

FREUD *OR* NIETZSCHE:
THE DRIVES, PLEASURE, AND SOCIAL HAPPINESS

by

Donovan Tateshi Miyasaki

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Philosophy
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

Many commentators have remarked upon the striking points of correspondence that can be found in the works of Freud and Nietzsche. However, this essay argues that on the subject of desire their work presents us with a radical choice: Freud *or* Nietzsche.

I first argue that Freud's theory of desire is grounded in the principle of inertia, a principle that is incompatible with his later theory of Eros and the life drive. Furthermore, the principle of inertia is not essentially distinct from his later theory of the death drive. Consequently, Freud's theory of desire can only be interpreted consistently as a monism of the death drive.

I then analyze Nietzsche's attempt to ground his theory of desire in the concept of the will to power. I argue that Nietzsche's view of desire is fundamentally opposed to the key elements of Freud's theory of desire: the principle of constancy, the Freudian definition of the drive, and the pleasure principle.

Next, I explicate the stakes of this opposition by analyzing the social consequences of each view for morality and justice. I argue that the Freudian subject seeks to dominate the social other, and that there is an insurmountable conflict between the satisfaction of desire and the demands of social life. Consequently, Freud's view allows only for a negative

conception of the social good in which morality is defined as the intrinsically impossible task of eliminating evil, and justice can be achieved only through the equal distribution of instinctual frustration.

Finally, I argue that in Nietzsche's theory of desire there is no essential conflict between individual desire and social life. The Nietzschean subject desires to manifest power in the form of activity that is independent of external agents, not to dominate the other. Consequently, Nietzsche's view allows for the possibility of a positively defined concept of the social good in which morality is the affirmation and enhancement of every subject's happiness, and justice can be achieved through the promotion and protection of an equality of power among subjects.

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INTRODUCTION

Another thing I loathe to hear is an infamous “and”: the Germans say “Goethe *and* Schiller” — I am afraid they say “Schiller and Goethe” Don’t people *know* this Schiller yet? — There are even worse “ands” . . .

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Although there is a significant body of literature comparing Freud and Nietzsche’s work, the greater part of this literature has highlighted their similarities at the expense of their differences. In the rare cases where the differences between Freud and Nietzsche’s views have been given attention, they have often been treated as relatively inconsequential. It has not generally been appreciated just how profound their differences are. Moreover, in those cases where specific incompatibilities between the two thinkers’ views have been recognized, the explicit consequences of their disagreements have not been sufficiently explored. Finally, comparisons of Freud and Nietzsche’s views have been primarily focused on the topics of the unconscious, repression, and sublimation. Few commentators have compared Freud and Nietzsche’s views of desire, the drives, and pleasure in significant detail.

It is the purpose of this essay to remedy these deficiencies by providing a thorough analysis of the radical differences between Freud and Nietzsche’s theories of desire, the drives, and pleasure. I shall argue that their views on the subject are antagonistic to the point of opposition. On the issue of desire, we are presented with a choice: Freud *or* Nietzsche. Furthermore, I shall attempt to make explicit what is at stake in the confrontation of their views of desire by analyzing the consequences of those views for our understanding of social relationships, morality, and justice. I shall argue that Freud and Nietzsche’s opposition on

the issue of desire is a profoundly consequential one, with nothing less at stake than the essential possibility of human happiness within social life.

It is not entirely the fault of Freud and Nietzsche's commentators that their differences on the subject of desire have been overlooked. Nietzsche's view of desire is not easily compared to Freud's. He attempts to understand human motivation primarily through the concept of the will to power. Yet his formulations of the concept of the will to power in his published work are quite general, often ambiguous, and limited to relatively brief, passing statements. Freud's theory of desire, on the contrary, involves a number of clearly defined and thoroughly elaborated concepts—the principle of constancy, the definition of the aim and object of the drive, and the pleasure and reality principles—each of which occupies a very specific place in his overall theory of mental life. Moreover, Freud clearly explains the connection of these elements of his theory of desire to one another—e.g., the way in which the constancy principle as a general principle of mental functioning connects the satisfaction of the drives to the production of pleasure. Nietzsche, on the contrary, rarely explicitly connects his extraordinarily broad notion of the will to power as the essence of living things to his specific discussions of human psychology, the drives, and pleasure. His discussions of the will to power usually treat it exclusively on the general level of living things, rather than in its specific manifestations in human life or, more importantly, in the individual's drives.

Consequently, Nietzsche's view of desire is not directly comparable to Freud's. It is possible to bring their views into confrontation only by unpacking and, to some degree, reconstructing the implicit details of Nietzsche's statements. For example, Nietzsche does not define his use of the term "drive." He does not tell us what the aim of a drive is, or how

it is satisfied. Indeed, he rarely ever speaks of the drives as such, but rather of specific drives—a tactic that makes the elaboration of a general theory of the drives unnecessary. Consequently, if we wish to compare the Nietzschean and Freudian views of the drives, we must first deduce Nietzsche's view of the drive from his statements about the will to power. We cannot, of course, simply invent a concept of the drive on Nietzsche's behalf. But we can, on the basis of Nietzsche's statements about the will to power, determine what elements of the Freudian view Nietzsche cannot consistently endorse and, consequently, how a Nietzschean approach must differ. That is, where Nietzsche does not explicitly give his view, we can deduce certain points of comparison to Freud's work—provided these point follow necessarily from views that Nietzsche *has* explicitly expressed. It is simply a matter of unpacking the implicit consequences of his expressed views on the will to power, the drives, and pleasure.

Even when Freud and Nietzsche's views of desire are compared, it is very easy to overlook their differences. Both thinkers' views of desire are obscured by internal inconsistencies. Both thinkers commit themselves to foundational assumptions about the nature of desire—the primacy of inertia in Freud's case and the primacy of the will to power in Nietzsche's—but do not consistently uphold that foundational principle in the elaboration of their views. For example, I will argue that Freud's late dualistic theory of life and death drives is incompatible with his principal assertions about the nature of the drives, and that Nietzsche's frequent depiction of human desire as a desire for power and domination is inconsistent with his assertions about the will to power. Although it is easy to locate points of apparent compatibility or agreement in the two thinkers' views, these apparent parallels are in fact a product of the inconsistencies in each thinker's theory of desire. Consequently,

in order to successfully bring to light the differences between Freud and Nietzsche's views of desire, it will first be necessary to provide an internally consistent account of each view.

In Part I, I provide a comparative analysis of Freud and Nietzsche's views of the foundation of desire, the drives, and pleasure.

I begin, in the first chapter, with a discussion of the foundational principle to which Freud's theory of desire is committed: the principle of inertia. Freud only explicitly discusses the principle of inertia in the context of biological theory, and he only discusses it in detail twice: once in the posthumously published 1895 essay "Project for a Scientific Psychology" and again in his 1920 work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. However, I argue that the principle of inertia is the foundation of the psychical principle of constancy and that, consequently, the principle of inertia is inseparable from his theory of the drive, the pleasure principle, and the reality principle.

In chapter two, I discuss Nietzsche's theory of the will to power and its consequences for the theories of the drives and pleasure. I oppose Nietzsche's view to each of the principal elements of Freud's theory of desire: the primacy of inertia, the definition of the drive, and the pleasure principle. I argue that, in marked contrast to Freud's theory, Nietzsche's attempt to found desire in the will to power commits him to the view that pleasure does not depend upon stimulation or tension and that the drives do not have an aim that is external to the immediate manifestation of power in the form of activity.

In chapter three, I argue that Freud's later dualistic theory of Eros and death drive is incompatible with his commitment to the primacy of inertia; consequently, his theory of desire can only consistently be interpreted as a monism of the death drive. I begin by arguing

that Eros is not, as Freud suggests, merely an extension of his early theory of sexuality. The theory of Eros as a tendency toward the formation of ever greater bonds is incompatible with his explanation of sexual and social bonds as derivative of the inhibition of libidinal aims. I then argue that Freud cannot replace his earlier theory of sexuality with that of Eros because it is incompatible with each of the principal elements of his theory of desire. Finally, I conclude with a response to two possible objections to the view that Freud's theory is a monism of the death drive.

In Part II, I contrast the consequences of Freud and Nietzsche's theories of desire for social theory and the possibility of social happiness. I analyze the social consequences of each thinker's views in relation to three key issues: 1) social bonds and social domination, 2) justice, and 3) morality and conscience.

I begin chapter four by arguing against two attempts to solve the problem of Freud's pessimism toward the possibility of social happiness. Both attempts fail to resolve the radical pessimism of Freud's theory by following Freud in his misidentification of the source of that pessimism in a conflict between life and death drives, rather than in its true source: the conflict between the aim of inertia and reality.

I then argue that because Freud's theory of desire has its basis in the inertia principle and because he cannot appeal to Eros as a counter-principle to inertia, there is an inevitable tendency in the Freudian subject toward the domination of the libidinal other. Furthermore, I argue that authentic satisfaction of the Freudian subject's drives also requires the subordination of the social other to the subject's will. Consequently, the satisfaction of the Freudian subject's desire is essentially incompatible with social bonds.

Finally, I argue that because social happiness is essentially impossible for the Freudian subject, 1) justice can only take the negative form of promoting the equal distribution of instinctual sacrifice, 2) morality can only take the negative form of an essentially impossible task of eliminating evil rather than the production of a positively defined good, and 3) moral conscience must be essentially a “bad conscience”—its only possible function is the negation of the will and the production of guilt.

In chapter five I contrast the social consequences of Nietzsche’s theory of desire with those of Freud’s theory. I begin by resolving an apparent inconsistency between my analysis of Nietzsche’s theory of the drive and Nietzsche’s statements about the will to power.

Although I argue in chapter two that the will to power is incompatible with the view that the drives have an aim external to the immediate manifestation of power, Nietzsche occasionally suggests that the will to power does have an external aim. I argue that the apparent inconsistency can be resolved by distinguishing two different ways of describing the will to power: as quanta of power in relation to one another and as the relations in which those quanta exist. I then argue that although the essence of the will to power is in some sense “domination,” it does not follow that relations of social domination are inevitable. The Nietzschean subject’s desire aims only at the manifestation of its power through activity that is independent of external forces, not at the domination of the external world or others.

Next, I contrast the consequences of Freud and Nietzsche’s views of desire for our understanding of social relationships, morality, and justice. I argue that on Nietzsche’s view, unlike Freud’s, there is no essential conflict between the happiness of the subject and social bonds. The satisfaction of the subject’s desire is compatible with the other’s independence, and the subject is able to find pleasure and happiness in the other’s resistance and opposition.

I then suggest that the compatibility of each subject's happiness with that of others provides for the possibility of a form of morality based on Nietzsche's conception of "noble" values. A noble form of morality would be a positively defined morality that has as its end the positive promotion of every subject's happiness, and its foundation in noble values would not, I argue, necessitate social domination or hierarchy. Furthermore, I argue that the possibility of a positively defined noble morality has as its consequence the additional possibility of a truly "good conscience": a form of moral duty that has its basis in affirmation and the feeling of power, rather than in negation of the will and guilt. Finally, I argue that Nietzsche's theory of desire also allows for the possibility of a noble form of social justice that is positively defined as the protection and enhancement of the happiness of all subjects through the promotion of a balance of power among subjects. Nietzsche's concept of nobility not only allows for the promotion of equality of power and the end of social domination, the opposition of noble values to "slave morality" actually demands it.

PART I

THE FOUNDATION OF THE THEORY OF DESIRE

CHAPTER 1

INERTIA AS THE GROUND OF DESIRE IN FREUDIAN THEORY

The Principle of Biological Inertia in Freud's Theory of Desire

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud suggests that there is an “inertia inherent in organic life,”¹ a suggestion that serves, in the same essay, as the basis for his hypothesis of the death drive.² He presents the idea as a new addition to his theory, saying that it “has not hitherto been recognized or at least not explicitly stressed.”³ But the hypothesis of biological inertia can in fact be found in a slightly different form in his earliest essays, and it is implicitly presupposed as the basis for his theory of human desire throughout his entire career.

Freud suggests biological inertia for the first time in 1895, in “Project for a Scientific Psychology.” There he uses the principle of inertia to explain the related “principle of constancy,” which had appeared in his unpublished writings as early as 1892. The earliest explicit formulation of the constancy principle is simply: “The nervous system endeavours to keep constant something in its functional relations that we may describe as the ‘sum of excitations.’”⁴ In the “Project,” however, Freud goes further, suggesting that constancy is derivative of the more fundamental trend of inertia. The principle of inertia is simply “that

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, XVIII:36. All references to Freud's work are to *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Vintage/The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-74).

² I discuss the relation of the principle of inertia to the death drive below, 12-14, and chapter three, 70.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Freud, “Sketches for the ‘Preliminary Communication’ of 1893,” I:153.

neurones tend to divest themselves of Q .”⁵ “ Q ” is Freud’s name for a quantity of energy in general, although he usually uses it to refer to the quantity of energy possessed by an external object acting upon a living organism, in contrast to “ $Q\dot{\eta}$,” which refers specifically to a quantity of intercellular energy or activity in the nervous system. From this general principle, Freud concludes that the primary function of the nervous system is to reflexively discharge any $Q\dot{\eta}$ received from the external world by converting neuronal energy into motor activity.⁶ He then adds a secondary function: flight from the external source of excitation, provided the effort necessary for such an activity is proportional to the energy received from the external stimulus—i.e., provided that flight is consistent with the principle of inertia.

Were this the entire picture, a living organism would successfully discharge all $Q\dot{\eta}$, and, consequently, it would quickly perish for internal reasons.⁷ However, Freud points out that the somatic element of the organism is itself a source of stimulation. Consequently, the nervous system must deal with stimuli received from internal as well as external sources. Because endogenous stimuli are constant and cannot be dealt with by flight, a greater amount of motor activity is required to remove them than is required for either the reflexive discharge of externally received excitation or flight. Consequently stimuli of this sort cannot be discharged from the nervous system through efforts that are directly proportional to the $Q\dot{\eta}$ received from the source of stimulation, as was the case with external sources of $Q\dot{\eta}$. So the original principle of inertia and flight is modified into he calls elsewhere the “principle of

⁵ Freud, “Project for a Scientific Psychology,” I:296.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967), 344: “Freud’s constructions . . . might well seem absurd from the standpoint of the biological sciences, in that they claim to *deduce* an organism—with its vital capacities, its adaptive functions and its energy constants—from a principle which is the very negation of any sustained difference in level.”

constancy.” Under the necessity of dealing with internal stimuli, Freud says, the nervous system must “put up with maintaining a store of $Q\dot{\eta}$ sufficient to meet the demand of a specific action” and the primary trend of “bringing the level of $Q\dot{\eta}$ to zero” becomes “an endeavour at least to keep the $Q\dot{\eta}$ as low as possible and to guard against any increase of it—that is, to keep it constant.”⁸

Nevertheless, this does not mean that inertia is no longer primary. “The same trend persists,” Freud claims, but in a modified form. Constancy is not contrary to inertia, nor is it independent of it. The storage of $Q\dot{\eta}$ is still governed by the primary principle of discharge, for it only occurs as a necessary means to the discharge of internally generated $Q\dot{\eta}$ —excitation that would be impossible to discharge otherwise. That constancy is not essentially distinct from inertia is quite clear from his claim that “to keep the $Q\dot{\eta}$ as low as possible and to guard against any increase” is the same as “to keep it constant.”⁹ An independent principle of constancy, on the contrary, would imply that if $Q\dot{\eta}$ fell below a certain level, the nervous system would tend to *increase* $Q\dot{\eta}$ in order to maintain a constant level, and consequently that the nervous system would not *always* guard against increase.¹⁰ But Freud makes clear that this is not the case. The “storing” of $Q\dot{\eta}$ is not an exception to discharge, but rather the consequence of the impossibility of complete discharge. It is what remains when the nervous system has brought $Q\dot{\eta}$ to a level that is “as low as possible.”

⁸ Freud, “Project,” I:297.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Freud’s insistence upon the term “constancy” is quite misleading and has led some commentators astray. For example, Cordelia Schmidt-Hellerau suggests a strict distinction between the inertia and constancy principles and claims, “The principle of constancy ensures that a given ‘store of $Q\dot{\eta}$ ’—that is, endogenous (excitation) quantity—and hence a constant tension, is constantly maintained within a system.” See Hellerau, *Life Drive and Death Drive, Libido and Lethe: A Formalized Consistent Model of Psychoanalytic Drive and Structure Theory*, trans. Philip Slotkin (New York: Other Press, 2001), 173. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis take a similar view in *Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 341-48.

Freud's principle of biological inertia as formulated in 1893 does not differ in any significant way from the notion of biological inertia he introduces in the 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The only difference is one of emphasis, not revision. Rather than simply attribute inertia to the biological organism in general, Freud also suggests an analogous tendency specific to the drives.¹¹ That is, inertia is here discussed specifically in its application to endogenous sources of stimulation, rather than to both external and internal sources:

It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, *the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life* [emphasis mine].¹²

He does not discuss this “inertia inherent in organic life” in much detail, since he is primarily concerned with the drives rather than with the nervous system, and with psychological principles rather than biological ones. But the nature of biological inertia is quite clear from his description of the drives that are its “expression”:

The attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception. . . . The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state.¹³

This revived principle of inertia parallels the 1893 version of the principle of inertia in three principal aspects:

¹¹ I will use “drive” for the original German “*Trieb*” (as distinguished from “instinct,” or “*Instinkt*” in the original texts) throughout. However, I will nonetheless preserve without modification the standard Strachey translation of “instinct” for “*Trieb*” in all quotations. All references to “instinct” in cited text are to “*Trieb*” in the original German text. For an excellent discussion of Freud's use of the terms “drive” [*Trieb*] and “instinct” [*Instinkt*], see Laplanche and Pontalis, 214-16.

¹² Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:36

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

- 1) In both versions, the ultimate end of the activity of the biological organism is to return to the inanimate state by “bringing the level [of energy in the nervous system] to zero.”¹⁴
- 2) In both cases, the organism’s activity is in its most fundamental form a reactive response; that is, it is initiated by an activity independent of its nervous system (exogenous or endogenous stimulation) and it tends to undo any change brought about by that independent activity. The primitive organism endeavours to “cancel out” the externally received stimulation, just as, in Freud’s earlier formulation, the neurones “neutralize” received quantities of excitation through reflex movement.
- 3) Most importantly, in both versions inertia is a *first* principle, of which apparent exceptions are instead modifications. In 1893, he explains that the maintenance of a constant level of $Q\dot{\eta}$ rather than complete discharge is nevertheless a mode of inertia—since it is in the service of discharge that $Q\dot{\eta}$ is stored. In 1920, he deduces from biological inertia a first principle of the “conservatism” of the drives—“the hypothesis that all instincts tend toward the restoration of an earlier state of things”¹⁵—and, once again, apparent exceptions prove to be modes of the same. For example, to the objection that such a view of the drives disallows for the development of organisms into more complex forms, Freud answers that externally imposed changes are repeated due to the tendency toward restoration that characterizes the drives, thus allowing for the accidental appearance of development. And when it occurs to Freud that such a view may be incompatible

¹⁴ Freud, “Project,” I:296.

¹⁵ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:37.

with sexual drives, rather than reject the essential conservatism of the drives (and consequently the principle of biological inertia on which it depends), he instead attempts to explain how sexual or “life” drives can be characterized as conservative.

The Principle of Psychological Inertia in Freud’s Theory of Desire

I will leave aside the question of whether he succeeds in such arguments. For now, I will emphasize only that although there is no explicit mention of biological inertia in his published works after 1893, the idea nevertheless reappears in 1920 with *no significant changes*. All the essential points—its aim of the complete discharge of nervous energy, its reactive nature, and its primacy over other tendencies—are intact. Why then does it disappear from his writings? Freud probably does not discuss biological inertia in the bulk of his writings, because that principle is directly relevant only to biological, not psychological, theory. In both instances where he discusses it—“Project for a Scientific Psychology” and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—it appears only in the context of purely biological speculations: the functioning of the entire nervous system in the former case, and the origin of organic life in the latter. Having decided that the primary tendency of inertia necessarily expresses itself as the principle of constancy, Freud probably saw no need to bring it directly into his psychological theory. And it may after all be the case that the principle of inertia *is* present in the bulk of Freud’s writings—under the name of the principle of constancy.

Although the inertia principle disappears in name after the “Project,” it clearly survives in its modified form of constancy. In most discussions of the principle of constancy after the “Project,” Freud transfers the principle of constancy directly into the psychical

realm: it now governs the mental apparatus specifically, as well as the biological organism in general. This should come as no surprise. He has suggested that the constancy principle governs the primary functions of the nervous system as a whole, so of course it must of necessity also apply to that part of the nervous system responsible for mental activity. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published seven years after the “Project” was written, Freud clearly still has inertia in mind in his discussion of psychological constancy. There he says, “The [mental] apparatus’ first efforts were directed towards keeping itself so far as possible free from stimuli; consequently its first structure followed the plan of a reflex apparatus, so that any sensory excitation impinging on it could be promptly discharged along a motor path.”¹⁶ This is clearly the primary principle of inertia applied specifically to psychological activity, and not simply a statement about constancy. And in the same work, he tells us that the psychological apparatus’ activities “are regulated by an effort to avoid an accumulation of excitation and to maintain itself so far as possible without excitation.”¹⁷ Although inertia is not here mentioned as a specific principle, it is clear that it must be a presupposition of this version of constancy. For were there not a primary trend toward zero excitation, it would not be the case that the mental apparatus seeks to maintain itself “so far as possible” free of excitation. And in the 1915 essay, “Instincts and their Vicissitudes,” we again see that the primary principle of inertia clearly grounds the notion of psychological constancy, or, to put it another way, that constancy is the principle of inertia in modified form: “The nervous system is an apparatus which has the function of getting rid of the stimuli that reach it, or of reducing them to the lowest possible level; or which, if it were feasible, would maintain itself in an

¹⁶ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, V:565.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 598.

altogether unstimulated condition.”¹⁸ And, again, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: “The mental apparatus endeavours to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant.”¹⁹

All of these formulations suggest that Freud never abandoned the primary principle of inertia—at least as a principle governing the psychical apparatus, if not the nervous system as a whole. But I will leave aside questions about Freud’s own intentions. My concern, on the contrary, is with whether or not inertia plays an essential role in Freud’s theory of desire as a whole—whether or not it can be rejected without rejecting the rest of his theory of desire at the same time. I will now argue that it cannot be. Because my concern is with the psychological consequences of the notion of inertia, I will restrict my discussion to the role of inertia in psychical activity, rather than deal with his general biological theory. To see why the psychic principle of inertia is inseparable from Freud’s overall theory, we must first understand what the principle of constancy—an integral part of Freud’s theory—would become without the presupposition of inertia.

In my discussion of the inertia principle, I stressed three crucial points about the original principles of inertia and constancy: 1) the ultimate end of the activity of the nervous system is to bring excitation to zero, 2) the primary form of its activity is reaction, and 3) the principle of inertia is primary—all other principles are either modifications of it or governed by it. If we remove inertia from Freud’s principle of psychic constancy, each of these three points must be rejected. The end of the activity of the mental apparatus would be, not to bring the quantity of excitation to zero, but to bring it to, or preserve it at, a certain level. If,

¹⁸ Freud, “Instincts and their Vicissitudes,” XIV:120.

¹⁹ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:9.

for the sake of argument, we temporarily suppose this to be the case, then its activity cannot be fundamentally reactive. I made two points about Freud's discussion of the primary "reflex movement" of the nervous system: 1) the activity is a reaction, initiated by excitation independent of the nervous system (by externally introduced stimuli or by stimuli originating from the somatic substance of the organism) and 2) the activity cancels out the change imposed by that source. Now, if we assume a principle of constancy that is not grounded in inertia, activity will not necessarily be reactive in the sense of (1), since it will be possible for the mental apparatus to act independently of an external or internal stimulus. For if the level of excitation were to fall below the level of constancy, it would have to cease the discharge of excitation in order to return to the level of constancy, and this would not be in response to or initiated by an independent stimulus. And activity will no longer be reactive in the sense of (2), since the mental apparatus will only cancel out an independently caused change in the quantity of excitation if that change results in an increase above the level of constancy. But if, on the contrary, an endogenous or external stimulus were to bring the level toward or equal to that of constancy, the mental apparatus would instead tend to *preserve* that change. Finally, if we assume constancy without inertia, then the third point—that inertia is primary—must also be rejected. Given the absence of a primary tendency of inertia, constancy is no longer a modification of inertia, but rather the reverse. The mental apparatus, on this assumption, primarily tends to maintain a constant level, but the presence of endogenous stimuli (which constantly increase the level of excitation) makes it impossible to do so at all times. It must then, as a *secondary* function, discharge excitation in the overall service of constancy.

Inertia, the Pleasure Principle, and the Reality Principle

We now have a revised version of Freud's psychic principle of constancy that does not presuppose a more primary principle of inertia. However, I shall argue that if we insist upon these changes to his theory, constancy becomes incompatible with Freud's two principles of mental functioning and with his theory of the drives. Throughout most of his career, Freud tentatively equated the principle of psychical constancy with the first principle of mental functioning—the pleasure principle—viewing them as two different kinds of description for the same phenomenon. One is a quantitative description of the activity of the mental apparatus, the other a qualitative description from the point of view of the psychological subject. For example, in the "Project": "Since we have certain knowledge of a trend in psychical life towards avoiding unpleasure, we are tempted to identify that trend with the primary trend towards inertia."²⁰ He says that unpleasure coincides with "a raising of the level of $Q\dot{\eta}$ or an increasing quantitative pressure" and that pleasure is "the sensation of discharge."²¹ Consequently, the "pleasure principle," as the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of unpleasure, coincides with the principle of constancy's tendency toward the lowest level of excitation. The same view is expressed in "Instincts and their Vicissitudes,"²² *The Ego and the Id*,²³ and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He is quite clear about the equation in the latter work:

²⁰ Freud, "Project," I:312.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Freud, "Instincts," XIV:120-21: "When we further find that the activity of even the most highly developed mental apparatus is subject to the pleasure principle, i.e. is automatically regulated by feelings belonging to the pleasure-unpleasure series, we can hardly reject the further hypothesis that these feelings reflect the manner in which the process of mastering stimuli takes place—certainly in the sense that unpleasurable feelings are connected with an increase and pleasurable feelings with a decrease of stimulus."

²³ Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, XIX:22: "Sensations of a pleasurable nature have not anything inherently impelling about them, whereas unpleasurable ones have it in the highest degree. The latter impel towards change, towards discharge, and that is why we interpret unpleasure as implying a heightening and pleasure a lowering of energetic cathexis."

The facts, which have caused us to believe in the dominance of the pleasure principle in mental life, also find expression in the hypothesis that the mental apparatus endeavours to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as a low as possible or at least to keep it constant. This latter hypothesis is *only another way of stating* [emphasis mine] the pleasure principle; for if the work of the mental apparatus is directed towards keeping the quantity of excitation low, then anything that is calculated to increase that quantity is bound to be felt as adverse to the functioning of the apparatus, that is as unpleasurable. The pleasure principle follows from the principle of constancy.²⁴

Admittedly, Freud does ultimately reject the equation of constancy and the pleasure principle in the 1924 essay “The Economic Problem of Masochism” and suggests that pleasure can in some cases coincide with an increase of excitation. But by that time, his theory of desire—of the drives, pleasure, satisfaction, and libidinal relations—is already in place. The version of the pleasure principle that informs the majority of his writings mirrors his formulation of the principle of psychic constancy on the crucial point at issue: a primary tendency toward decreased quantities of excitation. Consequently, any attempt to reject the notion of psychological inertia requires the rejection of that version of the pleasure principle. If we temporarily presuppose my revised version of the constancy principle, then we cannot accept Freud’s pleasure principle for two reasons. First, without the inertia principle, mental functioning is not governed by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of displeasure as defined in the majority of Freud’s works. For given our revised version of constancy, the activity of the mental apparatus has as its ultimate end bringing the level excitation to, or maintaining it at, a constant level and *not necessarily* decreasing that level. For example, if the level of excitation in the mental apparatus were to fall below the level of constancy, it would be possible for the subject to pursue an increase in the quantity of excitation present in the mental apparatus—on Freud’s definition, to pursue unpleasure. Second, if there is no

²⁴ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:9.

primary inertia, then the pursuit of pleasure is not—as Freud suggests—necessarily a reaction to the presence of unpleasure (i.e., the removal of a stimulus experienced as unpleasure). For as we have seen, it would be possible for the mental apparatus to act toward the end of constancy in the absence of any independent stimulus. (For example, to increase the level of stimulus if it is below the level of constancy could be experienced as pleasure. And so pleasure could be pursued in the absence of excitation rather than in response to painful excitation.)

Ultimately, any attempt to preserve the constancy principle while rejecting inertia will make the pleasure principle uninformative and useless, since we will no longer be able to determine what is pursued in the pursuit of pleasure or what is avoided in the avoidance of unpleasure. To pursue pleasure could mean to pursue an increase (given a level of excitation below constancy) or decrease (given a level of excitation above constancy) in stimulation, or simply to maintain a certain level (given an achieved level of constancy). To avoid unpleasure, likewise, could mean to avoid either an increase or a decrease (given an achieved level of constancy), or the pursuit of either an increase (given a level below constancy) or a decrease (given a level above constancy). And in any case, it would not be compatible with Freud's explicit formulation of the pleasure principle, which informs all of his major works on the general theory of desire. For although Freud will ultimately allow for exceptions to his linkage of pleasure, unpleasure, and quantity of excitation, and although he admits that the link is not one of direct proportion (between quantity of excitation and strength of feeling of pleasure or unpleasure),²⁵ he never rejects the basic assumption of the pleasure principle: that there is a positive causal relationship of some kind between increased excitation and

²⁵ Ibid., XVIII:8.

unpleasure and between decreased excitation and pleasure. The revised version of constancy that I have presented would make it impossible to establish any such link, and consequently impossible to preserve Freud's pleasure principle.

So, if we wish to reformulate the constancy principle to get rid of inertia, we will also to reject the pleasure principle. And with the pleasure principle, we must also reject Freud's second "principle of mental functioning," the reality principle, since it is formulated in terms of the pleasure principle. The reality principle, Freud tells us, "does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure."²⁶ From this distinction, we can see that the two principles of mental functioning are exact corollaries of Freud's first principles of the nervous system: inertia and constancy, as formulated in the "Project." Just as constancy was not the abandonment of the tendency toward ultimate discharge, the reality principle does not change the final aim of the pleasure principle. Just as the constancy principle requires abandoning certain immediate possibilities of motor discharge (e.g., direct reflex action and flight), the reality principle also involves abandoning possibilities of immediate satisfaction (e.g., hallucinated satisfaction). And just as constancy requires the nervous system to temporarily maintain a quantity of excitation before discharging it, the reality principle makes necessary the temporary toleration of unpleasure.

However, although we have managed to formulate a principle of constancy without inertia, we cannot do the same with their corollaries, the pleasure and reality principles. In

²⁶ Ibid., XVIII:10.

his definition of the reality principle, Freud interprets the “toleration of unpleasure” in terms of his previous linkage between unpleasure and quantity of excitation, a linkage which our revised version of constancy does not support. Without the presupposition of a principle of psychological inertia, the pleasure and reality principles cannot be maintained in any form that is useful or informative, and certainly not in any way consistent with Freud’s usage. Even if we were to define “pleasure” as the feeling of the achievement of the level of constancy, and “unpleasure” as the feeling associated with variation from that level, our principles of mental functioning will be uninformative. For they rely on a principle of constancy for which the level of constancy is unknown. Consequently, the relation between the level of excitation, pleasure, and unpleasure (the point of connection between the constancy principle and the principles of mental functioning) is unknown as well.

Inertia and Freud’s Drive Theory

I have argued that Freud’s principle of inertia is so closely connected to the pleasure and reality principles that we cannot reject the former without also rejecting the latter. It remains to be seen whether or not a principle of constancy that is grounded in the principle of inertia is also indispensable to Freud’s general theory of the drives. Freud’s drive theory is merely the specific application of the pleasure principle to endogenous sources of stimulation alone, as opposed to the pleasure principle’s broader applicability to both external and internal sources of stimulation in the mental apparatus. Consequently, his drive theory is incompatible with my revised version of the constancy principle for the very same reasons that the pleasure principle is incompatible with that principle.

In “Instincts and their Vicissitudes,” Freud describes an instinct as “the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind . . . a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.”²⁷ Since a drive is a psychical representation of an endogenous stimulus, and not that stimulus itself, Freud’s notion of drive involves the *relation between* the mental apparatus and endogenous sources of excitation. And that relation mirrors the relationship that held in his original account, in the “Project,” of the relation between the nervous system as a whole and endogenous sources of excitation. The only difference is that, in this case, the relationship is mediated by the psyche—the work of dealing with the stimulus is undertaken in response to a conscious or unconscious mental representation of that stimulus that is at the source of the drive. In the relation between the nervous system and endogenous stimulation, the work of the nervous system was to discharge the quantity of neuronal energy received, and in the case of the drive, the work of the drive—its “aim”—is “obtained by removing the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct.”²⁸ And like that relation, such an aim can be assumed only if we presuppose a primary principle of inertia—i.e., a version of the pleasure principle that is consistent with Freud’s original formulation of the principle of psychic constancy.

If, on the contrary, we assume my revised principle of constancy, Freud’s drive theory must be rejected. On the revised principle, the mental apparatus tends toward constancy rather than the lowest possible level of excitation, so it is not necessarily the aim of the drive to remove the stimulation that is its source. For example, if the level of

²⁷ Freud, “Instincts,” XIV:122.

²⁸ Ibid.

excitation in the mental apparatus were to decrease below the level of constancy, the drive could be a demand for an increase, rather than a decrease, of the stimulation at its source. But if this example is possible, then it is also possible for the drive to represent a deficiency of stimulation. Consequently, a drive cannot, as Freud says, be the representative of the presence of stimuli simply, but rather must represent the presence or absence of stimulation above or below the level of constancy. And in contrast to Freud's theory, on the revised principle, the drive will not depend for its existence upon the presence of an endogenous source of stimulation. Freud's drive is a reaction to a stimulus, but if constancy is primary, it is possible for the drive to be a demand to bring about a quantity of stimulation in its absence (to bring the level up to that of constancy)—to be a spontaneous demand by the mental apparatus rather than a reaction to a stimulus. Finally, and most importantly, our hypothetical principle has profoundly different consequences for the relationship between drive and object. According to Freud, "The object of an instinct is the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim."²⁹ The Freudian drive relates to its object as a means to the end of removing the endogenous source of stimulation. But on our hypothesis, it was possible that the aim of a drive (given a level of excitation below constancy) could be to increase excitation. And if that were true, then object and aim could coincide, rather than be related as means to end. The object as an external source of stimuli could in virtue of its presence alone be a satisfaction of the drive. On Freud's view, far to the contrary, the object's presence—a source of stimuli—must, apart from its utility for the achievement of the aim of the drive, be understood as a source of unpleasure.

²⁹ Ibid.

Clearly, such a view is not compatible with Freud's theory of the drives. If we choose to reject Freud's notion of psychic inertia, then his drive theory must, like the pleasure and reality principles, also be rejected. The primacy of the principle of psychical inertia in mental functioning is an indispensable presupposition of Freud's theory of the psychical subject's motivations in its relation to its external and internal worlds and, consequently, an indispensable presupposition of his theory of desire.

CHAPTER 2

THE WILL TO POWER AS THE GROUND OF DESIRE IN NIETZSCHE

The Will to Power and Atomism

Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, understood as the ground of both biological and psychological activity, avoids the presupposition of inertia that is integral to Freud's theory and escapes the troubling social consequences that, as we shall later see, follow from such a principle. Although there is a great deal of debate about what role Nietzsche's unpublished writings should play in our evaluation of Nietzsche's work as a whole, I will not concern myself with that issue. I will argue only that Nietzsche unpublished notes on the will to power provide us with a valuable alternative to the Freudian understanding of desire, and not that Nietzsche's definitive view of desire can be drawn from them.¹ At the same time, however, I do not believe that the following account of will to power is inconsistent with any of Nietzsche's statements in the published works, and I will include references to similar and supporting material in the published works.²

¹ I am in agreement with Linda L. William's view in *Nietzsche's Mirror: The World as Will to Power* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001) that even if Nietzsche is not committed to the views expressed in his unpublished notes "it is by no means clear that *we* should disregard them completely" (72). As she correctly points out: "It may still be philosophically valuable to reconstruct and investigate them. . . . But we must be sure that any reconstructions we undertake are clearly noted to be *our* interpretations of the material and not said to be Nietzsche's final position without providing ample support from the material Nietzsche authorized for publication."

² I have chosen to base my interpretation on the unpublished notes only because they present much more detailed analyses of the concept of will to power, not because I believe there is a distinct concept found in the notes that cannot be found in the published writings. In chapter five I will discuss apparent inconsistencies between the following interpretation and certain descriptions of will to power that Nietzsche makes elsewhere. However, it is worth pointing out that these apparent inconsistencies (which are, I will argue, only apparent) can be found within the published works by themselves, and do not reflect a significant difference between the accounts of will to power found in the published works and the unpublished notes.

