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# On Parasitism and Overflow in Nietzsche's Doctrine of Will to Power

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*Abstract:* In this article I offer a new interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrine of will to power by treating its relation to an often neglected conceptual distinction in Nietzsche's philosophy: the distinction between (a) parasitism and (b) overflow. I show that Nietzsche treats (a) and (b) as two different ways of willing power, but with an important qualification: (a) is always a means to (b), which is the real aim of power. Because (b) is conceived of as the real aim of power, it serves as Nietzsche's standard for evaluating the degree of power attained by beings and their actions. The more that a being or activity attains (b), the greater is its power and rank according to Nietzsche.

*Keywords:* rank, value, parasitism, overflow, will to power

## Introduction

In his notebooks, Nietzsche depicts the will to power as the basic "principle" (or "standard") that informs his evaluations of beings, values, actions, and so on (*KSA* 12:5[71], 12:2[131]).<sup>1</sup> It is his "objective measure of value," he writes (*KSA* 13:11[83]). In his published writings, he refers to the will to power in a similar manner: "What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness" (*A* 2). Accordingly, throughout his writings, we find him ranking beings and actions based on their "degree of power" (*KSA* 12:5[71]).

By carrying out this approach to rank, Nietzsche intends to overcome the nihilistic consequences of our accustomed approach to valuation. He contends that this latter approach originates in, and perpetuates, an unhealthy relationship to life—a relationship characterized by resentment

and vengefulness toward life. As he depicts it in *GM I*, this vengeful relationship to life has enacted a system of valuation that, in effect, inverts all life-affirming values: it disvalues the body, sex, wealth, strength, and life on earth, while praising the antitheses of these things (abstinence, poverty, meekness, and that which is beyond life: heaven, or nothingness). Nietzsche attempts to counteract the nihilistic consequences of this approach to valuation by replacing it with an approach that is more life-affirming. He attempts to do this by grounding his valuations in the will to power, which he considers to be “the essence of life” (*GM II*:12; see also *Z I*: “On Self-Overcoming”).

An appropriate interpretation of will to power, then, must account for this role that it plays in Nietzsche's philosophy and may be judged, in part, by its ability to show how Nietzsche's evaluative results do, indeed, follow from the will to power (so interpreted). That is, if Nietzsche's approach to valuation leads him to rank  $x$  higher than  $y$ , this should be explainable in terms of the one privileged principle that underlies his approach to valuation: the will to power.<sup>2</sup> If a given interpretation of will to power leads us to the contrary conclusion—that  $y$  should be ranked higher than  $x$ —then this will give us reason to doubt the accuracy of that interpretation of the will to power.

In this article, I suggest that the accuracy of one of the leading interpretations of will to power—according to which the will to power is the will to encounter and overcome resistance—can be challenged on this basis. I contend that this reading of will to power leads to evaluative results contrary to those that we find in Nietzsche's writings. I briefly consider different ways of amending this reading, as defended in the secondary literature, before offering a new interpretation of will to power—one that, I argue, yields a better account of evaluative results found in Nietzsche's writings.

## 1. Motivating the New Account

### 1.1. *Reginster on the Will to Encounter and Overcome Resistances*

When interpreting Nietzsche's doctrine of will to power, it is common to emphasize the fact that the will to power involves a struggle with resistances. In recent years, Bernard Reginster has defended a version of this approach. In his formulation, we will power by willing the encountering

and the overcoming of resistances involved in the pursuit of our first-order desires for food, sex, shelter, property, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

No doubt, Nietzsche interprets such pursuits as manifestations of the will to power. And part of what it is to will power in such cases is to will the encountering and overcoming of resistances: “[t]he will to power can manifest itself only against *resistances*; it seeks what will resist it” (*KSA* 12:9[151]).<sup>4</sup> And yet, when we attempt to explain the rank that Nietzsche accords to various types of action via the will to power (so understood), we quickly run into problems.

Recall that, according to Nietzsche, the will to power is “the essence of life” (*GM* II:12). He maintains that the will to power manifests itself in all human action.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, he interprets both high-ranking and low-ranking actions as manifestations of will to power. And so, in order to retain the distinction between higher and lower actions while nonetheless analyzing both as manifestations of will to power, Nietzsche must show both (i) that all human action *is* will to power and (ii) that some human actions are higher manifestations of will to power and that others are lower manifestations of will to power.

Given Reginster’s reading, Nietzsche does this by analyzing all human action as the encountering and overcoming of resistance and then by drawing distinctions between the amount of resistance that each action or human being encounters and overcomes. In this way, according to Reginster, Nietzsche allows the difficulty of an action to affect its rank: great actions will be those that encounter and overcome a great amount of resistance; lower actions will be those that encounter and overcome a low amount of resistance. It is in this sense, according to Reginster, that Nietzsche ranks actions according to their power.

But this cuts against a number of the rankings that we find in Nietzsche’s writings. Consider Nietzsche’s treatment of the priest in *GM*. If it were right that Nietzsche ranks beings and actions according to the amount of resistance that each encounters and overcomes, then the priest and his actions would be ranked quite highly. For it is undeniable that, given Nietzsche’s depiction, the priest encounters and overcomes a great amount of resistance. And yet, Nietzsche does just the opposite. While recognizing that the priest has his “will to power intact,” Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes the priest’s (relative) lack of power: the priest is “the most impotent [ohnmächtigsten]”; he expresses the “will to power of the weakest” (*GM* III:15, I:7, III:14; cf. *GM* I:13). Accordingly, he assigns the priest, and his actions, a low rank.

Consider also those values, actions, and beings that Nietzsche ranks the highest. While some of these may be reasonably accounted for in terms of the (mere) encountering and overcoming of resistances, there are others that pose significant problems. Take, for example, Nietzsche's contention that the "gift-giving virtue is the highest virtue" (ZI: "Gift-Giving Virtue" 1). It seems right that we encounter and overcome resistances (of some sort) whenever we engage in acts of gift-giving. As such, gift-giving expresses will to power (so understood). But it does not seem right that gift-giving, compared to all other types of action, involves a particularly high amount of the encountering and overcoming of resistances. And surely, acts of gift-giving do not (categorically) involve the *highest* amount of the encountering and overcoming of resistances, compared to all other types of action. Hence, it is difficult to make sense of such rankings when adopting this interpretation of will to power.

A further problem presents itself when we note that, given Reginster's interpretation, not only are activities such as cooking or writing opportunities to manifest great will to power, but so too, and perhaps to an even greater degree, are violent and brutish pursuits of first-order desires (e.g., theft, murder, and so on). In addressing this concern, Reginster takes up the example of Nazi expansionism. While recognizing the "embarrassment" that arises from the inference, "if power is a value, then Nazi expansionism, horrifying as it was, would nonetheless have been good," he concludes that Nietzsche provides us with little to counteract this inference.<sup>6</sup> For "Nazi expansionism [. . .] certainly involved much overcoming of resistance."<sup>7</sup> And "Nietzsche left open the question of what standards might govern the choice of the particular ends in connection with which to pursue power."<sup>8</sup>

So Reginster's interpretation of will to power has an unfortunate result. Because he interprets the will to power as the mere will to encounter and overcome resistance, and because he takes it to be Nietzsche's only privileged evaluative standard, his interpretation risks the conclusion that Nazi expansionism (as well as many other physically violent and brutish pursuits of power) would have to be more valuable on Nietzsche's account than the numerous actions that we tend to value but that encounter and overcome less resistance (e.g., giving gifts, artistic creation, etc.).<sup>9</sup> This result is not only counterintuitive, but more importantly (for our purposes), it contradicts the evaluative results that we find in Nietzsche's writings.<sup>10</sup>

