
The End of Nietzsche's Will to Power: Dominion and Efficacy

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The notion of a 'Will to Power' is foundational for Friedrich Nietzsche, both through his use of it as an explanation for *ressentiment* as well as for cosmological, biological, and psychological phenomena.^I^{II}

While Arthur Schopenhauer had previously posited that humans aim primarily for self preservation, Nietzsche sought to correct his predecessor's views by stating that instead of a desire to *maintain* one's existence, humans (as well as all other life forms) seek to *improve* it.^{III} That is, Nietzsche viewed the Will to Power as a desire not simply to preserve a state of being; instead, he viewed it is a drive to extend one's power by "discharg[ing] strength."^{IV} In fact, "as a fundamental instinct of life," the Will to Power "aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation."^V Although there are many potential manifestations of this concept, this essay will focus on the psychological interpretation of the Will to Power and attempt to exactly assess the conditions and ends which satisfy its drive.

Nietzsche's writing seems to indicate that the acquisition of dominion *itself*^{VI} is what satisfies a will to power. That being said, power can only be procured effectively when certain conditions have been met, indicating that the validation of effectiveness must necessarily also compromise the Will to Power.^{VII} This essay will contend that the acquisition of dominion is not enough to satisfy a

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Will to Power and must be coupled with the feeling of successfully applying one's abilities. This conclusion can be reached by assessing why certain ends^{VIII} are satisfying yet still produce frustration in others and why the Will to Power is insatiable. Moreover, the practical consequences that manifest from the acquisition of dominion are derived contextually by the values a given individual has and the manifestation of power that they strive to obtain. The implication of this is that the Will to Power describes the *insatiable* human drive to acquire *dominion* while validating a feeling of *effectiveness* through the *active* procurement of power against a *resisting* force. This essay will begin by discussing the possibility that dominion is itself the final end of the will to power before offering the suggestion that the acquisition of any power is satisfying insofar as it helps validate an individual's capacity by evoking a feeling of success.

Dominion as the End of the Will to Power

It seems most immediately plausible that Nietzsche believes the Will to Power can be satisfied by the acquisition of "dominion." That is, he describes how the Will to Power compels individuals to become "master over the forces of nature, master over his own savagery and licentiousness."^{IX} In this essay, dominion will be utilized as a term to describe the procurement of mastery, domination, and control of an object or individual.^X While the concepts of dominion may hold a negative connotation that links it to callousness, brutality, and authoritarian domination,^{XI} it is a fundamentally neutral idea for Nietzsche whose meaning is derived from its contextual manifestations. This is to say that dominion is the imposition of an individual's values on some object, ultimately shaping it to conform to the desires of that individual. As Nietzsche put it, "[t]hat is your whole will, you who are wisest: a Will to Power—when you speak of good and evil too, and of valuations. You still want to create the world before which you can kneel..."^{XII}

As a consequence, any moral evaluation of the acquisition of dominion is contingent on the values and aspirations that manifest in an individual's Will to Power. For instance, a politician seeking political office with the intention of reducing income inequality and economic injustice may be subject to a completely differ-

ent moral evaluation than if she sought to consolidate power by propagating the hatred of minority groups. While the manifestations in each case would seemingly be very different, the politician is still engaging with the same notion of dominion by attempting to impose her values externally. Beyond this, it seems feasible that attempts at acquiring dominion can be made for both external objects as well as internal conditions. For example, while a businessperson might attempt to increase her revenue in order to acquire external dominion, a Buddhist monk might attempt to reach a kind of internal spiritual dominion through her religious pursuits.

However, the centrality of an individual's values to the manifestation of dominion may be problematic since her beliefs and values ultimately determine the way in which dominion is acquired and applied. Given that, it seemingly follows that an individual cannot have dominion without those values. It would be impossible to conceptualize someone who truly had no values or ways in which she hoped the world might change; such a person would necessarily need to hold complete indifference to every aspect of her existence. In this case, there would be no object or content for that individual's dominion to manifest as. Consequently, values seem unequivocally essential to the capacity to acquire dominion and satisfy a Will to Power.

The chief issue that arises from this is one of redundancy: it does not appear necessary for Nietzsche to discuss the drive to acquire dominion as a necessary condition for the Will to Power if an individual's values are ultimately what motivates her.^{XIII} That is, it seems feasible to assert that the motivation for an increase in dominion is not a desire for power or domination at all; instead, it may simply be the desire to see one's values represented in a given object. However, if the desire for dominion is not what is practically motivating an individual, there need not be a reason for her to consider it as such. Nietzsche might as well have concluded that an individual's values and desires are a sufficient motivation without needing to discuss the desire to dominate and extend mastery. For example, if an activist is working to create more acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, that individual is attempting to impose her values externally not as a means to acquire an increase in dominance and power, but instead as a means

to propagate beliefs that she maintains as important. To the activist, the spread of her values is important and desirable for themselves and not as a means to increase her power. If dominion is at all relevant in the will of this activist, it is at least secondary to her drive to see her values externalized, thus making a discussion of a Will to Power through dominion seem unhelpful.

