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A Nietzschean Case for Illiberal Egalitarianism

Introduction

Nietzsche's hostility to moral and political egalitarianism is well known. However, I would like to argue that we can find resources in his work to defend a noble egalitarianism: a unique, non-liberal form of political egalitarianism that is independent of classical liberal views from Locke to Rawls about essential human equality of worth and right. My argument will be based in a critical reconstruction of Nietzsche's own distinction of noble and slavish forms of egalitarianism, a reconstruction grounded in Nietzsche's moral psychology of the will to power as affect and feeling of power. A noble, Nietzschean form of egalitarianism would be a strong, non-formal kind, promoting general proportionality of power, grounded in a relative equality of welfare, resources, and capabilities.

As a partially critical endeavor, my purpose is not to offer a case for egalitarianism that Nietzsche would accept, nor one that is compatible with any and every philosophical and normative position Nietzsche in fact holds. Rather, my goal is to use Nietzsche *contra* Nietzsche, to redirect his best ideas – the most plausible, original, and fruitful for further development – against the weaker elements of his philosophical work, particularly those views – such as his arguments against egalitarianism – that are less distinctive, less convincingly argued and, often, more deeply grounded in his own character and prejudices than in his philosophical commitments.¹

Of course, since Nietzsche's particular views – even those that are not logically bound to his key philosophical claims – do not exist in isolation from the whole of his life and thought, my aim cannot be accomplished without departing substantially from Nietzsche's own claims in both letter and spirit: I propose a Nietzschean defense of egalitarianism, not Nietzsche's. Although my argument will have its foundation in what I consider to be a core philosophical commitment in Nietzsche's thought, the moral psychology of the will to power,

¹ I share Mark Warren's view that "one might choose the philosophical Nietzsche while excluding his politics, but do so without eclecticism – that is, without fragmenting the internal necessities of his thinking [...] Nietzsche's own politics [...] violates the intellectual integrity of his philosophical project" (Warren 1988, p. 208).

his views are only a departure point; the rest is reconstruction and development beyond that foundation. I claim only that from a central Nietzschean view we *can* move to a novel case for egalitarianism – not that we must, and certainly not that Nietzsche would do so.

1 Noble and Slavish forms of Morality and Egalitarianism

The idea of a distinctly noble form of egalitarianism is part of Nietzsche's conception of the noble form of evaluation, in which moral values are created through "self-glorification" (*Selbstverherrlichung*) grounded in a primary self-evaluation as good (BGE 260, KSA 5, p. 209). Nietzsche believes that in an aristocratic culture, the elite not only determine moral values using their own condition and character as the criterion of goodness, but also that they uphold the "severity" (*Strenge*) of a "principle [*Grundsatz*] that one has duties [*Pflichten*] only to one's peers [*Seinesgleichen*]," including a duty to treat each other as what they, in fact, are: social equals (BGE 260, KSA 5, p. 210).² Because they view their own character type as the measure of goodness, they are kept "strictly [*Strenge*] within limits [*Schranken*] *inter pares*" by an elitist variant of egalitarianism: equal respect, promoted by "mores" (*Sitte*, which Nietzsche will later insist in GM I 11, KSA 5, p. 274 are incompatible with autonomy) of "consideration, self-control, tact, loyalty, pride, and friendship" for their peers (GM I 11, KSA 5, p. 274).

This element of customary respect and dutiful self-restraint toward others – an aspect shared with noble morality's opposite, "slave morality" – is an often forgotten aspect of noble morality, easily overlooked in Nietzsche's provocative account of its origins in violence and conquest, his vivid descrip-

² Warren emphasizes this element of equality in noble morality, arguing that Nietzsche's position is compatible with equality of political rights, provided that equality is founded in equality of capacity to act (Warren 1988, p. 73). Lawrence Hatab (1995), Maudemarie Clark (1999), David Owen (2002), and Herman Siemens (2009) also interpret Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism as one consistent with formal equality of rights, but all within a liberal democratic framework, while Daniel W. Conway argues that Nietzsche endorses the political inequality of "political perfectionism" only as a means to the more primary goal of individual moral perfectionism, which does not require political inequality (Conway 1997, p. 55). My position differs from these readings, because I claim that Nietzsche's moral psychology of power supports a strong, and not merely formal, egalitarianism of economic and social power, as well as of the resources and capabilities that such equality might depend on, rather than democratic liberal egalitarianism.

