Tolkien's Forms of Power: A Nietzschean Anti-realist Ontology of Middle-earth

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ABSTRACT

Tolkien's Legendarium of stories about Middle-earth and other regions of Arda imparts moral questions—especially concerning the conflict for *power* among the characters. *What kind of power? Power over whom or what?* These are the questions I will tend to in this paper. Although Tolkien is a serious critic of literary allegory, this does not mean his stories are without their own moral significance. To bring Tolkien's moral ontology to bear, I will synthesize the natures of his fictional characters with Nietzsche's *immoral* approach; nested within Nietzsche's power ontology, I will establish a relationship between "activity," time, and the affirmation of one's fate and nature. More specifically, I will explain his power ontology in Nietzschean terms through characters such as Sauron, Fëanor, and Aragorn, to name a few. What is more, I will show how, more than individual characters, *races themselves*—Elves and Men—are *bound* to a natural power ontology. Nietzsche will respond to Tolkien's belief in the moral concepts of "good" and "evil" in his Legendarium with his own immoral power ontology: that there are no moral facts, only moral perspectives. If this is so, then we are left with no grounds for an ethics. Instead, what we have is an "innocent" world governed by existential power, drives, and fate. This paper, by carefully considering the psychological motivations (drives) of Tolkien's characters and races, will offer a timely evidence-based moral ontology through which we can more honestly judge human conduct.

INTRODUCTION

I must first make clear, with respect to the comparative nature of this project, that mine is not a Nietzschean *interpretation* or *reading* of Tolkien. This project is in no way an attempt to deconstruct or critically analyze Tolkien's moral and social imperatives, subconscious or otherwise. Indeed, it is vital that the reader understands, before advancing, that Tolkien *abhorred* allegorical and symbolic literary devices.[1] He instead favored a genuinely *escapist* mode of composition produced primarily by the unconscious. In other words, Tolkien's legendarium is without a political, moral, or otherwise social agenda. This is not to say that his works are without meaning, but that they are without a *designed* meaning. It is Gandalf who warns, "he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom."[2] In turn, this paper will neither "break" nor deconstruct Tolkien's motivations; instead, I will only *refer* to Tolkien's legendarium, with all its moral complexity, to offer a rich and substantive story through which we can broach Nietzsche's power ontology. In so doing, I will *realize* Nietzsche's moral anti-realist perspective through the medium of Tolkien's *unconsciously* moral stories and characters.

When observing Tolkien's legendarium from a Western moral perspective, it is obvious to us which characters in Middle-earth appear as "good" or "evil." This, of course, is no accident, as the stories unconsciously reflect Tolkien's Catholic moral realism. We can observe the same moral structure whenever we encounter phrases like "the common good" or "the right thing to do." Nested within these judgments lies the assumption that there *is* a right moral action and that *all* agents are morally beholden to it in the same capacity. We can observe the quintessential form of Western moral realism in Christianity's Ten Commandments: moral laws which Christians are expected to obey. In other words, moral realism is founded upon the idea that principles of "right and wrong" do exist, and they exist the same way for everyone. It is with Nietzsche's anti-realism, however, that we will pass "beyond" moralization and into a realm of fate and existential power which, I will argue, more accurately define the human

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[1] Orson Scott Card, "How Tolkien Means," in *Meditations on Middle-earth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 155.

[2] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 290.

experience. To make such a pass, this paper will not devote its attention chronologically to Tolkien's legendarium. Instead, I will rotate my attention from one issue to the next, crossing timelines as we move.

In Part I, I will define "power" in Nietzschean terms, establishing my own position in relation to the work of leading Nietzsche scholars. Further elucidating the links between Nietzsche's anti-realism and Tolkien's realism, I will provide a philosophical foundation upon which to ground the ontological discussion of Tolkien's legendarium. Part II will address the Ring of Power and how it affects characters differently; here, I will turn to Nietzsche to explicate the Ring's influence in terms of his power ontology. In Part III, I will broach Nietzsche's naturalism in terms of the relationship between power and drives as they are realized in Tolkien's characters. Part IV will synthesize Nietzsche's and Tolkien's commitments to fate through heredity. In my conclusion, I will provide an account of what I deem the most apt moral resolution between Nietzsche and Tolkien: *compassion* and *affirmation* through anti-realist perspectivism.

PART I: WHAT IS POWER?

For Nietzsche, power has little to do with ethics, control, or domination of others. Instead, Nietzsche's "power" is more concerned with how *effectively* an individual can navigate and affirm his fate, which includes his past and his pedigree.[3] Missing in Nietzsche's power ontology is a basis for moral realism: the idea that moral facts exist independent of an agent and his psychological constitution. To be sure, Nietzsche's moral anti-realism will challenge Tolkien's Catholicism. Although Nietzsche's claims will, in the end, defeat Tolkien's realism, this does not make their views mutually exclusive in terms of power; in fact, Tolkien will come to Nietzsche's aid when I argue that power has more in common with compassion than domination.

While there is some controversy over what *exactly* Nietzsche means by power, there is a large consensus that it emphasizes harmony and personhood. John Richardson argues that Nietzsche takes power to mean a person's "progress" in improving his ability to realize his drives in accordance with his nature.[4] In other words, power is not an achievement by itself, but a *process* of becoming better at being oneself. This view differs from Bernard Reginster's conception of power; he takes power to mean the act of *overcoming* suffering by learning to *value* challenges as opportunities to develop oneself.[5]

It is Maudemarie Clarke who takes elements from both Richardson and Reginster to explain power in terms of *personhood* and *drives*. According to Clarke, power is "one's ability to impose the conditions required for the satisfactions of one's first-order desires on the world."[6] Here, she means that power's primary feature is: one's degree of *success* in being oneself. While I previously championed Reginster's view on power in my work on the affirmation of suffering, I will, in this paper, ally myself with Clarke.[7] In my own words, power is an agent's ability to *realize* and *perform* his natural drives in the world.

