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# Self-Cultivation: Ancient and Modern

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## **Cultivating What Self? Philosophy as Therapy in the *Genealogy of Morals* and Hellenistic Ethics**

**LISA HICKS**

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*In this paper, I argue that the *Genealogy of Morals* is, in part, a work of philosophical therapy. First, I provide an account of philosophical therapy by turning to the Hellenistics, for whom philosophical therapy begins with the diagnosis of some widespread cultural problem. I then turn in more detail to Nietzsche, arguing that the *Genealogy* does therapeutic work similar to the work of the Hellenistics. In particular, I examine Nietzsche's claim that modern thinking has fallen prey to what he calls the 'ascetic ideal'; I interpret this claim as diagnosis, and I interpret the work of *Essay Three* as providing therapy for that diagnosis. The rest of the paper considers how this therapy unfolds for the three major 'types' that Nietzsche identifies in *Essay Three*: the artist, the philosopher, and the priest. Finally, I return to the Hellenistics to re-evaluate both their therapeutic projects and Nietzsche's in light of the notion of self-cultivation.*

In this paper, I argue that the *Genealogy of Morals* is, among other things, a work of philosophical therapy. First, I provide an account of philosophical therapy by turning to the Hellenistics, for whom philosophical therapy begins with the diagnosis of some widespread cultural problem—a problem that systematically impinges on the flourishing of individuals within the culture. I briefly examine the Hellenistics to see how this cultural diagnosis works and what sorts of cures or solutions the Hellenistics offer, and then I turn in more detail to Nietzsche. I argue that the *Genealogy* performs therapeutic work similar to the work of the Hellenistics. In particular, I use the Hellenistic account of philosophical therapy as a lens for examining Nietzsche's claim that modern thinking—

and particularly modern ethical thinking—has fallen prey to what he calls the ‘ascetic ideal’. I interpret this claim as the diagnosis of a common pitfall that impinges on the flourishing of individuals in Nietzsche’s modern Western culture, and I interpret the work of Essay Three as providing therapy for that diagnosis. The major portion of the paper considers how this therapy unfolds for the three major ‘types’ that Nietzsche identifies in Essay Three: the artist, the philosopher, and the priest. Finally, I return to the Hellenistics to re-evaluate both their therapeutic projects and Nietzsche’s in light of the notion of self-cultivation.

Under some descriptions, all philosophy is therapy: the philosopher says, ‘You, my reader, have false beliefs, and I, the philosopher, will try to correct them by giving you new information’. But that description does not offer a very fine-grained sense of either philosophy or therapy. The kinds of philosophy that offer therapy deal with a particular sort of false beliefs. In order to determine the relevant type of false beliefs, I turn now to the Hellenistics, the most famous practitioners of philosophical therapy.

I imagine that, in many cases, adherents of a particular Hellenistic school were inspired to engage with that school in the first place for the same reason that people go to therapy today: because they were unhappy. Patients begin a course of therapy because they do not like the way their lives are progressing, and they want to change things. Just as modern patients find different therapeutic approaches from, for instance, a Freudian and a cognitive behaviourist, Hellenistic patients found very different explanations for their unhappiness in each different Hellenistic school. Today, some therapeutic schools may focus on cultural influences and assumptions that play into the patient’s unhappiness, but not all forms of modern therapy concern themselves with culture. For the Hellenistics, though, a patient’s unhappiness was almost always a product of his culture, and all of their different diagnoses and solutions for individual unhappiness were intimately linked with cultural critique.<sup>1</sup> The Cynic said, ‘You are unhappy because your culture has taught you to value convention over nature. To be happy, you must eradicate your merely conventional desires so that you are left with only the natural ones’.<sup>2</sup> The

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1 For an in-depth account of Hellenistic diagnosis and therapy, see Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

2 See the account of Diogenes the Cynic in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, Volume II*, trans. by R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

Epicurean said, ‘You are unhappy because your culture has acclimated you to the wrong sorts of pleasures—the sorts that bring pains along with them. To be happy, cultivate the right sorts of pleasures—the simple ones that do not bring pains in their wake’.<sup>3</sup> And the Stoic said, ‘You are unhappy because your culture has trained you to get emotionally invested in things that are outside your control. To be happy, stop placing value in things that make you a hostage to fortune’.<sup>4</sup> The schools offer very different sorts of answers, but those answers share a common theme of being based in a belief that individual problems stem from cultural norms. Further, they share a belief that culturally-imposed values become quite deeply rooted in individual selves. Cultural values and beliefs come to drive our basic, everyday actions. These beliefs are fundamental and often unexamined; they are the beliefs that affect how we relate to other people, or how we choose to spend our time, or what we take to be valuable—beliefs about ourselves and our place in the world. These basic, fundamental, self-constituting beliefs are the ones upon which philosophical therapy works.