tions of the brutal behavior of aristocratic societies toward their perceived inferiors. Noble morality is, he would have us believe, the work of “uncaged beasts of prey [*losgelassne Raubthiere*],” “barbarians in every terrible sense of the word” who “do not know what guilt, what responsibility, what consideration [*Rücksicht*, a characteristic of noble morality in GM I 11, KSA 5, p. 274] is” and whose actions are “instinctive,” “involuntary,” and “unconscious” (GM I 11, KSA 5, p. 274; GM II 17, KSA 5, p. 324; BGE 257, KSA 5, p. 205f.).

It is surprising that such “beasts” should – or could – be “so strictly” bound by custom and principle, dutifully observing a moral obligation to respect even their equals. It is perhaps more surprising that Nietzsche unhesitatingly admires noble egalitarianism, insisting that the “true voice of justice [*Gerechtigkeit*]” commands, “Equality for equals, inequality for unequals” (TI Skirmishes 48, KSA 6, p. 150). Nietzsche’s contrast of noble and slave morality is a critical one, intended to call into question the origin and aim of slavish values, particularly those of pity and selflessness, in *ressentiment* and revenge, exposing such other-regarding ideals as “anti-natural” values engineered to protect “the herd” at the expense of higher individuals, undermining, through self-destructive guilt, the healthy warrior ethos of noble peoples (GM I 7, KSA 5, pp. 266–28; BGE 260, KSA 5, pp. 208–12; BGE 201–02, KSA 5, pp. 121–26). Why, then, does he believe that respect for equality entirely loses its unnaturalness and harmfulness when limited to an elite?

The form of egalitarianism that Nietzsche rejects is a development of the “slavish” form of moral evaluation, supposedly characteristic of a politically oppressed people. Slave morality begins, in contrast to noble self-affirmation, in an envy-motivated negation of the privileged that defines noble characteristics and values as “evil,” in contrast to the slave’s characteristics as “good” (GM I 10, KSA 5, p. 270). Slave values are, then, reducible to a condemnation of privilege. Slavish egalitarianism is a political extension of this value system, identifying inequality – the existence of any kind of spiritual or political superiority – with intrinsic evil and its elimination with moral goodness.

This characterization of slavish egalitarianism as normative envy is surely unflattering, but it does not demonstrate that equality is undesirable, nor that inequality is morally acceptable. Ugly origins aside, why is equality objectionable? Why take seriously Nietzsche’s claim that justice demands we “never make equal what is unequal”? (TI Skirmishes 48, KSA 6, p. 150). His case against slave egalitarianism is grounded in the view that it promotes the wellbeing of society at the expense of the highest, rarest, and culturally most valuable individuals, and that this amounts to harm to humanity as a whole, since the flourishing of humanity is measured by its “highest exemplars” (HL 9, KSA 1, p. 317).

This harm supposedly takes three primary forms. First, the belief in the equal worth of all persons undermines the individual will to self-development (BGE 257, KSA 5, p. 205). Second, the attempt to achieve equality produces cultural leveling in the form of damage to superior powers, talents, and abilities (TI Skirmishes 37, KSA 6, p. 138).³ Third, by destroying the belief in orders of rank, equality produces cultural assimilation. By eliminating hierarchical orders of rank, equality undermines the desire for “self-overcoming,” destroying the “will to stand out” that promotes a “multiplicity of types” and values (*Vielheit der Typen* and *Werthverschiedenheit*), eventually dissolving distinctive forms of identity, value, and life (TI Skirmishes 38, KSA 6, p. 139).

2 Reconceiving noble egalitarianism

My purpose is to reconstruct a *positive* Nietzschean case for egalitarianism, so I will not extensively discuss his arguments against egalitarianism.⁴ However, his critique is not incompatible with the defense of some forms, since he attributes harm not to equality as such, but to the belief in equality and only to some methods of achieving it. His arguments are aimed only at slavish forms of egalitarianism, where the moral good is equated with the eradication of spiritual, qualitative, or evaluative superiority, entailing the rejection of belief in any kind of superiority, as well as of any qualitative differences that could support such belief.