Nietzsche also makes a distinction between two types of people—slave and master—who achieve different degrees of power in different ways. The slave's psychology works *against* him, diminishing his power, because his vast array of internal drives competes for dominance in a mutually exclusive form. That is, the slave has many drives, but they often stymie one another and hinder personal progress because each desires a separate goal. On the other hand, the master has few drives, but, in his psychological simplicity, he successfully organizes them into a unifying project. To unify both types into a third group, Nietzsche describes the Übermensch as someone with the slave's complexity of drives but the master's ability to organize them into a cohesive project.[8] When faced with his inability to achieve power, Nietzsche explains that the slave seeks *revenge* upon the master for his success by deeming him *evil*. In other words, Nietzsche thinks the slave deals out revenge and calls it justice. In so doing, the slave adopts a sort of moral realism when he realizes his vengeance.

Before proceeding to unpack Tolkien's moral realism, we will turn our attention to Plato, the original architect of the magic ring of power. In the *Republic*, Plato calls us to imagine the terrible temptations imposed by a magic ring whose power granted the same sort of invisibility as Tolkien's Ring. Faced with endless possibilities to lie,

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[3] Maudemarie Clarke, "Suffering and the Affirmation of Life." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 93.

[4] John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.

[5] Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 132.

[6] Clarke, "Suffering and the Affirmation of Life," 93.

[7] Lucas Wyrembeck, "Nietzsche's Life-Affirmative Suffering in Western Literature: Confronting Technological and Anesthetic Decadence." *UWL Journal of Undergraduate Research* 22 (Spring 2019), 3.

[8] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 69.

steal, and manipulate others to advance our own ends, Plato warns us that the ring's ultimate power is man's downfall. In becoming "like a God among men," this power would perpetuate injustice.[9] Rooted within Plato's conclusion is a premise: that injustice, vice, and evil are *real* qualities that not only exist, but reflect human conduct. Tolkien will agree with Plato's warning when he remarks, "It is possible for the good, even the saintly, to be subjected to a power of evil which is too great for them to overcome—in themselves."[10] We can see this when Frodo, an obviously "moral" character, *fails* at the end of his journey and succumbs to the power of the Ring.

Tolkien's views on morality are clearly informed by his Faith, but such religiosity need not be explicit in his stories for us to observe his realism. While Aragorn abstains from explicit religious devotion, he still expresses ethical sentiments whose foundations are not unlike Plato's realism. "Good and evil have not changed since yesteryear, nor are they one thing among Elves and another among Men," he remarks. "It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house." In a word, morality is *fixed* for Tolkien; it demands the *same commitments* of all individuals and races across time.

Conversely, Nietzsche holds that morality cannot be universalized or systematized as it is in Catholicism and Tolkien's Middle-earth. For Nietzsche, there are no "mind-independent moral facts," or those that exist in nature.[11] Instead, we are left with an "innocent" world whose moral foundations are reducible to perspectives. These same perspectives do not amount to "moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena."[12] With this concept of moral anti-realism in mind, how may we still approach morality without trivializing it as mere perspective alone? If morality does not come from nature or God, from where, then, does it originate? Nietzsche thinks we can answer these questions in terms of heredity and psychology.

Nietzsche articulates that a person's moral intuitions are not necessarily learned, but "nurtured." That is, he *acquires* his moral perspective from his ancestors' psychological traits.[13] In this way, his moral sensibilities are not *his to choose*, but his to *learn* and *affirm*—to say "yes" to. Nietzsche insists, "one's ancestors, one's 'blood' decide here, too. Many generations must have labored to prepare the origin of the philosopher;"[14] the "decision" (made by one's blood) is Nietzsche's case for naturalism: that nature and heredity outweigh existential choice or freedom; that one's lot is largely preordained, fixed, and irreparable. While this may sound surprising, Nietzsche's claims about fate are overwhelmingly supported by vast numbers of controlled studies in contemporary behavioral psychology which observe that *most* of children's moral intuitions are governed by heredity.[15] Within such a fatalistic world, however, Nietzsche leaves room for freedom, albeit in a new sense. In a word, Nietzsche does not take freedom to mean choice, but a *harmony of drives*. Indeed, Nietzsche scholar Donald Rutherford considers freedom and fate to be *two sides of the same coin*, as argued in "Freedom as Philosophical Ideal," connected in terms of *power*. That is, the freest person is he whom fate bestows with the most power.[16] Paradoxically, the freest person accepts his fate and, in so doing, gains power. Later in this paper, we will see the extent to which fate influences Nietzsche's power in Tolkien's Middle-earth.

PART II: THE RING'S EFFECT

Before applying Nietzsche's philosophy to Tolkien's characters, we need to unpack the nature of the One Ring to grasp *why* it affects characters differently. The chief "power" of the Ring is its *amplification* of the wearer's original drives. That is, the Ring "enhances" one's existing traits and slows natural decay.[17] We can observe these effects through the *unnaturally* long lives of Smeagol and Bilbo. What is more, the Ring's effect is harsher upon mortals because their immortal constitutions *conflict* with the Ring's *preservative* effects. In consequence, mortals who use the Ring to become invisible will "fade" until they are wholly consumed by its power. Ceasing to grow or change, they will remain invisible permanently.[18] At this point, we will engage John Richardson's scholarship to help synthesize Nietzsche's views on power with the effects of the Ring on individual characters.