All this talk of fundamental, self-constituting beliefs can sound rather far removed from Nietzsche’s work in general and from the *Genealogy* in particular. Many readings of *Genealogy* focus on its politics—the just-so story about the origins of society, the bits about class resentment, and, in short, the parts about people as groups.<sup>5</sup> But I am less interested—

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University Press, 2000), §§ 20-81 (§37: ‘he claimed that [...] he could oppose [...] to convention nature[...]’).

- 3 See Epicurus, ‘Epicurus’s Letter to Menoeceus: Diogenes Laertius 10:121-135’, in *Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), pp. 23-25 (p. 25: ‘becoming accustomed to simple, not extravagant, ways of life makes one completely healthy, makes man unhesitant in the face of life’s necessary duties, puts us in a better condition for the times of extravagance which occasionally come along, and makes us fearless in the face of chance’).
- 4 See Diogenes Laertius, ‘Ethics: 7.84-131’, in *Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), pp. 136-145 (p. 139: ‘neither good nor bad are those things which neither benefit nor harm, such as life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, good reputation, noble birth, and their opposites [...]. For these things are not good, but things indifferent in the category of preferred things’.)
- 5 Primary-source-based textbooks in political philosophy frequently include selections from the *Genealogy*—see, for example, David Wootton, *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, pp. 858-903—and an edition of the *Genealogy* is included in the series *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. For purposes of modern

and I think Nietzsche himself is less interested—in the groups themselves and more interested in the individuals who make up those groups. My reading of the *Genealogy* is less concerned with politics and more concerned with psychology.

For Nietzsche as for the Hellenistics, the move from politics to psychology, from the group to the individual, comes through cultural diagnosis. Nietzsche's most fundamental cultural diagnosis concerns value.<sup>6</sup> Modern Western culture, Nietzsche thinks, inculcates its members with beliefs that render them unable to develop a healthy and functional sense of how to value anything. The twin roots of Platonism and Christianity undergird a very common view of value as something that comes from a world other than this one—the world of the Forms for Platonism and heaven for Christianity. Nietzsche thinks that his contemporary modern Westerners, though for the most part no longer Platonists or Christians, remain infected with a sense that this world cannot be a genuine source of value.

This inability to see the everyday world as valuable plays out in individuals in very destructive ways. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche tracks some of those destructive ways in order to tell us a story about the development of the modern self. More specifically, he tells us about what we might call 'pathologies of the self', or ways that the modern self goes wrong. Each essay of the *Genealogy* centres around a different pathology of the self: *ressentiment* in Essay 1, 'bad conscience' in Essay 2, and attraction to the ascetic ideal in Essay 3. In this paper, I focus on the last of these pathologies, attraction to the ascetic ideal.

In order to render plausible my claim that the *Genealogy* is a work of philosophical therapy, I must show not only how the ascetic ideal works but also how attraction to the ascetic ideal can be overcome. If Nietzsche merely shows us that we go in for self-undermining patterns of

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publication, then, the *Genealogy* seems to be considered a political work. For an in-depth treatment of Nietzsche's political philosophy, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1994), esp. pp. 121-146. See also Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge, 2008), esp. pp. 243-273.

6 For an exemplary extended treatment of Nietzsche on the problem of valuing, see Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). The account of the will to power that I adopt in this paper has deep roots in Reginster's view.

behaviour, then he is not doing therapy: he is only doing diagnosis. Many contemporary interpreters of Nietzsche would, I think, claim that Nietzsche's project is purely diagnostic; such a claim would sit well with a view that Bernard Reginster describes as 'almost a commonplace in the scholarly literature of the past twenty-five years': namely, the view 'that Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly his ethical thought, is mainly negative and critical, and that he has little to offer in the way of positive substantive ethical proposal'.<sup>7</sup> In order to argue that Nietzsche's aims are therapeutic as well as diagnostic, I rely on three key concepts: the self, the will to power, and the ascetic ideal.

The first of these terms, 'self' (*Selbst*) is not one that Nietzsche uses very frequently, and he is famously dismissive of related notions like 'subject' and 'soul'.<sup>8</sup> Thus, to claim that he has view of 'the self' at all is a bit controversial. However, I believe that 'self', though not his chosen term, captures a concept about which he has reasonably coherent views.

What, then, is a self? In my view, the self—not just for Nietzsche, but in general—is composed of a person's defining and constitutive characteristics. These are the characteristics that really matter—the characteristics that make me *me*. This claim carries with it an implied claim that other characteristics that I happen to have might *not* really matter—that those other characteristics *do not* play an important role in making me who I am. In my view, Nietzsche's most important contribution to discussions of the self is to challenge that implied claim: Nietzsche's view of what counts as the self is much more inclusive than nearly all previous

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7 Reginster, p. 7. Notions of therapy and diagnosis are not traditional idioms in the secondary literature, so we must extrapolate a bit to determine scholarly attitudes toward the question of whether Nietzsche's aims are merely diagnostic or also therapeutic. I take it that most political readings of the *Genealogy* tend to see his aims as diagnostic; the point of his political narratives is, on these readings, to tell us how modern Western societies came to be as they are, not to tell us how individuals in those societies might learn to be happier. Views that emphasize Nietzsche's 'critical' project over his 'positive' project would probably also tend to see his aims as more diagnostic than therapeutic. Such views include Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Bernard Williams in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), and most readers in the post-modernist tradition.