However, this overlooks the possibility that a noble form of egalitarianism could be extended to all, rather than limited to members of a political elite. Nietzsche even explicitly acknowledges this possibility, only to ignore it in his later critique: “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)” (HH 1 300, KSA 2, p. 240).

A noble but *universal* egalitarianism of this form must, if it is to be consistent with Nietzsche’s critique of slavish egalitarianism, have three key characteris-

³ In the contemporary literature, this has come to be known as the “leveling down objection.” See Larry Temkin (1993).

⁴ I have argued elsewhere that Nietzsche’s criticisms of egalitarianism succeed only on a narrow and inconsistent interpretation of power as purely quantitative, and not on his more primary conception of power as qualitative, where he emphasizes that human flourishing is grounded in the *feeling* of power rather than power simply. See Miyasaki (2013).

tics. First, it must not assume that human beings are equal in moral or cultural worth. It is, then, *normative* without *descriptive* egalitarianism: although humans are not qualitatively equal in value, they should be equal in social, political, and economic power.⁵

Second, such equality must be achieved through positive means, through proportional empowerment and complementary enhancements of status, rights, wealth, and abilities, rather than through the direct diminishment or “leveling down” of forms of superiority. Put differently, political institutions may prevent or alleviate social inequalities only if all parties, including the most privileged, benefit.

We might contrast this to John Rawls’ “difference principle,” according to which social and economic inequality is acceptable only if it is “improves the expectations of the least advantaged members of society” (Rawls 1971, p. 75). The difference principle reflects the “maximin” rule of choice in Rawls’ hypothetical original position, where, given ignorance of our individual fortune under a given system of justice, we “adopt the alternative the worst outcome of which is superior” (Rawls 1971, p. 153). Because Rawls’ difference principle of justice reflects the aim of maximizing the wellbeing of the least advantaged, it tolerates inequality only as a means to that end. Nietzschean egalitarianism, in contrast, follows what I will call a *maximax* rule of choice: its aim is to maximize human wellbeing, and so it tolerates *equality* only where equality also benefits the *most* advantaged.⁶

5 In answer to Amartya Sen’s question, “Equality of what?” (Sen 1980), Nietzschean egalitarianism aims for a relative equality of individual power. However, Nietzsche’s understanding of power is, as I explain in more detail below, a unique one in which power is measured qualitatively as the feeling of capability in the face of resistance rather than as quantitatively superior ability. Consequently, the egalitarian promotion of power in this sense does not directly entail any specific form of quantitative distributive equality, and cannot easily be fitted to the usual categories of egalitarianism, such as equality of welfare (Arneson 1989), resources (Dworkin 1981), or capabilities (Sen 1980, Nussbaum 1992). However, because Nietzsche suggests that the principal conditions of the feeling of power are resistance to action and an ability to act that is proportional to resistance, it is likely that equality of power is promoted through a high degree of equality in all three respects – welfare, resources, and capability – insofar as they are compatible. This would be necessary to promote equality of particular kinds of abilities and a generally equal ability to develop particular abilities to an equal degree.

6 This should be distinguished from John Richardson’s description of Nietzsche’s moral and political values as “maximax,” according to which Nietzsche “aims not at the greatest sum of all wills but at the greatest concentrations of power in individual wills” (Richardson 1996, p. 150). While I agree that this is Nietzsche’s explicit view, I will argue that the priority of the qualitative feeling of power in his psychological theory implies that power is maximized precisely through equality of power rather than quantitative superiority, whether that of the sum of all wills or the concentration of power in individual wills.

Yet, in such cases, equality is not only tolerated but may also be imposed, in contrast to Rawlsian liberalism. Rawls' difference principle is moderated by the priority of the first principle of liberty: egalitarian measures are permitted only if they do not violate equally distributed individual rights (Rawls 1971, p. 61). In contrast, because noble egalitarianism denies descriptive egalitarianism, it is only limited by the maximax rule. Measures to promote equality are not constrained by a liberal principle of equal rights. Instead, the liberal principle of *equality of rights* is constrained by an illiberal principle of *right to equality* within the maximax rule. Rights are justified only insofar they serve such greater overall equality, which in turn is justified only if it is compatible with the wellbeing of the most advantaged.

