

Peter K. Westergaard

pkwest@hum.ku.dk

“The Suffering of an Ascetic”: On Linguistic and Ascetic Self-misunderstanding in Wittgenstein and Nietzsche

Abstract

This paper outlines an interpretation of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s remark in the *Big Typescript* in which he compares the philosopher bewitched by the workings of language to “the suffering of an ascetic”. The interpretation takes as its starting point Friedrich Nietzsche’s terse account of the philosopher, the history of philosophy, and his diagnosis of ascetic self-misunderstanding, from the Third Essay, “What do ascetic ideals mean?”, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In its assumption of an affinity between Wittgenstein’s remark and Nietzsche’s descriptions, and in its analysis, this paper introduces a “method of voice borrowing” to approach the question: “Wittgenstein and Nietzsche?” The juxtaposition of Wittgenstein’s conception of the philosopher’s linguistic self-misunderstanding with Nietzsche’s notion of the ascetic self-misunderstanding leads finally to the question of what is gained by introducing this method, and hence by reading Wittgenstein’s remark on the suffering of an ascetic with the help of Nietzsche’s voice.

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“Our motto might be: “Let us not be bewitched”.
L. Wittgenstein: *Zettel*, §690

1. *The spell of the forms of expression*

It is well known that Ludwig Wittgenstein emphasises the “fundamental” nature of language (TS 231, 413) and that philosophers relate to it in a binary manner. On the one hand, language is the “net” in, with and through which we live. Language is the medium in which our thought moves, indeed, language is in itself “the vehicle of thought” (PI §329). Language is that through which we feel at home in the world. But language is also the medium that leads us astray, produces confusion and causes us to lose our orientation (PI §123). Language can give us a sense of feeling at home but can also alienate us from ourselves and the world. It is well known that Wittgenstein is preoccupied with both aspects of language in his analysis of the nature of philosophical problems and his account of the situation, tasks and methods of philosophy. Wittgenstein’s remarks include a range of striking characterisations of the compulsive state of mind that accompanies philosophical activity. He writes: “The philosopher exaggerates [*übertreibt*], shouts [*schreit*], as it were, in his helplessness [*in seiner Ohnmacht*], so long as he hasn’t yet discovered the core of his confusion.” (TS 213, 421). Indeed: “The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace [*zur Ruhe bringt*], so that it is no longer tormented by questions [*von Fragen gepeitscht*] which bring *itself* in question” (PI §133). Wittgenstein adduces a number of factors in addition to “the forms of our language” that “produce a false appearance” and which “disquiet us [*beunruhigen uns*]” (PI §112), which spur our thinking on, prompting us to pick answers out of thin air (PI §36). He also makes the point that our thinking is essentially driven by certain instinctive intellectual inclinations, needs or predispositions that manifest themselves in our everyday uses of language. We are, he writes, “deeply imbedded in philosophical, i.e., grammatical confusions [...] because people had – and have – the inclination [*die Neigung*] to think in this way” (TS 213, 423). The human mind intuitively searches for the essence of phenomena, something that is “common to them all”, rather than attend to the differences between them (PI §66). We assume that, in order to understand the supposedly hidden nature of a

phenomenon, we have to “*penetrate*” it, rather than take its immediate appearance at face value (PI §90). By virtue of “the *preconceived* idea of crystalline purity”, that which is clear and perspicuous appeals to us more than that which is unclear and unperspicuous (PI §108).

The grammatical syntax of language, or more generally, “the primitive forms of our language” and of the progressive stages and intuitive forms of thought, tend to blind us to the multiplicity of ways in which words and phrases are used. This obscuring leads us to disregard the ambiguity of the word or phrase and ultimately to lose sight of, or our sense of, its “original home [*Heimat*]”. Consequently, the individual, and particularly the philosopher, is tempted to put forward descriptions, questions, observations, answers and assumptions that are all too human and simplistic. The point could be summed up using some of the comments from Wittgenstein’s *Prewar Investigations* (TS 220), confessional and diagnostic remarks selected to illustrate how he himself was misled or deceived by the primitive forms of language during his preparatory work on the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In his confession, Wittgenstein writes that in this philosophical work, he was led towards and sought “desperately for a system, for a *unity* of all sentences”.

And here I become a captive to certain forms of expression in my language, entangled in the net of language – (TS 220, 86 (§109)).