Reginster deals with this problem by arguing that such results "may be explained, and justified, in the light of his broader philosophical objectives. The target of his revaluation is the life-negating condemnation of

suffering. [. . .] For this general revaluation of the role and significance of suffering in human existence, establishing the value of power suffices.”<sup>11</sup> I contend, though, that these results do not follow from Nietzsche’s doctrine of will to power. Thus, we do not find these evaluative results in Nietzsche’s writings, and there is nothing of this sort to justify. In order to make my case, I will need to supplement Reginster’s reading of will to power. But before doing so, let us briefly consider some alternative approaches to supplementing Reginster’s reading.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2. Katsafanas’s Defense of Reginster’s Reading

Paul Katsafanas has argued that we may adopt Reginster’s general reading of will to power while avoiding these unattractive conclusions. For although will to power may be Nietzsche’s only *privileged* evaluative standard, it is not his *only* evaluative standard, Katsafanas argues. He writes, “if will to power were the only normative standard, then we would all [. . .] have equal reason to perform actions that generate equal resistance. This seems not only implausible, but also counter to the result that Nietzsche claims for his theory. For Nietzsche certainly doesn’t recommend those [violent, brutish] actions; he doesn’t think we select actions *merely* in terms of how much resistance they provide. Rather, the degree of resistance afforded by an action seems to be *one* important factor among many others.”<sup>13</sup>

The other factors that we must consider, according to Katsafanas’s reading, are the will to power-compatible values that we already embrace. By inviting us to revalue our values, Nietzsche invites us to determine whether these values that we already embrace are compatible with the value of will to power. And if we discover a conflict, Nietzsche suggests that we change the value that conflicts with will to power. It is in this sense that will to power is privileged, according to Katsafanas.<sup>14</sup> As he puts it,

[T]he Nietzschean theory does not entail that we all have reason to perform every activity that generates great resistance, such as murdering, sticking our hands in fires, and so forth. These pursuits would conflict with the other values that most of us embrace. For example, while murdering would engender resistances to overcome, it would conflict with the value that most individuals place on human life. While sticking one’s hand in the

fire would generate great resistance, it would conflict with the value that we tend to place on self-preservation. On the other hand, activities such as the pursuit of intellectual endeavors would not conflict with, and in some cases will be supported by, our other values.<sup>15</sup>

And so, although Katsafanas agrees with Reginster that “lying and murdering are ways—possibly quite good ways—of willing power,” he emphasizes that Nietzsche is not necessarily prescribing these actions.<sup>16</sup> For if these actions conflict with values that we already possess (and if the relevant values do not conflict with will to power), we will have more reason to seek out those actions that do not conflict with our current values (e.g., we may have more reason to pursue intellectual and artistic activities).

Accordingly, the standards that govern the best course of action in each case will be determined by the agent's particular (will to power-compatible) values and desires. In this way, the greatest approach to pursuing power will differ from individual to individual and from culture to culture, given Katsafanas's reading. And while this implies that the greatest courses of action for those who have horrific values and desires may, indeed, be acts of horrific violence, “we do not have these desires; as Nietzsche likes to put it, the aggressive instincts of modern individuals have been ‘tamed’ and redirected.”<sup>17</sup> For those of us whose instincts have been tamed and redirected, then, and for those of us who value this taming and redirecting, Nietzsche's theory will recommend pursuits of power that follow suit. Accordingly, Nietzsche's theory does not prescribe horrific violence for us moderns (although it may for others), given Katsafanas's interpretation.

In this (limited) sense, then, Katsafanas's Nietzsche provides further specification regarding which first-order desires are to be pursued over others. We are to pursue those that are most consistent with our own values and desires, so long as these values and desires are compatible with the (privileged) value of the will to power. This may help to explain, then, those instances in which Nietzsche makes evaluative claims that seem unexplainable in terms of the will to power (so understood). When, for instance, Nietzsche seems to attribute more value to intellectual and artistic endeavors than to brutish and (physically) violent endeavors, we may account for this in terms of Nietzsche's (or his presumed audience's) other values and desires. So long as these values and desires are compatible with the value of will to power, we may account for Nietzsche's evaluative claims

without sacrificing the notion that he bases his evaluations on only one privileged value: the will to power. In such cases, then, Nietzsche would continue to affirm the privileged status of the will to power. But because the things being evaluated involve an equal amount of the encountering and overcoming of resistances, he employs instead his (or our) other (will to power-compatible) values, using them to complete the evaluation.

And yet, in many of these cases, it is doubtful that the things being evaluated against each other involve an equal amount of the encountering and overcoming of resistances. Surely, brutish and physically violent endeavors often (and perhaps in most cases) involve the encountering and overcoming of greater resistances than do intellectual and artistic endeavors. (At the very least, these two sorts of action do not categorically involve an equal amount of the encountering and overcoming of resistance.) Accordingly, it seems that in many of these cases, Katsafanas's Nietzsche would be abandoning his one privileged value (will to power), in favor of other values, too soon.

Moreover, it seems that the other values that Katsafanas's Nietzsche relies on may conflict with the value of will to power. For instance, Katsafanas cites the value of self-preservation as one of the values that would constrain our choices regarding the actions with which it is appropriate to pursue power.<sup>18</sup> But Nietzsche makes it quite clear that the will to power and the value of self-preservation tend to be in conflict with each other: "The wish to preserve oneself is a symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at *the expansion of power*, and in so doing frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation" (*GS* 349).<sup>19</sup> And so long as we construe the will to power as the mere will to encounter and overcome resistances, it would seem that even the value of human life would often be in tension with the value of will to power. Hence, this recourse to our other values and desires may not be as fruitful as Katsafanas's reading suggests.

### 1.3. Richardson on Active and Reactive Forms of the Will to Power

Perhaps, then, it is worth revisiting the meaning of will to power. Perhaps there is more to the will to power than the mere will to encounter and overcome resistances. If so, it may be the case that this further component is in play in those cases in which Nietzsche's evaluative results seem to reflect something other than the (mere) degree of the encountering and overcoming

of resistances (e.g., when he devalues the priest, or when he ranks gift-giving as the highest virtue). That is, it may be the case that the will to power itself offers another standard for ranking actions against each other.

In this regard, we might consider an alternative reading offered by John Richardson. Instead of focusing on the amount of difficulty involved in a given instance of will to power, Richardson adopts the Deleuzian distinction between active and reactive forms of will to power. On Richardson's account, reactive pursuits of power are always deficient pursuits of power; they somehow lose sight of the real aim of power. As he puts it, "the active drive wills power itself, whereas the reactive has somehow turned aside from its essential end."<sup>20</sup> By being "tempted away from its own distinguishing activities and values," the reactive will fails to achieve the aim of will to power, which, on Richardson's account, is the very exercise of these distinguishing activities and values.<sup>21</sup> In this way, then, Richardson's account suggests that Nietzsche's doctrine of will to power allows him to rank beings, actions, and values in a way that goes beyond an appeal to the encountering and overcoming of resistances. If a being fails to exercise its own distinguishing activities and values, it thereby fails to exercise the aim of will to power, given this reading. This, then, will negatively affect the rank of that being. In this way, Nietzsche may rank beings in a way that appeals to something other than the encountering and overcoming of resistances while remaining true to his only privileged standard: the will to power.