In the notes posthumously published under the title of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche suggests the “will to power” as an alternative to the atomism of mechanistic theory. The notion of the atom as a substantial unity that causes change is, he argues, an unjustified assumption derived from our own phenomenal experience: “The mechanistic world is imagined as only sight and touch imagine a world (as moved)—so as to be calculable—thus causal unities are invented, “things” (atoms) whose effect remains constant (—transference of the false concept of subject to the concept of the atom).”³ Because our sensible experience is of a world composed of things in motion, we assume unities as the primary structure of the world and the motion of these unities as the cause of events. Nietzsche believes that the root of this presumption is the simple inference that “where there is motion *something* is moved.” However, this inference depends upon our concept of motion which, in turn, depends upon human sensible experience or, as Nietzsche puts it, “the logic of the perspectivism of consciousness.” Consequently, he rejects it as a “subjective fiction”—a translation of the world as such into the language of the human subject’s experience.⁴ Nietzsche’s rejection of atomism has three important consequences: (1) an entity must be understood as a product of activity rather than as a cause of activity, (2) there cannot be any essential distinction between cause and effect, and (3) a law or principle of the activity of an entity must be understood as a product of the activity of forces rather than as a cause of activity. These consequences, in turn, lead him to an understanding of biological and psychological activity that is profoundly different than Freud’s.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), §635. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §112: “Cause and effect: such a duality probably never exists; in truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces, just as we perceive motion only as isolated points and then infer it without ever actually seeing it.”

⁴ Cf. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §112: “We operate only with things that do not exist: lines, planes, bodies, atoms, divisible time spans, divisible spaces. How should explanations be at all possible when we first turn everything into an *image*, our image!”

Rather than explaining change in terms of the motion of entities, Nietzsche reduces the activities of entities to relationships of what he calls “quanta of [the will to] power.”⁵ The concept of a quantum of power is similar, but not identical to, the common notion of a “force.” The concept of force, he argues, cannot by itself explain events: “An inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as ‘will to power,’ i.e. an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power.”⁶ The common notion of a force concerns a relation between entities, or the effects of the activity of one entity upon another. Between entities, relations of force may either exist or not exist; an entity may or may not act upon another entity. But if force is primary, activity must be primary as well. For it is only in terms of an entity outside of any relation with another that we can speak of a *potential* force. So, without substantial entities to which to attribute forces, a force must be essentially active: “Every power draws its ultimate consequence at every moment.”⁷ And if force is essentially active, then it must be the cause of its own activity, thus necessitating Nietzsche’s attribution of an “inner will” toward activity to a quantum of power. Furthermore, the primacy of activity, the inner will to activity of a quantum of power, requires that we view power-quanta as essentially relational. We cannot comprehend a power-quantum as an activity that is independent of relation, since the manifestation or “employment” of power

⁵ Ibid., §634.

⁶ Ibid., §619.

⁷ Ibid. §634. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), I:13: “The ‘doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” and II:12: “The democratic idiosyncrasy which opposes everything that dominates and wants to dominate . . . seems to me to have already taken charge of all physiology and theory of life—to the detriment of life, as goes without saying, since it has robbed it of a fundamental concept, that of *activity*. Under the influence of the above-mentioned idiosyncrasy, one places instead ‘adaptation’ in the foreground, that is to say, an activity of the second rank, a mere reactivity; . . . Thus the essence of life, its *will to power*, is ignored; one overlooks the essential priority of the *spontaneous* [emphasis mine], aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions.”

requires something in relation to which power is manifested. So Nietzsche tells us, “A quantum of power is designated by the effect it produces and that which it resists” and that “their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their ‘effect’ upon the same.”⁸ Quanta of power are relations. Unlike the atom of mechanistic theory, they do not exist independently of one another.⁹ Consequently, “entities”—insofar as there are entities—cannot be conceived of in isolation, but rather must be understood as consisting of relations of power-quanta, leading Nietzsche to the conclusion that “it is only relations that constitute an essence,”¹⁰ and that “all unity is unity only as organization and co-operation—just as a human community is a unity.”¹¹ Here we see that Nietzsche’s view stands the atomistic view on its head. Rather than a force being the effect of one entity upon another, entities themselves are effects of force; they consist of power-quanta in relation. Consequently, entities do not cause activity; they are the product of activity—they are the product of essentially active relations of power-quanta.

⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §634-35. Cf. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I:13: “A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a ‘subject,’ can it appear otherwise.”

⁹ See Alphonso Lingis, “The Will to Power,” in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1977), 40-41: “The Will to Power is originally plural. . . . Difference is constitutive of the original being of force: force is in its quantitative difference from another force. Force cannot exist in the singular.”

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §625.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, §561. In the published works, Nietzsche does not clearly claim that all entities are reducible to the will to power, only that living things are. However, he does make similar suggestions about the human subject which is, of course, the concern of this essay. Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), §12: “But the way is open for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as ‘mortal soul,’ and ‘soul as subjective multiplicity,’ and ‘soul as social structure of the drives and affects,’ want henceforth to have citizen’s rights in science.” (For a thoughtful discussion of the debate over whether or not Nietzsche’s views about will to power apply to both organic and inorganic life, see Williams, 43-49.)

We have seen that the rejection of the presupposition of substances entailed a concept of forces or power-quanta as essentially active and relational. But if power-quanta are essentially active, then there is no basis for the distinction between cause and effect. Because a power-quantum *is* its activity, we cannot make a distinction between a power-quantum as cause and its activity as effect. To do so would imply that the former is independent of the latter, that a quantum of the will to power could exist without acting and outside of relations to other quanta, which would return us to atomistic theory. It would require what Nietzsche rejects as a “mythology”—“the separation of the ‘deed’ from the ‘doer,’ of the event from someone who produces events, of the process from something that is not in process but enduring, substance, thing, body, soul, etc.”¹² Furthermore, if a power-quantum is essentially relational, then we also cannot distinguish one quantum from another in terms of cause and effect. If we try to interpret the activity of one quantum as the cause, and the change in the state of another quantum as the effect, we must assume the independence of the former from the latter. And this would mean that a quantum of power could exist outside of its relation to other quanta. If, as Nietzsche claims, a quantum *is* its effect upon another, then this certainly is not the case. Consequently, the distinction of cause and effect must be rejected with atomism. Rather than explaining events in terms of cause and effect, Nietzsche suggests understanding events as a rearrangement in the relations of power-quantum: “It is a question of a struggle between two elements of unequal power: a new arrangement of forces is achieved according to the measure of power of each of them . . . the factions in the struggle emerge

¹² Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §631. Cf. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I:13: “There is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything. The popular mind doubles the deed; when it sees the lightning flash, it is the deed of the deed: it posits the same event first as cause and then a second time as effect.”

with different quanta of power.”¹³ The significance of this view is that we cannot understand an entity’s activity in isolation (the entity viewed as either cause or effect); a thing’s activity can only be understood either within a relation (of one thing to another), or as a product of a relation (the relation of the forces that constitute it).

The third important consequence of Nietzsche’s rejection of atomism is that we can no longer appeal to overarching laws to explain an entity’s activity. As we have seen, Nietzsche attributes activity to power-quanta essentially, and he thinks that entities are constituted by the relations of these essentially active forces. Consequently, we cannot make a rigorous distinction between a thing and its activity—a thing *consists* in activity. But a law requires just such a distinction. A law implies that entities possess a potency that will of necessity become actuality. If a thing is a product of activity, then it cannot be dissociated from the active forces that constitute it, and thus we cannot say that an entity must of necessity actualize some potency. As Nietzsche puts it: “Every power draws its ultimate consequence at every moment.”¹⁴ Put another way, an entity *is* what it *does*. There is no space between an entity and its activity for necessity to apply: “One should use ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ only as pure concepts, that is to say, as conventional fictions for the purposes of designation and communication—not for explanation. In the ‘in-itself’ there is nothing of ‘causal connections,’ of ‘necessity,’ or of ‘psychological non-freedom’; there the effect does *not* follow the cause, there is no rule of ‘law.’”¹⁵ The only necessity left is a trivial one, the necessity of being rather than of events: “The unalterable sequence of certain phenomena demonstrates no ‘law’ but a power relationship between two or more forces. To say ‘But this

¹³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §633.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, §634.

relationship remains constant' is to say no more than 'One and the same force cannot also be another force.'"¹⁶

The three consequences of the rejection of atomism share a common emphasis: to understand the cause of an event we must look to relations rather than to entities in isolation. The first consequence—that an entity is a product of the activity of power quanta—makes it impossible to treat an entity as the cause of its own activity. The second—that there is no essential distinction of cause and effect—makes it impossible to treat one entity as the independent cause of an effect upon another entity. And the third—the rejection of the concept of law—makes it impossible to infer from regularity in an entity's activity a necessary principle that would serve to explain that activity.

The Will to Power and Freud's Principle of Psychological Inertia

Nietzsche views the will to power as the fundamental principle of psychology, recognizing no fundamental difference between physical and psychical activity: "That all driving force is will to power, that there is no other physical, dynamic or psychic force except this."¹⁷ So Nietzsche's psychological theory must be understood in light of his comments on the will to power. In my discussion of Freud's biological and psychical principles of inertia, I emphasized three points: 1) the ultimate end of activity is to bring excitation to zero, 2) the primary form of activity is reactive, and 3) the principle of inertia is primary—all other

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §21.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §631.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §688. Cf. Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §23: "All psychology so far has got stuck in moral prejudices and fears; it has not dared to descend into the depths. To understand it as morphology and *the doctrine of the development of the will to power*, as I do—nobody has yet come close to doing this even in thought."

principles are either modifications of or governed by it. Nietzsche's rejection of atomism requires the rejection of all three of these claims.¹⁸

Freud's view that the aim of psychological activity is to bring the quantity of excitation in the mental apparatus to zero is based upon a misleading representation of the subject's relation to internal and external sources of stimulation. For Freud's understanding of psychic activity requires that we picture mental events in a sequence of cause and effect—an approach that Nietzsche will not allow. In Freud's description, the subject passively receives stimulation from the external world and from its own somatic substance—from sources independent of the activity of the mental apparatus. This leads to an increase in the level of excitation in the mental apparatus, and the attempt, through motor action, to discharge the received quantities of excitation. The independent source of stimulation, whether internal or external, is portrayed as an independent cause in relation to the mental apparatus, and the increased level of excitation as the effect of that cause. This division into cause and effect leads us to think that the source of stimulation is entirely active and that the mental apparatus is entirely passive in relation to the source. Consequently it appears that the mental apparatus only increases its level of excitation passively. And from this one might be tempted to conclude that Freud is right at least about constancy, if not inertia.

However, as Nietzsche has pointed out, we cannot understand an entity's activity in terms of cause and effect, rather we must understand it in light of its relations. When Freud pictures the source of stimulation as purely active, and the mental apparatus as purely passive, he treats the source as an isolated entity, outside of any relation. In the case of an

¹⁸ For a discussion of additional points of contrast between the Freudian and Nietzschean conceptions of the drive, see Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, trans. Richard L. Collie, Jr. (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 53-94.

external object as the source, it is assumed that the subject and object are in a relation only due to the activity of the external object. However, because they are in a relation, the object cannot be purely active and independent. It receives as well as imparts stimulation, and the subject imparts as well as receives stimulation.¹⁹ In other words, each entity is both cause and effect, active and passive. But if that is true, then we cannot conclude that the mental apparatus *only* increases excitation passively. Although the subject does passively receive stimulation from the object, its presence or absence in the relation can be the consequence of its own activity. Consequently, it is still possible that the subject can actively increase the level of excitation in the mental apparatus by acting upon objects, not only by being acted upon by them. The assumption of constancy, then, is not justified in the case of an external source of stimulation. In the case of an endogenous source of stimulation, Freud once again pictures the mental apparatus as entirely passive to the source as active. But this is misleading. The mental apparatus can either discharge a stimulus or not, so there is a sense in which an increase of the level of excitation—even though it has endogenous stimuli as its source—can be actively brought about by the mental apparatus. This is possible if the mental apparatus by its own activity disallows the discharge of excitation, thereby indirectly acting to increase the level of excitation. Consequently, we again cannot conclude that the mental apparatus *only* increases excitation passively, and the assumption of constancy is not justified in the case of endogenous sources of stimulation.

¹⁹ See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 62: “We should not be surprised by the double aspect of the will to power: from the standpoint of the genesis or production of forces it determines the relation between forces but, from the standpoint of its own manifestations, it is determined by relating forces. This is why the will to power is always determined at the same time it determines, qualified at the same time it qualifies.” See also Eugene Victor Wolfenstein, *Inside/Outside Nietzsche: Psychoanalytic Explorations* (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 49: “In overcoming resistance, the accumulation and expenditure of force are conjoined.”

The same misleading division into cause and effect is found in Freud's description of the discharge of excitation. When the mental apparatus discharges excitation through motor action, it is portrayed as a purely active and independent cause, of which the discharge of excitation is the effect. So it appears that the activity of the mental apparatus *always* results in a decrease of excitation, and consequently that Freud's notion of inertia is correct. Once again, however, when we understand the activity as a relational one, Freud's conclusion does not follow. Because motor activity cannot take place without bringing the mental apparatus into relation with an external object, the mental apparatus is never entirely active in the relation—it is also always *receiving* as well as discharging excitation when the subject acts. Consequently it is not necessarily the case that activity *always* leads to a decrease in the level of excitation in the mental apparatus. For the quantity of excitation received from motor activity—which is a relation to external sources of stimulation—can possibly be greater than the quantity discharged by motor activity. Therefore it is possible for the subject to act in order to increase the level, and motor activity is not necessarily connected to a decrease in the level of excitation of the mental apparatus. And if motor activity does not always lead to a decrease in the level of excitation in the mental apparatus, then there is no reason to assume the principle of inertia.

In the previous chapter, I pointed out that the activity of the mental apparatus in Freud is reactive in two senses: 1) activity is a response to excitation that is imposed independently of the functioning of the nervous system, and 2) the activity cancels out the change imposed by that source. We need not deal explicitly with (2). I have already argued that Nietzsche must reject the assumption that the activity of the mental apparatus has the decrease of excitation as its aim. The changes imposed by sources of stimulation are an increase of

excitation, so we cannot assume, as (2) does, that the mental apparatus acts to cancel such changes. However, Nietzsche's rejection of atomism also requires that we reject reactivity in the sense of (1).

Reactivity in this sense means that the mental apparatus cannot act independently of a source of stimulation; it acts only in response to a stimulus—though this need not be with the aim of decreasing excitation. We saw that Nietzsche thinks that entities are composed of power-quanta in relation, and that power-quanta are essentially active. We also saw that Nietzsche rejects the view that decrease in excitation is a necessary end of activity. But if power-quanta are essentially active, we must go further: Nietzsche rejects the notion of *any* aim of activity that is external to the activity itself. For when he demands that we “take the doer back into the deed,”²⁰ he is also rejecting any essential distinction between an action and the end of that action.²¹ If the end or aim of an activity were independent of the activity, then power-quantum would not be essentially active; they would be active only when the end of the activity has not been achieved. But Nietzsche does treat them as essentially active; the only aim of their activity is that activity itself. Just as the doer *is* the deed, the activity *is* its own end: “That one should take doing *something*, the ‘aim,’ the ‘intention,’ the ‘purpose,’ back into the deed after having artificially removed all this and thus emptied the deed.”²² This is

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §674.

²¹ See Wolfenstein, 48: “Power is the activity itself, the accumulating and discharging of force. And because the will is *to* power, will to power is not teleological. It does not aim beyond itself but only at the experience of itself.” See also Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology of Power* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), 262: “Power has no purpose but to express itself spontaneously, and true spontaneity has no purpose towards which it is directed and which it aspires to achieve.”

²² Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §675. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), II:12: “Where there is perishing and a falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself—for power. That I must be *struggle and a becoming and an end and an opposition to ends* [emphasis mine]—alas, whoever guesses what is my will should also guess on what *crooked* paths it must proceed.”

why Nietzsche speaks of the will to power as a will to “manifest,” “employ,” or “exercise” power²³—to emphasize the fact the aim of the will to power is not external to its activity. Because Nietzsche believes that psychical activity is, like all activity, a form of the will to power, this must apply to the human subject as well. Consequently the Nietzschean subject’s activity does not depend on any external aim. It will seek to manifest power regardless of the level of excitation in the mental apparatus. It does not act in order to increase, decrease, or keep constant the level of excitation. The Freudian subject, on the contrary, acts only in response to a stimulus, and only in the service of the aim of achieving the lowest possible level of excitation. For example, the Freudian subject will not act if it has achieved the lowest possible level of excitation. It will also refrain from action if the action will lead to an increase rather than a decrease in the level of excitation in the mental apparatus. For example, if the Freudian subject encounters an external object that imparts a greater quantity of stimulation than would be discharged through action, then it must, according to the principle of inertia, flee the object rather than engage it. The Nietzschean subject, on the contrary, always seeks to manifest power, to act in some way, regardless of the state of excitation. Consequently its actions can never be fundamentally reactive.

Finally, according to Freud the principle of inertia is the primary principle of the activity of the mental apparatus. Not only is there a tendency toward zero excitation, all other tendencies are consistent with that tendency. Constancy, for example, can never lead to an attempt to maintain a level of excitation above that of the lowest possible level. And the reality principle does not enable the mental apparatus to tolerate a level of excitation that will not result in an ultimate, overall decrease in the level of excitation. So inertia is not one

²³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §619.

principle among others, with which it can be in conflict. It applies necessarily to all activity in the mental apparatus. As we saw earlier, Nietzsche rejects the notion of necessary laws as the cause of an entity's activity. Instead, he attributes regularity in phenomena to regularity in the relations of forces. Nietzsche's view on this issue is a natural extension of his view that will to power is essentially active. If an entity's activity does not have an end external to that activity itself, then it also cannot have a *necessary* external end that it must fulfill. Consequently, there can be no principle governing the mental apparatus that tells us what end it must of necessity achieve (e.g., lowest possible level of excitation). But Nietzsche's view, it should be added, eliminates the possibility of *any* primary principle of the activity of the mental apparatus. He also cannot accept, for example, either a principle of pure constancy without inertia or a principle of increased excitation. Nietzsche's rejection of the principle of inertia is not, consequently, a rejection of inertia as such, but only of its application as a primary principle or law governing all mental activity.

The Will to Power and the Pleasure Principle

Nietzsche does not, as Freud does, link increased excitation to unpleasure or decreased excitation to pleasure. Not only does he reject the Freudian definitions of pleasure and pain, he also rejects the pleasure principle in its entirety: "Man does *not* seek pleasure and does not avoid displeasure: pleasure and displeasure are mere consequences, mere epiphenomena—what man wants, what every smallest part of a living organism wants, is an increase in power."²⁴ It should be emphasized that "increase in power" cannot, if it is to be consistent with his discussion of the will to power, be understood as an end external to the

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 702.

activity in which a thing consists. The will to power *is*, as we have seen, its activity, and so to increase power must be understood as an increase in the manifestation of power.

Nietzsche's view, then, is that an organism seeks to manifest power independently of the sensation of either pleasure or pain.

There is a connection between pleasure and power, but it is one that is that does not justify the adoption of the pleasure principle. Pleasure, according to Nietzsche, is "an excitation of the feeling of power by an obstacle."²⁵ But if this is true, then pleasure requires pain: "As a force can expend itself only on what resists it, there is necessarily an *ingredient* of *displeasure* in every action. But this displeasure acts as a lure of life and strengthens the will to power!"²⁶ It is true that Freud also recognizes the role of pain in the experience of pleasure. He says that pleasure is the sensation of a decrease in excitation (that is, in the sensation of pain), so there cannot be a sensation of pleasure without the presence of pain. But in Freud's case, the sensation of pleasure accompanies the return of the mental apparatus to the lowest level of excitation. It ends with satisfaction, the end of the need for activity, and follows from the pleasure principle's claim that the subject necessarily avoids displeasure. In Nietzsche's case, on the contrary, pleasure can also be an incitement back to activity, and to greater levels of excitation, rather than to satisfaction. Against the claims of the pleasure principle, Nietzsche does not believe that the subject necessarily avoids displeasure: "The feeling of pleasure lies precisely in the dissatisfaction of the will, in the

²⁵ Ibid., §658.

²⁶ Ibid., §694. Cf. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §12: "But what if pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever *wanted* to have as much as possible of one *must* also have as much as possible of the other?"

fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance.”²⁷ He claims, “Displeasure, as an obstacle to [an organism’s] will to power, is therefore a normal fact . . . ; man does not avoid it, he is rather in continual need of it.”²⁸ Consequently, the Nietzschean subject, unlike Freud’s subject, can actually seek pain in the attempt to increase the feeling of power. Nietzsche says there exists “displeasure as a means of stimulating the increase of power.” That is why “the rich and living want victory, opponents to overcome, the overflow of the feeling of power across wider domains than hitherto.”²⁹ Freud’s version of pleasure is simply that of flight from pain; it does not allow for the return to pain as an incitement to life. He is attempting to characterize all pleasure according to one specific type: “The great confusion on the part of psychologists consisted in not distinguishing between these two kinds of pleasure—that of falling asleep and that of victory. The exhausted want rest, relaxation, peace, calm—the happiness of the nihilistic religions and philosophies.”³⁰

Nietzsche’s understanding of pleasure, on the contrary, allows for both types of pleasure. That is because Nietzsche understands pleasure in terms of the relation between subject and object, rather than solely in terms of the level of excitation of the mental apparatus—just as he defines the will to power as a relation, rather than as an attribute of an entity considered in isolation:

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §696.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §702. Cf. Nietzsche’s description of the will to power of the saint, *Good and Evil*, §51: “They sensed the superior force that sought to test itself in such conquest” and Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §13: “An easy prey is something contemptible for proud natures. They feel good only at the sight of unbroken men who might become their enemies and at the sight of all possessions that are hard to come by.”

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §703. Cf. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §370: “But there are two kinds of sufferers: first, those who suffer from the *over-fullness of life*—they want a Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight—and then those who suffer from the *impoverishment of life* and seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anaesthesia, and madness.”

The decision about what arouses pleasure and what arouses displeasure depends on the degree of power: something that in relation to a small quantum of power appears as dangerous and seems to require the speediest defense, can evoke, given the consciousness of greater power, a voluptuous excitation and a feeling of power.³¹

Consequently, the same level of excitation in the mental apparatus can be experienced as pain or pleasure depending on the power relation between subject and object.³² Excitation can be a source of pleasure if the power of the subject is relatively proportional to, or greater than, that of the object in relation to which it acts. If on the contrary, the object's strength is significantly greater, then the excitation it introduces is felt as pain. Displeasure is, in other words, "every feeling of not being able to resist or dominate."³³

From Nietzsche's view of pain and pleasure we can draw two crucial conclusions. In contrast to Freud's view, where every action is a reaction to the presence of excitation in the mental apparatus, the Nietzschean subject can act independently of the presence of excitation in the mental apparatus. For if, as we have seen, the subject can actively pursue displeasure as a means to greater power, then the subject does not act entirely in reaction to displeasure. Secondly, against Freud's assumption that every external source of stimulus is a source of displeasure, Nietzsche's view allows that an external source of stimulus can be a source of pleasure, provided there is a relatively proportional power relation between subject and object.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §703.

³¹ *Ibid.*, §699.

³² Cf. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §127: "When a strong stimulus is experienced as pleasure or displeasure, this depends on the *interpretation* of the intellect which, to be sure, generally does this work without rising to our consciousness: one and the same stimulus can be interpreted as pleasure or displeasure."

³³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §693.

The Will to Power and Freud's Drive Theory

In the previous chapter, we saw that Freud's drive theory is the specific application of the principle of psychical inertia to the case of endogenous sources of stimulation. Because Nietzsche's concept of the will to power necessitates the rejection of the principle of inertia, he must also reject the Freudian view of the drives. I emphasized three points in my discussion of Freud's drive theory: 1) the aim of the drive is to remove the state of stimulation at its source, 2) the drive is a reaction to endogenous stimuli, and so does not act independently of stimuli, and 3) the object of the drive is, apart from its utility for the aim of the drive, a source of displeasure. It is not necessary to go into detail as to why Nietzsche must reject points (1) and (2). Those two points are drawn directly from the principle of inertia, and Nietzsche must reject them for the same reasons that he must reject inertia—reasons we have already been through. Furthermore, Nietzsche's alternative to (2) should be clear from the previous sections of this chapter. We have already seen that Nietzsche believes the will to power is essentially active; and this is, of necessity, his view of the drives as well. Before discussing (3), I will first discuss Nietzsche's alternative to (1).

The aim of a drive in Nietzsche's theory must be understood in terms of the will to power: "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."³⁴ We saw in Nietzsche's discussion of the will to power that the aim of a quantum of the will to power is manifestation, and that this aim cannot be external to the activity of the quantum of power. However, when Nietzsche discusses the will to power in the form of biological

³⁴ Ibid., §675.

and psychological motivation he seems to contradict this view. We saw that in the case of pleasure he spoke of the “increase in power,” a phrase that seemed to indicate an aim external to the activity itself—increased quantity. In the above passage he speaks of increased strength and growth, and elsewhere of a “will to appropriate, dominate, increase.”³⁵ All of these terms also suggest a biological and psychological aim beyond the manifestation of power, an aim external to the activity of the organism.

However misleading the terminology may be, I do not believe that these descriptions are inconsistent. The confusion arises only if we preserve an atomistic model of the organism in which we distinguish its activity from its effects—e.g., a model of which it makes sense to say that an organism seeks to act but not to appropriate. But as we have seen, Nietzsche believes that the essence of a quantum of the will to power *is* its effect upon another quantum, so we cannot make such a distinction between activity and effect. If Nietzsche sometimes says that organisms seek to grow, then it is because seeking to grow is identical to seeking to act. For the will to power is essentially relational—insofar as it acts, it forms and transforms relations. And if Nietzsche sometimes says that an organism seeks to dominate, then it is because seeking to act is identical to seeking to dominate. For, once again, the will to power is essentially relational—insofar as it acts, it transforms that upon which it acts. To say otherwise—that there can be activity that is not growth, or that there is activity which is not domination—would require a distinction between activity and effect, which would in turn require an atomism in which we can treat entities as substantial unities that cause, but are not identical, to their activities and relations. In any case, even if this change in terminology indicates a change in view on Nietzsche’s part, it would be a move to

³⁵ Ibid., §689.

a view that is incompatible with his description of the will to power, and it is only the latter that is my concern here. I will deal with this issue in more depth in my discussion of Nietzsche's social theory.³⁶ For now, I will insist upon an interpretation compatible with the will to power as a will to manifestation.

Now, what consequences does the subject's aim of the manifestation of power have for a theory of the drives? A drive as will to power must of necessity have the increase of excitation as a *precondition* of its aim, for the subject cannot satisfy a demand to act, to enter into a relation with an external object, without actively exposing itself to a source of stimulation. For the Freudian subject this is not the case, for it enters into such relations only in the service of an ultimate decrease in the level of stimulation in the mental apparatus—its ultimate aim is still the discharge of excitation. In Nietzsche's case, the aim is not decrease, but the manifestation of power. The subject exposes itself to excitation without an ulterior aim of discharge.

This does not, however, mean that we can reverse Freud's view and say that the aim of the drive is to increase the state of stimulation at the source of the drive. Its aim of necessity includes exposure to excitation, but this does not mean that the aim is to *increase* excitation. The aim is to express the stimulation at the source of the drive in the form of activity, regardless of the consequence for the overall level of excitation in the mental apparatus. The situation is similar to that of pleasure. We were not able, in our discussion of pleasure, to simply reverse Freud's view and say that pleasure is the increase of excitation; we could only conclude that it has some amount of increase (due to resistance or an obstacle)

³⁶ See below, chapter five, 130-36.

as its precondition. Whether or not excitation was experienced as pleasure or pain was dependent upon the relative power of subject to object.

The situation is similar with the drives. Whether or not the satisfaction of the aim of the drive will result in an increase or decrease of the stimulation at its source will depend upon the power of the subject to express the drive in action relative to the power of the object of the action. The difference is, as it was in our discussion of pleasure, a matter of kinds. We saw that one kind of pleasure follows from strength—the pleasure of pain as a means to a greater feeling of power—and one from exhaustion—the pleasure of the elimination of pain. A similar division applies to the drives: “The normal dissatisfaction of our drives . . . contains in it absolutely nothing depressing; it works rather as an agitation of the feeling of life, as every rhythm of small, painful stimuli strengthens it.”³⁷ If a drive’s power is sufficient to manifest the force of the drive through effective action, the aim of the drive in relation to the source will not be the decrease of stimulation and the satiation of the drive, but rather an increase in stimulation and the incitement of the drive. But we can also imagine the opposite case, more in keeping with the Freudian model. If the resistances or obstacles to expressing a drive in action are too great relative to the power of the drive, then the aim of the drive relative to the source will be satiation, or the decrease of the level of stimulation. Just as Freud’s mistake with pleasure was to treat all pleasure on the model of one kind, his mistake in the case of the drives is to treat every drive on the model of one kind.

Now, what are the consequences of the will to power for my third point about Freud’s theory of the drives? Freud believes that the object is the means by which the stimulation at the source of the drive is removed. But although the object is a means to the satisfaction of

³⁷ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §697.

the drive, it is at the same time a source of displeasure. For it is also an external source of stimulation. So in the Freudian view, there is a fundamental ambivalence toward the object of the drive: as an external source of stimulation it is a frustration of the principle of psychological inertia, and as a means to remove endogenous stimulation, it is a source of satisfaction. We have already seen that Nietzsche does not need to view the object as a necessary source of displeasure, since on his view the subject can derive pleasure from an external source of stimulus. But we can now take this conclusion even further. We now know that in the Nietzschean theory of the drive, it is possible for the aim of the drive to be an increase in the level of endogenous stimulation. The object of the drive, insofar as is independent of the drive, is an obstacle to the removal of the source of stimulation at the source of the drive. So, in cases where the aim of the drive is increase, the object in its independence (that is, considered apart from its utility for the discharge of endogenous stimuli) is a direct satisfaction of the aim of the drive. It is direct satisfaction because it provides satisfaction as such (regardless of the subject's relation to it), rather than serving only as a means to satisfaction. This difference in the Freudian and Nietzschean understanding of the drives has, as we will see, profound consequences for their social theories.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF EROS IN FREUD'S THEORY OF DESIRE

Freud introduces his dualistic theory of the life and death drives in the 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. A great deal of that essay is devoted to the justification of his addition of the death drive, while surprisingly little is said in defense of the notion of the “life drives” and of the broader concept of “Eros.” Eros, Freud seems to think, is not a radical modification of his previous views and so stands in little need of defense. The concept of Eros merely requires “the extension of the concept of libido to the individual cells.”¹

If Freud is to be believed, there is nothing particularly troublesome or surprising about the introduction of Eros: “Over and over again we find, when we are able to trace instinctual impulses back, that they reveal themselves as derivatives of Eros.”² If his new hypothesis of the dualism of the drives is precarious, the fault lies entirely with the death drive:

It was not easy, however, to demonstrate the activities of this supposed death instinct. The manifestations of Eros were conspicuous and noisy enough. It might be assumed that the death instincts operated silently within the organism towards its dissolution, but that, of course, was no proof.³

If it were not for the considerations put forward in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and ultimately for the sadistic constituents which have attached themselves to Eros, we should have difficulty in holding to our fundamental dualistic point of view. But since we cannot escape that view, we are driven to conclude that the death instincts are by their nature mute and that the clamour of life proceeds for the most part from Eros.⁴

¹ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:60, footnote 1.

² Freud, *The Ego*, XIX:46.

³ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, XXI:119.

⁴ Freud, *The Ego*, XIX:46.

In this chapter I will argue that Freud's presentation of the dualism of life and death drives is highly misleading. It is not the death drive that is a radical addition to Freud's theory of the drives, but rather the concepts of life drive and Eros. It is not death that is "mute" and impossible to locate in Freud's theory, but life. And it is precisely the death drive, and not Eros, that is merely an extension of his libido theory.⁵

What is Eros?

Freud first introduces the term "Eros" in the sixth chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a counter principle to the death drive. He has described the death drive as a biological tendency in living things to return to the inanimate state. The concept of Eros is developed in order to explain why the death drive fails to achieve its goal. Transposing his theory of human sexuality onto the relationship of the cells of an organism, Freud suggests, "We might suppose that the life instincts or sexual instincts which are active in each cell take the other cells as their object, that they partly neutralize the death instinct . . . in those cells and thus preserve their life."⁶ Eros becomes Freud's term for this extension of sexuality into the biological realm. "Eros," he says, "by bringing about a more and more far-reaching

⁵ Many commentators have remarked upon the fact that it is Eros, not the death drive, which is "beyond the pleasure principle." However, they have not recognized the startling consequences of this fact: that, as I shall argue, Eros is fundamentally incompatible with Freud's theory of desire and that, consequently, Freud's theory can only be consistently interpreted as a monism of the death drive. See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), 320: "If the pleasure principle means nothing more than the principle of constancy, must it not be said that only Eros is beyond the pleasure principle? Eros is the great exception to the principle of constancy." See also Max Schur, *The Id and the Regulatory Principles of Mental Functioning* (New York: The Free Press/Macmillan, Inc., 1966); Hans Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), 61-63 and 79-80; Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 314; and Laplanche and Pontalis, 242.

⁶ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:50.

combination of the particles into which living substance is dispersed, aims at complicating life and at the same time, of course, at preserving it.”⁷

But where does this erotic aim of combination come from? Eros is not, as Freud would have us believe, a simple transposition from the psychological to the biological realm, nor is it simply an extension of an old theory. For in this extension an entirely new aim has appeared. Freud has never before indicated in his theory of sexuality an essential tendency toward combination into “ever larger unities”⁸ or a “main purpose” of “uniting and binding.”⁹ The introduction of Eros is a radical one because it includes the old theory of sexuality but introduces a new aim.¹⁰ By doing this, Freud has retroactively reinterpreted his entire theory of sexuality. It now becomes necessary that the sexual drive be reinterpreted in order to include a tendency toward ever-greater bonds within its aim. If this implicit revision of his theory fails, the dualism of the life and death drives fails as well. For it is precisely this new erotic aim that distinguishes Eros from the death drive, and consequently, distinguishes *sexual drives* from death drives as well.

The Absence of Eros in the Freudian Theory of Sexual and Social Bonds

If Eros is, as Freud suggests, merely an extension of his theory of sexuality—i.e., if the sexual drives are, as Freud claims, “the true life instincts”¹¹—then the sexual drives must

⁷ Freud, *The Ego*, XIX:40.

⁸ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:42-43.

⁹ Freud, *The Ego*, XIX:45.

¹⁰ Ricoeur has suggested that the theory of Eros is a revision of the libido theory made necessary by the postulate of the death instinct, however he has not, as I shall do, investigated at length the distinction between the aim of libido and that of Eros. See *Freud and Philosophy*, 282.

¹¹ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:40.

share with Eros the aim of producing “ever larger unities.” For if they do not share this aim, there is no reason to treat the sexual drives as an “essentially different class” of the drives,¹² and consequently no reason for Freud to uphold a dualistic theory of the drives.

Furthermore, if there is an essential tendency in the sexual drives toward the formation of unities, then the social products of Eros—e.g., sexual and social bonds—must be traceable to the aims of the sexual drives. However, a close analysis of Freud’s theory of the formation of sexual and social bonds reveals that this is not the case. On the contrary, it will be seen that sexual and social bonds, far from having their origin in the aims of the sexual drives, arise only with the *restriction* of the sexual drives. The development of social unities is not the outcome of an instinctual tendency but rather a compromise between sexuality and necessity that is made possible only through the introduction of the reality principle.

Freudian sexuality is curiously non-erotic.

The aim of Eros can be broken down into three distinct and essential elements:

- 1) There must be an essential tendency to relate to an external object, since this is prerequisite to the formation of unities beyond that of the organism itself.
- 2) There must be an essential tendency to *preserve* the relations formed with external objects, since Eros tends toward “ever-larger” unities, or brings about “a more and more far-reaching combination.” That is, although new bonds are formed, old ones tend to be preserved.
- 3) There must be an essential tendency toward the *activity* of binding or unifying itself. That is, the aim of forming bonds is not satisfied by the achievement of

¹² Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, XXII:103.

any particular bond. Although old bonds tend to be preserved, there is a constant tendency to seek new ones.

If the sexual drives are essentially erotic, that is, if they participate in an essential conflict with the death drives, then each of these three elements of the erotic aim should be shared by the sexual aim. I will analyze three elements of Freud's social theory to show that these three elements of the erotic aim are not, in fact, shared by the sexual aim: 1) the taking of a sexual object by the subject, 2) the formation of lasting bonds with the sexual object, and 3) the move from sexual bonds to larger social bonds.

If Freud is right to include sexuality within Eros, then the fact that the subject seeks an external sexual object should be explained by an essential tendency in the sexual drive. But this is not the case. For if taking an external sexual object is a tendency essential to the sexual drive, then it must be part of the aim of the sexual drive. And if it is part of the aim, then it should be a necessary condition of the satisfaction of the drive. But Freud suggests, on the contrary, that satisfaction of the sexual drive is possible without an external object. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he tells us that the original state of sexuality during infancy is autoeroticism; it does not involve an external object, yet still involves satisfaction: "The instinct is not directed towards other people, but obtains satisfaction from the subject's own body."¹³ This absence of the object is not merely a matter of circumstance; the drive does not simply lack the object. There is, according to Freud, "no need of an object" at this stage;¹⁴ the external world is "indifferent for purposes of satisfaction."¹⁵ If the autoerotic stage of sexuality is possible, it can only be because the external object is *not essential* to the

¹³ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, VII:181.