8 For dismissiveness about traditional notions of the subject, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967) (hereafter GM), I.13.



views, particularly in German philosophy.<sup>9</sup> For Kant, the self is a unity: a single part—the intellect—constitutes the self proper. Schopenhauer challenges the Kantian picture by envisioning the self as a duality: the intellect plays *a* constitutive role in the Schopenhauerian self, but it no longer plays *the* constitutive role; it is joined by a second part, the will, which also plays a constitutive role. The Schopenhauerian self is composed of two elements that stand in constant tension, and Schopenhauer does not allow us to resolve that tension by claiming that only one of the elements genuinely counts as part of the self. Schopenhauer insists that both elements together constitute the self.

Enter Nietzsche, who builds on Schopenhauer's idea that the self might be constituted by more than one component. Where the Kantian self is a unity and the Schopenhauerian self is a duality, the Nietzschean self is a multiplicity composed of many pieces. The Nietzschean self includes drives, impulses, tendencies, desires, bodily attributes—in short, all of the physical and psychological aspects that make up a person. Nietzsche does not allow us to rule elements out of our notion of selfhood. The Kantian view (and, to a lesser extent, the Schopenhauerian one as well) allows us to reject inconvenient aspects of our personalities as not really part of the self; Nietzsche's view does not allow us this move. If we take Nietzsche's view seriously, we can no longer say of some element of our personality, 'That piece isn't *really* part of the self. It's not really *me*'. Nietzsche thinks that *all* of the elements are really me. His inclusive account of the self pushes us to accept all of the messy, irrational, troublesome aspects of our physical and psychological make-up as full-fledged parts of the self.

If we grant that the self might have more than one element, we then introduce a new complication: namely, the need to explain how all of the elements relate to each other. A self composed of only one element has an obvious relationship to itself (i.e. identity). However, in a self made of multiple elements, the relations between the parts must be explained.

This need for explanation brings us to the next key term, 'will to power'. The will to power plays many roles in Nietzsche's philosophy, and I focus here on just one of those roles: its place as the central piece in

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9 See Christopher Janaway, 'Nietzsche, the Self, and Schopenhauer', in *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson (New York: Routledge 1991), pp. 119-142.

the manifold self. The will to power is the part that we might see as the nucleus of the cell, or the star that anchors the planets. The will to power, on my reading, can be understood as the will to effectiveness in the world. It is a particular kind of second-order desire. As Harry Frankfurt explains, a first-order desire takes as its object a particular thing in the world, and a second-order desire takes as its object a first-order desire.<sup>10</sup> If I want, for instance, wealth, then I have a first-order desire for wealth. But I might have desires about how I obtain that wealth; I want to get it by becoming a world-famous philosopher and not by robbing a bank. Those desires about *how* I obtain the object of my first-order desire are second-order desires. Second-order desires say, ‘I want that thing, but I want to achieve it in this way and not in that way’.

The will to power, then, is a second-order desire that says, ‘I want the objects of my first-order desires, but I want to feel like I worked for them. I want to feel like I got them under my own steam rather than like they dropped into my lap by happy accident’. If I get the things that I want just by luck or chance, then that acquisition will satisfy my first-order desires, but my will to power will remain unsatisfied, for I will not feel like I am an effective person—a person who has what it takes to get the things that I want.

Now, if I come to see myself as ineffective—as someone who is not very good at getting things under her own steam, as someone whose will to power is frequently thwarted—then I may develop pathologies of the self. These pathologies serve as defensive strategies that help compensate for my feeling of ineffectiveness or let me repress those feelings or hide them from myself.

The ascetic ideal is one such pathology of the self. On my account, the ascetic ideal is the belief that this life and this world are valueless, that genuine value comes from some source outside or beyond this world, and that accessing this extra-worldly source of value requires living a life of self-denial. The ascetic ideal is asceticism for its own sake, not asceticism undertaken to achieve some end in this world.

In Essay Three of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche talks in detail about three character types who tend to be attracted to the ascetic ideal: the

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<sup>10</sup> Harry Frankfurt, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’, in *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge, 1998), pp. 11-25.

artist, the philosopher, and the priest. Each type is attracted to the ascetic ideal for different reasons; thus, each type requires different therapeutic strategies for breaking the grip of attraction to the ascetic ideal. We turn now to the first type, the artist, to discover the reasons for his attraction to the ascetic ideal and the relevant strategies for overcoming that attraction.