Although I think this general approach is attractive, I contend that the Deleuzian terminology of "active" and "reactive," when applied to the will to power, is more misleading than it is helpful. It is misleading, in one sense, because it misrepresents both Nietzsche's and Deleuze's own use of the terms. Nietzsche tends to reserve the terms "active" and "reactive" for his descriptions of force (*Kraft*). He uses different terminology when describing modes of power (*Macht*).<sup>22</sup> Deleuze takes note of this, reserving the terms "active" and "reactive" for his descriptions of force while using the terms "affirmative" and "negative" for his descriptions of will to power.<sup>23</sup> Hence, Richardson departs from Deleuze (and Nietzsche) when he uses the terms "active" and "reactive" in his depictions of will to power.

Beyond the problem of their misapplication, the terms "active" and "reactive" (when applied in this way) create unnecessary confusion. The vague connotations of the term "reactive" lead Richardson to clarify that what Nietzsche must have in mind is something more along the lines of

“obeying.”<sup>24</sup> But even this seems to mislead. As Richardson comments, “Reacting is indeed a matter of ‘obeying’ but in a stronger sense, in which one will obeys another only by adopting, ‘internalizing,’ the latter’s views and values, and indeed by adopting them in preference to its own. It obeys not especially in what it does but in what it views as worth being done. A reactive will is one with a tendency—a habit or an instinct—to obey in this special sense.”<sup>25</sup> We run into a further problem when we note that the “reactive” need not correlate with the “weak,” given Richardson’s account.<sup>26</sup>

And so, the pragmatic value of the active/reactive distinction, when applied to Nietzsche’s doctrine of will to power, is called into question. Furthermore, as Richardson notes, “these terms are more his [Deleuze’s] than Nietzsche’s, who shifts freely among different contrast pairs (‘healthy’/‘sick’ etc.)”<sup>27</sup> Hence, I see no reason to remain beholden to these terms if there are others that better capture the two basic modes of pursuing power on Nietzsche’s account. I suggest that when we instead construe the two basic ways of pursuing power in terms of overflow and parasitism (as Nietzsche often does), we can make better sense of the doctrine of will to power, and the system of rank that it informs, than when we apply to will to power the Deleuzian terminology for force. The remainder of this article is an attempt to show how this works.

## 2. Reinterpreting the Will to Power

### 2.1. *On the Structure and the Feeling of Power*

Below, I will be arguing that Nietzsche conceives of two basic modes of pursuing power, differentiated by the manner in which each allows an agent to attain an increase in the feeling of power. But before doing this, I will need to put forth some reasons for understanding the will to power as both a thesis regarding the structure of all human action (as it is often interpreted) *and* a thesis regarding the (sought-after) feeling (i.e., the feeling of power) that motivates all human action. I contend that these ways of understanding the will to power are compatible with each other and that, together, they inform Nietzsche’s more interesting, and more cohesive, theory of human action.

In this connection, we may begin by noting Nietzsche's tendency to speak not only of the will to power, but also of the feeling of power, and of power itself: "What is good? Everything that heightens in human beings the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself" (A 2); life "strives for a *maximum feeling of power*: is essentially a striving for more power: striving is nothing other than striving for power" (KSA 13:14[82]). In these and similar passages, Nietzsche employs the "feeling of power," the simpler "power," and the "will to power" in a manner that calls into question their precise relationship to each other. Is "the feeling of power" shorthand for "power"? Is "power" shorthand for "the feeling of power"? Is the "will to power" shorthand for the will to "the feeling of power"? Or might it be the case that each of these locutions names something distinct in Nietzsche's philosophy? Might it be the case that Nietzsche intends to reserve a special sense for each, but to bring each in relation to the other? And what about the relationship between power, the feeling of power, and the heightening (or increase) of each? Can we will power without willing an increase in power?

Given constraints of space, we cannot engage here in a thorough treatment of these topics. My intention is only to offer a few justifications for the implicit response to these questions that will be informing my account below. I suppose that by the will to power, Nietzsche always means the will to an *increase* in power. In this regard, I am in agreement with the scholarly consensus.<sup>28</sup> More controversially, however, I will contend that the will to power names not only the structure of all human action, but also the feeling that we seek whenever we do act: the feeling of an increase in power. When Nietzsche says that we will power, he means that we will an increase in the feeling of power.<sup>29</sup> And the way we do this, on his account, is by encountering and overcoming resistances.

In other words, I maintain that the will to power is *both* a structural thesis about the will (i.e., a thesis about *how* we will) *and* an instrumentalist thesis about the will (i.e., a thesis about *what* we will). The instrumentalist interpretation of will to power is often rejected on the grounds that Nietzsche's notion of power is indeterminate. It always requires "a contingent filling out," as Richardson puts it.<sup>30</sup> That is, the willing of power always presupposes some further, more determinate end that the will to power allows us to will in a certain *way*. Accordingly, interpreters commonly construe the will to power as a merely *structural* (or *formal*) feature of our willing: it specifies the way in which our will operates when we act.<sup>31</sup>

Yet there are passages in which Nietzsche entertains an instrumentalist conception of will to power, one that construes human action (and willing) as a *means to power*.<sup>32</sup> For example: “Everything that happens out of intentions can be reduced to the *intention of increasing power*” (KSA 12:2[88]; cf. GM III:7). Life “strives for a *maximum feeling of power*: is essentially a striving for more power: striving is nothing other than striving for power” (KSA 13:14[82]). “The basic drive of life [. . .] *aims at the expansion of power*” (GS 349, my emphasis). “All ‘purposes,’ ‘aims,’ ‘meaning’ are only modes of expression and metamorphoses of one will that is inherent in all events: the will to power. To have purposes, aims, intentions, *willing* in general, is the same thing as willing to be stronger, willing to grow—and, in addition, willing the means to this” (KSA 13:11[96]).

Accordingly, there is reason to think that Nietzsche entertains both the structural thesis and the instrumentalist thesis about the will to power. And he may—and does, I contend—coherently affirm both. According to Nietzsche, *what* we will is an increase in our *feeling* of power. This is the instrumentalist thesis. And an important part of *how* we will this is by encountering and overcoming resistances. This is the structural thesis.<sup>33</sup> In this way, then, we may make sense of those passages in which Nietzsche emphasizes the encountering and overcoming of resistances involved in the will to power while also making sense of those passages that construe the will to power as the will to an increase in the *feeling* of power.

There is, though, another possible objection to my emphasis on the feeling of power; namely, that Nietzsche cannot really have in mind the feeling of power when he speaks of the will to power, for the feeling of power and *actual* power often come apart. Consider cases of self-deception, for instance. Say that I envy someone who is more powerful than I am. In order to increase my feeling of power, I may tell myself that being powerful is a bad thing. In this way, I may try to convince myself that I prefer not to be powerful, and that I am better because of it. Perhaps I increase my *feeling* of power in this way. But surely I do not increase my *actual* power. And so, given that the feeling of power and actual power may come apart, on what grounds would Nietzsche choose to emphasize the feeling of power over actual power?

In response, I maintain that Nietzsche emphasizes the will to an increase in the feeling of power because this is what allows him to explain the widest variety of human behavior. He intends to explain “our entire instinctive life

as a development and ramification of *one* basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power”; to “determine *all* efficient force univocally as—*will to power*” (BGE 36). And indeed, it would be difficult to explain such cases of self-deception—cases in which Nietzsche is definitely interested—as a manifestation of the will to an increase in (what is commonly construed as) *actual* power.<sup>34</sup> It makes more sense to say that I will an increase in my feeling of power and that my seeking after this feeling is what leads me to my self-deceptive tendencies. Moreover, we have little reason to suppose that what *we* mean by (actual) power would bear any important relationship to what Nietzsche means by power. (Indeed, “power” is a term of art for Nietzsche.)