And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. To escape the spell of the forms of language, we must plough the language up (TS 220, 87 (§109)).

“Every proposition says: This is how things are [TLP 4.5].” Here is such a form which can mislead us. (Did mislead me.) (TS 220, 87 (§110))

We keep on tracing the form of expression believing we are making a drawing of it. – An optical illusion gives us the impression of seeing the inside of things, when it is drawn on our glasses (TS 220, 88 (§110)).

The expression of this illusion is the metaphysical use of our words. For one attributes to the thing something that belongs to the mode of representation (TS 220, 88 (§110)).

And Wittgenstein adds:

When philosophers use a word (“knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, etc.) and try to grasp the e s s e n c e of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language, which is its original home [*seine Heimat*]? (TS 220, 89 (§110))

What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use (TS 220, 89 (§111)).

2. Raising a heavy ball

Here Wittgenstein uses autobiographical examples to illustrate the kind of linguistic self-misunderstanding or self-deception that can constrain and mislead the philosopher in his work. A linguistic self-misunderstanding which, as mentioned, derives from a binary relationship to language, insofar as language constitutes the self-evident and familiar framework of life and thought on the one hand, while also “containing”, on the other, “the same traps for everyone; the immense network [*das ungeheure Netz*] of well-kept //passable// false paths [*Irrwege*]” (TS 213, 423), paths that carry us away from the complexity of the self-evident and the familiar. In Wittgenstein’s accounts of the circumstances the philosopher has to contend with – as a result of the false paths and the confusions, loss of orientation and “turbulent conjectures and explanations [*der turbulenten Mutmassungen und Erklärungen*]” (TS 213, 432) that they give rise to – one characterisation that recurs frequently is “suffering” or “pain”. The philosopher is haunted by questions and becomes aggravated by the “irritating character of grammatical unclarity” (TS 213, 409). Confused and disoriented, he collides with doors and walls leaving his “understanding [*der Verstand*]” with painful bumps [*Beulen*] (PI §119). The philosopher loses his footing and gets hurt falling over. He is fascinated and attracted by smooth, shiny surfaces and thus finds himself standing on “slippery ice where there is no friction”, where he is “unable to walk” (PI §107). He often feels as if he is held captive (PI §115). He is often close to drowning because he has difficulty keeping his head above water (PI §106), and sometimes he is overcome by a feeling of suffocation that prevents him from moving on from the point he

has arrived at. “There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe [*draussen fehlt die Lebensluft*]” (PI §103).

Among Wittgenstein’s descriptions of this highly strung condition, which derives from linguistic self-misunderstanding and leaves the philosopher with a painful sense of being “tormented by questions” and by the quest for “a general rule”, we find the following frequently overlooked quasi-mythological illustration.¹ It is an illuminating image that Wittgenstein uses in several contexts in the early 1930s, for example in the *Big Typescript* (TS 213, 416), and later in the *Prewar Investigations* (TS 220, 80 (§99)).² In the *Big Typescript* he writes:

The strange thing about philosophical uneasiness and its resolution might seem to be that it is like the suffering of an ascetic [*die Qual des Asketen*] who stood raising a heavy ball, amid groans [*unter Stöhnen stemmend* [*unter Leiden dastand* (TS 220, 80)]], and whom someone released by telling him: “Drop it [*lass’ sie fallen*].” One wonders: if these sentences make you uneasy [*beunruhigen*] and you didn’t know what to do with them, why didn’t you drop them earlier, what stopped you from doing it? Well, I believe it was the false system [*das falsche System* [*das System des Ausdrucks* (TS 220, 80)]], that he thought he had to accommodate himself to [*dem er sich anbequemen zu müssen glaubte* [*welches mich in Bann hielt* (TS 220, 80)]], etc.

At the end of the remark, Wittgenstein added the handwritten comment: “Hen and chalk line [*Henne und Kreidestrich*]” (TS 213, 416).

In the following I wish to dwell on this remark. It is not my intention to explore Wittgenstein’s broader account of philosophy as an activity that can bring release [*Erlösung*] when it avails itself of different “methods” or “therapies” (PI §133) or when it strives for “a perspicuous representation” (PI §122). Instead I shall attempt a tentative reading of the above remark against the background of Friedrich Nietzsche’s late thought. In other words, I wish to embed

¹ One of the few commentaries that briefly touches on this “Sisyphean” analogy is Stefan Majetschak’s 2005 essay “*Philosophie als Arbeit an sich selbst*”. By contrast, it is not mentioned in any of the following (to mention but a few): Kenny 1984, Hilmy 1987, Baker & Hacker 1988a: 259-293; and Baker & Hacker 1988b: 189-247.