¹⁴ Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, XVI:355.

satisfaction of the sexual drives. Consequently, we cannot include the erotic tendency of entering into a relation with an external object in the aim of the sexual drives. The move from autoeroticism to the sexual object is, in some sense, accidental to the nature of the sexual drive.

If entering into a sexual relation with an external object is not essential to the sexual aim, then what motivates the Freudian subject to do so? The taking of a sexual object is, according to Freud, a question of the quantity of libido rather than the product of a tendency intrinsic to the sexual aim. “Libido” is Freud’s term for a specifically sexual form of quantifiable psychological energy, as distinct from the general notion of quantifiable energy Q that he introduced in “Project for a Scientific Psychology”: “We have defined the concept of ‘libido’ as a quantitatively variable force which could serve as a measure of processes and transformations occurring in the field of sexual excitation.”¹⁶ According to Freud, the subject’s original condition is one of primary narcissism, in which there is “an original libidinal cathexis [investment] of the ego, from which some is later given off to objects.”¹⁷ The subject’s first inclination is, in accordance with the pleasure principle, to attempt immediate satisfaction rather than seek an object. Freud suggests that such immediate satisfaction can be obtained to some degree through imaginary objects,¹⁸ but this form of satisfaction cannot be maintained indefinitely. The necessity of the libidinal cathexis of an

¹⁵ Freud, “Instincts,” XIV:135.

¹⁶ Freud, *Three Essays*, VII:217.

¹⁷ Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” XIV:75.

¹⁸ See, for example, Freud, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” XII:223: “The continuance of auto-erotism is what makes it possible to retain for so long the easier momentary and imaginary satisfaction in relation to the sexual object in place of real satisfaction, which calls for effort and postponement.” See also Freud, “Narcissism,” XIV:85-86: “Working [excitations] over in the mind helps remarkably towards an internal draining away of excitations which are incapable of direct discharge outwards, or for which such a discharge is undesirable. In the first instance, however, it is a matter of indifference whether this internal process of working-over is carried out upon real or imaginary objects.”

object, of the move from ego-libido to object-libido, arises, he tells us, “when the cathexis of the ego with libido exceeds a certain amount.”¹⁹ Presumably, then, the quantity of libido can be decreased narcissistically (either through auto-erotic activity or through hallucinated satisfaction involving an imaginary object), but it cannot be decreased in quantities equal to the endogenous production of libido. Temporary satisfaction of the sexual drives is accomplished narcissistically at the cost of an ultimate increase in the long run. This means that the move from narcissism to a relation with the sexual object is in some sense inevitable. However, the relation to the object is still not essential to the sexual aim. The move to the libidinal cathexis of an object depends upon the quantity of libido, rather than on any tendency intrinsic to the aim of the sexual drive. That is, although there is a tendency toward object relations, it is quantitative rather than qualitative—it has nothing to do with the fact that the sexual drives are sexual (that they supposedly belong to a specific class of drives called “Eros”), but only follows from the quantitative level of excitation. We might put this another way by saying that the move to the sexual object follows from the institution of the reality principle. It is only because the ultimate satisfaction is greater through a sexual object (the discharge of libidinal energy ultimately greater) than through immediate narcissistic satisfaction that the subject leaves the state of narcissism. And the introduction of the reality principle is precisely a move by the subject beyond the purely “instinctual.” Consequently, this supposedly “erotic” tendency cannot be said to be an essential tendency of the sexual drives. The sexual drive clearly tends in the opposite direction—toward autoeroticism or hallucination. It is only when the subject acts in recognition of reality, and not when the subject acts directly in accordance with the aim of the drives, that object-libido appears. The sexual drive, it appears thus far, is not a “life drive”; it is not fundamentally “erotic.” “Life,”

¹⁹ Freud, “Narcissism,” XIV:85.

it seems, is not a “drive” at all, but the modification imposed upon the drives by the subject in its recognition of reality. That is, to put it as clearly as possible, life involves a *restriction* of the essential tendencies of the sexual drives.

We have not found any indication of a ground for the equation of sexual drives with life drives. And we have only investigated the first element of the erotic aim. What about the others? If Freud is correct in the view that Eros is an extension of his libido theory, then it is not alone sufficient that the subject enter into a sexual relation to an external object. The sexual drives must also share the second tendency that I have attributed to Eros—the tendency to *preserve* the relation formed with an external object. However, once again we find that no such tendency can be attributed essentially to the sexual drives. Freud’s explanation of the formation of lasting bonds with the libidinal object is similar to his explanation of the move from narcissism to object-cathexis. The lasting bond depends, not on the aim of the sexual drives, not on the qualitative aspect of the sexual drives qua sexual, but rather on purely quantitative considerations. According to Freud the foundation of the family as a permanent sexual relation is linked to the constant endogenous stimulation that is the source of the drives:

One may suppose that the founding of families was connected with the fact that a moment came when the need for genital satisfaction no longer made its appearance like a guest who drops in suddenly, and, after his departure, is heard of no more for a long time, but instead took up its quarters as a permanent lodger. When this happened, the male acquired a motive for keeping the female, or, speaking more generally, his sexual objects, near him.²⁰

²⁰ Freud, *Civilization*, XXI:99. See also Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, XVIII:111: “In one class of cases being in love is nothing more than object-cathexis on the part of the sexual instincts with a view to direct sexual satisfaction, a cathexis which expires, moreover, when this aim has been reached; . . . But, as we know, the libidinal situation rarely remains so simple. It was possible to calculate with certainty upon the revival of the need which had just expired; and this must no doubt have been the first motive for directing a lasting cathexis upon the sexual object and for ‘loving’ it in the passionless intervals as well.”

It is worth noting that this explanation is given in an essay from 1930, ten years after he has posited Eros as a fundamental tendency toward the production of ever-larger unities. If the sexual drives were essentially erotic, there would be no need for the male to “acquire a motive” for the preservation of sexual relations—the sexual drives would be that motive. Once again, we find that something that should be attributed to the aim of the sexual drives is instead attributed to necessity: the return of the stimulus at the source of the drive. The formation of the bond is pragmatic; like the original move out of narcissism, it has its basis in the reality principle and consequently is not attributable to anything so fundamental as “Eros” or to a primary instinctual basis such as the “life drives.” We can underscore this point by imagining a sexual relation that conforms strictly to such a purely pragmatic motive. Such a relation would fit Kant’s peculiar description of legal marriage as “the union of two persons of different sexes for lifelong possession of each others’ sexual attributes.”²¹ Such a bond serves as a means to the satisfaction of the sexual drives, but the bond itself is strangely *asexual*. Of course Freud recognizes the fact that bonds are *not* simply practical arrangements, that they do have a libidinal character. But they are not essentially sexual; their origin is not essentially rooted in the sexual aim. We could imagine the Freudian subject happily continuing in such a loveless relation, since nothing in the nature of the Freudian sexual aim demands more than a strictly utilitarian sexual relation.

Why then does the Freudian subject go beyond strict pragmatism? Why does the subject love the sexual object as such, and not simply as a means to the satisfaction of the sexual drives? Freud uses the term “overvaluation” to describe the subject’s interest in the

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Part I, Chapter II, Section III, §24.

sexual object beyond its direct utility for the sexual aim. Appreciation of the sexual object, he says, “extends to the whole body of the sexual object” and “spreads over into the psychological sphere.”²² But such an interest, he says, “cannot be easily reconciled with a restriction of the sexual aim to the union of the actual genitals.”²³ In the 1920 edition of *Three Essays*, he adds a note suggesting that overvaluation is due to what he calls “collateral flow” of libido.²⁴ When the libido fails to find satisfaction “in the normal way,” it “behaves like a stream whose main bed has become blocked” and “proceeds to fill up collateral channels that have hitherto been empty.”²⁵ Freud is suggesting that in the normal sexual relation (since overvaluation is characteristic of the normal sexual bond) overvaluation is motivated by some kind of frustration of sexual satisfaction, a quantity of libido that cannot be discharged and so must be redirected.²⁶ This seems strange since the subject enters the sexual relation precisely in order to avoid frustration. So where does this frustration come from? What generates the excess libido that is diverted in overvaluation into interest in the object as such is nothing other than the subject’s narcissism:

Complete object-love of the attachment type is, properly speaking, characteristic of the male. It displays the marked sexual overvaluation, which is doubtless derived from the child’s original narcissism and thus corresponds to transference of narcissism to the sexual object. This sexual overvaluation is the origin of the peculiar state of being in love.²⁷

²² Freud, *Three Essays*, VII:150.

²³ *Ibid.*, 150-51.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 151, footnote 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁶ See Freud, *Group Psychology*, XVIII:103: “We have already observed phenomena which represent a *diversion of the instinct from its sexual aim* [emphasis mine]. We have described them as degrees of being in love, and have recognized that they involve a certain encroachment upon the ego” and XVIII:142: “Being in love is based on the simultaneous presence of directly sexual impulses and of sexual impulses that are inhibited in their aims, while the object draws a part of the subject’s narcissistic ego-libido to itself.”

²⁷ Freud, “Narcissism,” XIV:88.

Now, the lasting libidinal bond was intended precisely to deal with excessively high quantities of ego-libido. The sexual bond was supposed to satisfy the sexual drives, to decrease the overall quantity of libido. If this strategy were completely successful, there would be no excess libido to transfer to the object in the form of overvaluation. The satisfaction of the drives would make overvaluation, and consequently “love,” unnecessary.²⁸

But we should not understand the frustration of sexual aims too simply. In one sense, the libidinal cathexis of objects succeeds in bringing satisfaction to the sexual drives: a greater discharge of libido is possible through the sexual relation. In another sense, it is a compromise that includes both frustration and satisfaction. The subject becomes dependent for its satisfaction upon another; it gives up the immediacy of narcissistic satisfaction. The abandonment of narcissism requires tolerating low levels of libidinal energy in return for a greater overall discharge in the long run. We have encountered, once again, the reality principle at the root of supposedly “erotic” phenomena. The subject tolerates a certain degree of sexual unpleasure for the sake of greater ultimate satisfaction. This tolerated level of excess libido is the ground of the over-cathexis or “overvaluation” of the object, the interest that the subject shows in the object beyond its utility for satisfaction of the sexual aim. The “sexual bond” is not “sexual” in the sense that there is an essential tendency in the sexual drives toward the preservation of relations to an external object. On the contrary, there is a sexual bond only because the relation to the object includes to some degree an

²⁸ See Freud, *Group Psychology*, XVIII:115: “It is interesting to see that it is precisely those sexual impulses that are inhibited in their aims which achieve such lasting ties between people. . . . It is the fate of sensual love to become extinguished when it is satisfied; for it to be able to last, it must from the beginning be mixed with purely affectionate components—with such, that is, as are inhibited in their aims.”

inhibition of the aim of the sexual drives—i.e., because the attempt to satisfy the sexual drives does not fully succeed.

The third element that I attributed to the general aim of Eros was that of an essential tendency toward the *activity* of binding or unifying. This tendency is necessary, as I have said, because Eros is a continual process of binding and uniting; the accomplishment of unity does not bring the activity of unifying to an end. On the level of Freud's theory of sexuality, this means that the subject's move from sexual bonds to larger social bonds should be due to an essential tendency in the nature of the sexual drives. But once again we find that this is not the case. Social unities do not, according to Freud, owe their existence to sexual demands, but rather to force: "Human life in common is only made possible when a majority comes together which is stronger than any separate individual and which remains united against all separate individuals."²⁹ Consequently, the achieved sexual bond is not part of an over-arching tendency toward larger social bonds; the Freudian subject must be forced to expand its social ties. Sexuality resists the move to the social: "Directly sexual impulses are unfavourable to the formation of groups."³⁰ Indeed, they are unfavourable to such a degree that Freud even suggests an "antithesis between civilization and sexuality": "Sexual love is a relationship between two individuals in which a third can only be superfluous or disturbing, . . . When a love-relationship is at its height there is no room left for any interest in the environment; a pair of lovers are sufficient to themselves."³¹ This passage is followed by the very peculiar comment that "in no other case does Eros so clearly betray the core of

²⁹ Freud, *Civilization*, XXI:95.

³⁰ Freud, *Group Psychology*, XVIII:140.

his being, his purpose of making one out of more than one; but when he has achieved this in the proverbial way through the love of two human beings, he refuses to go further.”³² Freud seems to have completely forgotten that Eros is characterized, not simply by unity, but by the tendency toward “ever-larger” unities. This oversight leads to the very awkward result that, in the antithesis between sexuality and civilization, it is *civilization* rather than sexuality that fits his description of Eros. Freud later makes this point explicitly: “Civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind.”³³ But how is it possible for sexuality and civilization to be antithetical if both belong to Eros? Once again it seems that the attribution of the sexual drives to Eros is unjustified. And we cannot solve the problem simply by suggesting that Freud overstates the case when he calls this an “antithesis.” The conflict of sexuality and civilization is not accidental: “It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression, or some other means?) of powerful instincts.”³⁴

Nevertheless it is a fact that non-sexual social bonds do have a libidinal character. They are characterized by affection, which seems to suggest that they rely on more than just force or utility. We have seen that Freud does not attribute the founding of the social group to the work of sexuality, but can we at least attribute the libidinal character of social bonds essentially to the sexual drives? The affection found in social bonds, like the love found in

³¹ Freud, *Civilization*, XXI:108.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 122.

sexual bonds, is not an essential tendency of the sexual drives, but instead a product of the inhibition of the aim of the sexual drives; it does not motivate the formation or preservation of bonds, but is instead a product of those bonds. And, as with the move from narcissism to the sexual relation, this inhibition is not motivated by an instinctual tendency, but rather by the intervention of the reality principle. Freud believes that emotional ties—that is, the affectionate characteristics of social bonds—have their origin in identification. Identification is made with a sexual object that is “renounced or lost”; it is “a substitute for a libidinal object-tie, as it were by means of an introjection of the object into the ego.”³⁵ So it is a substitute for the sexual relation and, consequently, an inhibition of the sexual aim.

But what motivates this substitution in the case of social groups? According to Freud, social feeling involves “the reversal of what was first a hostile feeling into a positively-toned tie in the nature of an identification.”³⁶ In Freud’s “just-so story” of the primal horde, the original form of the social bond is brought about through a powerful, tyrannical father who prohibits his sons from entering into sexual relations with the women of the tribe. The sons compensate for their sexual frustration by substituting identification with the father for libidinal object ties. Through their shared identification with their father, they are then able to form identifications and affectionate bonds with one another. In the case of their bonds with the father, it is precisely their hostility to him that makes the affectionate relation necessary. Their sexual aims tend toward the establishment of libidinal bonds and hostility toward the father, but because such activities would put them in danger, they identify with him instead. Clearly, this does not indicate any essential tendency in

³⁴ Ibid., 97.

³⁵ Freud, *Group Psychology*, XVIII:108.

sexuality toward affectionate bonds. It is only due to obstacles to the sexual bond that the affectionate bond becomes necessary.

Freud further underscores this point in his description of how this social situation is preserved. The bond among the brothers enables them to eventually band together and murder the father, but this does not lead to a lifting of the sexual prohibition. Each son identifies with the father and wishes to take his place. Consequently, the father's death leads to rivalry among the brothers for the father's place. The original pattern of rivalry and identification occurs yet again. The brothers' sexual aims would tend toward taking the father's position, but any attempt to do so would put them in danger of sharing the father's fate. The threat posed by the group of brothers toward any individual member ensures that the sexual prohibition stays in place. The brothers themselves uphold the father's prohibition of sexual relations with women in the horde, even despite the father's absence, and the continued inhibition of their sexual aims motivates the preservation of mutual identification and affectionate ties. Consequently, the preservation of non-sexual social bonds, like their formation, depends not on any essential tendency in the sexual drives, but rather upon the inhibition of sexual aims and conditions of rivalry. And the influence of rivalry (the threat of death) shows that larger social bonds, like sexual bonds and object-cathexis, depend upon the reality principle rather than instinctual tendencies for their possibility.

My analysis of the three tendencies of the erotic aim in the formation of social and sexual bonds demonstrates that Freud cannot equate the sexual drives with "life drives" or consider the theory of Eros to be a mere addition to his theory of sexuality. That is to say, the concept of Eros cannot simply be added on. Its inclusion would necessitate significant

³⁶ Ibid., 121.

revision of his theory of sexuality and of his view of how sexual and social bonds are formed and maintained. The postulate of Eros has shown itself to be so radical that at every level of social phenomena it is in tension with the sexual drives. Eros is achieved, at each level, through the inhibition of the sexual aim. The postulate of Eros is so peculiar an addition that Freud's famous "struggle between Eros and death" (the most obvious cause of civilization's "discontents" after the appearance of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) somehow manages to transform itself into a struggle between civilization and sexuality—a struggle of Eros with itself. I would like to pursue this tension between Freud's previous theory and the concept of Eros further, beyond the level of the sexual drive alone. It is clear that any attempt to defend Freud's addition of Eros would require significant reinterpretation and revision. However, I shall now argue that any such attempt is bound to fail, and that the concept of Eros is fundamentally incompatible with Freud's theory of desire.

The Incompatibility of Eros with Freud's Theory of Desire

Freud's theory of Eros, as a theory of a fundamental psychological tendency toward the formation of ever-larger unities, is incompatible with his general theory of desire. Because my interest is in the social consequences of Freud's theory of desire, I will limit my argument to the psychological aspect of Eros—the "life drives"—and leave aside, for now, the notion of a biological tendency toward unity. I will argue that the notion of a life drive is incompatible with three central elements of Freud's theory of desire: the general theory of the drives, the pleasure principle, and the psychical principle of constancy.

In chapter one, I emphasized three aspects of the Freudian notion of the drives: 1) the aim of the drive is to remove the state of stimulation at its source, 2) the drive is a reaction to

endogenous stimuli and so does not act independently, and 3) the object of the drive is, apart from its utility to the aim, a source of displeasure. An authentic “life drive,” or a drive that includes an essential tendency toward the production of ever larger unities, would be incompatible with (2) and (3). There is an apparent, but not essential, difficulty with (1). A life drive must include the relation to external objects in its aim, and the relation to an external object includes an increase in the level of excitation in the psychical apparatus, since the object is a source of external stimulation. However, the Freudian drive requires the decrease of excitation only in relation to the somatic process at its source. Consequently, it is perfectly possible for the aim of the life drive to include the removal of endogenous stimulation at the source of the drive while at the same time allowing for an increase in excitation from external sources.

However, the concept of the life drive is not compatible with (2). If it is part of the aim of the drive to bring the subject into ever-greater unities with external objects—to form, preserve, and increase its relations—then the aim of the life drive goes beyond the regulation of endogenous sources of stimulation. It must also include in its aim an increase of the quantity of excitation in the psychical apparatus, since the formation of lasting bonds requires a reception of external stimuli that is not subordinated to a greater aim of discharging stimuli. That is, the sexual bond must be an aim as such, not a means to the end of removing the stimulus at the source of the drive. This demand for increased excitation gives the life drive a certain independence from endogenous stimuli. In the Freudian view of the drive, the drive depends directly upon the source. It is only given the production of excitation that there exists a demand for work. But if the life drive requires an increase in the general level of excitation in the psychical apparatus, that demand that cannot be contingent upon any given

state of the mental apparatus—the demand to form bonds will exist independently of the level of excitation that exists in the mental apparatus. In other words, the life drive must be essentially active, in marked contrast to Freud’s general theory of drive, in which the drive exists only reactively, in response to a certain state in the subject (endogenous stimulation). Freud’s drive theory requires that there be a state in the subject which, when it is achieved, temporarily removes the demand for work, while a true life drive, in contrast, requires that there be no achievable state in the subject which would remove the demand for work. If the life drive did include such a state, there would be no intrinsic tendency to maintain the sexual relation, and no intrinsic tendency to expand relations beyond the sexual bond—in other words; it would not be a “life drive” at all. Consequently, the life drive requires rejecting the Freudian view that the true source of the drive is endogenous stimulation, that the source is “the somatic process which occurs in an organ or part of the body and whose stimulus is represented in mental life by an instinct.”³⁷

The concept of the life drive is also incompatible with the third aspect of Freud’s drive theory—the assumption that the object is intrinsically a source of displeasure apart from its utility for the sexual aim. In Freud’s drive theory, the object of the drive is the means to the achievement of the aim; the object is not, as such, a part of the aim. In other words, the object is not essentially necessary to the sexual aim. The life drive, because it includes the preservation of libidinal bonds with the object in its aim, must, on the contrary, include the object essentially in its aim. The means and end of the drive, in this respect, would coincide. The object would be essentially a satisfaction of the drive, a satisfaction that does not depend upon the state of excitation at the source of the drive. For example, even if

³⁷ Freud, “Instincts,” XIV:123.

sexual union provides a discharge of the excitation produced at the source of the drive, the life drive would still require the preservation of the relation with the object for its satisfaction. In other words, the aim of a life drive cannot be, as in Freud's drive theory, simply a matter of "removing the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct."³⁸ Such a removal would be a necessary but insufficient condition of the satisfaction of the life drive. Consequently, the concept of the life drive also requires the rejection of the definition of the object of the drive as "the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim."³⁹ The object of such a drive cannot be essentially distinguished from the aim; the relation to the object is a necessary condition of satisfaction, not merely a means to it. The Freudian definition of a drive, then, is fundamentally incompatible with the theory of the life drives.

The concept of the life drive is also incompatible with Freud's theory of the pleasure principle. According to the pleasure principle, the mental apparatus is regulated by a primary tendency toward the "avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure," where unpleasure corresponds an increase in the quantity of excitation in the mental apparatus and pleasure corresponds to a decrease.⁴⁰ As we have seen, a life drive must include an increase in the quantity of excitation in the psychological apparatus as an essential element of its aim, since it includes the preservation and increase of object-relations—sources of constant external stimulation—in its aim. But it cannot be the case that this aim—the *satisfaction* of the life drive—can be equivalent to unpleasure. Consequently, the life drive requires the

³⁸ Ibid., 122.

³⁹ Ibid.

rejection of the pleasure principle. Either it must be possible for the subject to obtain pleasure in the increase of levels of excitation (since such an increase is a necessary condition of the life drive's satisfaction), in which case we must reject the *definition of terms* in the principle, or it must be possible for the subject to seek pleasure without necessarily avoiding unpleasure (again, since increase is a necessary condition of the life drive's satisfaction), in which case we must reject the *formulation* of the principle. Furthermore, because the increase of excitation is part of the aim of the life drive, we must either reject the definition of unpleasure or, again, reject the principle's formulation. If we reject the definition, we must say that it is possible for the subject to experience unpleasure in the *absence* of an increase. For according to Freud, the dissatisfaction of a drive involves an unpleasurable endogenous stimulus. And in the case of the life drive, that endogenous source of unpleasure must coincide with either the absence of libidinal relations or the absence of the extension of libidinal relations (the absence of "ever greater unities")—i.e., with a decrease or constancy in the overall quantity of excitation in the mental apparatus. If, instead, we choose to reject the formulation of the pleasure principle, then we must argue that it is possible for the subject to attempt to *avoid* what is, on Freud's definition, pleasure—the decrease or constancy of levels of excitation, which are a frustration of the life drives' demand for the active formation of libidinal bonds.

Finally, and most importantly, the concept of the life drive is incompatible with the principle of psychological constancy. The principle of psychological constancy is, as I have shown in the first chapter, a modified form of the principle of inertia. In my discussion of the principle

⁴⁰ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:7.

of constancy, I emphasized three essential points: 1) the aim of constancy is to bring excitation to the lowest possible level, 2) the primary form of the activity is reactive, and 3) the principle of inertia is primary. The life drive is incompatible with each of these three aspects of Freud's principle of psychical constancy.

As we have already seen, the life drive requires the increase of the general level of excitation for the satisfaction of its aim. Therefore it cannot be compatible with the tendency of the psychical apparatus to bring the level of excitation to the lowest possible level.⁴¹ In my discussion of Freud's explanation of sexual and social bonds, we saw that it is possible for the subject to tolerate increases of excitation under the reality principle in order to ultimately achieve greater satisfaction. In the case of the life drive, however, the motivation to enter into and expand social bonds is essential to the drives. The increase of excitation from external sources is, in this case, not compatible with the reality principle, since it is a direct satisfaction of the life drive, and not a means to a greater ultimate discharge of excitation. The modification of the principle of inertia into that of constancy does allow for the toleration of excitation, but only the toleration of excitation that is already present in the mental apparatus due to endogenous or external sources; it does *not* allow the subject to actively introduce additional excitation. The life drive, on the contrary, seeks a relation with external objects independently of a demand for discharge, and consequently, it is incompatible with (1), the tendency toward the lowest possible level of excitation in the mental apparatus.

⁴¹ Laplanche makes a somewhat similar argument against Freud's suggestion that the principle of inertia is a biological one. He uses this argument to restrict the principle of inertia to the psychological level. See *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 57-58, and Laplanche and Pontalis, 241.

In my discussion of (2), I noted two senses in which constancy involves reactivity. On the first sense, the activity of the mental apparatus is initiated only in response to an increase in the level of excitation that occurs independently of the mental apparatus (through external or endogenous stimuli). In the absence of such independently imposed changes, the mental apparatus does not act. In the case of the life drive, on the contrary, we have already seen that it must be essentially active rather than a response to, and regulation of, endogenous stimuli. This means that the life drive must act independently of the principle of constancy, a principle that supposedly governs the entire activity of the mental apparatus. Indeed, as I pointed out in chapter one, Freud's general theory of the drive indicated that a drive is nothing other than the specific application of the principle of constancy to an endogenous source of stimulation. A true life drive would have the impossible consequence that a drive can act not only *independently* of the principle which supposedly governs it, but also that, since life drives actively seek an increase of excitation through libidinal bonds, a drive can act *against* the principle which supposedly governs it.

In the second sense of reactivity, the principle of constancy is reactive not only because it is a reaction to an independently caused change in the mental apparatus, but also because its activity is specifically directed toward neutralizing, or *undoing*, that change. The mental apparatus only acts in response to passively received increases in stimuli, and it acts only in order to cancel out these increases. The life drive, on the contrary, does not merely seek to undo a change; it does not aim only at the removal of an endogenous stimulation at its source. As we have seen, its aim goes beyond the regulation of endogenous stimulation; it has as part of its aim the preservation and extension of libidinal relations. By seeking preservation and extension, the life drive exhibits a tendency toward the introduction of

change, rather than the undoing of independently imposed changes. The preserved bond, a part of the life drive's aim, increases the general level of excitation in the mental apparatus and, more importantly, introduces a *constant source* of external stimulation (the bond with the object). The extension of bonds, also part of the life drive's aim, again increases the general level of excitation and, more importantly, adds *new* sources of generally constant external stimulation. It is essential to remember that this activity of the life drive, unlike Freud's theory of the sexual drive, is not undertaken as a means to the ultimate overall reduction of the level of excitation; it is not a consequence of the reality principle, a compromise between satisfaction and necessity. On the contrary, if the life drive has an essential tendency toward ever-greater unities, then it demands these changes as such, and not as part of a general attempt to undo the changes imposed by endogenous stimulation. Consequently, the life drive is incompatible with the both forms of reactivity that are found in the principle of constancy.

Finally, the concept of the life drive is incompatible with the third aspect of the principle of constancy, the primacy of inertia. The importance of this aspect, as we saw in chapter one, is that we cannot understand the tendency to discharge quantities of excitation and the tendency to store quantities of excitation as distinct and independent principles. There is storage of excitation (and ultimately, toleration of unpleasure) only in the service of the primary aim of lowering the overall level of excitation. Consequently, it can never be the case under the principle of constancy that the mental apparatus undertakes the storage of energy independently of the aim of discharge. In the case of the life drive, on the contrary, the storage of energy must be understood as independent of the aim of discharge. If the constancy principle is primary, the mental apparatus can only preserve energy that is already

present in the system. (One possible reason for such an occurrence is the need to use that energy for more complicated actions necessary for the satisfaction of the drives.) If there is a life drive, however, we must allow not simply the preservation of quantities of energy already present, but the active introduction of new quantities. The life drive demands a constant tendency toward unification, a tendency to bring new quantities of excitation into the mental apparatus rather than simply the storage of quantities already present. Consequently, it requires a principle of psychical activity in which the principle of inertia is not primary.

Freud's Monism of the Death Drive

It is not, as Freud would have it, the theory of Eros that is an extension of his theory of sexuality and desire. It is, on the contrary, the death drive that is an expansion of his previous theory. The argument for the death drive is a deduction from the hypothesis of the conservatism of the drives, the view that “an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of the things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces.”⁴² This deduction of the death drive is a generalization of the principle of constancy, the extension of its logic of reaction and return into the biological sphere: the biological organism as a whole (not simply on the psychical level) seeks to return to a state prior to the introduction of any independent change, just as the mental apparatus does when it seeks to cancel out any increase of excitation due to external or endogenous sources of stimulation.⁴³ It is the close relationship between the principle of

⁴² Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:36.

⁴³ Cf. Ricoeur, 319: “The death instinct turns out to be the most striking illustration of the constancy” and Laplanche, 117; “And it is quite true that with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it is the same priority of zero which, under the name of Nirvana, is being reaffirmed.”

constancy and the death drive that makes the introduction of Eros so difficult. Death and constancy are the biological and psychological levels of a single tendency; we cannot expect a tendency antithetical to death to find a place in such a theory. The death drive is an extension of Freud's general theory of the psychical apparatus, and I have attempted to show that the addition of a counter-tendency in the form of a specifically erotic drive is, at least on the psychical level, impossible. Consequently, it appears that if Freud's theory of the drives is to be maintained in a consistent form, it can only be interpreted, against his intentions, as a monism of the death drive. Admittedly, at this level it is not authentic "death" that is at issue, but the psychical tendency toward lowest excitation of which natural death is, for Freud, the biological source and parallel.

There are two ways in which one might attempt to preserve Freud's theory from a monism of the death drive. It was the principle of constancy, a principle operating on the level of the *psychical* apparatus, that originally prevented our attempts to identify a clear dualism on the psychological level in the form of life and death drives. One way around the problem would be to appeal to Freud's notion of the "fusion" of the drives. The impossibility of an equation of life drives and sexuality, the absence of any clearly erotic tendencies in Freud's theory of the drives, could be explained as a product of the fusion of the drives. This would involve a peculiar reversal of Freud's appeal to the fusion of the drives to explain his inability to clearly point out the death drives, to explain their peculiar "muteness." If it Eros, and not death, that is "mute," then perhaps its absence is only apparent, as Freud has argued is the case with the death drives. This strategy requires an appeal to Freud's biological theory: if a tendency toward ever-greater unities does not appear, or is muted, on the psychological level, it becomes necessary to defend the duality on the

biological level. The second way in which one might attempt to deal with the apparent monism of death in Freud's theory is by accepting his monism, but rejecting its essential connection to the death drive. This approach would require rejecting the essential distinction between the aims of life and death drives, and defending the possibility of deriving the tendencies attributed to the death and life drives from a single principle.⁴⁴ Because this approach rejects the essential dualism of the drives, it also requires the rejection of Freud's biological theory. In this final section I will argue that both of these attempts to rescue Freud from a monism of the death drive cannot succeed.

I have argued that Freud's concept of the life drives is incompatible with his theory of sexuality and with his theory of desire in general (constancy, pleasure, and the drives). I have also argued that the postulate of the death drive is merely an extension of the fundamental principles of his theory of desire and that, consequently, Freud's theory is a monism of the death drive. In an attempt to explain his inability to pinpoint the activity of the death drive, Freud has suggested "a very extensive fusion and amalgamation, in varying proportions, of the two classes of drives takes place, so that we never have to deal with pure life instincts or pure death drives but only with mixtures of them in different amounts."⁴⁵ Can the fusion of drives explain the absence of Eros on the psychological level? It is conceivable that the admixture of the drives could explain why a biological tendency of Eros never comes into conflict with the operations of the mental apparatus. Although the aims of

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan takes a similar approach, suggesting that "the distinction between the life drive and the death drive is true in as much as it manifests two aspects of the drive." See *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 235.

⁴⁵ Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," XIX:164.

Eros are incompatible with the aims of the drive and the principles of pleasure and constancy, the fusion of Eros with the death drives could ensure that Eros' aim is not directly manifested on the psychological level. That is, on the psychological level, Eros would appear negatively as a restriction of the death drive, rather than positively as a drive toward unity.

Such an explanation only shifts the difficulty from the psychological to the biological level. For we cannot situate the essential dualism of Eros and death drive on the biological level either. It is the very formulation of the Freudian theory of the death drive that makes it impossible to oppose it essentially to *any* second biological tendency. This is made quite clear in Freud's own argument for the death drive. He begins that argument by supposing the essential conservatism of all drives, a tendency "towards the restoration of an earlier state of things."⁴⁶ It follows, he argues, that all development is the result of external influences, since such a tendency cannot bring about new states in the organism. But if the tendency of the drives is to return to a previous state, and every previous state is due to external influence, then the drives must seek to return, ultimately, to the very first state. That is, the living entity must seek to return to the state prior to the first externally imposed change of state—the inanimate state. This argument makes clear why, if the death drive is the biological tendency to return to the organism's first state, we cannot oppose to it an equally fundamental tendency to life. The death drive requires that "inanimate things existed before living ones."⁴⁷ The death drive must be primary because it originates with the introduction of life; it is first because the inanimate state is first. If Freud's argument is correct, then life must come second both in fact and in principle. The problem with an essential biological dualism

⁴⁶ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:37.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

is similar to that of an essential psychological dualism. On both levels, the dualism is supposed to be explicable in terms of a *single* principle—the principle of constancy on the psychological level, and the conservative nature of the drives on the biological level. But both constancy and conservatism necessarily privilege death. Freud tries to get around this problem by speculating that Eros may share the death drives’ conservative tendency. He tentatively suggests that “living substance at the time of its coming to life was torn apart into small particles, which have ever since endeavoured to reunite through the sexual instincts.”⁴⁸ This explanation must fail if Freud’s argument for the death drive is correct. Remember that the hypothesis of death as an instinctual aim was based on the fact that a conservative trend cannot have as its end a new state of affairs, that it seeks to return to a state prior to an externally imposed change. But the “coming to life” of living substance is a new state of affairs and, on Freud’s hypothesis, an externally imposed change, so the return to that state cannot be the final end of any conservative instinctual tendency. Any tendency to restore that state would only be a secondary endeavour, having the restoration of the inanimate state as its final end. Freud never explicitly acknowledges this problem, though he does seem to suspect it. Assuming conservatism, the death drive must be primary, since inanimateness is the initial state. If we are to avoid this conclusion, we must argue that both instinctual tendencies originate simultaneously. Freud hints at this in a later description: “Both instincts would be conservative in the strictest sense of the word since both would be endeavouring to reestablish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life. The emergence of life would thus be the cause of the continuance of life and also at the same time of the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 58.

striving towards death.”⁴⁹ This passage implicitly recognizes the fact that types of conservative drives can only be equally primary if they have a simultaneous origin in a single state of affairs. But in what way does Eros reestablish “a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life”? Far to the contrary, Eros preserves the disturbance that is the emergence of life, and more importantly, expands it. Any attempt to originate opposing conservative drives in a single state of things must fail, *because the aim of a conservative instinct is equivalent to the original state of things*. If there is a single original state, then there is a single aim and, consequently, a single form of the drives.

The only way out of this dilemma is to reject the hypothesis of the conservatism of all drives. Although Freud attempts to reconcile Eros and instinctual conservatism, he never fully commits himself to that hypothesis. In 1933 he says that the question of whether the erotic drives are conservative is one that “we must leave unanswered.”⁵⁰ It should not be too surprising that a truly dualistic theory must provide us with drives that cannot be subsumed under a single overarching instinctual tendency or principle. Freud’s biological dualism can only be preserved if he can provide a countertendency to conservatism. But this would only introduce a new difficulty. Without the hypothesis that all drives are conservative, Freud’s argument for the death drive fails. Freud described the conservatism of the drives as a tendency to restore an earlier state of thing that the organism has “been obliged to abandon

⁴⁹ Freud, *The Ego*, XIX:40-41.

⁵⁰ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, XXII:107-08. Freud’s commentators often overlook the fact that Freud is not committed to such a view. See, for example, Laplanche and Pontalis, 102: “In fact what Freud was explicitly seeking to express by the term ‘death instinct’ was the most fundamental aspect of instinctual life . . . What is designated here is more than any particular *type* of instinct—it is rather that factor which determines the actual *principle* of all instinct.”

under the pressure of external disturbing forces.”⁵¹ On the assumption that all drives are conservative, Freud was able to conclude that “the phenomena of organic development must be attributed to external disturbing and diverting influences.”⁵² It was only because every new state has its origin in external forces that the Freud was able to conclude that the ultimate aim is to return to the inanimate state. If, on the contrary, Eros is not conservative, then it will not be the case that every new state in the organism is due to external forces. Consequently, the conservative drives, which restore only states abandoned due to externally imposed change, will not have the original inanimate state as their final end. Eros can be inserted into Freud’s biological theory only at the cost of the death drive.