Nietzsche says that the artist is attracted to the ascetic ideal because the artist he has a problem with reality. He experiences himself as ‘to all eternity separated from the ‘real’, the actual [...]’.<sup>11</sup> He sees himself as ineffective in the world, and that feeling of ineffectiveness leads to a feeling of unreality—a feeling that he is less of a full and successful participant in the world than other people are. This feeling of unreality combines with a belief in a ‘true world’—a world outside and beyond the world of everyday appearances. Various forms of religious afterlife, such as the Christian notion of heaven, would count as instances of a ‘true world’ of the sort that Nietzsche has in view here, as would Plato’s realm of the Forms and Kant’s ‘noumenal world’. In all of these ‘true worlds’, the other realm is the realm in which value or reality resides, and the ‘merely apparent’ everyday world is at best a pale copy.

For the an artist who is beset by this feeling of unreality, believing in a ‘true world’ can seem like a good strategic move: the artist feels unreal in this world, so he decides that this world is not the world that matters. What matters is the ‘true world’. Furthermore, he, the artist, is one of the few people clever enough to realize that the everyday world does not matter. If a true world beyond this one exists and serves as the place where reality and value reside, then the artist’s feeling of unreality is correct: insofar as he exists in this world, he *is* unreal, and so is everyone else. The others are simply not clever enough to notice their own unreality. By believing in the true world, the artist turns his feeling of unreality from a *problem* into an *insight*.

This revaluation of the feeling of unreality might seem like the sort of move of which Nietzsche would approve. He himself reevaluates concepts quite often. However, in this instance, Nietzsche thinks that the artist’s revaluation of his own feeling of unreality is pathological. And Nietzsche sees this move as a pathology because it makes the artist even more unable to engage successfully in this world. It makes the artist feel even more ineffective, and thus it renders the artist’s will to power even

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<sup>11</sup> GM III.4.

less capable of obtaining its constitutive desire: that is, the desire to feel effective. Simply telling oneself a different story about one's feelings of ineffectiveness does not make those feelings go away, and it does not change what the will to power wants. The root problems are feelings of unreality and ineffectiveness, and those still remain even after the attempted revaluation.

How, then, can the artist eradicate those feelings? He must first realize that everything begins with self-perceptions. He, the artist, feels unreal; he experiences and perceives himself as unreal. That perception may or may not be accurate, and the accuracy of it is usually irrelevant; what matters, for purposes of fixing pathologies of the self, is how one sees oneself. And Nietzsche believes that we are frequently quite oblivious to how we see ourselves. Much of self-perception happens unconsciously, and the conscious stories that we tell ourselves about who we are and how we see ourselves may be more pleasant and flattering than the unconscious picture. We often suppress our negative self-perceptions. In many cases, the artist is engaging in such suppression. Thus, the artist's first step toward getting free of the ascetic ideal is becoming more self-aware, becoming more attentive to suppressed, unconscious self-perceptions. Only by becoming aware of his self-perceptions can the artist identify the ones that are causing problems.

Once he has found the problematic self-perceptions, the next step is to attempt to change them. If the artist can stop seeing himself as ineffective in the world, he will stop feeling unreal, and he will stop needing the prop of a belief in a 'true world'. He will be able to see this world, the everyday world, as valuable and worthy of engagement. This process takes work and self-reflection and luck; overcoming pathologies is difficult. But I think that Nietzsche believes that at least some of us can accomplish it, and thus I think that he has hope for the artist.

The priest, on the other hand, may be a hopeless case. The priest is difficult for me because I cannot see a way for him to get better. I cannot see a way for Nietzschean therapy to help him. He has what Nietzsche calls 'life-denying instincts', and those instincts seem to run too deep to be rooted out.<sup>12</sup> To understand what those life-denying instincts are, we need to return again to Schopenhauer and to Nietzsche's engagement with him.

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12 GM III.13

Schopenhauer believes that life is essentially characterized by suffering and that happiness is impossible, and he offers a metaphysical explanation for these beliefs. This explanation relies on two features: first, his definition of happiness and, second, the structure of human desire. Schopenhauer defines happiness as the absence of suffering, and he believes that the structure of human desire renders happiness impossible. According to Schopenhauer, suffering occurs when our desires (or some of our desires) are not satisfied. To put an end to suffering, then, would be to bring about a once-and-for-all satisfaction of all of our desires.

Now, even a cursory consideration of some of our desires—hunger, for instance—lets us know that the once-and-for-all satisfaction of all our desires is impossible. Since we are the kind of beings that we are, some of our desires (such as hunger or thirst) cannot be satisfied once and for all because they are cyclical.

Given counter-examples like hunger and thirst—what we might call naturally cyclical desires—the Schopenhauerian argument that suffering is an ineradicable part of life could stop at that point. Happiness is absence of suffering, absence of suffering requires once-and-for-all satisfaction of desires, and once-and-for-all satisfaction of desires is impossible, so happiness is impossible. But Schopenhauer goes further, arguing that, even if it were possible to satisfy the naturally cyclical desires once and for all, doing so would still not eliminate suffering. Why not? Because he thinks we have another desire—a special kind of desire—that would remain unsatisfied. He means the desire to have something to do—the desire that is frustrated when we feel boredom.

