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On Nietzsche's Criticism towards Common Sense Realism in *Human, All Too Human* I, 11

Pietro Gori

Abstract: This paper explores Nietzsche's observations on language in *Human, All Too Human* I, 11; reflects on the anti-realist position that Nietzsche defends in that aphorism; and focuses on the role she plays in his later investigation on Western culture and its anthropology. As will be argued, Nietzsche's criticism towards common sense realism is consistent with some pragmatist epistemologies developed during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. This treat of "timeliness" does not limit Nietzsche's originality on the topic. In fact, the idea that philosophy can contrast the metaphysical commitment of common sense can be seen as the theoretical tool that allows Nietzsche to operate on the development of European culture and society.

Keywords: anti-realism; language; metaphysics; pragmatism

1. Introduction

This paper aims to explore Nietzsche's observations on language in *Human, All Too Human* I, 11, and to reflect on the cultural function Nietzsche attributes to that fundamental human device. Particular attention will be given to the anti-realism that Nietzsche defends in that aphorism, for that position plays an important role in his later investigation on Western culture and its anthropology. The research will therefore not be limited to a thorough investigation of HH I, 11;[1] on the contrary, attention will be given to Nietzsche's dealing with the consequences of men's belief in language in his later writings. As will be shown, according to him, the impact of language on human culture is much deeper and philosophically relevant than what is described in *Human, All Too Human*, and involves Nietzsche's arguments on morality and the degenerative anthropology he elaborates in particular during his late years.

Moreover, Nietzsche's criticism towards common sense realism can be contextualized in the epistemological debate of his time, thus showing particular treats of "timeliness." This is something that needs to be clarified by some preliminary remarks, for in what follows (see section 3) that epistemological debate will be addressed by talking of "pragmatism". In this paper, pragmatism has to be understood in a broad sense, far from the contemporary interpretations and applications that only share some basic principles with the original position developed by Peirce, James and Dewey. The attempt is therefore to go

back to the time when pragmatism is born, and to look at it from a historical point of view. This perspective reveals a more complex – and less analytical – image of that view, and shows important connections between pragmatism and other anti-metaphysical positions grounded in the same roots as its own.

According to the subtitle of James's book from 1907 – *Pragmatism. A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* – pragmatism can be conceived as a research program that elaborates and develops some features of the late nineteenth-century philosophic and scientific thought, features that this research program shares with other positions which arose in the same period. Common denominator of all these views is an epistemology rooted in evolutionism (especially Darwinian evolutionism) and in some modern developments of Kantianism[2]. If considered from that perspective, pragmatism shows its complexity, and it is possible to evaluate its philosophical value by looking at the "diagnostic moment" that pertains to it and that comes *before* the methodology for evaluating truth to which pragmatism is usually reduced. In other words, pragmatism can be interpreted as a general *strategy for dealing with the meaningless of the traditional notion of truth* revealed by modern science and philosophy, and not just as a method for solving that problem.

The starting point of pragmatism is, according to James, the rejection of the old correspondence theory of truth, that is, of the metaphysical conception of truth that follows from the ordinary worldview and which is implied in the language man daily uses – the same position that Nietzsche criticizes in *Human, All Too Human* and other writings[3]. One fundamental aim of pragmatism is therefore to criticise the "naïf realism" of common sense by means of philosophical and scientific thought. This aim does not pertain only to James's investigation; rather, it can be found in other studies in epistemology carried on during the late nineteenth century, and in particular in the works of Ernst Mach and Hans Vaihinger[4]. Both these authors, without having been influenced by James (or other pragmatists), reflect on the realism of the common sense, and contrast that view with an anti-metaphysical conception of ideas and truths that stresses their purely relative role of human devices[5]. This attitude toward the common sense worldview can in fact be considered the point on which James's, Mach's and Vaihinger's positions intersect, and therefore the very root of their being "pragmatist" epistemologies. As will be argued, Nietzsche can also be included in that list, for his anti-realist critique of language is in agreement with the above men-

tioned views. Moreover, that critique becomes in Nietzsche a *cultural strategy*. Indeed, the idea that the philosophical thought can criticize the metaphysical commitment of common sense is one of Nietzsche's fundamental *theoretical tool* that will allow him to operate on the development of European culture and society – and, consequently, on the human type they generate.

