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A NIETZSCHEAN DIAGNOSIS OF PHILOSOPHERS

by

JARED RIGGS

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Friedrich Nietzsche thought that philosophers were deeply mistaken about the nature and sources of philosophical activity. Where others took themselves to be motivated by a desire to know the truth, Nietzsche charged that his fellow philosophers, motivated by a pathological set of psychological and physiological characteristics, did little more than sublimate and rationalize their own prejudices. In this thesis, I sketch out in further detail and defend the plausibility and significance of this Nietzschean diagnosis of philosophers. I argue that since Nietzsche's view of philosophers both offers a compelling explanation of some phenomena in contemporary philosophical practice and, were it true, would have significant upshot for how and even whether philosophy should be practiced, we philosophers ought to begin taking it seriously.

INDEX WORDS: Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosophy, Metaphilosophy, Value of philosophy, Philosophical psychology, Sociology of philosophy

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JARED RIGGS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	NIETZSCHE’S ACCOUNT OF PHILOSOPHERS	4
2.1	Philosophers’ Symptoms.....	5
2.2	Nietzsche’s Psychological Framework.....	7
2.3	Nietzsche’s Explanation of Philosophers.....	11
3	DIAGNOSING METAPHYSICAL OPTIMISM	14
3.1	Some Cases of Metaphysical Optimism.....	15
3.2	The Prevalence of Metaphysical Optimism	26
3.3	The Nietzschean Explanation of Metaphysical Optimism	28
3.4	The Baggage of the Nietzschean Explanation.....	30
3.5	The Virtues of the Nietzschean Explanation.....	34
4	THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHIATRY	36
4.1	The Theoretical Upshot of Nietzsche’s Diagnosis.....	39
4.2	The Practical Upshot of Nietzsche’s Diagnosis	43
5	CONCLUSION	47
	REFERENCES.....	52

1 INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche has a lot to say about philosophers. He often insults and mocks us: he charges that most philosophers “have no conception of the basic demands of intellectual integrity” (A 12), that Socratic thinking “stinks of the *rabble*” (BGE 190), and that philosophers lack “genuine honesty” (BGE 5).¹ At other times, he psychoanalyses us: he claims that Spinoza’s “hocus pocus of a mathematical form” reveals “personality timidity and vulnerability” (BGE 5), that philosophers characteristically display “irritability and rancor against sensuality” (GM III: 7), and that a philosophers’ moral beliefs “bear decided and decisive witness to *who he is*” (BGE 6). At still other times, he enumerates the conditions conducive to philosophical activity: he tells us that philosophers abhor marriage “as obstacle and doom along [their] path to the optimum” (GM III: 7), that “a certain asceticism... a hard and lighthearted renunciation with the best of intentions belongs to the most favorable conditions of highest spirituality [*Geistigkeit*]” (GM III: 9), and that “we philosophers need rest from *one* thing before all else: from all ‘today’” (GM III: 8).

Despite the number and provocativeness of these remarks, commentators in the secondary literature on Nietzsche have discussed his thoughts on philosophers only rarely and almost always unsystematically. Although it is hardly a failing of any particular work that it does not engage thoroughly with what Nietzsche says about philosophers, his comments do warrant systematic treatment. For I think Nietzsche’s remarks about us philosophers constitute an account of philosophy worth taking seriously. His frequent jabs are not, say, a mere series of unconnected *ad*

¹ Parenthetical citations of works by Nietzsche refer to the following: BGE-*Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); D-*Daybreak*, eds. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); HH-*Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986); GM-*On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998); TL-*On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, trans. Daniel Breazeale in ed. Daniel Breazeale *Philosophy and Truth* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979); A, EH, and TI-*The Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); BT-*The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); GS-*The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josephine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

hominem attacks. Rather, these jabs are pieces of a psychological account of philosophers that purports to make sense of the behavior Nietzsche so often ridicules. On my view, Nietzsche thinks that some people, drawn to quietude and contemplation, exhibit a set of psychological maladies that lead them to reason poorly, overestimate their own significance, and attempt tasks that lie far beyond their capabilities; these people become philosophers.²

A thorough engagement with Nietzsche's remarks on philosophers is desirable for at least two reasons. First, understanding what Nietzsche thought of his fellow philosophers promises to inform our understanding of other parts of his work. For instance, if Nietzsche sees a philosopher's metaphysical and moral views as mere manifestations of his or her psychological needs, we may suspect that Nietzsche would not seriously offer similar views of his own. Here, however, I will not explore the implications of Nietzsche's view of philosophers for exegetical issues, but will focus instead on a second point: namely, on the philosophical upshot Nietzsche's view would have, were it correct.

A few philosophers and psychologists have recently turned their attention to the psychological and sociological facts about philosophers and their discipline. For instance, Schwitzgebel and Cushman (2012, 2015) and Tobia et al. (2013) have studied philosophers' sensitivity to order and framing effects, finding that philosophers' judgments about the moral status of hypothetical cases can be manipulated by framing or ordering those cases differently. Others such as De Cruz (2015), Holtzman (2013), and Byrd (2015) have investigated the relationship between philosophical views and irrelevant factors such as upbringing, personality, and cognitive style. Yet other philosophers like Thomasson (2015) and Schroeder (2009) speculate that certain philosophical views owe their popularity to how pleasing they are to hold or how well they stimulate philosophical

² The outlines of this view are largely taken from Berry (unpublished ms.).

activity. And much empirical work has been conducted that investigates the causes of the underrepresentation of men of color and women in academic philosophy.

I think Nietzsche's view of philosophers offers two things lacking in this contemporary work. First, his view offers a psychological diagnosis of philosophers that promises to explain the phenomena examined in these studies. For example, although Schwitzgebel and Cushman show *that* philosophers' moral judgments can be manipulated by irrelevant features of order and framing, they do not explain *why* philosophers' judgments are so vulnerable.³ Similarly, when Thomasson and Schroeder speculate that some positions are popular for reasons having nothing to do with the evidence in their favor, they do not explain why philosophers would form their views in this way. Nietzsche, on the other hand, *does* provide a deeper account of philosophers' psychology which would explain, among other things, why philosophers form their views in the way they do.

Second, Nietzsche's view, precisely because it offers a diagnosis of the phenomena contemporary philosophers have identified, provides us with a helpful framework for thinking about how we ought to respond to those phenomena. Although many of the recent studies of philosophers' cognition have suggested that that cognition is often flawed, there has been relatively little discussion of how we ought to respond to the knowledge of those flaws. Nietzsche's more comprehensive account of philosophers' psychology gives us a clearer picture of how much we ought to worry about these flaws and how we ought to respond to them.

Of course, Nietzsche's view is helpful for these ends only if it is at least roughly accurate. For that reason, I'll offer an argument that his account of philosophers is likely correct. While the ideal way to evaluate his account would be to tally up detailed psychological profiles of individual

³ Perhaps the only explanation required here is that philosophers are humans, too. However, Schwitzgebel and Cushman (2015) found that even those philosophers who claimed to have both familiarity with and stable opinions on the cases presented to them were vulnerable to order and framing effects. Insofar as we would not expect *these* people to be vulnerable to those effects, there remains some explanatory work to be done showing how these general cognitive flaws influence even philosophers' considered judgments.

philosophers, this course of action is wildly unfeasible. Instead, I'll make an argument to the best explanation. Nietzsche's psychological profile of philosophers provides the best explanation for a widespread pattern of poor philosophical reasoning, and so it is likely to be true.

The structure of the remainder of this thesis is as follows. I begin by explaining Nietzsche's diagnosis of philosophers in more detail. Next, I argue that that diagnosis gives the best explanation for certain facts about philosophical reasoning, and so it is likely to be true. I conclude by discussing the bearing of Nietzsche's account on explanations of other sociological phenomena in philosophy and on philosophical practice itself.

2 NIETZSCHE'S ACCOUNT OF PHILOSOPHERS

I think we should view most of Nietzsche's remarks on philosophers as explaining the existence and nature of philosophical activity. That is, most of what Nietzsche says about us philosophers aims to explain why we philosophize and why we philosophize as we do. Accordingly, Nietzsche's account can be divided into two parts. First, Nietzsche has a view of what it is about philosophers that calls for explanation; call these their *symptoms*. Second, Nietzsche explains these symptoms; call this his *diagnosis*. I'll treat each of these pieces of the account in turn.

Before discussing the symptoms Nietzsche attributes to philosophers, it's worth saying something about how Nietzsche and I will use the term "philosopher." Although Nietzsche frequently makes broad claims about philosophers in general, he often has particular philosophers in mind when making such claims, especially Socrates, Plato, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Hegel.⁴ For this reason, we may doubt both that Nietzsche meant to claim that *all* philosophers show *all* the symptoms he outlines and that contemporary philosophers will also show those symptoms. For surely Kant and the like were rare breeds whose psychological characteristics were quite distinct

⁴ For a small sample of these remarks, see, e.g., TI "The Problem of Socrates" for some of Nietzsche's remarks on Socrates, BGE P and BGE 14 on Plato, BGE 5 and BGE 11 on Kant, GM III: 5-7 on Schopenhauer, and D P: 3, D 90, and D 193 on Hegel.

from those of both their contemporaries and present-day philosophers. I think the best way to read Nietzsche's claims about philosophers, then, is as detailing a sort of ideal philosopher who displays a complete set of symptoms that any actual philosopher will fall more or less short of in various ways. So although I'll use the term "philosopher" broadly throughout this chapter, I don't endorse the claim that every philosopher, contemporaries included, fits Nietzsche's description perfectly.⁵

2.1 Philosophers' Symptoms

So what symptoms does Nietzsche think philosophers exhibit? One significant symptom is the mismatch Nietzsche sees between philosophers' view of themselves and their actual activity. As he puts it in BGE 5, philosophers "all act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic," while "what essentially happens is that...they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract – and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact." Viewing philosophers in this way allows us to name three questions Nietzsche's explanation of philosophers ought to answer. First, why do philosophers view themselves in the way they do? Second, why do philosophers act the way that they do? Third, why do philosophers' view of themselves and their actual activity lie so far apart? Before showing how Nietzsche answers these questions, I'll discuss in more detail the explanatory task Nietzsche sets for himself with each one.

Nietzsche thinks that philosophers view themselves as careful, disinterested seekers of deep and significant truths. As he sees it, philosophers think that they engage in philosophical activity because of a will to truth; they want to know how the world is, and so they attempt to silence any desires that the world be a certain way and use the most effective methods possible to learn the metaphysical and moral truth.⁶ The philosopher takes her views to be the result of this careful

⁵ Of course, I *do* endorse the claim that some of us moderns fit Nietzsche's description well enough that that description can explain a good deal of our behavior.

⁶ Cf., in addition to BGE 5, TI "The Problem of Socrates" 10-11, TI "Reason' in Philosophy" 1, and GM III: 12.

investigation, rather than, say, of prejudice or whimsy. But, of course, this self-conception is hardly forced on us. Philosophers *could* see themselves as deeply interested in the outcomes of their inquiries, and they *could* take the objects of their inquiry to be unimportant trifles. Similarly, they *could* think that certain of their views are the result of personal preferences rather than rigorous inquiry. Views of these sorts are not unprecedented: Carnap (1931) and Wittgenstein (1953) have deflated views about the significance of the objects of philosophical inquiry, and Rorty (1989) thinks that certain philosophical views are owed more to one's constitution than to careful deliberation. Given that the self-conception Nietzsche describes is by no means necessary, he will want to ask why that self-conception is nonetheless so widespread.

