight that difficulty matters while refusing the reduction that difficulty alone is value. Difficulty is important because it frequently indicates the presence of intensive achievement, but value proper is the structured capacity to increase power, expressivity, and affirmative integration.

Now let's apply the Reconstruction in an example. Consider the case of equality. One might argue that equality is difficult to achieve because entrenched class hierarchies and external pressures obstruct its realization. On a "mere difficulty" reading, such obstacles would make equality praiseworthy in itself. Yet, under the reconstructed framework, two further questions must be asked: (a) If equality were realized, would it foster forms of life that amplify power, creativity, and flourishing? (b) Is the difficulty in attaining equality intrinsic to the value of equality itself, or does it stem from contingent social and historical barriers? If the primary effect of equality is to level

²¹ (Reginster, 2006) especially Chapter 4

distinctions in a way that diminishes excellence or inhibits higher forms of flourishing, Nietzsche's evaluative criteria would call for critique rather than automatic affirmation. Conversely, if equality were shown to generate unforeseen forms of vitality and creativity, a Nietzschean evaluation might commend it—but on principled grounds, not merely because of the difficulty involved in its attainment.

Accordingly, Nietzsche does not simply identify value with difficulty. Difficulty acquires significance only insofar as it is bound up with the cultivation of constructive, rare, and life-enhancing forms of power. Any satisfactory defense of the claim that Nietzsche values power must therefore attend to the quality of the power expressed, the source of the difficulty, and the perspective-dependent yet normative criterion Nietzsche employs: namely, whether it conduces to life-enhancement and creative self-mastery.

Here is making sense to ask why do I consider this philosophical reconstruction to possess significant advantages for understanding Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole? I will now outline three specific philosophical advantages that, in my view, support this claim. First, it remains faithful to Nietzsche's genealogical method, which he developed primarily in the *Genealogy of Morals*. By reading moral registers as the inscriptions of a people's will to power, we keep the genealogical insight that values originate in evaluative practices bound up with the flourishing and extension of group-level power. The passage from difficulty to praise is thereby intelligible as a historical psychology of valuation rather than as an a priori normative claim.

Second, it yields a normatively substantive yet naturalistic standard: value is assessed by empirical, organismal, and cultural criteria (enhancement of capacities, intensification of affective life, increased creative power). These criteria can be articulated without recourse to metaphysical goods; they appeal instead to the measurable or describable aspects of life and vitality (complexity, resilience, creativity, scope of expression).

Third, the account offers a principled way to distinguish life-affirming expressions of power from mere domination or destruction. Not all expansions of power are *prima facie* valuable: a practice that increases capacity only by annihilating the conditions for richer forms of life (for instance, by reducing complexity, destroying creative potentials, or producing a shallow homogeneity) fails the expressive-augmentation and affirmative-integration tests. Thus a Nietzschean ethics grounded in power need not collapse into an uncritical valorization of domination; rather, it is selective, privileging those modes of power that intensify life in both qualitative and structural ways.

Having established that, in Nietzsche's philosophy, value extends beyond mere difficulty, it now becomes necessary to examine why the degree of difficulty in attaining a goal should nevertheless figure as a criterion of valuation, and to critically assess the significance of difficulty within Nietzsche's power-centered ethical framework. Three interrelated considerations clarify his emphasis: First of all, difficult achievements function as tests of capacity. The very resistance posed by difficulty functions as a stimulus to the reorganization and strengthening of powers. Through overcoming difficulty, agents develop new capacities and new forms of valuation.

Second, difficulty serves as an epistemic witness to the depth and novelty of an achievement. Rare, hard-won goods are less likely to be accidental or derivative; their rarity marks them as products of intensified agency.

And the last one, the confrontation with difficulty, is often the medium in which suffering is transfigured into higher forms of affirmation. Nietzsche's famous injunctions to embrace *amor fati* and to valorize suffering as a condition of growth find their echo here: difficulty often catalyzes the very processes by which affirmation is deepened.

Thus, the relation between difficulty and value is not causal in a simple sense (difficulty does not automatically produce value) but conditional and indicative: difficulty creates conditions in which value—properly understood as expressive intensification and affirmative integration—can be realized.