2. Language and culture

The eleventh paragraph of the first book of *Human, All Too Human* plays an important role in Nietzsche's writing, for in that text one finds stated for the first time the idea that "mankind set up in language a separate [*eigene*] world beside the other [*andere*] world" – an idea that, as known, Nietzsche will be particularly concerned with during his late period, when he talks about the distinction between "true" and "apparent" world. Moreover, in HH I, 11, Nietzsche argues that "the significance of language for the evolution of culture [*Cultur*] lies" in the creation of this dualism, since that makes it possible for mankind to "make itself master of" the world. In this paper, attention will be payed to the anti-realism that Nietzsche defends in that paragraph, that is, to his criticism towards the common sense view according to which our language is a *truthful* description of reality[6]. As Nietzsche puts it,

to the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world. The sculptor of language was not so modest as to believe that he was only giving things designations, he conceived rather that with words he was expressing supreme knowledge of things; language is, in fact, the first stage of the occupation with science. Here, too, it is the *belief that the truth has been found* out of which the mightiest sources of energy have flowed. A great deal later – only now – it dawns on men that in their belief in language they have propagated a tremendous error. (HH I, 11)

In this excerpt, Nietzsche contrasts the idea that "in language [man] possesse[s] knowledge of the world" with an anti-realist and nominalist view. That idea is quite useful, according to Nietzsche, for it played a fundamental role in the development of the human species by letting mankind raise itself above the animal. However, usefulness is not truthfulness, and the mere belief in something does not give to that something actuality. Therefore, one should be "modest", and admit that concepts and names are only designations of things and that with words one does not "express supreme knowledge of things".

This observation allows us to reflect on the cultural significance that Nietzsche attributes to language, which is in fact twofold. At the beginning of the above quoted passage, Nietzsche stresses a *positive* cultural significance of language, that is, its having made the world manageable for mankind, thus helping the preservation of the human species. But if one reads HH I, 11 in the light of Nietzsche's later writing, it is possible to argue that language also has a *negative* cultural significance for the human being. Indeed, the belief in the dichotomy between a "true" and an "apparent" world generates a *degenerative*

anthropology. In Nietzsche's view, the declining type of life he talks about after 1885, and the culture that type of life represents, are actually grounded on the "error" according to which one mistakes names for reality of things[7]. It is worth noting that, in the same paragraph from *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche suggests that modern times are ready for a "new beginning". As he argues – with all likelihood inspired by some post-Kantian thinkers – at his time it finally "dawn[ed] on men that in their belief in language they have propagated a tremendous error" and, therefore, philosophy can reveal the fundamental mistake of common sense realism[8]. On that basis, it is possible to stress the importance of Nietzsche's anti-realism for the development of human culture and society. That position is in fact the device that can be adopted in order to educate mankind to a new worldview, thus opening the way for the development of an anti-metaphysical culture.

If one looks at Nietzsche's concerning with realism and nominalism throughout his writing, it is possible to see that these topics actually lead to the problem of culture. The anti-realistic attitude that Nietzsche defends in HH I, 11 is reiterated a few years later, in *The Gay Science*. In the opening sections of the second book of that work, Nietzsche argues against the "realists" who "insinuate that the world really is the way it appears" to them: "That mountain over there! That cloud over there! What is 'real' about that? Subtract just once the phantasm and the whole human *contribution* from it, you sober ones! Yes, if you could do *that*! (…) There is no 'reality' for us – and not for you either, you sober ones" (GS 57). Then, in the following paragraph, Nietzsche defends a sort of axiological nominalism by stating that, especially when we talk of value judgements, "*what things are called* is unspeakably more important than what they are" (GS 58). As he did in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche is concerned with the role that words – which, according to him, are mere human designations – play in ordinary thought, and tries to shake the traditional belief in their value as truthful representation of the world.