Nietzsche's *own* view of philosophical activity is quite unlike the self-conception he attributes to other philosophers. Where we take ourselves to be finding out how the world actually is, Nietzsche sees us as doing little more than inflating and rationalizing our prejudices. So, for example, Kant "saw himself obliged to posit an undemonstrable world, a logical 'Beyond,'" in order to "create room for *his* 'moral realm'" (D 3). Similarly, Schopenhauer "used the Kantian formulation of the aesthetic problem for his own purpose," namely, "*to break free from a torture*" (GM III: 6). More generally, "every great philosophy" has been "a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir" (BGE 6). As Nietzsche sees it, a good deal of philosophical activity amounts to nothing more than thinly veiled attempts to defend beliefs that answer to peculiar psychological needs and to present the objects of those beliefs as deeply important.⁷ But just as the self-conception Nietzsche ascribes to philosophers is not the only possible one, it is far from obvious that philosophers *must* base their views on their own prejudices

⁷ See, e.g., HH I: 26, GS 347, GM III: 7-8, and BGE 187.

and desires. For surely *some* beliefs could be the result of careful investigation. So Nietzsche will want to explain why philosophers in fact form their views in this way.⁸

Finally, whatever explanation Nietzsche provides ought to make sense of the disparity he posits between philosophers' view of themselves and their real activity; that is, it ought to make sense of philosophers' self-deception. Indeed, the sort of self-deception Nietzsche attributes to philosophers is especially curious, since (as he views them) philosophers would be strongly inclined to *deny* that they are self-deceived; they view themselves as the sort of people *least* likely to have wildly inaccurate views of themselves. We should want, then, an explanation for the gap between philosophers' self-conception and their real behavior. For one thing, any gap this large between a person's self-conception and the truth about her calls for explanation. And for another, if philosophical activity is nothing like philosophers' view of it, we should wonder how that activity could be satisfying for them.

2.2 Nietzsche's Psychological Framework

In schematic form, Nietzsche's explanation of the existence and nature of philosophical activity runs as follows: the kind of person who engages in philosophical activity does so because she has certain physiological and psychological characteristics. These and other psycho-physical characteristics explain why they philosophize in the way he describes. So the interest of this explanation lies largely in how exactly Nietzsche cashes out "certain physiological and psychological characteristics." As I read him, Nietzsche thinks that philosophers do what they do because of 1) their will to power, which is common to all people, and 2) their psycho-physical constitution (especially their set of drives) which serves to distinguish philosophers from other people and to

⁸ Here I skip over an important step in Nietzsche's account of philosophers – namely, proof that philosophers really do reason in the poor way he describes. Although Nietzsche himself provides various sorts of reasons to think that philosophers are poor reasoners (a general skepticism about humans' capacity for reason, specific arguments against philosophical concepts or positions, genealogical debunkings of particular views, and so on), our focus is only on the *explanation* of this phenomenon. I will, however, argue in Chapter 3 that philosophers are often poor reasoners.

direct their will to power. I'll explain each of these in turn, and then show how Nietzsche uses them to explain philosophical activity.

I suggest that we understand the will to power as a name for the psychological hypothesis that “every animal, thus also *la bête philosophe*, instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can vent its power completely and attain its maximum in the feeling of power” (GM III: 7). Although there is some controversy about how universal Nietzsche takes the will to power to be (whether, say, all physical things exhibit it, or just living things, or just animals), it suffices for our purposes to note that Nietzsche certainly thinks all humans act according to the will to power.⁹ Moreover, we will understand the will to power as just one drive among others, although one that interacts with other drives in complex ways.

To understand how Nietzsche thinks the will to power guides action, it is necessary first to understand what he takes *power* to be. I agree with commentators like Reginster (2007) and Katsafanas (2013a) who deny that Nietzsche understands power as anything like control over others. Instead, the conditions under which people are most powerful are “the truest and most natural conditions of their *best* existence, of their *most beautiful* fruitfulness” (GM III: 8). One vents one’s power completely when one productively makes use of all of one’s capacities for action. So as we’ll understand the term, “power” more accurately describes an artist in the midst of creative activity than, say, a bored politician. The *will* to power is an instinctive or subconscious tendency to seek out the conditions under which one is best able to make use of one’s capacities for action. So Nietzsche thinks that people will be drawn (whether they know it or not) toward situations, people, beliefs, and roles that foster their ability to act as creatively and fruitfully as possible.

⁹ By way of support for this claim, note that the explanation of the prevalence of ascetic ideals Nietzsche gives in GM III requires that all (or nearly all) people are motivated by a will to power. Further, Nietzsche claims that the will to power is a feature of all life in BGE 13 and 259 and indeed that our world’s essence “is will to power” in BGE 186. So any feasible interpretation of the will to power ought to extend the hypothesis *at least* to all humans, if not further.

Nietzsche appeals to the will to power to explain a variety of psychological phenomena. Perhaps the most detailed psychological explanation he offers in terms of the will to power comes in GM III, where he explains the prevalence and tenacity of religions that promote an ascetic morality. Nietzsche thinks that the fact “*that* the ascetic ideal has meant so much to man” (GM III: 1) is to be explained by the fact that ascetic ideals allow sick individuals who suffer from life (on Nietzsche’s view, the vast majority of people) to give meaning to their suffering and so attain a feeling of power. Sick individuals who adopt ascetic ideals view their suffering as deserved, and so see self-flagellating activity (i.e., activity intended to increase their feeling of suffering) as meaningful. This avenue for meaningful activity allows those sick individuals to maximize their feeling of power.

How the will to power guides any particular individual’s actions will depend on the specific capacities and nature of that individual. Nietzsche outlines the specific nature of philosophers in large part by attributing a number of drives to them. Drives, as Nietzsche understands them, are unconscious psychological forces that dispose us to act in certain ways. So, for instance, a drive “to benevolence” (D 119) would dispose us to act benevolently. But note that drives are not *merely* dispositions to behave in certain ways. Rather, they are psychological forces which influence our desires and beliefs in order to bring about actions that will satisfy the drive. A drive to benevolence, then, is not *just* a disposition to act benevolently. Instead, someone with a drive to benevolence would be likely to interpret situations as calling for benevolent action; that is, the drive to benevolence would influence her beliefs about her circumstances such that benevolent action seemed appropriate or fitting (Katsafanas 2013b).

Nietzsche posits the existence of hundreds of drives (Katsafanas 2013b), so it is unsurprising that he attributes a vast number of them to philosophers. At one point, he lists “the individual drives and virtues of the philosopher one after the other—his doubting drive, his negating drive, his wait-and-see (“ephectic”) drive, his analytical drive, his exploring, searching, venturing drive, his

comparing, balancing drive, his will to neutrality and objectivity, his will to every ‘*sine ira et studio*’...” (GM III: 9). He also ascribes to philosophers a “will to contradiction and anti-nature” (GM III: 12) and claims that “philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the ‘creation of the world,’ to the *causa prima*” (BGE 9). In addition, philosophers have a drive for certainty (GS 347).

Although Nietzsche is not entirely clear about how philosophers acquire their drives, note that they are not all entirely inborn. For instance, although philosophers exhibit drives to contradiction and anti-nature, Nietzsche suggests that many of them have these drives only because their other drives have led them to value the conditions of asceticism (e.g. lack of distractions, freedom from disturbance, “good air”) and historical and psychological circumstances have led to an association between the *conditions* of asceticism and the endorsement of ascetic *ideals* (GM III: 7-8).

Of course, Nietzsche’s view of philosophers’ psycho-physical constitution is not exhausted by the list of drives he attributes to them. After all, as he often points out, the same drive can be satisfied in a variety of different ways, so merely describing someone’s drives would not itself allow us to completely explain her behavior. For instance, an ascetic priest and a philosopher may both have a drive to anti-nature, but this drive would manifest itself differently in each case. Although Nietzsche is less than ideally explicit about the psycho-physical facts about philosophers that supplement his description of their drives, he notes that philosophers exhibit “inactive, brooding, unwarriorlike elements” (GM III: 10), and he suggests that they are physically weak, and so inclined to discharge their drives in the intellectual realm, rather than, say, through physical combat or sport.¹⁰

¹⁰ Recall that I intend to claim neither that all philosophers are physically weak nor that Nietzsche thinks that all of them are. This rather broad sketch of philosophers’ psycho-physical traits merely describes a paradigmatic type.

2.3 Nietzsche's Explanation of Philosophers

So how does Nietzsche use this framework to explain philosophical activity?¹¹ Recall the first question we wanted his account of philosophers to answer: why is it that philosophers view themselves as careful and objective inquirers after deep and important truths? Parts of this self-conception can now be explained by appeal to philosophers' will to power. Philosophers inflate their view of the process and products of their labor because this inflated view makes them feel more productive and fruitful. Viewing their inquiries as rigorous gives philosophers a view of their activity as difficult and distinguished, and viewing the results of those inquiries as of the utmost importance for human lives similarly magnifies the apparent value of the work they are already inclined to do.

Philosophers' view of themselves as objective, however, is better explained by the particular drives that they have than their general will to power. On Nietzsche's view, philosophers' conception of their inquiries as *objective* requires the view that they can silence these personal drives and access reality as it is in itself, such that "no falsification [takes] place from either the side of the subject or the side of the object" (BGE 16). Philosophers aspire to an ideal of objectivity that entails that they prevent any irrelevant facts about themselves from interfering with the formation of their beliefs; and they implicitly judge *all* facts about themselves to be irrelevant.

As Jessica Berry explains in her "Perspectivism and *Ephexis* in Interpretation" (in Berry 2011), the philosopher's aspirations to be objective are merely an epistemic variation on the ascetic priest's aspirations to not exist at all. "Just as the ascetic priest adopts a highest ideal that calls for his own annihilation (qua flesh-and-blood human being)," she remarks, "the ascetic thinker or philosopher adopts a highest ideal that calls for his own annihilation (qua thinker)." Where the

¹¹ The explanation I'll present in what follows is better viewed as a rational reconstruction that synthesizes stray comments of Nietzsche's with his general psychological explanatory framework than as a summary of an explanation he himself offers. As far as I am aware, Nietzsche never sets out to explain philosophers' behavior in the explicit, step-by-step manner I attempt here.

ascetic priest views his existence as a source of guilt, an error, and something that must be made up for, the philosopher views his contribution to cognition as a source of error and falsification. Both types fabricate an ideal of self-annihilation, with the philosopher sublimating this basic drive to be rid of herself into the epistemic realm.

Why would philosophers adopt an ideal of this sort? Nietzsche offers two possible explanations. First, philosophers may be attracted to ascetic ideals for the same reasons that other sick individuals are – adopting those ideals gives them a way to express their power insofar as they can cause themselves to suffer and view that suffering as meaningful. Second, philosophers may be attracted to ascetic ideals because the conditions ascetic ideals praise (poverty, chastity, and solitude) are also the conditions most conducive to philosophical activity (GM III: 7-8). Philosophers are attracted to ascetic ideals because those ideals increase their feeling of power, and they thereby form the desire for self-annihilation characteristic of those ideals.