However, this objection might be countered by asserting that, since the desire to see one's values shape an object is central to the notion of dominion, it stands that an individual is still striving for dominion even if it is not a conscious objective. However, this response does not seem to be completely adequate; the Will to Power describes the motivation and drive towards 'mastery, domination, and power' over some object. However, if an individual were only subconsciously engaging in a drive to acquire dominion, it would seem like a distinct reinterpretation of the Will to Power. Nietzsche ascribes a considerable amount of importance to the motivational influence he believes is intrinsic to the Will to Power, making the assertion that it is only experienced as a subordinate drive seem like a contradiction of the notion that a satisfied will to dominate is ultimately what is gratifying.^{XIV}

Even if this objection were to be disregarded entirely, the Will to Power understood as a drive towards dominion remains contestable. This is because Nietzsche provides two qualifications on the means through which a will to power is successfully exercised: he states that an individual must *actively*^{XV} pursue his or her goals against a *resisting*^{XVI} force. Indeed, as Nietzsche explains, "I assess the power of a will by how much resistance, pain and torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage."^{XVII} An example he uses is the biblical myth of Adam and Eve, where God has provided all the necessities of life and allowed them to live as immortals prior to the "First Sin." However, Nietzsche proclaims that the "innocent, idle, immortal, happy -- this conception [...] must be criticized above all."^{XVIII} This condemnation and belief that Adam and Eve are not actually engaged in a Will to Power is issued because their dominion was given to them by God and not earned through the criteria that Nietzsche has delineated. That is, they did not actively participate in the process of acquiring dominion, nor have they faced opposition in the process.^{XIX}

If dominion is understood as the imposition of one's values and desires on an object, it would not follow that it could be the end of the Will to Power alone. Nietzsche's restrictions on the means by which dominion is achieved seems to contradict the notion that dominion can itself satisfy the Will to Power. For example, in the case of the social activist, it does not follow that the imposition of her values externally requires opposition in order to be satisfying. If Nietzsche believed that dominion is the ultimate end of the Will to Power, it is not clear why activity and opposition are treated as necessary conditions; mastery, control, and the imposition of values can exist without these requisites. Consequently, there must be another aim of the Will to Power that is not satisfied by the acquisition of dominion alone, but rather by the means through which it is achieved.

The Case for Effectiveness

In order for dominion to be the end of a Will to Power that also satisfies the criteria Nietzsche ascribed, there must necessarily be some other component of the Will to Power that is only satisfied if an individual is actively engaged in a drive against an opposing force. That is, in order for Nietzsche's criteria for a Will to Power to be consistent, that will must have an end that can be satisfied only through the means he identifies. In order for the circumstances in which dominion is achieved to be valuable in the appeasement of a Will to Power, those circumstances must be represented as part of the final end of the Will to Power. As this essay has attempted to illustrate, such a reality would not be true if dominion alone were the end. Instead, a drive to have one's own effectiveness validated seems to be an essential component of a satisfied Will to Power. While dominion is the quality of having *power over* an object, effectiveness can be characterized as a *capacity to* perform a certain task or achieve a desired end. It is a validation of one's own abilities and a means of gauging the success of an individual.^{xx}

One primary indication that effectiveness must be represented in a satisfied Will to Power in some capacity is that Nietzsche's emphasis on resistance and activity is only consistent if efficacy is a desired end. In order for a feeling of effectiveness to be validated, an individual must psychologically feel as though she has

actively brought on her own success and overcome some obstacle to achieve it. They must feel as though they have utilized their own capacity and abilities in order to achieve the end. As Nietzsche says, “[i]t is not the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure [...], but rather the will’s forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way.”^{XXI} For example, the young adult who inherits wealth does not satisfy the Will to Power because she has not met resistance or actively brought on his success. In this case, the young adult has not utilized her abilities or met opposition in the process of obtaining dominion, indicating that she has no reason to believe that she could continue to make money. That is, while she may have achieved an increase in dominion itself simply by having more financial resources, there is no reason for her to believe that she would be able to maintain this dominion and has therefore not psychologically satisfied the Will to Power. As a consequence, a feeling of effectiveness appears to be a necessary condition for a satisfied Will to Power.