That view is developed in *Beyond Good and Evil* 268, where Nietzsche states that "words are acoustic signs for concepts; concepts, though, are more or less determinate pictorial signs for sensations that occur together and recur frequently, for groups of sensations". This idea comes from the book of the post-Kantian thinker Gustav Teichmüller, *Die Wirkliche und die Scheinbare Welt* (1882), that Nietzsche read after 1883 and that strongly influenced his late thought[9]. What is worth noting, for the aims of the present paper, is that the main topic of BGE 268 is culture and communication. Nietzsche's dealing with the mere symbolic value of words is thus aimed at showing that in our language we do not have a truthful knowledge of things. On the contrary, the language we speak is only a translation and interpretation of reality, and we can properly understand each other only if we share a complex background, the several features of which shape the words we use. Moreover, in BGE 268 Nietzsche anticipates some observations that he later publishes in *The Gay Science* 354. As known, this paragraph is devoted to the role of consciousness for the sake of communication, and Nietzsche argues that "the word of which we can become conscious is merely a surface- and sign-world" and

that "all becoming conscious involves a vast and thorough corruption, falsification, superficialization, and generalization". Moreover, in GS 354 Nietzsche stresses that the world-image our consciousness draws is shaped by the perspective of the *human-herd*, a topic that involves questions related to Christian morality and, therefore, European culture[10].

The final step of this very brief and partial exposition is Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*. In the third section of that text, *"Reason" in Philosophy* – a section where Nietzsche develops several ideas already published in *Human, All Too Human,* I – one reads:

These days we see ourselves mired in error, drawn *necessarily* into error, precisely to the extent that the prejudice of reason forces us to make *use* of unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, objectification, being; we have checked this through rigorously and are sure that this is where the error lies. This is no different than the movement of the sun, where our eye is a constant advocate for error, here it is *language*. Language began at a time when psychology was in its most rudimentary form: we enter in a crudely fetishistic mindset when we call into consciousness the basic presuppositions of the metaphysics of language – in the vernacular: the presuppositions of *reason*. (GD, *"Reason"* 5)

In this passage, Nietzsche develops what he first argued in HH I, 11. His fundamental idea is that our language is the very source of the common sense realism we traditionally adopt, that is, a worldview that believes in the existence of substances, identical things, and other "presuppositions with which nothing in the real world corresponds" (HH I, 11). Insofar as they outline a metaphysical world and force us to believe that this world is the "true" one, the prejudices of reason are at the origin of the anthropological degeneration of the human being that in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche particularly deals with (in that text he calls it *décadence*). Thus, in this book from 1888 one finds the final development of a reflection started in 1878, and Nietzsche shows to his readers the effects of language on the human being. As above argued, language has an important – but *negative* – cultural significance, for the (theoretical) division of the world in two separate realms it presupposes deeply impacts on our society and on the individual himself, finally producing a declined type of man[11]. Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* is explicitly aimed at contrasting that consequence, by means of a critique of the value of the "eternal idols" – which are in fact the old truths traditionally adopted (see EH, *Twilight of the Idols* 1).

3. Scientific thought and common sense realism

The reflection on the metaphysical implications of language and the importance of a philosophical critique of common sense characterizes the early pragmatist epistemology. In a paper from one of the founders of the *Metaphysical Club*, Chauncey Wright, it is possible to find some interesting remarks on language, which sound quite similar to those published by Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human*:

The languages employed by philosophers are themselves lessons in ontology, and have, in their grammatical structures, implied conceptions and beliefs common to the philosopher and to the barbarian inventors of language, as well as other implications which he takes pains to avoid. How much besides he ought to avoid, in the correction of conceptions erroneously taken from the forms of language, is a question always important to be considered in metaphysical inquiries. (Wright, 1873: 280)

Wright's paper has been published in 1873, and with all likelihood Nietzsche did not read it. Nevertheless, it shows us that, when Nietzsche developed his early philosophical investigations (the unpublished writing *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, which deals with the metaphorical value of language, is dated 1873), other thinkers were concerned with the metaphysical implications of our language. Moreover, as Wright's paper suggests, the question these thinkers were facing was how to deal with that ontology, that is, which should be the role of philosophy in the "correction of conceptions erroneously taken from the forms of language" and that constitute the content of the ordinary worldview?

