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Nietzsche's "New Happiness:" Longing, Boredom, and the Elusiveness of Fulfillment

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I. Stendhal's "Terrible Question"

In *The Life of Henry Brulard*, a pseudonymous autobiographical work, the French writer Stendhal reports the following reaction to the satisfaction of his long-held desire to go to Paris and study mathematics:

«Paris, is that all it is?» This meant: the thing for which I have longed so much, as the supreme good, the thing to which I have sacrificed my life for the past three years, bores me. It was not the sacrifice of three years of my life that troubled me; [...] the terrible question that I was not lucid enough to see clearly was this: Where, then, is happiness on earth? And sometimes I got as far as asking: Is there happiness on earth? (Chapitre 39, pp. 429-430; my translation).

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, this experience proves to be a source of perplexity and an inducement to philosophical reflection for a wide range of thinkers, including Stendhal himself, but also Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and others beside. You believe that the possession of a certain thing you desire will bring you fulfillment. You manage to secure possession of that thing, but, instead of the fulfillment you expected, you find yourself feeling dissatisfied, perhaps even empty and depleted. I will refer to this experience as *the elusiveness of fulfillment*, and by fulfillment, I understand here a state of complete satisfaction, in which nothing is left to be desired. As this experience repeats itself, as it did for Stendhal, you must eventually confront the question of why fulfillment so eludes you, that is to say, insofar as you think of it in terms of fulfillment, the question of the very possibility of happiness.

Stendhal's "terrible question" has two remarkable features, which merit our attention. First, note that it is a genuine *question* for it is a distinctive characteristic of the elusiveness of fulfillment that it should be a source of perplexity. It differs, in this respect, from the perpetual dissatisfaction that attends to the pursuit of *essentially perfectible goods*, such as determinate forms of excellence that can be approximated ever more closely but never fully attained, or goods, of which having

more is always better, and of which there is always more to have. While there is nothing particularly surprising in this sort of dissatisfaction, the elusiveness of fulfillment described by Stendhal is a baffling, unexpected experience because the object of his desire is not an essentially perfectible good, but on the contrary a good whose possession can be fully secured.

Second, Stendhal's question is a question about the *very possibility of happiness*. This is remarkable if only in the following respect: Why should Stendhal have thought that only his move to Paris could bring him happiness? He could presumably have attributed his disappointment to some defect in this *particular object* itself and left open the possibility that the pursuit of other objects might have delivered the happiness for which he longed. Instead, in what he describes as moments of lucidity, it is his disappointment with this particular object that leads him to question the possibility of happiness itself. He is not led to this question, as I have just noted, by the thought that happiness could only be found in some sort of unattainable perfection. The peculiar dissatisfaction that inspires his question is not just any kind of disappointment with the object of his desire. It is, specifically, the experience of being *bored* by it. And while the individual whose achievements fall short of the perfection he seeks certainly is dissatisfied with them, his dissatisfaction could hardly be characterized as boredom.

In the course of his own reflections, Stendhal considers a number of possible explanations for his dissatisfaction, many of which share the following predictable form: the possession of the object of your desire leaves you unsatisfied because it is not, unbeknownst to you, what you *really* want. As I understand the notion here, an object can fail to be what you really want either insofar as it is the object of a merely *apparent* desire, or insofar as it is the object of a real, but *conditioned* desire, whose conditioned character goes unrecognized because the desire by which it is conditioned remains unacknowledged. A brief examination of a few general instances of this form of explanation will show, however, that it can neither adequately explain why Stendhal's dissatisfaction assumes the specific guise of boredom, nor adequately motivate his "terrible question."

Merely apparent desires are desires you only take yourself to have as a result of confusion over what you really want. This confusion may have its source in cognitive error, as when, for example, your persistent pursuit of material well-being rests on your failure to recognize that your deepest desires are for essentially non-material goods. It is this cognitive failure that makes your dissatisfaction with material well-being, when you achieve it, a source of puzzlement. The confusion may also have its source in certain sorts of affective conflicts, when you unsuccessfully attempt to resolve them through substitutive satisfaction. Substitutive satisfaction is the operation by which you substitute for the object of your real desire a different one, which is supposed either to provide an adequate satisfaction for your real desire, or to compensate for its frustration. To use a rather

hackneyed example, you are engaged in a failed attempt at substitutive satisfaction when you vainly seek genuine intimacy in sexual promiscuity. Attempts at substitutive satisfaction are typically the consequence of the *repression* of your real desire. You may take its object to be unattainable or even fraught with dangers, and you resort to repression to alleviate the unbearable feelings of frustration or anxiety this desire inspires in you. But a repressed desire is not psychologically inert: it continues—through a mechanism psychoanalytic theory calls a compromise formation—to move you, for example by inducing you to pursue less disturbing substitutes, objects that are within your reach or less terrifying. It is the repression of your real desire that explains why your dissatisfaction with these objects, when they prove to be inadequate substitutes, must remain diffuse and unintelligible even to you.

Alternatively, you could really want an object and yet still find yourself strangely dissatisfied by it. One possible explanation is that your desire for this object is in reality an opportunity to get *something else*, which securing possession of that object fails to deliver. For instance, you might really aspire to certain intellectual achievements, but be dissatisfied with them because you also take them to be opportunities to inspire the proud concern of an otherwise indifferent father, whom your intellectual achievements fail to impress. Here too, your inability to recognize the conditioned character of your intellectual ambitions might be thought to rest on the *repression* of your conditioning desire for the concern of an indifferent father. This is a desire you could not admit to yourself for this would have required you to acknowledge the deeply disturbing fact that you did not have your father's concern already and as a matter of course. As a consequence, you are bound to find puzzling the disappointment you feel at your intellectual achievements, when they do not succeed in inspiring fatherly pride.