² The remark also appears in MS 112, 119v; MS 142, 107; TS 211, 520-521; TS 212, 1138-1139 and TS 237, 80. See also Wittgenstein 2001: 147.

the remark in Nietzsche's own writings. The remark and its handwritten addition lend themselves to such an embedding. What I am doing here is borrowing Nietzsche's voice and making it relevant to Wittgenstein's remark on the suffering of an ascetic. Were we to encounter this remark in isolation from its legitimate place in Wittgenstein's oeuvre, we could be forgiven for thinking it was by Nietzsche – and the same applies to many other remarks by the former.³ In other words, I shall attempt to apply a Nietzschean perspective to the remark. With this I also wish to suggest what could be viewed as a special approach to the question “Wittgenstein and Nietzsche?” The methodological device of what we could call voice borrowing serves as a supplement to other more familiar and common strategies used in exploring the relationship between the two philosophers: the comparative, biographical and thematic methods, or cultural-mapping, or the description of preferences and the types of problems they focused on.⁴ But what I shall give in the following is an example of the voice-borrowing method.

3. Borrowing Nietzsche's voice

Which voice in Nietzsche's late writings should we select in seeking new aspects in Wittgenstein's remark on the suffering of an ascetic and his “Hen and chalk line” addition? It should come as no surprise that I turn first to Nietzsche's treatment of the question “What do ascetic ideals mean?” in the Third Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. More specifically, I wish to focus on Nietzsche's brief and succinct (and to some degree autobiographical) characterisation of the philosopher as a human type, on the ascetic self-misunderstanding that he associates with this type, and on the diagnosis he offers thereof. Of particular relevance here are §§6-10 of the Third Essay. In the following I

³ Erich Heller gives a number of examples which show that in some cases, and especially in connection with Wittgenstein's remarks on the grammatical and syntactical order of language and its “seductive spell” on our intelligence, it is nearly “impossible to guess where Nietzsche ends and Wittgenstein begins”. See Heller 1988: 141-157.

⁴ Concerning these strategies, see e.g. the monographs: Dobbins 1991, Cahoon 1995, Bearn 1997, Heinen 1997, Ronen 2002, and Mulhall 2005.

shall seek to embed Wittgenstein's remark on "the suffering of an ascetic" in this section of text.⁵ In the foreground here is the question of the relationship between the ascetic ideal and philosophy. Nietzsche asks: what is it that inclines the philosopher to favour the ascetic ideal? Indeed, "what does it *mean* if a philosopher pays homage to ascetic ideals?" (GM III.6). Nietzsche addresses these questions under the aspects of typology, psychology and genealogy, relating his remarks to what he calls the philosopher's "ascetic misconception" or "ascetic self-misunderstanding [*asketisches Selbst-Missverständniss*]" (GM III.10). If we now borrow Nietzsche's voice from this passage to support a reading of Wittgenstein's remark on the suffering of an ascetic, it appears that for Nietzsche the suffering of the ascetic is attributable to the particular way in which the philosopher seeks to represent and justify his activities to himself, and this, he claims, amounts to an "ascetic self-misunderstanding", which for our purposes can be equated with Wittgenstein's linguistic self-misunderstanding. The heavy ball and the "false system that he thought he had to accommodate himself to" in Wittgenstein's remark can be subsumed under Nietzsche's ascetic ideal, but they also constitute what Wittgenstein calls "the forms of our language" that "produce a false appearance". Both philosophers identify and diagnose the kind of self-misunderstanding that is endemic to philosophical practice. And both highlight the consequences of this self-misunderstanding for the philosopher's work. In borrowing Nietzsche's voice for a reading of Wittgenstein's remark, we note that Nietzsche's explication of the figures of thought relevant to the remark is developed in four stages: he begins with an introduction of the "ascetic self-misunderstanding" in its basic form; this is followed by a genealogical account of philosophy's lack of self-confidence and the self-concealment this prompts; thirdly, he describes how philosophy deals with the mistrust that it has always been met with; and finally, he addresses the question of the current state of philosophy and the conditions under which it operates. In the following, I shall explore these four aspects one by

⁵ See Conway 2008: 104-112; Leiter 2002: 245-254; Ridley 1998: 64-77; and Stegmaier 1994: 176-181.

one so as to shed light on Wittgenstein's remark about the suffering of an ascetic and also, ultimately, on the benefits of this voice-borrowing method.

