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Pragmatism, Perspectivism, Anthropology. A Consistent Triad

> *The* trail of the human serpent is over everything.
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> W. James, *Pragmatism*

William James developed his pragmatism at the end of the nineteenth century, inspired by the outcomes of modern epistemology – the same results that interested Nietzsche, and that James had in mind when he was elaborating his ideas on the phenomenalist character of human knowledge. Nietzsche's perspectivism arose from the same cultural framework that influenced James, and Nietzsche dealt with the same epistemological relativism that the American pragmatist was concerned with. Moreover, both Nietzsche and James connected these questions to a broader philosophical interest in the nature and nurture of the human being. Their ethical concerns, in fact, cannot be isolated from their theory of knowledge, and the question of the value (or meaning) of truth they both posed must not be considered as merely an epistemological issue. On the contrary, that question is anthropological at its very core, for the way one approaches it can determine which type of man he or she will become.

This is what I will try to show on the following pages. As I will argue, pragmatism, perspectivism, and anthropology represent a consistent triad, for the similarities and connections between the first two positions rest in their engagement with the anthropological question. In order to demonstrate this, I will thus a) show that

pragmatism is concerned with anthropology and that it deals with a fundamental issue of Nietzsche's late thought (§§ 1 and 2); b) stress that the problem of the type of man (*der Typus Mensch*) is involved in Nietzsche's questioning the value of truth, and that perspectivism is an alternative view to Platonic and Christian metaphysics which arises from the same phenomenalist conception of knowledge defended by James (§ 3); c) argue that Nietzsche's interest in developing a philosophy that affirms the perspectival character of existence is primarily anthropological, and that this is the pragmatic criterion of validity that one can attribute to Nietzschean perspectivism (§ 4).

I. Pragmatism and anthropology

The connection between pragmatism and anthropology can be illustrated by making reference to the work of Sami Pihlström. In a paper published in 2007, Pihlström suggests that pragmatism can be considered as „*more* than a mere method," and argues that it „provides us with, or is, a *philosophical anthropology*" (Pihlström 2007, § 62).[1] More precisely, according to Pihlström, „for James as much as for Kant, philosophy culminates in the question, 'What is man?' (or more politically correctly, 'What is a human being?'), that is, the key question of philosophical anthropology, which is the starting point for any pragmatically conceivable metaphysical inquiry" (ibid., § 66).

Pihlström also expressed this conclusion in his earlier book „Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology" (Pihlström 1998). According to him, „the pragmatist urges to take seriously the role that our purposive, goal-oriented, and value-laden practices play as the background of our ways of dealing with the problems" in many fields in philosophy; therefore, „the question of human nature should be in the focus of all pragmatistic philosophy" (ibid., ix). Insofar as „it is humanity with reference to which reality is structured," and „the conceptual schemes and practical viewpoints through which alone things can be meaningfully said to exist (or fail to exist), to be real or unreal,

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[1] I made use of the open access version of this paper; therefore, I provide references to the section numbers that can be found in the online edition.

are (…) human-made," Pihlström argues that „the Kantian question 'What is man?' is the core of (…) pragmatism in general" (ibid., 132). In other words, he thinks that „taking human purposes and practices seriously in philosophy – as a pragmatist does – naturally invites the question of what this qualification 'human' signifies," for „one cannot appeal to human practices or human purposes without trying to find out what kind of beings we humans are" (ibid., x).