The question motivating this section is straightforward but pressing: can power—understood as such—serve as an end in itself and the sole criterion of moral evaluation? Nietzsche's texts sometimes invite an affirmative reading. For example, through the prophetic voice of Zarathustra, he provocatively suggests that the moral worth of an end is measured by the opportunity it affords for power: "You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I say unto you: it is the good war that hallows any cause." (1978, 47) Read in a crude, content-neutral way, such passages appear to make whatever succeeds in overcoming resistance immediately valuable: success, conquest, the imposition of one will over another would thereby become intrinsically good.

This interpretation, however, quickly yields an unacceptable consequence: if power alone is the standard, then expansionist or genocidal projects that secure domination would count as morally meritorious merely because they succeed. It is for precisely this reason that many readers recoil at any simplistic identification of Nietzsche with "might makes right": it would imply that figures such as Hitler (to take the most extreme contemporary example) are morally on a par with Beethoven or Goethe so long as all three manifest a certain kind of aggressive overcoming. That consequence is

intolerable, and it also seems to run contrary to central, reiterated features of Nietzsche's evaluative language.

To avoid this *reductio*, we should register two interpretive claims about Nietzsche's normative framework. First: Nietzsche does not present "power" as a content-neutral, formal rule that confers value to any and every instance of domination. Second: the evaluative standard implicit in Nietzsche's will to power is not mere domination but a quality of power—one bound up with creation, enhancement, and the enrichment of life.

These claims can be defended by attending to recurrent distinctions in Nietzsche's corpus. He contrasts active and reactive forces, and he diagnoses resentment as the origin of values that negate life (slave morality). By contrast, the noble or "higher" types—those Nietzsche praises—exhibit forces that create values, reorder sensibilities, and augment the possibility of richer, more intense modes of living. In Zarathustra the paradigms of greatness are aesthetic and formative: the artist who self-overcomes produces new forms of significance; the "dancing star" image indexes a luminous, affirmative becoming rather than merely increased capacity to coerce.²² Likewise, Nietzsche's critique of the last man—the creature who abandons difficult heights for warm comfort—marks the avoidance of struggle as decline, not a higher ethical achievement. For Nietzsche, struggle is valuable insofar as it functions as a site of transformation and creation, rather than merely as an instrument of domination simpliciter.

From these textual regularities, one can extract a concise normative thesis appropriate to a Nietzschean ethics: power is a criterion of value only insofar as it is formative and life-affirming—i.e. insofar as it creates, intensifies, and enlarges modes of life and valuation. When "power" names reactive, resentful, or mass-manipulating domination—when it functions to enervate, homogenize, or eliminate capacities for flourishing—Nietzsche characterizes that form of power as decadent or nihilistic. In short, both Beethoven and Hitler may be described as agents of "power" in the thin sense of overcoming resistance, but they instantiate radically different kinds of will and therefore, radically different moral valuations in Nietzsche's vocabulary. Beethoven and Goethe exemplify creative, world-making force; Hitler's politics exemplify reactive, compensatory power that negates the conditions of higher life.

This reading also clarifies how to read Zarathustra's aphoristic praise of the "good war." Taken

²² The image derives from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue §5 ("one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star."). It symbolizes the transformation of inner chaos into creative form—an emblem of Nietzsche's idea of self-overcoming and life-affirming creation.

in the rhetorical and existential context of the work, such pronouncements are not programmatic endorsements of conquest or imperialism. They valorize struggle as a formative condition for self-overcoming and cultural renewal. Nietzsche's rhetoric is deliberately provocative; his praise of conflict is existential, aesthetic, and educational rather than a blanket endorsement of aggression as such. To make the argument explicit, one can formalize the relevant normative structure:

- Nietzsche's evaluative standard is grounded in the effects actions/forces have on life: they are good if they enhance vitality, creativity, and the capacity to generate new values.
- "Power" (will to power) is valuable only when it bears those life-enhancing, creative effects.
- Political projects that systemically destroy, homogenize, or deny higher forms of life do not have those effects.
- Therefore, such projects are not morally endorsed by Nietzsche's criterion.

Finally, a responsible Nietzschean power-centered ethics must attend to the quality of power rather than its mere presence; it must read Nietzsche's valorization of struggle within his larger, recurring valuation of transformation, creativity, and life-affirmation.

Our task at this stage is to inquire into the criteria by which the pursuit of power can be rendered legitimate. In other words, we must explicitly address the content of the power that is exercised—namely, the overcoming of resistance. On this basis, and in order to sharpen the contours of Nietzsche's ethics of power, I will turn to two key concepts in his philosophy: greatness and creativity. These will serve as the conceptual frameworks through which the content of such power can be clarified.