So, the third key characteristic of a universal noble egalitarianism is the *illiberal rights principle*: rights are guaranteed only within the limits of equality of distribution allowed by the maximax rule. In conflicts between rights and equalizing measures beneficial to all, equality overrides rights. By rejecting descriptive egalitarianism, the noble form also rejects any claim of a moral obligation to protect equality of rights at the expense of shared advantage – particularly those rights of the privileged that might preserve or promote unequal distributions of power and wealth – but conceivably any individual rights that prevent universally beneficial equalizing measures.

The three characteristics I have sketched – descriptive anti-egalitarianism, the maximax rule of distribution, and the illiberal rights principle – ensure that this view is not subject to Nietzsche's first two objections. Because my reconstructed, universal form of noble egalitarianism does not endorse belief in the essential equal worth and rights of all persons, it evades his worries about harm to the individual incentive toward self-improvement and development. And because the maximax principle disallows direct harm to the advantaged for the sake of equality, it avoids the consequence of cultural leveling.

But how can I answer the third criticism that egalitarianism promotes the assimilation of qualitatively different forms of life, that it is, in effect, antipluralistic and anti-individualistic? Of course, egalitarianism need not have such assimilation as its aim. So, Nietzsche's argument might depend upon a false conflation of quantitative equality of power with qualitative equality of types, of equality (*Gleichheit*) with "sameness" or "likeness."⁷

7 Martha Nussbaum's wholesale dismissal of Nietzsche as a political philosopher on the topic of liberty depends in part on this questionable interpretation, attributing to Nietzsche the belief that liberal egalitarians "deny that differences among people exist in abundance, including differences of achievement" (Nussbaum 1997, p. 10). Nietzsche does not, of course, believe this. Instead, he objects to the liberal egalitarian's beliefs about equal moral desert, the view, in Nussbaum's words, that "humanity itself has dignity and gives its bearer a claim to the goods

However, Nietzsche's criticism is not directed at the goal of equality, but rather at its consequences. He believes assimilation is the unintended but inevitable consequence of equality. My answer to this third criticism depends on my positive argument in favor of egalitarianism. So, I will first argue that distributive equality is beneficial to all, because it establishes the optimal conditions for maintaining and enhancing the abilities of all individuals, including – in accordance with the maximax rule – those of superior economic and political power. Then, in response to Nietzsche's final criticism, I will argue that noble egalitarianism, extended universally, also establishes the optimal conditions for cultural pluralism, for the promotion and preservation of qualitative differences in human types, values, and forms of life, and so does not promote cultural assimilation.

3 Making the case: the will to power as feeling-able in relation to proportional resistance

My argument begins with two assumptions that I consider to be Nietzsche's, as well. His views on these points are, of course, a matter of controversy, but I need not insist on them as interpretive claims. The Nietzschean foundation of my argument is the conception of noble egalitarianism and the moral psychology of the will to power, so these claims do not require his support, even though I believe they have it. My foundational assumptions are: 1) moral anti-realism, according to which moral and political *normative* claims cannot be justified on strictly epistemic grounds, and so must be argued on the basis of true descriptive claims about *general desirability*, not claims about obligation and 2) moral naturalism, according to which *descriptive* claims about the desirability of moral or political principles must be grounded in claims about human nature and psychology, and so are not claims about *perceived* interest or merely *subjective* desirability.

Consequently, my approach will be to argue for the general objective desirability of a nobly achieved, universal equality of social, political, and economic power, including its desirability to the advantaged, while grounding this claim

distributed by politics" (Nussbaum 1997, p. 11). His objection is that distribution should be based on the real enhancement (*Erhöhung*) of humanity, upon the actual value of any given individual, rather than on moral considerations of merit or desert – particularly ones based on potential value (essential humanity) or counterfactual value where "today's differences in merit reflect yesterday's differences in power" (moral luck).

in Nietzsche's views about moral and social psychology. By arguing that equality is *objectively* desirable, I am granting that the "maximax" rule may permit egalitarian institutions and laws that are not initially subjectively desirable to all. The privileged in societies marked by substantial inequality will likely interpret such measures as harmful to their current level of wellbeing. However, my approach assumes the possibility that there are objective truths about subjective conditions of desirability – that subjects can predictably desire differently under different social conditions, so that their given desires do not necessarily track which social conditions would, if realized, best promote their own subjectively evaluated happiness. Subjective judgments about the desirability of equality can be mistaken, based in a failure to accurately compare current happiness to potential happiness in an egalitarian society.⁸ The maximax rule would apply in precisely such cases of mistaken subjective judgments about desirability.