In what follows, I also contend that Nietzsche entertains a distinction between the feeling (or state) that gives rise to a given pursuit of power and the feeling of power itself (i.e., the feeling that the pursuit of power seeks). For ease of reference, I will sometimes refer to these two kinds of feeling (differentiated by their relationship to the pursuit of power) as  $F_1$  and  $F_2$ . Nietzsche further differentiates the feeling of power itself (i.e.,  $F_2$ ) from the two basic ways in which this feeling may be pursued. I refer to these two ways of pursuing the feeling of power as  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ .

I begin by treating  $P_1$ , the first of the two basic ways in which beings may seek an increase in their feeling of power. I explain this way of seeking an increase in the feeling of power by first exposing the feeling that gives rise to this way of pursuing power (i.e.,  $P_1:F_1$ ). Following this, I explain the types of action that this feeling produces and the way in which these actions allow beings to attain an increase in the feeling of power itself (i.e.,  $P_1:F_2$ ). I then go through the same procedure with  $P_2$ .

Throughout, it should be understood that each of these basic ways of pursuing an increase in the feeling of power involves the willing of the encountering and overcoming of resistances. I am in agreement with Reginster and Katsafanas that this is an essential component of the structure of all willing (and so, too, all action), for Nietzsche. Nonetheless, I contend that in order to make sense of Nietzsche's evaluative claims, we must take note of the distinction between  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ . By recognizing the role this distinction plays in Nietzsche's approach to rank, we arrive at an account of will to power that deals better with the problems faced by the accounts discussed in section 1—so I will argue.

## 2.2. Two Basic Ways of Pursuing Power

2.2.1. The Feeling that Precedes Overflowing Pursuits of Power. Nietzsche places great importance on the affective state that immediately precedes a given pursuit of power. Indeed, his writings are full of references to a particular affective state that, he thinks, gives rise to an unhealthy (and nihilistic) manner of pursuing power: the affective state of *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment*, given Nietzsche's analysis, tends to arise in those who are experiencing a relative lack of the feeling of power. Accordingly, it often informs a particular mode of pursuing power—one that we will treat further in section 2.3. Nietzsche's concerns with (and his low estimation of) *ressentiment* will be evident to most of his readers.

Less obvious, perhaps, is his account of the affective state that arises when one attains an abundance of the feeling of power. He suggests that when we feel an abundance of power (that is, when we experience the type of abundance that Nietzsche advocates), we become immune to *ressentiment*: “all *ressentiments* [are] absent where there is a great abundance of force” (*KSA* 12:2[171]). We experience instead a feeling of overfullness and tension, and an accompanying desire to overflow with (i.e., give away) our power, on his account.

Consider some of the passages in which Nietzsche describes this state: it is “a feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow” (*BGE* 260); “a feeling of well-being, from overflowing health, from an abundance of existence” (*BT* “An Attempt at Self-Criticism” 1); the feeling of “exuberance and an overflowing, spendthrift will” (*KSA* 13:11[44]); “the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow” (*BGE* 260); a “frenzy of the will, the frenzy of an overcharged and swollen will. What is essential in such frenzy is the feeling of increased strength and fullness” (*TI* “Skirmishes” 8). He often refers to it through the symbol of Dionysus: it involves “an overflowing energy pregnant with future (my term for this is, as is known, ‘Dionysian’)” (*GS* 370). And it provokes in one—in accordance with the above-mentioned feeling of tension—a peculiar, Dionysian brand of suffering: “suffer[ing] from the *overfulness* of life” (*NCW* “We Antipodes”); a “suffering from superabundance itself” (*BT* “An Attempt at Self-Criticism” 1).

From such passages, we may gather what Nietzsche has in mind. This feeling ( $P_1:F_1$ ) occurs via the accumulation of an excess of power. It is a feeling of increased strength, fullness, and tension. Although there is a kind

of happiness and well-being associated with this state, it also involves a kind of suffering—the suffering of tension; the suffering of overfulness. Accordingly, we experience, in this state, a desire to overflow with and give away power.

**2.2.2. Pursuing Power via Overflow.** Let us now see what type of action this state leads to. Nietzsche tells us, “[i]n this state one enriches everything out of one’s own fullness” (*TI* “Skirmishes” 9). The tension involved in this state eventually gives way to an “overflow” of power.<sup>35</sup> That is, it gives rise to a compulsion to squander and give away our power. As we give away power, we empower other beings; we become a host of power. Accordingly, when we act “from overflowing power and abundance” (*GS* 382), we embody the virtue of gift-giving, on Nietzsche’s account—so I argue in this section.

Now, if Nietzsche contends that all actions are manifestations of will to power, he will need to have an account (however implicit) of how the actions that arise when we have accumulated an excess of power—that is, when we have accumulated an excess of the feeling of power (an excess of  $F_2$ ) and when we are experiencing the affective state that accompanies that excess ( $P_1:F_1$ )—do indeed manifest the will to power. So we will need to ask: Does Nietzsche construe these acts as manifestations of the will to power? And if so, in what sense do they manifest it?

Indeed, Nietzsche contends that even when we act via overflow—even when we give away our power, even when we empower others—we continue to exercise the will to power. In this connection, we must bear in mind that for Nietzsche, both “[b]enefiting and hurting others are ways of exercising one’s [will to] power upon others” (*GS* 13). Accordingly, he construes “the gift-giving virtue” as an expression of the will to power: “[p]ower is she, this new virtue” (*ZI*: “On the Gift-Giving Virtue” 1). Such acts continue to manifest the will to power, but in a particular (and perhaps, less obvious) way.

In this connection, consider the following passage from *Z*: “The lust to rule—but who would call it *lust* when what is high longs downward for power? Verily, there is nothing diseased or lustful in such longing and descending. That the lonely heights should not remain lonely and self-sufficient eternally; that the mountain should descend to the valley and the winds of the height to the low plains—oh, who were to find the right name for such longing? ‘Gift-giving virtue’—thus Zarathustra once named the unnamable” (*Z* III: “On the Three Evils” 2). In this passage, Nietzsche tells us that the gift-giving virtue names the “longing” that occurs “when what

is high longs downward for power” (*Z* III: “On the Three Evils” 2). The gift-giving refers to this mode of “descending.” Accordingly, to “descend,” as Nietzsche uses the term in *Z*, is to bear gifts—that is, to engage in the mode of will to power that occurs via overflow and squandering. Nietzsche opens *Z* with a depiction of his decision to pursue power in this way. He becomes “a cup that wants to overflow” by giving and descending, by going down and under: “I would give away and distribute, until the wise among men find joy once again in their folly, and the poor in their riches. For that I must descend to the depths [. . .] I must *go under*—go down” (*Z* P:1). Zarathustra is thus an exemplar of this mode of will to power. He “helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power” (*BGE* 260); he “transforms things until they mirror his power” (*TI* “Skirmishes” 9).

And so, we have good reason to conclude that Nietzsche interprets acts of overflow and gift-giving as manifestations of the will to power. In these cases, one “longs downward for power” via the “[g]ift-giving virtue” (*Z* III: “On the Three Evils” 2). Nonetheless, we will need to clarify the meaning of these claims. In what sense am I pursuing the feeling of power when I long to give my power away, according to Nietzsche? On the face of it, this sounds nonsensical. Surely I do not feel more power by giving away my power, one may object.