Let me begin with Nietzsche's description of the grammar of the philosopher's self-misunderstanding.

4. An ascetic self-misunderstanding

In his endeavour to describe what is typical of the philosopher, Nietzsche begins by focusing on two crucial characteristics. Firstly, for as long as they have existed, philosophers have demonstrated “a genuine irritation and rancour [...] against sensuality”, and secondly, this irritation leads to “a genuine partiality and warmth among philosophers with regard to the whole ascetic ideal” (GM III.7). By default, the philosopher is favourably inclined towards the ascetic ideal precisely because it promises conditions that are optimal for the philosopher to cultivate his way of life and thought. The ascetic ideal is an inherited system of value judgments and “procedures” (GM III.20) that serve the preservation [*Erhaltung*] of life (GM III.13). Intended here is a system that establishes an ultimate and *absolute* truth and meaning, and whose content is rendered valid and maintained through a self-discipline that stands at odds with life's propensity to flourish and diversify. By restraining his life in accordance with the ideal, the philosopher gains power over and is able to organise it. The philosopher is able to cope with his irritation and rancour by means of rigorous ascetic training (GM III.17). The irritation and rancour are managed by means of the ascetic ideal.⁶ The philosopher abhors “any kind of disturbance and hindrance which blocks or could block his path to the optimum” (GM III.7). And he can escape from this “torture” by resorting to the procedures of the ascetic ideal. Underlying this assumption of a genuine partiality to and warmth towards the whole ascetic ideal we also find Nietzsche's fundamental assertion. Nietzsche asks: “What does it mean if a philosopher pays homage to ascetic ideals?” He answers: “Every animal, including the *bête philosophe*, instinctively strives for an optimum of favourable

⁶ For an explanation and discussion of “ascetic ideals” see, e.g., Soll 1994:168-192.

conditions in which fully to release his power and achieve his maximum of power-sensation” (GM III.7). The philosopher’s prejudice in favour of the ascetic ideal is fuelled by his will to power such that the attitude can be considered instinctive. The philosopher is immediately attracted to the ascetic ideal, since it offers itself as a tool to say “No!” to all servitude. In other words, it effectively enables him to set off “into the desert” – “the desert” being Nietzsche’s metaphor for the necessary conditions for philosophy. Thus the philosopher is attracted to the ascetic ideal because he views it as an instrument for achieving the optimal conditions under which to pursue his life and thought without the distractions of sensuality and other disturbances. “The ascetic ideal points the way to so many bridges to *independence*”, bridges to self-affirmation and the realisation of one’s personal intellectual inclinations. “On seeing an ascetic ideal, the philosopher smiles because he sees an optimum condition of the highest and boldest intellectuality [*Geistigkeit*]”. Thus the immediate incentive to embrace the ascetic ideal is not a desire to negate “existence”, but rather a perceived possibility for the philosopher to affirm “*his* existence and *only* his existence” (GM III.7). Here the practice of the ascetic ideal is associated not with a self-destructive agenda, but rather with self-affirmation. And as mentioned, for Nietzsche the philosopher’s favourable attitude towards the ascetic ideal is an instinctive response rather than one of deliberation or conscious thought. The philosopher embraces the ascetic ideal immediately, as the necessary condition for his personal self-realisation. But this instinctive action of resorting to the ascetic ideal as a means to an end exposes the philosopher to self-misunderstanding [*Selbst-Missverständnis*] or misconception. There is a danger that he will misunderstand the nature of his own use of and relationship to the ascetic ideal. For he risks mistaking the instrumental use (the merely instrumental function) of the ideal for an actual commitment to the ideal. Whereby he comes to regard himself as an advocate of the ascetic ideal and its values, when in fact all he wanted was to use it as a means to safeguard his own power and secure his own inner growth and development. The ascetic self-misunderstanding is a label for this confusion. It is a self-misunderstanding that arises from the philosopher’s binary

relationship to the ascetic ideal: he resorts to it as a *means* to achieve his own independence, but as a consequence of this emancipatory use he is tempted to assume the role of, and regard himself as, an advocate for the values of the ascetic ideal. Thus his philosophical work becomes guided and burdened by the “false system/ideal”, which holds him captive as something he believes he has “to accommodate”. The anguish and groans of the ascetic philosopher stem from this accommodation and the consequences it has for his life and thought. The philosopher must come to his senses before he can drop the ball!