So, the desirability of equality is to be found in Nietzsche's psychology, which, as is well known, gives a central place to the concept of power. However, Nietzsche's psychology is not, as often thought, a theory of a central desire, drive, or instinct for the accumulation of power. In its most developed form, the "will to power" is not brute instinct, but self-conscious affectivity. The primary drive is not toward the quantitative increase of power, but the qualitative increase of the *feeling* of power.⁹ Accordingly, Nietzsche defines the human good as "all that heightens the feeling of power [*Gefühl der Macht*], the will to power, power itself" (A 2, KSA 6, p. 170). Priority is given to feeling, while the desire for power and its attainment come second, precisely because they are a mere means to the former. Likewise, Nietzsche identifies human flourishing or happiness, not with the possession or accumulation of power, but with "the feeling that power increases [*wächst*], that a resistance [*Widerstand*] is overcome" (A 2, KSA 6, p. 170). Notice that for happiness, in contrast to the good, there is no further qualification: the feeling of power and the feeling of overcoming resist-

⁸ Nietzsche's will to power is a mix of speculative and common sense psychology, based in generalizations about the inseparability of resistance and proportionality from the feeling of power, so the legitimacy of a noble egalitarianism ultimately depends upon the possibility of empirically verifying Nietzsche's psychological claims generally and the ability to demonstrate the falseness of mistaken subjective judgements about desirability. However, there is growing empirical support for some of Nietzsche's psychological views (Knobe/Leiter 2006), and some studies provide support for key suggestions I will draw from Nietzsche's psychology: that happiness as affect (emotional wellbeing in contrast to reflective self-evaluations of happiness) is not strongly related to wealth or directly related to relative superiority in wealth (Kahneman/Deaton 2010) and that wellbeing depends on relative rather than absolute quantity of wealth (Easterlin 1974 and Easterlin et. al. 2010).

⁹ I develop this interpretation in more detail in Miyasaki (2014).

ance are alone the condition of happiness – a will to power and the attainment of power are unnecessary. So, the objective psychological good of a human being includes power and the desire to increase power, but only as a precondition for the subjective psychological good of happiness, which is reducible to feeling, to qualitative rather than quantitative states of power.

This distinction between quantitative power and the qualitative experience of one's state of power is easily confused – indeed, Nietzsche conflates them frequently – so I will try to capture it in slightly different terms. Let us say that happiness, a better or more flourishing life, depends solely on the feeling of power as *ability*, including both the feeling of power that comes from an ability's successful exercise (the feeling of active power), and the feeling *that* one is capable of exercising an ability (the feeling of potential power). In contrast, the preservation of the human good as *general wellbeing* includes additional conditions: the will to power as *incentive to exercise and develop abilities*, and power itself, understood as *effective active and potential ability*.

Because the conditions of happiness are weaker than the conditions of wellbeing, happy states do not directly track states of wellbeing. There are two striking consequences. First, happiness (the feeling of ability) can be increased relatively, without a corresponding absolute increase in wellbeing (absolute ability and the desire for its increase). For example, a chess player who consecutively defeats increasingly talented opponents may experience a feeling of increasing ability or power (“the feeling that power is growing, that resistance is overcome”), despite achieving no absolute change in her skill level.

Second, an absolute decrease in wellbeing need not result in a decrease in happiness. For example, our chess player might grow bored with the game and allow her skills to deteriorate from lack of practice. However if, when she returns to the game, she chooses less skillful but still challenging opponents, she may feel no less accomplished in her gameplay than she did before.