Although Stendhal's reflections often evoke explanations of this general form for the elusiveness of fulfillment, they fall short in two respects. First, they do not explain why his dissatisfaction with the object of his desire should assume the peculiar form of *boredom*, although we will have to wait for an analysis of boredom to see precisely why. And second, even though they might suffice to inspire him to ask, "Where, then, is happiness on earth?", they cannot suffice to motivate the more terrible question he ends up raising, "Is there happiness on earth?" By themselves, indeed, explanations of this form do not preclude the possibility of fulfillment. They only suggest that it requires you to get clear on your real desires, and come to terms with them.¹

II. Schopenhauer's Pessimistic Answer

How, then, are we to understand, and answer, Stendhal's "terrible question"? To

examine these issues, it is natural to turn to the nineteenth century philosopher who concerned himself most explicitly with the elusiveness of fulfillment, namely, Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's central claim is that securing possession of the objects of your desires is bound to leave you unfulfilled because they lack *intrinsic value*. An object is intrinsically good, for Schopenhauer, when its value does not depend on the fact that it is desired, which is rather motivated by it. By contrast, an object is extrinsically good when its value depends entirely on the fact that it is desired. To this distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goods corresponds a distinction between two types of desires. *Object-based* desires are those desires motivated by your recognition of the intrinsic desirability of their objects. In this case, it is because you judge the object good that you come to desire it. *Need-based* desires are motivated, instead, by a pre-existing need for a certain object. In this conception, the object's desirability is *extrinsic*, entirely determined by its capacity to meet the relevant need. Absent this need, the object loses its desirability and therefore its appeal or interest to you. Here, you judge the object good or desirable only because, and insofar as, you desire (or need) it.

When its desirability depends solely on the fact that it is needed, the possession of an object cannot be a source of lasting enjoyment. For presumably your enjoyment depends upon your continuing to see this object as appealing or interesting, but these are characteristics it has by virtue of being desired, and it ceases to be desired as soon as its possession is secured, and the need that motivated you to desire it in the first place is sated. Schopenhauer's paradigmatic examples of need-based desires, hunger and thirst, offer vivid illustrations of this point: drinking water, for instance, loses its appeal as soon as your thirst is quenched.

All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive. It is not a gratification which comes to us *sui generis* and of itself, but it must always be the satisfaction of a desire. For desire, that is to say, lack, is the precedent condition of every pleasure; but with the satisfaction, the desire and therefore the pleasure cease (WWR, I §58; p. 319).

Schopenhauer correctly concludes that the possession of extrinsic goods, or of the objects of need-based desires, cannot be a source of lasting satisfaction but he also goes one surprising step further: "for this reason it cannot be lasting satisfaction and gratification, but always delivers us from a pain or want that must be followed either by a new pain, or by *langor, empty longing, and boredom*." (ibid., p. 320; my emphasis) The satisfaction of your need-based desire not only fails to yield lasting enjoyment, but actually soon leaves you with a feeling of "langor, empty longing, and boredom." This further conclusion is a little hasty. To see

why, we must examine more closely Schopenhauer's claim that happiness and pleasure are essentially negative:

But when everything is finally overcome and attained, nothing can ever be gained but deliverance from some suffering or desire; consequently, we are only in the same position we were before this suffering or desire appeared. What is immediately given to us is always only the want, i.e., the pain. The satisfaction and pleasure can be known only indirectly by remembering the preceding suffering and privation that ceased on their entry. Hence it comes about that we are in no way aware of the blessings and advantages we actually possess; we do not value them, but simply imagine that they must be so, for they make us happy only negatively, by preventing suffering. Only after we have lost them do we become sensible of their value, for the want, the privation, the suffering is what is positive, and proclaims itself immediately. Thus also we are pleased at remembering need, sickness, want, and so on which have been overcome, because such remembrance is the only means of enjoying present blessings. It is also undeniable that in this respect [...], the sight or description of another's sufferings affords us satisfaction and pleasure. (ibid., pp. 319-320)

To say that the pleasure you derive from the possession of the object of your desire is "negative" is simply to say that it is not *experienced* directly and "of itself," but only as the absence, or "negation" of pain. This explains why feeling pleasure requires the remembrance of past miseries in your own life, of which you are now delivered, or the sight of miseries in the lives of others, which you are mercifully spared. Absent such reflection on your own past miseries or on the present miseries of others, your feeling of pleasure, which is nothing but the experience of their absence, would eventually dissipate. Schopenhauer appears to conclude from this that the satisfaction of all your need-based desires can yield no fulfillment, but only "empty longing and boredom." This is the hasty conclusion: Why should securing the possession of the objects of your desires, when no new particular desire takes hold of you, give way to the restless diffuse dissatisfaction characteristic of "langor, empty longing, and boredom"? Or why, now that your determinate desires have been satisfied (even if the pleasure you take at this satisfaction eventually dissipates), should you then continue to be agitated by an "empty longing"?

To answer this question, we must first ask what sort of state boredom is, and what sort of dissatisfaction it involves. Schopenhauer's analysis of boredom

begins with three observations. He first remarks that boredom sets in when all your occurrent determinate desires are satisfied, and no new desire “appears on the scene” (WWR, I §57; p. 314). Second, he insists that boredom is a singularly unpleasant state, which you are prepared to go to great lengths to escape: “Boredom is anything but an evil to be thought of lightly; ultimately it depicts on the countenance real despair.” (WWR, §57; p. 313) Third, he points out that the displeasure you experience when you are bored is a kind of frustration: you feel as though something is still lacking, or left to be desired. Thus, he describes boredom as an “empty longing” (WWR, I §58; p. 320), a “longing without a determinate object” (WWR, I §29; p. 164), or “the pressure of will itself, without recognized motive” (WWR, I §65; p. 364).

This last observation circumscribes the central difficulty a successful analysis of boredom must resolve. If boredom sets in when all occurrent determinate desires have been satisfied, and no new desire has yet occurred and demanded satisfaction, how could the displeasure characteristic of it result from the frustration of a desire? As Schopenhauer describes it, boredom is quite precisely a state in which, having achieved some particular goal you have, you remain nonetheless unsatisfied. And if we ask why you so remain unsatisfied, Schopenhauer offers the following answer: “satisfaction quickly begets satiety. The goal was only apparent; possession takes away its charm. The desire, the need, appears again on the scene under a new form; if it does not, then dreariness, emptiness and boredom follow” (WWR, I §57; pp. 313-4) This lapidary answer requires careful analysis.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Schopenhauer anticipates here the contrast between “apparent” and “real” desires as it figures, for example, in the cases of substitutive satisfaction or conditioned desires I discussed earlier. For the feeling of dissatisfaction described in these cases cannot plausibly be characterized as boredom. The two conditions are phenomenologically distinct. The emptiness you feel when you vainly seek true intimacy in sexual promiscuity, or the proud concern of an otherwise indifferent father through your intellectual achievements involves the sense that something is still lacking, but it is something of a *determinate* nature, even if, as a consequence of repression, it remains unknown to you. In contrast, when you are bored, you have all the determinate objects you want, and although you have the sense that something is lacking, it is not the sense that something determinate is lacking.