5. Everyone lacked self-confidence

As already indicated, the circumstances surrounding the philosopher’s ascetic self-misunderstanding are, however, more complex. Analysing these circumstances from a genealogical standpoint, Nietzsche remarks that the philosopher’s situation is characterised by more than just a genuine irritation with and rancour against sensuality. For if we take a closer look at the philosopher’s prejudice in favour of the ascetic ideal, we discover that, historically speaking, “the tie between the ascetic ideal and philosophy is very much closer and stronger” (GM III.9). Nietzsche asserts that: “it was only on the *leading-rein* of this ideal that philosophy ever learnt to take its first toddler steps on earth” (GM III.9). The point he makes is essentially that the ascetic self-misunderstanding is attributable in part to philosophy’s lack of self-confidence. The favourable attitude towards the ascetic ideal is also conditioned by the fact that, historically speaking, the philosopher’s inclinations and abilities – “his drive to doubt, his drive to deny, his drive to prevaricate (his ‘ephectic’ drive), his drive to analyse, his drive to research, investigate, dare, his drive to compare and counter-balance, his will to neutrality and objectivity, his will to every ‘*sine ira et studio* [without anger or partisanship]” – stood in fundamental opposition to the primary and categorical demands of morality and conscience for unquestionable absolute truth. The philosopher’s favourable attitude towards the ascetic ideal thus conceals an ambiguity, insofar as a commitment to the ideal is only possible when this oppositional relationship is kept hidden. Thus

the philosopher himself conceals the discrepancy between his inclinations and abilities, and the demands of the ideal. The philosopher guards “himself ‘from feeling’, from being aware of himself”, in order not to perceive himself as inclined towards something forbidden (namely to doubt, to deny, to prevaricate...). But in parallel with this wariness about “being aware of oneself”, the philosopher is pursuing his philosophical practice, which is thus pursued in the shadow of the philosopher’s relationship to the ascetic ideal. In other words, he is able to continue his forbidden activity, but without fully identifying with it. This self-concealment amounts to a kind of self-alienation. The philosophical practice is pursued as an accommodation to “the false system/ideal”, but as a result the philosophy is developed within the binding perspective of that accommodation. In more general terms, for Nietzsche, the history of philosophy is a narrative of the many and various evasions that philosophy itself has instigated in order to avoid the need to consciously acknowledge the contradictory relationship between its own inclinations and abilities on the one hand and the demands of the ascetic ideal on the other. In short: “At first, philosophy began like all good things – for a long time, everyone lacked self-confidence, looking round to see if anyone would come to their aid, even afraid of anyone who looked on” (GM III.9). The philosopher took refuge in the ascetic ideal. Indeed, up until today philosophy is nothing more than a series of hesitant outcomes: a “backdoor philosophy” (TI ix.16).

Seen from this perspective, in other words, when uttered with Nietzsche’s voice, Wittgenstein’s remark about the suffering of an ascetic illustrates the torments of philosophy itself. Lacking the courage to “be aware of [him]self” and to acknowledge his opposition to the ascetic ideal, the philosopher shapes his investigations, analyses, distinctions and judgements in accordance with the ascetic ideal, even though the practice of philosophy is essentially driven by completely different inclinations and abilities. “Why is it”, Nietzsche asks in the preface to his second edition of *Daybreak*, “that from Plato onwards every philosophical architect in Europe has built in vain?” His answer is that these philosophers were all “building under the seduction of morality, even Kant –

that they were aiming, apparently, at certainty, at ‘truth’, but in reality at ‘majestic moral structures” (D P3). In other words, philosophy has manifested and developed “the particular drives and virtues of the philosopher” in a direction that is completely different to the one the philosopher was naturally inclined to pursue. In this sense, the philosopher has imitated “the ascetic priest” (preacher and adjudicator of the ascetic ideal (GM III.15.17)) and this he has done to such a degree that he has fallen into the trap of ascetic self-misunderstanding. The same idea is expressed in slightly different terms in a well-known remark in *The Gay Science*:

I am reminded of old Kant, who helped himself to the “thing in itself” – another very ridiculous thing! – and was punished for this when the “categorical imperative” crept into his heart and made him stray back to “God”, “soul”, “freedom”, “immortality”, like a fox who strays back into his cage. Yet it *had* been his strength and cleverness that had *broken open* the cage! (GS 335)

In short, due to a lack of self-conviction, philosophy has, right up until the present, concealed itself from itself, even while giving free rein to its inclinations and abilities, which have taken a false direction, insofar as philosophical practice has been pursued under the influence of the ascetic ideal, which it ends up embracing. Nietzsche’s objective is to clear the way for a philosophy that has the courage to use its inclinations and abilities. He is saying to the suffering ascetic struggling with the heavy ball: “Drop it!”