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[9] Plato, *Republic,* trans. Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000) 32.

[10] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2000), 252.

[11] Brian Leiter, *Moral Psychology with Nietzsche*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 33.

[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 85.

[13] Leiter, *Moral Psychology with Nietzsche*, 67.

[14] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 140.

[15] Leiter, *Moral Psychology with Nietzsche*, 172.

[16] Ibid., 159.

[17] Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 152.

[18] Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the* Ring, 51.

Richardson explains Nietzsche's concept of power in terms of an agent's "activity." An "active" individual affirms his drives and effectively organizes and synthesizes his individual wills into a unifying project.[19] His motivation is internal and largely *independent* of other people. He affirms his past—no matter if it is painful or pleasant—by *gladly* accepting it as part of his life and *tying* it to his future.[20]

We can observe this kind of "activity" in Tom Bombadil especially. While much of Bombadil's story remains a mystery, we do know a great deal about his character and temperament. Tolkien describes him as a "master in a peculiar way: he has no fear, and no desire of possession or domination at all. He merely knows and understands about such things as concern him in his natural little realm."[21] In a word, he is indifferent about that which falls outside of his land and his control. He cares little about others' opinions of him and is wholly satisfied with the life he leads in the wild. His kindness, awareness, and wisdom complement each other, making him the perfect denizen and caretaker of animals, woods, and any beings who find themselves in his company. His temperament aligns with what Nietzsche says of power: "When power becomes gracious and descends into the visible—such descent I call beauty. And there is nobody from whom I want beauty as much as from you who are powerful: let your kindness be your final self-conquest."[22] Bombadil *actualizes* his drives each time he works to fulfill his aims. When he shelters the Hobbits, feeds them, and provides them with ponies, he further increases his power by *becoming* more of himself. He does not require others' submission or gratitude, however, to be fulfilled. Bombadill merely behaves in his natural manner—unaffected by events and individuals around him—and exercises his power by being himself. His will has complete control over his drives, as we can see when he encounters the Ring. Bombadil holds the Ring, wears it, and makes *it* disappear.[23] Gandalf later explains that "the Ring has no power over him. He is his own master."[24] That is, the Ring does not affect him, and he has no interest in its power; his own power is so great that he remains entirely unaffected, or "active," in his encounter with it.

Likewise, Samwise Gamgee exercises a similar sort of Nietzschean "activity" through his drives' harmony. The Ring's promise of domination fails to attract Sam because he already knows exactly who he is.[25] Sam is most himself *without* the power of the Ring. His authentic realization of power consists of tending his garden, loving his family, and protecting his friends. "The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due," Tolkien describes, "not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command."[26] Indeed, Sam's power lies in the self-affirmation of his drives: each complements the next and no one drive is at odds with the others. Consequently, Sam's psychology and drives are active because they are self-sufficient and affirm his nature. In other words, Sam is proud of himself, requires no one else's approval, and is most powerful when he is strengthening those around him.

Conversely, several characters in Tolkien's legendarium lack Nietzsche's power because their drives are "reactive" by nature. In a word, reactive agents are "obsessively, resentfully struggling against others."[27] That is, the reactive person *relies* on others to affirm himself and to give value to his life. He is happiest when others praise him, and resentful when he is scorned or abused. In this way, reactivity places power *outside* of the agent, displacing his *value* from his *power*. This reactive proclivity "gets meaning from others because it can supply none itself."[28] Where the active person wills his power directly from himself, his reactive counterpart seeks *others* for power. The reactive agent is often *overwhelmed* and *paralyzed* by his complexity of competing drives to the point that he cannot act.

We can see elements of reactivity especially pronounced in Smeagol when he easily succumbs to the power of the Ring. He is immediately overtaken by its will to dominate him. Smeagol embodies Nietzsche's reactivity because he resents and negates his life. He is ashamed of himself and wishes to be *other* than that which he is. His desire to *negate* his life is what enhances his longing to be *more* than he originally was through the Ring's power. Smeagol cannot will power through his natural drives alone, so he resorts to the Ring. Tolkien explains that the

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[19] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 28.
[20] Ibid., 108.
[21] Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 192.
[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1982), 230.
[23] Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring, 174.
[24] Ibid., 346.
[25] Eric Katz, "The Rings of Tolkien and Plato," in *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2003), 18.
[26] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 186.
[27] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 42.
[28] Ibid., 43.

Ring's power is essentially corruptive, "but some individuals are harder to corrupt than others."[29] In effect, Smeagol's susceptibility to and *longing for* the Ring's corruption is what makes him reactive, or *reliant* on outside sources to grant him power.

Fëanor, a High King of the Ñoldor in the First Age, is another Tolkienian character with reactive psychological drives. Paramount to his constitution is his proclivity for *revenge.* Fëanor's greatest achievement was the crafting of his three Silmarils, Elven gems in which were captured some of the purest light and beauty of the Valar. When Melkor rapes his Silmarils and kills his father, Fëanor swears an oath with his sons to reclaim the precious gems, by any means, unto death.[30] Such a violent oath reveals the severity of Fëanor's affliction: he is so internally *affected* by Melkor that he will sacrifice the whole of his bloodline to avenge his father. In Nietzsche's view, Fëanor's power *wanes* upon his oath because he aligns his identity with forces *outside* of himself—with revenge upon another. In terms of temporality, Fëanor is loath to affirm Melkor's crimes and to incorporate them as part of his future. Indeed, he would much sooner negate his past and begin anew. When we apply Richardson's concept of power, Fëanor's "project" of revenge allows him to unify his focus, albeit toward a "reactive" goal.[31] In so doing, he loses power by devoting his energy to a *response* to mitigate his suffering.