Schopenhauer believes that an adequate account of boredom must explain this sense that something *indeterminate* is lacking.² His most promising proposal is that boredom is the consequence of the frustration of a peculiar desire to desire, or to be interested: the empty longing for a new desire is languor, boredom” (WWR, I §52; p.260). You are bored, he in fact declares, when you “lack objects of willing,” which means not that you are lacking the determinate objects of particular desires, but rather that you are lacking objects *to* desire.

This account is borne out by the distinctive phenomenology of boredom. When you are bored you will typically complain that "you have nothing to do." Obviously, you do not mean that you are under no *obligation* to do anything: this would be leisure, not boredom. You rather mean that you have no *inclination* or *desire* to do anything. Nothing arouses your interest; nothing engages your will, or your desire. As Schopenhauer says, you "lack objects of willing." Moreover, you *deplore* this condition precisely because you also desire things to will, or to desire. This desire has no determinate object: you merely desire something to desire, but nothing in particular—any fresh determinate desire will do. Your boredom is the expression of an "empty longing," a desire in search of an object, a desire to desire again: this is why it arises only when all your occurrent determinate desires have been satisfied.

We may now return to Schopenhauer's account of the elusiveness of fulfillment. He characterizes as boredom the distinctive feeling of dissatisfaction or emptiness an individual experiences even when he has satisfied his determinate desires:

Their satisfaction is hard to attain and yet affords him nothing but a painless state in which he is still abandoned to boredom. This, then, is positive proof that, in itself, existence has no value; for boredom is just the feeling of its emptiness. Thus if life, in the craving for which our very essence and existence consist, had a positive value and in itself a real intrinsic worth, there could not possibly be any boredom. (PP §146; p. 287)

Schopenhauer appears to blame boredom on the fact that none of the determinate objects the individual now possesses has value "in itself." But why should the possession of objects that lack *intrinsic* value be a cause of boredom? It is undeniable that water ceases to be interesting to you as soon as your thirst is quenched, but why should a state in which you have lost interest in an object, the need for which was a source of pain a moment ago, induce in you a feeling of emptiness or boredom?

The answer, as we are now able to see, is simply this: you are left dissatisfied because in addition to your desire for the water, you also have a desire to desire, or a desire to be interested.³ And this desire, which is satisfied so long as you are thirsty, is frustrated as soon as your thirst is quenched. You are dissatisfied, however, not because the object of your desire failed to be *all* that you had expected. In one respect, extrinsic goods are undeniably valuable: for instance, water does deliver you from the pangs of thirst. But in another respect, they fall short: they fail to keep you interested.

It is thus from the standpoint of this desire to desire that the lack of intrinsic value of the object of your desire assumes its significance. If anything in your existence had value “in itself,” its possession would be a positive good, rather than merely the absence of the pain caused by the need for it. It would retain its “charm” or its interest to you, it would continue to inspire desire, even after you had secured possession of it, and its possession would be a source not of boredom, but of fulfillment. And so, for Schopenhauer, the appeal of intrinsically good objects does not simply lie in their intrinsic goodness, but also in the fact that, by virtue of their intrinsic goodness, they are capable of satisfying the desire motivated by your need for them and your desire to be interested by them.⁴ And the defect of extrinsically good objects is not their lack of intrinsic goodness as such, but the fact that, by virtue of lacking intrinsic goodness, their ability to satisfy your desire to be interested is severely limited.

Schopenhauer believes that there are no intrinsically good objects, or, in any event, that all human desires are need-based desires.⁵ In the absence of intrinsic goodness, what are the prospects of fulfillment? Schopenhauer explicitly defines fulfillment as a state in which all your desires are satisfied and nothing is left to be desired: “a final satisfaction of the will, after which no fresh willing would occur,[...] an imperishable satisfaction of the will,” a “permanent satisfaction which completely and forever satisfies its craving,” or a “contentment that cannot again be disturbed” (WWR, I §65; p. 362).⁶ Although the existence of intrinsically good objects would have left open the possibility of fulfillment, their inexistence ineluctably leads to this bleak conclusion:

Willing and striving are [life’s] whole essence, and can be fully compared to an unquenchable thirst. The basis of all willing, however, is need, lack, and hence pain, and by its very nature and origin, it is therefore destined to pain. If, on the other hand, it lacks objects of willing, because it is at once deprived of them again by too easy a satisfaction, a fearful emptiness and boredom come over it; in other words, its being and its existence itself become an intolerable burden for it. Hence its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents. This had been expressed very quaintly by saying that, after man had placed all pains and torments in hell, there was nothing left for heaven but boredom. (WWR, I §57; p. 312; cf. §38; p. 196)⁷

The following picture of human willing emerges from Schopenhauer’s reflections on the susceptibility to boredom. Human beings obviously have

many *first-order* desires for determinate objects (for instance, fame, wealth, love, food and shelter, and so on). And such desires are also painful so long as they are unsatisfied. But their susceptibility to boredom reveals that human beings also have a *second-order* desire, a desire whose object is (or includes) a desire. This structure of human willing in first- and second-order desires shows why a final and complete satisfaction of all desires (that is to say, fulfillment) is impossible. The satisfaction of first-order desires for determinate objects, which eliminates ordinary pain, necessarily implies the frustration of the second-order desire to have (first-order) desires, and therefore boredom, and vice-versa. Since both kinds of desires can never be satisfied together, human life "swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom." Something is always left to be desired.⁸

I should note that Schopenhauer argues that it is possible to escape this bleak predicament through what he calls "complete resignation," or the "negation of the will." This consists not only in renouncing the satisfaction of all of your desires, which, in the absence of intrinsic goods, is impossible anyway, but in renouncing these desires themselves, for example through appropriate practices of ascetic mortification. But he does not cease to believe that true happiness is *fulfillment*, and that only intrinsic goods could provide fulfillment. He therefore concedes that the condition of "will-lessness" is only an ersatz happiness, the mere absence of misery, which we may still call good only "metaphorically and figuratively":