Pihlström's observations on the pragmatist approach outline an image of this philosophical tradition which is different from the (analytically-oriented) one which is usually debated. That image might be thus summed up:

a) Pragmatism is a humanism

As is well known, William James developed his pragmatism with particular and explicit reference to Ferdinand Schiller's „Humanism" (see e.g. James 1907, chapters 2 and 7; James 1909, chapter 3). An exploration of this topic makes it possible to stress a connection between the humanistic feature of classic pragmatism and some fundamental questions of (philosophical) anthropology. This is exactly what Pihlström does. First, he conceives pragmatism as „the humanistic demand of taking human practice seriously in philosophy," for we cannot separate our theoretical concerns from the practical interests and values that guide whatever we do (ibid., 3). From this premise, Pihlström argues that any inquiries into the ways in which our life affects the world within which it takes place helps us understand our human life itself in this human world (ibid., 25). A humanistic conception of reality thus determines that any question on reality is a question about human nature, and this directly leads to the anthropological problem.

b) Pragmatism deals with concrete and contingent life

According to Pihlström, for a pragmatist thinker „there is no deeper philosophical question to ask than the question of how we should think about what we, as human beings, are doing in the world" (ibid., 65). The pragmatist is therefore „concerned with

the concrete factuality of life" (ibid., 75); and focuses on the „contingent conditions of human ways of experiencing and representing reality" (ibid., 101); finally, attempts to „find meaning from within the life one contingently leads" (ibid., 186). But all this deals with the question of what it is like to be a human being. Moreover, Pihlström argues that the pragmatic approach should consider the active role of the human being, who is involved in the construction of the reality she or he lives in.[2] This action is not merely epistemological. On the contrary, Pihlström (ibid., 25) particularly stresses that „in living and acting in the world, we see it (…) from an ethical point of view." Reality is for us morally relevant and normatively structured; as Pihlström argues (ibid., 116), „truth cannot be detached from human values and individual experiences. Truths are constructed within human value-laden practices." Pragmatic humanism is therefore primarily concerned with our practical experience; consequently, an investigation of reality is inextricably intertwined with the anthropological question on the nature of the human being – and her or his values.

c) Pragmatism is concerned with the meaning of life

The problem of the meaning of life, a fundamental question of philosophical anthropology, is also addressed by pragmatism. Once again, that problem follows from the humanistic approach, which copes with all concrete and contingent aspects of human life. According to Pihlström, pragmatism attempts to „avoid anti-humanistic nihilism and pessimism" (ibid., 181), that is, the view that affirms that principles of orientation can only be found beyond the humanly-structured world. The pragmatist admits that a metaphysical, absolute meaning of life cannot be found, but, contrary to nihilists and sceptics, he focuses on the possibility of finding a contextual and temporally-limited meaning for our being in the world. In particular, this meaning plays an important role in the evaluation of the Jamesian theory of truth and his pragmatic

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[2] Needless to say, this is an element that directly relates pragmatism with the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner and, particularly, Arnold Gehlen. See on this e.g. Franzese 2008, 78.

method. In fact, their validity cannot be demonstrated in principle, by referring to a final or absolute reason, but the application of the pragmatic method to that method itself is rather possible, and the evaluation will take into account the consequences of that approach for our life. As Pihlström puts it:

> Pragmatism is true precisely by its own lights, on its own standards of acceptance, on those very same standards related to the satisfactoriness and moral consequences of a belief by which other beliefs must, according to James, be evaluated. In choosing her or his philosophical orientation (say, pragmatism), an individual makes an existential choice, in which her or his unique existence as the particular individual she or he happens to be is at stake (ibid., 125-126).

d) The core of pragmatism is ethical

In the above-mentioned writing on Pragmatist Metaphysics, Pihlström (2007, § 11) reaffirms his idea that „the world is a humanly structured world" and argues something important for the purpose of the present paper. As for him, James „offers us a novel, pragmatic form of metaphysics, one deeply grounded (…) in the concrete conditions of everyday life", but „the core of this pragmatic effort was, for him, ethical" (ibid., §§ 18-19). Moreover, Pihlström states that

> the substantial meaning of metaphysical views the pragmatist aims at uncovering is moral, or more generally valuational. The true pragmatic insights into the structure and content of metaphysical disputes are to be achieved, according to Jamesian pragmatism, by means of an ethical evaluation of the rival metaphysical positions in terms of their potential humanly significant outcome. *What will our human life in this human world be like, if we conceptualize our world in terms of a particular metaphysical position?* This is the core pragmatic question. It is by no means ethically indifferent to us whether or not, say, the world is such that freedom or immortality is real. This constant pragmatic need for the ethical evaluation of metaphysical concepts, problems, disputes, and theories is (…) the heart of James's pragmatic method (ibid., § 19, my emphasis).