At this point, we might wonder: if wellbeing is not necessary to happiness, then in what sense is it a human “good”? This question highlights the deeply relational nature of Nietzsche's view of human psychology. The “feeling of power,” of ability and its exercise, is precisely the feeling of proportionally, if not absolutely, equal resistance – specifically, the feeling that my activity is resisted and I am able to act despite this resistance. In excess, of course, resistance produces the opposite feeling of impotence. However, the complete absence of any resistance would produce no feeling at all, for it is the tension of action and counter-action that produces the feeling of ability.¹⁰

¹⁰ Nietzsche's psychology of power is, consequently, a fitting accompaniment to Bernard Suits' definition of a game as “a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits 2005, p. 55). Compare Suits' explanation of the gamewright's craft: “The gamewright must

Moreover, our ability to qualitatively distinguish higher states of wellbeing, higher degrees of happiness, is also based in the feeling of resistance: the greater the resistance, the more intense the feeling of power experienced in its equaling or overcoming. As Nietzsche suggests, happiness, a form of positive freedom, is not found in the absence of interference, but in its proportional intensity:

How is freedom measured, in individuals as in nations? By the resistance [*Widerstand*] which has to be overcome, by the effort [*Mühe*] it costs to stay aloft. One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the greatest resistance [*Widerstand*] is constantly being overcome: five steps from tyranny, near the threshold of the danger of servitude. (TI Skirmishes 38, KSA 6, p. 140)

Consider, for example, the different intensities of power experienced by a professional weight lifter compared to an amateur, or the intensity of power felt in winning an arm-wrestling match with someone of equal strength compared to winning against someone much weaker.

Because the feeling of ability is based in qualitative states determined by relations, not by property or individually possessed goods, happiness is both social and agonistic; it is based in contests of power. It requires others to resist us; it needs proportionally equal counter-powers and counter-actions. However, happiness also requires a degree of wellbeing in the form of absolute quantitative ability, since resistance without the power to act is felt as impotence. And this is why both “power itself” (effective ability) and “the will to power” (a desire to exercise and increase ability) are beneficial to happiness, though not direct conditions for it: happiness requires the exercise of power, and thus its possibility is preserved by a desire to put our abilities to use and, in so doing, to enhance them.

4 The intrinsic good of equal distribution vs. the instrumental worth of distributed goods

If Nietzsche’s conception of happiness is right, it provides us with a novel way of arguing for the general desirability of substantial social and political equality.

avoid two extremes. If he draws his lines too loosely the game will be dull because winning will be too easy [...] On the other hand, rules are lines that can be drawn too tightly, so that the game becomes too difficult” (Suits 2005, p. 45).

ty. The goal of minimizing inequality is misleadingly conceived as the equal distribution of intrinsic “goods,” of simple, direct components of happiness. Consequently, egalitarian methods of distribution or redistribution are misconstrued as simple subtractions of intrinsic goods, as the direct diminishment of the wellbeing of the privileged. Rightly understood, however, the goods of distribution are relative ones – necessary in some amount for wellbeing, but only minimally and indirectly conditions for happiness. Such goods only increase happiness given broader social conditions that promote the increased *feeling* of power, rather than mere accumulation of power. Just as the chess player’s ability is, taken as an absolute measure of power, not itself the source of her happiness, so the goods of political distribution are not themselves the principal basis of human happiness.

On the contrary, if Nietzsche’s psychology is correct, the most desirable human good – and the only *intrinsic* one – to be distributed by a just political system is not quantitative but qualitative, not possession but feeling, not power but *relations that promote the feeling of power*. In other words, the primary good is the form of distribution rather than its contents. The primary good to be distributed is equality of distribution itself.

For if happiness is the feeling that ability is growing in relation to a resistance, its key foundation is the proportionality of that resistance relative to our abilities; it is found, as Nietzsche says, in “mighty” opponents against whom we must “stake all our strength,” opponents “who are our equals [*gleiche Gegner*]” (EH Wise 7, KSA 6, p. 274).¹¹ Happiness requires the presence of resistances to our abilities that are neither too strong to produce any feeling of power, nor too weak to produce any feeling of resistance. Admittedly, this is a relation of only relative equality, since some differences in ability are required for the feeling of increasing power or overcoming a resistance. However, it is a relative equality that is absolutely incompatible with substantial, permanent social and