This question has been addressed by William James in one of the lectures collected in his *Pragmatism* (1907) and titled *Pragmatism and Common Sense*. The starting point of James is an evolutionary conception of knowledge which can be compared with that defended by Nietzsche (e.g. in GS 110). According to James,

our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time. They form one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development, the stage of common sense. (James, 1907: 170)

According to James, common sense makes use of certain intellectual forms or categories of reason, such as "things", "kinds", "bodies", "causal influence", etc., which are purely logical concepts that proved their usefulness in the history of our species, but whose actual reality cannot be demonstrated[12]. According to him, "common sense appears as a perfectly definite stage in our understanding of things, a stage that satisfies in an extraordinarily successful way the purposes for which we think", and "suffices for all the necessary practical ends of life" (James, 1907: pp. 181-182). Given this practical usefulness, the ordinary worldview cannot be rejected, but it would be necessary to reflect on the metaphysical commitment it involves. What interests James is actually to stress the nature and origin of the notions we daily use, for modern science, at her stage of development, cannot accept the old conception of knowledge (and truth) anymore.

In dealing with the character of concepts, James reveals his other main reference, that is, the German school of Post- and Neo-Kantian thinkers: "All our conceptions – argues James – are what the Germans call *Denkmittel*, means by which we handle facts by thinking them" (James, 1907: pp. 171-172). Moreover, he states that

in practice, the common-sense *Denkmittel* are uniformly victorious. Everyone, however instructed, still thinks of a "thing" in the common-sense way, as a permanent unit-subject that "sup-

ports" its attributes interchangeably. No one stably or sincerely uses the more critical notion, of a group of sense-qualities united by a law. (James, 1907: pp. 180-181)

This excerpt reminds what Nietzsche states in *Beyond Good and Evil* 268, when he talks of words as "acoustic signs for concepts", and of concepts as "signs (…) for groups of sensations". Modern epistemology actually reflected on the nature of our knowledge, and stressed the purely logical value of words and concepts. Both of them, indeed, are a secondary product of our intellect, which provide man with means for finding his way in the world. The problem at stake, here, is not only epistemological, but also *ontological*. In dealing with the relationship between ordinary and critical thinking, two different – and apparently contrasting – metaphysical conceptions are indeed taken into account. As one reads in the above quoted passage, James is well aware of the impossibility of getting rid of the language traditionally adopted, but he also thinks that the metaphysics implied in that language should be rejected. In James's view, a critical approach can help superseding "the *naif* conception of things (…), and a thing's name [can be] interpreted as denoting only the law or *Regel der Verbindung* by which certain of our sensations habitually succeed or coexist". Thus, concludes James, "science and critical philosophy burst the bounds of common sense. With science *naif* realism ceases" (James, 1907: pp. 185-186).

James's observations on that topic – in particular, his talking of concepts as names for "groups of sense-qualities" and his idea that science can correct the realism defended by the common sense – have been inspired by the work of the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach. At the end of the first chapter of *The Analysis of Sensations* (1900[2]) – a book that James carefully read[13] – Mach argues:

The philosophical point of view of the average man – if that term may be applied to his naïve realism – has a claim to the highest consideration. It has arisen in the process of immeasurable time without the intentional assistance of man. It is a product of nature, and is preserved by nature. (…) The fact is, every thinker, every philosopher, the moment he is forced to abandon his one-sided intellectual occupation by practical necessity, immediate returns to the general point of view of mankind. (…) Nor is the purpose of these "introductory remarks" to discredit the standpoint of the plain man. The task which we have set ourselves is simply to show why and for what purpose we hold that standpoint during most of our lives, and why and for what purpose we are provisionally obliged to abandon it. No point of view has absolute, permanent validity. Each has importance only for some given end. (Mach, 1914: p. 37)

These observations come at the end of some introductory *antimetaphysical* remarks aimed at showing the merely theoretical character of the distinction between the realms of the physical and the psychical. According to Mach's neutral-monist view, reality is constituted by "elements" that we first perceive and therefore group in relatively permanent complexes. It is only at this stage that we *interpret* these complexes of elements *as* either physical or psychical events, depending on the functional relation they are part of, and on our research interests in that particular moment[14]. Moreover, Mach stresses the purely fictional value of substance-concepts such as "ego"

or "body": both of them are only mental constructs, thought symbols elaborated for practical purposes[15]. In the same way as James, Mach therefore contrasts the common sense – *naif* – metaphysical realism, which pretends that ego, body, and things actually exist, with a scientific and critical standpoint. Nevertheless, Mach also recognizes the practical value of the point of view of the average man – a point of view which proved its importance for the preservation of the species – and admits that, for daily use, that perspective cannot be abandoned. The question is, thus, to what extent scientific thought can correct the common sense view.