To see what Nietzsche has in mind here, consider how we pursue power by learning and by teaching. We may attain an increase in our feeling of power by learning—that is, by accumulating knowledge. As we learn more, we increase our feeling of power. (I will return to this mode of pursuing power below.) But eventually, when we have accumulated an abundance of knowledge on a given subject (and thereby, an abundance of the feeling of power in that subject’s domain), we tend to experience a drive to give away that knowledge (and the feeling of power that accompanies it). That is, we tend to develop a desire to teach others about that subject. It is this sort of process that Nietzsche has in mind when he speaks of overflowing pursuits of power. Indeed, when Nietzsche’s Zarathustra becomes a “cup that wants to overflow,” he directs our attention to the same phenomenon: “[b]ehold, I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to receive it” (*Z* P:1).

Now, it would be misguided to say that we do this in order no longer to feel power ( $F_2$ ), on Nietzsche’s account. Instead, we do this in order to get rid (however temporarily) of the feeling of tension and overfulness that

arises when we have accumulated an excess of power ( $P_1:F_1$ ). And we get rid of this feeling of tension in a way that continues to manifest the will to an increase in the feeling of power ( $F_2$ ). But in what sense may we attain an increase in our feeling of power ( $F_2$ ) by engaging in this mode of action ( $P_1$ )?

I take it that we may do so in two basic ways. First, we may attain an increase in our feeling of power on account of the mere exhibition (to ourselves or to others) of our over-empowered state. We give evidence of—and so, in a loose sense, prove—our overabundance of power when we exhibit our own ability to squander it. For one cannot afford this sort of squandering when one is suffering from a lack of power. (In such cases, one will tend to seek power by taking it *away* from external sources. I will return to this point in section 2.3.2.) Proving that we can sustainably engage in this empowering of others, then, confirms the (relatively high) rank of our power, for Nietzsche. (I return to this issue in section 3.) And when this is confirmed (via our own, and others', recognition), it occasions an increase in our feeling of power.

This phenomenon is on display in a number of our celebratory customs, for instance. Consider how people respond after winning a sports championship. Indeed, a kind of overflow and squandering of power tends to occur here. In order to celebrate, we may shake and spray champagne, host a party, buy strangers food and drinks, and so on. Part of the appeal of these rituals is that they exhibit our own ability to squander power. And this exhibition of our ability to squander power is appealing because it expresses (and thereby, evinces) the fact that we have attained an overabundant feeling of power. By expressing this, we allow it to be further recognized. And this recognition further increases our feeling of power.

Recall, too, Nietzsche's claim that a "man in this state [ $P_1:F_1$ ] transforms things until they mirror his power" (*TI* "Skirmishes" 9). Accordingly, when we engage in  $P_1$ , we may attain an increase in our feeling of power by seeing our power reflected in others—that is, when we see that others are feeling more powerful on account of the things that we have (willfully) given to them. To return to the example of teaching: it will increase my feeling of power when I see that one of my students has mastered a given subject with my assistance. Or consider the case of parenting. To see my child thriving and feeling powerful will tend to increase my own feeling of power—that is, if I feel that I have contributed to her thriving, and to her feeling of power. In these cases, I see that I have empowered someone other than myself. Seeing my power reflected in someone else occasions a further

increase in my feeling of power. In these cases, “we want to increase their power because in that way we increase ours,” as Nietzsche puts it (*GS* 13; cf. *BGE* 260).

Now, it is worth noting that the things upon which this mode of will to power expresses itself need not be other human beings. And the materials involved need not be things like champagne, food, and knowledge. Nietzsche suggests that it may just as well express itself upon the materials of literature and fine art (e.g., upon clay, paint, sound, words, etc.). Hence, he refers to “the overflowing feeling of strength that desires to overpower, to compel to itself, to lay to its heart—the drive of the artist in relation to his material” (*KSA* 11:26[262]). In a similar fashion, it may express itself upon the materials of philosophy (e.g., ideas, values, etc.). Zarathustra depicts the act of valuing in these terms: “[w]ith your values and words of good and evil you do violence when you value; and this is your hidden love and the splendor and trembling and overflowing of your soul” (*Z* II: “On Self-Overcoming”).<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Nietzsche suggests that the process of “idealizing” (that is, the type of idealizing that he advocates) is preceded by the same “frenzy of an overcharged and swollen will. What is essential in such frenzy is the feeling of increased strength and fullness. Out of this feeling one lends to things, one *forces* them to accept from us, one violates them—this process is called *idealizing*” (*TI* “Skirmishes” 8). And so we should bear in mind that this mode of pursuing power may take a number of forms, depending on the materials involved. As should be clear, though, the same analysis will be applicable to each of these cases. That is, when the artist, or the philosopher, pursues power in this way, she will be motivated by the same forces: the feeling of tension that accompanies an overabundance of power (i.e.,  $P_1:F_1$ ) and the will to increase her feeling of power (i.e.,  $F_2$ ) by exhibiting her ability to squander power or by seeing her power reflected in other materials (e.g., paint, plaster, sounds, ideas, etc.).

### 2.3. *Parasitism*

2.3.1. The Feeling that Gives Rise to Parasitic Pursuits of Power. Nietzsche refers to the second mode of pursuing power via the metaphors of parasitism (*Parasitismus*) and vampirism (*Vampirismus*).<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche uses these terms interchangeably to describe a mode of being in which one takes power away from one’s environment.<sup>38</sup> (I will be adopting

Nietzsche's practice of using these terms interchangeably in what follows.) He contends that we engage in this mode of pursuing power when we are in state of "undernourishment," "distress," and "weakness."<sup>39</sup> And when we are in this state ( $P_2:F_1$ ), we experience a particular kind of suffering: we suffer from a *lack* of the feeling of power (*GS* 370; cf. *NCW* "We Antipodes").

And so, when comparing  $P_2:F_1$  with  $P_1:F_1$ , Nietzsche contends that it is the "opposite state, a specific anti-artistry by instinct—a mode of being which would impoverish all things, making them thin and consumptive" (*TI* "Skirmishes" 9). He emphasizes the fact that when we are experiencing this state of weakness, we pursue an increase in our feeling of power by taking power away from our environment. Our actions are thereby guided by a kind of selfishness. He describes this as "an all-too-poor and hungry [selfishness] that always wants to steal—the selfishness of the sick: sick selfishness" (*Z I*: "On the Gift Giving Virtue" 1). Accordingly, this mode of pursuing power "looks at everything splendid" "with the eyes of a thief" (*Z I*: "On the Gift Giving Virtue" 1). It "must of necessity grab things, eat them out, and make them more meager" (*TI* "Skirmishes" 9). And so, the state that gives rise to parasitic pursuits of power is one in which we suffer from a lack of the feeling of power, one in which we feel "starved by life," on Nietzsche's account (*TI* "Skirmishes" 9).

**2.3.2. Pursuing Power via Parasitism.** Accordingly, with parasitic pursuits of power, we attain an increase in our feeling of power at the expense of (the power of) one or more hosts. We attain an increase in power by taking it away from other individuals. Hence, with this second mode of pursuing power ( $P_2$ ), we derive an increase in our feeling of power ( $F_2$ ) by doing the opposite of what occurs when we engage in the first mode of pursuing power ( $P_1$ ). This result, which may at first seem counterintuitive, is fully consistent with Nietzsche's theory. Recall that for Nietzsche both "[b]enefiting and hurting others are ways of exercising one's power upon others; that is all one desires in such cases" (*GS* 13). He goes on to add that "[c]ertainly the state in which we hurt others is rarely as agreeable, in an unadulterated way, as that in which we benefit others; it is a sign that we are still lacking power, or it shows a sense of frustration in the face of poverty" (*GS* 13). (The fact that these pursuits evince a lack of power will be of central importance when we consider Nietzsche's approach to raking these pursuits of power, in section 3.)