However, if we wish to give an honorary, or so to speak an emeritus, position to an old expression that from custom we do not like entirely to discard, we may, metaphorically and figuratively, call the complete self-effacement and denial of the will, true will-lessness, which alone stills and silences for ever the pressure of willing, which alone gives that contentment which cannot again be disturbed, [...] the absolute good, the summum bonum, and we may regard it as the only radical cure for the disease against which all other good things, such as all fulfilled wishes and all attained happiness, are only palliatives, anodynes. (WWR, I §65; p. 360)

III. Nietzsche's "New Happiness"

Once its significance is properly understood, the experience of boredom points Schopenhauer not only to the motivation of Stendhal's "terrible question" but also to an answer to it. In attesting to the presence in the human will of incompatible desires, the susceptibility to boredom shows why there cannot be "any happiness

on earth”: “Everything in life proclaims that happiness on earth is destined to be frustrated or recognized as an illusion. The grounds for this lie deep in the very nature of things.” (WWR, II xlvi; p. 573; cf. WWR, I §59; p. 323).

Schopenhauer’s answer to Stendhal’s question has two noteworthy characteristics: first, he takes the elusiveness of fulfillment to be thoroughly *regrettable*, essentially incompatible with true happiness; and second he attributes this elusiveness to the *world* itself, rather than to the nature of your desires: the only objects the world has to offer are devoid of intrinsic value, and so prove unable to satisfy both the desires based on your particular need for them and your desire to be interested by them. Nietzsche’s own account of the elusiveness of fulfillment stands in sharp contrast with Schopenhauer’s in each of these two respects. First, he attributes the elusiveness of fulfillment to something pertaining to the nature of your desires, rather than to what the world has to offer. And second, he also argues that the elusiveness of fulfillment, far from being regrettable, is an essential and distinctive feature of the good life, once it is properly understood—what he calls his “new happiness.”

To understand how Nietzsche is led to this radical idea, we must first return to Schopenhauer’s analysis of the experience of boredom, for this analysis is not without its shortcomings, three of which in particular deserve mention. First, boredom can occur even when you have live (unsatisfied) determinate desires. Schopenhauer himself offers an example: prisoners can grow bored, even though they have a live desire to get out of jail.⁹ It follows that boredom cannot simply be a consequence of the frustration of the desire to have things to desire. And indeed the ordinary manner in which you express boredom supplies a clue: you do not complain that you have nothing to *desire*, but rather that you have nothing to *do*. Boredom is the frustration of a desire to engage in activity, or to have things to do. And you want determinate desires only insofar as they give you something to do. The prisoner’s desire to be free cannot stave off boredom precisely because there is nothing he can do about it. It is not, at least in the ordinary cases, an inducement to action. Second, boredom can occur even when you have things to do. This is typically the case when the required activities are *unchallenging*.¹⁰ Boredom is therefore the frustration of the desire to engage in some challenging form of activity.

These two modifications of Schopenhauer’s account imply a third, even more significant one. Boredom can occur even when your activity results in securing the possession of *intrinsic goods*. It is possible to tire of intellectual or creative achievements, for example, even when you take the value of these achievements to be independent of your pre-existing needs and desires. This is because the desire that lies at the source of boredom is not simply the desire to be interested, it is the desire to be engaged in a certain challenging form of *activity*. And even intrinsic goods, once their possession is firmly secured, might lose their appeal

by ceasing to motivate engagement in that sort of activity. This last modification points to a far more radical explanation of the elusiveness of fulfillment than Schopenhauer's, insofar as it suggests that it cannot simply be attributed to a defect in the objects of your determinate desires—fulfillment would still elude you even if these objects were intrinsically good. In addition, this view might also be thought to stand on firmer ground than Schopenhauer's, insofar as it does not rest on his questionable denial of the existence of intrinsic goods.¹¹

Nietzsche's famous concept of *the will to power*, I now want to argue, designates a desire to engage in a challenging form of activity. Since this is a new way of understanding this concept, I feel it necessary to make a brief exegetical case for it. Few of Nietzsche's ideas have been more maligned and more misunderstood than his concept of the will to power. Among the various misgivings it has inspired, the deepest and most enduring remains rooted in a tempting interpretation of power in terms of *control* or *domination*: to will power is to seek to control or dominate.¹² The implications of this interpretation (for example, that Hitler's Nazism is a paradigmatic embodiment of the will to power) have proven deeply embarrassing to scholars otherwise favorably disposed toward Nietzsche's ideas.¹³ This interpretation is not embarrassing, however, insofar as the doctrine is a *descriptive* psychological theory, which presents the desire to dominate as the fundamental human motivation. Although this view is certainly disturbing to those who want to believe that human beings are capable of genuine compassion, for example, it should hardly be embarrassing to Nietzscheans themselves. After all, it could be one of those "terrible" "un-Christian" truths about which he regularly warns his unsuspecting readers. The view is embarrassing because he also claims that the will to power is a *value*, which means, on the interpretation I am considering here, that Hitler's Nazism is not only a phenomenon Nietzsche could have predicted, but also one of which he would have approved.

The interpretation of power in terms of domination and control is widespread because some of Nietzsche's own formulations invite it, among which the most notorious may be the following:

Life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation—but why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages? [...] 'Exploitation' does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect or primitive society: it belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life. (BGE 259)

However, a close reading of even this provocative passage already suggests that this interpretation is not inevitable: it presents domination and control, in their various forms of “appropriation,” “overpowering,” “exploitation,” and the like, as a common, perhaps unavoidable, “consequence” of the pursuit of power, but not necessarily as what this pursuit *consists of*. A proper appreciation of this fact points, in my view, to a very different, and far more interesting, conception of the nature of the will to power.

All the activities Nietzsche associates with the will to power in the passage above have a common core, which he describes elsewhere in the following terms: “But all expansion, incorporation, growth is striving against something that resists [*ein Anstreben gegen Widerstehendes*]; movement is essentially tied up with states of displeasure; that which is here the driving force must in any event desire something else [than happiness] if it desires displeasure in this way and continually looks for it.—”(WP 704) The pursuit of power (“expansion, incorporation, growth”), he declares, is “striving against something that resists.” Since striving against is an effort to overcome, we might say that the will to power aims at the overcoming of resistance. It is “a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs” (GM, I 13).