Mach dealt with that question some years later, in *Knowledge and Error* (1905). In that book, Mach argues that everyone accepts "as a gift of nature and culture [*Kultur*]" a worldview that is intrinsically metaphysical, insofar as she believes in bodies and souls as substance entities. That is the starting point of any world-description; "no thinker can do more than start from this view, extend and correct it, use his forebears' experience and avoid their mistakes as best he may, in short: carefully to tread the same path again on his own" (Mach, 1976: p. 4). In Mach's view, the history of civilization and culture is the history of the relationship between ordinary and scientific thought (the latter including both philosophy and specialist research)[16]. Ordinary thought, "at least in its beginnings, serves practical ends, and first of all the satisfaction of bodily needs; it "does not serve pure knowledge, and therefore suffers from various defects that at first survive in scientific thought, which is derived from it. Science only very gradually shakes itself free from these flaws"; finally, "any glance at the past will show that progress in scientific thought consists in constant correction of ordinary thought" (Mach, 1976: p. 2).

The correction Mach talks about is in fact a critical view of the realism defended by common sense. Scientific thought actually provides a more accurate world-description which gradually gets rid of all the metaphysical notions inherited from the past conceptions. What is worth noting, for the aim of the present paper, is that Mach focuses on the same features of the ordinary world-view Nietzsche stresses in HH I, 11. According to Mach, indeed, scientific thought can particularly shed light on the artificial contraposition between illusion (*Schein*) and reality (*Wahrheit*): it is only the "confusion between findings under the most various conditions with findings under very definite and specific conditions" that "in ordinary thought leads to the opposition between illusion and reality, between appearance and object. (…) Once this opposition has emerged, it tends to invade philosophy as well, and is not easily dislodged" (Mach, 1976: p. 7. See also Mach, 1914: pp. 10 ff.). The problem Mach faces is therefore the same that interested Nietzsche from his early stage of thought. Our language and the culture it represents generate a metaphysical word description, according to which one can distinguish between appearances and things-in-themselves, as if they pertain to two different and separated realms. Actually, that distinction is only an illusory product of our view of the world, which is physiologically limited by our cognitive and perceiving apparatus. Furthermore, in Mach's view, all the substance concepts that ordinary thought pretend to be isolated objects, such as things, bodies and ego, have to be seen only

as mere names for groups of elements. As a critical investigation shows us, indeed, "they are only fictions for a preliminary enquiry, in which we consider strong and obvious links but neglect weaker and less noticeable ones" (Mach, 1976: p. 9).

This fictionalist view of ego, bodies and things is another link to Nietzsche's investigation. In *Twilight of the Idols*, and more precisely in the sections *"Reason" in Philosophy* 5 and *The Four Great Errors* 6, Nietzsche criticizes the traditional belief in the I as both causal agent and substance concept[17]. Moreover, the topic of *fictions* is quite useful to introduce the last author that will be considered in this section, and whose approach to epistemology has something in common with pragmatism. The main work of Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As if"* (1911) is an in-depth and exhaustive investigation of the concept of "fiction", the basis of which Vaihinger programmatically aimed to lay out, as the subtitle of his main work suggests: "A system of the theoretical, practical and religious fictions of mankind"[18]. As summarized by Klaus Ceynowa (1993: p. 9), *"The Philosophy of "As if"* supports the thesis that we must not see scientific theories as representing outer reality, but only as instruments to manage it". This thesis is particularly "grounded on the idea that the human intellect has a fundamental practical function", since it creates a manageable world-image that helps human self-preservation. Vaihinger explicitly states that "knowledge is a secondary purpose, (…) the primary aim [of logical thinking] being the practical attainment of communication and action" (Vaihinger, 1925: p. 170). This is better argued in the opening page of the first part of *The Philosophy of 'As if '"*, where Vaihinger presents the basic principles of his view:

The object of the world of ideas as a whole is not the portrayal of reality – this would be an utterly impossible task – but rather to provide us with an instrument for finding our way about more easily in this world. Subjective processes of thought (…) represent the highest and ultimate result of organic development, and the world of ideas is the fine flower of the whole cosmic process; but for that very reason it is not a copy of it in the ordinary sense. (Vaihinger, 1925: p. 15)

