asserted that my whole position on free will is paradoxical. I have not included these already published discussions in the present book: none of the ten moral paradoxes directly concerns free will.

2 An exception is Derek Parfit's early work, primarily in *Reasons and Persons* (1984), which has been an inspiration and an influence on my own. But note that, while Parfit's specific paradoxes have generated interest, his example in seeking them has not been followed. Parfit himself has turned his attention in other directions. The late Gregory Kavka also combined in his work morality and paradox (see his 1987), but sadly passed away at an early age. There has been some discussion of paradox in the political context, particularly within game theory (see, e.g., Brams 1976), although the discussions rarely focus on authority. A search for the word combination "moral paradox" in the standard philosophical data base, the "Philosopher's Index," going back 65 years all the way to 1940, yielded a mere eight results, three of them on Plato's so-called "Socratic paradoxes," and two on nuclear deterrence.

3 Roy Sorensen (2003) plausibly argues that not all paradoxes would fit this mold, but for our purposes the Quine–Sainsbury type of definition will do.

4 Doris Olin (2003) rightly notes that there are two distinctions here: one is whether there is a single line of argumentation (which she calls type 1 paradox) or two separate lines (type 2). The second distinction is about the result being veridical or falsidical. But I shall continue to use Quine's familiar terminology. A given paradox may be described as an example of different kinds of paradox (say, as a veridical paradox or as an antinomy), but one description will be more adequate.

1 Fortunate Misfortune

Mortals grow swiftly in misfortune.
Hesiod, *Works and Days*

Some people have easier lives than others, and some people have better lives than others. There is no necessary connection between these two banalities. Sometimes, however, people seem to encounter misfortune, by suffering great unchosen hardships and being confronted with severe undesired difficulties, in ways that facilitate their success and happiness in life. This creates a problem: if a seemingly unfortunate aspect of a life has proven to be beneficial overall, then it would appear not to have been a genuine misfortune. However, certain aspects of actual lives would seem to be obvious misfortunes, irrespective of whatever occurs thereafter. It thus seems open to us to assert that the life-aspects under consideration are misfortunes and also to deny that they are. Simply saying that they have been both a misfortune and not a misfortune would not do: the question which concerns us is whether something has been an unfortunate, regrettable occurrence. We shall understand this question in the "overall" or "at the end of the day" sense and, as we shall see, the difficulty does not result from ambiguity or indecision. There are here two opposing views, and we rightly seek a reply. This paradoxical state of affairs is not only interesting in itself, but also relevant to many criteria in accordance with which we evaluate our own

or other people's lives, both morally and non-morally. I have certainly found that this notion helps to make sense of aspects of my own life (which is unsurprising, given that some personal experiences led me to think of the paradox).

As this is our first paradox, we shall take our time in explaining it, first setting the initial assumptions required in order for it to be a paradox, and then building up the two sides of the antinomy. This needs to be a process where, as through a sieve, irrelevant elements are extracted, until we see under which conditions the paradox exists, and the strong pull of the opposing claims that make it a paradox.

Consider the cases of Abigail and Abraham. Abigail was born with a combination of unfortunate defects: a serious breathing difficulty, and a little-known muscle disease that made it difficult for her to use her legs. Fortunately, the local doctor recommended early on that she learn how to swim and continue swimming in an intensive way. Abigail lived in a poor village far away from a swimming pool and from the sea. However, a charity in the closest city heard of her case and the doctor's advice, and it made some minimal arrangements that enabled her to travel to a swimming pool. With her parents' active encouragement, Abigail learned to swim and swam persistently. After a number of years her breathing and her ability to use her legs became normal. In the process, swimming became central to Abigail's identity, she put even more effort into it, and found it increasingly fulfilling. In time, she became an excellent swimmer, pioneered a slightly different movement of the legs for the backstroke (which was better suited to her original difficulties), and became for many years the world backstroke champion in women's swimming.

Abraham grew up in very poor surroundings. Despite being very talented, he had to leave school at an early age in order to help support his family, and he never completed his high school education. These difficulties made Abraham ambitious, and they steeled his character to an unusual degree. After years of hardship, he managed to open his own small business selling used tools. With almost superhuman hard work and painstaking

attention, he built his business into a worldwide empire. Today he is one of the wealthiest people in the country, and enjoys his wealth.