PART III: INTEGRATED DRIVES AND POWER IN MIDDLE-EARTH

If we take Nietzsche's concept of power to mean the successful realization of one's drives, we need to understand which human qualities or "type facts" beget such success. While the "active" individual has the advantage of willing power *through himself*, there is yet a deeper psychological factor that determines the *degree* to which his power is willed; this factor I will call "harmony." By harmony, I mean the synthesis, or *cooperation,* of drives. In a word, harmonious drives *complement* one another and contribute to a greater project: the will to power.

For Nietzsche, heightened power requires a "mastery" over one's drives.[32] We will note the distinction between Nietzsche's "masters" and "slaves" in terms of *how* they will. The master type achieves power by dominating others. His basic but unified drives impart an effective rule. Whereas, slave types hold many drives, but cannot control or "master" them; so, they themselves are mastered.[33] Nietzsche argues that the master is superior to the slave—for he attains power through his rule—but certainly does not represent the pinnacle of power in man. The *height* of power is reached by the person whose drive is to rule *himself.*[34] Tolkien will agree with Nietzsche that tyranny is, in several ways, opposed to power. However, where Tolkien will call tyrants "evil," Nietzsche will make his perspectival case for "innocence." If we endorse Nietzsche's view, we shall arrive at a surprisingly compassionate *and* pragmatic conclusion—particularly regarding some of the most repulsive moral agents.

While Bilbo Baggins may not immediately appear to us the quintessence of power, it is through Nietzsche that I shall expound his richness. Truly, Bilbo is no master over others, but he is quite the commander of his own drives— and drives he has aplenty. With Nietzsche's emphasis on heredity in psychology, we will observe just why Bilbo's drives are so obverse. His mother was a Took, a branch of Hobbits regarded as "bolder and more adventurous."[35] On the other hand, Bilbo owes his conservative proclivity to his "solid and comfortable" father, Bungo Baggins.[36] Tolkien refers on several occasions to the inner conflict to which Bilbo tends during his quest with the Dwarves. Regarding his "Tookish" side, Tolkien describes it as "something that only waited for a chance to come out."[37] That is, his dual nature engenders ambivalence and doubt, but also yields a striking psychological complexity and wisdom.

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[29] Aeon J. Skoble, "Virtue and Vice in *The Lord of the Rings*," in *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2003), 115.

[30] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, edited by Christopher Tolkien (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2001), 83.

[31] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 134.

[32] Robert C. Solomon & Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2000), 219.

[33] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 69.

[34] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, edited by Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 141.

[35] Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 5.

[36] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2012), 5.

[37] Ibid., 5.

When the spiders and the elves seize his companions in Mirkwood, Bilbo cautiously, stealthily engages the captors and rescues the dwarves.[38] On both occasions, afraid for his own life, Bilbo's reticence meets his Tookish drive for action, allowing him to successfully complete his tasks. Bilbo applies his same caution when he engages with Smaug and Gollum by speaking in riddles and withholding his identity. Despite his drives' confliction during heavy decisions, Bilbo's hesitation is a *byproduct* of his great psychological richness. He owns a slave's wealth of drives but manages and synthesizes them with the master's organization. To my mind, Bilbo's opposing drives and the success with which he employs them makes him a powerful character in a Nietzschean sense; they inspire him to "wear a sword instead of a walking stick."[39]

Faramir is yet another Tolkienian character who embodies Nietzsche's concept of power. While we could discern his power in terms of individuals drives, I will instead show how Tolkien takes *gender* to influence power. To qualify Tolkien's views on gender, this does not mean feminine traits are exclusive to females or vice versa; indeed, we will see how several of Tolkien's males embody feminine dispositions and how integration is constructed through a balance of the two genders. Melanie A. Rawls astutely explains how the "Good" is achieved in Tolkien's works through what she takes to be a "harmony" between feminine and masculine drives. She explains, "Those beings in Arda who are able to achieve good either embody both Feminine and Masculine within themselves or have access to the nature of the other gender, usually in the form of a spouse, a sibling, or a mentor."[40] That is, Tolkien's form of the Good results from a *balance* of feminine and masculine traits and influences. People can achieve this balance through their own internal constitution *or* through interactions with people whose temperamental structure—relative to gender characteristics—*differs* from theirs, and thereby harmonizes. Rawls also argues, "The best of the males of Arda...display feminine traits." This claim corresponds well with Nietzsche's concept of power because Nietzsche's "best" individual (in terms of power) is the one with a full spectrum of drives. Faramir embodies Nietzsche's power *through* complexity with his combination of feminine "tenderness and understanding" and his prowess as a skilled warrior.[41] Rawls goes on to offer what she takes to be the chief qualities of the two genders in Tolkien's works. "In Arda, the prime feminine characteristic is *understanding*. The prime masculine characteristic is *power*."[42] In a word, the masculine tends toward the outer world, and the feminine the inner. The integrated person with the most Nietzschean power is whoever balances these two forces, thereby making Faramir a man of great power.

Opposing the psychological richness of Faramir and Bilbo, we will turn our attention to Sauron, the great Deceiver of Middle-earth. It is tempting to think of the Dark Lord as powerful due to his long reign, immense tyranny, and terrible capacity for destruction. However, I hope to show that Sauron is far less powerful than we might suspect. In his essay on Nietzsche and Tolkien, Douglas Blount contends that "Sauron seems like a candidate for the title *Übermensch* (or overman)."[43] I find this view misguided, however, as Nietzsche's Übermensch lacks Sauron's tyrannical obsession. The overman, who is both slave and master *synthesized*, finds himself sympathetic to *all types* because he himself embodies a full range of drives.[44] What is more, the overman's values are internal and independent of others; his power comes from himself. In Richardson's view, "It's in the announcements of the overman that we most find Nietzsche suggesting we value others' power."[45] If Nietzsche's overman cares about others, then we must rescind Sauron's candidacy.