It is easy to see that Vaihinger's fictionalism is first contrasted with a correspondence theory of truth, that is, the idea that our knowledge is a copy of outer reality. In his (evolutionary) view, human knowledge is only the final product of a biological development and its value is merely instrumental. Moreover, Vaihinger holds that our mind is "assimilative and constructive", and that "logical thought is an active appropriation of the outer world, a useful organic elaboration of the material sensation" (Vaihinger, 1925: p. 1)[19]. Thus, according to him, the "psyche" (to be understood not as a substance, but rather as "the organic whole of all so-called 'mental' actions and reactions") is an organic formative force, which independently changes what has been appropriated (Vaihinger, 1925: p. 2). Finally, Vaihinger considers scientific thought as a function of the psyche and calls "fictions" the products of its activity: "The fictive activity of the mind is an expression of the fundamental psychical forces; fictions are mental structures" (Vaihinger, 1925: p. 12).

This view is strongly influenced by Friedrich Lange's *History of Materialism*[20]. In that book, Vaihinger found an exposition of the most important topics debated by German neo-Kantian thinkers and scientists during the second half of the nineteenth century. In particular, Lange made reference to the studies of the German physiologist Johannes Müller and focused on the epistemological value of sense organs[21]. As for Lange, "pure" knowledge is not possible; anything we know is first moulded by our sense organs, and therefore by our intellect and its logical structure. This is coherent with the development of Kant's epistemology that Lange aimed to provide and whose radicalization led to Vaihinger's philosophical position[22]. In Vaihinger's view, his own fictionalism – that is, the idea that "psychical constructs (…) are only fictions, i.e. conceptual and ideational aids", and "not hypotheses relating to the nature of reality" – is in fact a "'critical' standpoint" (Vaihinger, 1925: p. 177).

This brief outline of the content of Vaihinger's book already shows the several similarities between his view and those of James, Mach – and Nietzsche. Vaihinger reacts to the same outcomes of modern epistemology that James and Mach have in mind when they develop their own epistemological views. The relativization of the value of human knowledge requires a new conception of truth and ideas, a conception that can give them the meaning they lost. Vaihinger, in agreement with other pragmatist thinkers, stresses the practical usefulness of concepts, but at the same times insists on their metaphysical lack of content. Theories, ideas, etc., are, in his view, only conceptual constructs that played a fundamental role in the development of the species, but whose value must be restricted to their operational fruitfulness. This idea can of course be compared with Nietzsche's view. The latter, indeed, also claims that the categories of reason have only a pure logical value, and stresses the role of these categories as tools for the preservation of the species. Moreover, similarities with Nietzsche's view can be found with regards to Vaihinger's idea that primary aim of the logical activity is communication. In dealing with that topic, Vaihinger talks of sensation-complexes that can only be managed – and, therefore, communicated – if they are expressed in words, and argues that a common *error* is to regard "such logical instruments as ends in themselves and in ascribing to them an independent value for knowledge" (Vaihinger, 1925: pp. 168 and 170). This discourse is quite similar to the observations that one finds in *Beyond Good and Evil* 268, and the anti-metaphysical conception that Vaihinger defends can be compared to what Nietzsche states in *Human, All Too Human* I, 11[23]. In general, all the above considered authors agree in looking at philosophical and scientific thought as an instrument to shed light on the ordinary worldview and contrast the realism that view upholds with a critical standpoint that can help developing a new anti-metaphysical culture.

4. Nietzsche's timeliness

From what above stated, it can be argued that the observations on language that Nietzsche publishes in 1878 are in agreement with the epistemologies developed by some

authors that, in a broad sense, can be called "pragmatists". At the core of Nietzsche's original philosophical position one actually finds ideas debated during the late nineteenth century, and that apparently inspired Nietzsche[24]. Thus, it is possible to say that, in dealing with language and the metaphysical worldview of the average man, Nietzsche is a proper *timely* thinker.