This reference to the ethical dimension of pragmatism has been also stressed by other scholars who reflected on the connection between Jamesian philosophy and

philosophical anthropology. Sergio Franzese, for example, argued that „the problem of morality [is] the central problem of James's life and work," (Franzese 2008, 49) and focused on the dependence of the moral question upon the anthropological question. According to him (ibid., 50), the moral question can be posited only when the relationship between human being and nature has been clarified – that is, when the fundamental question of philosophical anthropology has been addressed.[3] Given that morality is the highest expression of human activity and that it lies at the intersection between nature and culture (Franzese 2008, 73), Franzese argues that it is not possible to investigate James without exploring his engagement with the fundamental questions of philosophical anthropology. Furthermore, he believes philosophical anthropology to be „the privileged theoretical frame within which the development of James's thought needs to be reconsidered" (ibid., 4).[4]

II. Facing relativism

Pihlström sheds light on classic pragmatism and focuses on some aspects that this approach shares with philosophical anthropology. As will be shown, some of these aspects can also be found in Nietzsche's reflections about our *perspectival* interpretation of the world. Before turning to that issue, something more must be said about pragmatism, in order to shift the discourse onto properly Nietzschean grounds.

Traditionally, pragmatism is reduced to the pragmatic method as formulated by James, often presented in an extremely reductive version that sounds like: „*p* is true and *q* is

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[3] Franzese adopts Scheler's definition of philosophical anthropology: „A basic science which investigates the essence and essential constitution of man, his relationship to the realms of nature" (Scheler 1958, 65).

[4] Michael De Armey (De Armey 1986, 35) also suggested that „James is first and foremost a pioneering philosophical anthropologist," given his interest for a scientifically-grounded philosophical investigation of the human being. De Armey focused on the attention that James and the philosophical anthropologists pay to the historical and contingent character of human nature – that is, on their *humanistic attitude* (ibid., 19 and 21) – and stressed that, during the late 1860s, James „spent most of the time reading Kant" and reacted with enthusiasm to Kant's „Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View" (ibid., 24).

false, if *p* works and *q* does not".[5] The emphasis is usually put on the fact that the pragmatic method pretends to establish the *truthfulness* of an idea, with no interest in the actual meaning James gives to the notion of *truth* in his writings, nor in the fact that James's attempt was first and foremost to *conceive that notion in a quite new way*. Thus, the framework of James's reflections remains mostly neglected, and only few scholars have been interested in the questions he faced when he adopted Peirce's methodology as philosophically fertile. That framework includes the outcomes of modern epistemology, the reflections of Neo-Kantian thinkers, and the revolutionary ideas of evolutionism. All these elements determined a potentially nihilistic and sceptical relativistic view. The sort of „bad relativism" which „claims that there is really no truth (…), no objective facts, and no universal validity claims" (Bernstein 2010, 109). This is what James has in mind when he addresses the problem of truth. He realizes that no absolute and static meaning of truth can be found, and therefore develops a new definition of that notion focused on its *value* for our practice and for our life.