So much for philosophers' view of themselves. Nietzsche's account should also explain why philosophers act the way that they do, or why they so often simply rationalize and inflate their own prejudices. The central piece of Nietzsche's explanation for philosophers' poor reasoning, it seems to me, is his claim that "the falsest judgments...are the most indispensable to us," that "a renunciation of false judgments would be a renunciation of life" (BGE 4). Nietzsche thinks the stock of beliefs that is most conducive to an organism's flourishing is not determined by what is *true*, but rather by the idiosyncratic needs of the organism in question. Humans, he claims, could not live "without measuring reality against the wholly invented world of the unconditioned and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world through numbers" (BGE 4). Similarly, "the doctrine of the freedom of will has human pride and feeling of power for its father and mother" (D 128). Indeed, many of our basic beliefs, e.g. "that there are identical things, that there are things...that a thing is what it appears to be" are held because they are conducive to our flourishing (GS 110).

So, on this way of explaining things, philosophers are prone to reason in favor of their own prejudices because holding those prejudices maximizes their feeling of power and helps satisfy their drives. Certain metaphysical and moral beliefs make philosophers feel more powerful by, say, inflating their view of their significance in the world; a belief that humans are metaphysically distinct from non-human animals or that they have a special kind of dignity might serve this purpose. Similarly, holding particular beliefs makes one more likely to act in ways that will satisfy certain drives. A negating drive or a will to contradiction will be much more likely to be satisfied if one views oneself or one's physical, worldly existence as insignificant. Nietzsche offers a diagnosis of Schopenhauer's pessimism along these lines (GM III: 6-7). In the same way, philosophers' drives to analyze and explore can be satisfied only if they think that they have some degree of epistemic access to the objects of their inquiry, so they will be inclined to reject many varieties of skepticism.¹² Note, however, that Nietzsche does not think that philosophers consciously endorse any line of reasoning like "if skepticism is false, then I can satisfy my drives to analysis and exploring, so skepticism must be false." Rather, philosophers' will to power and drives subconsciously lead them both to favor apparently legitimate lines of reasoning that support beliefs that are conducive to the satisfaction of their drives and the enhancement of their feeling of power, and to avoid or reject lines of reasoning that oppose those beliefs.

Finally, we want Nietzsche's account to explain why it is that philosophers' view of themselves and their actual activity lie so far apart. In broad strokes, the explanation is that a view of oneself and one's activities need not be accurate in order to maximize power or satisfy one's drives. Philosophers happen to be so constituted that false beliefs about themselves and their activities better satisfy their psychological needs, and so they are drawn to those beliefs. Although there is

¹² I take Nietzsche's mockery of Kant's "discovery" of "the faculty of synthetic judgments *a priori*" and of "the young theologians of the Tübingen seminary" in BGE 11 to express a point along these lines.

evidence available to philosophers that their self-conception is inaccurate, philosophers ignore or downplay the significance of that evidence because acknowledging it would lower their feeling of power and make it harder to satisfy their drives.

We may also wonder how philosophers would be satisfied by performing an activity whose nature they grossly misunderstand. Shouldn't they become disillusioned with philosophy when it fails to provide the goods they thought it would, i.e., true beliefs about the most important matters? Note first that philosophers do not *realize* that philosophy fails to meet their desires; on the inaccurate view of the discipline they have, their inquiries really do yield true beliefs. But recall that philosophers are not, on Nietzsche's view, in fact motivated to philosophize because they want true beliefs. Rather they want to maximize their feeling of power and satisfy their drives. *These* desiderata are nicely satisfied by philosophical activity, whether or not philosophers are aware of it. So there is no reason to expect philosophers to come to be disillusioned with philosophical activity.

In short, then, Nietzsche thinks that philosophers have a radically inflated self-conception that is at odds with their actual activity because they are so constituted that such a disparity maximizes their feeling of power and satisfies their drives. Philosophers' inaccurate self-conception allows them to reap the psychological benefits of viewing themselves as careful, rigorous, and disinterested seekers after deeply significant truths while at bottom they do little more than reason poorly in favor of their own prejudices and inclinations.

3 DIAGNOSING METAPHYSICAL OPTIMISM

In this chapter, I'll argue that because Nietzsche's diagnosis of philosophers can explain a particular variety of poor reasoning on the part of philosophers, we have reason to think that that diagnosis is true of many philosophers. Although I think Nietzsche's account can help explain a good deal of poor philosophical reasoning, I concern myself here only with one sort of such reasoning, namely *metaphysical optimism*. I'll call anyone who takes an irrelevant fact about humans to

tell us something important about a feature of metaphysical reality a metaphysical optimist. I'll argue 1) that many philosophers are metaphysical optimists, 2) that metaphysical optimism calls for explanation, and 3) that Nietzsche's psychological account of philosophers offers the best explanation of metaphysical optimism, and so we have reason to take that account to be true.

3.1 Some Cases of Metaphysical Optimism

Some philosophers think, or sometimes act like they think, that a variety of irrelevant facts about human behaviors, desires, needs, and capacities are accurate guides to how things are with nonhuman reality. For instance, as Nietzsche says, some people think that lofty feelings are a guide to truth (A 12). Using my terminology, such philosophers are metaphysical optimists: they think that some fact about humans tells us something about metaphysical reality, when in fact it does not.

As I'm defining the term, a charge of metaphysical optimism ought to come with both a specification of the parochial fact about humans that the accused takes to tell us something about metaphysical reality and an argument that that parochial fact tells us no such thing. For that reason, exactly outlining the extension of the term "metaphysical optimism" would entail a good deal of heavy-duty metaphysical and epistemological argumentation showing just which facts about us humans tell us something about metaphysical reality. While it lies beyond the scope of this thesis to carry out that work in full, I'll try to illustrate the phenomenon by arguing that a few particular examples constitute cases of metaphysical optimism and that similar examples are common.

Here's the first symptom of metaphysical optimism that I think philosophers manifest: some philosophers think, wrongly, that if humans quantify over some entities, we have reason to think that those entities exist. I don't mean to claim that our quantifying over entities *never* gives us reason to think that those entities exist. Rather, I think that there are some putative entities that are so constituted that, *contra* certain philosophers, our quantifying over them would not give us reason to think that they exist. Past and future (or non-present) entities are two examples of such entities.

The structure of certain arguments in the philosophy of time shows that some philosophers think that quantification over non-present entities would be evidence that they exist. Consider one argument against presentism: presentism is implausible because it has a hard time making sense of singular propositions about non-present entities. On the presentist view, there is no entity referred to in sentences like “Socrates was snub-nosed,” since the only plausible entity would be Socrates, who is non-present, and therefore does not exist. But since many singular propositions about non-present entities are true, presentism must be false.

Of course, presentists have responded to arguments of this type in a variety of ways. For instance, they have devised paraphrase schemes that purport to show how we can interpret these sentences without requiring them to refer to non-present entities. Luckily for us, we don’t need to analyze the success of these responses. Instead, I’ll try to show how the argument assumes a link between human behavior and the metaphysical truth that is just not there.

For the argument in question to go through, there must be evidence in favor of the truth of singular propositions about non-present entities. Otherwise, it would hardly count against presentism that it entails (or seems to entail) that such propositions are false. So why might someone think that singular propositions about non-present entities are likely to be true? I think that many people believe this simply because we humans assert so many singular propositions about non-present entities. Since we attribute properties to particular historical or future individuals all the time, one might think that there is a presumption in favor of the correctness of such attributions. While I doubt that many philosophers would explicitly endorse this line of reasoning, I nonetheless suspect that it underlies the force of the argument we are considering.

Here’s one reason to think metaphysicians think that people uttering non-presentist sentences is a reason to think those sentences are true: such deference to common usage often figures in metaphysical debates over the existence of entities. For instance, Van Inwagen (1990)

offers a paraphrase scheme according to which folk sentences like “there are statues” are just loose talk for “there are mereological simples arranged statuewise.” This paraphrase scheme allows him to square his view that there are no (non-living) composite objects with folk linguistic practices that seem to endorse the existence of such objects. In the same vein, it is commonly considered a virtue of mereological universalism (the view that any two objects compose a third object) that it can account for the existence of composite objects typically posited by the folk. Since metaphysicians regularly take folk belief to provide at least *prima facie* evidence in favor of other metaphysical views, it is likely that they presume that we have *prima facie* reason to take folk speech and belief about non-present entities to be accurate.

Moreover, defenders of presentism typically feel a pull to show how their view can be squared with common usage. For instance, Ted Sider (1999) attempts to defend presentism against the aforementioned objection while adhering to the following constraint: “the presentist should not *completely* reject ordinary talk and thought. The presentist should salvage *something* from what we commonly say... A presentist who completely rejected masses of ordinary talk as just being confused would be a quite radical skeptic.” Similarly, Ned Markosian (2004) claims that the “typical English speaker on the street” would, on reflection, agree that the paraphrase Markosian offers for non-presentist sentences correctly captures her view of the meaning of those sentences. He takes her agreement to show that a particular (presentist-friendly) understanding of the truth-conditions of discourse about non-present objects is accurate. Each of these philosophers thinks that the presentist’s account of non-presentist sentences ought to be compatible with the speech and beliefs of ordinary speakers. That their accounts are so constrained suggests that they think that ordinary speech and thought give us reason to think the metaphysical fact of the matter is one way or another. That is, they think that if presentism could *not* be squared with how people ordinary talk and think, that would be a reason to think presentism was false.

So some, although of course not all, metaphysicians think that the prevalence of singular propositions about non-present objects gives us reason to think that some such propositions are true. But for the prevalence of these propositions to be evidence in favor of their truth, there would need to be an appropriate connection between their prevalence and their truth. For instance, perhaps their prevalence would simply *constitute* their truth, or their truth would be the best explanation of their prevalence. To better understand this connection, let us make the following stipulation: we will only consider those iterations of the argument in question that take it that the truth of presentism is a mind-independent metaphysical matter that is true regardless of human attitudes. On this view, it is not the case that presentism is true merely because we use an existence predicate that does not extend to non-present entities. Instead, presentism is an independent truth about the structure of reality. I take it that most philosophers engaged in arguments over presentism accept this latter characterization of the matter.¹³ But if the status of presentism is a mind-independent matter about the metaphysical structure of reality, then the prevalence of singular propositions about non-present objects does not give any reason to think that presentism is false.

The truth or falsity of presentism does not figure in the causal story explaining the prevalence of non-presentist utterances. That is to say, even if presentism *were* false, the existence of non-present objects would not be responsible for the utterances humans make that seem to refer to those objects. The causal story for any given utterance will include only garden-variety facts about the formation of languages, a person's ends and beliefs, and so on. So the prevalence of non-presentist utterances fails to be evidence against presentism in at least one way: that prevalence is not causally explained by the existence of non-present objects.

¹³ The following argument, then, does not show that philosophers who *do* think that presentism's truth is constituted by facts about our linguistic behavior are metaphysical optimists.

Why else might the facts about human speech behavior suggest that presentism is false? It's not as though the falsity of presentism deductively follows from the ordinary facts about what people utter. That humans make noises that sound like singular propositions about non-present objects is not logically incompatible with the claim that there are no non-present objects. Similarly, it's not as though the prevalence of non-presentist utterances makes it more *likely* that presentism is false: finding ourselves in a world where some creatures utter apparent singular propositions about non-present objects doesn't suggest that the necessary structure of time across all worlds is one way or another. For certainly we could just as well have found ourselves in a world where creatures *don't* utter the problematic propositions, regardless of the truth or falsity of presentism.