Other passages from the first book of *Human, All Too Human* show that compliance. In HH I, 16, for example, Nietzsche defends an evolutionary conception of knowledge, and argues: "That which we now call the world is the outcome of a host of errors and fantasies which we have gradually arisen and grown entwined with one another in the course of the overall evolution of the organic being, and are now inherited by us as the accumulated treasure of the entire past". This sentence sounds quite similar to some above quoted passages from James, Mach, and particularly – because of the reference to the inherited "errors" – Vaihinger. Nietzsche repeats that view a few pages later, in HH I, 18, where he claims that "only knowledge educated in the highest scientificality contradicts (…) the belief that there are *identical things*", an idea inherited "from the period of the lower organisms". Furthermore, in that same paragraph, Nietzsche defines metaphysics as "the science that treats of the fundamental errors of mankind – but does so as though they were fundamental truths". These observations have a pure pragmatist taste. In criticizing the character of human knowledge, that, according to the evolutionary view, cannot be considered as corresponding to reality, Nietzsche agrees with one important principle of Jamesian epistemology. Moreover, the idea that ordinary thought upholds a metaphysical conception that pretends our intellectual "errors" to be actual "truths", leads to a problematization of the *value* of truth and to the question of her actual *meaning* – which is the very ground of the investigation of all pragmatist thinkers and can be found also at the core of Nietzsche's mature thought[25].

As final remark on Nietzsche's early concerning with metaphysics, two other paragraphs from *Human, All Too Human* must be taken into account. HH I, 9 and 21, indeed, reveal an agnostic attitude to that topic that can be compared with James's famous idea that pragmatism is not interested in the sterile and interminable disputes of the old philosophical schools, and rather aims at finding a method for evaluating ideas and theories that looks at the practical plane[26]. In the first of these paragraphs, Nietzsche considers the absolute possibility of the existence of a metaphysical world. That possibility, argues Nietzsche, "is hardly to be disputed. We behold all things through the human head and cannot cut off this head; while the question nonetheless remains what of the world would still be there if no one had cut it off" (HH I, 9). Nietzsche's point of view on this topic is – exactly as James's and his friend Ferdinand Schiller's – quite a *humanist* perspective[27]: we are confined into our body and can only access to external reality through our perceptive and cognitive apparatus. The world we know is the world our sense organs and intellect create, by selecting, interpreting and falsifying the external data. What can interest us, therefore, is only what we find within these boundaries, while everything lying beyond them is not our concern. Thus, Nietzsche argues that "even if the existence of such

a [metaphysical] world were never so well demonstrated, it is certain that knowledge of it would be the most useless of all knowledge: more useless even than knowledge of the chemical composition of water must be to the sailor in danger of shipwreck" (HH I, 9).

Nietzsche deals with that problem in HH I, 21, and reflects in particular on the consequences of a sceptical point of departure for culture and society, a point of view that rejects the very idea of the existence of the "separate world" that "mankind set up in language" (HH I, 11). "If there were no other, metaphysical world and all explanations of the only world known to us drawn from metaphysics were useless to us – asks Nietzsche – in what light would we then regard man and things?" (HH I, 21). Then, he continues:

The historical probability is that one day mankind will very possibly become in general and on the whole *sceptical* in this matter; thus the question becomes: what shape will human society then assume under the influence of such an attitude of mind? Perhaps the *scientific demonstration* of the existence of any kind of metaphysical world is already so *difficult* that mankind will never again be free of a mistrust of it. And if one has a mistrust of metaphysics the results are by and large the same as if it had been directly refuted and one no longer had the *right* to believe in it. (HH I, 21)

This excerpts clearly shows the cultural value that Nietzsche attributed to his own work. According to him, a critical attitude towards common sense realism and the metaphysics set up in language can actually get us rid of that illusory realm, thus providing a new attitude of mind to our society. Nietzsche's philosophy is precisely aimed at that goal and, as above argued, in modern epistemology he found the theoretical tools that can shake the metaphysical world from its basis and lead European culture to a new stage.

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Notes

[1] Nietzsche's works are cited by abbreviation, chapter (when applicable) and section number. The abbreviations used are the following: HH (*Human, All Too Human*), GS (*The Gay Science*), BGE (*Beyond Good and Evil*), GM (*On the Genealogy of Morality*), TI (*Twilight of the Idols*), EH (*Ecce Homo*). The translations used are from the Cambridge Edition of Nietzsche's works (see final references).

