

**Self-Talk in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*:
A Lesson for Philosophical Practice¹**

RAN LAHAV

UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA, ISRAEL & JOHNSON STATE COLLEGE, VERMONT

Introduction

For anyone who wishes to make philosophy relevant to our everyday life, the *Meditations* by the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius is a fascinating text. It is fascinating because it not only presents a deep conception *about* life, but also mentions practical ways of applying this conception to everyday life.

The *Meditations* is a Stoic text which contains some central ideas already found in earlier Stoic writings and develops them in an engaging way. Several prominent historians of philosophy, notably Pierre Hadot² and A.A. Long³, interpret it as a personal notebook of Stoic exercises, or what Hadot calls "spiritual exercises."⁴ The idea is that the emperor's primary purpose in writing this text was not to describe or speculate, but rather to practice. His purpose was not to *record* his thoughts and actions but to *influence* them, and thus to direct himself towards the good life.

The view that the *Meditations* is a book of Stoic exercises makes this text especially relevant for philosophical practice. Philosophical practice is a modern approach that seeks to use philosophical thought for dealing with our personal predicaments, enriching our self-understanding, and thus living more deeply, fully, and with greater wisdom.⁵ Philosophical practice can take different shapes: as philosophical counseling between a philosopher and a counselee; as a workshop of self-examination directed by a philosopher; as a companionship of fellow philosophical seekers; but it can also be practiced by an individual who seeks to live philosophically, just like Marcus Aurelius. Thus, the *Meditations* can be seen as one of the ancient precursors of modern philosophical practice.

Case Studies from Research at Eastern Michigan University

KATE MEHURON
EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

These clients consented to public distribution and discussion of their case studies under the condition that their real names or persons or organizations would not appear in any of these studies. Some of these case studies are the result of my two-year research project, "Philosophical Counseling Case Studies: Implications for Philosophical Practice," approved by my university Institutional Review Board (IRB) in 2004. My success in gaining the IRB approval of this project is indebted in no small way to the advice provided in *Philosophical Practice*. (Marinoff 2001)

Case Studies from Research at SUNY Cortland

ANDREW FITZ-GIBBON AND KATHRYN RUSSELL
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK (SUNY), COLLEGE AT CORTLAND

The case studies we present in this article are from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved research project conducted at the State University of New York College at Cortland, in May through November 2008. Our IRB supported research in philosophical practice is the first of its kind. It was entitled “Philosophical Counseling: Case Studies and Their Implications.” Our research question was “Does talking to a trained philosopher help people resolve life issues?” We concluded that most of our clients benefited from philosophical counseling and that we should continue to offer it as an element in our philosophical outreach.

Realizing that it was necessary to preclude or overcome potential resistance from IRB members who had never heard of philosophical practice, we took on the task of educating them. This was not a formidable undertaking because [co-author] Andrew Fitz-Gibbon was the professional ethicist sitting on the IRB itself. Thus he had gained credibility through his association with board members, and he was able to engage in informal conversations with them. Our proposal began with the definition of philosophical practice used by APPA and suggested by Lou Marinoff:

Philosophical practice is a relatively new field, though its roots are deep in the philosophical tradition. Philosophical counseling is intended for clients who are rational, functional, and not mentally ill, but who can benefit from philosophical assistance in resolving or managing problems associated with normal life experience.

**Synchronicities, Serpents, and “Something Else-ness”
A Meta-Dialogue on Philosophy and Psychotherapy¹**

LOU MARINOFF
THE CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK

Synchronicity I

In the summer of 2006, I read several books by well-known existential psychiatrist and insightful novelist Irvin Yalom.² They were all thought-provoking and mightily entertaining. Dr. Yalom sustains lively interests in philosophical aspects of psychiatry, as well as in psychiatric aspects of philosophy. Among other works, he has written two profoundly philosophical novels, namely *The Schopenhauer Cure* and *When Nietzsche Wept*, in which he has delved deeply and creatively into the psyches of these two outstanding thinkers via the refracting media of literary and historical fiction, and through lenses of eclectic existential psychiatry.

Yalom’s fictive excursions are not confined to philosophical realms—far from it. In a delightfully ironic novel entitled *Lying on the Couch* (he is an inveterate punster in love with *double-entendre*) Yalom takes to task some perennially unfinished business of psychoanalysis, namely analysts’ perpetual struggles with counter-transference issues. Even the most seasoned psychoanalysts, so Yalom artfully reveals, have not yet had their own egos sufficiently shrunk. In consequence, they are apt to experience all kinds of problems with patients, and not always of the patients’ making. To be sure, patients are wont to deceive their analysts at times, whether subconsciously, diffidently, or maliciously. And analysts themselves are prone to all the vanities catalogued by Ecclesiastes in antiquity,³ egoisms and egotisms alike that appear innately rooted in the human psyche, and which inevitably contribute to self-deception. If an analyst’s vanities, self-deceptions, and unresolved counter-transferences were skillfully exploited by a professional con-artist posing as a patient, personal and professional mayhem would result. This is one of the conspicuous threads in the rich tapestry of untruths, vanities and self-deceptions that Yalom weaves in *Lying on The Couch*.

One particular episode in Yalom’s novel rather jarred me when I encountered it in August 2006, because it coincided with an uncannily similar episode that was unfolding in my own life at precisely the same time.