By contrast, the master expresses power in relation to others—often by ruling over them. We can see the master in Sauron through his will to dominate Middle-earth. Like the master, Sauron's drives are quite limited and basic: he desires organization, perfection, and control of Middle-earth. By depending so heavily upon others' submission to affirm himself, Sauron *loses* power. As Tolkien explains, "A man who wishes to exert 'power' must have subjects, who are not himself. But he then depends on them."[46] It is no wonder, then, why Sauron's fear of Elendil's line runs deep: the heir to the throne of Gondor seeks to restore, to heal, and never to dominate.

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[38] Ibid., 146.

[39] Ibid., 16.

[40] Melanie A. Rawls, "The Feminine Principle in Tolkien," in *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Janet Brennan Croft and Leslie A. Donovan, (Altadena: Mythopeic Press, 2015), 100.

[41] Ibid., 110.

[42] Ibid., 100.

[43] Douglas Blount, "Überhobbits: Tolkien, Nietzsche, and the Will to Power," in *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2003), 94.

[44] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 69.

[45] Ibid., 150.

[46] Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 278.

While Aragorn belongs to the race of Men, he descends from an array of ancestors which includes Melian (Maia), Lúthien (Elf), and Beren (Man). Indeed, Aragorn's pedigree and talents are far more diverse than meet the eye. He is a skilled healer, tracker, and woodsman. He can survive alone for months in the wild just as *naturally* as he can lead great hosts of Men and Elves. Aragorn's capacity for destruction and tyranny is coupled with a *temperance* that moderates his actions and redirects his power *inward.* He desires kingship, but not for its own sake. Aragorn sees his rule as a means to gratify his drives: to amend Isildur's "fault," to wed Arwen, and to unify Middle-earth under his restorative reign. Along his journey to destroy the Ring, Aragorn routinely employs his complex drives to achieve his ends. While the Ring's power succumbs other characters, Aragorn is strong enough to refuse it. When he first encounters the Hobbits in Bree as Strider, he reveals to them the ease with which he could claim Frodo's Ring. "If I was after the Ring," he remarks, "I could have it—now!"[47] Instead of seizing the Ring for himself, he guides the Hobbits safely to Rivendell with the help of Glorfindel. What is more, in speaking with Bilbo and Frodo in Rivendell, Aragorn reveals to us more of his complexity:

> He turned to Strider. 'Where have you been, my friend? Why weren't you at the feast? The Lady Arwen was there.'
>
> Strider looked down at Bilbo gravely. 'I know,' he said. 'But often I must put mirth aside. Elladan and Elrohir have returned out of the Wild unlooked-for, and they had tidings that I wished to hear at once.'
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> 'Well, my dear fellow,' said Bilbo, 'now you've heard the news, can't you spare me a moment? I want your help in something urgent. Elrond says this song of mine is to be finished before the end of the evening, and I am stuck. Let's go off into a corner and polish it up!'
>
> Strider smiled. 'Come then!' he said. 'Let me hear it!'[48]

We can observe in this scene a pensive Aragorn who, in the span of a few breaths, *overcomes* his reticence and actively opens his mind and heart to Bilbo. These beneficent actions, however, do not make Aragorn "good" in Nietzsche's view; they only illustrate the *color* and *complexity* of his character.

In other words, if we are to take Nietzsche's immoralism seriously, then Sauron is no more "evil" or "bad" than Aragorn; it is only in respect to existential power that they differ—and, in this, Aragorn's power is *far greater* than Sauron's because it is constitutionally harmonious. That is, Aragorn's drives synthesize one another to promote even greater unification through personal progress. His psychological facts and drives all work together toward a greater project: to heal the broken, unite peoples, restore hope, and reclaim the throne of Gondor so that he may earn the privilege to wed his love, Arwen. In a word, Aragorn is hyper-successful in achieving his natural ends thanks to the harmony of his drives. What is common about Aragorn's social drives is the *direction* of his power. Aragorn shares his power with others, be it through hope, healing, fellowship, or arms. Conversely, Sauron's power, laden with his will to dominate others, will always *rely* on controlling others to affirm his being. Sauron *drains* others of their power, whereas Aragorn *restores* others' power, often heightening it even further. Indeed, Aragorn's restoration and healing are forms of what I take to be love and mercy. Nietzsche says of the powerful agent: "the great problems all demand *great love*, and it is only the strong, well-rounded, secure spirits, those who have a solid basis, that are qualified for them."[49] This statement affirms Aragorn's merciful sense of power. Tempted as we may be to pronounce Aragorn as "good," Nietzsche's immoralism negates such a claim. Instead, our pronunciation is relegated to a descriptive observation: Aragorn is *good* at being himself because his drives cooperate and synthesize one another. Sauron, on the other hand, is neither *bad* nor *evil*; he was merely fated with a set of qualities and drives which *badly* coexist and fail, largely, to will power.