The cases of Abigail and Abraham invite us to note some uncontroversial points. Things did not seem to go well for them at the beginning of their lives: if we consider only those early years, we would certainly say that in several respects Abigail and Abraham were unfortunate to an extent that many people are not. It would also be hard to deny that, whatever might have happened later in their lives, their initial suffering is in itself a bad feature of their lives. Even if we do not take account of the memories that will accompany Abigail and Abraham to the end of their lives, the pain, the shame, and the despair existed and cannot be erased. In both their lives, there were many very hard, and even bad, years, irrespective of the consequences. And it is also clear that their ultimate success was not a freak of luck: they made their separate successes in the teeth of misfortune, against the odds, and largely by themselves.

These last two elements – that the seeming misfortune involves serious harm or suffering, and that its connection with the good fortune not be artificial – help make Fortunate Misfortune into an important paradox. The first is crucial. Consider a person who breaks his leg, is taken to hospital, and ends up falling in love with the doctor, living happily ever after with her. This is less a case of Fortunate Misfortune than of a blessing in disguise. While breaking a leg is not normally good fortune, it is easy to discount the unfortunate aspect in view of the happiness that resulted from it in this case. Whatever we may think in the end about the cases of Abigail and Abraham, we cannot discount their early hardship in the same way that we do with the man's broken leg. The scale and duration of the misfortune are such that they pale in the latter case, but not in the former.

Further, in the hospital case the causality was accidental: unless this person had broken his leg, his chances of meeting that doctor would probably have been negligible, but he himself was not transformed by the accident. The more interesting cases are those in which the misfortune was inherently connected with

the good fortune: the misfortune and the good fortune are non-accidentally part of the same life history. In the cases of Abraham and Abigail, the good fortune – given the prior misfortune – is *not* accidental; whereas in the hospital case the good fortune *is* accidental, even given the prior misfortune. In the cases of Abigail and Abraham we have *one* intervention of fortune, which is seemingly both bad and good; in the hospital case, by contrast, we have *two* interventions of fortune, one bad (breaking a leg), the other good (meeting the doctor). Cases such as those of Abigail and Abraham, who have been formed by the misfortune, pose the paradox in a deep way.

The interesting question concerns a successful life as a whole, and not a successful career or other mere parts of a life. But for the purpose of exposition I will speak without qualification about success, and assume that success in sport or business has given Abigail and Abraham a successful and happy life. There are plenty of other examples of Fortunate Misfortune beyond sport and business: for example, cases in which the success that depended upon the hardship is artistic; or in which the success is not even necessarily related to achievements beyond oneself, such as becoming a more reflective or a more sensitive person.

It is, I trust, becoming clear that our ordinary notions of fortune and misfortune are leading us into difficulties. For, it is very reasonable to assume that Abraham would not have reached the degree of success that he achieved had he not been "unfortunate" to begin with. And this is equally so in the case of Abigail. But assuming that Abraham and Abigail are happier at the end than they would have been had they not originally been unfortunate creates problems for us. It invites the thought that the "misfortunes" of Abigail and Abraham were actually their good fortunes.

There is a question about whether you can judge me to be better off overall although I disagree that I am better off overall. But this question need not detain us, for we assume that Abigail and Abraham would agree with the claim that they are better off overall than they most probably would have been without the original hardship. In other words, my discussion of the paradox

assumes that the person's subjective perception agrees with the judgment that his or her misfortune has been beneficial. We can call this the "subjectivity condition." Another question is whether one may agree that one is better off overall as a result of some factor, but could still rationally prefer that this factor had not intervened, that is, prefer to have remained less well off. This question as well does not concern us, for we assume that Abigail and Abraham would say that they are happy to be better off.

We must not make light of such assumptions. Many cases that seem to be instances of Fortunate Misfortune cannot, under the subjectivity condition, be considered genuine. For example, some people would honestly claim to be more than willing to give up any later success "caused" by their misfortune, if they could have had a happy childhood. Or they may believe that the hardship and the success are incommensurable and cannot be weighed against each other, or that any verdict about their lives and happiness would be too ambiguous. But many other people would say that, even having suffered hardship, they have ultimately gained from it, and would not prefer living the lives they would probably have led if the misfortune had not occurred.

What then is under contention? Quite simply, Abigail and Abraham would insist that, since their childhood hardship was so substantial, and since their success has required such great effort on their part to overcome it, this hardship must be considered a misfortune. They would thus object to, and are likely even to resent, any insinuation that their hardship has not in fact been a misfortune. It is this last issue, whether Abigail and Abraham had been unfortunate in spite of their visible success in their later years (which depends on the misfortune), that concerns us.