The second argument against a monism of the death drive involves accepting monism but rejecting its essential connection to the death drive. I have argued that the connection between Freud’s theory of the drives and death is the principle of constancy. The essential conservatism of the drives in his biological theory is the ground of the postulate of the death drive, and this conservatism is simply an extension of the principle of constancy governing all psychical activity. If we wish to break this connection, to provide an account of a singular class of drives that allows for both erotic and conservative tendencies, we have to modify the principle of constancy. The most obvious way to modify that principle in order to detach it from the death drive is to reformulate it in such a way that the principle of inertia is no longer primary. I have already argued in chapter one that such a revision would require the rejection of Freud’s theory of desire in its entirety, so I will leave this option aside. The alternative is to find a principle that is compatible with Freud’s theory of desire in general

⁵¹ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:36.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 38.

and that can explain both conservative and erotic tendencies, a principle that is more fundamental than, but not opposed to, constancy. There is, I believe, one passage in Freud's texts that is particularly suggestive on this point—the discussion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of the “mastery” of stimuli. Freud suggests that under a traumatic influx of stimuli, the pleasure principle can be temporarily “put out of action”:

There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead—the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can then be disposed of.⁵³

“Binding” stimuli, according to Freud, involves the conversion of psychical energy from the state of a “freely flowing cathexis [investment] that presses on towards discharge” to a “quiescent” state.⁵⁴ He suggests that this activity of binding free energy is a function of the mental apparatus that is independent of the pleasure principle, since the increased quantity of excitation (a source of pain) cannot be avoided and the binding of the stimuli does not result in pleasure (a decrease in excitation). At the same time, however, he stresses that it does not contradict that principle—the ultimate purpose of mastering excitation is to ultimately dispose of it.

It is the independence of this activity from the pleasure principle that makes it appear to be a hopeful alternative to the primacy of the principle of constancy. The language of “binding” is reminiscent of Eros' task of bringing about ever-larger unities, yet it is also closely associated with the task of disposing of quantities of psychical energy rather than opposed to it. These two tendencies of binding and disposing could perhaps serve as

⁵³ Ibid., 29-30.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 31.

alternatives to Freud's essentially distinct and opposed drives of life and death.⁵⁵ However, this strategy will work only if we disassociate the mastery of stimuli from the principle of constancy. The mastery of stimuli would, then, be a tendency to bind and dispose of quantities of excitation, but would not have as its aim the lowering of the quantity of excitation in the mental apparatus to the lowest possible level. Both tendencies would be aspects of a single instinctual tendency toward mastery, a tendency which, unlike that of constancy, does not subordinate the act of binding to the aim of discharge. On this view, it would be possible for the Freudian subject to actively enter into relations with external objects as a direct satisfaction of the instinctual tendency toward the binding of stimuli, since external objects provide a source of free stimuli upon which the tendency of mastery can do its work of converting free energies into a quiescent state. And, on this view, mastery of free stimuli can also explain the phenomena that Freud associates with the death drive. Because the activity of binding in this case (unlike that of the life drive) includes the ultimate aim of the disposal of bound quantities of energy (without being subordinated to it), we can still explain a general tendency in the mental apparatus toward lower quantities of excitation. Since the aim of disposal is not subordinated to the principle of constancy, it is possible for the mental apparatus to seek both to increase the quantity of external stimulation and to discharge currently maintained amounts of bound stimuli without contradiction.

Unfortunately, this is not Freud's view of things. Though he does say that the mastery of quantities of stimulus is independent of the pleasure principle, he also insists that

⁵⁵ Deleuze offers an interpretation very similar to this one in *Coldness and Cruelty*, in *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 113. He interprets the mastery of stimuli as the point of connection between the pleasure principle and the compulsion to repeat, and suggests that the binding of stimuli is not contrary to the pleasure principle, but the condition for its possibility: "It is the binding process which makes pleasure as the principle of mental life possible. Eros thus emerges as the foundation of the pleasure-principle."

it does not contradict the pleasure principle. The version that I have suggested, on the contrary, does indeed contradict the pleasure principle. I have suggested that the tendency to form bonds with external objects can be understood as a direct satisfaction—an active seeking of amounts of stimulus upon which mastery can work. On Freud's pleasure principle this amounts to a pursuit of unpleasure. This is why Freud stresses that the work of mastery is limited to cases in which the pleasure principle has been put out of action, instances in which it is too late to avoid an influx of stimuli. In other words, the mental apparatus binds only quantities of free energy that are already present in the system, it does not actively seek to increase those quantities. Consequently, Freud's notion of the mastery of stimuli is thoroughly consistent with the principle of constancy, which does allow for the storage of quantities of psychical energy, but only in the service of the overall aim of bringing the level of excitation to the lowest possible level. A workable alternative to Freud's monism of the death drive must allow that the work of mastery not be limited to excitation that is already present in the mental apparatus. Any such version will be incompatible with the principle of constancy and, consequently, incompatible with the pleasure principle and Freud's theory of the drive. In other words, a workable alternative to Freud's version of mastery requires the rejection of Freud's theory of desire rather than its modification. It is just such a rejection, and just such an alternative, that I have already attempted, in chapter two, to find in Nietzsche's theory of the will to power.

PART II

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE THEORY OF DESIRE FOR SOCIAL THEORY

CHAPTER 4

RADICAL PESSIMISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN FREUD'S SOCIAL THEORY

Two Attempts at a Solution to Radical Pessimism in Freud's Social Theory

In this chapter I will discuss the consequences of Freud's theory of desire for social theory—specifically, its consequences for the possibility of the reconciliation of desire's aims with the necessities of social life. Freud readily admits that his social theory is pessimistic in a radical sense. He attributes the “discontents” of civilized life to two conflicts. First, there is a conflict within Eros between sexual and affectionate bonds and larger social bonds and obligations. Second, there is an essential opposition of Eros or life drives and the death drive, a conflict that appears in civilization in the form of a primary tendency toward aggressiveness. It is the second conflict that appears to give Freud's pessimism its radical character, for it is an essential and insurmountable conflict in the individual subject and leads to an insurmountable antagonism between instinctual satisfaction and social life.

Most commentators accept Freud's explanation of his own pessimism. Consequently, for those seeking to avoid Freud's pessimistic conclusions, the standard approach has been to reject the essential conflict of Eros and death drive, while suggesting potential changes to social life that would enable human beings to overcome the inessential conflict within Eros of libidinal and social aims. However, I believe that Freud has misidentified the root of his own pessimism toward the possibility of social happiness. His commentators' attempted solutions to the problem of social unhappiness cannot be accepted, because they are based on Freud's own mistaken explanation of the problem. I will argue that, contrary to Freud's own

views and the views of many of his commentators, it is not a conflict between drives that truly grounds his pessimism. It is not even a conflict exclusive to the drives. Rather, Freud's radical pessimism has its basis in the primacy of the inertia principle in his theory of desire in general. Social happiness is impossible in Freudian theory because of an essential and insurmountable conflict of desire as such with reality as such, a conflict that finds expression on the social level in the form of an essential tendency toward domination of the libidinal and social other.

The most common solution to Freud's pessimistic conclusions about social life is the rejection of the hypothesis of the death drive. The death drive is not the ultimate target of such a critique; the ultimate aim is to reject the postulate of aggressive and destructive drives within the social subject that have their basis in the death drive. Freud equates the death instinct—which was introduced as a tendency to return to the original, inanimate state—to an impulse of self-destruction, though he gives little justification for the questionable move from death to destructiveness. He believes the death drive qua self-destructive drive is diverted by Eros onto the external world: “The libido has the task of making the destroying instinct innocuous, and it fulfils this task by diverting that instinct to a great extent outwards . . . towards objects in the external world. The instinct is then called the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, the will to power.”¹

Although the “destructive instinct” is not a primary drive, but rather a vicissitude of the death drive, it is an essential source of discontent within civilization. For, on one hand, the presence of primary life drives makes the diversion of the death drive necessary, while on the other hand, social life is possible only given significant restrictions upon that diversionary

¹ Freud, “Problem of Masochism,” XIX:163.

form of satisfaction. In other words, if Freud's theory of destructive drives is correct, then there is a conflict between the drives and social life that cannot be surmounted by any particular form of society. The most obvious way to avoid this conclusion is to reject the death drive, thus making the destructive drive unnecessary. This, in turn, would mean that destructive or aggressive activity has its basis in erotic drives, that it is not grounded in an essential conflict, and that, consequently, we need not believe that destructive behavior is an essential and insurmountable tendency in the social subject.

Jonathan Lear has taken this approach in his recent work, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*. For Lear, "There is no such thing as the death drive."² He believes that Freud has taken a crucial misstep in his derivation of the death drive from repetitive compulsion. Freud introduces the death drive in order to explain certain puzzling clinical phenomena in which a patient's behavior seems to be incompatible with the pleasure principle. He examines a number of examples of this phenomenon, but focuses his attention upon the dreams of patients suffering from traumatic neuroses. He notes that these dreams "have the character of bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident,"³ a repetition of displeasure that seems to have no motive consistent with the pleasure principle as the avoidance of displeasure. On the basis of these and other examples of unpleasure repeated without benefit, Freud then suggests, "There exists in the mind a compulsion to repeat which over-rides the pleasure principle."⁴ From the compulsion to repeat, Freud then infers the essentially conservative character of the drives, a conservatism upon which—as we

² Jonathan Lear, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 62.

³ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

saw in chapter three—he bases the hypothesis of the death drive. Lear attacks the hypothesis of the death drive at its source, the “compulsion to repeat,” persuasively arguing that such a compulsion need not be understood in the form of a teleological principle:

If we stick close to the clinical data of traumatic neuroses, all we know is that they do have a compulsive power and that they issue in repetitions. But to talk of a compulsion *to* repeat is to suggest that the aim or the point of the compulsion is to produce a repetition—that is, it is implicitly to import a teleological assumption about the functioning of the compulsion. And for this, as yet, we have no evidence.⁵

If the attribution of a teleological aim of repetition to compulsive repetition is unjustified, then Freud cannot derive from the compulsion to repeat an essential conservatism of the drives and, consequently, we need not accept the hypothesis of the death drive. And if we reject the death drive, we cannot accept Freud’s radical pessimism about a socially insurmountable drive toward destruction, or, more generally, toward aggression:

The metaphysical basicness of the death drive implies a kind of metaphysical intractability to the phenomenon of human aggression. As a matter of empirical fact, humans may be aggressive animals—and the fact of human aggression may be difficult to deal with. It may even be experienced as intractable. But to raise this purported intractability to a metaphysical principle is to obliterate the question of responsibility. And it is to cover over—by precluding—what might turn out to be significant empirical possibilities.⁶

Lear’s argument for rejecting the death drive and the theory of primary aggression that accompanies it is compelling. The death drive is only a reasonable hypothesis if the teleological interpretation of compulsive repetition is accepted. But Freud has not given sufficient reason for such an interpretation. It may be the case that repetition is a product of instinctual tendencies—that it is “compulsive.” But it can be the result of instinctual activity without necessarily being the final end or aim of that activity.

⁵ Lear, 77.

⁶ Ibid., 132.

The trouble with Lear's approach, however, is that it does not go far enough. I have argued in chapter three that the primary difficulty in Freud's final theory is not, as he suggests, the death drive, but rather the theory of Eros. Like many of Freud's commentators, Lear takes Freud at his word, assuming that it is only the death drive that is in need of critique. However, as I have argued, the death drive is an extension and generalization of the principles of inertia and constancy. These principles are introduced at the beginning of Freud's career; they support his entire theory of desire; and they are the very basis of sexuality or so-called Eros. Why reject the unjustified teleological underpinnings of the death drive and not those of the rest of his theory—the constancy principle, the pleasure principle, and the aim of the drives? Lear reserves his skepticism for the death drive alone. Consequently, he completely overlooks the potential consequences of his critique: the undermining of Freud's entire theory of desire. We cannot consistently reject the death drive and retain the principle of inertia, since both are forms of the same teleological principle. And as I have argued in chapter one, if we reject the principles of inertia and constancy, we must also reject Freud's theory of desire in its entirety. Lear can successfully overcome Freud's social pessimism only if he is willing to reject Freud's theory of desire. Unfortunately, Lear's approach is quite common among Freud's commentators: he simply rejects unpalatable aspects of Freudian theory and keeps the palatable. In Lear's critique, the death drive plays the scapegoat: the basic elements of Freud's theory of desire—constancy, the pleasure principle, and the drive—are left relatively intact, while Eros, as usual, is viewed as immune to criticism.

It is only if the problem of aggression is exclusive to the death drive that Lear's approach can avoid Freud's radical pessimism. This is true of any attempted solution that

relies solely on the rejection of the death drive, since such attempts do not address the origin of the death drive in the principle of inertia—that is, in Freud’s general theory of desire. In the next section, I will argue that it is not the case that the problem of social conflict is exclusive to the death drive. The conflict at the root of Freudian pessimism is between desire and reality, not between one class of drives and another.

A second common way to avoid Freud’s social pessimism is to allow for instinctual dualism while rejecting Freud’s views about the diversion of the death drive in the form of destructive and aggressive drives. Now, any version of Freud’s drive theory that includes an essential conflict between the life and death drives must lead to some form of radical pessimism about the satisfaction of desire. For if the two classes of instinct are primary and opposed, one cannot be satisfied except at the expense of the other. So if we only reject Freud’s deduction of aggressive drives from the death drive, the problem remains. In addition to the rejection of aggressive and destructive drives, we must also reject the conflict that is at the root of the problem. This is the dialectical approach to Freudian dualism. If there are two distinct classes of drives that are *not essentially opposed* to one another, Freud’s dualism need not result in the necessary frustration of the drives or in a necessary conflict between the drives and social life.

Two influential attempts at a dialectical interpretation of Freudian dualism can be found in the works of Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown. Marcuse rejects the essential opposition of life and death by endorsing Freud’s initial suggestion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that the conservatism of the drives is a “universal attribute of instincts” rather than a tendency solely attributable to the death drive.⁷ This is, as I mentioned in chapter three, a

⁷ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:36.

view to which Freud refused to commit himself in his later works.⁸ Marcuse nevertheless insists upon the possibilities of Freud's initial suggestion: "The discovery of the common 'conservative nature' of the instincts militates against the dualistic conception and keeps Freud's late metapsychology in that state of suspense and depth which makes it one of the great intellectual ventures in the science of man."⁹ For if there is no fundamental incompatibility between the two classes of the drives, then there is no fundamental conflict upon which to ground the necessary frustration of desire or the necessary conflict of desire with social life. Brown makes a similar argument. "We need," he says, "instead of an instinctual dualism, an instinctual dialectic."¹⁰ And he bases the possibility of such a dialectic on an original unity of the drives: "Freud's own formula—"The goal of all life is death"—suggests that at the biological level life and death are not in conflict, but are somehow the same. . . . We thus arrive at the idea that life and death are in some sort of unity at the organic level, that at the human level they are separated into conflicting opposites, and that at the human level the extroversion of the death instinct is the mode of resolving a conflict that does not exist at the organic level."¹¹

⁸ See Freud, "New Introductory Lectures," XXII:107-08: "The question, too, of whether the conservative character may not belong to all instincts without exception, whether the erotic instincts as well may not be seeking to bring back an earlier state of things when they strive to bring about a synthesis of living things into greater unities—this question, too, we must leave unanswered."

⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 28.

¹⁰ Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), 83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100. It should be noted that Brown, like Marcuse (see note 7, above), is appealing to a statement in Freud's text to which Freud refused to fully commit himself. Although Freud does say that "the goal of all life is death," he does so in a passage that begins with, "Let us suppose, then, that all the organic instincts are conservative," and ends with, "But let us pause for a moment and reflect. It cannot be so. The sexual instincts . . . appear under a very different aspect" (*Beyond*, XVIII:39). In other words, the aim of life is death only if the life drives, too, are essentially conservative—a view to which Freud is not committed. Deleuze has also proposed a solution to Freudian dualism that involves asserting an essential identity between Freud's two classes of drives. However, he locates their essential identity in Freud's concept of mastery and repetition rather than in the return to a previous state. Because he rejects Freud's attempt to found repetition in a conservative principle of return, this view is not compatible with Freud's overall theory of desire. See my previous discussion of the mastery of stimuli in chapter three, above, 76-79, and Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 113.

On the basis of the postulated common nature of the drives, Marcuse and Brown attempt to redeem the reputation of the death drive. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Freud often equates the death drive with a self-destructive drive, an equation that grounds the view that its external diversion takes the form of a destructive drive. But as Marcuse insightfully points out, “The death instinct is destructiveness not for its own sake, but for the relief of tension.”¹² Both Marcuse and Brown emphasize that the death drive is not essentially destructive, allowing both to argue that its antagonism to the life drives is the product of contingent historical development rather than an essential conflict.

For Marcuse, the manifestation of the death drive as destruction and aggression is a consequence of, and protest against, the repression of sexual gratification.¹³ Death and destructiveness only become aims under intolerable social conditions: “It is the *failure* of Eros, lack of fulfillment in life, which enhances the instinctual value of death. The manifold forms of regression are unconscious protest against the insufficiencies of civilization: against the prevalence of toil over pleasure, performance over gratification.”¹⁴ If a non-repressive society is possible, then the death drive need not manifest itself in such forms: “The death drive operates under the Nirvana principle: it tends toward that state of ‘constant gratification’ where no tension is felt—a state without want. This trend of the instinct implies that its *destructive* manifestations would be minimized as it approaches such a state.”¹⁵ Of course, this is true only *if* a non-repressive society is possible. However, the

¹² Marcuse, 29.

¹³ Marcuse uses the word “repression” in a non-technical sense, designating “both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes of restraint, constraint, and suppression” (8).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

brilliance of Marcuse's argument is that it disallows the rejection of such a possibility on the basis of a supposed fundamental tendency toward destruction. If there is an insurmountable necessity for repression, it is no longer the death drive that is to blame. That is, the destructiveness of the death drive does not necessitate repression; its destructiveness is the result of repression. Consequently, Marcuse, unlike many of Freud's commentators, recognizes that the problem of repression (of the conflict between desire and social life) in Freud's theory is not exclusive to the death drive.

Like Marcuse, Brown also rejects Freud's implicit equation of the death drive and destructiveness. He argues that death is, rather, "the aspect of life which confers on life individuality, independence, and separateness."¹⁶ The transformation of death into destructiveness, then, has its basis in the repression of an instinctual tendency toward individuation. He does not, as Marcuse does, disregard the essential connection to death altogether; he merely rejects the idea that the death at issue is anything other than a natural one. That is, he rejects the view that the drive to death is an active destructiveness toward one's own life: "The death instinct is reconciled with the life instinct only in a life which is not repressed, . . . the death instinct then being affirmed in a body which is willing to die."¹⁷

Both Marcuse and Brown attempt to overcome Freudian pessimism by rejecting the essential antagonism of the drives rather than, as Lear does, rejecting one of the parties of the antagonism. This rejection enables them to interpret destructiveness and aggression as a form of the death drive that is produced by repression rather than the inevitable product of an essential conflict—in other words, as a justification for repression. They have, unlike Lear,

¹⁶ Brown, 109.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

recognized that Freud has mistakenly traced his radical pessimism toward social happiness to the death drive. But from this insight, both quickly conclude that the conflict of desire and social life, and the necessity for repression grounded in that conflict, is to be found in contingent historical conditions—in a state of reality that can be surmounted. For Marcuse, the necessity for repression depends upon conditions of scarcity, conditions that are overcome through technology, while for Brown it depends upon the institution of the human family, specifically, upon the prolonged period of childhood dependence upon the family. In other words, they both assume too quickly that if there is no desire for destruction or aggression, then the aim of desire is not essentially at odds with society. Though they reject Freud's explanation of the radical conflict of Eros and the death drive, they accept his explanation of the conflict between Eros and civilization as an inessential one, since they believe that desire is only in conflict with a contingent state of reality. I have, in my discussion of Lear, suggested that the source of Freud's radical pessimism is not a conflict between the drives. I will now suggest, against the view of Marcuse and Brown, that Freud's pessimism is also not rooted in a contingent conflict of desire and reality. Desire in Freud's theory is essentially in conflict with reality and society as such, rather than with a particular state of reality and social life. It will be the task of the following sections to defend this view.

The Libidinal Relation as Domination

The Aim of Inertia in Relation to Social Life

The attempt to overcome the pessimism of Freud's social theory through the rejection of the death drive was rooted in the assumption that the only insurmountable conflict in

Freud's theory is between Eros and the death drive. The dialectical approach, on the contrary, rejected the assumption of an essential conflict of the drives and traced social discontent to a conflict between desire and surmountable social conditions. Both approaches follow Freud's own explanations of his pessimistic outlook, by assuming that apart from the death drive there is no essentially insurmountable conflict between desire and social life. In this chapter I will argue that Freud's radical pessimism cannot be evaded, because it is grounded in an essential conflict between desire and reality—the impossibility of the aim of the principle of psychological inertia. This conflict reappears on the level of social life in the form of an essential tendency in libidinal and social relations toward relations of domination, a tendency that is essentially incompatible with civilization and thus an insurmountable source of social discontent.

In what follows, I will assume the principle of inertia only in its most general form. I will assume, first, that it is limited to the psychological apparatus, and not necessarily a principle of the activity of the biological organism. And I will use it in a form that does not presuppose any specific view concerning the physical basis of the psychological apparatus. With this in mind, I will take as my general formula for inertia, not Freud's original formula that "neurons tend to divest themselves of Q ,"¹⁸ but rather a revision based upon Freud's 1920 theory of the conservatism or inertia of the drives. By the principle of inertia I will mean the view that the primary activity of the psychological apparatus is to "restore an earlier state of things" that it "has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces."¹⁹ This phrasing allows us to leave to one side Freud's controversial biological

¹⁸ Freud, "Project," I:296.

¹⁹ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:36.

speculations and retains the crucial elements that I have emphasized in Freud's initial formula—primacy, reactivity, and the aim of inanimateness.

It is the primacy of inertia in Freud's theory of desire that grounds his radical pessimism. If the inertia principle determines all mental activity, then there can only be two types of activity in mental life: activity resulting directly from changes imposed by the external world, on the one hand, and the activity of the mental apparatus in its attempt to undo or avoid those changes, on the other hand. The success of the task of undoing and avoiding the former kind of changes makes the latter kind unnecessary. In other words, if the mental apparatus were able to return to its original state and to avoid any further changes of state, it would reach a state of relative psychic death—the absence of any psychological activity. The mind, in Freud's theory, seeks to dissolve itself; desire is this process of psychological suicide.²⁰ This “death drive” of the psyche cannot be underemphasized. Given the primacy of inertia all specific desires, whatever they may be—the satisfaction of vital needs, sexual desires, sublimated forms of cultural activity, social desires, etc.—have their ground and final aim in the desire to bring an end to psychic life. Insofar as there is any satisfaction, any pleasure, in mental life, it is because an activity contributes to that end.

The aim of inertia is absolutely incompatible with reality. The drives are constant and, because they have their source in the subject's own body, cannot be avoided. Not only do the constant changes imposed by the body upon the mental apparatus make its task impossible to complete, they also make it more difficult: “They make far higher demands on the nervous system and cause it to undertake involved and interconnected activities by

²⁰ Cf. Lacan, *Seminar, Book II*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvania Tomaselli (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 233: “Life doesn't want to be healed. The negative therapeutic reaction is fundamental to it. . . . All that life is concerned with is seeking repose as much as possible while awaiting death.”

which the external world is so changed as to afford satisfaction to the internal source of stimulation.”²¹ Endogenously imposed changes in the mental apparatus both prevent inertia from advancing toward its goal *and* set it back further from its goal. From the conflict between endogenously imposed change and the principle of inertia alone we can conclude that the satisfaction of desire is essentially opposed to the reality of psychic life. It is a conflict that cannot be surmounted, a source of discontent that is absolute. Unlike Freud’s conflict of Eros and death drive, this conflict is not limited to the civilized *social* subject. One can imagine possible forms of uncivilized life that escape the conflict of life and death drives by giving aggression free expression. The conflict of inertia and the drives, on the contrary, is essential to the subject regardless of the form of social life in which it exists. Nor does this conflict depend upon Freud’s postulate of a specific class of “death drives,” or of an essential tendency toward aggression or destruction. Lear’s rejection of the death drive does not avoid the problem, since it is the drives as such (as endogenous sources of change in mental life), and not a specific class of “death drives,” that are the source of the conflict. And, in contrast to the conflict found in dialectical versions of Freudian theory, this conflict has nothing to do with contingent conditions of external reality. The reality that frustrates desire is the subject’s own body, the very source of its life, and not surmountable conditions of reality such as material scarcity or contingent forms of social life.

At the same time, however, it is not necessarily the case that this conflict has consequences for social theory. It may be the case that desire is insatiable, that it necessarily cannot fulfill its final aim, while at the same time this essential frustration is limited solely to the attachment of mental life to the body. If that were true, then there would be no conflict

²¹ Freud, “Instincts,” XIV:120.

with social reality, and one could still argue that the satisfaction of desire—to whatever degree it is possible—is not in conflict with social relations and civilization. It is still necessary for my purposes, then, to argue that this conflict has equally pessimistic consequences for the subject’s social life, that it leads to equally insurmountable conflicts between the subject of desire and social bonds.

The conflict of desire and the social bond is also essential. It has as its primary basis a conflict between desire and external reality in general, but this conflict is, in turn, aggravated in the specific case of the human other. The primary error in most approaches to Freud’s theory of desire is that they focus their attention exclusively upon the satisfaction of the drives. To do so is to ignore the primacy of inertia as a principle governing mental life in its entirety, rather than as a principle exclusive to the satisfaction of the drives. Consequently, its aims also include the relation of the mind to the external world, not just to the body and the satisfaction of the drives. And the external world is essentially an imposition of change upon the mental apparatus; it is essentially in conflict with the principle of inertia. Freud is painfully explicit on this point: “It cannot be denied that hating, too, originally characterized the relation of the ego to the alien external world with the stimuli it introduces. . . . At the very beginning, it seems, the external world, objects, and what is hated are identical.”²² Admittedly, the subject does not *only* hate the external world; the external world is, after all, a source of satisfaction for both vital and libidinal needs. But what is too often overlooked is that hatred of the external world is an original relation and, because it is based on an essential conflict of the external world with the inertia principle, an insurmountable one. Love and affection are not alternatives to this position, but additions to

²² Ibid., 136.

it. The other is hated insofar as it is (essentially) a source of displeasure and loved insofar as it is (accidentally) a source of pleasure. Consequently we cannot, as the dialectical Freudians do, consider the conflict between desire and social life to be accidental, depending on whether or not satisfaction of the drives is inhibited or prohibited. Even under social conditions in which the satisfaction of the drives is possible, the other is essentially a frustration of the aim of desire, a source of change in the mental apparatus, and an obstacle to the primary aim of psychic death. The social other is, like the external world, essentially an enemy of desire, because it revitalizes the mental life that the subject seeks to dissolve.

But it is not simply the subject's original hatred of the external world that is the problem in Freud's social theory. The conflict of the subject with the social bond is a heightened one. First, not only must the subject in the social bond engage the hated external world, it must also resign itself to a *constant relation* to an object of frustration in the form of the bond itself, a constant engagement with the external world. Second, the satisfaction on behalf of which frustration is tolerated becomes, in an authentic social bond, *dependent upon the will of the other*. Finally, the social other is itself a subject of desire; the other's desire *makes demands* upon the subject, demands that require further engagement with the hated external world. Each of these aspects of the social bond further removes desire from its ideal aim of extinction. We have already seen, in chapter three, the practical motive behind this setback; it is a question of quantity, of tolerating frustration on behalf of a greater ultimate gain. But although the social bond is on the whole advantageous for the satisfaction of desire, it is only relatively so. It is profoundly misleading to overlook in Freud's theory how severely at odds social life is with the primary aim of the mental apparatus. Ideally, the subject would be strictly antisocial. The aim of inertia tends toward absolute separation from

the other. The *social* other, which is a constant obstacle to desire, a cause of dependency of satisfaction, and a source of demands upon the subject, would ideally share the same fate as the one the subject desires for its own mental life—death. The other is, after all, precisely a *source* of mental life. The original attitude of the Freudian subject is suicide, and the original attitude of the Freudian *social* subject is murder.²³

The Origin of Primary Narcissism

In chapter three, I argued that there is no true erotic tendency in the Freudian account of the sexual drive, no intrinsic instinctual aim of which social bonds are the product. In the previous section, I have expanded that point in two ways. First, the issue concerns Freud's theory of desire as such, not simply the drives—it involves inertia's tendency to undo and prevent change that has its source both in the external world and in the body or the drives. Second, not only is a social instinctual tendency absent, and not only does the social bond involve the frustration of desire, but also the aim of desire and the social bond are radically opposed. Obviously, then, there is in Freud's theory an essential conflict of desire and society. However, thus far I have only considered that conflict in its most general or abstract form: inertia in opposition to the changes imposed by social life. Even if there is no primary social aim, there is, as we have seen, a necessity for social life. Given that necessity, what is the subject's aim within the social relation? What kind of relation does it seek? The purpose of the following sections will be to examine in detail the specific form that the general

²³ Cf. Lacan, *Seminar, Book I*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 170: "The subject's desire can only be confirmed . . . through an absolute rivalry with the other, in view of the object toward which it is directed. And each time we get close, in a given subject, to this primitive alienation, the most radical aggression arises—the desire for the disappearance of the other in so far as he supports the subject's desire."

conflict of desire and sociality takes within social life. I will examine the subject's social aim as a secondary formation of necessity, or as a compromised version of the aim of inertia.

In order to make explicit the specific form that the conflict of desire and social life takes within social relations, we must analyze the social aims of the subject. In order to do that, we must see how the subject moves from its ideal, original position of suicide and murder to libidinal and social bonds. With each move in the subject's development toward social life, there must be a modification of the aim of inertia in a compromised form. At each level of social development, there is a specifically social form of the aim of inertia. That is, the necessity of social bonds makes the subject seek social forms of psychic death.

The original condition of the subject is, according to Freud, primary narcissism. This often leads commentators to view the Freudian subject as essentially "selfish," since narcissism is a kind of self-love, a "libidinal cathexis of the ego."²⁴ But such a characterization is profoundly misleading. The notion of an instinctually grounded "selfishness" suggests a primary drive to "self-preservation," a view that Freud does entertain but ultimately rejects. Such a view cannot be consistent with the inertia principle, since the primary aim of the subject is, as we have seen, psychic death and not preservation. Any tendency to self-preservation, then, must be secondary to and derivative of the inertia principle. Furthermore, self-love as an instinctual investment of the ego presupposes an obstacle to inertia's aim: the presence, in Freud's language, of libidinal "energy." That is, the preservation of, or the return to, the state of primary narcissism cannot be a fundamental aim, since it includes the imposition by the body of change upon the mental apparatus, the "cathexis" or "investment" of the ego with libidinal energy. Consequently, the state of

primary narcissism is already a compromised situation, a frustration of inertia's aims. A proper understanding of the state of primary narcissism requires that we view it in light of a more primary condition that precedes it.

Primary narcissism is only the primary state of the psychological subject proper. As a libidinal investment of the ego, it begins with the development of the ego: "A unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed."²⁵ So we must distinguish between the original condition of the individual under the primacy of inertia and the compromised condition of inertia given the development of the ego. The latter can only be understood properly in relation to the former. Prior to the development of the ego, Freud tells us, the individual exists in an undifferentiated unity with the external world: "An infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish its ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in upon him."²⁶ The development of the ego begins as a distinction between inside and outside, a distinction that has its basis in the differentiation of internal and external sources of stimulation: "On the one hand, it will be aware of stimuli which can be avoided by muscular action (flight); these it ascribes to an external world. On the other hand, it will also be aware of stimuli against which such action is of no avail . . . ; these stimuli are signs of an internal world."²⁷

Consequently, the psychological subject proper—that is, an individual that is aware of itself as distinct from the external world—is born precisely out of the frustration of the inertia principle, the changes imposed upon the subject that cannot be overcome because they

²⁴ Freud, "Narcissism," XIV:75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁶ Freud, *Civilization*, XXI:66-67.

have their source within it. The subject's first aim, its fundamental desire, is given with its birth—to overcome the frustration into which it is born. But this aim is at the same time an aim of abolishing the very source of its subjectivity, the internal sources of change by which it distinguishes itself from the world. So, from the very beginning of the psychological subject's development, we have a radical modification of the inertia principle in the form of original desire. The subject's first desire is not the ideal end of inertia—psychic death and absolute separation from the world—but rather absolute unity with the world. For if the subject were to successfully overcome the endogenously imposed changes of the mental apparatus, it would abolish itself as a self-aware subject. It seeks to resolve the conflict of inertia and life in a compromised form: rather than bringing a strict end to mental activity, it seeks the nearest possible equivalent by attempting to dissolve the distinction between itself and the world, which would be the end of the subjective awareness of mental life—the death of the self-conscious subject. This aim is a form of psychic death, but on a specifically human level, where mental life includes awareness of self and other. This change in levels modifies the original aim from separation to unity, but it is a modification that is still subordinate to the overall aim of inertia.

This point is crucial, since it exposes the link between inertia as death and separation to a tendency in the subject to desire unity. It exposes the element of truth in the concept of Eros as a tendency toward unity, while also showing how that tendency is consistent with inertia and why it cannot be used to support a distinction between opposed principles of life and death. In the original situation of the subject, the desire for unity is identical to the desire for death, for it is precisely the death of the psychological subject (the end of the recognized

²⁷ Freud, "Instincts," XIV:119.

distinction of ego and world) that would return the individual to its pre-subjective unity with the world. In other words, far from supporting Freud's theory of Eros, and far from indicating the existence of a drive to life, the subject's tendency toward unity is part and parcel of its tendency toward death. It is not a drive to life, for the subject seeks to exterminate the drive as a source of revitalization. And it is not an erotic tendency because by seeking unity in the end of subjectivity (the end of the distinction of self and other) it is also seeking to dissolve recognition of both self and other, to eliminate the terms of the supposedly "erotic" relation. In other words, it seeks to *avoid the social relation* by abolishing the relational terms. The tendency toward unity in Freud's theory is properly understood as an aim that is opposed to both life and relation, the contrary of life drive and Eros.²⁸

Having analyzed the state prior to the development of the ego and the distinction of the self and the external world, we are now in a position to properly understand primary narcissism. We saw that the subject is born out of the frustration of inertia; it attains self-awareness because the drives are a permanent obstacle to the mental apparatus' attempt to reach a state of inactivity. Because the pure aim of inertia cannot be attained, the subject's desire takes the form of the elimination of changes that have their source in the subject, changes that are, at the same time, its distinction from the external world. Consequently, desire appears as a trend toward unity through the dissolution of the recognized distinction of self and other. But the permanence of the drives is also the permanence of the distinction between self and other; the subject cannot return to undifferentiated unity with the external world. The failure of that trend provides us with a new form of desire, and a new

²⁸ Cf. Lacan, *Seminar, Book I*, 149: "We are all agreed that love is a form of suicide."

compromised form of inertia's aim. Because absolute unity is impossible, because the self/other division is insurmountable, the subject now seeks to separate from the world insofar as it is a source of frustration. And in light of this we can properly understand the primacy of narcissism in the development of the subject. The subject's investment of the ego with libido is not a form of primary selfishness, not "love of self," but a compromised form of inertia. Narcissism is the subject's primary state because the external world is a further frustration of the desire to return to the pre-subjective state of unity: "Hate, as a relation to objects, is older than love. It derives from the narcissistic ego's primordial repudiation of the external world with its outpouring of stimuli."²⁹ In primary narcissism, the subject seeks to satisfy the drives without engagement of the external world (and without the libidinal cathexis of objects) because this method is most consistent with the aim of returning to the pre-subjective state, of abolishing the external and internal division that is grounded in the difference between internal and external sources of stimulation or change. Consequently, the subject's self-interest is accidental. Primary narcissism is not an ideal state, not something the subject seeks as such, but a failed endeavour to return to the condition prior to it. The narcissist's ideal state would be the end of the ego and the end of the instinctual activity that necessitates cathexis. It can only be properly understood in light of that aim. Just as the subject's aim of unity with the world did not aim at a true relation but instead at the dissolution of the terms of the relation, primary narcissism seeks not a self-relation (libidinal investment of the ego) but the end of the terms of that relation. It gives up unity with the world as psychic death for self-unity as psychic death. Even if Freud characterizes it as "self-love," it must be remembered that primary narcissism has as its purpose removing the

²⁹ Freud, "Instincts," 139.

necessity for any kind of love—bringing an end to the changes imposed upon the mental apparatus by the drives.³⁰

The Pleasure-Ego and Love

The aim of inertia at the level of primary narcissism is as doomed to failure as the aim of return to undifferentiated unity with the world. Because I have already discussed in chapter three the nature of this failure, I will not go into further detail here. There we saw that the drives cannot be efficiently dealt with narcissistically and that the subject is forced, against its narcissistic tendencies, into the libidinal cathexis of objects. In that chapter, however, I only discussed the move to normal libidinal relations. Freud also mentions a stage that should be situated between primary narcissism and normal object-relations—the institution of the “pleasure-ego.” In the pleasure-ego we find a compromised form of the aim of primary narcissism. Although the subject does enter into libidinal relations with external objects, it attempts to do so without losing the advantage of narcissism—the evasion of externally imposed changes to the mental apparatus. It is this stage that will provides us with the clearest view of how the conflict of desire and reality appears specifically in libidinal bonds.