At first glance, this explication does not require us to think of power in terms other than domination and control, since their pursuit often makes it necessary to overcome the resistance of those (or that) one seeks to dominate or control. But closer examination shows otherwise. We should first note that the pursuit of the desire to dominate does not, in fact, *necessitate* the overcoming of resistance, even when domination is of other people. As Nietzsche observes, many people actually wish to be dominated and would oppose no resistance to those who seek to subjugate them—namely, those to whom he attributes a “slavish” disposition (see, e.g., BGE 261; GS 363; A 54). And control could presumably at least sometimes be achieved by circumventing all possible resistance, rather than confronting it. Insofar as he emphasizes “striving against something that resists,” Nietzsche already draws a contrast between his concept of the will to power and the mere desire to dominate and control.

Even if the desire to dominate and control were to necessitate it, moreover, the overcoming of resistance would play only a purely instrumental role, so that if domination and control could be achieved without overcoming resistance, this desire would be no less satisfied. But Nietzsche explicitly and insistently maintains that the will to power “is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance [*ohne den Gegner und Widerstand noch nicht satt genug ist*]” (WP 696; cf. 656; A 2). This is the case because the will to power has a distinctive characteristic, which the widespread interpretation entirely overlooks: it is “a *thirst* for enemies and resistances [*ein Durst nach Feinden und Widerständen*].” The widespread interpretation explains only why your will to power requires that you be prepared to

confront and overcome whatever resistance is opposed to its satisfaction, but it does not explain why it should induce you to "thirst" for such resistance. In other words, the widespread interpretation fails to recognize a crucial ambiguity in the notion of the will to power. It could designate a desire for the satisfaction of which overcoming resistance is a perhaps necessary means. Or it could designate a desire for the overcoming of resistance itself. In the first case, which is the view of power as domination or control, pursuing power requires being prepared to overcome whatever resistance presents itself, but certainly not deliberately seeking it. In the second case, which is the view I think we should favor, pursuing power requires actually and deliberately seeking resistance to overcome. Thus, power for Nietzsche is not synonymous with domination or control.¹⁴

The explicit contrast between power and happiness in the passage mentioned earlier (WP 704) suggests one further important qualification. In the conception under which Nietzsche disparages it, happiness is understood in terms of the satisfaction of all of your desires. If we keep in mind that happiness so conceived requires that all resistance to that satisfaction has been overcome, then in contrasting power with it, Nietzsche indicates that the will to power is not a will to a *state in which resistance has been overcome*. Since the will to power is not simply a will to *resistance* either, or the desire for a condition in which your strivings are perpetually frustrated by resistance or obstacles (there would be no "expansion, incorporation, growth" unless such strivings were eventually successful), we must conclude that the will to power is a will to the very *activity of overcoming resistance*.

We may now turn to the most perplexing claim Nietzsche makes about the will to power: whoever wills power thereby "desires displeasure and continually looks for it [*die Unlust will und fortwährend aufsucht*]" (WP 704). To make sense of this claim, we need a better grasp of the basic structure of the will to power, particularly of its relation to other desires.¹⁵ The will to power is a desire for the overcoming of resistance. Considered in isolation, this desire lacks *determinate content*. It gets a determinate content only from its relation to some *other* (determinate) desire. Something constitutes a resistance only in relation to a determinate end one desires to realize. For example, a recalcitrant puzzle is an obstacle to the desire to understand, and the strength of an opposing player is resistance against the desire to win. Accordingly, the will to power cannot be satisfied unless the agent has a desire for something else than power. The will to power therefore has the structure of a *second-order desire*—it is a desire whose object is or includes another (first-order) desire. It is, specifically, a desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of some determinate first-order desire.

We can now begin to make sense of the puzzling claim that the will to power "desires displeasure" or suffering. It will help to consider this claim against the backdrop of Schopenhauer's conception of suffering: "We call its [=the will's]

hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, *suffering* [Leiden]" (WWR, I 56; p. 309).¹⁶ Suffering is the experience of frustration, or of resistance against the satisfaction of your desire. Schopenhauer is himself both a psychological and an ethical hedonist: the ultimate human motivation, and the ultimate human good, is the avoidance of suffering. In this respect, Nietzsche radically departs from his erstwhile mentor:

Human beings do not seek pleasure and avoid displeasure. [...] What human beings want [...] is an increase of power; driven by that will they seek resistance, they need something that opposes it [*aus jenem Willen heraus sucht er nach Widerstand, braucht er Etwas, das sich entgegenstellt*—Displeasure, as an obstacle to their will to power, is therefore a normal fact [...]; human beings do not avoid it, they are rather in continual need of it [...]. (WP 702; cf. 656)

The will to power, insofar as it is a desire for the overcoming of resistance, must necessarily also include a desire for the resistance to overcome. Since suffering is the experience of such resistance, then he who desires power ipso facto “desires displeasure.”

The two features of the will to power I have been describing—that its satisfaction requires that you desire something else than power, and that its satisfaction implies displeasure—combine to give the will to power a complex structure. The will to power is a will for the overcoming of resistance. Since resistance is always defined in relation to determinate ends, the desire for resistance to overcome cannot be satisfied unless you also desire these determinate ends. Yet, in willing power, you must also desire resistance to their realization. And so, in willing power, you must want *both* certain determinate ends and resistance to their realization: “That I must be struggle and a becoming and *an end and an opposition to ends* [Zweck und der Zwecke Widerspruch]¹⁷—ah, whoever guesses what is my will should also guess on what *crooked* paths it must proceed.” (Z, II 12; first emphasis mine)

You will remember that my purpose in this lecture is to examine the sources and ethical significance of the distinctive experience of what I have called the elusiveness of fulfillment. We now come to the feature of Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power that is most relevant to this purpose. The following passage brings it out: “It is *not* the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure (...) but rather the will’s forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way. The feeling of pleasure lies precisely in the dissatisfaction of the will, in the fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance.” (WP 696; cf. 656; GS 56)

Nietzsche contrasts here his own conception of pleasure from the traditional one, which he associates with Schopenhauer. I wish to call attention to a peculiar conceptual tension detectable in the passage. On the one hand, pleasure is described as the effect of *overcoming* resistance, of getting rid of it, while on the other, it is described as an effect of *resistance* itself. I believe this tension to be more than the unintended result of philosophical clumsiness. To appreciate its significance, we must remember that the will to power is not simply a desire for a determinate end and for resistance to its realization, but also a desire for the overcoming of this resistance. This suggests that there is no actual contradiction in the passage: the pleasure taken at the satisfaction of the will to power does require both resistance and its overcoming. The peculiar characteristic of the pursuit of power this passage brings to light is that the pleasure it causes, insofar as it requires both resistance and its overcoming, must be very precarious indeed.