Nietzsche challenges us to recognize that our admiration for certain forms of human excellence—whether articulated in terms of "greatness," "perfection," or the advancement of humanity—often exists in latent tension with our commitment to traditional morality, particularly its egalitarian and leveling tendencies. By drawing upon Nietzsche's own formulations, this unacknowledged conflict can be brought into sharper relief, with one especially significant passage serving as a focal point for the present analysis.

"Let us articulate this new demand: we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called in question and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew. [...] One has taken the value of these "values" as given; as factual, as beyond all question; one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing "the good man" to be of greater value than "the evil man," of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of man in general (the future of man included). But what if the reverse were true? What if a symptom of regression

were inherent in the "good," likewise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living at the expense of the future? Perhaps more comfortably, less dangerously, but at the same time in a meaner style, more basely? - So that precisely morality would be to blame if the highest power and splendor actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained? So that precisely morality was the danger of dangers?" (1989, 20)

Nietzsche's decisive claim here is that ordinary morality — the values most cultures treat as sacrosanct — can be anti-progressive in a very specific sense: they may actively prevent the realization of the species' highest possible power or "magnificence." This suspicion strikes at the heart of the moral faith that "goodness" is naturally allied with human betterment. Nietzsche asks, instead, whether what we have called "good" might in fact function as a poison — securing present stability but diminishing the conditions for future greatness.

Two clarifications are vital for situating this claim within a power-centered ethical framework. First, Nietzsche rejects any simplistic teleology of "progress." His ideal of greatness is not a quantitative accumulation of improvements — longer life-spans, more comfort, increased utility — but a qualitative intensification of capacities, the creative self-overcoming of individuals and cultures, and the emergence of exceptional types. "Perfection" is not measured in the arithmetics of welfare but in the capacity to generate new values, new forms of life, and higher standards of excellence. In this sense, utilitarian or egalitarian notions of progress may directly conflict with Nietzsche's vision: what looks like moral advancement (e.g., reducing suffering or distributing resources equally) can amount, from his standpoint, to a systemic leveling that obstructs the will to power's highest expressions.

Second, the ethical conflict Nietzsche diagnoses is often structural and unconscious. Modern morality usually contains a reactive moral structure: practices such as compassion, equality, and humility that appear ethically unquestionable, yet ultimately function to protect weakness and limit strength. This is the genealogical point: morality's authority rests on its taken-for-granted self-evidence, but its actual effect may be to immunize societies against risk, danger, and transformative creativity. In Nietzsche's terms, such values reduce existence to a "meaner style" of life, precisely because they secure the present by sacrificing the possibility of future greatness.

For a power-centered ethics, then, the lesson is diagnostic. We must interrogate moral commitments not only by their immediate ethical face but by their longer-term consequences for the will to power's expression and elevation. The commitment to ordinary morality may blind us — epistemically and morally — to the fact that what we take to be ethical achievements (security, comfort, equality) can coincide with the regression of human greatness. The measure of value, for

Nietzsche, is thus not conformity to moral precepts, but the degree to which our practices expand or contract the horizon of what human beings can become.

Accordingly, this section advances the idea that for Nietzsche, greatness is essentially a species of creativity: to be 'great' is to have the capacity to originate new valuations, new styles of life, and novel criteria of worth. "Such men of great creativity, the really great men, according to my understanding, will be sought in vain today and probably for a long time to come: they are lacking; until, after much disappointment, one must begin to comprehend why they are lacking and that nothing stands more malignantly in the way of their rise and evolution, today and for a long time to come, than what in Europe today is called simply "morality"-as if there were no other morality and could be no other-the aforementioned herd-animal morality which is striving with all its power for a universal green-pasture happiness on earth, namely for security, absence of danger, comfort, the easy life, and ultimately, "if all goes well," hopes to do away with any kind of shepherd or bellwether. The two doctrines it preaches most often are: "equal rights" and "sympathy with all that suffers"--and it takes suffering itself to be something that must absolutely be abolished." (1968, 502)

The unpublished aphorism supplied above—with its image of the missing, creatively great man and its diagnosis that "morality" in contemporary Europe is the primary obstacle to such men—condenses two interconnected claims that recur throughout Nietzsche's corpus: (1) greatness is defined by creative value-formation rather than by mere possession of power, rank, or talent; and (2) modern moral sensibilities that seek the abolition of suffering and the flattening of difference (the "herd" morality) systematically frustrate the conditions in which creative greatness can arise. I will first offer a close reading of the aphorism, then reconstruct Nietzsche's broader conceptual link between creativity and the power-centered ethic.