PART IV: FATE AND POWER

Despite their disagreement on morality, Tolkien and Nietzsche share similar positions on fate and nature (or blood)—chiefly in the ways they determine one's drives, character, and aptitude. In the earlier section on power, we learned how Nietzsche considers freedom, fate, and power to be intertwined. That is, the freest person is the one with the most power—or, who is *best* at being himself. Nietzsche's naturalism surfaces here, as he takes this sort of freedom to be reserved for a select few: existential freedom is extremely rare in individuals, he believes. What is more alarming to a reader who believes in agency, however, is that Nietzsche does not think these select few *choose*

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[47] Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 194.
[48] Ibid., 261.
[49] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Paul V. Cohn and Maude D. Petre (Mineola: Dover, 2006), 158.

their freedom or their power. Rather, they are born with it.[50] Even as they will power, they follow a path that nature has laid for them. Nietzsche scholar Brian Leiter likens Nietzsche's naturalism to the growth of a tomato plant:

> Think of some seeds from a tomato plant. No amount of environmental input will yield an apple tree from those seeds, yet the 'environment' (the amount of water, sun, pests, etc.) will affect which of the trajectories possible for a tomato plant—wilting, flourishing, or any of the stages in between—will be realized.[51]

Through Leiter's analogy, we can better understand Nietzsche's view on identity. A tomato seed can only ever become a tomato plant. However, its environment determines how well or poorly the plant develops, allowing for some variance. This means, despite his commitment to naturalism and fatalism, Nietzsche allows for *nurture* to influence the way a person's nature is *realized*.

To further support this tomato analogy and buttress Nietzsche's naturalism with empirical evidence, I will turn to Dr. Jay Belsky's "Differential Susceptibility Theory," also known as "Orchid Theory" in the field of psychology. "Orchid Children," who tend to be introverts, are named after the plant because their genetic expression is more malleable in response to environmental experiences and conditions, much like the tomato plants in Leiter's explanation. These individuals tend toward the "best or worst developmental outcomes depending on the quality of the early child rearing environment."[52] In a word, these "Orchid Children" are more strongly influenced by their environment, "For Better *and* For Worse."[53] They *thrive* in suitable environments and *wilt* in disagreeable placements. This, however, does not repudiate Nietzsche's and Tolkien's commitments to hereditary fate—it only means that introverted individuals' genetic expressions and temperamental outcomes are more malleable by environmental factors than others'. In effect, fate still naturalistically *determines* an individual's malleability and, consequently, power.

In Tolkien's Middle-earth, fate is largely determined by bloodlines. This concept of fate is supported by the overwhelming majority of developmental psychological literature. Indeed, one landmark study conducted by Bouchard and Loehlin shows how personality traits, which shape the paths of individuals' lives, are mostly explained by natural and sexual selection.[54] This aligns well with Nietzsche's fatalism, except Tolkien takes fate to be characterized by both natural *and* divine powers; whereas, Nietzsche is singularly committed to a *naturalistic*, "earthly" fate.[55]

However, if we are to accept Nietzsche's naturalism as an explanation for Tolkienian characters' fates, how can we understand why Aragorn rejects the Ring and Isildur succumbs to it? They share the same kingly blood of Númenor—the blood of Elendil. How and why, then, do they respond so differently to the power of the Ring? I will employ Leiter's analogy of the tomato plant as well as "Orchid Theory" to explain the rift between the choices of Aragorn and Isildur.

The race of Men covets power for the sake of external control, be it militaristic, political, or social. This is obvious when we observe Isildur succumb to the Ring easily so he can use it to augment his kingship. While Aragorn shares in his drive for external power, it is *tempered* by his education in Rivendell. Thanks to his tutelage under his foster-father (Lord Elrond), Aragorn is *hyper-aware* of his identity, his drives, and his bloodline. While the seed of his identity has much in common with Isildur, Aragorn *staves off* the proclivity toward external power through environmental factors—primarily his education in Rivendell. He achieves a deeper, more integrated self which is *internally* focused, allowing for him to refuse the Ring. In other words, if we are to keep with the tomato and orchid plant analogies, Isildur and Aragorn are both of the same seed, but the garden in which Aragorn develops is better suited to the realization of integrated, harmonious drives.

Moving beyond individual characters, we can also observe differences in the natures and fates of Tolkienian *races*. For instance, a primary distinction between Elves and Men is that Elves endure forever in Arda, while Men

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[50] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 140.

[51] Joshua Knobe and Brian Leiter, "The Case for Nietzschean Moral Psychology," in *Nietzsche and Morality*, edited by Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 90.

[52] Eilis Kennedy, "Orchids and dandelions: How some children are more susceptible to environmental influences for better or worse and the implications for child development," in *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (2013), 319.

[53] Jay Belsky, Marian J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, and Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, "For Better *and* For Worse: Differential Susceptibility to Environmental Influences," in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (2007), 300.

[54] Thomas J. Bouchard, Jr. and John C. Loehlin, "Genes, Evolution, and Personality," in *Behavior Genetics* (2001), 244.

[55] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 144.

"fade" through mortality. Elves are *bound* to existence, and Men are freed from it. Who, then, is the more fortunate in terms of power? I hope to show that neither Elves nor Men possess a more powerful fate regarding death. Rather, I will argue that it is one's *attitude* and *affirmation* of fate which instead determine Nietzschean power. In *The Silmarillion*, Númenórean Men are blessed with greater strength, wisdom, and longevity than others.[56] Yet, they still covet the immortality of the Elves. When Elves die in Arda, they return again, reborn. The Messengers of the Valar explain to Men:

> 'The Eldar, you say, are unpunished, and even those who rebelled do not die. Yet that is to them neither reward nor punishment, but the fulfilment of their being. They cannot escape, and are bound to this world, never to leave it so long as it lasts, for its life is theirs. And you are punished for the rebellion of Men, you say, in which you had small part, and so it is that you die. But that was not at first appointed for a punishment. Thus you escape, and leave the world, and are not bound to it, in hope or in weariness. Which of us therefore should envy the others?'[57]

Here, Tolkien shows how Men's "punishment" of death was not originally punitive—it was a *gift*. And, the Elves' immortality is a double-edged sword: they live forever in Arda but are, simultaneously, *confined* to its boundaries. In a sense, their immortality is a prison. One begins to understand why Men's mortality can be interpreted as a gift. When we apply Nietzsche's views on power, Men's envy of Elven immortality is a form of weakness: in wishing for immortality—a realm of being *other* than their *natural* fate—Men lose power.