The pleasure-ego is a rejection of the original distinction between self and other. It is not the rejection of that distinction as such, but rather of its original form. Rather than identify itself with internal sources of stimuli that cannot be evaded, in this stage the subject identifies itself with its sources of pleasure: “In so far as the objects which are presented to it are sources of pleasure, it takes them into itself, ‘introjects’ them . . . and, on the other hand,

³⁰ Cf. Lacan, *Seminar, Book XI*, 235: “But what does *not wanting to desire* mean? The whole of analytic experience . . . shows us that not to want to desire and to desire are the same thing.”

it expels whatever within itself becomes a cause of unpleasure.”³¹ Consequently, the drives, which were originally the ground of the identification of the self, are now treated as external to the ego, since they are sources of unpleasure. The pleasure-ego splits the subject in two. But it not only splits itself; it also divides the external world, treating it as part of the ego insofar as it is pleasurable and as external to the ego insofar as it is not pleasurable.

We saw that the initial project of desire was a return to unity through the extinction of the drives that provoked the subject’s initial separation from the world. The failure of that attempt only aggravated the distinction, transforming the attempt to extinguish the drives, at the level of primary narcissism, into an activity of separation from the world. In the pleasure-ego, the subject seeks a compromise of the two, seeking both unity with and separation from the world in its different aspects, according to its utility for inertia’s aim of reducing, avoiding, and eliminating changes imposed upon mental life. Once again, however, this strategy is doomed to failure. The pleasure-ego is a fantasy. The sources of the subject’s pleasure are not an inseparable part of its ego, and the primary sources of its displeasure, the drives, are part of the subject. Nevertheless, it is a fantasy that can be maintained to some degree, since it has support in actuality. That support is found in the infant’s relation to its mother or primary caregiver. Because of the infant’s helpless state, the burden of its desire’s satisfaction falls upon the primary caregiver. The caregiver must be a relatively constant presence in relation to the infant’s needs because the infant cannot satisfy them by itself, and this would tend to support the illusion of a unity between the infant and its primary source of pleasure. Furthermore, the infant is, thanks to its dependency, generally protected from prolonged dissatisfaction of its drives and vital needs. This, too, would tend

³¹ Ibid., 136.

to support the illusion of the pleasure-ego, since it is precisely dissatisfaction of internal needs that leads to the distinction of internal and external worlds. So the infant's relation to its primary caregiver enables the prolongation of primary narcissism in a modified form. As in narcissism, the infant refuses to make any (acknowledged) libidinal investment in the external world; it refuses to enter into a relation with the world. But it avoids the frustration of narcissism by dividing the world according to its pleasure, by mistaking the pleasurable other for part of itself.

Obviously, the ground of the fantasy of the pleasure-ego is tenuous—not only because the infant's development will necessitate independence from its caregiver, but also because that original relation is never in fact a perfect one. The infant's desires are not always immediately satisfied, and so the original division of ego and external world always threatens to break through the fantasy. However, the crucial point for my purposes is the implicit social aim that is found in the pleasure-ego. At this stage, the subject does not recognize that its pleasurable bonds with the other are, in fact, relations at all. But Freud's discussion of the pleasure-ego makes explicit what the ideal form of social relation will be: separation from others insofar as they are an obstacle to inertia's aim, and unity with others insofar as they promote those aims. The pleasure-ego presents us with the first authentically social form of inertia's aim, for it begins with recognition of the self and other, and seeks to surmount, through unity with the other, all obstacles to the satisfaction of its desire.

From Freud's discussion of the pleasure-ego, we can deduce the primary social aim of the subject—that is, the new form that the aim of psychic death takes within social life, given the failure of narcissism. The Freudian subject seeks social relations in which it can achieve a relative unity with the other insofar as the other satisfies desire and in which it can achieve

relative separation from the other insofar as the other hinders desire. In other words, the subject seeks to reinstate the pleasure-ego in a modified form on the social level. This form of the aim of desire can be fully taken up by the subject once it has overcome primary narcissism, having correctly distinguished its ego from the external world and recognized the impossibility of efficiently satisfying its desire outside of object-relations.

The difficulty in this form of inertia's aim is that it is not simply the external world that is split in two—into pleasurable and unpleasurable aspects, into objects of unification and separation. The libidinal object is itself split in two by this aim. It is, as a source of satisfaction of the drives, an object with which the subject seeks to unite. But it is also, as an external object, a source of stimulation and an imposition of change upon psychic life. Consequently, it is also a source of the frustration of desire and an object from which the subject seeks to separate. Freud understates the case, suggesting that the “history of the origins and relations of love” explains why love “so frequently manifests itself as ‘ambivalent’—i.e. as accompanied by impulses of hate against the same object.”³² But Freud's account of that history—keeping in mind the primacy of inertia—gives us reason to believe that *all* love (including the “self-love” of narcissism) is essentially ambivalent.

In my discussions of the pre-subjective stage and primary narcissism, I stressed two points. First, the aim of unity is a mode of inertia—unity is sought as a compromised form of psychic death. In the initial form, subjectivity is to be dissolved through the extinction of the drives, the ground of the self-other distinction. The consequence would be a form of psychological death—mental activity would continue but inertia's aim would be attained on the psychological level in the form of the death of the self-aware subject. In the modified

³² Ibid., 139.

aim of unity at the level of narcissism, the subject continues to seek unity, but it is only unity with the body in the form of the narcissistic satisfaction of the drives. The impossibility of unity with the external world is acknowledged in the subject's active separation from external objects. A narcissistic form of psychic death would be, not the absence of subjectivity or the end of awareness of the distinction between self and other, but rather the overcoming of changes imposed by either side of that division: the constant satisfaction of the drives and sustained withdrawal from the external world. The second point that I have emphasized is that in both cases unity is sought as the evasion of a relation, rather than as the achievement of a relation. Unity is initially attempted through bringing an end to the distinction between self and other—abolishing the terms that constitute the relation. The failure of such an attempt leads, in narcissism, to an attempt to separate the terms absolutely, to isolate the self and thus evade the relation.

In the social relation, both of these aspects of the modified aim of inertia are preserved in a new form. The subject now seeks unity with the other qua source of pleasure, but this unity is also sought as a compromised form of psychic death. Successful unity with the libidinal other is not sought as a source of constant pleasure, but as a source of the constant *prevention of desire*, as consistent with the principle of inertia. The aim is to prevent and minimize, through satisfaction in the libidinal object, the changes imposed by the drives upon mental life. An ideal relation would minimize both desire and pleasure, since pleasure presupposes desire, or changes imposed upon mental life. At the same time, the subject's aim in the social relation must also include the minimization of change imposed by the presence of the libidinal object upon mental life. The social form of psychic death would include both the minimization of the activity of the drive through unity with the object qua

satisfaction and the minimization of the social relation in every aspect not relevant to the satisfaction of desire. Consequently, this form of the subject's aim is, like the previous ones, an attempted evasion of any relation rather than the institution of authentic social relations. Rather than, as before, attempting to dissolve the terms of the relation (the return to pre-subjectivity) or to separate the terms of the relation (narcissism), the social subject seeks to achieve unity with the other *as a subject*. And this means that the libidinal relation aims not at a relation with another subject but at the absorption of the other into a single subject, the dissolution of the social relation through its reduction to a single term.

The consequences of this social aim for the love bond are profound. The social aim of the subject is essentially in conflict with the love bond. It seeks a pseudo-relation, since it demands the complete unity of subject and object, an end to the division that is prerequisite to authentic relations. But as we have seen in chapter three, the libidinal bond with the other involves the overvaluation of the object in its entirety.³³ Love involves a recognition and valuation of the other in its independence from the subject, and not, as the social subject's desire would have it, the absorption of the object into a single subjectivity, where the other is valued solely in its utility for satisfaction. In other words, desire does not seek love of the object any more than, as we saw in my discussion of narcissism, it seeks self-love. Love, like narcissism, presupposes quantities of "libido" or, more generally, activity and change in mental life that has not been overcome; it presupposes the failure of desire's aim. Self-love was the failure of the return to the pre-subjective stage. Object-love is the failure to achieve the aim of absolute unity with the libidinal object. It is precisely that failure that grounds the love bond. For as we saw in chapter three, it is frustration, or "excess libido," that makes

³³ See above, chapter three, 55-57.

overvaluation of the love object necessary and possible. Consequently, we cannot, as most followers of Freud do, place our social hopes in love. Not only is the love bond not an aim of desire or a primary instinctual tendency, as a secondary formation it is *essentially in conflict* with desire. The subject's satisfaction is not compatible with the love bond.

The precise nature of this conflict can be made explicit in relation to my earlier discussion about the aim of inertia's relation to social life. There I mentioned three ways in which the conflict of inertia and social life is heightened in the social bond: (1) the bond itself is a constant external imposition of change upon mental life; (2) the satisfaction of the subject's desire is dependent upon the will of the other; and (3) the other's desire makes demands upon the subject. Now, the specific aim of the social subject is unity with the other qua source of satisfaction, which entails separation from the other qua source of frustration. So, in relation to (1), the desired relation cannot take the form of an authentic bond. It seeks the presence of the other *only in relation* to satisfaction; in every other aspect of the other, desire seeks distance. And, in relation to (2), the desired relation must seek to overcome the dependency of its satisfaction upon the other's will. The subject primarily seeks the subordination of the other's will to its own desire for satisfaction of the drives and to its desire for distance from the other as a source of change unrelated to satisfaction. And, (3), the desired relation cannot include the other as a subject of desire that makes demands. That would be, firstly, opposed to the aim of separation from the other qua source of frustration. And it would be, secondly, a division into distinct subjects, which is incompatible with the ideal of unity. Consequently, the subject seeks a form of unity with the other that is only possible given the domination of the other. For it is precisely insofar as the other is an independent subject of desire that it is incompatible with the social aim. It is precisely the

other's independence that is cut out of the subject's desire to reconstitute the pleasure-ego on the social level. We must conclude that the subject's specific social aim, what it desires in its relation to the social other and not merely the aim of inertia viewed generally or abstractly, is essentially in conflict with libidinal bonds such as love. The love bond, then, can only be a frustrated form of this aim, since, as I have already argued, Freud is not justified in the postulate of Eros or life drives which could serve as an independent motivation toward love relations. And if the love bond is derivative of the social aim, then we must conclude that the aim of love is to dissolve itself, to overcome its frustration in the ideal relation of unity. In other words, love is nothing more than a frustrated form of the desire to dominate the libidinal other.

It is worthwhile, at this point, to contrast these profoundly pessimistic conclusions about libidinal bonds with the interpretations of Freud's more optimistic followers. Jeffrey Abramson, for example, treats the love bond as an ideal state of unity between distinct subjects. He defends this view by appealing to the ideal unity of infant and mother, "a moment of union, or being at one with the other, that enriches the identity of both without impoverishing either."³⁴ This interpretation completely overlooks the fact that this unity only exists in the pre-subjective stage. The child does not yet even recognize the identity of the mother as independent of the self. The unity at issue is not a relation of subjects, not a bond between identities, but a conflict, in which the individual originally seeks to end the recognition of both identities and later to absorb one identity into the other.

³⁴ Jeffrey Abramson, *Liberation and its Limits: The Moral and Political Thought of Freud* (New York: The Free Press/Macmillan, Inc., 1984).

Both Abramson and Norman O. Brown suggest, in their interpretations of Freudian love, that possession is not a primary aspect of the subject's aim. Abramson, for example, claims that it is "the desire to identify with, not possess, that seems to describe more closely the infant's primal form of love."³⁵ But this view overlooks the essential conflict between social desire and love. Social desire tends toward domination of the other, and must include possession as part of its aim of union with the other. Identification, like love, is not a primary tendency—it exists only given the frustration of the social aim. According to Freud, identification is made "with an object that is renounced or lost, as a substitute for that object."³⁶ Far from providing a contrast to the tendency in love toward possession, identification is a compromised form of possession.

Brown makes a similar argument, but appeals to unity as well as to identification. The aim of love, he says, "is not possession but union with the object, a union which is hardly distinguishable from [Freud's] own category of identification."³⁷ This contrast of union to possession is quite peculiar, since possession of the object is prerequisite to union with it. Brown is able to contrast possession to union because he overlooks the basis of sexuality in the inertia principle as a principle of psychic death. He believes, "The ultimate essence of our desires and our being is nothing more or less than delight in the active life of all the human body" or, as he often puts it, in "play."³⁸ Consequently, he understands the union sought in love as a kind of mutual play, an interactivity of shared pleasures, a kind of unity compatible with non-possession. From my analyses of the origins of social aims in the

³⁵ Ibid., 25.

³⁶ Freud, *Group Psychology*, XVIII:109.

³⁷ Brown, 43.

aim of inertia and my argument against the theory of Eros, it should be clear that the attribution of an erotic goal of play, of pleasure in the body independent of the aim of inertia, is profoundly incompatible with Freud's theory of desire. Consequently, Brown's argument against possessive love cannot be accepted.

An alternate approach is to downplay the element of unity in love relations. Jonathan Lear takes this approach, insisting that love tends essentially toward individuation. He says that love "pulls us toward higher, more differentiated unities" and that "love is manifested in human life in the process of individuation."³⁹ Such a view, if correct, implies that the unity at which social desire and love aim leaves room for authentic social relationships, the preservation of the distinct subjects of the relation. But even if we appeal to Freud's postulate of "Eros," such a view is not justified by Freud's theory. Freud does not limit the erotic aim of unity to innocuous forms that conveniently avoid the elimination of complexity, individuality, and difference. And Lear's attempt to do so seems to fit poorly with Freud's adamant view that "there is unquestionably no universal instinct towards higher development," no "instinct towards perfection."⁴⁰ Lear defends his view by pointing to the development of the individual ego. In narcissistic identification, he says, "An I is being constituted out of a less differentiated field."⁴¹ He argues that "love must appreciate greater structure; otherwise no I would ever differentiate itself from the world."⁴² However, this argument conflates development with libidinal aims. That complexity and individuation are

³⁸ Ibid., 30.

³⁹ Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1990), 150 and 177.

⁴⁰ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:41-42.

⁴¹ Lear, *Love and Its Place*, 162.

the result of the process of development does not at all mean they were the aim of that development. As we saw in my discussion of Abramson, identification is a substitute for an object-tie. It is only because the libidinal aim of unity with an object is frustrated that identification occurs. But if the identifications that produce greater psychic differentiation are produced by the frustration of libidinal aims, we cannot conclude that differentiation is an essential part of that aim. Love need not “appreciate greater structure,” in order to differentiate; it is only necessary that it be prevented from reaching its goal, and forced to turn to more complicated substitute forms of satisfaction. Consequently, we cannot conclude from the individual’s development that libidinal aims include differentiation and individuation within their goal of unity. That consequence may be accidental, a product of deviation from libidinal aims.

But Lear’s conclusion is not simply unnecessary; there are also independent reasons for rejecting that conclusion as incompatible with Freud’s theory of desire. First, we can find in Freud’s theory counterexamples to Lear’s evidence, cases in which individual development leads to homogeneity rather than individuation, to greater simplicity rather than to greater complexity. Group psychology, extreme forms of love, and hypnosis are, according to Freud, forms of individual psychic development that have their basis in libidinally motivated identification. But unlike other forms of identification in which the subject identifies its ego with the libidinal object, in these cases, “*The object has been put in place of the ego ideal.*”⁴³ This form of psychical development has, as its consequence, a union with others in which individuality is sacrificed in the idealization of the person or idea

⁴² Ibid., 166.

⁴³ Freud, *Group Psychology*, XVIII:113.

that has replaced the ideal ego. In such cases, identification does not increase the complexity of the individual—it is not just one more instance of identification, an added modification to the ego. Unlike in other forms of identification, through which the ego has “enriched” itself, in this form the ego is “impoverished.” It has, Freud tells us, “surrendered itself to the object.”⁴⁴ Because Lear has overlooked the negative forms of libidinal development, we cannot accept Lear’s conclusion of a progressive tendency in love towards complexity and individuation. And it should be clear from my analysis of the origin of love’s aims in inertia that such a view is simply not compatible with Freud’s theory of desire. Greater complexity in the ego can only be a frustration of desire if the subject’s ultimate aim is psychic death. The subject’s demand for unity with an object is grounded in the object’s ability to satisfy the drives, to silence the libidinal activity that makes further development and greater complexity necessary. That is, it seeks the object precisely with the aim of avoiding further ties and development, and it seeks individuation only as a means to psychic death.

Finally, there is Marcuse’s optimistic reading of Freud’s theory of love. Because Marcuse locates the conflict of desire and reality externally to the love relation, he is able to suggest that love is at odds with repression. He believes that scarcity is the root of social conflict and repression. If scarcity were overcome, repression would be lifted and sexuality would become truly social: “Under non-repressive conditions, sexuality tends to ‘grow into’ Eros—that is to say, toward self-sublimation in lasting and expanding relations . . . which serve to intensify and enlarge instinctual gratification.”⁴⁵ If my analysis of the Freudian subject’s social aim is correct, then nothing could be further from the truth. We have seen

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Marcuse, 222.

that “Eros” appears as the frustration of the aim of unity through domination. There are love bonds *only insofar as there is repression* of the sexual aim of dominative unity with the libidinal other. To remove repression would be precisely to dissolve the libidinal bond and with it so-called Eros, since the bond is constituted by overvaluation which is, in its essence, the frustration of the social aim.

The Social Bond: A Parody of Eros

We have seen in the preceding sections that the subject’s principal social aim, the form desire takes on the social level, is profoundly and essentially opposed to love—that love is a failure and frustration of desire. The subject seeks unity with a libidinal object insofar as it is a source of satisfaction and separation insofar as it is a source of frustration. Because the libidinal object is both, this aim demands the subordination of the libidinal object to the subject’s will, the other’s domination in a secondarily constituted social form of the pleasure-ego. Such a relation, if achieved, would be the relative satisfaction of desire as the minimization or prevention of both externally and internally imposed change in the mental apparatus. It would be the attainment of a state that approaches, to the greatest degree possible, psychic death. It is only given the failure of desire to reach this state that the love bond is necessary. The bond is supported by an overvaluation of the libidinal object that, in turn, exists precisely because desire has not been satisfied; in Freud’s language, excess libido that cannot be discharged is directed to the libidinal object. Were love to achieve its aim of overcoming this frustration, it would dissolve itself. That is, insofar as love is an aim and not merely a frustration, its only aim can be to abolish itself by making the love bond unnecessary. Consequently, love does not prove to be an alternative to, or surmounting of,

the general conflict of desire with social life. It is, instead, an extension of that conflict. In this section, I will examine the consequences of the conflict between desire and love for extended social bonds, or for bonds that are not directly libidinal in nature. I will argue, first, that the primary form of the relation between the Freudian subject and the social other is that of enmity and that, consequently, the only possible forms of society in Freud's theory are societies of domination, sacrifice, or combinations thereof. Secondly, I will argue that because domination is an essential tendency of the social subject, justice can only take the negative form of mutual sacrifice and is possible only as a compromised mode of the subject's tendency toward domination. Finally, I will argue that Freud's theory only allows for a negative form of morality and conscience in which external social forms of domination are preventable only through the internalization of domination in the individual subject.

Neighbours and Enemies

Unlike the libidinal object, the extended social other is essentially a source of frustration for the Freudian subject. This does not mean that the social other cannot be useful for the satisfaction of the subject's desire, but rather that the social other is only secondarily or accidentally a source of satisfaction. For example, as we saw in chapter three, it can serve as an aim-inhibited substitute satisfaction in the affectionate bond, provided the social aim of unity has been frustrated.⁴⁶ It can also serve secondarily as an assistance to direct satisfaction. For example, the social other can be useful to the satisfaction of vital needs that are, as sources of change in psychic life, a frustration of the general aim of desire. But the social other, unlike the libidinal object, is never a direct satisfaction of desire. Consequently,

⁴⁶ See above, chapter three, 59-60.

the relation of the Freudian social subject to the social other is, unlike the libidinal object, not essentially ambivalent. It is simply a relation of hatred to the other as an external imposition of change upon mental life. The Freudian social other is an enemy, and society is, in Freudian theory, an organization of enemies.

The social other is the neighbour. We have seen that the subject seeks only two kinds of relation according to the other's utility to desire: unity or separation. The social other, because it is not a direct satisfaction of desire, is not an object of union. But precisely insofar as there is society, the social other is not separate. It is near, or next to, the subject; it neighbours the subject. And it is precisely by neighbouring that it frustrates, refusing either unity or separation. We have seen that the love relationship seeks to resolve itself as a relation by absorbing the other term of the relation into the subject. The aim of desire is from the very first an aim to undermine, avoid, and dissolve relations. The social relation is the purest form of the frustration of desire because it is the truest relation. Unlike the libidinal relation, it does not preserve the promise of unity. It is essentially a relation, because it does not aim at the surmounting of its terms. Consequently, it is radically and essentially opposed to the satisfaction of desire. In Freud's social theory, neighbour and enemy are identical.

The link of neighbour and enemy is Freud's explicit suggestion. Of the religious commandments to "love thy neighbour" and "love thine enemies," he declares: "At bottom it is the same thing."⁴⁷ Oddly, however, he feels compelled to justify this link by resorting to a description of *accidental* qualities often found in the neighbour. The neighbour, Freud says, "has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred," because she often shows no consideration for me; she may be willing to harm me; and she is quick to jeer, insult, and

⁴⁷ Freud, *Civilization*, XXI:110.

slander me.⁴⁸ But this is a very poor explanation. He tells us, in effect, that the subject treats the other as an enemy because the other treats her as an enemy. As we have seen, there is no need for Freud to resort to the actual wrongs committed by the neighbour to explain the antagonism of social subjects—the neighbour is *essentially* the enemy. Like his commentators, Freud forgets that his own theory of desire includes in its aim more than just the satisfaction of the drives; any source of stimulation, of imposed change, is an object of hatred. The neighbour is not simply a matter of indifference. She need not *do* anything to become my enemy. That is, she need not do anything other than *neighbour me* by refusing to separate and offering no reason to unify. The neighbour is in its essence an enemy.

We have seen in the preceding sections that the subject's social aims do include an aim of unity with the libidinal other. However, that aim is not consistent with the theory of Eros as a tendency toward social relations. The aim of unity in libidinal relations was sought as a form of psychic death, not life, and it had as its ideal complete unity, the production of a single, unified subject through the domination of the libidinal other, rather than an authentic relation between two subjects. We will now see that the pursuit of psychic death completes the illusion of Eros in the form of a tendency toward ever-greater unities—a parody of Eros in which the pursuit of death produces extended attempts at ever-greater relations of domination, relations which, in their failure, produce ever-greater social bonds.

It was the libidinal object's aspect of satisfaction for desire that motivated the pseudo-erotic tendency toward union with the other. But the general social other, as we have seen, is an essential enemy, offering no such motive for greater social bonds. Consequently, the move to social bonds must be an accident of the attempt to dominate the libidinal other. In

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Freud's social theory, the ground of the social relation is the primal father. The existence of the group is given naturally in the family, but the preservation and extension of that relation has as its support the father's domination of the women in the horde. It is only in relation to the father's desire to dominate the women of the horde that the non-libidinal social relation is maintained. As we saw in chapter three, every male in the group desires the father's position. Strictly speaking, *every* member of the group must covet that position, for it is, we can now recognize, the achieved aim of the social subject: unity with the libidinal object and separation from sources of frustration. Freud calls the primal father "absolutely narcissistic," suggesting that he has achieved in actuality what the infant sought to achieve through fantasy and hallucination.⁴⁹ Every member must envy this position as the actual satisfaction of the social form of its desire. But it is the men in the group, according to Freud, that pose a threat to the father. Consequently, the primal father must dominate the men of the tribe in order to protect the unity he has established with his libidinal objects. It is the rivalry of each individual for full libidinal satisfaction that necessitates the social relation. And the desired social relation takes the same form as the libidinal one: not an authentic relation with, but the domination of, the other. We have already seen in chapter three that extended social relations are not the product of instinctual aims and involve the frustration of instinctual aims. We can now specify, as we did with libidinal relations, the precise cause of that frustration. It is not simply the abstract conflict of inertia and change, but specifically the conflict between the nature of social bonds and the subject's desire for unity with the social other in the form of domination. As with the love bond, such a desire is directly opposed to the social bond because the social bond includes recognition and valorization of the

⁴⁹ Freud, *Group Psychology*, XVIII:123-24.

independent subjectivity of the other and because the bond is essentially constituted by frustration—that is, by frustrated desire for the women of the tribe that has been transformed into affection toward the father.⁵⁰ So we can now conclude that the conflict of desire with social bonds is, like that of love bonds, absolutely insurmountable. To end the frustration of desire would dissolve both love and social bonds, and the libidinal and social satisfaction of one individual or group is only possible at the expense of the satisfaction of another, since the satisfaction of desire requires domination.

The pseudo-erotic move from libidinal to social bonds is, like libidinal union, motivated by the aim of psychic death and seeks domination rather than authentic relations. We have already seen why this aim fails. The threat posed by the group toward any individual rival for domination motivates the shared sacrifice of that aim and the institution of an aim-inhibited bond of fraternal affection. But this still does not explain the illusory appearance of an erotic trend toward *ever-greater* unities. This apparent tendency is explained by the fact that there is no essential motive for the subject to accept the absolute sacrifice of its social aims. The rivalry of the horde motivates sacrifice of that aim only relative to the men and women of the horde. Consequently, that frustration merely redirects the aim outward. As Freud puts it, “One of the reactions to the parricide [of the primal father] was after all the institution of exogamy.”⁵¹ The aim of union with a libidinal object through domination is, in other words, directed toward women outside of the horde. The failure of the social aim within the immediate social group is transformed into conquest, the search for a new libidinal other outside of the fraternal bond to satisfy desire. Undoubtedly,

⁵⁰ See above, chapter three, 60.

⁵¹ *Group Psychology*, XVIII:141.

this outward movement of the aim of domination must encounter precisely the same danger that initiated the fraternal bond. The threat of rivalry in exogamous relations suggests the same outcome—murder or sacrifice. And as a result, we can see how Freud’s theory can produce a parody of so-called Eros in all of its aspects. The repeated frustration and outward extension of social desire could produce a social tendency toward ever greater unities that has its basis entirely in the aim of compromised forms of psychic death rather than life, of domination rather than society. In any case, given the nature of the Freudian subject, the only options for the social relation are either social bonds that frustrate desire’s aim or social relations of domination—in other words, either self-domination or the domination of the other.

Justice, Equality in Sacrifice, and Envy

Because Freud’s theory of desire has as its consequence an essential opposition between the social subject’s desire and the social bond, his concept of social justice can only take a negative form. I will use “justice” in the general sense of social agreements, rules, or actions that have as their purpose both the protection and promotion of the well-being of every member of a social group. I will be dealing with two aspects of justice: its aim and its psychological motive (what justice seeks to achieve and why individuals desire it). A negative conception of the aim of justice is one in which the well-being of those members is defined negatively. In Freud’s case, we may say that justice aims at the equal distribution of the sacrifice of desire’s full satisfaction or, given a more positive spin, equal protection from the desire of other social subjects. A negative conception of the motive to justice is one in which concern for the well-being of others is derivative of a more primary negative attitude

toward the other. In Freud's case, the motive to justice is envy. These two points about justice are explicit in Freud's texts. But I will emphasize them as points of contrast to Nietzsche's views, and I will argue that Freud's view of justice is inseparable from his views of desire. In other words, this view of justice stands or falls with his theory of desire—we cannot take it or leave it in our interpretations of Freud.

“Social justice,” Freud tells us, “means that we deny ourselves many things so that others may have to do without them as well, or, what is the same thing, may not be able to ask for them.”⁵² This is a highly suspicious formulation of the motive to justice, but for now I will focus only upon the aim of justice. Justice involves mutual denial, the equal distribution of sacrifice in relation to desire. This point is well illustrated in Freud's account of the origins of the fraternal bond in the primal horde. The brothers institute a primary form of justice through the mutual denial of the desired position of the father. They each sacrifice the same desire: domination of the horde and the right to sexual relations with women in the horde. This aspect of equal sacrifice is inseparable from Freud's theory of desire for two reasons. First, the subject's aim in relation to the libidinal object is absolute unity, an aim that requires exclusive possession and the absolute separation of rivals from the object. Second, the subject's aim in relation to the social other is for absolute separation, an aim that requires control over the social other as an object of hatred, as a potential imposition of change upon mental life that does not serve the satisfaction of desire. From these two points it follows that the satisfaction of the desire of every member of a group is absolutely impossible. Not only does each subject seek exclusive possession of the libidinal object, each seeks absolute control over the non-libidinal other as both a potential source of

⁵² Ibid., 121.

interference with its libidinal union and as an essential source of frustration in its presence as social—neighbouring rather than separate—other. Consequently, the complete satisfaction of any group member's desire is the complete frustration of one or more other members. Because it is impossible for every member to have complete satisfaction, justice must take a negative form. The well-being of the group can only be defined as the least amount of sacrifice possible for each member. And because satisfaction for one is frustration for another, the least amount of sacrifice for each member is, necessarily, equally shared sacrifice of desire.

This would not be the case in a theory of desire that assumed the mutual compatibility of the aims of all members of a group. One could, for example, view the aim of desire as satisfaction of the drive simply. In such a case, there would be no necessity for equality in the sacrifice of desire. Applying this to Freud's primal horde, justice could be founded through the distribution of the women of the tribe rather than through exogamy. It would not need to be an equal distribution, since the aim of the subject's desire, on this view, would simply be possession of a libidinal object—not exclusive possession, or possession of all the women, or control of the horde, etc. And on such a view, the group's well-being would not be defined negatively, since the satisfaction of desire would be possible. Even if one did view the satisfaction of all members as impossible, thereby defining justice negatively, it would still not be necessary to make justice a demand for equality. If desire were intrinsically insatiable, justice as equality would not necessarily follow. For it would be possible for one subject to achieve the greatest possible degree of satisfaction without its satisfaction being a source of frustration for others. Consequently, Freud's assumption that group satisfaction is impossible only necessitates a negative conception of the aim of justice.

But his view that the satisfaction of one subject's desire is the frustration of another's necessitates the conception of justice as equality.

Freud's explicit account of the motivation to justice is misleading. He has said that in justice we deny ourselves things "*so that* others may have to do without them as well" (emphasis mine).⁵³ This suggests that the motive to sacrifice is some kind of cruel satisfaction taken in the other's privation, that the privation of the other's satisfaction is the primary motive. But Freud's theory of desire cannot justify giving primary status to an interest in the other's desire, whether positive or negative. It is the satisfaction of the subject's own desire which must be fundamental. The subject does not give up satisfaction in order to deprive the other of it. On the contrary, the rivalry of the members of the group for a satisfaction that cannot be shared makes the sacrifice *necessary*. The subject sacrifices full satisfaction in order to prevent the total loss of satisfaction. Sacrifice is not made "so that" others also go without, but *provided* others also go without. This means that although justice is, in Freud's theory, motivated by envy, envy cannot be taken as the primary motivation. The motive of envy must be explained as well.⁵⁴

Envy involves both the desire to possess what another has and, due to this desire, a negative attitude toward that other. Only given the lack of the desired object can we derive from envy a satisfaction in the other's privation. For the negative attitude to the other has its basis in that lack. Consequently, we cannot accept Freud's suggestion that the lack is undergone in order satisfy a negative attitude. The lack in relation to the other originates

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Cf. Nietzsche's criticism of attempts to use revenge to explain how undergoing suffering became a way of repaying debts: "Whoever interposes the concept of 'revenge' does not enhance his insight into the matter but further veils and darkens it (—for revenge merely leads us back to the same problem: 'how can making suffer constitute a compensation?')" (*Genealogy*, II.6).

envy; it must come first. So Freud's negative conception of the motive to justice cannot have its primary basis in the negative attitude of envy. The true basis of that conception is the essential status of the social other as neighbouring enemy. This is the negative attitude that motivates justice. Because the social other is an essential enemy, the subject's aim includes domination of the other. And because the satisfaction of desire includes domination, it is impossible to achieve within the social group. The group will prevent or bring an end to the subject's satisfaction for the very simple reason that it must come at their expense—they will be dominated and their desire frustrated. It is this necessity alone that motivates the subject's willingness to give up the complete satisfaction of desire within the social group.

From this position of necessary sacrifice, we must then understand why the subject also demands mutual sacrifice from the group. Freud's answer is simply "envy." But why must the subject experience envy? Why does it care about the other's satisfaction? There is no basis in Freud's theory for giving envy primary status, for the simple reason that every motivation in the subject has its root in the satisfaction of its own desire. There is no necessity for the subject to experience displeasure in the other's satisfaction *even given its own frustrated desire*, no necessity for it to desire either the frustration or satisfaction of the other as such. It is not the satisfaction of the other's desire as such that motivates envy, but rather the nature of that desire. The other's desire, like the subject's, demands the domination of others, the frustration of the other's desire. The subject demands that the other sacrifice its full desire precisely because the other's satisfaction is also the subject's frustration and subordination. It is only because, on the Freudian view of desire, the advantage of one is essentially the disadvantage of another that the subject demands mutual sacrifice from the group. Applying this to Freud's story of the primal horde, it is only

because the other's sexual satisfaction within the horde is directly a frustration of the subject's desire that the subject demands mutual sacrifice. If the other could obtain satisfaction without further frustrating the subject's desire, there would be no motive for envy and, consequently, no motive for equal sacrifice by all members. We can, then, specify the primary negative attitude that grounds Freud's negative conception of justice: the subject's hatred of the other's satisfaction as her own frustration, or the other as domination. This is the subject's motivation for taking a negative interest in the other's satisfaction; in doing so she protects her own. It is also the motive for taking a positive interest in the other's satisfaction. The other's disadvantage disturbs the balance of mutual and equal sacrifice, and it is precisely that balance that prevents the other from obtaining full satisfaction at the subject's expense; it protects the subject's satisfaction in the limited form in which it is possible.

Morality, Bad Conscience, and the Primacy of Evil

Immediately after introducing the dualistic theory of the drives in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud defensively admits to playing “*advocatus diaboli*,” while insisting that he “is not on that account himself sold to the devil.”⁵⁵ And rightly so: admitting the devil's existence in the form of the death drive does not amount to taking his side. Only the elimination of a counter principle would put him in such a position. Of course, I have argued that Freud's devilish interpretation of the subject's desire was present from the start in the form of the inertia principle, and that the introduction of Eros is a failure. That is, I have been arguing that Freud is, after all, a true devil's advocate. This is most evident in the

⁵⁵ Freud, *Beyond*, XVIII:59.

consequences of Freud's theory of desire for morality and conscience. Because Freud's theory of desire has as its consequence an essential conflict between the subject's social desire and the social bond, his social theory only allows for a negative form of morality in which every conscience is a "bad conscience."

I will include in my use of "morality" both the concept of good and evil and the criteria of moral action. A negative morality is one in which the "good" does not exist as such and must be derived secondarily from evil. Its criterion for moral action is, consequently, defined secondarily in relation to evil. A moral action is one that prevents, eliminates, or resists evil. There can be no "good" as such in Freud's theory, because the well-being of the social group is, as we have seen, negatively defined. The essential conflict of desire and the social bond makes it impossible for every subject in the group to achieve full satisfaction. The good, consequently, can only be understood as the attainment and preservation of the minimal necessary degree of sacrifice from each member of the group. In other words, the good is equivalent to the minimization of evil; it depends secondarily on the existence of suffering, sacrifice, and the subject's intrinsic desire for states that produce suffering and sacrifice (the subject's social aim of unity through domination).

This negatively defined concept of the good closely parallels Freud theory of pleasure. As we saw in chapter one, Freudian pleasure does not have independent existence—it depends upon the presence of pain. An act is pleasurable insofar as it is conducive to the aim of reducing quantities of excitation in the mental apparatus. Pleasure is the sensation associated with victory over pain—it is the negation of pain. It is appropriate then that Freud's original name for the "pleasure principle" was the "unpleasure principle."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, V:600.

Only later was that name modified to become the “pleasure-unpleasure principle, or more shortly the pleasure principle.”⁵⁷ The same negativity is found in Freud’s interpretation of the satisfaction of desire. The satisfaction of desire is not the obtaining of a state that is independently satisfying, a surplus of enjoyment, pleasure, or happiness. It is, on the contrary, a return to a previous state, a state that is not desirable in itself, but only desirable retroactively in relation to the introduction of suffering. So, even if the satisfaction of desire were possible for every member of society, Freud *still* would not have a basis for a positive concept of the good. The good would still be nothing more than the end of evil, the return to a state prior to suffering.