¹¹ Nietzsche calls this demand for equality the “first presupposition of an honest dual,” a claim that introduces a four-proposition summary of his “practice of war” – a “just war theory” of sorts (EH Wise 7, KSA 6, p. 274). But rather than an abstract duty, as implied by his claim that “the voice of justice” commands us to “never make equal what is unequal” (TI Skirmishes 48, KSA 6, p. 150), this principle is grounded in the noble nature: “Being able to be an enemy [...] belongs to a strong nature. It needs objects of resistance; hence it looks for what resists.” It is a curious contrast: if it is in the nature of the noble personality to seek and invite resistance, then why do not “honest” (*rechtschaffen*, righteous or upright) warfare and “justice” (*Gerechtigkeit*) also permit the cultivation of worthy opponents? Why not “make equal what is unequal” as a means to righteous warfare?

political inequality, since such inequalities destroy the resistance to ability and action upon which the feelings of power and happiness depend.¹²

We can refine this condition by suggesting that human happiness requires stability of equality over time, but only proportional, variable degrees of equality at any given time. We can further define the *proportional equality* at stake as a relation in which inequalities do not endanger stability of equality over time. In such relations, inequalities of ability, advantage, and opportunity are limited to those that are 1) non-debilitating, allowing all to act with *some* degree of success, 2) non-dominating, allowing all to *sometimes* act with a high degree of success, and 3) non-demoralizing, allowing everyone the possibility of *feeling* powerful in the relation, even in the absence of successful action.

This, in turn, suggests a novel view of the relationship between equality and happiness. Equality is not desirable as an equal opportunity to obtain intrinsic goods that comprise happiness; rather, the relative goods of distribution contribute to happiness only when possessed in relationships of relative equality. Equality is itself the good to be distributed as the basic ground of any form of wellbeing, and as the necessary condition for any degree of happiness at all.¹³ This is a dramatic conclusion, since it means that not just some, but *everyone's*, happiness is directly endangered by the toleration of disproportional degrees of inequality: those with substantially superior powers and abilities lack sufficient resistance to their exercise to produce or enhance their feeling of power, while those with substantially inferior powers and abilities experi-

12 Because Nietzschean noble egalitarianism aims for equality of power in a sense related to one's ability to act, it has similarities to the capabilities approach (Sen 1980, Nussbaum 1992). However, the Nietzschean question is not Sen's "equality of what," but equal *how*? Power is not measured quantitatively but qualitatively, not by functionality or freedom but by feeling, which depends upon the proportionately equal capabilities of others as limited *resistance* to functional capability. Consequently, the equal distribution of basic abilities would not be sufficient to achieve noble egalitarianism. A substantial degree of equality of wealth and economic opportunity would likely be necessary to ensure not merely that basic capabilities are equal, but that non-basic, more developed capabilities find resistance and competition, that a sufficient number of individuals are economically capable of developing their capabilities to a relatively proportional level.

13 Elizabeth S. Anderson also emphasizes equality of relations rather than holdings when she criticizes those who assume egalitarianism is about compensation, restitution, or desert, arguing instead that it is the creation of a certain form of human relation, a kind of community (Anderson 1999, p. 289). However, she shifts the aim of equality from desert to freedom, to the elimination of oppression (Anderson 1999, p. 288), which for noble egalitarianism is a consequence, but not the aim, of equality. The aim of noble egalitarianism is, on the contrary, the maximization of human happiness as the feeling of power, which happens to coincide with proportional equality of power and thus with conditions of non-domination.

ence their exercise only as impotence, due to disproportional resistance to action.

So, our key conclusion for the objective desirability of egalitarianism is that any social good contributes to happiness only to the degree that it promotes the exercise of abilities in conditions of proportional equality. A noble egalitarianism of proportional equality is beneficial to the happiness of everyone, including those currently advantaged by present inequalities. In contrast, substantial permanent inequalities are not accidentally, but intrinsically, harmful to the happiness of all, including the most advantaged. Inequality promotes relations of *conquest* – the overcoming of competition in the form of disproportional resistance – rather than relations of *contest* – the preservation of proportional resistance and competition.¹⁴ In doing so, inequality destroys the primary social conditions of happiness for anyone.

5 The maximization of happiness and assimilation objections

This is the core of my argument; however, it leaves two unresolved issues. First, Nietzsche's argument against egalitarian leveling may still be raised in a more modest form. It may be argued that although proportional equality preserves the possibility of happiness for all, it is incompatible with the *maximization* of happiness, which requires the feeling of the *increase* of power. Moreover, the feeling of increasing power requires the feeling of overcoming increasingly greater resistances and, consequently, requires increasingly greater degrees of inequality. However, this argument fails for two reasons.