So it seems unlikely that the prevalence of singular propositions about non-present objects gives us reason to think that presentism is false: the truth or falsity of presentism is entirely divorced from the facts about human linguistic behavior. Nonetheless, some philosophers act as if human linguistic behavior constitutes evidence against presentism. In my terminology, these philosophers are (or at least act like) metaphysical optimists.

Here's the second symptom of metaphysical optimism that I think philosophers manifest: they explicitly or implicitly endorse the claim that if we humans or philosophers have strong prudential reason to take some metaphysical thesis to be true (or false), that thesis is likely to be true (or false). While there may be some cases in which this line of reasoning is correct, I'll argue that philosophers endorse it in cases in which it is not correct.

The first example of this sort of optimism I'll cite involves taking a metaphysical thesis to be false precisely because as *humans* or *agents* we have strong reason to take that thesis to be false. Sharon Street (unpublished ms.) thinks that realism about reasons is false because every practical standpoint is committed to the rejection of realism. I'll first explain why she seems to think this, and then I'll explain why it's false.

In her “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Rethink It,” Street offers an argument against normative realism, which she defines as “the view that there are at least some normative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes.” On her antirealist view, any normative reason an agent has to Φ “must somehow follow from within her own practical point of view.” Where the realist takes us to have at least some reasons independently of our evaluative attitudes, the antirealist thinks the only reasons we have are those that are entailed by our practical standpoint.

Street’s argument against realism runs as follows. Realism about reasons entails that in all likelihood we are hopeless when it comes to recognizing what reasons we have, since our normative judgments are shaped by causal forces that we have no reason to think would track the normative truth. For instance, Street (2006) thinks that many of our moral beliefs can be causally traced back to evolutionary pressures; that is, we hold many of the moral beliefs we do because holding those beliefs was conducive to our survival and reproduction. But there is no reason for the realist to think that those evolutionary pressures would track the moral truth. After all, it is not as though the independent facts of the matter about what is morally right and wrong had any *causal* bearing on those evolutionary pressures. So the realist ought to think that his normative judgments have been shaped by forces that have nothing to do with the normative truth, and so he is in all likelihood hopeless when it comes to recognizing what reasons he has. But, Street thinks, since every agent makes some normative judgments, every agent is committed to thinking that they are not hopeless at recognizing what reasons they have. Since realism entails that we *are* so hopeless, we must reject it.

This argument is perfectly valid, as far as it goes: if we agents are committed to rejecting anything that would entail that we cannot recognize what our reasons are, and normative realism entails that we cannot recognize what our reasons are, then we are committed to rejecting realism. However, that every agent is committed to rejecting realism does not entail that realism is *false*. The truth of realism is at least logically compatible with it being the case that every (possible or actual)

agent has a decisive reason to reject realism. For instance, it might be the case that every agent has attitude-independent reason to view herself as capable of recognizing what her reasons are and that she therefore has attitude-independent reason to reject the truth of realism.

Nonetheless, one might think that realism is at least unlikely to be true in light of the fact that all agents are committed to rejecting it. I'll argue that this is not the case. Consider the following case. Suppose it were merely a contingent fact that some agents were committed to rejecting realism: some agents, given their ends, desires, and beliefs, would have to reject realism, but some agents would not be so constituted as to have to reject realism. Would the instantiation of some evaluative profiles that were committed to rejecting realism constitute evidence that realism was false? The answer, it seems to me, is no. For the truth of realism does not itself bear on the kind of evaluative profiles that happen to be instantiated in the world. There is no reason to expect that, if realism were true, there simply could not be any creatures with values that gave them reason to reject realism. The forces guiding the kinds of creatures that appear in the world are presumably only ground-level causal forces; those causal forces are not themselves sensitive to the truth of realism, so there would be no reason to expect them to be different were realism true.

Now consider Street's original case. Does the fact that every valuing creature is committed to rejecting realism show that realism is false? Again, it seems to me that the answer is no. For just as we would not expect the truth of realism to bear on the sorts of evaluative profiles that exist in the world, we shouldn't expect the truth of realism to bear on the relationship agents must take themselves to have with their reasons. That is, it's not the case that if realism were true, then agents would not be committed to rejecting realism: realism would still be unacceptable on the grounds that it would entail that we are hopeless when it comes to knowing our reasons. The truth of realism doesn't have an impact on the relationship agents must take themselves to have with their reasons. So that we find ourselves committed to rejecting realism does not suggest that realism is in fact false.

So Street gives a general example of the sort of reasoning I mean to highlight here: she pinpoints a fact about what all agents must think about their reasons and concludes that, since all agents *must* reject realism, realism must be false. However, this line of reasoning does not always take as its starting point a matter so grand as the necessary features of agency. Philosophers, I think, often take *professional* benefits to be arguments in favor of views. For instance, sometimes philosophers think (or at least act like they think) that, because a claim must be true for certain kinds of inquiry to proceed, that claim is probably true. Ted Sider gives a clear example of this more parochial strain of metaphysical optimism.

In his *Writing the Book of the World*, Sider introduces the notion of structure and uses it to make sense of a variety of debates in contemporary metaphysics. For our purposes, it will be sufficient to understand structure as having two features. First, it is a sentence operator that picks out the parts of reality that are most fundamental, or real, or genuine. Second, it can be applied to any part of speech, including (and importantly for our purposes) sentence operators. So for any given term, logical operator, concept, etc., we can ask “Is it structural?” If and only if the item in question makes up part of the fundamental furniture of the world, then it is structural. So notions like charge, mass, and the existential quantifier are probably structural, whereas notions like grue, city, and “the” are probably not structural.

At one point, Sider considers “extreme realism” about structure. That is, he asks whether “structure” is itself structural. This amounts to asking whether structure is part of the basic furniture of the world, whether it carves reality at its joints, and so on. Sider argues that our options are to “either adopt extreme realism about structure...or else give up altogether on explanations that invoke structure, which is tantamount to giving up on structure itself.” Sider’s choice, unsurprisingly, “is for the former” (140).

Sider's argument for extreme realism runs as follows.

The status of metaphysics itself hangs on this choice. In their loftiest moments, metaphysicians think of themselves as engaged in a profoundly important and foundational intellectual enterprise. But if fundamentality is highly disjunctive, the field of metaphysics itself—which is delineated by its focus on fundamental questions—would be an arbitrarily demarcated one (140).

Sider summarizes the upshot of his argument, claiming that “the argument for saying that structure is structural was that this is needed to insure that structure can take part in genuine explanations.”

Just so, he also holds that extreme realism about structure “offers explanatory power (and a pleasing self-conception for metaphysicians)” (140).

Here Sider gives two distinct arguments. First, he thinks that since structure must be structural to figure in genuine explanations, structure must be structural. The quality of this argument will hinge on the evidence we have that structure does in fact figure in genuine explanations. If we have such evidence, Sider's argument would seem sound. If we have no evidence suggesting that structure does figure in genuine explanations, but merely a desire that it does, Sider's argument would be poor. Of course, Sider spends the bulk of *Writing the Book of the World* arguing that structure *does* figure in genuine explanations, so this first argument seems strong.

The second argument Sider offers is that if structure were not structural, then metaphysics would be an arbitrarily demarcated discipline, and for that reason not a “profoundly important and foundational intellectual enterprise.” Again, the quality of this argument hinges on the quality of the evidence we have that metaphysics is not an arbitrarily demarcated discipline and that it is a profoundly important and foundational intellectual enterprise. But, unlike the argument for structure's explanatory power, Sider does *not* offer independent reason to think that metaphysics is important and not arbitrarily demarcated. That is, he does not give reasons to support the “pleasing

self-conception” extreme realism offers metaphysicians. For this reason, this second argument displays a kind of metaphysical optimism: Sider endorses a view in part because endorsing that view offers him (and other metaphysicians) some prudential value, even though its offering prudential value does not give evidence to think reality is one way or another.

So much for this second brand of metaphysical optimism. The third and final sort of optimism I’ll discuss is as follows. Philosophers sometimes think, wrongly, that a metaphysical claim’s making good sense of human behavior or language gives us reason to think that that claim is true. Again, I don’t think that arguments of this shape *always* fail, but rather that philosophers sometimes make arguments of this shape that do fail. David Lewis’s argument for modal realism in *On The Plurality of Worlds* seems to me to be just such an argument.

Here’s a rough outline of Lewis’s argument for modal realism, or the claim that possible worlds other than the actual world exist just as concretely as the actual world. Lewis poses the question to himself, “Why believe in a plurality of worlds?” and answers it, too, “Because the hypothesis is serviceable, and that is a reason to think that it is true” (3). Accepting modal realism greatly simplifies our ideology and allows us to make sense of a variety of notions that might have looked primitive. Indeed, we “improve the unity and economy of the theory that is our professional concern – total theory, the whole of what we take to be true” (4). And Lewis offers an argument that this is the best way to help ourselves to these benefits: no other way of conceiving of possible worlds does so with the economy and simplicity of modal realism. So we ought to believe, literally and sincerely, in a plurality of worlds.

Although explanatory power *can* be reason to think that some claim is true, I think that the putative explananda of modal realism are such that its explanatory power would *not* be a reason to

think that it is true. That is, I think that explaining our concepts of modality, counterfactuals, mental and verbal content, and properties¹⁴ is not evidence in favor of modal realism.

Here is one reason for thinking this. The notions that can be best explained by modal realism are notions we acquired without ever coming into contact with the things that would make modal realism true, i.e. other worlds. But without such a causal link, it seems to be a matter of total happenstance that our concept of modality¹⁵ works in a way best explained by the existence of other worlds rather than by some other theory. But if it is just happenstance that our concepts work this way, it seems that we are not entitled to take on the ontological baggage intrinsic to the theory that best explains those concepts. For we might have had *other* concepts best explained by some *other* theory without the status of modal realism altering one way or another.

Here's another way of making this point. If modal realism is true, there are other possible worlds containing people who speak languages much like ours, except that their talk about modality is substantially different. Indeed, for some of these people, their talk about modality will be *so* different that some theory other than modal realism will provide the best explanation of it. Moreover, in some cases, this other theory will entail the *rejection* of modal realism.¹⁶

The people with exotic systems of modality, it seems to me, are *not* licensed to think that the theory that best explains their talk about modality is actually true. But since we are in the same epistemic predicament with respect to possible worlds as they are, *we* are not licensed to think that the theory that best explains *our* talk about modality is actually true. The principle that theories which best explain our concepts are likely to be true has two flaws in this case. First, it can just as

¹⁴ These four notions are the ones that Lewis uses modal realism to explain.

¹⁵ I'll use "modality" as a placeholder for all of the notions Lewis thinks modal realism best explains. Not much turns on which of these explananda we take for our example.