From this, it may seem to follow that dominion does not even need to be achieved in order to satisfy a Will to Power because the feeling of effectiveness alone fulfills the criteria of meeting opposition and active engagement. For instance, a freedom fighter who loses a hard-fought battle against a dominant force may have physically lost dominion, but she will have exercised her Will to Power insofar as the individual’s proficient fighting helped to validate her effectiveness. However, this objection does not seem to be completely consistent with Nietzsche’s notion of a Will to Power.^{XXII} Even if the freedom fighter had experienced a battlefield loss, by surpassing expectations of her opponents as well as her own, she *has* acquired dominion: she has changed his external environment into a place in which her abilities are more respected. This indicates that the acquisition of dominion is still necessary for a satisfied Will to Power; an assessment of success and effectiveness must be derived through an evaluation of one’s acquisition of dominion. This relationship is important not only because a validation of effectiveness must necessarily correspond with an increase in dominion, but also because it offers an indication to an individual of their capacity to obtain more.

Such a relationship can be illustrated in the psychological

consequences of not having a feeling of efficacy validated. For example, if a writer is provided with a positive public book review as a gift from a friend, such a favor might help bolster the success of the publication; however, it would not validate the author's effectiveness as a writer. On the contrary, it may leave the author in a precarious position, unsure of her abilities and capacity for success.^{XXIII} According to Nietzsche, this failed Will to Power can result in a feeling of frustration, impotence, or self-doubt.^{XXIV} In this example, the writer has a desire to be respected for her talents, which indicates that she is assessing her efficacy through *dominion*. However, since the writer has not validated her effectiveness, she cannot expect to obtain the future dominion that she strives for through her writing. As a consequence, her Will to Power has not been satisfied.

This also exemplifies the emphasis Nietzsche placed on success in the face of adversity or competition as a criterion for a satisfied Will to Power. For a Buddhist monk, this may manifest through success in battling appetitive inclinations within the mind, while this sort of competition may be achieved through thwarting rivals for a businessman. Nietzsche makes the point that the Will to Power requires the confrontation and overcoming of resistance overtly clear: "the Will to Power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore, it seeks that which resists it."^{XXV} As a consequence, it seems that the Will to Power can only be satisfied through a feeling of accomplishment; that is, the genuine belief that one's acquisition of dominion was a demonstration of one's own skills and capacity for success.

An additional point that is worth considering is why the feeling of acquiring dominion and a validated capacity only needs to be a belief and not something that is overtly true. This is because many people can satisfy a Will to Power through self-deception by conjuring an illusory conception of their own abilities and successes. Such a reality can be partially attributed to the need for the intoxicating, perhaps euphoric feeling that comes from accomplishment, however contrived and delusional it is.^{XXVI} For example, in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy frequently attempts to conjure and fantasize over a deceptive assessment of his skills as an entrepreneur. He is actively attempting to avoid the immense disappointment and feelings of impotence that might

result from coming to terms with his perpetual failure. As Nietzsche says, “[h]ere the experience of intoxication proved misleading. This increases the feeling of power in the highest degree—therefore, naively judged, power itself.”^{XXVII}

One way in which this kind of illusory Will to Power can be conjured is by reassessing one's desires or convincing oneself that the failure was a result of external circumstances or foul play. For example, if a woman is attempting to succeed as a baseball player, yet is not judged as effective by her teammates and is subsequently rejected, she may attempt to avoid the frustration of her Will to Power by pretending that she was not really driven to become a baseball player. This is a way of limiting the feeling that she has failed at acquiring dominion (the desire to impose one's values on an object); she denies that she ever had the values (the desire to play baseball) that she failed at acquiring. Alternatively, she might convince herself that players on the team conspired against her to remove her. Doing so also allows her to avoid having to face the realization that her capacity as a baseball player is lacking. As a consequence, she prevents her effectiveness from being subject to criticism.^{XXVIII}

The importance of validating one's own effectiveness to the Will to Power is also made clear through Nietzsche's discussion of it as an insatiable drive; that is, “to [perpetually] have and to want to have more—growth.”^{XXIX} Even if an individual were to ascend into an authoritarian political position and receive dictatorial authority and vast amounts of dominion, this position of extreme power would not be satisfying forever. According to Nietzsche, this is a result of the human desire to attempt to improve themselves and experience new accomplishments, something that can only occur if an individual is expanding their dominion. While the kind of dictator mentioned in this example may look to further expand his power by conquering other territories, her predicament illustrates an important point about dominion: there is a finite amount of it. This is true in spite of Nietzsche's contention that “the earth is large enough and man is sufficiently unexhausted.”^{XXX} Even if she were to become a supreme leader, the desire to experience new accomplishments and further validate her capacities would still be a present and gnawing drive.