The aphorism stages a lament and an explanation. Its opening—"Such men of great creativity, the really great men... will be sought in vain today"—registers absence as a cultural symptom rather than a mere empirical fact. The emphasis on creative greatness distances Nietzsche from conceptions of greatness reducible to social prestige or institutional office; greatness here is an originary activity. The following lines diagnose the cause: modern European "morality," conceived as monolithic and compassionate, produces a political and psychological ecology—"green-pasture happiness," comfort, security—that favors uniformity and the soothing of tension. Two doctrinal vehicles of this morality are singled out: the rhetoric of "equal rights" and the imperative of "sympathy with all that suffers." Both doctrines, Nietzsche suggests, are leveling movements: the first distributes status in a way that blunts hierarchical discrimination, the second makes suffering

the central norm from which value is then judged and remedied. The aphorism's final part—that this morality aims to "do away with any kind of shepherd or bellwether"—is an indictment of attempts to remove exemplarity and rank, which for Nietzsche are the position in which new valuations and higher types develop.

Additionally, the pastoral image of the "green pasture" serves as a metaphor for a polity that seeks equilibrium and minimization of tension, whereas the metaphors of "shepherd" and "bellwether" recall the leadership and signal functions that enable differentiation and elevation. This is to say, read together, the image and metaphors make the claim that the therapeutic aim to remove suffering and risk eliminates—by removing the necessary conditions—the flourishing of novel evaluative personalities.

Accordingly, Nietzsche's notion of creativity is not narrowly aesthetic; it names a form of ethical and existential origination. Greatness consists in the power to posit new evaluative perspectives: to revalue inherited goods and evils, to produce types of life that instantiate alternative hierarchies of worth. This creativity is bi-directional: it operates both inwardly (the reconfiguration of the agent's drives and self-relations) and outwardly (the institution or exemplification of new norms and cultural practices). Thus creativity is at once a psychological capacity (a management and transmutation of drives) and a normative achievement (a creation of standards that guide others). In this double sense, creativity and greatness are bound together: the great person is the creative legislator of new values.

Philosophically, this position entails a reconception of normativity. Instead of viewing norms as derivative from pre-existing moral laws or universal reason, Nietzsche attributes normative force to the active expressive capacities of particular types. Value acquires its authority not by appeal to universality but by its power to orient life and to be affirmed by strong, life-enhancing agents. Consequently, creativity possesses epistemic and practical primacy, as the capacity to create and give form precedes any abstract justification in grounding the value of a form of life.

The aphorism's claim that "what stands more malignantly in the way of [their] rise... than what in Europe today is called simply 'morality'" invites a reconstruction of an ethic of power. This ethic is not a crude glorification of brute force; rather it is an evaluative grammar that privileges self-overcoming, rank-differentiation, and the cultivation of strength as conditions of value-creation. The will to power, in this reading, names a productive impulse toward enhancement and self-creation rather than mere domination for its own sake. Power is ethical insofar as it is formative: it institutes orderings of value, brings distinctions into being, and enables the emergence of higher modes of existence.

That said, Nietzsche's rhetoric often risks being read as endorsing an aristocratic politics of cruelty. The aphorism anticipates this misreading and turns attention instead to structural effects: moral doctrines that valorize pity and equality may be well-intentioned but their practical effect is to reduce anxiety, discipline, and selective pressure—conditions Nietzsche regards as constitutive of creativity. The ethic of power therefore functions more as an epistemic and environmental account: what kinds of moral climates produce the pressures in which value-creating personalities can be formed? Nietzsche's answer is paradoxical: climates that permit and even require risk, suffering, and strenuous struggle make possible the emergence of creative greatness.

Central to the aphorism is the claim that the modern moral demand to abolish suffering is an obstacle to the genesis of greatness. Suffering, in Nietzsche's framework, is an ambivalent condition: it is neither intrinsically good nor simply evil; rather, suffering is a formative occasion for differentiation and self-transformation. When suffering is treated as a categorical evil whose primary meaning is merely to be negated, then the reactive energies of resentment and pity are channeled toward the suppression of challenge and difference. Pity and sympathy, therefore, becomes a leveling force: it arrests the painful processes through which novel forms crystallize.