Freud’s moral outlook is even more radically pessimistic, because even the relative good of return (of breaking even rather than surplus) is essentially impossible—one subject’s satisfaction is another’s frustration. So, not only does the good exist only relatively to evil; in a radical way the good does not exist at all, since the elimination of evil is impossible. The good is merely an ideal end to which morality seeks an approximate state. Consequently, the criterion of moral action can only have a negative basis. An action is moral insofar as it prevents, eliminates, or resists evil. In Freud’s theory, we can say that an action is moral insofar as it prevents, eliminates, or resists inequality in the mutual sacrifice of desire among the members of a social group. A moral action is always essentially a negative act. Its ultimate aim is, like that of inertia, to undo or prevent. It differs from inertia in that it is directed toward a level of constancy, a lowest possible level, in society as a whole rather than in the individual alone. Of course, morality can be positive in the sense that it enforces certain actions as duties, rather than simply prohibiting actions. But every positive

⁵⁷ Freud, “Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” XII:219.

duty must have as its essence a negative aim: the social elimination of evil. There is nothing for a positive duty to achieve other than the prevention or reduction of human suffering. There is no good that is more than or other than the negation of evil, nothing for morality to create or achieve that has value independently of the presence of evil. On the level of the individual, we can understand the criterion of goodness generally as the negation of domination. As we have seen, the subject experiences the other's desire as her own frustration, while recognizing her own desire, a potential frustration of the other, as impossible to achieve under the threat of the group. The good is established as a moral principle when the subject recognizes her identity with the other in the shared fate of sacrificed desire, when she desires, as both her own and the other's good, the equal distribution of sacrifice. An activity is good insofar as it supports the prohibition of domination of the social other—that is, insofar as it demands universal self-domination as a defense against social domination.

The consequence of Freud's negative conception of morality is that there is no possible form of conscience other than "bad conscience." In Freud's explicit theory, this fact is explained as an expression of the conflict between Eros and death drive on the level of ego and super-ego. Freud defines conscience as "the readiness to feel guilty" and says that guilt is inevitable: "Whether one has killed one's father or has abstained from doing so is not really the decisive thing. One is bound too feel guilty in either case, for the sense of guilt is an expression of the conflict due to ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between Eros and the instinct of destruction or death."⁵⁸ Obviously, on my interpretation of Freud's theory, the source of bad conscience cannot be instinctual dualism. The true source of guilt in Freudian

⁵⁸ *Civilization*, XXI:131-132.

theory is the conflict between desire as such, the aim of complete unity with the libidinal other and complete independence from the social other, and the compromised desire to protect the partial satisfaction of desire within society through self-domination. That conflict, like the one Freud suggests, is inevitable within civilized society. The fundamental aim of the subject's desire is insurmountable, and the restriction of that aim is essential to the preservation of the social bond. Consequently, guilt is inevitable too.

But the inevitability of guilt is not alone sufficient to call the Freudian conscience an essentially bad conscience. It is essentially bad in the sense that it can do nothing *other* than feel and respond to guilt in its relation to the subject's own desires, and do nothing other than call the other to guilt in its relation to society. Because it has its basis in an essentially negative morality, its every affirmative act, its every endorsement of a value, is essentially a negation. Freudian conscience is a battle of the devil with itself, the conflict of a single desire, and a single aim, with itself. There is no affirmative conscience in Freudian theory because there is no true antagonist in the conflict, no "good will." Without Eros, there is no will that is not evil, no will that does not seek domination of the other, that does not seek to dominate the libidinal object, and that does not hate the social other. Freudian morality and Freudian conscience are the peculiar consequence of a very peculiar form of atheism: one in which the devil survives the death of God.

CHAPTER 5
THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF NIETZSCHE'S THEORY
OF THE DRIVE AS WILL TO POWER

The Will to Power as Domination

Distinguishing the Will to Power as Force and as Relation

In my discussion of a Nietzschean approach to the theory of drives in chapter two, I acknowledged a possible conflict between my account of will to power and some of Nietzsche's descriptions of the will to power.¹ In that chapter, I argued that because Nietzsche considers a quantum of the will to power to be essentially active and identical to its effects upon other forces, we cannot make a distinction between the drive and an aim external to the immediate manifestation of the drive in activity.² However, in a number of places in both the published works and unpublished notes, Nietzsche does seem to suggest an aim external to the activity of the will to power.³ His specific descriptions of that aim vary

¹ See above, chapter two, 42-44.

² My argument for rejecting the notion of an external aim of the will to power was based on Nietzsche's rejections of natural law, of the distinction between act and effect, and the treatment of will to power as essentially active. These views, it should be noted, can all be found in the published works as well as in his notes. Consequently, the apparent inconsistency between the two views of will to power does *not* indicate an inconsistency between the published and unpublished treatments of the will to power.

³ For example, he speaks in *The Gay Science* of "the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power." In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he claims that a living thing "seeks above all to discharge its strength" (§13) and that it strives "to grow, spread, seize, become predominant" (§259). In *On the Genealogy of Morals* he again equates life with will to power, and speaks of organic life as a "subduing, a becoming master" (II:12). In *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), he says that life is an "instinct for growth, for continuance, for accumulation of forces, for power" (§6). Finally, in *The Will to Power* he speaks of will to power as an attempt "to overcome, appropriate, assimilate what it encounters" (§702), "a will to violate and to defend oneself against violation," (§634) and claims that "every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (—its will to power) and to thrust back all that resists its extension" (§636).

from statement to statement—exploitation, distinction, the imposition of form, etc. However, they all share the implication that the will to power has the domination of the external world or the other as its principle aim. Consequently, it is not surprising that many commentators interpret the will to power not only as a force that has an aim external to its immediate manifestation as activity, but as a force that aims, specifically, at mastery or domination—that the will to power is a desire for power in the specific sense of power over the other.⁴ To approach the will to power in this way is to be misled by Nietzsche’s anthropomorphic attribution of a “will” to force—an analogy that suggests a distinction between “volition” and action and treats a force as the traditional agent of an act. Nietzsche may have been misled by his own analogy.⁵ Whether or not this is the case, I believe that both approaches to the will to power can be reconciled.

The tension between the will to power as a force that aims at domination and the will to power as an essentially active force that aims only at its immediate manifestation in activity can be resolved by making a distinction between *relations* of power-*quanta* (or of “forces” in Nietzsche’s modified sense) and the will to power as it applies to individual

⁴ For a number of examples, though there are too many to mention them all, see R.J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 158: “desire for power”; Lester H. Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 1993), 74: “desire to manipulate and control”; Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and The Contradictions of His Philosophy*, trans. David J. Parent (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 123: “The will to power seeks to rule and incessantly to expand its domain of power”; Ike Okonta, *Nietzsche: The Politics of Power* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1992), 50: “a will to exploit, subjugate, overpower and suppress”; and Williams, 42: “striving for superiority.”

⁵ Nietzsche clearly has reservations about the analogy of “will to power” and the traditional notion of the will. See *The Will to Power*, §619: “There is nothing for it: one is obliged to understand all motion, all ‘appearances,’ all ‘laws,’ only as symptoms of an inner event and to employ man as an analogy to this end” and §627: “The psychological necessity for a belief in causality lies in the inconceivability of an event divorced from intent; by which naturally nothing is said concerning the truth or untruth (the justification of such a belief)! The belief in *causae* falls with the belief in *télé*.” His reservations about the traditional notion of the will as a human faculty are, of course, well known. For Nietzsche’s critique of the human faculty of the will, see *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §5 and *Good and Evil*, §19.

forces within those relations. Put another way, we must distinguish *the* will to power from *a* will to power. When we are describing an individual force or quantum of power, we cannot speak of an independent aim. For as we saw in chapter two, Nietzsche claims that an effect is identical to the act (that the aim is inseparable from the deed) and, furthermore, that an act is inseparable from the agent of the act (that the doer is inseparable from the deed).⁶ If a power-quantum possessed an independent aim, this would make it possible for a force to fail to achieve its aim—to be without effect upon other forces. But since a force *is* its effect, this would mean there would be no force at all. A force, understood as a quantum of the will to power, is not an individually existing substance; it is essentially related to other forces. Consequently, it does not have an “aim” in the sense suggested by the analogy of the human will. Its aim is its activity, and its activity is its “substance.” The consequence of this view is, as we have already seen, that a force never fails to achieve its aim: “Every power draws its ultimate consequence at every moment.”⁷ Consequently, for an individual manifestation of the will to power, for an individual force, there is no “aim” in the sense of an effect or state of affairs that is distinct from the activity in which the force consists.⁸

Furthermore, even if we accept a modified notion of “aim” that does not presuppose that the aim is external to activity, we still cannot speak of the aim of a force as domination.

⁶ See above, chapter two, 28-32.

⁷ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §634.

⁸ Nietzsche’s commentators often overlook this point. However, there are a number of authors who acknowledge that the will to power is anti-teleological at root. See, for example, Wolfenstein, 48: “Power is the activity itself, the accumulating and discharging of force. And because the will is *to* power, will to power is not teleological. It does not aim beyond itself but only at the experience of itself”; Golomb, 262: “Power has no purpose but to express itself spontaneously, and true spontaneity has no purpose towards which it is directed and which it aspires to achieve”; and Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 12, where he argues that the will to power has struggle as both end and means. See also Michael Haar’s essay, “Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language,” in *The New Nietzsche*, 10-11, where he points out that the “*zur*” in *Wille zur Macht* suggests “movement toward” rather than an end to be accomplished.

As we have seen, the aim of a force is achieved at every moment. But it is certainly not true that every force dominates other forces. On the contrary, power relations are relations of command and obedience; for every dominating force there is a force that is dominated.⁹ The aim of a force must be one that is achieved by both victorious and vanquished forces. I have already suggested that the aim can only be the manifestation of power as activity, and we have seen that Nietzsche equates a force to its effects.¹⁰ Consequently, the aim must be the effect a force has upon another force. This, in turn, suggests that we cannot distinguish dominating and dominated forces as active and passive. That is, we cannot say that a strong force acts upon a weak force by preventing it from acting. Both forces must be active in the sense that they produce an effect upon the other force.

Nietzsche distinguishes stronger and weaker forces according to *kinds* of activity and effects, rather than according to activity and passivity or according to the achievement or failure of their aim: “What is ‘passive’?—To be hindered from moving forward: thus an act of resistance and reaction. What is ‘active’?—reaching out for power.”¹¹ Nietzsche slips into anthropomorphism when he speaks of “reaching” for power. An active force does not grasp at power, but takes it; it does not strive for domination, but dominates. An active force

⁹ See Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §644: “There is a will to power in the organic process by virtue of which dominant, shaping, commanding forces continually extend the bounds of their power and continually simplify within these bounds” and *Genealogy*, II.12: “All events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*.”

¹⁰ See above, chapter two, 36-37.

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §653. See also *Will to Power*, §642: “‘Life’ would be defined as an enduring form of processes of the establishment of force, in which the different contenders grow unequally. To what extent resistance is present even in obedience; individual power is by no means surrendered. In the same way, there is in commanding an admission that the absolute power of the opponent has not been vanquished, incorporated, disintegrated. ‘Obedience’ and ‘commanding’ are forms of struggle.”

subordinates the weaker force, controlling and directing its activity.¹² What is important in this passage is that the weaker force is not impotent (and could not be, if a force is its activity, and if power is primary rather than an attribute of the agent). A subordinated force still acts, but in the form of reaction. The effect of a reaction is to weaken the other force; the stronger force must expend power to dominate it.

Consequently, the aim of a will to power can take two forms, both of them essentially active. A strong force dominates, which is to say, it controls the activity of the weaker force, thus establishing an organization of forces, while a weak force reacts, which is to say it weakens the stronger force, reducing its ability to further dominate and organize other forces. The common aim of every force is to act—to produce an effect upon another force, whether by directing or weakening it. Those interpretations of will to power which seek to understand individual manifestations of the will to power (such as individual forces, drives or organisms) as domination overlook the latter form that the aim of a will to power can take. They interpret will to power entirely on the model of victorious forces, and consequently treat the weaker force as one that has “failed” to achieve the aim of domination, that “strives,” “wants,” or “struggles” for power.¹³ But a force “wants” to dominate only if it is the relatively stronger; the weaker force in a relation aims not to dominate but to resist. That

¹² Cf. Nietzsche’s critique of chemical ‘laws,’ *Will to Power*, §630: “It is far rather a question of the absolute establishment of power relationships: the stronger becomes master of the weaker, in so far as the latter cannot assert its degree of independence.” See also §552: “Becoming stronger involves an ordering process which looks like a sketchy purposiveness; . . . as soon as dominion is established over a lesser power and the latter operates as a function of the greater power, an order of rank, of organization is bound to produce the appearance of an order of means and ends”; 634: “The degree of resistance and the degree of superior power—this is the question in every event”; §552: “All events, all motion, all becoming, as a determination of degrees and relations of force, as a *struggle*”; and §656: “Appropriation and assimilation are above all a desire to overwhelm, a forming, shaping, and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and increased the same.”

¹³ See Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §668: “‘Willing’ is not ‘desiring,’ striving, demanding: it is distinguished from these by the affect of commanding.”

is, the weaker force in a power relation does not aim for power in the sense of power over the other force, but aims only at its own power, the strength in virtue of which it resists and preserves its activity in the face of domination. Consequently, we cannot speak of domination as an aim in relation to individual manifestations of the will to power. Indeed, we should not speak of an “aim” at all. To avoid the misleading implications of the language of “will to power,” it is preferable to speak of relations of domination as a *consequence* rather than as the aim of a will to power.

Nevertheless, we can consistently speak of an aim of domination provided it is applied only to the will to power generally, and not in its specific manifestations. The will to power consists of relations of power-quantia. If we view the will to power as a relation rather than as the elements in the relation, we can speak of domination as the aim of the will to power. For in every relation of forces the effect is a reorganization of forces in which the weaker force is dominated by the stronger.¹⁴ In that sense, domination is, indeed, the aim that the will to power always achieves. However, because it is *always* achieved—every relation involves the subordination of weaker forces to stronger ones—it is still misleading to speak of an “aim” of the will to power. It would be less misleading to say that the will to power *is* essentially domination, not that it “aims” at domination. And this is, in fact, how Nietzsche often speaks of will to power—even if there are, as we have seen, exceptions. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he says, “Life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and at the least, at its mildest, exploitation,”¹⁵ and in *On the Genealogy of*

¹⁴ See above, chapter two, 30-31.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §259.

Morals he claims, “Life operates *essentially*, that is in its basic functions, through injury, assault, exploitation, destruction and simply cannot be thought of at all without this character.”¹⁶ The word “essentially” is crucial. Life does not *aim* to exploit—as if it could *fail* to do so, as if exploitation were something that belonged to life accidentally and occasionally. And Nietzsche is clearly not describing individual quanta of the will to power; for although it can be said that the weaker force in a relation “injures,” possibly even “exploits,” the strength of the stronger force, it is not the case that the weaker force in a relation “appropriates,” “overpowers,” or “incorporates.”

Distinguishing Domination as the Essence of the Will to Power and as Social Domination

I have argued that the treatment of domination as an aim of the will to power is compatible with the view that the will to power does not have an external aim, provided we distinguish the will to power as relation from a will to power as force in relation. I concluded that the usual sense of “aim” cannot be applied to the will to power in either sense, and that domination can more properly be called the essence rather than the aim of the will to power. It might be thought that such a distinction is ultimately trivial from the point of view of the social consequences of Nietzsche’s theory of the will to power—that in either case social domination is inevitable.¹⁷ Nietzsche certainly encourages this inference. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he insists, “‘Exploitation’ does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function.”¹⁸ And in *On the*

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.11.

¹⁷ For examples of this view, see Okonta, 50-58; Hunt, 74; and Frederick Appel’s *Nietzsche contra Democracy* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §259.

Genealogy of Morals he warns, “Legal conditions can never be other than *exceptional conditions*, since they constitute a partial restriction of the will to life, which is bent upon power, and are subordinate to its total goal as a single means: namely, as a means of creating *greater units of power*.”¹⁹

But there are a number of reasons to be suspicious of the logical move from life as domination to the inevitability of *social* domination. It is not clear, first of all, that the sense of “domination” is the same when we speak of life as essentially “domination” and when we speak of the “domination” of one person or group by another. Nietzsche calls attention to this question when, after declaring that life is essentially appropriation and exploitation, he adds, “But why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages?”²⁰ A sense of “domination” broad enough to describe every level of organic life might not, in other words, tell us anything about the inevitability of social relations of domination in the specifically pejorative sense that indicates suffering or a lack of freedom on the part of the dominated. Linda Williams, for instance, has pointed out that such language can be interpreted in a way that removes the ethically troublesome implications: “It is not such an impossible task to view these words neutrally, for there are many contexts in which the words do not appear to have pejorative connotations. We can suppress laughter, exploit a mine for its ore, and incorporate new ideas into a belief system. Suppressing a laugh in a certain social situation may be prudent on your part, but no one would accuse you of doing something evil or immoral to your laughter.”²¹ If the senses of words like “domination” and “exploitation” are not identical when applied broadly to life and

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.11.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §259.

when applied to human relationships, then we cannot directly conclude that social domination is an inevitable product of the will to power.

Indeed, the sense of domination in each case cannot be the same. For if we equate them, then we cannot make sense of the notion of social or political domination. The latter notion contains an ethical sense, since “domination” in that sense is pejorative. Consequently, it presupposes a meaningful contrast between relations that are characterized by domination and those that are not. If the two senses of domination were the same, then the ethical sense of the word would be absurd. For domination would never be absent and therefore could not be something that “ought” to be eliminated from social relationships. This could be used as an argument for dismissing the idea of a social relation without domination as a fantasy. But such an argument would, first, beg the question of whether or not social domination is inevitable given life as domination and, second, would overlook the fact that all meaningful forms of egalitarianism must surely base their concepts of both social domination and its absence on *actually* existing relationships. In other words, the only necessary conclusion is that social relations that we would generally consider to be relations of equality, Nietzsche would insist are, on the contrary, essentially dominating. Consequently, we might not find relations of “domination” in Nietzsche’s specific sense of that word to be ethically objectionable.

Consider, for example, Nietzsche’s analysis in *The Gay Science* of helping others as an exercise of power. In this passage, Nietzsche tries to expose the true motives of apparently “altruistic” actions: “Benefiting and hurting others are ways of exercising one’s power upon others; that is all one desires in such cases. . . . We benefit and show

²¹ Williams, 25.

benevolence to those who are already dependent on us in some way . . . ; we want to increase their power because in that way we increase ours.”²² The passage is a critique of moral interpretations of volition, but it would be absurd to conclude from it that, because human beings desire only to exercise power over others, harming others is therefore inevitable. On the contrary, the passage shows that “domination” can be expressed in different ways—not all of them harmful. The proper conclusion, then, is not that helping others is a “restriction of the will to life” and thus inevitably rare, but rather that benevolent behaviour and the primacy of domination are perfectly compatible. In other words, Nietzsche’s sense of “domination” is not identical to the ethically relevant sense.

We have seen that the ethically relevant sense of domination that is involved in the notion of social domination is not identical to the sense of domination involved in Nietzsche’s conception of life and will to power as essentially domination. Consequently, the view that life is essentially domination does not entail that social domination is inevitable. However, it is not simply an unnecessary conclusion; there are independent reasons for rejecting that conclusion. I will now argue that on Nietzsche’s view of the drives, the state of being dominated in the broad sense of life as domination is compatible with the satisfaction of the drives and that, consequently, “being dominated” in this general sense is compatible with the absence of social domination. If domination in Nietzsche’s sense is compatible with the absence of domination in the ethically relevant sense, then it cannot be true that Nietzsche’s views about the will to power imply the inevitability of social domination.

²² Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §13.

One might believe that the domination that is essential to life has social domination as its direct result. Such a view suggests a parallel between the relation of forces in the will to power and the relation of social subjects to one another. That is, just as forces necessarily relate to one another as stronger to weaker and dominating to dominated, so must social relations be relations of stronger subjects dominating weaker subjects. However, the direct parallel of force relations to subject relations is unjustified. I have explained in my discussion of the will to power as force in relation that the “domination” at issue is that of stronger forces in relation to weaker forces. The stronger force does not prevent the activity of the weaker but directs, organizes, or controls it. The weaker force, on the other hand, acts by resisting the domination of the stronger; its activity consists in its effect of weakening the stronger force. Consequently, on the level of entities rather than power-quanta, we can conclude that every *effective* activity by an entity (that is, activity beyond mere reaction and resistance) includes the domination of weaker forces external to that entity. Domination in this broad sense is identical to activity in the broad sense of effective action. Consequently, whenever a subject is acted upon or affected by another agent, there will be domination of some of the forces of which the subject consists. To be “dominated” in this sense can mean as little as being affected or acted upon; it does not necessarily mean that the subject is acted upon in such a way as to be subordinated to the other. In other words, forces internal to the subject can be dominated by the activity of an external agent without the subject as such being dominated by that agent.

This clarifies why domination in the broad sense does not entail social domination: it is the domination of forces, and the subject is not equivalent to a force, or even to the sum of its forces, but rather to an arrangement or organization of forces. However, even if social

domination does not follow directly from the essence of life as domination, this is not sufficient reason to reject such a conclusion. In order to understand the nature of social domination, we must understand the consequences of this view of life and will to power as domination for the subject's desire. For if the subject can be said to desire complete independence from external forces, it could be argued that any subordination of a force belonging to the subject by an external agent is a frustration of the subject's desire and consequently an act of domination of the subject. For example, we have seen that in Freud's theory desire has its basis in the inertia principle. The subject's entire activity is directed toward the removal and prevention of stimulation and tension. Consequently, Nietzsche's claim that life is domination would, in the case of the Freudian subject, suggest the inevitability of domination in the pejorative sense. The state of being dominated in its simplest form was, as we have seen, equivalent to simply being affected or acted upon by an external agent. And since being acted upon must result in an increase of stimulation or tension, such affectedness is a frustration of the desire of the Freudian subject. Because the Freudian subject desires to be entirely independent of, and unaffected by, the external world, Nietzsche's claim that life is domination would amount to the subject's inevitable subordination and resistance to an external world that dominates it.²³

However, we have seen that Nietzsche's view of the foundation of desire differs radically from the Freudian view. If, as I argued in chapter two, the drive does not have an aim external to the immediate manifestation of its power, then domination in the broad sense of the subordination of forces is compatible with the subject's desire. For the drive always satisfies its aim: it always manifests itself as either effective action or reactive resistance to

²³ See my discussion of the social form of the aim of inertia, above, chapter four, 94-96.

external forces. Consequently, the fact that the subject can be acted upon or affected by external agents is not a frustration of its desire. The subordination of particular forces in the subject to external forces is compatible with the satisfaction of the drives. Even if forces belonging to a drive are dominated, the “aim” is still satisfied: the drive’s power is manifested in relation to the external force as resistance, as a weakening of the external agent’s power. In other words, Nietzsche’s view of the drives allows for the possibility that forces belonging to the subject can be dominated without frustrating the subject’s desire or resulting in the domination of the subject. The subject’s independence from the external world does not directly depend upon the fate of particular forces internal to it.

The Aim of Desire and the Criteria of Satisfaction and Frustration

I have argued that because the relation of subjects to one another does not mirror the relation of forces to one another we cannot conclude that subject relations are inevitably relations of domination. However, it might still be argued that Nietzsche’s view that life is domination has social domination as an *indirect* consequence. For example, if we assume a parallel between the aim of the subject’s desire and the aim of the will to power as the domination of weaker forces by stronger forces, we might conclude that the desire to dominate others is an essential tendency of the subject’s desire. While it might be true, as I have argued, that social relations are not always dominating in nature and that the subordination of forces belonging to a subject is not directly equivalent to the domination of the subject, it could still be argued that social domination is inevitable as a consequence of the subject’s desire to dominate the external world and others. However, Nietzsche’s view of the drives and the subject will not allow such a parallel between the “aim” of the will to

power and the aim of the desire of the subject. I will now argue that given Nietzsche's description of will to power and my analysis in chapter two of its consequences for drive theory, the Nietzschean subject does not desire to dominate the other.

A theory of the drive based on Nietzsche's theory of the will to power does not directly provide us with a criterion for understanding the satisfaction or frustration of the subject's desire. If the drive is *always* satisfied in one way or another (as either effective action or resistance), it would appear our analysis of the drives can tell us nothing about what the subject desires and how the subject can fail to achieve the aim of its desire. We might speak loosely of the satisfaction of the drive as its manifestation in effective action and of the frustration of the drive as its manifestation in resistance. However, such language is quite misleading, for if the drive has no external aim, then "frustration" of the drive in this modified sense does not necessarily involve a frustration of the subject's desire.²⁴

In order to understand the possibility of frustrated desire, we must understand the satisfaction of the drive in its relation to the subject as well as in its relation to the external world. I have suggested a distinction between the will to power viewed as a force in relation to other forces and the will to power viewed as a relation of forces. The same distinction can be applied to the subject as a manifestation of the will to power. If we treat the subject as a complex force related to forces that are external to the subject, we cannot speak of an aim of desire that would provide a criterion of satisfaction and frustration. Just as in the case of individual forces and drives, the aim of the subject as a force in relation is to manifest power

²⁴ Nietzsche sometimes does speak of the "dissatisfaction" of the drive in this rather misleading way. See for example his claim that "the normal dissatisfaction of our drives . . . contains in it absolutely nothing depressing; it works rather as an agitation of the feeling of life, . . . This dissatisfaction, instead of making one disgusted with life, is the great stimulus to life" (*Will to Power*, §697). If we are not careful to distinguish the satisfaction of the subject's desire from the satisfaction of the drive, Nietzsche appears to be making the absurd claim that dissatisfaction is not dissatisfying.

through effective activity or resistance. Consequently, on this view, the subject always satisfies the aim of its desire as will to power. But it is precisely this view of the subject as a force in relation to external forces that is assumed in the argument that the Nietzschean subject desires to dominate the external world and others. Although we can establish a parallel between the subject as a complex force in relation to the external world and an individual quantum of the will to power in its relation to other quanta, in doing so we are left with an “aim” of manifestation that is always satisfied, rather than with an aim of domination which the subject might fail to achieve.

If, on the other hand, we view the subject as a relation of forces rather than as a force in relation, we can designate an aim for the subject’s desire that can be frustrated, but not an aim that includes domination in the ethically relevant sense. I have suggested that the will to power viewed as a relation has as its aim the domination of weaker forces by stronger forces within the relation.²⁵ Consequently, we might say the subject as a relation of forces, or as a relation of drives, has as its aim the domination of its weaker drives by its stronger drives.²⁶ This provides us with an aim of desire for the subject that goes beyond the mere manifestation of the subject’s power as a complex force in effective or resisting activity in relation to the external world. More importantly, it provides us with an aim of desire that can be frustrated. If the subject is, as Nietzsche suggests, a hierarchical relation of drives in which the activity of weaker drives is subordinated to that of stronger drives, then in its self-

²⁵ See above, 135-36.

²⁶ See Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §230: “That commanding something which the people call ‘the spirit’ wants to be master in and around its own house and wants to feel that it is master; it has the will from multiplicity to simplicity, a will that ties up, tames, and is domineering and truly masterful” and §19: “In all willing it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis . . . of a social structure composed of many ‘souls.’”

relation the aim of internal domination is the very basis of the subject.²⁷ It is because the aim of the subject as a relation of forces has been achieved—because forces have been organized through domination—that there is a subject that is distinguishable from, and independent of, the external world.²⁸ However, in its relation to the external world, it is possible for the hierarchy of drives of which the subject consists to be upset. If an external agent subordinates the activity of one or more of the subject's drives, the conquered drive is no longer in the command of the hierarchy of drives that constitutes the subject. In other words, frustration of the Nietzschean subject's desire can be understood as any obstacle to the activity of a drive that prevents the subject from having mastery over the activity of that drive. The subject's desire is frustrated when it is no longer able to act independently of the external world.

It should be noted that the subordination of a drive's activity to an external agent could coincide with the reduction of a drive's activity to resistance (as opposed to effective action). However, this does not mean that the frustration of the subject's desire is equivalent to the "frustration" of the drive in the loose sense mentioned earlier. Frustration of desire and drive will coincide in cases where an external agent prevents the subject from acting

²⁷ See Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §12: "The way is open for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as 'mortal soul,' and 'soul as subjective multiplicity,' and 'soul as social structure of drives and affects,' want henceforth to have citizens' rights in science"; §19: "Our body is but a social structure composed of many souls"; and §6, where Nietzsche compares philosophy to a personal confession by the author: "[The philosopher's] morality bears decided and decisive witness to *who he is*—that is, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other." See also Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §492: "The body and physiology the starting point; why?—We gain the correct idea of the nature of our subject-unity, namely as regents at the head of a communality (not as 'souls' or 'life forces'), also of the dependence of these regents upon the ruled and of an order of rank and division of labour as the conditions that make possible the whole and its parts."

²⁸ See Lingis, "The Will to Power," in *The New Nietzsche*, 51: "What makes this life, then, my life, *a* life in its own right, something individual and identifiable, is not the fact that it has an inner principle of unity, issuing from the identity-pole of a self-sovereign ego; it is rather that this life, this force, marks a difference in the field of forces. It is only conceivable in a field of force, and it is itself *something* by marking a difference in that field, by forcefully maintaining a line of tension in that field."

upon a drive when it desires to do so, but they will not coincide in every case. For example, if an external agent can prevent the activity of a drive that the subject does not seek to exercise, there is no loss of self-command on the part of the subject. In addition, this definition of the frustration of desire allows for cases of domination in which an external agent compels a subject to act upon a drive against its will. The criterion of satisfaction is not whether or not the subject can act effectively upon the drive, but whether or not the activity of the drive is under the control of the subject or of an external force. The subject's desire must be understood not as the drive's relation to the external world, but rather as its relation to the other drives, its place in the hierarchical relation of forces that constitute the subject.

I have suggested a general definition of the aim of the Nietzschean subject's desire as the internal domination of the drives that constitute it. Consequently, the frustration of desire can be understood as the disruption of this internal organization of drives, specifically, the subordination of the activity of a drive to an external force or agent. From this specific definition of the frustration of desire, we can now designate more specifically the aim of desire. On the one hand, the aim of the subject as a force in relation to the external world is to manifest its power in the form of either effective or resisting activity. This is a primary aim of the subject's desire since the subject, as an organization of forces, necessarily exists in relation to external forces. However, because the subject is also an internally ordered hierarchy of forces, it also has the aim of subordinating its weaker forces to its stronger forces. And because this organization constitutes the subject as an entity distinct from and independent of the external world, the subject's aim of maintaining the hierarchy of forces that constitutes it is at the same time a desire to preserve its independence in relation to the

external world. Consequently, the aim of the subject's desire is to act upon its drives (to manifest its will to power in activity) and to preserve its ability to act independently in its relation to the external world.

It should be noted that the aim of a maintained internal hierarchy of drives is not an aim that is external to the activity of the drives that constitute the subject. In other words, the activity of the forces that compose the subject has the organization of the subject as a consequence, not as an external aim or teleological end to which their activity would be the means.²⁹ The subject's drives do not have the constitution of the subject as an external aim, because the immediate aim of the manifestation of the drives' power in relation to one another is, at the same time, the production of the organization of drives that constitutes the subject. The difference between the aim of manifesting power in the external world and the aim of maintained independence of activity is not that of an essentially distinct aim; rather, it depends upon the differing forces in relation to which the aim is achieved. In the former case, the aim is the manifestation of force in relation to an external object. In the latter case, the aim is still the manifestation of force, but that of the drives in relation to one another, rather than of the subject as a whole in relation to the external world.

Consequently, this view of desire should be distinguished from any view in which the aim of desire is essentially distinct from the manifestation of power in relation to other forces. I have in mind, specifically, the view that the subject has self-preservation as a primary aim—a view Nietzsche explicitly rejects. I have argued that the desire to maintain

²⁹ See Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §552: "That the apparent 'purposiveness' . . . is merely the consequence of the will to power manifest in events; that becoming stronger involves an ordering process which looks like a sketchy purposiveness; that apparent ends are not intentional but, as soon as domination is established over a lesser power and the latter operates as a function of the greater power, an order of rank, of organization is bound to produce the appearance of an order of means and end."

the hierarchy of the drives is not distinct from the aim of the manifestation of the power of the drives. Furthermore, the desire to maintain the hierarchy of the drives is equivalent to a desire to maintain the independence of the subject's activity, because the internal hierarchy of the drives *is*, at the same time, the independence of the subject's activity. That is, the successful domination of weaker drives by stronger drives *is* the independence of those drives from domination by external forces. Consequently, this desire does not include a further aim that is distinct from and external to the aim of the manifestation of power. The desire for self-preservation does, on the contrary, involve a distinct aim external to the manifestation of power. For although the hierarchy of the subject's drives does constitute the subject and is therefore the basis of the existence of the subject, the hierarchy of the drives is not identical to the *preservation* of the subject's existence. Consequently, a desire to preserve the subject's existence would require a distinct aim beyond the maintenance of the hierarchy of the drives. The desire for self-preservation is, therefore, distinct from the desire for independent activity that I have suggested characterizes the Nietzschean subject.

To illustrate this difference, we need only consider whether or not the Nietzschean subject's desire allows for activity that would endanger its existence. For example, is it possible for the Nietzschean subject to enter into an antagonistic relationship with a stronger subject, even though such a relation could bring about the subject's destruction? On the view of desire I have proposed, there is no conflict between the subject's desire to maintain the hierarchy of its drives and the pursuit of an activity that poses a threat to its existence. For maintaining the hierarchy of the drives involves only the attempted domination of weaker drives by stronger ones. It is a demand made by the drives in their relation to one another, and not directly a demand made upon the subject in its relation to the external world.

Consequently, it is not a demand that the subject avoid any activity that might threaten the successful internal organization of the drives.

It should also be noted that the desire for the maintenance of the hierarchy of the drives is not compatible with the view, sometimes suggested by Nietzsche, that the will to power is a desire for growth or expansion.³⁰ I have argued that the will to power does not allow for an aim that is essentially distinct from the manifestation of power in activity, and the desire for growth must certainly include such an aim. For the will to power can be manifested as resistance to domination—and such manifestations do not involve expansion of force or growth. Consequently, everything I have said concerning Nietzsche’s occasional suggestion of a desire for domination applies equally to the notion of a desire for growth. That is, on the level of individual quanta of the will to power, growth is, like domination, a consequence rather than an aim of the activity of the will to power. And on the level of relations of quanta of will to power, I would suggest that growth is, like domination, the *essence* rather than the aim of will to power.

At the same time, the desire to maintain the hierarchy of the drives should not be viewed as hostile to growth specifically or to change in the constitution of the subject in general. As with domination, growth may well be a common consequence of the subject’s activity; it is simply not a primary aim of activity. Nor does the maintenance of the hierarchy of the drives suggest a kind of inertia in the subject, a tendency to preserve a *specific* configuration of the drives. Because the maintenance of the hierarchy of drives is the

³⁰ See, for example, Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §349, *Good and Evil*, §259, and *Anti-Christ*, §6. I believe that these statements, like those concerning domination, are due to Nietzsche’s tendency to treat too literally his analogy of the “will” in “will to power” and human volition. Whatever his reasons for making these claims, I believe the notion of a desire for growth is incompatible with his analysis of the will to power, as I explain immediately below.

expression of the power of the drives themselves, changes in the hierarchy of the drives that are the consequence of the drives are compatible with the subject's desire. Only changes that are imposed by external agents and involve the subordination of a drive to an external agent are incompatible with the desire of the subject. The subject's activities in its relation to the external world must certainly affect the relative strengths of the subject's drives, and such changes would have as their result an *internal* reorganization of the drives, a change in the nature of the subject, that would be compatible with the maintenance of the hierarchy of the drives. The Nietzschean subject is not adverse to change provided that the reconfiguration of its drives follows from the command of its strongest drives, rather than from the subordination of its drives to a stronger external force or agent.

If, as I have suggested, the Nietzschean subject's aim is simply to manifest its power through activity while maintaining its independence, then the suggestion of a parallel between the will to power and the aim of the subject's desire is false. The aim of desire does not essentially include a tendency toward domination of the external world. The subject seeks to express its power, not necessarily to overpower, and it seeks to affirm its own independence, not to negate the independence of external forces and agents. However, even if the subject does not directly desire domination, it can still be argued that it desires domination indirectly. In other words, it might be argued that the subject must dominate others in order to achieve the aim of its desire. This is, after all, the case in Freud's theory of the desire. In chapter four, I argued that the Freudian subject's primary aim of inanimateness has as its consequence a desire to dominate the other. Although the aim of the reduction of tension to the lowest possible level is not directly one of domination, it can only be achieved through the domination of the social other. The reason for this, I argued, is that the

satisfaction of the Freudian subject's desire is incompatible with the independence of the social other.³¹ Consequently, the subject must subordinate the other to its will, not as the end of desire, but as a means to the end of satisfying desire.

However, this is not the case with the Nietzschean subject. For the desire to manifest power in independent action is compatible with the independence of the social other. We have already seen that the primary desire to manifest power is so compatible. It is compatible with the other's independence, first, because it can be satisfied through resisting action, which does not involve the subordination of external forces and, consequently, cannot involve the domination of the social other. Second, effective action in relation to the social other only requires the subordination of particular forces, which is compatible with the independence of the other. To act effectively in relation to the other can mean as little as to have an effect upon the other, it does not require acting in such a way that the activity of the other is subordinated to the subject's will. As for the aim of maintained independence, there is no reason to assume that the subject can maintain its independence only at the expense of the other's independence. The independence of the subject requires only that in its relation to external agents the drive's activity does not come under the control of the other. Because one subject can act effectively upon another without controlling the other's ability to act or refrain from acting upon a drive, the independence of each is compatible with that of the other. The subject's desire to manifest power through independent action can only become a desire to dominate the other secondarily. Consequently, it cannot be concluded that a theory of desire based in the will to power has a tendency toward social domination as an indirect consequence.