This point deserves emphasis. The will to power will not be satisfied unless three conditions are met: there must be some first-order desire for a determinate end, there must be resistance to the realization of this determinate end, and there must be actual success in overcoming this resistance. But overcoming resistance eliminates it, and in so doing it also eliminates a necessary condition of satisfaction of the will to power. It follows that the satisfaction of the will to power necessarily brings about its own dissatisfaction. I will call this the paradox of the will to power.

The Greek "agon" (contest or competition) (KSA, I, pp. 783-792; cf. TI, II 8; IX 23) is one of Nietzsche's favorite illustrations of the pursuit of power. He favors it because it helps to bring out the paradox of the will to power. The will to power of the protagonists of a competitive game is expressed in their desire to play. But they are not really playing unless they care about winning and do everything they can to achieve victory. This simply follows from the fact that their motivation for playing the game is the will to power, namely, a desire for the *overcoming* of resistance: if they were to lose, their will to *power* would be frustrated, since they would have failed to overcome resistance. But in achieving victory they also bring the game to an end, frustrating thereby their desire to play: "Alas, who was not vanquished in his victory?" (Z, III 12[30])

What is the implication of this paradox for the pursuit of power? Nietzsche describes it in the following terms: "Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it." (Z, II 12) Willing power does not, strictly speaking, require you to destroy what you have created, or hate what you love. Rather, you must "overcome" what you love or create. Your will to power soon induces you to find any attained object of a determinate desire no longer satisfying, no longer enough. But you cannot simply undo what you have done and do it again: since the resistance to doing it has been overcome already, it could no longer count as genuine overcoming. What you need are

fresh, new, perhaps greater challenges.¹⁸

Consider one of Nietzsche's most common examples, the will to power as it relates to the desire to know or to understand. It requires you to seek and overcome resistance to knowledge and understanding, for example in the actual resolution of problems or the discovery of new worlds. But such achievements will ultimately leave your will to power dissatisfied and looking for more resistance to overcome. Obviously, it would hardly satisfy your will to power to go over problems that have already been solved, or travel again through worlds already discovered. What you need, rather, are new problems to solve, and worlds as yet unknown to discover.

In claiming that the satisfaction of the will to power brings about its dissatisfaction, then, Nietzsche is not saying that its pursuit is self-defeating or self-undermining. It is plainly possible to satisfy the will to power—you only have to engage in the successful overcoming of resistance. The paradox of the will to power simply reveals one of its most distinctive features, namely that it is a kind of desire the satisfaction of which cannot provide *fulfillment*. Insofar as it is satisfied by the on-going activity of overcoming resistance to the satisfaction of some particular desire, then it presupposes the frustration of this particular desire, until that resistance is finally overcome and this particular desire satisfied, at which point it is the desire to have resistance to overcome that is frustrated.

It is therefore the paradoxical nature of the will to power that accounts for the elusiveness of fulfillment. If you will power, the actual satisfaction of any determinate desire, or the achievement of any determinate goal, is bound to leave you with a palpable sense of dissatisfaction. But the cause of this dissatisfaction is not the fact that the object of your desire is defective, for example by virtue of lacking intrinsic value. Such a goal, once achieved, remains unsatisfying because its achievement spells the end of a particular bout of active confrontation and overcoming of resistance. And since the will to power is precisely the desire to be engaged in that sort of activity, you must, in order to pursue it, learn to “oppose” even the things you “love,” and take “joy in destruction of *the most noble* and at the sight of its progressive ruin: in reality joy in what is coming and lies in the future, which triumphs over existing things, *however good*” (WP 417; my emphases). As this passage makes clear, once again, it is neither the imperfection, nor the lack of intrinsic value of your achievement that causes you dissatisfaction: on the contrary, your will to power could induce you to take leave of those achievements you consider intrinsically good, or even perfect.

For Nietzsche, power is not simply the object of a peculiar desire, it is also a good, indeed the core of his new conception of happiness: “What is happiness?—The feeling that power *increases*—that a resistance is overcome [*dass ein Widerstand überwunden wird*]. Not contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war; *not* virtue but proficiency (virtue in the Renaissance style, *virtù*, virtue

free of moralic acid)." (A 2) And if we want to know what sort of good power is, Nietzsche offers a crucial hint in the following passage:

A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power. Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy. (Z, I 15)

Nietzsche observes here that we take the *difficulty* of an achievement to contribute to its value. And he claims that this is the implication of a commitment to the value of power, understood as the overcoming of resistance. At its core, an ethics whose principle is the will to power is intended to reflect the value we place on what is difficult or, as we might prefer to say, on what is *challenging*. The claim that difficulty contributes to the value of an achievement would require careful analysis, but I only want to indicate here an important implication Nietzsche takes this claim to have for our understanding of happiness.

Valuing the pursuit of power is valuing a specific type of activity, that of confronting and overcoming resistance. Remember that the will to power has a deeply paradoxical structure, with the consequence that its satisfaction brings about its own dissatisfaction. To satisfy your desire for the activity of overcoming resistance in the pursuit of some determinate end, you must achieve that determinate end, that is to say, overcome all the resistance to its realization. But once that resistance is overcome, the activity comes to a close, and your desire for this sort of activity finds itself frustrated, inducing you to seek out new opportunities for it.

It is therefore no surprise that his valuation of the will to power leads Nietzsche to claim to have discovered a "new happiness" (GS, Preface 3; cf. A 1). Happiness is often conceived in terms of *fulfillment*: the complete satisfaction of all of your desires, the state in which nothing is left to be desired—"the happiness of resting, of not being disturbed, of satiety, of finally attained unity, as a 'sabbath of sabbaths'" (BGE 200). In contrast, Nietzsche's "new happiness," insofar as it involves the successful pursuit of the will to power, cannot be *fulfillment*, a condition of "not being disturbed, of satiety, of fully attained unity," since it is the object of a desire whose very satisfaction brings about its dissatisfaction.¹⁹ And so, far from being incompatible with happiness, the elusiveness of fulfillment proves to be its most distinctive characteristic.