6. The deep mistrust

But among the circumstances surrounding the ascetic self-misunderstanding one further factor is of relevance. Following his account and *evaluation* of the origin of the *vita contemplativa* in *Daybreak* (D 41-42), Nietzsche asserts that the philosopher, like all people of a contemplative nature, “first appeared in the world in disguise [*in verummter Gestalt*], with an ambiguous appearance [*zweideutigen Ansehn*], an evil heart and often with an anxiety-filled head [*geängstigten Kopf*]” (GM III.10). Thus the philosopher followed in the footsteps of the contemplative man, to the extent that the earliest philosophers – and anyone else who “was inactive,

brooding and unwarlike” in their instincts – were from the very outset regarded with “a deep mistrust”. This mistrust was shown partly by “others”, that is, by the surrounding society with its slave morality, and partly by “the philosophers themselves”, insofar as the philosophers “found in themselves all their value judgments turned *against* themselves”; the philosophers applied a kind of self-mistrust or self-scepticism due to their attachment to the slave morality. Philosophers responded to this binary mistrust by showing (once again) a “genuine partiality and warmth with regard to the whole ascetic ideal”. The philosopher resorts to the ascetic practices of the ideal. And by making use of the ascetic ideal’s “terrible methods”, “cruelty towards themselves, imaginative forms of self-mortification – these were the main methods for these power-hungry hermits and thought-innovators” – they aroused “a pronounced *fear* of themselves” (GM III.10). The ascetic practices provoke fear among the “others”, thereby establishing a distance between the community and the philosopher. This distance amounts to a free space within which the philosopher can develop his individual inclinations and abilities. The self-oriented cruelty of the ascetic practices with their various forms of self-mortification also contribute to a defeat of “every kind of suspicion and resistance to the ‘philosopher in himself’”. For insofar as the philosopher stands out from the crowd and its value judgments, he weakens his own (slave) moral assessment of his individual inclinations and abilities. The ascetic ideal and its practices are therefore also the means by which the philosopher achieves a new self-understanding and a new social status. But by instinctively resorting to this practice he opens the door to ascetic self-misunderstanding. To put it another way:

Let us set out the whole state of affairs briefly: the philosophic spirit has always had to disguise and cocoon itself among *previously established* types of contemplative man, as a priest, magician, soothsayer, religious man in general, in order for its existence *to be possible* at all: *the ascetic ideal* served the philosopher for a long time as outward appearance, as a pre-condition of existence, – he had to *play* [*darstellen*] that part in order to be a philosopher, he had to *believe* in it in order to be able to play it [*um es darstellen zu können*] (GM III.10).

In other words, Nietzsche argues that what is now widely referred to as the “philosophical attitude as such” – a term that covers both the current social expectations and notions of the philosopher and his peculiarly withdrawn attitude: “denying the world, hating life, doubting the senses, desensitized, which has been maintained until quite recently” – is primarily “a result of the desperate conditions in which philosophy evolved and exists at all”. Nietzsche continues: “that is, philosophy would have been *absolutely impossible* for most of the time on earth without an ascetic mask and suit of clothes, without an ascetic misconception of itself” (GM III.10); in other words, without a confusion about its own instrumental use of the ascetic ideal and without an identification with the values of the ideal; in other words, without the philosopher mistaking the ascetic mask for his own genuine philosophical practice. “To put it vividly and clearly: the ascetic priest has until the most recent times displayed the vile and dismal form of a caterpillar, which was the only one philosophers were allowed to adopt and creep around in” (GM III.10).