We can imagine circumstances in which versions of our two characters, now named Abigail* and Abraham*, would have been just as successful and just as happy without the original hardship. Hardship as such is surely not necessary in order to achieve success or happiness (there *is* a sense of "success" where it consists of the overcoming of difficulties, but we are not limiting ourselves to this sense). If Abigail had not been born

handicapped, if Abraham's parents had won the lottery when he was born, and if both Abigail and Abraham had been born with rare musical talents, perhaps they both would have been successful and happy without any early hardship. We can admit that this would have been preferable. But it is not clear that this makes much difference to the paradox. For the real Abigail and Abraham, hardship was in fact a *condition* for ultimate success. We need not conduct a complex investigation into the nature of the necessity. It suffices that, other things being equal, they would not have been as successful, or as happy, without the hardship.[1] How, then, can this hardship be considered their misfortune?

Think for a minute about a very different case. Take Zelda, for example. Her original "good fortune" (her doting parents, the wealth she was born into and all that it has bought for her) has "spoiled" her, diluted her ambition, her work habits, and her ability to persevere. She gets discouraged easily, and lacks the strength of character to do much with her life. It is not that she is utterly miserable, but she simply has not managed to amount to much. She also lacks any of the deeper joys and feelings of achievement that Abraham and Abigail have. Unfortunate Zelda. Perhaps she is the true victim of misfortune, not Abigail and Abraham.

It would appear that things have gone seriously awry. Perhaps our difficulties begin when we do not take full account of the fact that the Abigails and Abrahams of this world are extraordinary in having overcome odds so great that most people in similar circumstances succumb to them. It is a personal triumph for Abigail, a triumph over misfortune, that she has not let herself become a spiritless invalid, just as it is a triumph for Abraham not to have become mediocre and bitter. Anyone who denies this does not do Abraham and Abigail justice, or – worse – falls into a simplistic and extreme position on free will and determinism. Or so it can be argued.

Let us put to one side the free will problem, and try to further clarify our central difficulty. One way might be to say that Abigail and Abraham would deride any talk about Fortunate Misfortune.

They would instead say something like the following: "Not only have we had such an unfortunate start, unfortunate both in itself and compared to that of others, but we have managed to achieve a great deal, and much more than most. Ours is a double triumph: overcoming misfortune, and achieving so much. We actually deserve pity and even compensation for having been unfortunate, as well as deserving the laurels of our later success, and particular appreciation for having won them on such hard terms."

Once Abigail and Abraham put matters in this way, however, we seem able to reply to them. In their cases the later success is not incidental to the earlier hardship: it is dependent on it. Without the early "misfortune," their characters would not have formed as they did, and their achievements, and resulting happiness, would not have materialized. And so, without denying the suffering involved in the early hardship, we cannot now consider it a "misfortune."

This however is surely outrageous. What about the pain, the fear, the humiliation, the daily demands for survival, the idea of being singled out among those more fortunate, the sense of helplessness? Am I claiming that, to live your childhood in gruelling poverty, to be denied an opportunity to learn and to develop your talents, and to have to struggle for years to eke out a minimal living, are not misfortunes? Am I denying that it is a misfortune in childhood to be unable to breathe properly and hardly able to walk, not for a short time but for many years? To deny in general that these are misfortunes would be very implausible, and cruel.

And yet, the puzzle remains. Perhaps we ought to say that such hardships would be a misfortune for most people, but for Abigail and Abraham they have not been misfortunes. Or, rather, that Abigail and Abraham have managed to turn this potential misfortune into non-misfortune, or – I hesitate – perhaps into good fortune. The meager opportunities for self-development that their early circumstances offered to Abigail and Abraham have in fact proved to be catalysts for such development. On this view, whether something is a misfortune cannot be determined in itself, even in seemingly obvious cases such as Abigail's. It

depends also upon what one makes of it, what it makes of one. In short, it depends upon what happens later. Abigail and Abraham cannot claim to have suffered a misfortune for which they might be pitied or compensated if this "misfortune" is crucial in having made them what they are, what they are proud of being: successful and happy. A misfortune, on this view, can be entirely compensated and redeemed by its ultimate beneficial effects.