This is not to romanticize suffering as an end in itself, nor to advocate gratuitous cruelty. Nietzsche's point is genealogical and evaluative: insofar as modern moral sensibilities reduce suffering to a problem to be universally rectified, they undermine the very processes—trial, hardship, selective attrition—that generate new evaluative heights. The prophylactic against greatness is not compassion per se but the systematic institutionalization of comfort and security as ultimate ends.

However, a powerful objection reads Nietzsche's argument as elitist and ethically perilous: it appears to endorse social arrangements that sacrifice the vulnerable for the flowering of the few. Two clarifications can blunt this charge without dissolving the thesis. First, Nietzsche's concern is with the conditions for the emergence of evaluative creativity, not an endorsement of permanent social cruelty. Second, the ethic of power can be read as an argument for plural normative milieus in which different forms of life are permitted, even encouraged, to develop. Nietzsche's elitism is thus methodological—he asks which conditions precipitate greatness—rather than prescriptive in a policy sense that mandates the suffering of the many for the few.

Moreover, egalitarian critiques that emphasize justice and the intrinsic dignity of persons demand a Nietzschean response. Nietzsche might counter that universalizing egalitarianism suppresses the possibility of value-pluralism and thereby impoverishes the overall possibilities of human flourishing. This counterclaim raises substantial moral-political questions that must be

adjudicated: what balance should be struck between protecting vulnerability and preserving incubatory pressures for creative development? Nietzsche forces the question but does not by itself supply a democratic political theory.

Drawing together the strands of the chapter, we can now say: the creative individual, as Nietzsche conceives her through the rubric of the will to power, is one who deliberately seeks to transgress and to remodel limits — to press against conventions, to enlarge the field of human possibility, and to convert previously accepted impossibilities into new tasks. Creativity, on this view, is not merely the production of novel objects or impressive feats; it is the purposeful engagement with resistance (both external and internal) that yields new expressive capacities and new evaluative perspectives. I offer the following synthesis of greatness, creativity, and their relation to the will to power.

Nietzsche's account of greatness exhibits a deliberate — and instructive — ambiguity. He points to paradigmatic instances of excellence understood as mastery within a domain. "Beethoven was a great composer, and Shakespeare was a great writer. In this case, the greatness of these individuals consists in their challenging successfully musical or poetic conventions, in their expanding the expressive resources of their respective media, and (perhaps) in their overcoming the inertial resistance of a public accustomed to the very conventions they shatter." (Reginster 2006, 192).

Nietzsche repeatedly insists that what we call a person's "greatness" is not reducible to a catalogue of accomplishments. Rather, greatness names a particular internal constitution: an organized plurality of drives and perspectives whose tensions are preserved and ordered so as to generate new forms of activity and valuation. This claim is encapsulated in his remark that greatness is "he that is overrich in will. Precisely this shall be called greatness: being capable of being as manifold as whole, as ample as full" (1966, 139). The phrase points to two linked claims. First, greatness is ontologically plural: a great soul contains diverse, even conflicting, instincts. Second, greatness is synthetically unified: those plural elements do not fragment the subject but are held together in a distinctive structural unity. The paradox is essential: multiplicity and unity co-belong.

Nietzsche develops this paradox further when he declares that "The highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured. Indeed, where the plant "man" shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully (e.g., in Shakespeare), but are controlled. (1968, 507)

Two interpretive moves are required. Literally, the sentence claims that exceptional individuals manifest a larger number of qualitatively distinct instincts than ordinary persons. Normatively and

functionally, the added clause “in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured” signals that these instincts are not merely present; they are sufficiently vigorous to affect conduct, yet sufficiently tempered so that antagonism among them does not produce disintegration. The hallmark of greatness, then, is not the suppression of conflict but an ordered conflict: antagonistic impulses are kept in play and are made to contribute — through tension, resistance, and recombination — to creative output. When Nietzsche invokes Shakespeare as an example, he draws attention to precisely this phenomenon: an artist in whom manifold, oppositional forces coexist and are transfigured into dramatic richness.