What is my problem when I am bored? That nothing captures my interest. Nothing engages my will. I have no inclination or desire to do anything. Boredom is desire that lacks an object. It is the desire to desire.

According to Schopenhauer's picture, if I stop being bored because something engages my will, then I pursue that desired object. Once I obtain it, though, it stops engaging my will. I am caught by the structure of my will: I have a first-order desire to acquire some particular thing and a second-order desire that the particular thing should keep eluding me so that I still have something to do. And the satisfaction of the desires at one

order means the frustration of the desires at the other. In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer says that, since both kinds of desire can never be satisfied at the same time, human life ‘swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom’.<sup>13</sup>

Nietzsche thinks that Schopenhauer’s account of the structure of human desire is correct. He eventually rejects some parts of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, but he keeps Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of the human will. And that metaphysics of the will becomes relevant for the priest, for it means that, when the priest says, ‘Suffering is ineradicable from human life’, the priest is correct. In fact, he is more correct than he realizes. The priest probably thinks of his own argument simply as a complaint against the world: the world is inhospitable to us, and we suffer because of that inhospitality, so we should reject this world in favour of some other one. But Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, notes that the world is not the problem. We are the problem. Merely changing our external circumstances would not change the kinds of creatures that we are. If we were removed from this inhospitable world and placed in another world, we would still have the same two-tiered desire structure. We would still be prisoners to Schopenhauer’s pendulum. That’s not the world; that’s us.

Thus, when the priest rejects the possibility that a life that includes suffering could be a valuable life, a life worth living, he is really rejecting all possible varieties of human life. The priest wants a life that contains value without containing suffering; that desire is, for Nietzsche, conceptually incoherent. The priest wants not just a practical impossibility but an actual contradiction. This self-contradictory desire is so deeply rooted in the priest’s psychological make-up that he cannot form a coherent identity or a coherent self-conception. Therapy for the priest cannot get started because therapy can only work on a reasonably coherent self, and the priest does not have one. Nietzschean therapy has, in effect, nothing to say to the priest.

We might wonder, then, what the priest does to my story about Nietzschean philosophy as therapeutic. The entire case of the priest looks, after all, like pure diagnosis. The case contains neither therapy nor the conceptual possibility of therapy. However, I maintain that the priest is

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 312.

useful to Nietzsche's larger therapeutic project. Nietzschean therapy cannot help the priest, but it may be able to help people whose beliefs overlap partially with the priest's beliefs. For instance, many people share the priest's belief that suffering is bad, that eradicating suffering from our lives is the royal road to happiness. As we have seen, Nietzsche thinks that this belief is deeply misguided; I believe he also hopes that, for people who are not the priest, this belief might be malleable. For people other than the priest, this belief might be less deeply rooted, less fundamental to their psychological make-up. And Nietzsche has things to say to those people about the right way to understand suffering.

What, then, is the right way to understand suffering? I noted above that Nietzsche keeps Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will. However, although he keeps the metaphysics, he rejects the ethics. He believes that Schopenhauer is right about the structure of things but wrong about what that structure means. We noted that Schopenhauerian pessimism has two parts: the structure of the will and the definition of happiness. Nietzsche agrees with the claims about the structure of the will, but he disagrees with the definition of happiness. In Nietzsche's view, Schopenhauer is correct when he says that suffering is an ineradicable part of human life but incorrect when he says that this fact about suffering makes happiness impossible. Nietzsche agrees that suffering is a necessary condition of life, but he argues that this fact should not be deplored. Suffering, rather than making happiness impossible, is actually a necessary ingredient for happiness.

To understand what Nietzsche means by this strange and surprising claim that suffering is necessary for happiness, we need to return to the will to power. The will to power, somewhat paradoxically, wills resistance. When I have a first-order desire for something, the will to power says, 'I want that thing, but I want to feel like I got it under my own steam, like I was the effective agent in acquiring it'. In part, the desire to feel like I got something under my own steam is the desire for the thing not to come too easily. I want to have to work to obtain the object of my desire. I want to overcome resistance to achieving my desire. In short, I want to suffer—not forever, and not pointlessly, but I want to suffer some. If I never suffer, then I will never feel like I am effective, like I am the driving force in getting the things that I want. Without having to overcome resistance in the process of obtaining the objects of my first-order desires, I will feel like those things are just dropping into my lap, and my

will to power will remain unsatisfied. Only through suffering—through having to overcome resistance to obtain the objects of my desires—can I ever satisfy my will to power. So suffering, rather than being a barrier to happiness, is a necessary ingredient in achieving happiness.

Nietzsche finds this revaluation of suffering compelling, but he does not believe that it provides a view that the priest could ever accept. The priest is a hopeless case. However, even though the priest is a hopeless case, he might share some features—such as this self-destructive belief about the role of suffering—with other types who are not hopeless cases.