Is this a plausible view? The air of paradoxicality lingers, for can we really see Abraham and Abigail, with the childhoods I described, as not having suffered a misfortune? When we can say so clearly (at the time that certain terrible events occurred) that these events were misfortunes, can the evaluation "misfortune" really depend so completely on what emerges later on? Is the misfortune's status as a misfortune not secured by the fact that even if it were compensated for, there was so much that needed compensation? Who would not view such a childhood for his own children as a misfortune, whatever might happen later? Moreover, does a misfortune cease to be one merely because it is overcome through great and unusual efforts?

But then thoughts supporting the "non-misfortune" view return once more: while Abigail and Abraham have confronted an apparent misfortune, this can hardly be viewed as unfortunate for them, as a similar situation would typically be for others. Yes, they were desperately unhappy – but as a result became much happier than they otherwise would have become. Yes, they were nearly crushed by cruel forces of nature or society – but as a result became successful agents and unusually capable masters of their own destiny. We do not have to follow Dostoevsky or Nietzsche in speaking about the ennobling features of suffering, to see that Abigail and Abraham have benefited. Their lives have become better.

The pendulum of arguments and intuitions goes back and forth. It seems that one wants to insist both that such people have been, and that they have not been, unfortunate.

So, perhaps we need to acknowledge and remain with the paradoxical antinomy, which is deeper and stronger than any

purported solution. That is a defensible position. My own view, most of the time, denies that Abigail and Abraham have suffered a misfortune. Although clearly they have suffered, this has not been a real misfortune for them. However, the idea that people like Abraham and Abigail have not been unfortunate (or that they have even been fortunate) remains paradoxical, even if true. Once we enter the land of paradox, even a solution (the correct choice in the antinomy) does not dispel all of the paradoxicality. This is perhaps a sign of a genuine paradox.

There is a further paradoxical twist here: by succeeding through great effort and sacrifice, one forfeits some of the pity and compensation that might be due to those who make no effort and end up failures: one "gives up" certain benefits by overcoming. It seems paradoxical to say that if you have overcome a misfortune then it was not in fact a misfortune, but this may well be the correct view.

Many of us have experienced hardships, probably more limited ones than those of Abigail and Abraham, from which we have benefited. What seemed to be bad fortune has often turned out to have welcome effects, making us stronger, better able to appreciate life, more mature, wiser, or more humane. If what I have been saying is convincing, we generally ought not to treat these hardships as misfortunes. It is not that one always ought to positively seek hardships that might be ultimately beneficial. But if such hardships have occurred, then, while we might in a certain case regret that the whole (hardship + success) combination had been necessary for the success, we cannot easily grudge the hardship while at the same time welcoming the effect.

One nagging thought remains. True, Abigail and Abraham's lots in life are ultimately not bad ones. But it is they who, in the face of overwhelming difficulties have made it "not bad." And they did not choose to undergo a certain amount of hardship in return for the prospect of a later success: they were thrown into the hardship, left to struggle as best they could or to drown. Do they not deserve our pity for having had to undergo all of this? Something is right here, but its rightness does not substantially change our earlier conclusion. They of course deserve sympathy

for the suffering, humiliation, and fear they suffered as children. It is also a pity – it is unfortunate – that Abigail and Abraham did not have an easier but just as successful a life. But while they deserve our sympathy and appreciation for overcoming a situation of great difficulty and potential misfortune, it is not clear, in the light of the outcome of the earlier hardship, that Abigail and Abraham ought to be pitied, in the sense that people who have been unfortunate often ought to be pitied. Without the early hardship, Abigail and Abraham would have been worse off. In the end, this hardship has not been a misfortune for them.

We can leave this point with the words of the Jewish-Italian author Primo Levi, who underwent some of the horrors of Auschwitz, from the "Afterword" to his acclaimed book on his personal experiences, *If This is a Man*:

> On the contrary, onto my brief and tragic experience as a deportee has been overlaid that much longer and complex experience of writer-witness, and the sum total is clearly positive: in its totality, this past has made me richer and surer. (Levi 1987: 397–8)

Fortunate Misfortune occurs on the collective level as well as to particular individuals. The Dutch, whose proverbial national character and ingenuity are said to have benefited greatly from the encroachment of the sea, are only one example. Speaking about collective Fortunate Misfortune raises other issues, such as collective agency and responsibility. And a close examination of who in fact suffered the apparent misfortune and who in the end benefited is of course necessary if a case is to come under the heading of Fortunate Misfortune. There is nothing philosophically puzzling about one person's misfortune contributing to another's good fortune.