This insatiability of the Will to Power can also help explain

the phenomenon of torture, which can be seen as a callous manifestation of this drive.^{XXXI} In high positions of power, where there are fewer challenges through which an individual can validate her capacity, torture can be seen as a mechanism to engage with a Will to Power. That is, by subjecting individuals to something that will make them resist her, a torturer is exercising her capacity for dominance and induces her own satisfaction by overcoming this resistance. A torturer is acquiring more dominion by imposing her sadistic desires on a resisting individual, thereby serving to validate her effectiveness and grant her a temporary thrill of accomplishment.

Effectiveness as a Condition of Dominion

While it may be possible to assert that dominion serves as a means through which a feeling of efficacy can be obtained and a Will to Power satisfied, Nietzsche seems to believe that the contrary is true. That is, the characterization of domination as a means to satisfy the Will to Power indicates that Nietzsche believes dominion has qualities that also address the need to establish a feeling of efficacy. A way of reconciling this is to posit that Nietzsche believes dominion implicitly must contain a validation of effectiveness. That is, there is no “power over” (dominion) without also having the “power to” (efficacy) transform the world in accordance with one’s values.^{XXXII} For example, a prince who inherits the title of king upon the death of his father has experienced a tremendous increase in power; however, he only experiences an increase in dominion if he has the skills to maintain this position and continue to conform the world to his will. This requires that he is also effective at leadership and being king; otherwise, he would never truly experience the full increase in dominion that comes from becoming a monarch. As a consequence, Nietzsche’s notion of a Will to Power seems to be best understood as the acquisition of dominion through the imposition of one’s values on an object and the validation of one’s efficacy and abilities. While the manifestations and ends of this will may vary, it is guided by the inexorable pursuit of the thrill that comes from a feeling of accomplishment. In this regard, Nietzsche’s Will to Power can be seen as not only a psychological explanation of a

Notes

^IIn this essay, all citations are direct from Nietzsche texts. The abbreviations are: BGE = Beyond Good and Evil, GM = On the Genealogy of Morality, GS = The Gay Science, WP = The Will to Power, and Z = Thus Spoke Zarathustra

^{II}WP §1067, BGE §259, BGE §23

^{III}Nietzsche, Friedrich (1965), *Schopenhauer as Educator*, trans. J.W. Hillesheim and Malcolm R. Simpson, (South Bend, Indiana, Gateway), pp. 25-26

^{IV}BGE§13

^VGS §349

^{VI}Increases in tangible power, domination, and control.

^{VII}By “dominion itself”, this essay seeks to draw the distinction between tangible increases in power and dominion that must be acquired in particular ways as well as distinguishing between dominion acquired as a means to something else.

^{VIII}By “end”, this essay is describing the manifestation of the Will to Power. For example, for a businessman, the end of his Will to Power might be an increase in revenue.

^{IX}WP §702

^XThis definition was inspired by Professor Bernard Reginster’s March 8, 2016 lecture.

^{XI}For example, we might say that Adolf Hitler attempted to increase his dominion in Europe.

^{XII}Z II §12

^{XIII}This objection was inspired by Professor Bernard Reginster’s March 8, 2016 lecture.

^{XIV}WP §423

^{XV}Here activity can be understood as an individual’s role as the initiation and driving force behind any obtained dominion.

^{XVI}That is, a force that stands to obstruct or oppose an individual

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from satisfying his or her Will to Power.

^{XVII} WP §382

^{XVIII} WP § 224

^{XIX} In order to even face opposition, it is a necessary condition that an individual is active.

^{XX} This definition was inspired by Professor Bernard Reginster's March 8, 2016 lecture.

^{XXI} WP §696

^{XXII} This reply was inspired by a discussion with Professor Bernard Reginster on March 17, 2016.

^{XXIII} WP §696

^{XXIV} Z II §12

^{XXV} WP §656

^{XXVI} WP §48

^{XXVII} WP §48

^{XXVIII} This is an essential component of what Nietzsche calls *resentiment*.

^{XXIX} WP §125

^{XXX} WP §125

^{XXXI} This point was inspired my discussion with Professor Bernard Reginster on March 12, 2016 lecture.

^{XXXII} BGE §259

^{XXI} WP §696

^{XXII} This reply was inspired by a discussion with Professor Bernard Reginster on March 17, 2016.

^{XXIII} WP §696

^{XXIV} Z II §12

^{XXV} WP §656

^{XXVI} WP §48

^{XXVII} WP §48

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^{xxviii} This is an essential component of what Nietzsche calls *resentiment*.

^{xxix} WP §125

^{xxx} WP §125

^{xxxi} This point was inspired my discussion with Professor Bernard Reginster on March 12, 2016 lecture.

^{xxxii} BGE §259

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