One such non-hopeless case is the philosopher. The philosopher is a strange case for Nietzsche because she does not originally sign on to the ascetic ideal due to a problem in her will power. She signs on to the ascetic ideal because it looks like the belief system that gives her will to power its fullest scope. The ascetic ideal says that worldly desires are bad; in part, being ‘the philosopher’ means being instinctively suspicious of worldly desires. Thus, the philosopher correctly identifies the ascetic ideal as a view that upholds her instincts.<sup>14</sup> The ascetic ideal tells the philosopher that her suspicion of worldly desires is right. Further, by giving her permission not to focus on worldly desires, the ascetic ideal allows her to pursue other desires that fit better with her instincts. The ascetic ideal, then, looks like a reasonable system for the philosopher to endorse.

Since the philosopher endorses the ascetic ideal because she correctly recognizes that it meshes well with her instincts, we might wonder why her endorsement of the ascetic ideal counts as a pathology. After all, her reasons for signing on are not a sign of a weak sense of self or of a sense that she is ineffective in the world. However, Nietzsche believes that it is practically impossible to endorse only the healthy and neutral parts of the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal tends to be a package deal, and it tends to carry a lot of baggage—baggage such as belief in a ‘true world’ beyond and outside this one, a realm where genuine value comes from. And Nietzsche thinks that philosophers, like artists, are very susceptible to ‘true world’ views. Once someone starts to believe in a ‘true world’ where the value really lies, she becomes unable to see *this*

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<sup>14</sup> GM III.8: ‘the philosopher sees in [the ascetic ideal] the optimum condition for the highest and boldest spirituality and smiles’.



world as valuable. And the inability to see value in this world leads to an inability to engage successfully with this world. Belief in a ‘true world’ will, for Nietzsche, almost always lead to a sense of ineffectiveness in the everyday world.

Thus, the philosopher’s commitment to the ascetic ideal will, Nietzsche thinks, erode even an originally healthy will to power, and this erosion of her will to power constitutes one serious problem with this commitment. Another problem with this commitment has to do with the history of the ascetic ideal among philosophers.<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche thinks that, in the early days of philosophy, the philosopher had to pretend to be the priest. The accepted model for contemplative types in a place like ancient Mesopotamia was the priest; thus, people who wanted to be contemplative types even in a new way would take on the trappings of the old way. The familiar trappings made them look like an acknowledged and accepted type, which prevented their fellow citizens from deciding that they were dangerous radicals who needed to be cast out or killed. As self-protection, early philosophers acted like priests, and part of acting like priests meant signing on to the ascetic ideal.

But the philosopher is its own accepted type now. Philosophers no longer have to pretend to be priests in order not to get cast out or killed by their fellow citizens. And Nietzsche thinks that the philosopher as a character type has not yet fully grasped that she does not have to pretend to be the priest anymore. He says that early philosophers had to wear the cloak of a priest and ‘creep about’ like ‘caterpillars’ in that cloak.<sup>16</sup> And the implication of that metaphor, I think, is that the time has come for the philosopher to stop being a caterpillar and start being a butterfly—to shed the chrysalis of the priest and become entirely her own type. And one of the components to be shed is the priestly commitment to the ascetic ideal.

How, then, to go about getting rid of that commitment? As in the case of the artist, it will start with more thorough self-awareness. The philosopher will need to learn to see herself as something other than a

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15 GM III.10.

16 GM III.10: ‘the *ascetic priest* provided until the most modern times the repulsive and gloomy caterpillar form in which alone the philosopher could live and creep about.

‘Has all this really *altered*? Has that many-coloured and dangerous winged creature, the ‘spirit’ which this caterpillar concealed, really been unfettered at last and released into the light [...]?’

copy of the priest. To do so, she will need to examine her previously-unexamined beliefs and drives to determine which ones are really hers. Once she has examined her beliefs and drives, she will probably find that some of them conflict with each other, in which case she will need to give up some of the beliefs and re-direct some of the drives.

The above way of describing work on the self, with its focus on self-examination, rooting out beliefs, and re-directing drives, sounds a little un-Nietzschean in (at least) two ways. First, it sounds a bit too conscious and cognitive. Nietzsche is always keenly aware that many of the components that comprise the manifold self remain below the level of consciousness. But I think he believes that we can sometimes catch sight of some of those components or discover them by examining their consequences. Self-knowledge, for Nietzsche, can never be complete, but it can always become *more* complete. Nietzsche tends to emphasize the first half of this claim, i.e. that self-knowledge can never be complete, as a useful corrective to the ‘overestimation of consciousness’ that he sees as pervasive of philosophical and moral psychological views of his time.<sup>17</sup> But the second half of the claim matters, too. Nietzsche would not, I think, wish for us to use the mere fact of having unconscious drives as an excuse for avoiding self-examination. In his view, clear-eyed self-evaluation remains an important goal—and a goal that is perfectly consistent with acknowledging the role of unconscious aspects of the self.