³¹ See above, chapter four, 108-09 and 115-20.

The Nietzschean Social Subject

Pleasure, Pain, and the Love of One's Enemies

In chapter four I argued that for the Freudian subject the social other is essentially an enemy. Because the Freudian subject seeks to avoid and undo any change imposed upon its mental life, the presence of the other in the social bond is essentially a frustration of desire's aim. Unlike the libidinal other, the other of extended social relations offers no direct satisfaction of the drives. Yet as an external source of imposed change and tension, the social other is a direct frustration of the general aim of desire. Consequently, the desire of the Freudian subject cannot be fully satisfied within the social relation: there is an essential conflict in Freudian theory between the satisfaction of desire and the demands of social life.

However, a Nietzschean approach to the theory of drives and desire has radically different consequences for the possibility of social happiness. I will argue that for the Nietzschean subject there is no essential conflict between desire and social life: the satisfaction of the subject's desire is compatible with the demands of social life and there is no essential basis for enmity between subjects. Consequently, social conflict does not have an essential basis in the drives and desire of the subject. Furthermore, I will argue that even contingent conflicts of interest between subjects are not necessarily an obstacle to social happiness. Because the Nietzschean subject is able to find satisfaction in the manifestation of power as resistance as well as in the manifestation of power as domination, and because the subject can obtain pleasure in the feeling of power even if its power is not superior to that of the other, social enmity need not be resolved through the domination or destruction of the

enemy. Social conflict is, in other words, potentially compatible with social happiness, provided it does not lead to conditions of social domination.

Because the social other is a direct frustration of the Freudian subject's instinctual aim, the ideal satisfaction of the subject's desire would require the absence of any relation to the external world. We saw in chapter four that this ideal state is an impossible one due to constant change imposed by the drives upon mental life. The Freudian subject must, under the reality principle, seek instinctual satisfaction in libidinal bonds. We also saw that the subject's participation in non-libidinal relations is only secondarily necessitated by its need for libidinal satisfaction. The incompatibility of subjects' aims with one another produces a dangerous rivalry that can only be surmounted through aim-inhibited social bonds.

Consequently, the Freudian subject seeks to avoid social relations to whatever degree possible, participating in them only as a means to the protection of its libidinal aims. Within the social relation, however, it aims at an inauthentic form of relation—the subordination of the other to its own will, a state analogous to the pleasure-ego in which the subject seeks to unite with the other as a single subject, thus absorbing the other term of the relation and ending the frustration that is the essence of libidinal and social bonds.

In the Nietzschean subject, however, there is no basis for hostility toward social relations. We have already seen that the aim of the subject's desire is compatible with the independence of the other, for the subject only seeks independent activity, not domination. Moreover, its independence lies in its self-command, the effective hierarchy of drives in which it consists. Consequently, its independence does not require, as the Freudian subject's does, the complete absence of social relations. Far to the contrary, a relation to external forces is an essential precondition of its satisfaction. For as we have seen, Nietzsche claims

that the activity of a force is identical to its effects upon another force. The Nietzschean subject can satisfy its desire to manifest its power only given a relation to an external force. Because the subject satisfies its desire in its relation to an external force, its satisfaction is perfectly compatible with social relations. Unlike the Freudian subject, which only enters into social relations as a means to the end of instinctual satisfaction, for the Nietzschean subject the social relation can be an end in itself. Because the aim of the subject is independent action, the other may serve as the direct satisfaction of desire rather than a means to that end: it is an external force in relation to which the subject is able act, to produce an effect upon the external world.³²

We have already seen that such a direct relation of activity toward the social other does not have domination as a necessary consequence. Effective activity toward the other requires only the subordination of particular forces belonging to the other, not the subordination of the other's activity to the subject's will. Of course, such a relation *can* have domination as a consequence. If the specific aims of the subjects' activities are incompatible, and the power of one subject is significantly greater, then the weaker subject's ability to act upon its desire will be frustrated. But what is crucial is that such a conflict is contingent upon the compatibility of the specific actions of the subjects and upon their relative strengths; it does not have a necessary basis in the nature of the drives and desire, as it does in Freudian theory. Consequently, if we adopt a view of drive and desire founded in Nietzsche's will to power, we cannot assume an essential enmity among subjects. The Nietzschean other can become, but is not essentially, an enemy. Enmity depends not upon the nature of desire and

³² Lawrence J. Hatab makes a similar point in "Prospects for a Democratic *Agon*," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 24 (fall 2002):134-35: "For Nietzsche, every advance in life is an overcoming of some obstacle or counterforce, so that conflict is a mutual co-constitution of contending forces. . . . The self is constituted in and through what it opposes and what opposes it; in other words, the self is formed through agonistic relations."

drive, but upon the specific activities through which subjects manifest their power, and upon the relative strengths of the related subjects.

I have argued that because the subject's satisfaction is compatible with social relations, there is no essential obstacle to the formation of social relations. Not only can the Nietzschean subject enter into social relations without any necessary frustration of desire, it can also directly satisfy its aim of manifesting power within the social relation. Although the will to power, which reduces all aims to the manifestation of power, cannot provide us with an essentially social drive or tendency, it is unnecessary for Nietzsche to explain the possibility of social life for the simple reason that, unlike in Freudian theory, nothing necessarily stands in the way of social life. However, it is not only true that the Nietzschean subject's desire is compatible with the independence of the other in the social relation. I will now argue that the happiness of the subject of social relations *requires* the independence of the other.

In chapter two we saw that Nietzsche considers pleasure and pain epiphenomenal. Because he believes all motivation is reducible to the will to power, pain and pleasure cannot play a direct causal role in the subject's motivation. As he says in his notes: "Everything would have taken the same course, according to exactly the same sequence of cause and effects, if these states of 'pleasure and displeasure' had been absent."³³ So the consideration of the subject's pleasure in social relationships, or of its social happiness in general, is not directly an issue of motivation. Nevertheless, it is relevant to a proper understanding of the social consequences of Nietzsche's theory of will to power. Any meaningful account of social happiness must take into account the issue of pain and pleasure. Even if happiness is

³³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §478.

not equated to states of pleasure or to the absence of states of pain, pleasure and pain must certainly play a role in the subject's happiness within social life. However, if pain and pleasure are epiphenomenal, it is conceivable that the satisfaction of the subject's desire is compatible with the absence of pleasure and the presence of pain or of, more generally, states of displeasure. So it is not sufficient to argue only that for the Nietzschean subject the satisfaction of desire is compatible with social life. Happiness must also be so compatible. For example, if pleasure could be optimized only through domination or cruelty, it would not be the case that desire is compatible with social happiness. In such a case, the happiness of one could be achieved only at the expense of another. And this would lead us to a radical pessimism similar to that of Freudian theory—an essential conflict that makes social happiness essentially impossible.

The Nietzschean account of pleasure, pain, and happiness does not, in fact, lead to such a view. Not only is the subject's pleasure in social relations compatible with the independence of the other, it in fact requires it. According to Nietzsche, happiness is determined by the subject's feeling of power: "What is happiness?—The feeling that power *increases*—that a resistance is overcome."³⁴ What is crucial in this definition is the focus upon the *feeling* of increased power and overcoming resistance. Pleasure is not identical to an increase of power or the overcoming of resistance simply, as many commentators have suggested.³⁵ It cannot be, for pain and pleasure are *interpretations* of the subject's condition,

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §2.

³⁵ See for example Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 186: "Power is enjoyed only as *more* power. One enjoys not its possession but its increase: the overcoming of impotence"; Hollingdale, 163: "The greatest increase of power brings the greatest happiness"; Williams, 61: "'Pleasure' is, for Nietzsche, an increase in the feeling of power. This is possible only if one has overcome some resistance"; and Wolfenstein, 59: "Thus we have, psychoanalytically formulated, the will to power: overcoming pain to gain pleasure, including the pleasure of overcoming pain." For an alternative view, see Thiele, 12-19. He suggests that for the Nietzschean subject struggle is an end in itself, not a means to conquest.

and not equivalent to its condition: “When a strong stimulus is experienced as pleasure or displeasure, this depends on the *interpretation* of the intellect.”³⁶ Increases of power and the overcoming of resistance may be instances in which pleasure is felt, but they cannot be equated to pleasure simply. Consequently, we cannot assume these are the only instances in which pleasure is experienced. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes the noble type by saying that “being active was with them necessarily a part of happiness,” and he opposes this form of happiness to that of the oppressed “with whom it appears as essentially narcotic, drug, rest, peace, ‘Sabbath,’ slackening of tension and relaxing of limbs, in short *passively*.”³⁷ But the overcoming of a resistance brings action to an end. If there is pleasure in overcoming a resistance, then it is first and foremost pleasure in the *act* of overcoming, not in the fact that the resistance has been overcome. The latter kind of pleasure is more in keeping with the “slackening of tension and relaxing of limbs” that Nietzsche disparages. It is, in other words, closer to a negative and passive form of pleasure that is reducible to the removal of displeasure. And in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche tells us that the noble type is characterized by “the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension.”³⁸ But such a feeling presupposes the presence of resistance—of something that prevents the “overflow” of power and provides the opposition necessary for any feeling of “high tension.” Again, the overcoming of resistance would include such a feeling in the *act* of overcoming, but not in the state of *having overcome* the resistance.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §127. See also above, chapter two, 40-41, and Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §669-70: “The decision about what arouses pleasure and what arouses displeasure depends upon the degree of power.”

³⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §I.10

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §260.

If we insist that pleasure is only found in cases where resistance is overcome, then pleasure would be an interpretation by the subject of its condition that has its basis in the comparison of the state of acting against a resistance to the state of having overcome resistance. On such a view, pleasure could only be experienced *after* resistance is overcome, for prior to that state there is no basis for the comparison of the two. However, in the above passages, it is quite clear that Nietzsche also allows for pleasure in activity as such, not simply in the outcome of an activity that leads to the overcoming of resistance. Consequently, the feeling of pleasure must have its primary basis in resistance, not in the overcoming of resistance. This is, in fact, how Nietzsche often explains pleasure in the *Nachlass*. There he calls pleasure “an excitation of the feeling of power by an obstacle,”³⁹ suggesting that it is this excitation produced by the obstacle, and not the overcoming of the obstacle, that is essential to pleasure. It is resistance itself that is primary: “It is *not* the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure . . . 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.”⁴⁰

If we interpret resistance as the primary basis of pleasure, then there is no inconsistency among Nietzsche’s various statements about pleasure. Overcoming resistance includes pleasure because it involves the engagement of resistance and the excitation of the feeling of power, not because the resistance has been overcome. At the same time, it is possible for any engagement of resistance to be a source of pleasure, even in cases where resistance is not overcome. For every action, whether it is one that dominates or resists, is a

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §658.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, §696.

manifestation of the subject's power. The subject's feeling of pleasure in the manifestation of power is an interpretation based on a comparison between the state of the subject before and after the manifestation of its power in a specific action. It is, as Nietzsche puts it in the *Nachlass*, "a feeling of difference, presupposing a comparison" and a "consciousness of difference."⁴¹ Consequently we can also, on this view, make sense of Nietzsche's suggestion that the noble type finds happiness in activity, tension, and struggle.

To be sure, not every resistance provokes pleasure. We must also be able to distinguish cases in which resistance provokes displeasure. In chapter two, we saw that Nietzsche suggests pain is experienced in relation to an external force that the subject judges to be relatively greater, and that displeasure is "every feeling of not being able to resist or dominate."⁴² If the subject is able to resist another force, it must certainly be capable of acting upon its drives, and this will, admittedly, include the domination of some external forces. The feeling of inability to "dominate" produces displeasure, then, in the sense of the domination of external forces that is part of any kind of action by the subject. But in general we can only conclude that pain is caused by a feeling of the inability to *resist* rather than to dominate. For if we say, on the contrary, that any feeling of inability to dominate is accompanied by pain, then we would have to conclude that there is no possibility of pleasure in struggle, tension, and activity as such—a conclusion incompatible with Nietzsche's statements. We would also have to conclude that the greater the subject's power relative to an external force, the more likely the subject is to experience pleasure—for it is precisely in such cases that the subject can be expected to feel most capable of domination. But this

⁴¹ Ibid., §699 and §688.

⁴² Ibid., §693. See my discussion of the will to power and the pleasure principle, above, chapter two, 38-41.

conclusion is also at odds with Nietzsche's statements. He claims, "An easy prey is something contemptible for proud natures. They feel good only at the sight of unbroken men who might become their enemies and at the sight of all possessions that are hard to come by."⁴³ Strength, he tells us, is a "thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs."⁴⁴ But if pain were simply the feeling of the inability to dominate, then the subject's preferred relation would be to the weaker, to what offers the least resistance to its pleasure in dominating.

As with pleasure, we can only consistently interpret Nietzsche's view of displeasure by rejecting the primacy of domination. Displeasure is produced by a feeling of inability to resist *or* dominate, but it is necessary to distinguish in which cases each applies. In cases where the subject's inability to dominate has as its consequence being unable to resist, then the inability to dominate is experienced as displeasure. That is, the subject's inability to dominate another force or agent only produces displeasure in cases where this inability has as its consequence the subject's domination by that force. And such a case can only arise where the particular aim of the subject's action is directly incompatible with that of the agent in relation to which it acts. In such cases, to resist *is* to dominate, for the subject's resistance directly interferes with the other's ability to act independently according to its will. Put another way, domination is only secondarily an issue in the determination of displeasure. Another agent must first seek to dominate the subject in order for the subject to experience displeasure in its inability to dominate the other. This displeasure is not directly due to the inability to dominate, but rather has its basis in the inability to resist domination. However, in such cases, resisting the other and dominating the other happen to coincide. For when an

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §13.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I.10. See also Hatab, "Prospects," 142: "Not only do I need an Other to prompt my own achievement, but the significance of any 'victory' I might achieve demands an able opponent. . . . So I should not only be in the presence of others in an *agon*, I should also want that they be able adversaries."

external agent seeks to dominate the subject's activity, the subject can maintain its independence, its ability to resist, only by dominating the other—by preventing the action that the other seeks to accomplish.

It should, then, be evident that domination's role in pleasure and displeasure is similar to its role in desire. We have previously seen that there is only secondarily a desire to dominate—namely, whenever dominating the other is a precondition for satisfying subject's desire to manifest its power. Likewise, there is only secondarily pleasure in domination—whenever the manifestation of the subject's power happens to have the domination of an external agent as its consequence. And there is only secondarily displeasure in the inability to dominate—whenever domination is a precondition of the subject's ability to resist being dominated. Each of these cases presupposes a relation in which the specific activities of the subject and object of the relation are incompatible. And, as we have seen, such incompatibilities are contingent, since they do not have their basis in any primary incompatibility of the desire of the subject with that of others. Consequently there is no necessary incompatibility between the happiness of one subject and another in Nietzschean theory. The satisfaction of each subject's desire is compatible with that of other subjects, and the pleasure of each subject is contingently compatible with that of others.

The interpretation I have offered of Nietzsche's view of pleasure has an important social consequence. Although it is possible for the subject to take pleasure in the domination of the other, the optimal condition of the subject's pleasure is, nevertheless, one in which there is not domination. I have argued that resistance is primary in Nietzsche's understanding of pleasure. Pleasure is a judgment about the manifestation of power in relation to an external force; consequently, it requires a resistance in relation to which power

is manifested. Although the overcoming of a resistance includes pleasure, it also brings it to an end. For once resistance is overcome, pleasure is no longer possible in relation to the overcome obstacle. In other words, pleasure requires the independence of the object to which the subject relates in the form of resistance.⁴⁵ Consequently, pleasure can be *maintained* in social relations only if the independence of each participant in the relation is also maintained, for only in its independence can the other provide the resistance that is the essential basis of the feeling of power. Nietzsche's view of pleasure, far from suggesting that the subject's happiness requires social domination, instead suggests that happiness can be maintained only through the absence of social domination.

Furthermore, we need not assume that social happiness has as its precondition a coincidence of values and aims. Nietzsche's view of pleasure also suggests that conflict is not essentially incompatible with social happiness. If resistance is integral to pleasure, then the subject can take pleasure in any kind of social relation—even in oppositional ones. Indeed, oppositional relations may in fact heighten the possibility for the experience of pleasure, since there is greater resistance where there is opposition and difference. In stark contrast to the Freudian view that to love one's neighbour and one's enemy is essentially the same thing, Nietzsche provides us with the possibility of loving one's enemy, of finding pleasure and satisfaction in the relation to the other in its difference.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Cf. Ronald Lehrer's discussion of Nietzsche's influence on the thought of Alfred Adler, "Adler and Nietzsche," in *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, ed. Jacob Golomb, Weaver Santaniello, and Ronald Lehrer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 239: "This striving to overcome is also related to Adler's Nietzschean concept of the 'counterfoil' (*Gegenspieler*), that is, the person who is in some sense an obstacle, but as such is the person in relation to whom one exercises and measures one's strength. A person functioning in such a capacity in relation to us, is a needed resistance for the experience and feeling of increase of power to be possible. Adler follows Nietzsche here, including, it would seem, Nietzsche's teachings about the potential value of enemies."

⁴⁶ See Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy: An Experiment in Postmodern Politics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 69-70: "Respect for the Other *as* other can avoid a vapid sense of 'tolerance,' a sloppy 'relativism,' or a misplaced spirit of neutrality. Agonistic respect allows us to simultaneously affirm our beliefs and affirm our opponents as worthy competitors in public discourse."

Here alone genuine “love of one’s enemies” is possible—supposing it to be possible at all on earth. How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies!—and such reverence is a bridge to love.— For he desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and *very much* to honor!⁴⁷

It is in light of Nietzsche’s view of pleasure that we can most fruitfully interpret his well-known comments in praise of war.⁴⁸ They should not be read as endorsements of the domination of one subject or group by another, nor as endorsements to harm one another. On the contrary, they endorse a condition that *prevents* domination: a struggle of powers that preserves the independence of each subject by preventing the resolution of power relations into a unity in which one party is subordinate. And they endorse a condition that optimizes the happiness of all members rather than necessitating the mutual sacrifice of pleasure: the preservation of mutual resistance as the basis of the feeling of power. When Nietzsche tells us to “love peace as a means to new wars”⁴⁹ he is affirming conflict as such, rather than as a means to the end of the destruction or domination of the enemy.⁵⁰ To affirm conflict as such rather than as a means to an end is to affirm the strength and independence of one’s enemy as the precondition of conflict. The pejorative sense of “conflict,” on the contrary, preserves its pejorative sense of harm to the other by treating conflict as a means to an end: the overcoming or destruction of the other. But this end negates conflict, since to successfully

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I.10.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I.10, “On War and Warriors.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Arthur C. Danto makes a similar point in “Some Remarks on *The Genealogy of Morals*,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). He describes the Nietzschean “warrior” as one “for whom the means is an end, for whom warmaking is not so much what you do but what you are, so that it is not a matter of warring for but as an end” (35). See also Nietzsche, *Twilight*, “Morality as Anti-Nature,” §3, on the “spiritualization of enmity”: “It consists in profoundly grasping the value of having enemies.” As an example of this spiritualization of enmity, Nietzsche contrasts his own position toward Christianity to Christianity’s approach to its enemies: “The Church has at all times desired the destruction of its enemies: we, we immoralists and anti-Christians, see that it is to our advantage that the church exist.”

negate the enemy is to bring conflict to an end.⁵¹ Nietzsche's endorsement of war is, ironically, an endorsement of "peace" in its best sense: not defined negatively as the absence of activity and conflict, but defined positively as the balance of powers, mutual independence, and the active self-affirmation of subjects in their difference from one another.

Noble Values and the Possibility of a Noble form of Morality

In my discussion of the social consequences of Freud's theory of desire, I concluded that Freud's view allows only for negatively determined forms of morality.⁵² In a negatively defined morality, the good does not exist as such, but is instead equated with the prevention and elimination of evil. Consequently, the criterion of moral action is likewise negative: a moral action is one that prevents, resists, or eliminates evil. I argued that Freud's understanding of the good is negative in two senses. First, the good is understood secondarily as the elimination of suffering and instinctual frustration—that is, satisfaction and pleasure do not exist independently of suffering. Second, the good is essentially impossible. Because the satisfaction of desire requires the domination of the social other, each subject's satisfaction can be fully achieved only through the frustration of the desire of others. Consequently, the only aim morality can have is that of maximizing the limited degree of satisfaction that is possible within social life; the good is merely an ideal end to which morality seeks an approximate state. However, if we interpret the drives and the

⁵¹ See Hatab, "Prospects," 135: "A radical agonistics rules out violence, because violence is actually an impulse to *eliminate* conflict by annihilating or incapacitating an opponent, bringing the agon to an end." It is worth noting that the concept of conflict and war that I am attributing to Nietzsche is not identical to that of competition or contest. The latter notions include a distinction between the struggle itself and the aim to which the struggle is a means—namely, winning; whereas the view I am proposing treats the conflict as an end in itself. Consequently, I do not think that Nietzsche's later view of conflict, which has its root in the relatively late addition of the concept of the will to power, should be conflated with his very early views about the Greek *agon*.

satisfaction of the subject's desire in light of Nietzsche's theory of will to power, the consequences for morality are profoundly different. I will now argue that Nietzsche's attempt to ground desire in the will to power allows for the possibility of a positively determined form of morality. The good can be defined positively and independently of the presence of evil or suffering; moreover, there is no essential obstacle to its realization in actual social life.

In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche explicitly provides a positive conception of the good: "What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man."⁵³ The good is determined as the feeling of power and the increase of power, as a positive presence rather than as the negation of the presence of pain or suffering. For Freud, on the contrary, the good is derived secondarily from evil: instinctual satisfaction is the elimination or reduction of instinctual stimulation, and pleasure is the elimination or reduction of tension in mental life. The good is the privation of evil, the limitation of instinctual suffering. And while Freud makes suffering primary, Nietzsche defines the "bad"⁵⁴ secondarily in reference to the privation of the good: "What is bad? – All that proceeds from weakness."⁵⁵ Consequently, the bad exists only relatively to the good; without the comparison to states of strength and the feeling of power, there would be no basis for the judgment "bad."

⁵² See above, chapter four, 125-29.

⁵³ Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §2.

⁵⁴ Since Nietzsche associates the term "evil" with "slave morality," I will use "bad" in place of "evil" when dealing with a Nietzschean concept of morality. Freudian morality, as we shall see, is quite in keeping with Nietzsche's characterization of "slave morality," so the use of the term "evil" is appropriate in his case.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

The difference between the Freudian and Nietzschean approaches to defining the good is analogous to Nietzsche's distinction of "slave" and "noble" forms of morality. The slavish form of morality defines the good negatively: "Slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside,' what is 'different,' what is 'not itself'; and *this* No is its creative deed . . . in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction."⁵⁶ Freud's view of drive and desire, then, is one that interprets every human being on the model of what is, for Nietzsche, only one type—the slave—and the Freudian description of the external world is nothing other than the world interpreted according to that type. The Freudian subject has the source of its motivation in inertia, in reaction to independent stimuli, and Freudian "reality" is in its essence a "hostile external world" against which the subject reacts. It should not come as any surprise, then, that such a subject—and in such a world—can only produce value through negation: the negation of instinctual stimulation and of the pain produced by internally and externally imposed excitation. Freudian morality is a slavish one because it defines the good as the negation of a negatively evaluated state of suffering or frustration. Consequently, there is no good that exists independently of such states.

The noble form of morality is, on the contrary, primarily affirmative. Its concept of the good is a direct affirmation of a positively evaluated condition, rather the negation of a negatively evaluated one. It is, Nietzsche tells us, a morality of "self-glorification."⁵⁷ The noble's conception of the good is little more than an affirmation of its own well-being and

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I.10.

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §260.

happiness: “In the foreground there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow.”⁵⁸

Such a morality begins with the noble’s positive evaluation of its own power, deriving the concept of the “bad” relatively to that primary value: “[The noble mode of valuation] acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly—its negative concept ‘low,’ ‘common,’ ‘bad’ is only a subsequently-invented pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept.”⁵⁹

This primacy of affirmation in morality is quite simply impossible on the Freudian view of human desire, since every positive state in the subject is achieved through the overcoming of a negative one. Freud consequently cannot explain the possibility of the noble type of morality that Nietzsche has attributed to certain human groups. If Freud is right, the noble form of morality cannot exist, since there is no state in the subject that can be affirmed as good simply. Every affirmation of the subject’s well-being is essentially a negation of the presence of frustration, excitation, and pain. Nietzsche’s view of drive and desire, however, can easily explain the possibility of noble morality. For a view of drive and desire grounded in Nietzsche’s theory of will to power provides us with a primary positive state that morality can take as its foundational good, that of power.

As we have seen, the Nietzschean subject is constituted by a hierarchy of forces that exist in relation to one another; that is, these forces are equivalent to their manifestation in activity. Because the subject *consists in* the successful manifestation of forces in relation to one another, the subject’s very existence is a positive manifestation of power. Consequently,

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I.10.

the basis of the Nietzschean concept of the good is the affirmation of the subject's being as affirmative power, just as the noble mode of morality is primarily one of "self-glorification." Furthermore, as we have already seen, this power in which the subject consists is not essentially a negation of the independence and power of the other. It is a simple self-affirmation that does not include any negation of the external world and, consequently, does not require the bad as a precondition of the judgment of good. Nietzsche's view thus allows for a concept of the good that is essentially positive in its definition. Power is good in itself, not as the means to the overpowering of an external force, nor as a means to any end. And consequently, on this view the good is independent of the bad. Unlike the Freudian view, where instinctual satisfaction and pleasure, as the negation of frustration and pain, *require* frustration and pain in order to exist at all, the Nietzschean concept of the good as power does not depend upon its opposite.

Admittedly, the "morality" at issue in Nietzsche's discussion of noble morality is not morality in the usual sense, so we cannot rely upon it alone when comparing the consequences of Nietzsche's view of desire for morality to those of Freud's view. The noble morality that Nietzsche describes is not morality in the usual sense, because it lacks three characteristics commonly attributed to morality. First, it is not clearly normative. Noble morality is described by Nietzsche as principally a mode of *evaluation*, a measuring of the value of persons and actions, not a normative judgment about what one ought to be or to do.⁶⁰ Evaluation of the worth of an action or character trait does not necessarily include the assertion of a duty to perform or avoid that action or to develop or eliminate that character

⁶⁰ There is a certain amount of ambiguity in Nietzsche's use of "morality" in his discussion of noble morality in *Genealogy*. Although he does not appear to always use the term in the same sense in that text, on the whole I agree with Maudemarie Clark's view that Nietzsche "counts the noble mode of valuation as a nonmoral mode of evaluating persons rather than as a morality." See Clark, "Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Concept of Morality," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, 16.

trait. Second, the concept of the good that Nietzsche attributes to the nobles concerns only the well-being of the subject and the social class to which the subject belongs. Consequently, this concept of the good does not take into consideration the well-being of the social group as a whole. Finally, this form of morality does not appear to include any notion of moral responsibility—of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness for an action or character trait.

In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to the morality Nietzsche has attributed to the nobles as noble values and the noble form of evaluation. I will limit my use of the term “morality” to value systems that include at least the first two characteristics mentioned above: normativity and a concept of the good that includes consideration of the well-being of others. This does not, it should be noted, involve a commitment to any specific ethical system or methodology. Normative moral theories may differ dramatically in the specific duties they affirm. These duties may or may not concern general principles of action, specific actions, or the development of character traits, but all traditional moral theories are normative. And although moral theories may differ dramatically in their specific criteria for determining good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, all traditional moral theories presuppose a moral interest in, and duties that concern, the well-being of others.

We have seen that Nietzsche’s view allows for a positively determined concept of the good. However, the noble form of evaluation described by Nietzsche does not necessarily include normative judgments and its values do not include consideration for the well-being of the social group as a whole. What, then, are the consequences of Nietzsche’s theory of desire for a normative social morality in the sense I have described? Is it possible for such a morality to be of the “noble” type? I will now argue that the noble form of evaluation can, in fact, serve as the basis for a noble form of normative social morality. Although noble values

are not equivalent to morality as traditionally understood, and although they have their origin in social hierarchy, they are not incompatible with morality.⁶¹ It should be noted that I am only here concerned with whether or not a noble form of normative social morality is *possible* given Nietzsche's theory of desire. My intention is only to defend Nietzsche against the suspicion that noble values are incompatible with morality as such. I will not defend or endorse any particular conception of morality; nor do I wish to suggest that Nietzsche did or would endorse the noble form of normative social morality that I will describe.

We have seen that Nietzsche defines the good as the affirmation of power, the increase of power, and the feeling of power. This concept of the good coincides with the Nietzschean view of happiness that I have discussed in the previous section. The good as the possession of power is equivalent to the manifestation of power in independent action. For as we saw in chapter two, a quantum of will to power is equivalent to its manifestation, or to its effect upon other power-quanta. So the first aspect of the Nietzschean concept of the good is precisely the satisfaction of desire as I have attempted to elaborate it from Nietzsche's concept of the will to power. Moreover, the good as the increase of power and of the feeling of power is equivalent to the increase of pleasure. I have argued in the previous section that Nietzsche's view of pleasure can only be consistently interpreted as the excitation of the feeling of power in the struggle against a resistance to which the subject's power is proportional. Consequently, the increase of the feeling of power is the increase of pleasure. So the Nietzschean concept of the good is, generally, the affirmation of increased happiness. This concept, in turn, may serve as the foundation of a noble form of social morality by being applied to all members of a social group rather than a specific segment or

⁶¹ Golomb has argued for a similar conclusion. See *Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology*, chapter six, especially 234-242.

class. The good in such a morality, then, is equivalent to the happiness of every member of the social group. Specifically, the good is equivalent to the satisfaction of every subject's desire to independently manifest power through activity and the achievement of pleasure in every subject through the presence of proportionate resistances to their activity.

From this concept of the social good we can then derive a possible form of normative social morality and a primary criterion of moral action. A normative form of noble morality would be one in which one has a moral obligation to promote the good and to eliminate evil. Consequently, according to a normative morality founded in Nietzsche's notion of the good, an action is moral if it promotes independent activity and proportionate resistance for every member of the social group, and immoral if it endangers independent activity and proportionate resistance for all members. Generally, good actions will increase power and the opportunity to manifest power in activity, while bad actions will endanger the independence of subjects' actions, limit opportunities for activity, or promote disproportionate resistances to subjects' actions. In distinction from Nietzsche's merely evaluative conception of good, on this view the moral good would be not simply a positive evaluation of power and the feeling of power, but a duty to produce its conditions. And, in distinction from Nietzsche's merely evaluative conception of the bad, on this view, the bad would be not merely what "proceeds from weakness," but a failure to reduce or eliminate weakness.

Is such a morality possible, and is it consistent with Nietzsche's views? Admittedly, Nietzsche might not *endorse* such a morality. However, my concern is not with what Nietzsche thinks *should* be the case but rather with what, given his view of desire and drive as will to power, *can* be the case. And in this sense, a normative social morality is

compatible with Nietzsche's views. Its possibility is supported, first, by my analysis of the consequences of the will to power for desire, pleasure, and happiness, and secondly, by Nietzsche's own descriptions of the nature of noble evaluation. I will begin by arguing that a noble morality is compatible with my own analysis of the Nietzschean subject's desire. I will then argue that it is also directly compatible with Nietzsche's explicit description of noble evaluation.⁶²

It might be argued that a moral duty to promote the satisfaction of desire of every member of the social group is incompatible with the primary basis of noble evaluation in self-affirmation—i.e., that the “selfishness” that founds noble values is incompatible with the concern for the well-being of others that characterizes social morality. Were this the case, then the moral concept of the good that I have suggested would be internally inconsistent: one could not consistently affirm and promote the increased power and pleasure of every member of the social group. I argued in the previous section that the subject's desire does not include the desire to dominate the social other, and that the satisfaction of its desire to independently manifest power does not require the domination of the other. Consequently there is no incompatibility between one subject's satisfaction and that of another. Furthermore, I argued that Nietzsche's notion of pleasure, when interpreted consistently, has its basis in resistance and does not require the overcoming of resistance. Consequently, there is no incompatibility between one subject's pleasure in the manifestation of power and that of another. Therefore it is possible for the Nietzschean subject to consistently affirm and promote both its own happiness—the manifestation of power in the face of proportionate

⁶² David Michael Levin takes a similar view in “On Civilized Cruelty: Nietzsche on the Disciplinary Practices of Western Culture,” *New Nietzsche Studies* 5, no. 1/2 (spring/summer 2002). He encourages the reader “to think about new possibilities for creating and maintaining a moral order within which the Nietzschean ideal of the creative, self-affirming individual could flourish” (73), and argues that “the body's drives are *already disposed* to develop into the new morality of spontaneity which Nietzsche envisions” (84).

resistance—and that of every other member of the social group. A noble form of normative social morality is possible, because the promotion of the other's power and pleasure is not the negation of one's own. The basis of noble morality—the primacy of affirmation—remains intact when the noble concept of the good is expanded to include the well-being of others.

The conclusion that a noble form of normative social morality is possible might seem surprising, but it is not incompatible with Nietzsche's explicit account of noble forms of evaluation. It might be argued that Nietzsche's description of noble values suggests that social hierarchy and domination are prerequisite to noble evaluation. Consequently, any morality that seeks the promotion of the independence and power of every social subject is fundamentally at odds with noble evaluation as Nietzsche has described it. This is, however, based upon a mistaken equation of the noble as a psychological type with the "master," or with a social position of power over others. Though Nietzsche does connect noble evaluation with social mastery, I will argue that mastery (and thus social domination) is not a precondition of noble evaluation. Such conditions cannot be a prerequisite to noble evaluation, because any set of values that require domination of the other will conform to Nietzsche's description of "slave" values rather than that of "noble" values.

Nietzsche's discussions of noble morality in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* appear to suggest that noble evaluation is the direct product of the condition of belonging to a privileged and more powerful social group. This leads some commentators to suggest that noble forms of evaluation (and, consequently, the noble form of normative social morality I have elaborated) are impossible without the division of the

community into higher and lower, more and less powerful, dominating and dominated.⁶³ But although Nietzsche does associate noble values with a master class that dominates a weaker class, we cannot directly infer from this that social domination is a precondition of noble values. Even if social mastery can be the basis of noble evaluation, it need not be the *only possible* basis. More importantly, social mastery may not directly be the basis of noble evaluation at all.

Although it is a “master” class that founds values of the noble type, Nietzsche does not give any indication that this is *because* it occupies the social position of master. He does, however, make it quite clear that the slave class produces slavish values *because* of its social condition of oppression. In other words, social domination *is* a direct basis for the production of slavish values. The essentially negative nature of slave evaluation directly reflects the misery of the slave’s condition: “Suppose the violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, who are uncertain of themselves and weary, moralize: what will their moral valuations have in common? Probably, a pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man along with his condition.”⁶⁴ And the slavish concept of the good, as we have seen, originates as a direct negation of the hated other who causes, or is thought to cause, the slave’s misery. It is *because* the slave is dominated, because it is “denied the true reaction, that of deeds,”⁶⁵ that it makes its oppressor the negative measure of value. Slave values are characterized by “the longing for *freedom*,

⁶³ See, for example, Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 248: “Master morality always implies an oppressed class.” See also Appel, 2: “[Nietzsche’s] work is an uncompromising repudiation of both the ethic of benevolence and the notion of the equality of persons.”

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §260.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I.10.

the instinct for happiness and the subtleties of the feeling of freedom,”⁶⁶ precisely because they have their basis in the *absence* of freedom and happiness. Consequently, we are quite justified in assuming that the slavish form of evaluation requires social hierarchy, domination, and oppression. But this is not the case with the noble form of evaluation.

The conditions that give rise to the noble form of values are, as we have seen, those of happiness—in Nietzsche’s language, of power and the feeling of power. Nietzsche says that the noble “honors himself as one who is powerful” and as one “who has power over himself.”⁶⁷ The “basic concept” of noble evaluation is the assertion, “We noble ones, we good, beautiful, happy ones!”⁶⁸ But if the precondition of noble self-affirmation is happiness, then we cannot assume that social mastery is also a precondition and that, consequently, social domination is necessary for the possibility of a noble form of morality. I have argued that the basis of happiness for the Nietzschean subject is independent action and proportionate resistance. Social mastery, the ability to dominate others, and greater strength relative to another can provide happiness for the Nietzschean subject, but only because they also provide active independence. If, as I have argued, the satisfaction of desire and the production of pleasure in the Nietzschean subject do not require domination of the social other—if mutual social happiness is possible—then noble evaluation can exist without social hierarchy or domination. Social masters may be nobles, but nobles need not be masters.⁶⁹ I do not wish to suggest that Nietzsche would agree that noble evaluation is

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §260.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I.10.