¹⁶ Perhaps "talk about modality" that is *so* exotic that it is not explained by the theory that explains *our* talk of modality is not properly called talk about *modality* at all. However, I'm not sure this point can be used to defend Lewis's argument: it would need to be the case that this exotic modality-resembling talk is so distinct from our modal talk that its practitioners aren't justified in accepting the theory that best explains that talk. Since I don't think this is entailed merely by its not being *modal* talk, I don't think that this point can by itself salvage Lewis's argument.

well lead us into error as into truth; people with exotic systems of modality who apply this principle will systematically come to false conclusions. Second, the principle draws a conclusion about nonhuman reality based on a phenomenon that is utterly insensitive to the way this part of nonhuman reality is. Possible worlds are just as likely to be populated by people with exotic systems of modality when modal realism is true as when it is false. But that the system of modality people happen to have is insensitive to whether or not modal realism is true just suggests that our having the system of modality we have gives no reason to think that modal realism is true.

So, again, we can conclude that this argument for a metaphysical truth rests on an overly optimistic understanding of the relation between human activities and nonhuman reality. If the only thing going for modal realism is that it does the best job of explaining *our* system of modality, we do not have much reason to believe it. For, just as the modal realist thinks there is nothing special about the actual world except that it's the world *we* happen to inhabit, there is nothing special about our system of modality except that it's the system *we* happen to use. But the fact that *we* happen to use this system is no reason to think that the theory behind that system is in special touch with nonhuman reality.

So much, then, for specific examples of metaphysical optimism. I'll now argue that this phenomenon calls for explanation and offer the Nietzschean explanation I favor.

3.2 The Prevalence of Metaphysical Optimism

In the last section, I gave examples of three different varieties of metaphysical optimism. First, philosophers sometimes think, wrongly, that our quantifying over certain entities gives reason to think that those entities exist. Second, philosophers sometimes think, wrongly, that if it is prudentially valuable to accept a certain claim, then that claim is likely to be true. Third, philosophers sometimes think, wrongly, that a metaphysical view's ability to explain certain facts about human behavior or language is a reason to think that that view is correct.

As mentioned, I don't think that the structure of these arguments is in itself problematic. Indeed, my own argument tries to support a view by showing that it can explain certain facts about human behavior. I do think, however, that the examples I cited of poor uses of these argument forms are not just rare outliers. Philosophers frequently make poor arguments of the foregoing type.

In favor of this claim, first note that arguments with these shapes are quite common. The guiding claim in the argument against presentism – that there is a presumption against a view that implies that something we appear to quantify over does not exist – figures in a variety of philosophical debates, such as arguments against expressivism and error theory about moral discourse, arguments against various forms of nominalism, and arguments against mereological nihilism.¹⁷ Similarly, Street's argument that normative realism is false because all agents are committed to rejecting it is mirrored in a number of other ethical and metaethical debates, e.g., in Korsgaard's (1996) argument for constitutivism and Cuneo's (2007) argument against an error theory about epistemic reasons. Although few philosophers are as candid as Sider when he opts to accept extreme realism about structure partly because it provides "a pleasing self-conception for metaphysicians," arguments of much the same sort are common, for instance when philosophers suggest that a view is false because it implies skepticism, whether globally or about a particular domain.¹⁸ Finally, the spirit of Lewis's argument for modal realism, viz. the belief that a philosophical theory that explains theoretical notions well is likely to be true, is similarly ubiquitous, showing up in, e.g., Lewis's argument for his view of properties and arguments for platonism in mathematics.¹⁹

¹⁷ See, e.g., Korman (2009) on "the challenge from folk belief" generally, Shafer-Landau (2003) for arguments against expressivism and error theory, and Dorr and Rosen (2002) for a (critical) discussion of arguments against mereological nihilism from common sense.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Van Inwagen (1990) for a worry about mereological nihilism on the grounds that rejecting the existence of ordinary objects means rejecting a "Universal Belief," which entails radical skepticism, Benacerraf (1973) and responses to same for arguments for and against views in mathematics in light of their potentially skeptical consequences, and Chalmers (1996) for an argument against epiphenomenalism in light of its skeptical consequences.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Lewis (1983) on properties, and Swoyer (2008) on platonism.

Of course, that arguments with these forms are common does not show that *bad* arguments with these forms are common. Nonetheless, I think that the prevalence of this sort of argument suggests that metaphysical optimism is widespread. For neither the domains nor the people I've singled out for discussion seem to be special in a way that would make them more likely to manifest metaphysical optimism than other domains or people. It is not as though, say, the philosophy of time just attracts bad arguments or Lewis was ignorant of common standards of rigor. So it seems improbable that arguments of the mentioned kind are improper only in the cases I've just examined.

So I think that we have good reason to think that metaphysical optimism is widespread, i.e., that many philosophers make arguments that assume links between nonhuman reality and human behaviors, preferences, and capacities that are just not there. Although there may be fewer cases than I suppose, it is unlikely that the instances I've adduced are just isolated incidents. Given that this phenomenon is widespread, I think that it calls for explanation. In the rest of this section, I'll offer a Nietzschean explanation of metaphysical optimism.

3.3 The Nietzschean Explanation of Metaphysical Optimism

I think that many philosophers are (or act like) metaphysical optimists because doing so, in Nietzsche's terminology, increases their feeling of power and satisfies their drives. That is to say, acting in accordance with the belief that human behaviors, preferences, and capacities are hooked up with the metaphysical structure of the world allows philosophers to work more productively, makes possible "a pleasing self-conception," and satisfies their needs for certainty, control, and objectivity.

According to this explanation, the prevalence of metaphysical optimism is not to be explained by any evidence in favor of that viewpoint; indeed, we typically have good reason to think, for any particular instance of optimism, that the assumed connection between nonhuman reality and human activity does not really exist. Rather, philosophers have strong arational motivation, given the

facts about their constitution, to assume links between metaphysical matters and human behavior that are not really there.

Recall Nietzsche's general description of philosophers' psychological needs: we need to feel as though we have carefully reached certainty about the deepest nature of reality. We feel more powerful to the extent that we work productively to satisfy these needs, and we instinctively strive toward the conditions that will make us feel the most powerful. Given these needs, there will be strong pressure toward views that make metaphysical inquiry possible and productive. For instance, a globally skeptical epistemology ought to be anathema to the philosophical type, since this would straightforwardly preclude serious metaphysical inquiry.

Metaphysical optimism is attractive to philosophers in part because it makes possible certain routes of metaphysical inquiry. The more links we take there to be between ourselves and the objects of metaphysical study, the more potential avenues we have for investigating those objects. So, for instance, the belief that our talking about certain objects is a *prima facie* reason to think that those objects exist gives metaphysicians an epistemic foothold into a variety of domains. Since philosophical inquiry is facilitated by philosophers' belief that we have epistemic access into metaphysical matters, metaphysical optimism is directly conducive to our will to power.

These direct epistemic benefits, however, are not the only advantages of metaphysical optimism. Indeed, if the only thing speaking in favor of metaphysical optimism were its epistemic benefits, it would likely not be so common, since philosophers reject plenty of other views that would imply they had good access to the objects of metaphysical inquiry. Rather, the belief in these sorts of connections is tied to a general outlook, a "pleasing self-conception," that philosophers have strong motivation not to give up.

As Nietzsche describes it, the philosopher "sees on all sides the eyes of the universe telescopically focused upon his action and thought" (TL). Such a view of oneself is a natural result

of the philosopher's will to power, her "tyrannical drive" (BGE 9) and her "metaphysical need" (HH I 26). The philosopher is driven to posit herself as a uniquely important piece of existence, and this view of herself lends itself easily to the belief that her "action and thought," since they are *her* action and thought, are hooked up with reality itself.

Metaphysical optimism, then, is both epistemically desirable and personally flattering. Street's argument against normative realism demonstrates these features well. Street argued that realism is false because all agents must reject realism, and this because all agents are committed to the view that they can detect their reasons, which view is incompatible with realism. The link Street posits between agents' necessary commitments and the real nature of their reasons is of obvious epistemic utility; indeed, Street posits this link precisely because it is needed to escape skepticism about our reasons. By hooking up our reasons with ground-level facts about the conditions which make it possible for us to act, Street ensures that we have a method for detecting our reasons. Moreover, Street's view demonstrates the confidence that the universe is "telescopically focused" upon our action and thought. The necessary conditions for our behavior are not just contingent facts about a particular class of organism, but rather guides to the nature of normativity itself.

In a nutshell, then, metaphysical optimism is common in philosophy because philosophers are creatures who are unconsciously motivated to feel as though they've reached certainty about the deepest truths of reality. The belief that various human desires, activities, and needs are accurate guides to the nature of nonhuman reality gives philosophers the sense that they can figure out how reality is in itself and supports their self-conception as uniquely important beings, as "*causa prima*" (BGE 9). These prudential benefits are too good for philosophers to pass up.

3.4 The Baggage of the Nietzschean Explanation

The Nietzschean account of philosophers may seem implausible, and indeed for a variety of reasons. For one thing, we might doubt that anything like the will to power is really a guiding force

in human behavior. Next, we might not think that philosophers have the particular psychological profile Nietzsche ascribes to them. Further, we might not be convinced that the psychological profile of philosophers informs their philosophical views. Finally, we might not think that metaphysical optimism is the sort of view philosophers would be attracted to.

I'd like to view these considerations not as *objections* to the Nietzschean account, but rather as indicators of the commitments we take on board if we accept it. Whether taking on these commitments is worth the explanatory benefits will depend both on the weight of the commitments themselves and the quality of their explanatory benefits. I'll argue that the baggage of the Nietzschean account is not so heavy, and the explanatory work it does is hard to accomplish with other means, so we should be happy to take on the commitments of that account. I'll begin by trying to assuage worries about the account's commitments.

The centerpiece of the Nietzschean account is its assertion that human behavior is in large part guided by a will to power, i.e., that people act such that they can feel maximally productive and significant. Without this piece of the account, we would lack an explanation as to *why* philosophers are attracted to views that are conducive to metaphysical inquiry. While it is hardly feasible to defend such a broad thesis here, some considerations might make it more palatable. Note that Nietzsche is plausibly read as offering the will to power hypothesis as a competitor to psychological hedonism. That is, he thinks that we can't make sense of human behavior just by appeal to a desire for pleasure; we also need to appeal to a need for creative and fruitful activity. Positing a will to power helps make sense of a number of phenomena, including boredom's motivational force, our willingness to pursue difficult courses of action regardless of the pleasure they'll bring, and (of special importance for Nietzsche) the popularity of ascetic religions. Positing (beside other desires) a general desire to feel productive and significant helps explain much human behavior, so we ought to posit it.

Next, Nietzsche's account includes a remarkably detailed psychology of philosophers. However, the explanation of metaphysical optimism does not require that everything Nietzsche said about philosophers is true of every philosopher; it is not particularly important for our purposes whether the diagnoses Nietzsche made of figures like Plato and Kant were accurate, nor whether all philosophers are laboring under the delusions of morality. It will suffice for our purposes if philosophers have a metaphysical need, a drive to tyrannize, a need for certainty, and an inflated self-conception. Moreover, not *all* philosophers need to have this psychological profile; our account extends only to those who show signs of metaphysical optimism.