Nietzsche notoriously describes the pursuit of philosophical knowledge and understanding as manifestations of the will to power (cf. Z, I 10). His preferred

analogy, in this connection, is that of the great discoverer who embarks on uncharted waters, in search of new worlds (GS 124, 289, 343). As he conceives of it, in its philosophical guise, the good life consists in challenging hallowed and deeply entrenched views (what he often calls “the ideal”), and in setting off to discover new worlds, full of still unknown questions, riddles, and mysteries. It is no wonder, then, that he should describe the rewards of a lifetime of inquiries with the following words:

And now, after we have long been on our way in this manner, we argonauts of the ideal, with more daring perhaps than is prudent, and have suffered shipwreck and damage often enough, but are, to repeat it, healthier than one likes to permit us, dangerously healthy, ever again healthy—it will seem to us as if, as a reward, we now confronted an as yet undiscovered country whose boundaries nobody has yet surveyed, something beyond all the lands and nooks of the ideal so far, a world so overrich in what is beautiful, strange, questionable, terrible, and divine that our curiosity as well as our craving to possess it has got beside itself—ah, now nothing will fulfill us anymore! (GS 382)²⁰

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Notes

¹ The suggestion that you are simply confused about what you really want might seem simplistic. It is very likely, for example, that your attempt to find intimacy in promiscuity is not simply an error, but the result of a compromise between two desires that are in conflict, such as the desire for true intimacy and the desire for emotional security. The ersatz intimacy achieved through promiscuity is the price of emotional security. However, the conflict between these desires is the consequence of contingent circumstances, which could presumably be modified by the agent, once he becomes aware of it.

² That Schopenhauer recognizes this as the distinctive trait of boredom is evident from one type of explanation he frequently proposes for it: “All that these remarks are intended to make clear, namely the impossibility of attaining lasting satisfaction and the negative nature of all happiness, finds its explanation in [...] that the will, whose objectification is the human life like every phenomenon, is a striving without aim or end.” (WWR, I §58; p. 321) Or again: “The will

dispenses entirely with an ultimate aim and object. It always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such striving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction; it can be checked only by hindrance, but in itself it goes on forever." (WWR, I §56; p. 308) According to this explanation, the will goes on pressing, even after a determinate goal has been attained, because it is ultimately aimless, so that no determinate goal can ever satisfy it. The determinate goal it realizes is "only apparent" not because another determinate goal is its "real" goal, but because it has no goal at all.

This type of explanation rests on a central tenet of Schopenhauer's metaphysics: we should think of the will, including the human will, on the model of what nineteenth century physicists call "force" (as in the "force of gravity") (see WWR, I §56, pp. 308-9; cf. §§ 21, 26-27). The chief characteristic of a force is that it keeps on exercising the pressure determined by its particular nature, but it is not intentional, it does not have an aim or a goal. Therein lies the problem with this type of explanation, and the reason why I leave it out: as Schopenhauer himself explicitly recognizes, human willing (or desiring) is an essentially intentional state and therefore requires an intentional object. Indeed, the idea of a willing without an object makes no sense: "When a man wills, he wills something; his will is always directed to an object and can be thought of only in relation to an object." (FW, p. 14; cf. WWR, I §29; p. 163) But how, then, are we to make sense of the idea of an "aimless striving" (cf. WWR, I §29; p. 164)? The challenge would be to develop a plausible account of how an essentially non-intentional force or tendency could be manifested or instantiated in an essentially intentional state.

³ Here is how Schopenhauer defines what it is for an object to be *interesting* to human beings: "to be interesting to them, it must (and this is to be found already in the meaning of the word) in some way excite their *will*" (WWR, I §58; p. 314).

⁴ This appears to generate a paradox. An intrinsic good has its value "in itself," and not in the fact that it satisfies a pre-existing desire. But Schopenhauer clearly suggests that an important part of the value of intrinsic goods lies precisely in the fact that they satisfy a desire, namely the desire to desire. However, I do not believe this paradox to be vicious: it is by virtue of their intrinsic goodness, i.e., their ability to *inspire* desire, rather than simply to *satisfy* it, that such objects can satisfy the desire to desire. The present paradox is structurally similar to one Harry Frankfurt (1999) identifies when he observes that final ends can also be useful, i.e., means to some further end, *by virtue of being final*, or ends to be pursued for their own sake. They are useful, specifically, insofar as they satisfy our desire to have things to love, or to care about, where to love something is to regard it as good for its own sake.

⁵ “[Every man] would then first know a thing to be *good*, and in consequence will it, instead of first *willing* it, and in consequence calling it *good*. According to the whole of my fundamental view, all this is a reversal of the true relation.” (WWR, I 55; p. 292) Also: “everything agreeable to the will in any one of its manifestations, and fulfilling the will’s purpose is thought through the concept *good* [...]; in short, we call everything good that is just as we want it to be.” (WWR, I 65; p. 360)

⁶ Schopenhauer’s definition of fulfillment is fraught with an ambiguity: it designates, on the one hand, a condition of *complete* satisfaction, i.e., a state in which all of one’s desires are satisfied, and also, on the other hand, a condition of *permanent* satisfaction, i.e., a state of contentment that is no longer to be disturbed. The two notions differ and Schopenhauer develops independent arguments against the possibility of each form of fulfillment (against the possibility of permanent satisfaction, see, e.g., WWR, I §58, pp. 319-320). The same ambiguity can be found in Nietzsche as well, and his arguments against both forms of fulfillment draw on different features of his concept of the will to power. In this paper, I focus exclusively on their critique of the possibility of fulfillment understood in terms of complete satisfaction.

⁷ “[E]very human life is tossed backwards and forwards between pain and boredom.” (WWR, I §57; p. 313)

⁸ The elusiveness of fulfillment comes as a surprise, in this view, not because this desire to desire is repressed or unconscious, but because it is subtle enough to escape ordinary notice.

