

NIETZSCHE, GM TREATISE III
PHIL 449, Spring 2014

1. What are ascetic ideals?

a. Owen: difference between ascetic practices/procedures and ascetic ideals (113-114)

b. some characteristics of living life according to ascetic ideal:

- (i). rejection of sensuality, sexuality (III.2, 6-8)
- (ii). against nature, this world, this life; value some other world, some other life (III.3, III.10-13)
- (iii). value truth as absolute, universal, unchanging, achievable by eliminating all perspectives and interpretations (III.9, III.24)
- (iv). insist on one interpretation of world as only valid one (III.11, 23)
- (v). self-contradictory: using life and energy to try to get away from life, to stop up energy (III.11)
-- yet ascetic ideals also serve life in some respects (III.11-12)
- (vi). summary III.28 (very end of the text)

2. Main question driving the treatise: “What do ascetic ideals mean?” (III.1)

-- what does *this question* mean?

Class discussion

- what is the psychological underpinnings of this worldview? Not: are these ideals true, but what interests, affects, perspectives generally allow these to be acceptable
- what does it mean for us that we've adopted this response to *ressentiment*, how it's going to affect the future, why it's happened
- what are the consequences of this ideal? How does it affect us in terms of promoting life or not?
- AI covers over what we actually are, which is useful for some because they can't handle it

a. N says he's asking about what the AI “hints at, what lies hidden behind it, beneath it, in it, for which it is the provisional, indistinct expression” (III.23)

b. also: “What does the very *power* of this ideal mean, the *enormity* of its power? Why has it been given room to this extent? Why has there not been better resistance?” (III.23)

c. N's view of the meaning of AI: we did not have a meaning for the suffering of life, and needed one. AI gave it a meaning; some meaning is better than none (III.28)

3. who holds ascetic ideals?

a. artists (III.2-5)

-- but N says AI doesn't mean much for them (III.5)

b. philosophers (III.6-10)

-- engage in ascetic *practices* as what allows them to thrive as philosophers (III.7-8): need to avoid sex, family, noise, news of the day, politics in order to have “clarity in the head; dance, leap and flight of ideas” (III.8)

-- they don't have to hold to ascetic *ideals* in the sense of thinking of their lives as aiming at some goal transcending life, though they did do so early on, to justify their existence, since it went against earlier ideals (III.10)

-- they took on the “repulsive, caterpillar-form” of the ascetic priest in order to exist at all; might this now change? (III.10)

c. also ascetic priests and those who pursue “science”—see below

4. ascetic priest

a. priests take “dominion” over those who suffer (e.g., slaves): an ascetic priest is “foothold, resistance, support, compulsion, disciplinarian, tyrant, god” to the suffering herd (III.15)

-- physician: brings “ointments and balm” for their suffering, but also “*poisons the wound at the same time*” (III.15)

b. gives them a way to vent *ressentiment* even further than creating a new set of values: gives another target for blame beyond the strong—they themselves (III.15)

-- why would ascetic priests do this? Because slaves still have *ressentiment* against nobles—their revenge is only partial, and “imaginary” (I.10).

-- This *ressentiment* needs to be discharged somehow so that “it does not blow up either the herd or the shepherd” (III.15).

c. provides a meaning for their suffering: punishment for sin (III.20); also gives hope for reward in another world

d. works both against life (III.11, III.13) and helps preserve life (III.13)

-- preserves life by explaining and justifying suffering, giving it a meaning

e. why the ascetic priests' method for dealing with suffering is problematic

-- makes the sick sicker (III.20-21) by turning against life itself (III.11)

-- bad conscience is a sickness (II.16), but it's made worse with the introduction of Christian idea of God and a debt that can never be paid off (II.20)—suffering interpreted in ascetic ideal as sin that one can never atone for

5. science is not an alternative to the ascetic ideal

- a. “science” here is *Wissenschaft*: can refer to scholarly inquiry of various kinds, including natural and social sciences as well as philosophy
- b. scientists hold to AI when they have an “unconditional will to truth” as what drives their pursuits; believe in “a *metaphysical* value, a value *in itself of truth*” (III.24)
 - the value of truth is treated as unquestionable, uncriticizable (III.25)
 - (i). there is “no science ‘without presuppositions’”; “a ‘belief’ must always be there first so that science can derive a direction from it, a meaning, a boundary, a method, a *right* to existence” (III.24)
 - unconditional value of truth is this presupposition for most scientists
 - (ii). what sort of truth has this value: transcendent, without perspective, without interpretation (III.24)
 - this truth is put in the place of God: “God is truth, ... truth is divine” (III.24; quoting from *Gay Science* 344)
 - aiming at this means affirming “*another world* than that of life, nature and history” (III.24; quoting from *Gay Science* 344), and rejecting this life, in which our pursuit of knowledge is driven by our interests, our affects
 - (iii). aiming for this sort of truth involves us in an absurdity and is an attempt (probably impossible) to castrate the intellect by asking us to eliminate our will and affects in pursuing knowledge (III.12)
 - (iv). like ascetic priests, they often insist that their interpretations of the world are the only correct ones

6. the “self-overcoming” of ascetic ideals & Christian morality (III.27)

- a. will to truth leads us to reject the “lie involved in belief in God” (III.27)
- b. now “Christian truthfulness” (ascetic truthfulness) can turn against itself by asking: “what does all will to truth mean?” (III.27)
 - “in us this will to truth has come to a consciousness of itself *as a problem*” (III.27)
 - “It is from the will to truth’s becoming conscious of itself that from now on ... morality will gradually *perish*” (III.27)
- c. what do you think N means here?

7. The book leaves us with the question: Now what? How can we avoid nihilism?