First, even if egalitarianism limits the maximal degree of happiness by limiting the increase of power inequalities, anti-egalitarianism fares worse since, by allowing expanding inequalities, it reduces the proportional resistance that is the condition of *any* degree of happiness – temporary increases in the feeling of power gained in this way must eventually undermine any capacity for the feeling of power at all. Where unequal societies produce increases in happiness, it is in localized relations of proportional equality. For example, a power-

¹⁴ In this respect Nietzschean noble egalitarianism resembles what Suits calls an “open game”: “a system of mutually enabling moves whose purpose is the continued operation of the system” (Suits 2005, p. 124). Compare also Nietzsche's early, admiring account of the ancient *agon*, in which the most accomplished competitors were expelled: “Why should no one be the best? Because with that the contest would dry up” (HC).

ful CEO is able to fully experience the power of her position only by falling short of a total monopoly over her own company and the industry in which it operates: her power is felt in relation to proportionally equal competing employees in her own company and CEOs in competing companies. To whatever degree she is successful in *continually* expanding her power *disproportionally* to her competition, she will destroy her own happiness. At the ideal limit of such development, she would conquer all competitors, attain total relative power, and reduce her feeling of resistance, her happiness, to zero.

Consequently, the maximization of happiness through the feeling of increasing power depends not on expanding inequalities, but upon expansions of proportional power: the feeling of increased power comes, not from conquest, not from the absolute overcoming of resistance, but through the overcoming of increasingly greater resistances. For my feeling of power to increase, power must indeed increase, but it must do so in proportional equality with that of others, in order to preserve the resistance that grounds any feeling of power. For example, a tennis player increases her feeling of power through the defeat of ever-stronger opponents. Her heightened happiness does not come from the absolute increase of her ability, nor from the degree of inequality between her abilities and those of her opponents. Instead, it comes from the proportionally increased abilities of the sport as a whole, from contest rather than conquest: her potential competitors must improve their abilities to a relatively equal degree if she is to continue to feel powerful in relation to them.

So, by preserving, through the maximax rule, the possibility of temporary, proportional inequalities in power or ability, noble egalitarianism allows for increases of power. And by requiring proportional equality over time, it also ensures that such increases preserve the resistance necessary to experience the feeling and happiness of increased power. Therefore, noble egalitarianism protects basic happiness while maximizing the happiness of the most talented, able, and powerful.

We are now in a position to decisively reject a second objection: Nietzsche's claim that egalitarianism harms cultural pluralism, leading to the assimilation of qualitatively different human types, values, and ways of life. By promoting equality in the form of proportional, oppositional resistances, noble egalitarianism also protects and promotes a diversity of human types and values, since proportional power enables differing individuals and groups to resist domination and coercion by one another. By protecting contest from the undermining effects of conquest, noble egalitarianism preserves power relations that are non-debilitating, non-dominating, and non-demoralizing.

Such relationships promote cultural pluralism in two ways. First they protect what Nietzsche calls the "pathos of distance": the "will to be oneself, to

stand out” (TI Skirmishes 37, KSA 6, p. 138). They protect the *subjective incentive* to maintain differences of identity, value, and type, by reducing the risk of feelings of impotence in the face of overwhelming resistance. Second, they protect the *objective foundation* of pluralism by minimizing dominating social relationships that undermine the real ability of different groups and types to maintain the distinctiveness of their forms of life.¹⁵ Unlike liberal egalitarianism and anti-egalitarianism, noble egalitarianism protects individuals’ real ability – rather than their abstract right – to preserve a distinct identity against the coercive social and economic power of the majority. Consequently, a Nietzschean form of noble egalitarianism, far from leading to assimilation, would provide the only strong foundation for lasting, stable, and happy pluralistic societies.

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¹⁵ As Vanessa Lemm points out, “While equality based on recognition of universality [...] forecloses the possibility of struggle and, hence, freedom as responsibility, equality based on the recognition of difference [...] generates freedom as responsibility” (Lemm 2009, p. 43). However, to this must be added Nietzsche’s psychological insight that equality based in the formal recognition of difference has real, if relative, power equality as its precondition.

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