Of course, there are a number of very common, yet uninteresting examples of this mode of pursuing power. When we are not farming and raising livestock, we will tend to engage in this mode of pursuing power when we relate to our sources of food. Likewise with the sun, and so on. The same will tend to hold for our relationship to our parents, to our teachers, to some of our friends, and so forth. In the latter cases, as Nietzsche puts it, we “live off the fact that other people have spirit and squander it,” we (implicitly) “know that it is of the very essence of the rich spirit to squander itself carelessly, without petty caution, from day to day” (*KSA* 12:7[17]).

But the more interesting applications of Nietzsche’s analysis concern those parasitic actions that are not driven by necessity. In this category, we find actions such as bullying, theft, rape, murder, and genocide.<sup>40</sup> (The distinction between these two categories—i.e., the distinction between acts of parasitism that arise out of necessity and those do not—will be important, too, when we consider Nietzsche’s approach to ranking parasitic pursuits among each other in section 3.2.2.) Nietzsche’s analysis also assigns to this category a more subtle, more “subterranean” (*A* 49), form of parasitism. He claims that we often engage in a parasitic pursuit of power by creating, or by adopting, a certain set of values. Accordingly, a religious leader, or a philosopher, may enact a parasitic pursuit of power by putting forth a system of values that allows him or her to disempower (and thereby control) a group of people. Exercising our ability to disempower, in this case, prompts an increase in our feeling of power. Nonetheless, it evinces an underlying state of weakness ( $P_2:F_1$ )—a relative lack of power—on Nietzsche’s analysis. This analysis, then, informs his critique of a particular “parasitical type of man, thriving only at the expense of all healthy forms of life, the priest” (*A* 26).<sup>41</sup> For the system of values that the priest teaches only makes more sick, and more disempowered, Nietzsche contends. And it is this disempowering of others on which the priest’s power depends.

### 3. Ranking Pursuits of Power

#### 3.1. *Pursuits of Overflow vs. Pursuits of Parasitism*

Nietzsche maintains that when we act out of weakness and hunger, when we engage in parasitic pursuits of power, we often attempt to represent ourselves (to ourselves, and to others) as superior to that (or to those) from

which (or from whom) we are taking our power. This attempt to devalue the hosts, this attempt to see ourselves as above them, this attempt to re-rank parasitism as the highest mode of being, is pervasive, according to Nietzsche.<sup>42</sup> “[A]s a matter of fact, history is rich in such anti-artists,” he tells us (*TI* “Skirmishes” 9). This “will of the weak to represent *some* form of superiority, their instinct for devious paths to tyranny over the healthy—where can it not be discovered, this will to power of the weakest!” (*GM* III:14).

He attempts to revalue these parasitic pursuits of power by exposing the fact that, driven as they are by an underlying undernourishment of (and thus an underlying hunger for the replenishment of) power, they evince a relative *lack* of power. As he puts it in a notebook passage, “hunger, understood as a consequence of undernourishment, means hunger as a consequence of a will to power that is *no longer achieving mastery*” (*KSA* 13:14[174]). Accordingly, those actions (i.e., those pursuits of power) that arise out of states of hunger and weakness are always devalued in his approach to rank: “[v]iewpoints for *my* values: whether out of plentitude or hunger” (*KSA* 12:10[145]); “I avail myself of the primary distinction concerning all aesthetic values: in every case I ask, ‘Is it hunger or superabundance that have become creative here?’” (*GS* 370); “What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness” (*A* 2; cf., *A* 57).

Parasitism is thus “the will to power of the weakest,” on Nietzsche’s account (*GM* III:14). It is the lowest-ranking mode of being: “[w]hat is the highest species of all being and what is the lowest? The parasite is the lowest species” (*Z* III: “On Old and New Tablets” 19; see also “Spirit of Gravity” 2). Accordingly, acts that pursue power via parasitism ( $P_2$ ) are always accorded a lower rank than those that pursue power via the overflow and gift-giving of power ( $P_1$ ). As he puts it in *Z*, “what do we consider bad and worst of all? Is it not degeneration? And it is degeneration that we always infer where the gift-giving soul is lacking” (*Z* III: “On Old and New Tablets” 19).

On the other hand, Nietzsche depicts the state that gives rise to the first mode of pursuing power (i.e.,  $P_1:F_1$ ) as “[t]he highest and most illustrious human joys” (*KSA* 11:41[6]); “the highest state a philosopher can attain” (*KSA* 13:16[32]). The pursuit of power that this state gives rise to—pursuing power via overflow and gift-giving—is the highest ranking, given Nietzsche’s evaluative approach. Accordingly, of all virtues, the “gift-giving virtue is the highest virtue” for Nietzsche (*Z* I: “The Gift-Giving Virtue” 1).

### 3.2. Ranking Pursuits of the Same Kind

3.2.1. **Ranking Pursuits of Overflow.** Hence, we engage in the higher-ranking mode of action when we pursue an increase in our feeling of power via the empowerment of others. That is, we engage in the higher mode by hosting power for other beings who thereby engage with us via parasitism. This leads Nietzsche to suggest that the most powerful individual may be determined (in part) by the amount, and the severity, of the parasites that he or she nourishes. For the quantity of parasites that one nourishes and endures evinces the degree of one's overflowing and squandering of power. Hence, Nietzsche writes, "the soul that has the longest ladder and reaches down deepest—how should the most parasites not sit on that? [. . .] how should the highest soul not have the worst parasites?" (Z III: "On Old and New Tablets" 19). And after asserting that "[t]he parasite is the lowest species," Zarathustra is quick to clarify: "but whoever is of the highest will nourish the most parasites" (Z III: "On Old and New Tablets" 19). Accordingly, Nietzsche attempts, as he puts it in another passage, "to evaluate a society or an individual according to how many parasites it can endure" (D 202). And so this is one of the standards by which he attempts to rank overflowing (i.e., hosting, gift-giving) manifestations of the will to power among each other. He attempts to rank them according to the number, and the severity, of the parasites that they endure.

He also considers the quality of the relationships that occur between hosts and their parasites. For Nietzsche, the higher-ranking hosting relations are those in which hosts are able to affirm their own parasites. Accordingly, a host that punishes its parasites for their parasitism (or aims to destroy them) thereby evinces a lack of power on Nietzsche's account. For this intention to punish or destroy one's parasites evinces the recognition of one's relative lack of the power to squander. It shows that the host is not confident in his or her (or their) own surplus of power. The more highly ranking host, on the other hand, will be the host who can affirm those she empowers. Hence, he argues that "a society might attain such a *consciousness of power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it—letting those who harm it go *unpunished*. 'What are my parasites to me?' it might say. 'May they live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!'" (GM II:10; cf. D 202). In this same passage, he goes on to claim that this "self-overcoming of justice," this "*mercy*," "remains the privilege of *the most powerful man*" (GM II:10, my emphasis). And so, Nietzsche makes it clear

that this “mercy” toward one’s parasites, this affirmation of the living and prospering of one’s parasites, will be present in the most powerful—and so, too, the highest-ranking—individuals.<sup>43</sup>