It is Sauron the Deceiver who corrupts Men and entices them to overthrow the Valar so they may achieve "Freedom" or deathlessness.[58] Of course, Men fail in this task and are severely punished by the Valar. Still, Sauron's tainting of Men endures through the Third Age until Aragorn, who is called Estel, *redeems* Men's Fall, mirroring the Christian Fall from Paradise.

In my previous paper, I characterized Christianity's emphasis upon Heaven as the ultimate source of meaning or worth.[59] Nietzsche fittingly labels this view as "afterworldly" and considers it to be life-negating and nihilistic.[60] Rather than view death as a conduit or an escape to Heaven, Nietzsche thinks we should embrace death as a natural part of life, regardless of the possibility for eternal salvation: "A new pride my ego taught me, and this I teach men: no longer to bury one's head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth."[61] Logically, it is impossible for earthly life to have intrinsic value if it is lived *for* the afterlife. By viewing life on earth as a "proving grounds" or a precursor to an afterlife, the earthly experience loses any claim for intrinsic value.[62] It follows, then, that the only way a mortal existence can have intrinsic value is if it is lived *for itself*, no matter what happens postmortem. To qualify this argument, I must also reiterate that the "value" Nietzsche has in mind is not an objective sort like in Christianity; it will differ between individuals, but all value will come from a common source: the earth. Its realization, however, will vary between people. Additionally, Nietzsche sees Heaven as an escapist form of "slave morality," or a means to "despise" the bodily, mortal condition. In despising his nature, which includes his mortality, man loses power. Referring once more to the "afterworldly," he explains, "They wanted to escape their own misery, and the stars were too far for them."[63] In this, Nietzsche means that Heaven is treated merely as an *escape*, and not necessarily as a beneficiary of value. When it comes to death, Nietzsche thinks we should long for it—not as an *escape* from mortal suffering, but as a *fulfillment* of our natural condition and fate. He writes, "He who has a goal and an heir will want death at the right time for his goal and heir. And from reverence for his goal and heir he will hang no more dry wreaths in the sanctuary of life."[64] We will see how Tolkien faces Nietzsche's critique on worldly value by closely examining Aragorn's "reverence for his goal."

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[56] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 260.

[57] Ibid., 264-265.

[58] Ibid., 272.

[59] Wyrembeck, "Nietzsche's Life-Affirmative Suffering in Western Literature: Confronting Technological and Anesthetic Decadence," 3.

[60] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 143.

[61] Ibid., 144

[62] Wyrembeck, "Nietzsche's Life-Affirmative Suffering in Western Literature: Confronting Technological and Anesthetic Decadence," 3.

[63] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 144.

[64] Ibid., 184.

While I have shown how "afterworldly" belief tends toward earthly nihilism, I must qualify that a "dual-meaning existence" is still possible;[65] that is, an existence in which mortal *and* eternal life both have intrinsic value. In a word, someone could believe in eternity, but choose to base his actions *outside* of their eternal consequences. In other words, his belief in eternity would not affect his actions, allowing them to retain value by themselves. While his attitude is not necessarily a reflection upon Tolkien's beliefs, Aragorn averts Nietzsche's critique of "afterworldly" nihilism by affirming this world *and* the (possible) next. Tolkien shows us through Aragorn a way that mortality can be affirmed, embraced, and celebrated. Rather than depart Middle-earth "unmanned and witless," Aragorn *affirms* his Doom to Arwen: "But let us not be overthrown at the final test, who of old renounced the Shadow and the Ring. In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! We are not bound forever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!"[66] Here, Aragorn embodies Nietzsche's ideal by accepting his death freely at the final stage of his fate. This way, he affirms his natural condition and gains power. If there is, indeed, an afterlife, then Aragorn will gladly accept it. If, however, there is nothing after death, his life is no less valuable, as he lived only in accordance with his nature.

Mirroring Aragorn's upbringing, Túrin Turambar was fostered by Elves in Doriath who teach him swordfighting and their language of Sindarin. Túrin, the only son of Húrin and Morwen, was a warrior of great renown and a prince of Men in the First Age. Owing his tragic fate to the curse Morgoth places upon his father, Túrin sees overcoming the Dark Lord as his great conquest.[67] In so doing, he commits himself to a "reactive" response. Unlike Fëanor's "project" of revenge against Mordred, however, Túrin *tries* to *renunciate* his identity and thereby evade the curse placed upon him; that is, he tries to change who he is at his core to escape his fate. If the new Túrin is no longer his former self, then the curse does not belong to him. Nietzsche may consider Túrin a "prisoner" because, "Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past."[68] To upend his horrid fate, Túrin tries to rename himself "Turambar" (Master of Fate) and thereby evade Morgoth's curse. He optimistically adopts a form of constructivism, hoping that he can *reactively* shape a more preferable fate than the one he inherited. Unfortunately, Túrin is waylaid by Morgoth's curse at every stage of his life, causing him to accidentally kill his friend Beleg and others— particularly those who tell him the truth about himself. When Túrin hides his identity (his true name) from friends and foes, Gwindor explains to him, "The doom lies in yourself, not in your name."[69] This friendly criticism aligns with Nietzsche's concept of power because it implies that mutability is not so easily achieved as Túrin had hoped. Instead, his new name belies his *wyrd* and thereby strips him of his power. As Nietzsche scholar John Richardson explains, "For Nietzsche, it's only reactive need that hates what was or is; this is the stance of the slave—and of the tyrant and the romantic."[70] When he flees from his fate, Túrin negates his self and *reactively* says "no" to his life*, leading him eventually to his suicide.