7. The releasing words

Nietzsche concludes his terse and condensed genealogy of philosophy with a question, in light of which, and when viewed against the background of the genealogy, the remark about the suffering of an ascetic assumes the appearance of a diagnosis of the circumstances under which philosophy is currently pursued and its current condition. The question Nietzsche asks is: Have the conditions of philosophical practice “really changed” since philosophy first emerged? And he continues:

Has the brightly coloured, dangerous winged-insect, the “spirit” which the caterpillar concealed, really thrown off the monk’s habit and emerged into the light, thanks to a more sunny, warmer and more enlightened world? Is there enough pride, daring, courage, self-confidence, will of spirit, will to take responsibility, *freedom of will*, for “the philosopher” on earth to be really – *possible*? (GM III.10)

Thus when read with Nietzsche’s voice, the account of the suffering of an ascetic and the words “Drop it!” indicate the possibility that philosophy could find *release*, if only it would follow

Nietzsche's insightful call to liberate itself from its tormenting enslavement to the ascetic ideal, that is to say, from the false system that the philosopher "thought he had to accommodate himself to". In Wittgenstein's perspective, the words "Drop it!" are a call for liberation from the agonising bewitchment caused by language – a language created by "the herd" (TS 213, 423). Wittgenstein exposes the linguistic self-misunderstanding. Read from the perspective of Nietzsche, the words "Drop it!" serve to expose both the true nature of the ascetic ideal and its (slave moral) values and the philosopher's relationship to and use of that ideal and the mask of the ascetic priest. These are insights that draw our attention to the ascetic self-misunderstanding and its nature, and the consequences thereof for philosophical practice. For both Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, the words "Drop it!" serve to point out philosophy's adaptive practices while at the same time calling for them to be abandoned, thus clearing the ground for philosophers to think differently about their activity and how they describe the world. The words "Drop it!" introduce the possibility of a new self-understanding and hence also of a new kind of thinking.

As already noted, in this respect Nietzsche speaks of a particular way of life (the "desert" to which "strong, independent minds withdraw and become hermits"), which is effectuated by means of "the serene asceticism [*den Heiteren Ascetismus*]"; the way of life in which the virtues of the ascetic ideal – "poverty, humility" and "chastity" – are used as "the most proper and natural prerequisites for their [the philosophers'] *best* existence and *finest* production" (GM III.8).⁷

8. Who possesses, is possessed

Having come thus far I can now conclude, as I mentioned I would, by asking what we gain from the use of this voice-borrowing method, over and above noticing a certain similarity between

⁷ Nietzsche's characterisation of this way of life (in GM III.8) has a clearly autobiographical element. In his account of the essential rules for this way of life and its expected "fruits", he alludes indirectly to on-going work on his planned *magnum opus*, *Der Wille zur Macht. Versuch einer Umwerthung aller Werthe* (GM III.27).

Wittgenstein's interest in linguistic self-misunderstanding and Nietzsche's identification of the ascetic self-misunderstanding.

What I have done is tentatively bring Wittgenstein and Nietzsche together in a conversation that takes the former's remark about the suffering of an ascetic as a starting point. By borrowing Nietzsche's voice for a reading of this remark, we glimpse a number of new aspects in Wittgenstein's writing, including a possible simplification of the way he characterises the conditions under which the philosopher works. Let me mention just three points. Firstly, reading the remark using Nietzsche's voice allows us to glimpse a possible *historical* interpretation thereof. By embedding "the suffering of an ascetic" in Nietzsche's accounts of both the ascetic self-misunderstanding and the genealogical narratives about philosophy's "attainment of self-awareness", we are able to dissociate the remark from its narrow reference to the practice of the individual philosopher. When taken in conjunction with Nietzsche's genealogy of philosophy, the remark can also be read as Wittgenstein's description of the history of philosophy up until the present and as a diagnosis of philosophy's current condition. The remark amounts to Wittgenstein's brief retelling of the impoverished history of philosophy and serves to announce a possible new way for philosophy to view itself and its practice. G.E. Moore, in his record of the lectures Wittgenstein gave in 1932–33, writes that what Wittgenstein claimed to be doing "was a 'new subject', and not merely a stage in a 'continuous development'; that there was now, in philosophy, a 'kink' in the 'development of human thought', comparable to that which occurred when Galileo and his contemporaries invented dynamics" (MWL 322). Read with Nietzsche's voice, the remark about the suffering of an ascetic is not only an appeal to you and me (a heuristic reminder of the linguistic self-misunderstanding), it also represents a historically angled and critical look at the history of philosophy. Nietzsche's voice enables us to see a historical and critical aspect in Wittgenstein's remark.