**3.2.2. Ranking Parasitic Pursuits.** The same applies to parasitic pursuits of power. Nietzsche allows the quality of a given pursuit of parasitism to affect its relative rank among other parasitic pursuits. An important factor here is whether we pursue parasitism as a means to the higher mode of power (i.e., hosting;  $P_1$ ) or as an end in itself. By approaching parasitism in the former (healthier) way, Nietzsche contends, one may avoid the mode of “declining life” which ends up “hat[ing] everything that justifies itself solely out of abundance, out of the overflowing riches of strength” (*CW Epilogue*). Indeed, Zarathustra teaches his disciples this higher-ranking form of parasitism: “[t]his is your thirst: to become sacrifices and gifts yourselves; and that is why you thirst to pile up all the riches in your soul. Insatiably your soul strives for treasures and gems, because your virtue is insatiable in wanting to give. You force all things to and into yourself that they may flow back out of your well as the gifts of your love” (*Z I: “On the Gift Giving Virtue” 1*).<sup>44</sup>

The way in which those engaged in parasitism relate to their host(s) will also factor into the order of its rank, given Nietzsche’s account. He suggests, for instance, that when we relate to beings as “merely their parasite,” we should strive to “take away as little as possible” from them (*TI “Skirmishes” 33*). To take away more than is necessary would be problematic in at least two senses, I gather. First of all, it may put the health of our host in jeopardy, which would be disadvantageous for both parties involved. And second, it would risk approaching parasitism as an end in itself, thus counteracting the possibility of the healthier approach to parasitism that was mentioned above.

Now, recall that in section 2.3.2 we made a distinction between those forms of parasitism that are necessary and unavoidable and those that are not. We noted that the latter forms of parasitism include acts of bullying, theft, rape, murder, and genocide, and also the more subtle form of parasitism that occurs when we adopt certain sets of values. We now know why Nietzsche’s evaluative approach assigns these types of action the lowest possible rank. Not only do they rank lower than hosting pursuits of power; they also rank lower than most other parasitic pursuits. For these forms of parasitism fail to take away as little as is necessary from their hosts. They also fail to approach parasitism as a means to the higher mode of power.

#### 4. What Is the Will to Power?

So, what is the will to power? I have discussed two basic ways of manifesting the will to power. I have shown how these two basic ways of pursuing power inform Nietzsche's approach to rank. But how should this affect our understanding of the will to power itself? It would seem reasonable to conclude from all of this that the will to power is the will to encounter and overcome resistances and that parasitic and overflowing pursuits of power are two ways that we can go about exercising it. That is, it would seem reasonable to conclude that these two basic ways of exercising the will to power have no effect on the doctrine of will to power itself: the will to power is one thing; the manners in which we go about exercising it are another. I now want to suggest a stronger conclusion.

I contend that it is not mere happenstance that Nietzsche ranks  $P_1$  higher than  $P_2$ . The ultimate aim of the will to power, I contend, is the overflowing (the discharging, the giving) of power. All willing ultimately aims at this highest mode of power, given Nietzsche's account. That is, parasitism, the mode of pursuing power that occurs in states of distress, always bears an instrumental relationship to this higher aim of the will. This hierarchical structure is thus built into the doctrine of will to power itself, I argue.

Let us consider a couple of those passages in which Nietzsche introduces his doctrine: "A living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength—life itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*" (BGE 13). "Every animal—therefore *la bête philosophe*, too—instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximum feeling of power" (GM III:7). We cannot adequately account for such passages, I suggest, if we fail to recognize that the will to power is *the will to  $P_1$* . According to the doctrine of the will to power, the ultimate aim of all willing is the overflowing and squandering (i.e., discharging and expending) of power. For it is only by engaging in this higher mode of power that an animal can "achieve its maximum feeling of power" (GM III:7).

Accordingly, all willing bears an instrumental relationship to  $P_1$ , given Nietzsche's account. Of course, when we are in states of weakness and hunger, we often take power away from other beings—thereby enacting  $P_2$ . But this occurs only when there is "a temporary restriction of the will to life," Nietzsche claims (GS 349). For he contends that "in nature it is not

conditions of distress that are *dominant* but overflow and squandering, even to the point of *absurdity*" (GS 349). Accordingly, conditions of distress ( $P_2:F_1$ ), and the parasitic mode of pursuing power that they give rise to ( $P_2$ ), are "only an *exception*, a temporary restriction of the will to life. The great and small struggle always revolves [. . .] around power, in accordance with the will to power which is the will of life" (GS 349).<sup>45</sup>

Consider also the following passage: "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 [i.e., overflow; giving] and nourishment [i.e., parasitism; taking]—it is *one* problem—then one would have gained the right to determine *all* efficient force univocally as—*will to power*" (BGE 36). Just how the will to power is supposed to provide "the solution to the problem of procreation and nourishment," how it construes it as "*one* problem," should now be clear. It provides a unifying explanation for both of these phenomena ( $P_1$  and  $P_2$ ) by treating them as two manifestations of a unifying principle: the will to power. In this way, Nietzsche dispenses with the "superfluous" teleological principle of the will to self-preservation (as it occurs in  $P_2$ ): "here as everywhere else, let us beware of superfluous teleological principles—one of which is the will to self-preservation [. . .]. Thus method, which must be essentially economy of principles, demands it" (BGE 13; see also KSA 12:2[63]). He explains  $P_2$  as a manifestation of the will to  $P_1$ —as it occurs in states of distress. In this way, he is able to dispense with other teleological principles that would attempt to explain  $P_2$  in isolation from  $P_1$ .

I suggest, then, that so long as we interpret the will to power as merely the will to struggle with resistances—e.g., as a will to encounter and overcome the resistances involved in the pursuit of our first-order desires—we lose sight of the central aim of the will to power. That is, we lose sight of its teleological structure. And when we lose sight of this teleological structure, we fail to make adequate sense of those passages in which Nietzsche claims that it contains "the solution to the problem of procreation and nourishment" (BGE 36), that it allows him to dispense with "superfluous teleological principles" such as the principle of self-preservation (BGE 13), and that it accounts for a purportedly "*dominant*" condition in nature: overflow and squandering (GS 349).

Moreover, if we overlook this aspect of the will to power, we cannot make good sense of a number of the evaluations that we find in Nietzsche's writings. By recognizing this teleological component of the

will to power—that the will to power is the will to  $P_1$ —we uncover a crucial aspect of the principle that informs Nietzsche’s approach to valuation. He ranks acts that pursue power via overflow higher than acts that pursue power via parasitism because the former are higher manifestations of the will to power. Not only do they evince a higher accumulation of power; they also achieve the ultimate aim of the will to power: the overflowing and squandering of power. As I tried to show in section 3, this way of understanding the will to power allows us to make better sense of a number of Nietzsche’s evaluations (e.g., his evaluation of gift-giving, his evaluation of the priest) than do the accounts of will to power that were discussed in section 1. By supplementing our understanding of will to power in this way—that is, by understanding the will to power as a will to encounter and overcome the resistances involved in the overflowing of power—we arrive at an account that allows us to better account for these facets of Nietzsche’s philosophy.

## NOTES

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1. I make use of the following translations of Nietzsche’s works: *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 565–656; *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1974); *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), 121–439; *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), 463–564; *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968); *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

2. For further commentary on the privileged status of the will to power, see Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 1983), 348–49, 389; Paul Katsafanas,

*Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147–56.

3. Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on the Overcoming of Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 131–32, 134–35.