On the other hand, Aragorn reconciles his fate by willingly accepting his Doom and committing himself to the affirmation of his life. Even in the face of death, as noted above, Aragorn gladly says *yes* to his mortality and *gently fades*. To be sure, Aragorn is not without his own tragic fate: his father dies at the hands of orcs, he loves a woman who must renounce her immortality for him, and he lives much of his life alone in the wild. Still, his drives harmonize themselves in a way that allows him to actively affirm his fate and effectively achieve his goals. In this, Aragorn wills more Nietzschean power each times he *successfully* affirms and incorporates his nature into his present and future life.

Finally, to conclude this section on fate and power, we will return to the First Age to entertain Nietzsche's concept of power as it is realized through the romance of Beren and Lúthien. Beren, a mortal Man, falls in love with the Elven princess, Lúthien Tinúviel of Doriath, and perishes just after retrieving a Silmaril from Morgoth's helm to win her hand. For Lúthien to restore Beren's life, she pleads with Mandos, Lord of Death, who grants her wish along with one condition: she must *renounce* her immortality if Mandos is to restore the mortal Beren.[71] Her renunciation is germane to Nietzsche's concept of power because it presents a double-edged sword: Lúthien's love for Beren *and* her immortality are both qualities of her fate and power, but are also mutually exclusive: she must *choose* between

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[65] Wyrembeck, "Nietzsche's Life-Affirmative Suffering in Western Literature: Confronting Technological and Anesthetic Decadence," 3.

[66] Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 378.

[67] Janet Brennan Croft, "Túrin and Aragorn: Evading and Embracing Fate," (Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature, 2011), 157.

[68] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 251.

[69] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 211.

[70] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 113.

[71] Tolkien, The Silmarillion, 186.

them.[72] Lúthien chooses mortality so she may live out her days with Beren and embrace the Doom of Men together. From the standpoint of power, Lúthien describes her commitment to Beren candidly:

> 'Not thus do those of elven race / forsake the love that they embrace. / A love is mine, as great a power / as thine, to shake the gate and tower / of death with challenge weak and frail / that yet endures, and will not fail / nor yield, unvanquished were it hurled / beneath the foundations of the world.'[73]

Here, Lúthien shows how she believes her love transcends or "shakes" the Doom of Men and thereby "endures" despite Beren's immortal fate. In terms of power, for her choice of immortality to be the most apt, Lúthien needs to accept the Doom willingly and affirm it. By taking her love to be a "power" in and of itself, and by willingly *choosing* it, at the sake of immortality, she affirms her nature along with her fate, intertwining it with the inheritance of Beren's Doom.

PART V: CONCLUSION AND CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS

Tolkien, through his naturally subconscious writing style, arrives (unconsciously) at several naturalistic observations about humanity in his fiction—observations supported by recent empirical data. If Nietzsche's reasoning is sound, and empirical evidence suggests that morality is best described by perspectivism, then we are left, indeed, with an *innocent* world. Does that mean punishment, justice, or laws are without purpose, as they are often founded upon universal codes? If we apply this same question to Tolkien's Middle-earth, we must ask whether Luciferic characters such as Morgoth *deserve* punishment. Morgoth's fate is to be imprisoned within a "Timeless Void" of the Valar for his crimes.[74] In a word, the Nietzschean response is that Morgoth, who is morally innocent, does not deserve imprisonment *as punishment*; however, his imprisonment can be justified through the sole reason that his freedom *infringes upon* the power of others. In other words, if we value natural power and its enhancement in others, then "evil," tyrannical individuals should be stymied. Without moral realism, however, this act cannot be motivated by resentment because Morgoth is innocent in a moral sense. The only thing of which he is guilty is the deception and mitigation of power among the children of the Valar. This, alone, does not make him a "bad" individual, but a weak one, as he *relies on* dominating others.

Bearing in mind this paper's realization of Nietzsche's immoralism through Tolkien's fiction, I believe it is time we redefine *power*. I have shown how the traditional concept of *power as control or dominion* over others is a misnomer, as such relationships require a degree of *dependency* within tyranny. In Nietzsche's and my own view, power is better understood as freedom *from* the will to tyranny because such a will *divorces* an individual from himself. Nietzsche calls this obsessive ordering of others "bad love" because it comes from someone who *cannot bare himself*, so he turns his gaze *away* from himself.[75] Believing this "bad love" comes from resentment, Nietzsche instead considers power to be the successful affirmation and realization of one's fate. Abandoning the *condemnatory* nature of moral realism, I believe this is a more appropriate way to consider power, as the only affect left with which to judge is empathy: if someone is fated with the propensity for tyranny, then we cannot condemn him; we have nothing left to feel for the tyrant besides *compassion*, for he lacks the will to power.

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[72] Lúthien's renunciation mirrors Arwen's (her descendent) choice in the Third Age to wed Aragorn.

[73] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lay of Leithian,* in *The Lays of Beleriand: The History of Middle-earth*, edited by Christopher Tolkien (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 331.

[74] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 254.

[75] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 172.

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