Two clarifications will prevent common misunderstandings. First, The central operation is formative: ordering and reconfiguring one’s own instincts so that they yield new evaluative possibilities. Power, on this account, is productive rather than exclusively coercive. Second, Nietzsche deliberately uses moral idioms — “conquest,” “strengthening,” “higher states” — in a non-moral, or supra-moral, register. Moral language is repurposed as technical vocabulary for transvaluation: familiar moral terms are instrumentalized to describe transformations in the hierarchy of values themselves, not to adjudicate those values by preexisting moral standards.

From these aphoristic claims a normative criterion follows for a power-centered ethics: Instead of measuring moral worth by conformity to universal rules or aggregate welfare alone, a Nietzschean standard attends to whether an agent, practice, or institution cultivates the inner conditions that enable sustained self-overcoming and creative revaluation. For Nietzsche, in short, greatness functions as the power-centered ethical exemplar because it designates the inner architecture of the self — the unification of multiplicity, the transfiguration of tension into form— through which genuinely new values and modes of life become possible.

Conclusion

This thesis has pursued a sustained clarification and reconstruction of Nietzsche's will to power with two complementary aims: (1) to dissolve longstanding ambiguities about the concept's scope and meaning, and (2) to show how, once properly understood, the will to power functions both as a plausible naturalistic account of life's dynamics and as the normative core of Nietzsche's revaluation of values. The argument proceeds from careful textual attention and conceptual analysis (chs. 1.1–1.3) to a focused ethical and evaluative application (chs. 1.4–1.7).

Chapter 1.1 identified the principal sources of ambiguity—metaphysical, psychological, and evaluative readings—and argued that much of the interpretive difficulty stems from conflating distinct explanatory levels. Distinguishing those levels is indispensable: the will to power can be simultaneously a descriptive claim about living organisms' tendencies and a normative criterion for assessing forms of life. Chapter 1.2 defended this reading against Schopenhauerian inheritance by showing that Nietzsche's will is not a mere will-to-live but a transformative tendency that seeks enhancement, differentiation, and overcoming rather than mere preservation. This contrast reframes Nietzsche's project as a corrective to pessimistic reductions of striving to self-preservation.

Chapter 1.3 offered a positive account: the will to power is best understood as an organizing, relational, and processual principle—not a single drive among many, nor a metaphysical substrate, but a pattern of interaction among impulses that culminates in forms of mastery, growth, and revaluation. This account preserves Nietzsche's insistence on biological immanence while giving clear analytic purchase on how drive-relations produce value-constituting phenomena. Chapter 1.4 then reinterpreted pleasure and suffering as indices within power-relations: they are not intrinsically good or bad but acquire evaluative significance insofar as they signal augmentation or diminution of a life's capacities for self-expression and self-overcoming.

In chapter 1.5 I examined the will to power's relations to other drives, arguing that Nietzsche envisages a hierarchical and integrative architecture: particular drives gain their meaning through their subordination to or appropriation by power-expressive projects. This dissolves the false dichotomy between pluralistic drive-psychologies and unitary readings, showing how multiplicity and unity cohere in a dynamic framework. Chapter 1.6 developed the central claim that the will to power furnishes the principle of Nietzsche's revaluation of values: by replacing transcendent grounds with life-centered criteria (strength, creativity, durability), Nietzsche relocates normativity within the empirically intelligible domain of flourishing and degeneracy.

Finally, chapter 1.7 sketched the beginnings of a power-centered ethics: not an endorsement of cruelty or domination simpliciter, but a normative vocabulary that privileges capacities for enhancement, creativity, and sustained self-overcoming while remaining attentive to the social and perspectival conditions that make such flourishing possible. Crucially, this ethics is perspectival yet not arbitrary: it aspires to intersubjective standards insofar as they track more or less life-affirming constellations of drives.

The thesis's overarching contribution is therefore twofold. First, it rehabilitates Nietzsche as a thinker who offers a serious naturalistic grounding for normative judgments—one that avoids reductive naturalism by preserving normativity's evaluative force. Second, it furnishes a philosophically disciplined interpretation of the will to power that unifies Nietzsche's psychological, biological, and ethical claims without collapsing them into a single register. Remaining questions—about limits, institutional embodiments of power-centered norms, and the precise epistemic status of intersubjective standards—invite further research, but they do not undercut the central reconstruction offered here.

In sum, reading the will to power as a relational, biological, and evaluative principle allows us to hear Nietzsche not as a mere provocateur of nihilism, but as a thinker who reconceives value in the language of life's capacities: a conception that demands both rigorous interpretation and critical appropriation.

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