4. See also KSA 13:14[174], 13:11[75]; GM I:13.

5. Nietzsche attempts to “determine all efficient force univocally as—will to power” (BGE 36).

6. Reginster, *Affirmation of Life*, 181.

7. Reginster, *Affirmation of Life*, 181.

8. Bernard Reginster, “Replies to My Critics,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43.1 (2012): 142.

9. Reginster’s Nietzsche appears to hold that if some  $x$  encounters and overcomes more resistance than some  $y$ ,  $x$  must be accorded greater value than  $y$ , regardless of considerations that may lead us to believe  $y$  is more valuable than  $x$ . For he thinks (1) will to power is the only privileged standard in Nietzsche’s approach to valuation, and (2) will to power is measured by the amount of resistance that an action, value, etc. allows us to encounter and overcome. Hence, it seems, Nazi expansionism would be accorded a higher valuation on Reginster’s reading than less difficult actions (e.g., hugging a friend or hosting a dinner party).

10. The difference between these evaluative results and those that we find in Nietzsche’s writings will become evident in section 3.

11. Reginster, *Affirmation of Life*, 181.

12. Maudemarie Clark objects to Reginster’s emphasis on the encountering and overcoming of resistances on different grounds—that it relies too much on passages from *Z* and unpublished notes. See Clark, “Suffering and the Affirmation of Life,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43.1 (2012): 96. I agree with Reginster, though, that there are plenty of reliable passages that underscore this facet of the will to power. Indeed, Reginster cites passages from *A* and *GM* to support his reading, passages from published works that were written in Nietzsche’s own voice (Reginster, “Replies to My Critics,” 138). It has also been argued that the will to power is a capacity or an ability, and that Reginster’s account is wrong when it supposes otherwise; see Ivan Soll, “Nietzsche’s Will to Power as a Psychological Thesis: Reactions to Bernard Reginster,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43.1 (2012): 125; Clark, “Suffering and the Affirmation of Life,” 93. For Reginster’s response to this latter objection, see his “Replies to My Critics,” 138–40. I set these objections aside, however, since I find them less convincing, and less damaging to Reginster’s account, than the one I am raising.

13. Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 185.

14. Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 187–89.

15. Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 189.

16. Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 188.
17. Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 185 n. 4.
18. Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 189.
19. See also *BGE* 13; *KSA* 13:14[121], 13:14[174].
20. John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 39.
21. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 42.
22. Nietzsche writes, "The victorious [physicists'] concept 'force' [. . .] still needs to be completed: an inner world must be ascribed to it, which I designate as 'will to power'" (*KSA* 11:36[31]). For further commentary on Nietzsche's use of the terms *Kraft* and *Macht*, see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Continuum, 1986), 53–54, and Jacob Golomb, "Will to Power: Does It Lead to the 'Coldest of All Cold Monsters'?", in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed. John Richardson and Ken Gemes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 525–51, 527.
23. See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 53–54.
24. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 41.
25. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 41.
26. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 41.
27. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 39 n. 45.
28. For further treatment of this claim, see Reginster, *Affirmation of Life*, 138; Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 157; Nadeem Husain, "The Role of Life in Nietzsche's *Genealogy*," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: A Critical Guide*, ed. Simon May (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 142–69, 151.
29. Nietzsche speaks of "growth—in a word—or, more precisely, the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increased power" (*BGE* 230; cf. *A* 2). Hence, there is reason to think that by "power," Nietzsche means more precisely, "the feeling of increased power." Accordingly, "power" for Nietzsche is "not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos*" (*KSA* 13:14[79]); "life," as "will to power," "strives for a *maximum feeling of power*" (*KSA* 13:14[82]).
30. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 24.
31. Reginster's is one such structural account of the will to power. See also Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David F. Krell, 4 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 1:42; Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 160–62.
32. Katsafanas takes note of such passages (*Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 162–63).
33. In other words, we will to encounter and overcome resistances because it allows us to attain an increase in our feeling of power. In this sense, our struggle with resistances arises from (i.e., follows from) our will to an increase in the feeling of power; see *KSA* 12:7[44].

34. Nietzsche treats this phenomenon at length in *GM* I. See also Peter Poellner, "Ressentiment and the Possibility of Intentional Self-Deception," in *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*, ed. Manual Dries and P.J.E. Kail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 189–211.

35. *Z* P:1; see also *GS* 382; *TI* "Skirmishes" 9; *Z* I: "On the Gift-Giving Virtue" 1.

36. For further descriptions of the state that gives rise to this higher mode of will to power, see *TI* "Skirmishes" 44; *NCW* "We Antipodes"; *GS* 370; *Z* III: "On the Three Evils" 2.

37. Nietzsche's writings—especially *Z*—attempt to enact what he calls a "return of language to the nature of imagery" (*EH* "Books: *Z*" 6). Regarding his "art of speech," he writes, "what is nearest and most everyday, here speaks of unheard-of things. [. . .] The most powerful capacity for metaphor that has existed so far is poor and mere child's play compared with this return of language to the nature of imagery" (*EH* "Books: *Z*" 6). Hence, Nietzsche's metaphors (e.g., the metaphor of the parasite), although they may be common and "everyday," are supposed to speak of "unheard of things." They become terms of art with which he intends to refer to original philosophical ideas.

38. "A priestly attempt! A parasite's attempt! A vampirism of pale, subterranean bloodsuckers" (*A* 49). Nietzsche often applies the metaphors of the parasite and the vampire to refer to a type of human being (e.g., the priest) or to a type of human institution (e.g., the church). But we also find him applying these terms to certain modes of thinking, as well as to basic, inescapable aspects of being a human being. He depicts, for instance, "[m]orality as vampirism" (*EH* "Destiny" 8). And he notes that "having a talent, one is also the victim of a talent: one lives under the vampirism of one's talent" (*KSA* 12:10[33]). In other words, the concepts of parasitism and vampirism are not used merely to insult those humans, institutions, and talents to which Nietzsche applies them (although they may do this as well). They are rather, I suggest, metaphors that have a central place in Nietzsche's philosophical vocabulary: they name one of the two basic ways in which beings may manifest will to power.

39. *KSA* 13:14[174]; *GS* 349; *A* 57; cf. *KSA* 12:10[2], 12:10[145]; *GS* 370; *GM* III:25; *A* 2; *Z* I: "On the Gift-Giving Virtue" 1; *Z* II: "On Self-Overcoming"; *Z* III: "Virtue That Makes Small" 2; *WS* 217; *NCW* "We Antipodes."

40. I contend that collective actions such as Nazi expansionism would fall into this category. It is on these grounds that Nietzsche's approach to valuation would (pace Reginster) devalue such courses of action.

41. Nietzsche construes the priest as "the most dangerous kind of parasite, the real poison-spider of life" (*A* 26, 38; see also *A* 49, 58, 62; *EH* "Why I Am a Destiny" 7). And he applies the same analysis, and the same image of vampirism, to the anarchist (*A* 58).

42. The passage continues, "[t]his is, for example, the case of the genuine Christian" (*TI* "Skirmishes" 9).

43. See also *HH* 350, and *EH* “Books: Z.”

44. This higher-ranking approach to parasitism is nicely illustrated in the Prologue to *Z*, as well.

45. In other words, when we are experiencing conditions of distress, we tend not to squander our power. Instead, we attempt to preserve it, and we seek further nourishment from external sources. But to suppose that this is the real aim of life (i.e., the will to power) is misguided, according to Nietzsche’s doctrine. For, again, this occurs only when the will is experiencing “conditions of distress,” when it is thereby “temporarily restrict[ed]” from exercising its real aim: the “overflow and squandering” of its accumulated power (*GS* 349).