Two considerations make these psychological claims plausible. First, it is easy to see how individuals with motivations like these would be attracted to philosophy, and difficult to see how individuals without these motivations would be. Those attracted to philosophy (and metaphysics in particular) are likely to be the sort of individuals who want to find the truth about deep questions, since that's precisely what philosophers are advertised as doing.²⁰ And professional philosophy does not seem to be an attractive career for those not interested in those questions: it is not as though it pays particularly well or comes with much prestige. Second, metaphilosophical trends and empirical studies suggest that many philosophers are as Nietzsche describes. For instance, the turn away from linguistic philosophy is plausibly construed as a rejection of the view that philosophy's task is the parochial one of analyzing human concepts in favor of a metaphilosophy that makes philosophy a "profoundly important and foundational enterprise." Moreover, studies like Leslie et al.'s (2015), which suggests that philosophers (along with members of some other disciplines) view inherent

²⁰ One might object that many philosophers, especially in certain historical epochs, likely did not view themselves as pursuing the answers to especially deep questions. I suspect that Nietzsche would dismiss these thinkers as mere "scholars" (BGE 6) and offer some other psychological explanation for their interest in philosophy. My account, for its part, is committed only to the claim that *if* these philosophers weren't attracted to philosophy because they wanted to find the answers to profound questions, then they are less likely to have been metaphysical optimists. Although I won't argue for that claim here, I take it to be *prima facie* plausible: ordinary language philosophers, for instance, would not have had much reason to claim that our concepts had some deep connection to the intrinsic metaphysical nature of reality.

genius as important for philosophical ability, fit quite comfortably with Nietzsche's claim that philosophers have an inflated sense of their own significance.

Nietzsche's account also requires us to believe that a philosopher's views are a function not just of evidence, but also of her psychological profile. This piece of the account is well supported by recent empirical work. As mentioned earlier, studies like Schwitzgebel and Cushman's (2012, 2015) or Tobia et al.'s (2013) show that philosophical views are vulnerable to factors other than evidence. More directly, Holtzman's (2013) and Byrd's (2015) studies link philosophical positions with personality traits and one's propensity to answer questions intuitively or reflectively, respectively. The view that philosophical positions can be determined by one's *desires* is not a distant leap from these studies. Moreover, work on motivated reasoning more generally shows that desires have a pervasive and powerful influence on most people's beliefs.²¹ It would be quite remarkable if philosophers' judgments were immune to the motivational forces that guide so much other thinking.

Finally, even if we accept that philosophers are motivated by a will to power, that this will to power would push them toward conditions under which they take themselves to have reached certainty about the deepest nature of reality, and that being so pushed could influence their philosophical views, we need to believe that metaphysical optimism is the sort of view towards which philosophers could be pushed. I hope to have shown in the last section that metaphysical optimism is *exactly* the kind of view that philosophers would be attracted to; metaphysical optimism lends itself to philosophers' epistemic needs and to their inflated self-conception.

To sum up the foregoing, the substantive commitments of the Nietzschean account are both independently plausible and supported by empirical work. For this reason, the explanation of metaphysical optimism that account offers does not bring with it unacceptable baggage. If that

²¹ Kunda (1990) offers an early overview of the evidence for this claim.

explanation is superior to its competitors, we should have no qualms accepting it. I'll now argue that the explanation I've offered is indeed the best on offer.

3.5 The Virtues of the Nietzschean Explanation

Of course, since metaphysical optimism is a phenomenon that I've myself named and classified, there are no other explanations of that phenomenon as such on the market. Nonetheless, we can compare the Nietzschean explanation to the structure of other possible explanations. I'll consider two alternatives and argue that the Nietzschean explanation is superior to both of them.

Call the first alternative explanation the *dismissive explanation*. On this view, instances of metaphysical optimism are not a special class of poor philosophical reasoning, but rather ordinary lapses in judgment. Philosophers are merely people, and they're prone to make and publish mistakes. Sometimes these mistakes happen to involve wrongly taking facts about human behavior to give reason to think that nonhuman reality is a certain way.

The dismissive explanation is not particularly attractive. Although it is admirably parsimonious (involving no substantive commitments except that philosophers are merely people), it is ill-equipped to explain both why the mistakes I've called metaphysical optimism survive reflection, colloquia, and peer review and why this sort of mistake is so common. If metaphysical optimism is merely an innocent error, it should be easy for philosophers to realize their mistakes once they've been pointed out, and it should be easy for other philosophers to point these mistakes out. But if this is the case, we wouldn't expect to find so many published cases of metaphysical optimism. That is, instances of metaphysical optimism should not be much more common than instances of invalid arguments, non sequiturs, and inconsistencies. But although philosophers are laudably skilled at exterminating the latter sort of mistakes, they do not seem so skilled at stamping out optimism.

So we've identified one virtue of the Nietzschean explanation: it explains how philosophers could make this specific sort of error and fail to correct for it. Let's now consider a second

alternative explanation, the *motivated reasoning explanation*. On this view, philosophers become metaphysical optimists when they need to argue in favor of a particular view that they antecedently desire be true. So, for instance, David Lewis may have wanted modal realism to be true, and so he used all available resources to argue in favor of it.

Like the dismissive explanation, this explanation does not come with too much baggage: we need only believe that certain philosophers want some positions to be true and that they are tempted to use poor reasoning to support those positions. Nonetheless, it suffers from a variety of problems. First, for any particular case of metaphysical optimism, we would require a story explaining why the philosopher in question wanted his or her conclusion to be true. So, for example, we would need to know why Lewis desired that modal realism be true. But these explanations are likely to be *ad hoc* or simply implausible; philosophical debates often center around abstract matters unlikely to bear on anyone's quality of life.²² Of course, it will often be the case that philosophers *are* motivated to believe some particular substantive philosophical thesis, either because those theses are important to their quality of life or because some other factor (say, a desire to agree with one's dissertation director) motivates them. However, explaining the prevalence of metaphysical optimism by appeal to these isolated cases of motivated reasoning shares the problems of the dismissive explanation. Even if particular philosophers desire that certain views be correct, other philosophers will not always share those desires. We would expect those latter philosophers to point out the shoddy reasoning characteristic of motivated cognition, and the motivated philosophers should be driven to find better arguments for their positions. But if this were the case, published instances of

²² This isn't to say that philosophers *never* hold certain views and make certain errors because of their desires or psychological constitution. As mentioned above, Nietzsche quite commonly diagnoses philosophical views in this way. I mean to claim only that metaphysical optimism *as a pervasive phenomenon* is better explained by the Nietzschean account than by individual instances of motivated reasoning. That claim does not rule out the possibility that some, or even many, cases of metaphysical optimism are to be explained by a desire that some particular philosophical claim be true.

metaphysical optimism ought to be about as common as other errors made in service of motivated reasoning.

The motivated reasoning explanation brings to light another virtue of the Nietzschean explanation: since it takes metaphysical optimism to be a view that is desirable in itself for philosophers, it need not explain, for every optimistically argued for substantive metaphysical position, how that position could be the target of motivated reasoning.

These two virtues give a rough picture of the superiority of the Nietzschean explanation. Metaphysical optimism is a peculiar phenomenon for which typical explanations of poor reasoning will not suffice. First, it manifests itself among a class of people typically quite efficient at and dedicated to exterminating poor reasoning. Second, it is not typically enlisted in the service of reaching conclusions that philosophers have particularly strong reason to believe. For these reasons, appeals either to the typical cognitive flaws of humans or the desires of individual philosophers will not make proper sense of the phenomenon. Instead, we need an account that can explain why philosophers as such would be vulnerable to this sort of mistake. The Nietzschean account satisfies this requirement quite nicely.²³ For this reason, its explanatory benefits outweigh its substantive commitments, and so we have good reason to accept it.

4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHIATRY

If Nietzsche is right about us philosophers, then many of our philosophical beliefs are held not because the balance of evidence is in their favor, but rather because holding those beliefs is conducive to our feeling of power. I think viewing this diagnosis as a debunking history of

²³ This desideratum may also seem to call for a *sociological* explanation; perhaps philosophers as such are vulnerable to this sort of mistake because of some sociological peculiarity of the discipline. For instance, it may be conventional to appeal to metaphysically optimistic lines of inference, so philosophers feel comfortable using (or even feel pressured to use) such lines of inference even when they are not themselves convinced of their legitimacy. Although I'm inclined to think that some claim along these lines must be true, I don't view these explanations as competing with the Nietzschean explanation. Rather, the psychological and sociological explanations complement each other: for the foregoing sociological explanation to work, there must be some reason that optimistic reasoning is and remains conventional, and Nietzsche's psychology of philosophers fills this gap in well.

philosophical activity is helpful for cashing out its upshot. More specifically, I suggest that we view Nietzsche as giving a (literal) history of the origin and development of philosophical activity, which history gives us reason to doubt that that activity is truth-tracking or valuable.

Think of debunking histories in general as doing the following. A theorist selects for investigation some practice or set of beliefs that purports to have some sort of legitimacy, e.g. being truth-tracking, or being God's will, or being conducive to human flourishing. She then investigates the history of that practice. The history of that practice will give a kind of higher-order evidence bearing on the likelihood that the practice is legitimate.²⁴ Although a history does not *demonstrate* that its target has or lacks a particular kind of legitimacy, it can give us reason to *suspect* that the target has or lacks that legitimacy. For instance, learning that I acquired my religious beliefs from an unreliable source doesn't *show* that Christianity is false, but it does give me reason to *suspect* that my belief may be false.

The history of a practice could undermine its claim to legitimacy in a number of ways. For instance, it may show that a set of beliefs has an etiology viciously unrelated to anything that would make those beliefs likely to be true. Evolutionary debunking stories about our moral beliefs function like this: the debunker purports to show that our moral beliefs can be causally traced back to evolutionary pressures that would have had nothing to do with the moral truth, and she infers that our moral beliefs are unjustified and likely false. Alternatively, a debunking history might give reason to doubt that some practice achieves the ends it claims to achieve. For instance, Marxist analyses may purport to show that a social practice owes its existence to its usefulness for the ruling classes, and that therefore that practice may not in fact be necessary or beneficial for the masses.

²⁴ Readers of GM II may suspect that here I make the mistake of confusing "the cause of the genesis of a thing" with "its final usefulness" (GM II: 12). However, I do not think that my reading of debunking histories in fact commits this error; I do not claim that the original cause of some practice tells us what it is currently good for. Rather, I think that certain causal histories can give us reason to suspect that a practice lacks the legitimacy it claims for itself. Histories are a tool for stimulating further inquiry into a practice, rather than a final verdict on that practice.

I think we should view Nietzsche's diagnosis of philosophers as just such a debunking history. We could produce, for any particular philosopher, a history of her philosophical views.²⁵ If Nietzsche's account of philosophers is accurate, then the etiology of most people's philosophical views has more to do with their prejudices, drives, and inclinations than the truth or the available evidence. Since such an etiology gives us reason to doubt that those philosophical views are likely to be true, Nietzsche's account of philosophers amounts to a debunking history of many of our philosophical beliefs.

Viewed this way, Nietzsche's diagnosis has two sorts of philosophical upshot. First, since the history of a phenomenon tells us something about the causal origin of that phenomenon, that history can also help to explain more features of that phenomenon than its mere existence. Call this a history's theoretical upshot. In our case, I think that Nietzsche's account of philosophers helps explain why philosophy hasn't made more progress on central questions, why academic philosophy is characterized by such striking demographic imbalances, and why, for certain philosophical positions, those positions gained or lost favor regardless of the evidence for or against them. Second, since a debunking history undermines a practice's claim to legitimacy, that history bears on how and even whether that practice ought to be pursued. Call this a history's practical upshot. In our case, Nietzsche's account suggests that philosophers ought to lower their credence in the affected beliefs and, depending on just how pervasive these illicit influences are, alter philosophical methodology to compensate for those influences in more or less drastic ways. I'll discuss the theoretical and practical upshot of Nietzsche's diagnosis in turn.