The foregoing paragraph will, I hope, prevent my account of Nietzschean work on the self from sounding over-focussed on consciousness. I wish also to prevent it from sounding too easy. Nietzsche is at pains to note that candid self-reflection, the rooting out of conflicting beliefs, and the re-direction of recalcitrant drives are all very difficult activities that carry no guarantee of success. Work on the self is *hard*. Many people will try it and fail, and many more will not even try in the first place. But I think Nietzsche believes that some people can do productive work on the self and that this work will help them to engage more successfully with the world.

I return now to the Hellenistics and their notion of therapy to flesh out this notion of ‘productive work on the self’. The Hellenistics’ diagnoses, like Nietzsche’s, usually started at the level of culture or soci-

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<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), I.11.

ety, but their therapy was always addressed at individuals. Seneca and Epictetus—Hellenistics in temperament and orientation even if not in geography—provide very different examples of how this focus on individuals works for the Stoics, and Diogenes provides a striking case from the Cynics. All three cases involve thinkers engaged in the daily practice of philosophical therapy, demonstrating both how therapeutic philosophy engages with others and how it asks each practitioner to work on himself. And, in all three cases, we see particularizing strategies that draw our attention to the individual nature of philosophical therapy.

Seneca's *Letters From a Stoic* address a particular interlocutor, a (probably fictional) young man named Lucilius.<sup>18</sup> In the letters, Seneca offers Lucilius advice on a wide variety of topics—including how to study,<sup>19</sup> how to choose one's friends,<sup>20</sup> how to face disappointing events,<sup>21</sup> and myriad other matters—and that advice, though intended for a wide audience, is framed in terms that address the concrete circumstances of Lucilius's and Seneca's lives. Letter LXII offers condolences on the death of one of Lucilius's friends, and Seneca mentions that friend, Flaccus, by name; its advice on grief applies to a broad class of cases, but the occasion for the advice is Lucilius's particular grief for Flaccus.<sup>22</sup> The advice of Letter CXXIII, which stresses the importance of equanimity, could apply to countless cases in which someone must bear with inconveniences, but the occasion for that advice is Seneca's own encounter with a specific set of inconveniences that arises when, in traveling from one of his houses to another, he arrives before the staff has had time to prepare his accommodations.<sup>23</sup> The details that Seneca provides—the name of the town, Alba, in which the house is located, the fact that he is in bed recovering from the rigours of his trip, the list of people from whom he can borrow bread if his baker cannot supply it today—give us the texture of an individual life and remind us that, though therapeutic advice is general, each person who engages in therapy is particular. The letter's therapeutic advice to recall 'how nothing is burdensome if taken lightly, and how nothing need arouse one's irritation so long as one doesn't make it bigger than it is by getting irritated' is not advice dispensed from any

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18 Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. by Robin Campbell (New York: Penguin, 1969).

19 Letter II, p. 33-34.

20 Letter III, p. 34-36.

21 Letter CVII, p. 197-200.

22 p. 113-117.

23 p. 226-230.

one human to any other, or even from any Stoic to any other, but from Seneca to Lucilius—two individuals whose particularities are interwoven into the letters.<sup>24</sup> This work vividly represents the individual aspects of giving and receiving therapeutic advice.

The works of Epictetus—or, more properly, the aphorisms collected by Epictetus's student Arrian—also focus on the individual and particular, but in a different way from Seneca. Seneca wrote; his medium was text. Epictetus, in contrast, wrote nothing; his medium was conversation. A.A. Long notes that '[t]aking account of this auditory context, which quite often focuses on a single, generally anonymous individual, is indispensable [...]. Epictetus is typically addressing precisely the people—young men—who have opted to study with him'.<sup>25</sup> That focus on a single individual is reflected in the *Handbook* through point of view: the text is cast in the second-person singular. Most sentences are imperatives, and they frequently exhort readers/listeners to 'remember': 'So remember, if you think that things naturally enslaved are free or that things not your own are your own, you will be thwarted, miserable, and upset, and will blame both gods and men.'<sup>26</sup> The imperatives, the exhortations to remember, and the frequent use of 'you' all make the text feel directed at the individual reader; each reader is made to feel like the particular 'you' to whom the advice is directed.

The *Discourses*, like the *Handbook*, make frequent use of second-person singular sentences and of imperatives, and to those individualizing and particularizing strategies they add the frequent use of examples and anecdotes. The *Discourses* are filled with stories (both mythological and historical) that refer to characters, individuals, and groups by name; the opening chapter, in a span of less than four pages, refers by name to Zeus, Aeolus, Lateranus, Nero, Epaphroditus, Thraseas, Rufus, Agrippinus, the town of Aricia, and Epictetus himself.<sup>27</sup> This frequent use of proper names grounds the *Discourses* in the particularities of Epictetus's world and draws our attention to the roles that those particularities play in shaping his therapeutic practices. As with Seneca, though the advice is

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24 p.226.

25 Long, A.A., *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), p. 4.

26 Epictetus, *Handbook of Epictetus*, trans. by Nicholas White (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p. 11.