The experience of people growing up as members of groups that are systematically discriminated against, and of their becoming more resilient and more highly motivated as a result, is all too familiar. The notion of Fortunate Misfortune may be central when we try to make sense of such experiences. But what is the ethical relevance of the good fortune that results

from the misfortune? In some sense, the resulting good fortune is irrelevant. Surely it matters most that racists intended the slight and the harm they inflicted, and that they created bad feelings that endure and obstacles that were unfair. This should suffice to make room for a need for victims of racism to be owed apology and perhaps compensation. The curious issue of Fortunate Misfortune does nevertheless seem pertinent here, at least in two ways. First, it makes for some "moral luck" for the racists, who, at the end of the day, have not caused harm of the sort that they wished for. (A collection of the central contributions on this issue is Statman 1993. The comparison between Fortunate Misfortune and moral luck can be fruitful, but I will not take it up here.) Second, Fortunate Misfortune quite obviously complicates our view of what constitutes being a victim.

Fortunate Misfortune on the collective level, the idea of "unfortunate good fortune" (such as Zelda's), or a detailed investigation into the role of fate, luck, choice, and effort in cases of Fortunate Misfortune, would each require a separate discussion. Similarly demanding would be an investigation into the many possible paradoxical corollaries of the paradox of Fortunate Misfortune: the way the issue of social equalization would play out, for example (should Abigail and Abraham compensate Zelda, who is much worse off?). Or, differently, attitudes such as remorse or forgiveness may well be transformed if one person's efforts to harm another actually proved to be a Fortunate Misfortune for the second person. But I shall not take up such matters here.

We all know that it is often very difficult to evaluate the significance of events either as they occur or afterwards, and in particular to evaluate their significance for a whole life. Occurrences of apparently Fortunate Misfortune are particularly extreme instances of this general theme, for in Fortunate Misfortune something has occurred that is in itself a clear and grim misfortune but it has resulted in good fortune. What are we to make of this? I have argued for a perhaps counterintuitive "solution" to the antinomy that lies at the basis of this paradox: in true instances of Fortunate Misfortune, it becomes doubtful whether the

seemingly obvious misfortune can really be thought to be so. But even if one finds this solution philosophically satisfying, some of the absurdity remains. Even if we resolve the paradoxical antinomy as to whether people like Abraham and Abigail have been unfortunate by denying that they have, our result remains paradoxical.

NOTE

1 One might argue that a person cannot complain of conditions that made him what he is, if without those conditions he would not be the person that he is. You may have suffered what seems like a misfortune, but this misfortune made you what you are. Without the misfortune, you would not be around to do the complaining. This argument does not distinguish between Fortunate Misfortune and other kinds of misfortune, and does not create a problem specifically for us (see Parfit 1984). There are various difficulties with such a position, but I cannot take up this complex issue here. Clearly much Fortunate Misfortune does not fall under this topic, i.e., the misfortune is fortunate without radically changing one's identity, such that we would say that that person does not exist. We should try to think about Fortunate Misfortune while bracketing the "identity" (or "non-identity") problems. I assume here a largely unified and stable notion of the self. I also ignore, in the context of this discussion, complications arising from changes in one's judgments of preferences in the past, present, or future. Admittedly, our views might change if the misfortune comes at the end rather than the beginning of a life (see, e.g., Velleman 2000). But the Fortunate Misfortune need not, in any case, be in one's past: one might, for example, suffer from a permanent disability (such as deafness) that leads to one's becoming better off overall.

2 The Paradox of Beneficial Retirement

A gentleman talked of retiring. "Never think of that," said Johnson. The gentleman urged, "I should then do no ill."

Johnson: "Nor no good either. Sir, it would be a civil suicide."

Samuel Johnson, quoted in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*

Morally, when should one retire from (or otherwise leave) one's job? The answer may be "now." Given that a number of conditions are met (the "Underlying Conditions"), this radical conclusion may apply to most people within many professions and pursuits. The paradoxicality appears already on the level of a single individual, but the fact that its presence seems to be so widespread increases its importance.

X is a doctor in a large hospital, Y a police detective, and Z a university professor. They are not particularly incompetent in their respective professions, but neither are they particularly good. They are, let us assume, ranked at the 80th percentile from the top (they are better than 20 percent of their peers and worse than 80 percent). Let us assume, moreover, that they are not ranked as they are because of their laziness or other factors easily within their control: even if they worked harder, they would not advance much. Over the years it has become apparent to those who work with or for them that they are not very talented or capable as doctors, detectives, or academics, although they are still