⁹ “The strict penitentiary system of Philadelphia makes mere boredom an instrument of punishment through loneliness and idleness. It is so terrible an instrument, that it has brought convicts to suicide.” (WWR, I §57; p. 313) This case also illustrates why, when the difficulty to satisfy a desire is recognized to be too great, frustration might give way to boredom—the desire persists, but it no longer gives the agent something to do.

¹⁰ Here, too, Schopenhauer unwittingly recognizes the point, when he attributes boredom to “too easy a satisfaction” of one’s desires (WWR, I §57; p. 312).

¹¹ Schopenhauer’s chief arguments for this view appear to be essentially empirical claims. One is the claim that all pleasures are “negative” insofar as they result from the satisfaction of pre-existing desires. If some pleasures came unbidden,

that is to say, not as the satisfaction of a pre-existing desire, they would have to be caused by the possession of intrinsic goods. Aesthetic pleasure, admittedly, does not result from the satisfaction of a pre-existing desire, but it is still "negative," i.e., it still consists of the removal of the pain caused by desires insofar as it is a condition in which our desires, whatever they are, temporarily lose their hold on us (see WWR, I §38; p. 197). This argument is questionable not just because it is merely empirical, but also because it is, as an empirical claim, dubious: it certainly seems as though some pleasures come unbidden and do not consist of a temporary elimination of our desires.

Another argument is based on the claim that the susceptibility to boredom extends to the entire domain of possible human experiences (see PP §146; p. 287). This shows that none of these experiences can be about an intrinsically good object. There are two problems with this argument. First, it depends on a dubious empirical claim: I will suggest shortly that one can grow bored even of intrinsic goods, which shows that the universal susceptibility to boredom cannot support a denial of the existence of such goods. Second, even if this empirical claim is true, it does not show that there are no intrinsic goods: there could well be intrinsically good objects, but our interest in them is limited to the fact that they satisfy a pre-existing need. We can be incapable of recognizing the intrinsic value of objects when we are, for example, overwhelmed or obnubilated by our needs: to a starving person, the only value a precious work of art may have is the promise its sale holds to relieve him of his hunger. Boredom, in this case, may demonstrate not so much that such objects lack intrinsic value as that our needs continue to blind us to it by shaping our view of the world, even though they are now satisfied.

This suggests a possible argument for the somewhat different claim that although there may well be intrinsic goods, we are incapable of appreciating them as such, insofar as they cannot inspire new desires in us. This could be the case if we are beings obnubilated by needs. If this is so, responsiveness of intrinsic goods would simply be a matter of removing subjective obstacles. Schopenhauer might argue that this is not possible (although the very possibility of boredom shows that it sometimes is, if only temporarily). But he might also have a deeper worry in mind, which concerns the question of what, in an object, could possibly excite the will or arouse the desire of human beings. And he might believe that this could only be features of the object by which it is relevant to the satisfaction of our existing needs, and that the idea that an object could, by virtue of its intrinsic properties, arouse a new desire, rather than stimulate or trigger pre-existing affective dispositions, is not psychologically plausible. But, once again, we would need to see an *argument* for such a claim.

¹² Some of the objections to the concept of the will to power bear on its nature:

when it is taken as a cosmological principle, for example, it appears to lack utterly any adequate empirical basis. I do not pronounce on this issue here and focus exclusively on the will to power as it operates in human psychology.

¹³ Stern (1979) offers a representative statement of this embarrassment. Even though he acknowledges that the will to power can also assume less disturbing guises, he declares: “If there is anything in the recent ‘Nietzschean’ era that comes close to an embodiment of ‘the will to power’, it is Hitler’s life and political career” (p. 120).

¹⁴ Failure to make sense of this deliberate quest for resistance is the central shortcoming of all interpretations of power in terms of control or domination, including in particular the most sophisticated among these interpretations found in Richardson (1996). It is also a shortcoming of the interpretation of power as capacity, rather than domination, at least as it is presented in Clark (1990), which also arguably takes a consequence of the pursuit of power to be what this pursuit consists of.

¹⁵ I discuss this difficult issue in detail, and criticize existing interpretations, in Reginster (2006), pp. 126-132.

¹⁶ “[A]ll suffering is simply nothing but unfulfilled and thwarted willing” (WWR, I §65; p. 363).

¹⁷ The term *Widerspruch* used here usually denotes a conceptual or rational opposition, as in contradicting a claim or rejecting an endorsement. It thus differs from the term ‘Widerstand,’ which Nietzsche uses to denote the resistance to the realization of an end. In the present passage, then, Nietzsche appears to claim that willing power implies endorsing an end and rejecting it at the same time—instead of desiring both the end and obstacles to its realization. Note, however, that willing an end and obstacles to its realization is tantamount to endorsing the end and rejecting it, for one cannot coherently endorse an end and will opposition to its realization. Thus, anticipating on the example of a competitive game, I want to win the game, but at the same time, I want strong opponents, who will jeopardize my ability to win the game, and this latter desire may seem to contradict the first.

¹⁸ This explains why Nietzsche describes the pursuit of power in terms of “growth” (e.g., WP 125) or “self-overcoming” (Z, II 12), which is not, as Kaufmann (1974) argues, for instance, overcoming of the *self*, but overcoming by the agent of his current level of achievement.

¹⁹ Nietzsche's conception of happiness in terms of the successful confrontation of difficulty has recently found empirical confirmation in research on the psychology of happiness. See, in particular, Csikszentmihalyi (1990), chapter 4. This focus on the value of resistance also grounds Nietzsche's disparagement of the Christian myth of the Garden of Eden: "God created man happy, idle, innocent, and immortal: our actual life is a false, decayed, sinful existence, an existence of punishment—Suffering, struggle, work, death are considered as objections and question marks against life, as something that ought not to last; for which one requires a cure—and *has* a cure!—From the time of Adam until now, man has been in an abnormal state [...]. The *true* life is only a faith (i.e., a self-deception, a madness). The whole of struggling, battling, actual existence, full of splendor and darkness, only a bad, false existence: the task is to be redeemed from it. 'Man innocent, idle, immortal, happy'—this conception of 'supreme desiderata' must be criticized above all." (WP 224; cf. GS 340)

²⁰ I wish to thank Charles Larmore, and audiences at the Center for Philosophic Exchange, SUNY Brockport, the Department of Philosophy at the University of Michigan, and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania for useful discussions of the paper.

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