⁶⁹ See Haar, 22: “It is clear enough that, for Nietzsche, the ‘master’ . . . is not the master of the slave, but the master of himself, his acts, and, above all, his ‘inward chaos.’”

independent of social domination. As I have mentioned before, Nietzsche is sometimes misled by his own analogy of the will to power and volition into treating domination as an aim and end of desire. But even if Nietzsche is willing to treat the social condition of mastery as a precondition of the noble form of evaluation, he cannot base such a position upon his analysis of noble evaluation. That is, even if Nietzsche holds such a view, his discussion of noble values does not require that he hold it.

We cannot, then, directly infer from Nietzsche's description of noble values that they require social hierarchy as their basis. But there is also good reason for rejecting such a conclusion: a type of evaluation that requires the existence of an oppressed or inferior other will correspond to Nietzsche's description of slave values rather than noble values. For if noble values presuppose the social condition of mastery, then the noble concept of the good must include that condition. In other words, the noble's superiority must be determined relatively to the slave's inferiority. If that were the case, then the good would be determined not as power, happiness, or pleasure simply, but would depend upon comparison to the other as the measure of power and happiness. The noble value of goodness would then require its opposite, and social hierarchy and domination would be necessary in order to provide the difference upon which the noble conception of good would then depend. But such a conception of the good is no longer primarily affirmative, as Nietzsche has claimed is the case with noble values. Like the slavish concept of the good, it begins with a primary "No," a "need to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself": the good as the negation of equality or weakness relative to the other and thus as the negation of the other's power and independence.⁷⁰ Whereas the noble type "experiences *itself* as determining values" and sees

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy* I.10. See also II.2: "The 'free' man, possessor of a protracted and unbreakable will, also possesses his *measure of value*: looking out upon others from himself, he honors or he despises."

itself as “that which first accords honor to things,”⁷¹ this concept of the good is one in which the subject needs the other in order to determine its value; its value is determined through comparison. Admittedly, the noble form of evaluation also includes comparison, but in precisely the opposite way: the noble determines its concept of the bad through comparison to itself as “good.” In the case of values that include mastery in their conception of the good, on the contrary, the bad is not derived secondarily; the good requires a prior conception of the bad—that of the other’s equality and independence.⁷² Ultimately, we cannot view the condition of mastery as a prerequisite to noble forms of evaluation without seriously endangering Nietzsche’s distinction of noble and slavish values, perhaps even collapsing them. Consequently, there is no essential incompatibility between noble values and the absence of social hierarchy and domination. Nor is there an essential incompatibility between the noble form of affirmative evaluation and normative social morality.

The Possibility of Good Conscience

Nietzsche’s conception of the nature of conscience is opposed to that of Freud in every possible way. For Freud, conscience is primarily associated with bad will, repression, subordination to social prohibition, and the feeling of guilt. For Nietzsche, conscience is primarily related to affirmation, memory, individual sovereignty, and the feelings of pride

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Good and Evil*, §360.

⁷² For an excellent analysis of the difference between noble and slavish forms of negation, see Deleuze on the distinction between aggression and *ressentiment* in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 121: “The man of *ressentiment* needs to conceive of a non-ego, then to oppose himself to this non-ego in order to posit himself as self. This is the strange syllogism of the slave: he needs two negations in order to produce an appearance of affirmation.” See also Freud’s distinction between sadism as mere aggression and sadism that seeks to inflict pain, “Instincts,” XIV:128, and Golomb, 239: “A man possessing a full sense of positive power does not need to exploit others to confirm and enhance his own self. Hence, only such an individual can allow himself to regard others not as a means only, but also as ends in themselves.”

and power. To be sure, Freudian “bad conscience” has its parallel in Nietzsche’s philosophy—but only as a modality of conscience, not as its essence. In my discussion in chapter four of the Freudian conception of conscience, I argued that Freudian conscience is essentially “bad” in the sense that 1) guilt is made inevitable by an essential conflict between the primary desire to dominate the other and the compromised social desire to achieve partial satisfaction through self-domination, and 2) its *only* function is to negate anti-social desire and to produce the feeling of guilt—every activity of conscience is essentially negative because the good in Freudian theory is essentially negative in character. In Nietzsche’s theory of conscience, on the contrary, there is no essential conflict of desire that would lead to the inevitability of bad conscience as the feeling of guilt, and the function of conscience is not solely to negate bad will and produce guilt—indeed, its original function is to affirm and sustain the will in the form of promise and responsibility. The striking consequence of such a view of conscience is the possibility of forms of moral responsibility in which guilt, blame, and “bad conscience” play no role. Put another way, a noble form of moral conscience is possible.

I will not dwell on the first point, since it follows directly from my analysis of the social consequences of Nietzsche’s theory of drive and desire. We saw in chapter four that for the Freudian subject guilt is inevitable due to an essential instinctual conflict. I argued that because the Freudian subject’s desire is based in hostility toward the external world and includes an essential tendency toward domination of the social and libidinal other, the subject’s true desire is always essentially in conflict with the social good. Although the demands of conscience are supported by the compromised social desire to protect limited instinctual satisfaction through the renunciation of domination, this desire is only a

modification of the foundational desire for domination. Consequently, “bad will” belongs essentially to the Freudian subject. This is not the case with the Nietzschean subject. I have argued above that the Nietzschean subject’s desire is for independent activity in relation to proportionate resistance, and that this desire is essentially compatible with the social good—i.e., that if desire has its basis in the will to power, then the mutual happiness of every subject in a social group is possible in principle. Because there is no essential conflict between the Nietzschean subject’s principal desire and an interest in the well-being of every subject, there is no inevitability to “bad will” and thus no inevitability to bad conscience and guilt. It is possible for the Nietzschean subject to have a good conscience: to will to promote the well-being of the other without, at the same time, negating its own desire.⁷³

But Nietzschean “good conscience” need not be defined only negatively as the absence of bad will or guilt. Conscience originates in an essentially affirmative act: the promise. According to Nietzsche, forgetting is an active “faculty” that is essential to human health.⁷⁴ Consequently, promising requires a sustained act of will to continually counter forgetfulness: “This involves no mere passive inability to rid oneself of an impression, . . . but an active *desire* not to rid oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once,

⁷³ For a contrary view, see Daniel W. Conway, “The Birth of the Soul: Toward a Psychology of Decadence,” in *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, 57: “By tracing the etiology of decadence to the illness of the bad conscience, Nietzsche thus accounts for the fatalism that pervades his 1888 writings. The bad conscience is the ineliminable, non-negotiable opportunity cost of civilization itself; it is the very condition and ground of human interiority as we now know it. Although some peoples and cultures can successfully mitigate its effects, thereby postponing the onset of decadence, no people or culture can opt out of the illness that constitutes and defines the human species. Death alone can free the human animal from the pain of the bad conscience.”

⁷⁴ In his essay, “Freud and Nietzsche, 1892-1895,” in *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, 190, Lehrer misleadingly compares this faculty of forgetting to Freudian repression. However, there are important differences between the two notions. Nietzsche speaks simply of forgetting; there is no indication that an idea is, as is the case with Freudian repression, maintained unconsciously. Furthermore, Nietzsche gives no indication that the act of forgetting is motivated by the specific content of an idea, which is crucial to the Freudian notion of repression.

a real *memory of the will*.”⁷⁵ This primary act of memory and sustained volition that serves as the origin of conscience is—much like the noble conception of the good—a form of self-affirmation. Nietzsche calls the capacity of memory and protracted will “the right to make promises,” an ability that provides “the right to stand security for oneself and to do so with pride, thus to possess also the *right to affirm oneself*.”⁷⁶

Consequently, the primary act of conscience—the act of memory that founds the ability to make promises—is an act of good conscience: not the negation of a desire but an act of continued affirmation of desire. Whereas the founding act of the Freudian conscience is obedience to a negative, external command—to the “thou shalt not” of the father’s prohibition of incest—the foundational act of Nietzschean conscience is an affirmative self-command, an “original ‘I will,’ ‘I shall do this’”⁷⁷ that is actively willed by the subject. While Freudian conscience encourages a primary forgetting of the subject’s desire—the child’s repression of its incestuous desire for its mother—Nietzschean conscience commemorates and affirms the subject’s desire through “protracted will.”⁷⁸ And while the founding affect of Freudian conscience is the guilt that serves as the child’s self-punishment for its forbidden desire, the founding affect of Nietzschean conscience is pride in the feeling of power that accompanies the subject’s ability to sustain an act of volition in the face of change: “A proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of *what* has at length been

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.1

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II.2

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, II.1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, II.2.

achieved and become flesh in him, a consciousness of his own power and freedom, a sensation of mankind come to completion.”⁷⁹

This connection of Nietzschean conscience to freedom is perhaps the most striking point of contrast to the Freudian view. Although Freudian conscience makes possible individual self-control and responsibility, it has its primary basis in subordination to social control: the internalization of external authority and the sacrifice of the original object of desire. Consequently, in the Freudian subject, individual sovereignty is from the start a compromise; the individual is freed only through socially mediated strategies of self-domination and the frustration of the drives—fortunately so, if Freud is correct in the view that the subject’s essential will is a devilish one that has its root in suicidal, murderous, and dominating drives.⁸⁰ For Nietzsche, on the contrary, the invention of conscience and responsibility makes possible a truly “sovereign individual” whose freedom consists not in the internalization of external authority, but rather in independence from it: “Like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for ‘autonomous’ and ‘moral’ are mutually exclusive).”⁸¹ Nietzschean conscience is independent of morality because it has its basis in the subject’s self-affirmation of desire, rather than in an externally imposed prohibition of the subject’s desire. Such affirmative and independent acts of conscience are essentially impossible on the Freudian understanding of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ In his fascinating essay “Nietzsche and Analytic Ethics,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, Frithjof Bergmann argues that many philosophers’ principal objection to Nietzsche’s account of morality has its roots in an assumption of egoism that Nietzsche does not share. Because they presuppose the truth of egoism in its usual sense, they conclude, “The values of self-denial, self-effacement, deference, modesty, meekness, and forbearance have to be enforced and practiced after all, since the world otherwise would be a raw, cruel and blood-drenched place” (86). Such a conclusion is not compatible with Nietzsche’s view of human motivation, but it is certainly appropriate if Freud’s views are correct.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.2.

conscience. It is true that Freudian conscience has its beginnings in a contingently negative act: the father's prohibition of the child's incestuous desire. However, as we have seen, the Freudian subject's desire is, at root, always at odds with social and moral demands. In Freudian conscience, every self-affirmation of the will is the affirmation of a negative desire; it is the negation of the subject's essential desire to dominate the social and libidinal other.

It might be objected that Nietzschean conscience is capable of being a "good conscience" only because he is using the term in a different sense. Nietzschean "conscience" is not moral conscience, just as Nietzsche's "noble morality" is not truly a morality. After all, the accompanying notions of promise and responsibility are of the subject to itself rather than to another. While this is true, the possibility of a noble form of normative social morality also provides for the possibility of a Nietzschean form of moral conscience. Because the subject can, as I have argued above, will to promote the other's happiness without necessarily negating its own desire and happiness, Nietzschean conscience can be the sustained affirmation of a *moral* will and still be free of bad conscience. To be sure, this does not mean bad conscience is impossible; only that it has its basis in contingent conflicts of will rather than necessary ones.

For Nietzsche, bad conscience originates, as does the slavish form of evaluation, with social domination. It begins, he tells us, when a "conqueror and master race . . . lays its terrible claws upon a populace perhaps tremendously superior in numbers but still formless and nomad."⁸² It is this condition of social oppression that produces what Nietzsche calls the "internalization of man," in which drives that are prevented from discharging themselves externally are turned inward, and this internalization of powerful drives produces "bad

⁸² Ibid., II.17.

conscience.”⁸³ Nietzsche’s explanation of bad conscience in many ways parallels Freud’s explanation of guilt in his later essays. Freud suggests that civilization requires the diversion of destructive drives away from the social other, and that guilt is produced when these drives seek substitute satisfaction in self-punishment. But we should be wary of conflating the two accounts. Freud’s theory places the origin of guilt in an essentially destructive drive. Consequently, it leads necessarily to the pessimistic choice between the absence of society or a society of insurmountable self-destructiveness in the form of guilt. But as we have seen, Nietzsche’s view of human desire does not admit of any essential aim that is external to the manifestation of power in activity. Consequently, it cannot be the internalization of *essentially* destructive drives. Admittedly, Nietzsche’s account encourages such a view: “All those instincts of wild, free, prowling man turned backward *against man himself*. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction—all this turned against the possessors of such instincts.”⁸⁴ But although the foundation of desire in will to power allows for pleasure in destruction (just as it allows for pleasure in anything that produces a feeling of power), it cannot admit of drives that have such destructive behavior as an *essential aim*.⁸⁵ Consequently, unlike Freud’s view, there is no inevitability to self-destructive and self-punishing behavior. The production of bad conscience depends upon the condition of social oppression. Self-cruelty only becomes a necessary outlet for the drives if other forms of the manifestation of power are prevented. I have already argued that the Nietzschean subject’s desire is not essentially incompatible with social life; consequently, there is no social

⁸³ Ibid., II.16.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ For an excellent discussion of Nietzsche’s view of cruelty, see Ivan Soll, “Nietzsche on Cruelty, Asceticism, and the Failure of Hedonism,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*. See especially 175: “Nietzsche’s explanation consists in a removal of the locus of the satisfaction of cruelty away from the occurrence of the suffering in the other (and even from my own consciousness of or belief in this suffering), and its relocation in my feeling of delight in being able to make him suffer, that is, in my enjoyment of my own power.”

necessity for the instinctual frustration that produces bad conscience. Like the slavish form of evaluation, bad conscience follows only from social hierarchy, not directly from the nature of the subject's drives and desire.

What Nietzsche and Freud call "bad conscience" might, in the spirit of Nietzsche's distinction of noble and slavish evaluation, be more accurately named "evil conscience." In both cases, bad conscience is characterized by more than just the negation of an act or desire; it includes cruelty, or satisfaction in causing oneself harm or suffering. What is most significant about the possibility of a noble form of conscience is that its negative form need not include self-cruelty and guilt—that "bad conscience" need not be "evil conscience." If, as I have argued, Nietzschean conscience is primarily an affirmation of the will and if, in the absence of conditions of social oppression, self-cruelty is not a necessary aspect of conscience, then it is possible for a noble form of normative social morality to be free of cruelty and guilt. An act of conscience may include the moral negation of an act or desire without the additional self-punishing affect of guilt or blameworthiness. Consequently, a noble form of normative social morality can be effective in the realization of its aims without inflicting, or demanding the self-infliction of, suffering.

The Possibility of a Noble Form of Social Justice

In chapter four I argued that the Freudian conception of justice is negatively defined in both aim and motive.⁸⁶ The aim of Freudian justice is negatively defined because the well-being of the social group can only be achieved as the equal distribution of instinctual sacrifice among the group's members. The motive of Freudian justice is negatively defined

because the social subject's participation in justice has its basis in the subject's primary hostility toward others. Because every subject's desire has social domination as the prerequisite of full satisfaction, each subject can preserve partial satisfaction of its desire only by giving up its own full satisfaction of desire. The motive to justice, then, is the recognition of the mutual hostility of the members of the social group, and of the threat posed by the group to any individual member's full satisfaction of desire. I will now argue that a view of desire grounded in Nietzsche's concept of will to power and in his treatment of the noble form of evaluation does not necessitate a form of justice defined negatively in either aim or motive. Furthermore, I will argue that this positively determined conception of justice is not only compatible with a noble conception of the good, but that it is, in fact, a necessary consequence of such a view.

Freud's view of desire necessitates a negatively determined aim of social justice because the full satisfaction of each subject's desire includes hostility and the desire to dominate; consequently, the desire of each subject is incompatible with that of others. The aim of Freudian justice cannot be, for example, to simply promote and protect the well-being of every member of the social group. For the simple promotion and protection of one subject's well-being endangers that of others. Consequently, the sacrifice of each subject's full satisfaction of desire is necessary, and the aim of justice can only be defined negatively as the reduction of suffering and instinctual sacrifice to the lowest degree possible. This aim, in turn, is a demand for a negatively determined equality among subjects. Because the full satisfaction of each subject's desire is possible only through the frustration of another's, the

⁸⁶ See chapter four, above, 120-25.

only way to achieve the lowest level of frustration for every member is through the equal distribution of this frustration.

The negatively determined aim of justice as equality in sacrifice depends, then, upon the essential conflict of the subject's desire with the well-being of the group. I have argued that there is no such conflict in the Nietzschean account of desire. Consequently, there is no need to define the aim of justice negatively. The aim of social justice can be defined in such a way that it complements the noble form of morality that I suggested above. If noble morality is the promotion of the happiness of every social subject, and the happiness of each subject is in principle compatible with that of every other, then we may consistently define the aim of social justice as the protection of the happiness of every social subject. For justice can protect the happiness achieved by any individual without necessarily negative consequences for the happiness of other subjects.

This notion of social justice is not one that depends directly upon a principle of social equality. As we saw in my discussion of Freudian justice, the demand for equality was necessitated by the incompatibility of each subject's desire with the well-being of the social group. Equality in the satisfaction of desire or in the achievement of pleasure is necessary only if greater happiness for one subject has as its consequence greater unhappiness for another. As we have seen, this is not the case in a Nietzschean understanding of desire. At the same time, however, the principle of social equality is not incompatible with this concept of justice. On one hand, greater happiness for one subject does not amount to less happiness for another. On the other hand, equality in happiness *also* does not necessarily affect another's happiness negatively. Despite Nietzsche's notorious contempt for the concept of

social equality,⁸⁷ the principle of social equality is problematic only given the Freudian assumption of incompatible desires. For it is only on such a view that social equality requires the *reduction* of the power and happiness of some in order to achieve the condition of social equality for all. The Nietzschean view of power and happiness, on the contrary, allows for a promotion of social equality that is essentially affirmative: the happiness of every subject can in principle be *brought up to* the same level. Equality, then, is not necessarily the negation of the happiness of those with greater power; it can instead be the promotion of the power and happiness of the unequal.⁸⁸ And, consequently, noble justice can include in its aim the *promotion* of social equality as well as the protection of happiness.⁸⁹

I will ultimately argue that such a promotion of social equality is, in fact, a necessary part of the aim of a noble conception of justice. However, I will first argue that Nietzschean justice can be defined positively in motivation as well as in aim. We saw in chapter four that the Freudian subject's motivation to justice has its basis in a negative relation to the other. Freud suggests that this primary negative relationship is one of envy. I have argued, however, that this attitude can only be understood as a manifestation of a more primary hostility toward the other as the frustration of desire. The basis of the Freudian subject's envy is the recognition that the other's advantage is achieved at its own disadvantage. The

⁸⁷ See, for example, Nietzsche, *Gay Science* §377; *Zarathustra*, II.7; *Good and Evil*, §44, 62, 212, 238, and 265; and *Twilight*, §48.

⁸⁸ See Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), §300, on the "two kinds of equality": "The thirst for equality can express itself either as a desire to draw everyone down to oneself (through diminishing them, spying on them, tripping them up) or to raise oneself and everyone else up (through recognizing their virtues, helping them, rejoicing in their success)." It is only in the former case that Nietzsche's accusations that the "preachers of equality" are "secretly vengeful," and desire "to hurt those who now have power," have any weight (*Zarathustra*, II.7).

⁸⁹ For an excellent discussion of the democratic possibilities of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, see David Owen, "Equality, Democracy, and Self-Respect: Reflections on Nietzsche's Agonal Perfectionism," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 24 (fall 2002):119-125.

motivation to accept the sacrifice of full desire required by justice comes from the recognition that, due to the mutual incompatibility of desires, one can protect one's own desire from the other only through such a sacrifice. The motivation to justice is, then, hostility toward the other's happiness on the basis that it is a threat to one's own happiness.

Nietzsche's conception of justice is radically opposed to the Freudian view that justice is motivated by primary hostility toward the other. Justice is not grounded in what he calls "reactive" feelings—feelings such as resentment, envy, or the desire for revenge: "As for Dühring's specific proposition that the home of justice is to be sought in the sphere of the reactive feelings, one is obliged for truth's sake to counter it with a blunt antithesis: the *last* sphere to be conquered by the spirit of justice is the sphere of the reactive feelings."⁹⁰

Nietzsche associates "reactive feelings" with the origin of slavish forms of evaluation. They are reactive in that they take the form, not of the subject's affirmation of its own power and happiness, but rather of a reaction to, and negation of, the power and happiness of others. Not surprisingly, Nietzsche believes that justice, like morality and conscience, originates with the nobles—with precisely those who, given their position of social privilege, have little cause for resentment or desire for revenge. Consequently, far from being a direct manifestation of reactive feelings, justice originates, on Nietzsche's view, as "the struggle *against* the reactive feelings, the war conducted against them on the part of the active and aggressive powers Wherever justice is practiced and maintained one sees a stronger power seeking a means of putting an end to the senseless raging of *ressentiment* among the weaker powers that stand under it."⁹¹ According to Nietzsche, the struggle against

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

ressentiment includes both the protection of the subject and the introduction of forms of compensation for damages—that is, it includes measures that both prevent and alleviate the conditions that produce reactive feelings. The institution of law prevents such conditions by protecting subjects from one another, while the establishment of legal equivalents through which to compensate subjects for injury helps bring reactive feelings to an end by eliminating the need for retribution.⁹²

Nietzsche's explicit description of the original aim of justice coincides in at least one respect with the noble form of justice I proposed above. It is the affirmation and protection of the social subject's happiness—specifically, the protection of the members of the social group from retribution—rather than a negative demand for a minimal level of sacrifice on the part of each social subject. But what motivates this struggle against, and protection from, “reactive feelings”? The motive to participate in, and to impose, social justice, follows from the opposition of noble and slavish forms of evaluation. We have already seen that the noble form of evaluation is an affirmation, by the nobles, of their own power and happiness. Their values reflect this self-affirmation. But slavish forms of evaluation are a direct reversal of noble values, a direct negation of the noble type and its values. Consequently, the self-affirmation of noble values requires the active suppression of slave morality. And it is precisely the reactive feelings of *ressentiment*, envy, and the desire for revenge that, in Nietzsche's view, give birth to slave morality. Consequently, the attempt to eliminate reactive feelings through the institution of justice is motivated by the nobles' desire to preserve and affirm their own values, power, and happiness. The noble form of justice is, in other words, simply an attempt by the nobles to protect their own happiness, rather than, as in

⁹² Ibid.

Freud's theory of justice, an attempt to protect one's own happiness through the negation of the other's happiness (denying ourselves many things "so that others may have to do without them as well").⁹³

The Nietzschean conception of justice also coincides in another respect with my proposal of a noble form of justice. I argued above that a noble form of justice is compatible with the aim of actively promoting equality among subjects. But it is not merely compatible with the promotion of social equality; the noble form of evaluation actually requires such a promotion. We have seen that the nobles originate justice in order to eliminate reactive feelings such as *ressentiment*, envy, and the desire for revenge. I have argued that this endeavour is motivated by a necessary conflict between noble values and slave morality. As Nietzsche describes the original form of justice, it is directed only toward specific injuries suffered by subjects within a specific class. That is, the original form of justice upholds the social hierarchy in which it was founded: "Justice on this elementary level is the good will among parties of approximately equal power to come to terms with one another, to reach an 'understanding' by means of a settlement—and to *compel* parties of lesser power to reach a settlement among themselves."⁹⁴

Because this original form of justice deals only with specific injuries inflicted by and upon members of the same social class, it is ineffective in treating the injury that is the very foundation of reactive social feelings and slave morality: social hierarchy and domination.⁹⁵

⁹³ Freud, *Group Psychology*, XVIII:121.

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II.8.

⁹⁵ See Max Horkheimer's criticism of Nietzsche's response to slave morality in "Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), 109: "The overcoming of this morality lies not in the positing of a better one, but in the creation of the conditions under which its reason for existing is eliminated."

Justice cannot possibly succeed in its struggle against resentment and the rise of slave morality if it preserves the social domination of a slave class by a master class, yet the noble mode of values that founds justice cannot consistently allow for the existence of a morality that has as its essence the negation and overcoming of noble values. Consequently, the consistent affirmation and preservation of noble values demands the elimination of social hierarchy and domination as the condition of its success. The victory of “master morality” is possible only through the sacrifice of the social position of “master.”

Such a conclusion may be surprising, and it is certainly at odds with Nietzsche’s own sentiments. However, the sacrifice of social hierarchy is not equivalent, as it is in Freud’s theory, to the sacrifice of happiness. I have already argued above that the Nietzschean subject’s happiness does not require a position of social mastery or superiority of power. And, more importantly, I have argued that the optimal condition for the Nietzschean subject’s happiness is the power of independent action in relation to proportionate resistance, or in an oppositional balance of power among subjects. Consequently, not only does the aim of equality of power for all social subjects follow from the self-affirmation of noble values, noble values also provide a subjective motive for bringing about such a condition. To achieve and promote equality of power among social subjects is equivalent to heightening the resistance among subjects that is the very basis of the Nietzschean understanding of pleasure. And because it is the promotion of equal resistance, it is at the same time the promotion of the mutual satisfaction of desire, since equality of power is also the power to resist domination and thus to manifest one’s power independently of other subjects. A truly noble form of justice would, in other words, seek “to share not suffering but joy.”⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §338.

CONCLUSION

Freud or Nietzsche: Which “Nietzsche”?

I have argued that Freud and Nietzsche’s views of desire, the drives and pleasure are profoundly opposed. On the subject of human desire, Freud and Nietzsche confront us with a choice: Freud *or* Nietzsche. The purpose of this essay has been, first, to make this confrontation explicit by establishing its basis in the foundational assumptions of each thinker’s view of desire. Second, I have attempted to clarify the stakes of the confrontation between the two views by analyzing the consequences of each for theories of social relationships, morality, and justice.

In my discussion of Freud’s theory of desire, I argued that he is implicitly committed to the primacy of inertia and that, consequently, we cannot reject the primacy of inertia without rejecting each of the principal elements of his theory of desire—the theories of the drive, the pleasure principle, and the reality principle. I then argued that Freud cannot treat the later hypothesis of the death drive as essentially distinct from the principles of inertia and constancy, and that he cannot consistently introduce the later theory of Eros and life drives into his original theory of desire. Although the interpretation I have presented of Freud’s theory of desire requires the rejection of much of his later speculation about the drives, I have argued that this rejection is necessitated by Freud’s own foundational assumptions. Consequently, an alternative to this interpretation is possible only through a radical critique, and not a revision, of Freud’s theories of constancy, the drives, and pleasure.

In my discussion of Nietzsche’s view of desire, however, I have allowed for greater interpretive flexibility. I have presented one possible interpretation of desire, the drives, and pleasure that is consistent with Nietzsche’s treatment of the will to power as the basis of

desire, but I have not argued that it is the only possible interpretation consistent with Nietzsche's texts. I have not done so for two reasons. First, there is significant debate over the status of the notes and writings published after Nietzsche's death. I have attempted to use Nietzsche's unpublished notes as a guide for formulating a more detailed interpretation of the will to power, while at the same time seeking to ensure that my interpretation is compatible with his published comments on the will to power. Although I do not believe there are any serious inconsistencies between Nietzsche's comments on the will to power in the *Nachlass* and the major published works, there are significant differences. In many instances, the statements on the topic in the published works are briefer and more general than those found in the notes. Consequently, there is room for disagreement in the interpretation of the will to power as it is presented in the published works. The ambiguity of the published comments leads to a significant degree of over-interpretability. If one chooses to interpret the will to power solely in light of the published works, it is possible to come to distinct and incompatible conclusions that are nevertheless consistent with the text. Because the published work leaves room for a variety of interpretations, I have not argued that my interpretation is the only possible one.

The second reason I have not attempted to provide an exclusive interpretation has to do with the relatively late entry of the concept of the will to power in Nietzsche's work in explicit form. Depending upon whether or not one relies primarily on the works prior to the introduction of the will to power or those that follow, one can conceivably produce distinct and incompatible interpretations of desire that have significant support in Nietzsche's text. Nietzsche's interest in desire, the drives, and pleasure certainly does not begin with the

introduction of the concept of the will to power, and so one might reasonably argue for a division of Nietzsche's views of desire into distinct, early and late forms.

The differences between Nietzsche's published and unpublished comments on the will to power and the relatively late introduction of the will to power allow for the possibility of finding multiple views of desire in Nietzsche's work and endanger any attempt to claim that a single interpretation of desire is maintained throughout the whole of Nietzsche's work. There may be more than one Nietzschean view of desire; there may, after all, be more than one "Nietzsche." Consequently, my assertion of an opposition between Freud and Nietzsche's views on this issue should be qualified accordingly: we are faced with the alternative of Freud or *at least one* Nietzsche. However that may be, I believe that it is only with great difficulty that one could produce a Nietzsche whose view of desire would be compatible with Freud's. I have based my interpretation of the will to power upon Nietzsche's rejection of atomism and of the opposition of cause and effect, as well as upon his emphasis upon the primacy of activity over reaction. These views can be found in both the published and unpublished writings, and although they find their most explicit formulation in the later work, they do have support in earlier texts.¹ Consequently, on the issues that I have been dealing with, one could produce a convincing alliance of Freud and Nietzsche only through very selective use of his texts, even if such an interpretative alliance is not altogether impossible.

¹ See, for example, Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I.18-19.

Critical Consequences for Contemporary Philosophy and Psychoanalysis

By clearly establishing points of opposition between Freud and Nietzsche on the issue of desire and its social consequences, the present essay provides a basis for a critical reevaluation of philosophical and psychoanalytic research that draws upon the work of Freud and Nietzsche. Because Freud and Nietzsche's influence upon contemporary philosophy and psychoanalytic theory is enormous, the possible objects of such critical reevaluation are innumerable. Consequently, I will limit my discussion of the critical consequences of this essay for contemporary research to three key issues. First, we can conclude that the incompatibility of Freud and Nietzsche's views is significant enough to demand suspicion of any work that uncritically enlists both thinkers on its behalf.² Indeed, one of the most questionable aspects of the contemporary use of Freud and Nietzsche's ideas is not the attempt to form an alliance between them, but rather the careless way in which it is often done. Both thinkers are often referenced in the literature without careful consideration of their points of similarity and difference, and their compatibility or agreement is more often assumed than asserted or defended. If I am correct to oppose their views of desire and the social consequences of those views, then a degree of wariness toward any attempt to ally the two thinkers is certainly justified. Moreover, by establishing a number of key points of opposition—the drives, desire, pleasure, and social theory—the present essay provides a basic guideline for the critical evaluation of work that draws upon both thinkers. For by determining on which points their views are incompatible, we are better equipped to identify potentially troublesome or contradictory confections of their views. In addition, the

² A few of the many contemporary thinkers who draw upon both Freud and Nietzsche without careful consideration of their profound antagonisms include Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-François Lyotard.

identification of their differences can, at the same time, help us identify elements in Freud and Nietzsche's work that may, in fact, be compatible. By more accurately defining the field of their differences, we can more successfully locate potential points of agreement.

The second consequence for contemporary research specifically concerns the use of Freud and Nietzsche's work in the tradition of critical theory. Because critical theory has traditionally given emphasis to issues concerning radical politics, social psychology, and justice, my analyses of the social consequences of Freud and Nietzsche's theories of desire are particularly relevant. In the case of Frankfurt School thinkers such as Marcuse and Adorno, it is necessary, as I have mentioned above, to critically evaluate their attempt to incorporate the ideas of both thinkers into their work. Admittedly, in more recent work in this tradition there is a greater appreciation for the potential incompatibility of Freud and Nietzsche's ideas. However, it is common to treat Nietzsche's work with greater suspicion, as though his views pose the greatest threat to critical theory's commitments to social justice and happiness.³ If my analysis of the social consequences of Freud and Nietzsche's views is correct, then this suspicion involves a profound misunderstanding of each thinker's relevance to the project of critical theory. It is Freud, and not Nietzsche, whose views are profoundly pessimistic concerning the possibility of the political achievement of social happiness. Consequently, there is a need, first, to determine to what degree current research in the field has inherited assumptions of Freudian theory that are incompatible with the aims of critical theory and, second, to remedy the fact that the usefulness of Nietzsche's work for contemporary critical theory has often been under-appreciated or overlooked.

³ Wolfenstein, for example, has attempted to revise Nietzsche's theory of will to power into a form compatible with the psychoanalytic assumption of hedonism, with the implication that is Nietzsche's preoccupation with power, and not the Freudian interpretation of drive and pleasure, that most endangers the political project of critical theory. See also Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001).

The final critical consequence of the present essay for contemporary research concerns the influence of Freud's work in contemporary psychoanalytic theory. Despite Freud's enormous influence on contemporary psychoanalysis, a number of his views have been the object of severe criticism. Most importantly in relation to the issues of this essay, post-Freudian psychoanalytic work has commonly involved a general rejection of Freud's attempt to ground the psychological theory of the drives in biology and, more specifically, the rejection of his biological speculations about the inertia principle and the death drive.⁴ However, if the interpretation that I have offered is correct, we have reason to call into question such attempted revisions to Freudian theory. I have argued that the inertia principle is not limited to Freud's biological speculations in the "Project" and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Rather, it is the foundation of his entire theory of desire. Everything that is questionable in Freud's speculations about the inertia principle and the death drive has its counterpart in Freud's general theory of desire: the conservative tendency to return to an original state, the primacy of the reduction of tension over constancy, and the subject's hatred of tension and the external world. Why, then, should Freud's psychological theory of drive and desire (including the theory of sexuality and libido) be viewed with less suspicion than the biological principles of inertia and the death drive? If, as I have argued, the death drive is not essentially distinguishable from the inertia principle, and the late theory of Eros is incompatible with Freud's theory of desire, then Freud's theory is essentially a theory of the death drive. But why reject Freud's explicit formulation of the death drive only to defend the rest of his drive theory, which is only a theory of the death drive under another name? The present essay thus provides a basis for calling into question the consistency of revisionist

⁴ The most influential examples of such criticisms can be found in the work of Jacques Lacan and Jean Laplanche. Other examples include recent work by Jonathan Lear and, in the Lacanian tradition, Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupančič, and Richard Boothby. Notable exceptions to this view can be found in the work of Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva, neither of whom entirely rejects the notion of the death drive.

critiques of classical Freudian theory. Either criticism of the biological theories of the inertia principle and the death drive should be extended to include their psychological counterparts—the constancy and pleasure principles—or proponents of such views must provide sufficient reason for exempting Freud’s general theory of desire from criticism. Furthermore, if the criticism of the death drive is extended to include criticism of the primacy of inertia in the Freudian theory of the drive and pleasure, it is also necessary to reassess contemporary forms of psychoanalytic theory to determine whether or not, and to what degree, they have inherited—along with Freud’s views of drive and pleasure—the implicit foundation of those views in the highly questionable principle of inertia.

Critical Consequences for Freudian Theory

It has not been my intention to directly argue against Freud’s theory of desire, but rather to provide an interpretation that consistently holds Freud to the primary assumptions upon which his views are founded. Nevertheless, the interpretation I have offered, if correct, leaves Freud’s theory of desire particularly vulnerable to criticism. I have not only argued that the inertia principle is essentially a principle of death and inseparable from his theory, I have also rejected as incompatible with his theory the only true alternative to inertia: Eros. That is, I have disallowed any attempt to ignore or remove the most controversial and unpalatable aspect of Freud’s theory of desire, while at the same time disallowing any appeal to its most attractive and least controversial aspect. Admittedly, Freud’s attempt to give a principal place in his theory to inertia and death—controversial and unpalatable though it may be—is not necessarily false. But it is certainly less easy to defend him once we are left without the alternative, or the balancing counter-principle, of Eros—once we can no longer

consistently defend Freud's views by treating libido and sexuality as independent of, or counter to, the trend of inertia.

Although the present essay does not present Freud's theory of desire in the most attractive light, I do believe it is worthwhile to say a few words in Freud's defense. This seems particularly necessary in order to separate the current essay from the recent glut of "Freud wars" literature debating the merits of Freud's work—much of which seems to recommend the rejection of Freud's work more or less in its entirety. Whatever critical relevance my interpretation of Freud may have, it should be emphasized that it concerns only *one part* of Freud's vast theoretical endeavour. Many of Freud's most important concepts—e.g., the unconscious, repression, the topography of ego, id, and superego—do not clearly depend upon his theory of desire and, consequently, do not fall with it. Moreover, even if we call Freud's theory of desire into question, there is no need to simply dismiss it.

In my comparison of Freud and Nietzsche, I noted that Freud's view of human motivation, pleasure, and the subject's relation to the external world bears strong similarities to Nietzsche's analysis of one particular psychological type: that of the "slave." Consequently, even if Freud is mistaken about the nature of human desire, it does not follow that his analysis of desire is without insight for understanding particular forms that human desire may take under specific social circumstances. Freud's theory of desire might be preserved in a useful form by simply rejecting its pretense to universality, by recognizing its explanatory limitations. Freud may have unintentionally made a valuable contribution to Nietzsche's analysis of "slavish" psychology. Furthermore, by contributing a particularly detailed and sophisticated analysis of this form of human psychology, Freud may have

provided us with the theoretical basis necessary to understand possible alternatives to that form—and, perhaps, to understand how we might realize and promote the alternatives.

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