[2] The study of Philip P. Wiener (1944) is still a good introduction to the relationship between pragmatism and evolutionism. On this, see also Franzese (2006). On the less studied connection between pragmatism and (Neo-)Kantianism, see Murphey (1968) and Ferrari (2010).

[3] See on this James (1907: chapters 5 to 7).

[4] Both these authors have actually been called pragmatists in some sense and for different reasons. On this, see Holton (1992) and Bouriau (2009).

[5] On this, see what James states in *The Meaning of Truth. A Sequel to "Pragmatism"* (1909: 58).

[6] On this, see also Stack (1981: pp. 95 and 98).

[7] The topic of "errors" in Nietzsche has a strong evolutionary meaning. See on this e.g. HH I, 16; GS 110 and 111.

[8] As known, during the 1870s Nietzsche has been particularly influenced by F. Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus* (Iserlohn, Baedeker, 1875²), K. Fischer's *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie* (6 vols., Stuttgart-Mannheim-Heidelberg, 1854–77), and A. Spir's *Denken und Wirklichkeit* (Leipzig, J. G. Findel, 1877).

[9] See on this Riccardi (2014: 252-253).

[10] On this, see Gori (2016: chapter 3). On the relationship between BGE 268 and GS 354, see Lupo (2006: pp.196 ff.) and Gori (2016: pp. 119 ff.).

[11] It is worth noting that the whole section TI, *"Reason"* is influenced by Teichmüller's book. Nietzsche's arguing that our ordinary metaphysical commitment follows from our "faith in grammar" and of course his talking of a "true" and an "apparent" world, are particular evidences of that influence.

[12] Nietzsche also stresses this point in HH I, 11 and GS 110.

[13] On this, see Ryan (1989: pp. 45-55), and Holton (1992: pp. 35-36). Nietzsche bought the first edition of Mach's book (*Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen*, 1886), which is still in his private library. On the relationship between Nietzsche and Mach, see e.g. Gori (2009).

[14] See e.g. Mach (1914: p. 16). On Ernst Mach's elements and his neutral monism, see Banks (2003).

[15] On Mach's conception of the ego and a possible comparison with Nietzsche's view of that topic, see Gori (2015).

[16] On the relationship between philosophical and scientific thought, see Mach (1976: pp. 2 ff.).

[17] On this, see Gori (2015).

[18] See Neuber (1914: p. 9).

[19] Michael Heidelberger (2014: p. 53) directly compared Vaihinger's view of human thought as a "biological function" with Ernst Mach's epistemology.

[20] As Vaihinger states (1925: p. XXXV), in Lange he found "a master, a guide, an ideal teacher". Vaihinger particularly devotes to Lange's "Standpoint of the Ideal" one section of the third part (*Historical Confirmations*) of his *The Philosophy of "As-if."* On Lange's influence on Vaihinger see Ceynowa (1993: chapter 3) and Heidelberger (2014).

[21] See Ceynowa (1993: pp. 134 f.).

[22] See Heidelberger (2014: pp. 51 ff.) and Vaihinger (1925: p. XXXVI).

[23] It is worth noting that Vaihinger mentioned Nietzsche among the "historical confirmations" of his own philosophical perspective. In the final section of his book (1925: p. 341), Vaihinger particularly stressed that Nietzsche recognized "that life and science are not possible without imaginary or false conceptions" and "that false ideas must be employed both in science and life by intellectually mature people and with the full realization of their falsity". Finally, he argued that "it was Lange, in all likelihood, who in this case served as his guide". Furthermore (1925: p. 341-342), Vaihinger states that "Nietzsche, like Lange, emphasizes the great significance of "appearances" in all the various field of science and life", and then claims that "this Kantian or, if you will, neo-Kantian origin of Nietzsche's doctrine has hitherto been completely ignored".

[24] Of course, Nietzsche cannot have been directly inspired by James or Vaihinger, and there are also evidences of the fact that he knew Mach very late. What can be stated, however, is that Nietzsche reacted to the same cultural framework that James, Mach and Vaihinger made reference to, and that led these authors to develop comparable views on some particular issues. On the influence of the nineteenth-century scientific framework on Nietzsche, see e.g. Heit/Heller (2014).

[25] See in particular GM III, 24 and 27, and Gori (2016)

[26] See e.g. James (1907: chapter 2).

[27] See on this Schiller (1912) and Stack (1982).