Secondly, we find that Nietzsche's voice enriches Wittgenstein. The Nietzschean "reading" of the remark, and hence also his *psycho-social* account of the ascetic self-misunderstanding, tends to

highlight features and observations that supplement and add nuance to Wittgenstein's descriptions of "philosophical uneasiness", the "deep disquietudes" and the linguistic self-misunderstanding that arises "through a misinterpretation of our forms of language" (PI §111). The Nietzschean reading of "the suffering of an ascetic" allows us to glimpse a new element in this that Wittgenstein passes over in silence, namely an element in his explanation of how the suffering ascetic came to be in his agonising situation. To put it another way: using the voice-borrowing method, Nietzsche's account of "the desperate conditions under which philosophy evolved and exists at all" (GM III.10) leads us to ask whether Wittgenstein overlooked or underestimated the impact of social circumstances – the "deep mistrust" of "the others" and the expectation of "the philosophic attitude as such" – on the way the philosopher views himself and his practice when he claimed that the "philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas [*Bürger einer Denkgemeinde*]?" Might it not be the philosopher's very independence "of any community" that "makes him into a philosopher"? (Z §455). Might this not amount to a simplification? For Nietzsche, the suffering of an ascetic is only relevant and only makes sense if we acknowledge the psycho-social circumstances, attachments and convulsions within which the philosopher works. These are things Wittgenstein neglects in his account of ascetic anguish.

And thirdly, the connection we have highlighted between Wittgenstein's remark and Nietzsche's description of the ascetic self-misunderstanding allows us to emphasise or further clarify one of Wittgenstein's fundamental points, namely, that in doing philosophical work we must constantly be aware that the particular *means* that enable or determine our philosophical practice, the particular *instruments* (the heuristic terms and metaphors, language forms and models) that we resort to in our thought, can and inevitably do incur inappropriate commitments, suffering [*Qualen*] and "mental cramps". These commitments have consequences in the form of various self-misunderstandings. Wittgenstein makes the point that philosophy "is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (PI §109). Nietzsche stresses

that the slogan for philosophers and their practice is and must be “who possesses, is possessed” (GM III.8).

9. Hen and chalk line

In conclusion, let me ask what Wittgenstein intended by the manuscript addition “Hen and chalk line”. What would Nietzsche mean by these words, if we were to borrow the voice we have used in our reading of the remark on the suffering of an ascetic? Nietzsche himself alludes to this “piece of animal psychology” shortly after his account of the ascetic self-misunderstanding in his subsequent discussion of how the ascetic priest provides or offers a meaning for human suffering. Viewed in light of this discussion in the Third Essay “What do ascetic ideals mean?” in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Wittgenstein’s handwritten insertion (read now as Nietzsche’s addition) draws our attention to the relationship between, on the one hand, the consequences of the ascetic self-misunderstanding for the philosopher and, on the other, the effects of the ascetic priest’s “religious interpretation and ‘justification’” of “the lethargy of depression” for “the sick man” (GM III.20). Here the ascetic self-misunderstanding and its consequences, namely the accommodation of thought to “the false system/ideal” is equated with “the hypnotic glance of the sinner”, which, due to the “religious interpretation, and ‘justification’” is “always moving in the one direction (in the direction of ‘guilt’ as the sole cause of suffering)”. Nietzsche adds: “The unhappy man has heard, has understood; he is like a hen around which a line has been drawn. He cannot get out of this drawn circle” (GM III.20). In other words, the ascetic self-misunderstanding induces a hypnotic trance, a kind of intellectual semi-paralysis of the philosopher’s thought, which is also a characteristic of the burdensome and hopeless practice of the agonised ascetic in Wittgenstein’s remark. The suffering ascetic is caught under the spell of the forms of expression, like a hen around which a line has been drawn.

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Biographical Note

Peter K. Westergaard is associate professor at the Department of Cross-cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. His areas of research are the history of ideas and the philosophy of religion. Westergaard's interests centre on the philosophy of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. His most recent publications are *Mennesket er et ceremonielt dyr. Ludwig Wittgensteins Bemærkninger om Frazers 'Den gyldne gren'* [Man is a ceremonial animal. Ludwig Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's The Golden Bough], Copenhagen 2013, and *Kritik og tro. Hume, Kant, Nietzsche og Wittgenstein* [Critique and Belief. Hume, Kant, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein], Copenhagen 2015.