²⁵ Note that this is distinct from a genealogy of the practice of academic philosophy; I don't think that Nietzsche provides an overarching explanation of the emergence of e.g. philosophy departments, conferences, peer review, etc. Rather, he provides a general outline for understanding why particular philosophers form the beliefs that they do.

4.1 The Theoretical Upshot of Nietzsche's Diagnosis

Recall the broad outlines of Nietzsche's account: some people become philosophers because philosophical activity is conducive to those individuals' power and helps satisfy those individuals' drives, and philosophers form the views they do for the same reasons. If this account is accurate, it would provide a fruitful means for investigating sociological features of the discipline, since the ground-level facts about what motivates people to philosophize, and to philosophize in the way that they do, will bear on the higher-level facts about what happens when those people interact.

In his (2015), David Chalmers draws attention to one such sociological feature. Chalmers argues that philosophy has failed to converge on the answers to the "big questions," and he canvases a variety of possible explanations for this failure. On his view, we philosophers have made much less progress toward agreement on the answers to the central questions in our discipline than have members of other disciplines, e.g., in math, physics, and chemistry (7). In support of this claim, he cites evidence from the 2009 PhilPapers Survey, which surveyed professional philosophers about their views on thirty philosophical questions. Chalmers cites questions about "the external world, free will, god, knowledge, meta-ethics, metaphilosophy, mind, and normative ethics" (7) as among the big questions of philosophy. Of these questions, only 2 have greater than 60% agreement on one answer (specifically, 82% of respondents endorsed non-skeptical realism about the external world, and 73% endorsed atheism). Chalmers takes these relatively low numbers to suggest that we philosophers are not moving very quickly toward convergence.

Chalmers goes on to ask *why* philosophy has failed to converge on answers to these questions. He runs through a number of possible explanations, such as the inefficacy of philosophical argumentation at convincing people, the possibility that philosophical debates are just verbal disputes, and the possibility that "there is something distinctive about human minds or about

philosophers' minds that prevents convergence on philosophical questions" (23). However, he runs through these explanations only schematically, neglecting to fill out the details for many of them.

I think the Nietzschean account of philosophers helps fill in part of the explanation for our failure to converge on the big questions. That is, Nietzsche tells us what it is about philosophers' minds that prevents convergence. Part of Chalmers' puzzlement about our lack of agreement stems from his belief that "attaining the truth is the primary aim at least of many parts of philosophy, such as analytic philosophy" (11). Nietzsche, of course, doubts that attaining the truth is typically philosophers' aim; it is only in "rare and unusual cases" that a "will to truth might actually be at issue" (BGE 10). If Nietzsche is right, it is relatively easy to explain why philosophers have failed to converge on the truth to the big questions: they aren't primarily seeking the truth, but rather seeking to inflate and rationalize their prejudices.

Contra Nietzsche's diagnosis, many philosophers would surely claim that they really do intend to attain the truth. Although the sincerity of such a self-ascription would be hard to gauge, Nietzsche offers an explanation of why even consciously truth-directed philosophers would fail to converge on the truth: our drives continue subconsciously to impact our evaluation of evidence and arguments even when we explicitly aim to figure out the truth. Since our desires are idiosyncratic and personal (they "bear decided and decisive witness" to who we are (BGE 6)), we should not expect them to lead toward convergence.

It may be objected that Nietzsche's account *would* lead us to expect philosophers to agree on the answers to many philosophical questions. For Nietzsche seems to think that the philosophical type has a large set of drives in common. If those drives are what determine philosophers' views, then they should lead most philosophers to the same views. Convergence of this sort would likely not be convergence on the philosophical truth, but it would be convergence nonetheless.

However, this objection misconstrues two pieces of Nietzsche's account. First, Nietzsche does not claim that the *same* drives motivate all philosophers; the psychological portraits he offers of, say, Kant and Schopenhauer have quite distinct forces guiding each philosopher's thought. Second, Nietzsche does not claim that drives uniquely determine philosophical views. Different drives can lead people to adopt the same views (as, say, both priests and the herd come to adopt ascetic ideals), and the same drives can lead different people to adopt different views, depending on the circumstances in which they are embedded.

The Nietzschean account of philosophers also provides some guidance for investigating academic philosophy's imbalanced demographic makeup. Since that account specifies the psychological profile of the type of person likely to be attracted to philosophy, it suggests that groups who are underrepresented among philosophers may simply not exhibit the psychological profile typical of philosophers. That is, philosophy might have relatively few women and people of color in part because women and people of color are less likely (for whatever reason) to instantiate the peculiar psychological profile of philosophers. Of course, this would only be *one* factor explaining philosophy's demographic composition.

This approach to philosophical demography shows some affinity with remarks made by David Papineau in his (2015) and with Leslie et al.'s (2015). Papineau suggests that women may be self-selecting out of philosophy: they see contemporary philosophical practice as the intellectual equivalent of snooker, "and conclude that they could be doing something better with their lives." Leslie et al. show that academic fields where innate genius or brilliance is assumed to be necessary for success typically have fewer women and that philosophy is just such a field. Both these explanations of the gender imbalance match up neatly with the Nietzschean approach. Papineau's claim that women see philosophy as pointless could be supplemented by evidence that women tend not to be of the psychological type that finds philosophy satisfying, and Leslie et al.'s finding that

philosophers are highly concerned with innate genius fits cleanly with Nietzsche's remarks about philosophers' inflated self-conception. Philosophers think of themselves as a special kind of truth-directed individual, and (so I speculate) the characteristics philosophers usually associate with themselves are associated more with men than women.

Finally, the Nietzschean diagnosis could make sense of wider trends in the popularity of certain philosophical positions. For instance, Amie Thomasson (2015) asks why "the Quinean approach to ontology" is "so universally adopted." She speculates that philosophers may have been attracted to (what she considers a misinterpretation of) Quine's views on ontology because "there was, perhaps, a longing to return to metaphysics" or because "it was attractive indeed to think of metaphysics as 'on a par with natural science'" (53). Nietzsche's account supplements her speculations by explaining more thoroughly why philosophers would long to return to metaphysics or want to think of themselves as on a par with scientists. Practicing old-fashioned metaphysics and viewing oneself as on a par with natural science would be conducive to philosophers' feeling of power and the satisfaction of their drives; old-fashioned metaphysics likely feels much more significant than the sort of philosophical lexicography practiced in the middle of the twentieth century, and seeing one's activity as akin to natural science would be quite satisfying for those who wanted secure knowledge about the way the world is.

The turn to neo-Quinean ontology is just one example of a philosophical trend that could call for explanation. Insofar as shifts in the popularity of philosophical and metaphilosophical positions are underdetermined by shifts in the evidence in favor of those positions, those philosophical trends will call for some psychological or sociological explanation. The Nietzschean account offers a general guideline for interpreting these trends: philosophers will be attracted to views that make them feel the most productive and important.

4.2 The Practical Upshot of Nietzsche's Diagnosis

So much for the theoretical upshot of the Nietzschean account; let's now turn to its practical significance. I claimed that Nietzsche's diagnosis would amount to a debunking history for any philosophical beliefs formed in the way he specifies (namely, those beliefs formed because they are conducive to a philosopher's feeling of power or the satisfaction of her drives). While it isn't plausible here to determine to whom and to what beliefs Nietzsche's diagnosis applies, we can say something about how worried we ought to be about the status of our philosophical beliefs and about how we ought to react to Nietzsche's diagnosis.

For our beliefs to be justified, they should be formed in ways that are likely to track the truth. If we have positive evidence that our beliefs were formed in a way that wouldn't track the truth, then our beliefs probably aren't justified.²⁶ For instance, if I believe in the existence of an all-powerful and all-knowing God merely because my parents inculcated such a belief in me as a child and I systematically ignore evidence to the contrary, my belief is not justified (although it may nonetheless turn out to be true), since it wasn't formed in a way that would track the truth.

Exactly this sort of story applies to our philosophical beliefs, if Nietzsche is right. We adopt a particular philosophical belief (say, that humans have free will) because the belief is conducive to our feeling of power and the satisfaction of our drives. We proceed to strengthen our confidence in this belief by selective appraisal of the evidence in favor of and against that belief; we take arguments that humans do have free will to be strong, and arguments that humans don't have free will to be weak. But this evaluation of the evidence, on Nietzsche's view, is motivated more by the psychological needs pushing us to have this belief than by sensitivity to good reasons.

This way of forming and maintaining a philosophical belief is therefore unreliable; it is responsive neither to the truth of the matter at hand (since the philosopher in question would

²⁶ This account of higher-order evidence owes much to the account given in Vavova (2014) and (unpublished ms.).

believe that we had free will whether or not we in fact did) nor to the best available evidence (since the philosopher in question would believe that we had free will whether or not the best available evidence suggested that we did). So the philosopher is unjustified in holding her belief.

If Nietzsche is right, many of our philosophical beliefs have causal histories much like the one just sketched out. Except for the rare cases where our psychological needs are likely to track the philosophical truth, beliefs formed in this way will be unreliable, and so unjustified.

Supposing Nietzsche were right, then, how ought we respond to the knowledge that many of our philosophical beliefs are unjustified? Although I doubt that any single course of action will be appropriate for every case, it's nonetheless worthwhile to sketch out some possible responses as well as the conditions under which each of those responses would be appropriate. I'd like to view these responses as existing on a spectrum of possible cases. Some philosophers will have reason to think that only a few of their beliefs were formed in the illicit way Nietzsche describes, whereas others will find that many of their beliefs were so formed. Similarly, some philosophers will care less about having true or justified philosophical beliefs than others. And, in the same way, some philosophers are less attached to current methods of philosophical inquiry than others. Each of these criteria (and still others) bear on what kind of response to Nietzsche's account is appropriate. For now, let's see how philosophers ought, *epistemically*, to act.

If Nietzsche's diagnosis extends to only a few of one's philosophical beliefs, it would be entirely appropriate to lower one's credence in the relevant beliefs and carry on one's philosophical way. However, Nietzsche seems to think that his account has much wider scope; recall that he thinks almost no philosophers have a "conception of the basic demands of intellectual integrity" (A 12). If the majority of philosophical beliefs are formed in the unreliable ways Nietzsche describes, then it would hardly be appropriate simply to reduce one's credence in all the particular beliefs shown to be so formed and continue philosophizing in the same way with respect to other beliefs.

This for two reasons. First, for philosophers to continue working, they had better have *some* beliefs, and the areas in which a philosopher is drawn to work are the same areas in which she is prone to motivated reasoning (if this Nietzschean view is right, anyway). If someone working primarily on the metaphysics of time found that her preference for the A-theory was motivated by irrelevant factors, we should not expect her to be satisfied by the advice to lower her confidence in the truth of the A-theory and start studying some other region of philosophy. After all, she must *care* about the nature of time, or else she would not have been susceptible to the Nietzschean diagnosis in the first place.