27 Epictetus, *Discourses and Enchiridion*, trans. by Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Roslyn, NY: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1944), p. 3-7.

general, the context within which each reader or listener engages with the advice is always specific, and Epictetus's methods remind us of that individual specificity.

Individualism works a bit differently in the case of Diogenes the Cynic, for, rather than focusing on individuated others, Diogenes flaunts his own individuality. Like Epictetus, Diogenes produced no writings, instead developing a style centred as much around performance as around pedagogy. We cannot talk about Diogenes's Cynicism without talking about Diogenes himself. The statement 'Diogenes believed that social conventions tended to oppose nature' is accurate but skeletal. For flesh, we need the anecdotes. Laertius tells us that, one day when Diogenes was sitting in the sun, he asked Alexander the Great to stand out of his light.<sup>28</sup> Diogenes constantly antagonized the wealthy and the comfortable (including Plato), making puns on their names and comparing them to animals and foods.<sup>29</sup> He once masturbated in the marketplace, saying that 'he wished it were as easy to relieve hunger by rubbing an empty stomach.'<sup>30</sup> In short, Diogenes flouted social convention at every turn. By setting himself in opposition to the usual rules of society, he insisted on his own individuality. In a full picture of Diogenes's philosophy, the stories about him carry more meaning than the doctrine, and that story-focused, individualizing aspect of his case sharply emphasizes the individual nature of therapeutic exercises.

In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche uses some of the same individualizing strategies as the Hellenistics. Like Seneca, he focuses on the particularities of his own life and of the psychologies of his readers. The opening of the *Genealogy* identifies Nietzsche's ideal readers as 'men of knowledge' and provides a vivid picture of the mental focus and distance from the everyday that often characterize the intellectual life.<sup>31</sup> In setting up this picture, Nietzsche identifies his patients and shows his familiarity with the circumstances of their lives. Like Epictetus, he targets individual readers through grammatical choices; Nietzsche sometimes uses Epictetus's second-person singular,<sup>32</sup> but he more frequently uses the first-

<sup>28</sup> Diogenes Laertius, §37.

<sup>29</sup> §§ 44-51, §60, and §61.

<sup>30</sup> §46.

<sup>31</sup> GM P.1.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, GM P.8: 'But you do not comprehend this [i.e. the victory of the 'slave revolt in morality']? You are incapable of seeing something that required two thousand years to achieve victory?'

person plural, turning himself and each reader into a pair—a ‘we’. Also like Epictetus, Nietzsche uses anecdotes and proper names; see, for instance, his discussion of Schopenhauer in the section that analyses philosophers and the ascetic ideal and his discussion of Wagner in the section on artists and the ascetic ideal.<sup>33</sup> That discussion of Wagner, with its tone of disapproval and disagreement, also highlights Nietzsche’s polemical tendencies—tendencies that he shares with Diogenes. He also shares with both Diogenes and Seneca a habit of including details about his own life, such as the story of his first philosophical writings, composed when he was thirteen, on the origins of good and evil<sup>34</sup> and his aside on the place that was, for him, the most useful ‘desert’ spot for balancing immersion in society with a philosopher’s distance from it.<sup>35</sup> For Nietzsche as for the Hellenistics, these individualizing moves remind us of the individual character of philosophical therapy.

To all of these individualizing moves, the Hellenistics add a tendency to write in a wide variety of styles and genres. I take this stylistic diversity to be another feature of their wish to reach many different individuals. Epicurus wrote his famous lists of maxims, but the fragmentary evidence indicates that he also wrote essays and scientific treatises. Seneca wrote in many styles and genres including letters, plays, and treatises. For the Hellenistics, offering different styles of texts meant offering different therapeutic opportunities.

Nietzsche’s stylistic quirks are meant, in my view, in part to serve the same purpose. He gives his readers many conceptual and argumentative pieces, but he leaves it up to us to put those pieces together. Leaving it up to us is part of his therapeutic project, for philosophical therapy, like other therapy, is not all about the therapist: it is also, crucially, about each individual patient. It parallels the old light-bulb joke:

Q: How many therapists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Just one, but the light bulb has to *want* to change.

Therapy requires the patient to do work, and this work is the work of self-

33 Schopenhauer discussion at GM III.8; Wagner discussion at GM III.2-4.

34 GM P.3.

35 GM III.109: ‘Perhaps we *do not* lack [such ‘deserts’]: I just recall my most beautiful study—the Piazza di San Marco, in spring of course, and morning also, the time between ten and twelve.’

cultivation. This self-cultivating work may vary significantly from patient to patient, but, just as a broad range of self-cultivating activities could all count as, for instance, Stoic therapy, I believe that a similarly broad range of self-cultivating activities can count as genuinely Nietzschean therapy. In this paper, I hope to have offered some plausible accounts of what Nietzschean therapy might look like and a compelling case for reading the *Genealogy* as a text of philosophical therapy.