But if she wants to continue working in the philosophy of time, she had better revise her methodology for doing so. Hence the second reason that simply lowering credence and moving on to other regions of philosophy is unsatisfactory: if Nietzsche's diagnosis applies to many of our philosophical beliefs, we have good reason to think that the methodology used to arrive at and support those beliefs is lacking. Nietzsche doesn't show us how exactly that methodology is flawed, but (if his diagnosis extends to us moderns) he does show us that that methodology is at best highly susceptible to distortion by irrelevant influences. So we should adjust that methodology, either by altering it to control for irrelevant influences or by removing those irrelevant influences themselves.

I doubt that the Nietzschean will hold out much hope for the latter sort of adjustment. It is unlikely, given the facts of her diagnosis, that philosophers could themselves overcome the psychological forces that distort their thinking. For these psychological forces are the things that drive them to philosophize in the first place: removing them would amount to removing the desire to philosophize. So we had better pursue the former option, and try to adjust philosophical methodology to better account for motivated reasoning.

What might such adjustments look like? At a minimum, we should become more suspicious of arguments in favor of conclusions that we have reason to believe we or others will be strongly motivated to accept. Note that being suspicious does not mean adopting a *negative* dogmatism and

rejecting those arguments outright. Instead, we ought to both apply more scrutiny to others' arguments and be less confident in our immediate evaluations of the strength of arguments. We ought especially to become more skeptical of argumentative moves that are easily influenced by one's desires that certain conclusions be true. A common move of this sort involves claiming that a certain tradeoff in theoretical desiderata is desirable, e.g., claiming that a theory is better than another because it yields greater explanatory power at the cost of a larger ontology. I suspect that one's evaluation of the worth of a given tradeoff is easily influenced by one's arational psychological needs. For it is not as though there is a body of uncontroversial evidence showing how likely to be true philosophical theories with given amounts of, say, explanatory power are; one's preferences for theoretical virtues, then, are difficult to subject to rational scrutiny (and may be resistant to change even in response to such scrutiny). So we ought to be skeptical of how people choose to balance different theoretical virtues, and we ought to be similarly skeptical about other forms of argument that are similarly difficult to subject to rational scrutiny.

Alternatively, philosophers might adjust their methodology by changing their view of what that methodology yields. If philosophers find that controlling for motivated reasoning is too difficult or just undesirable, they might allow for motivated reasoning and change their view of the status of philosophical beliefs. That is to say, philosophers *could* change their methodology such that it would in fact produce what it is supposed to produce (namely, true or justified beliefs), *or* they could preserve the methodology and alter their view of what it is supposed to produce.

A variety of views of the nature of philosophical beliefs could satisfy this requirement. For instance, philosophers might adopt a Carnapian (1931) view where philosophical claims are non-cognitive expressions of one's way of life. Since expressions of one's way of life are not the sort of thing that can be true or false, philosophers need not worry that their expressions may be subject to influences that do not track the truth of things. Philosophers could also refuse to endorse the

deliverances of their methodology. They might determine which views seem plausible to them, but refrain from giving much credence to any philosophical view. Alternatively, they might adopt a sort of fictionalist stance and *pretend* that certain philosophical theses are true within a certain context, without endorsing those theses *simpliciter*.

While these responses may seem unorthodox, it is worth pointing out that they may be what honest philosophers are forced to if Nietzsche is right about us. For if poor reasoning is an inexorable feature of philosophical reasoning, those philosophers motivated to act as they epistemically should would be obliged to accommodate that poor reasoning without sacrificing the value they place on epistemic virtues. If philosophers cannot alter the way that they reason about philosophical matters such that no irrelevant influences can distort the deliverances of that reasoning (and Nietzsche gives good reason to think that they cannot), they must cease believing that their reasoning arrives at the truth. But insofar as they are motivated to keep reasoning in the way they do, they then must change their view of what their reasoning amounts to. Non-cognitivist, (Pyrrhonian) skeptical, and fictionalist views of philosophical claims suit this role quite nicely.

In short, then, we ought to reduce our credence in any philosophical beliefs to which a Nietzschean diagnosis applies. If that diagnosis applies to a relatively small number of our beliefs, then it would be appropriate to reduce our confidence in those beliefs and continue on with philosophical activity as usual. But if, as Nietzsche seems to think, that diagnosis applies to many of our beliefs, then we ought either to alter philosophical methodology to better compensate for motivated reasoning or to change our view of the status of philosophical claims, such that their being influenced by our psychological needs is no *epistemic* demerit.

5 CONCLUSION

So much for how philosophers ought epistemically to respond to Nietzsche's diagnosis. Although that diagnosis entails that philosophers have an epistemic duty merely to adjust their

methodology in a certain way, it suggests even more radically that philosophers may have an *all-things-considered* duty not to practice philosophy at all. That is, it gives us some reason to doubt that philosophical activity is worth doing. I'll discuss four ways in which Nietzsche's diagnosis gives us reason to doubt this.

First, Nietzsche suggests that many of our philosophical beliefs are held in large part because holding those beliefs is conducive to our feeling of power and the satisfaction of our drives. If those beliefs are in fact held on those grounds, then we ought to lower our confidence in them, since they were formed unreliably. Similarly, our view of the significance of philosophical inquiry may *also* be held because that view is conducive to our feeling of power and the satisfaction of our drives. That is to say, we may think of philosophy as a "profoundly important and foundational intellectual enterprise" not because we have good *reason* to think that it is such an enterprise, but rather because we strongly desire and need it to be such an enterprise. But if our belief in the value of philosophy is grounded in this way, we ought to lower our confidence that that belief is accurate.

Of course, the existence of a plausible story suggesting that philosophers are motivated to think their discipline is worthwhile shows neither that philosophy isn't in fact worthwhile nor that philosophers do form their views in this illicitly motivated way. It's perfectly possible that philosophy is a valuable activity, and that philosophers believe this because of (say) the ample evidence demonstrating it.

However, if we accept the other pieces of the Nietzschean account, we have good evidence that philosophers have not formed their belief in the value of philosophy in a reliable way. For, on Nietzsche's view, we philosophers typically justify our activities by appealing to a seriously inaccurate view of our discipline. Philosophy is typically taken to be valuable insofar as it helps us approach the truth about fundamental matters, or makes us reconsider unjustified beliefs about ourselves and the world, or improves our beliefs about how life ought to be lived. But if Nietzsche is right, philosophy

rarely succeeds in achieving any of these goals. Where we take ourselves to be carefully inquiring into the fundamental truths of reality, Nietzsche takes us to be sublimating and elevating our idiosyncratic needs and desires.

That our view of our activity is so inaccurate gives us further reason to lower our credence in the belief that philosophy is worthwhile. First, it lends support to the Nietzschean claim that our belief in philosophy's value was formed unreliably. For our normative view about philosophy's value was likely formed by the same processes as our descriptive view of philosophy's worldly impact. But, if Nietzsche is right, our descriptive view about philosophy is radically false. That our descriptive view is so drastically mistaken suggests that the processes that yielded that view are not reliable. And since those same unreliable processes were likely responsible for our normative view of philosophy's value, we have good reason to think that that normative view is not in fact justified.

Indeed, we might suspect that our descriptive view of philosophical practice is as distorted as it is precisely because this is the view necessary to justify our *normative* view of philosophical practice. Contemporary work on motivated reasoning shows such a link: people often shape their descriptive beliefs in order to justify antecedently held normative beliefs.²⁷ The Nietzschean account shows quite nicely how philosophers might do something similar to support their belief in philosophy's value. Where conservatives downplay the descriptive facts about the risks of widespread gun ownership in order to justify their normative endorsement of gun ownership, philosophers may inflate the descriptive facts about how philosophy impacts people's lives in order to justify their normative endorsement of philosophy. But, of course, this form of motivated reasoning is unlikely to be reliable, so we should lower our confidence in the belief that philosophy is valuable.

Etiological considerations aside, the inaccuracy of our view of philosophical activity suggests that philosophy may not be worthwhile in another way. If the typical justifications for a practice

²⁷ Kahan (2007) and Liu and Ditto (2013) provide examples of this sort of motivated reasoning.

presuppose an inaccurate conception of that practice, we have reason to suspect that that practice is not worthwhile. While the failure of existing justifications is not positive evidence that a practice isn't valuable, it does give reason to lower our credence in the belief that that practice is valuable. This is so for a variety of reasons. First, insofar as our belief in philosophy's value rests on those existing justifications, if those justifications are inadequate, we ought to lower our credence in that belief. Second, philosophy's not being worthwhile would offer a rather compelling explanation for the failure of typical arguments to the effect that philosophy *is* worthwhile. While this explanation wouldn't be the only possible one, its immediate plausibility gives some reason to suspect that it may be true. Third, the absence of justifications of philosophy's value that rest on a more accurate picture of the discipline suggests that such an accurate picture may not in fact justify philosophy's value. On the Nietzschean view, philosophers are antecedently motivated to think that philosophy is an activity of great importance, so they will be motivated to seek out evidence in favor of that belief. But if the only evidence they can find is fabricated, then we ought to suspect that legitimate evidence is unavailable. For, other things being equal, we would predict philosophers to create *legitimate* justifications for their activity, were such justifications available. That they do not produce such justifications suggests (but, of course, does not prove) that there may not be any.

Nietzsche's diagnosis of philosophers suggests that their activity may not be worthwhile for yet another reason: it may be the case that no one who understands what motivates philosophical activity would want to engage in it. Or rather: it may be the case that philosophizing cannot be reflectively endorsed. For if Nietzsche is right, only a rather peculiar subset of people are motivated to do philosophy in the first place, namely those for whom philosophizing offers a chance to rationalize and sublimate one's prejudices. But for these people to be motivated to conduct philosophy, philosophy must not *appear* to be an elaborate game of justifying one's antecedently held

beliefs. Rather, philosophy must appear to be a rigorous and objective field of inquiry within which one comes to learn the truth about deeply important moral and metaphysical matters.

But, on Nietzsche's view, this rosy picture of philosophy is flatly inaccurate. It is only "in rare and unusual cases" that a "will to truth" (BGE 10) motivates someone to conduct philosophical inquiries. But were a potential philosopher to come to learn *both* that they were motivated to philosophize primarily because they wanted (consciously or not) to assure themselves of things they already believed *and* that philosophical inquiries would likely not generate true answers to deep questions, their desire to conduct philosophy would likely fade. If, as Nietzsche suggests, those motivated to do philosophy must have an inaccurate view of the discipline, then anyone with an accurate view would no longer be so motivated.

As with the previous considerations, philosophy's inability to be reflectively endorsed does not itself show that philosophy is not worthwhile. It may be the case that philosophy produces a number of valuable goods that simply fail to motivate actual philosophers, or that unreflectively endorsed philosophy is nonetheless worth practicing. Still, we ought to be skeptical of the value of any practice that attracts only people with a false view of what is going on in that practice.

So, if Nietzsche's diagnosis of us philosophers is correct, we have a number of reasons to lower our confidence in the belief that philosophy is worthwhile. That belief may be just another manifestation of our arational, idiosyncratic psychological needs. Given the ability of Nietzsche's account of philosophers to explain otherwise puzzling phenomena within the discipline and the upshot that account would have for the practice and value of philosophy, we philosophers ought to begin taking it seriously.

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