The problem of the *value of truth* is therefore fundamental for James, and it follows from his scientific background, as can be derived from his lecture on „Humanism and Truth" published in „The Meaning of Truth":

> As I understand the pragmatist way of seeing things, it owes its being to the break-down which the last fifty years have brought about in the older notions of scientific truth. (…) The „laws of nature" (…) were supposed to be the exact and exclusive duplicates of pre-human archetypes buried in the structure of things, to which the spark of divinity hidden in our intellect enables us to penetrate. (…) Up to about 1850 almost every one believed that sciences expressed truths that were exact copies of a definite code of non-human realities. But the enormously rapid multiplication of theories in these latter days has well-nigh upset the notion of anyone of them being a more literally objective kind of thing than another. There are so many geometries, so many logics, so many physical and chemical hypotheses, so many classifications, each one of them good for so much and yet not good for everything, that the notion that even the truest formula may be a human device and not a literal transcript has dawned upon us. We hear scientific laws

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[5] This is the formulation of the pragmatist maxim given by Arthur Danto in his classic book on Nietzsche (Danto 1965, 54).

now treated as so much „conceptual shorthands," true so far as they are useful but not farther (James 1909, 58).

Pragmatism arises from the relativistic picture implied in modern science. The development of the disciplines that mostly interested James made him agnostic about the actual *meaning* of ordinary notions. Ideas, concepts, and theories reveal an inner lack of content. They are only human devices, *useful* but not necessarily *truthful* in the ordinary sense. The focus therefore shifts from the agreement of these ideas with reality to their fruitfulness for our description of the world. It is by referring to this fruitfulness that it is possible to provide principles for orientation to our scientific (and practical) activity – which is the aim of pragmatism. As Christophe Bouriau argues, „a pragmaticist epistemology consists in endorsing" the idea that „a logically irrelevant view assumes some *practical* value insofar as it gives rise to a fruitful process" (Bouriau 2009, 227). In physics, for example, „the criterion of validity for a hypothesis is not truth or knowledge of reality in a strict sense, but the efficiency of operations that are based on them" (ibid., 229). There is no need to keep on using the notion of truth to be a pragmatist. What is important is not that notion itself, but only the attitude towards the relativism implied in the rejection of the metaphysical value traditionally attributed to the elements of our world-description. As suggested by Bouriau (ibid., 248), pragmatist thinkers do not give up to nihilism or scepticism, for they „believe that from the positive practical implications of certain ideas, the value of these ideas may be determined, such implications being conceived in terms of operational convenience and of fruitfulness."[6]

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[6] Bouriau's definition allows us to include among the pragmatists thinkers and scientists such as Ferdinand Schiller, Hans Vaihinger, Henri Poincaré, Ernst Mach – and probably also Nietzsche. This is coherent with James's idea that pragmatism is only „a new name for some old ways of thinking." In a review of Schiller's „Humanism," James in fact wrote that „the enormous growth of the sciences in the past fifty years has reconciled us to the idea that 'not quite true' is as near as we can ever get," and argued that this new conception of the relative character of theories and the laws of nature is the framework out of which „has arisen the pragmatism of Pearson in England, of Mach in Austria, and of the somewhat reluctant Poincaré in France, all of whom say that our sciences are but *Denkmittel* – 'true' in no other sense than that of yelding a conceptual short-hand, economical for our description" (James 1920, 449).

This attitude towards relativism can be found at the basis of James's new definition of truth.[7] Acoording to him, truth is only a secondary product of our evaluation of ideas and theories in practical terms. As he famously argued (James 1907, 201): „Truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*."[8] This process is not merely epistemological. On the contrary, James focuses on the practical and ethical plane, and evaluates the „truth's cash-value" in experiential terms: „Pragmatism asks its usual question. 'Grant an idea or belief to be true,' it says, 'what concrete difference will its being true make in any one's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false?'" (James 1907, 200). Once more, it is possible to see that James focuses on the *value* of ideas and theories *for our life*. He is not interested in truth in itself, and the very fact that he continues to use that term demonstrates it. James attempts to replace the older notion of truth with a new one, that is, to *modify the value we attribute to it*. As for him, truth does not correspond to reality anymore. It does not prove or represent anything, in the sense of reproducing it adequately. We can only believe in certain ideas that pass the „pragmatic test" and prove their *fruitfulness* for our experience. Thus, the problem which James is concerned with is not that of *truthfulness*, but rather that of the *value of truth* – a question that also Nietzsche addresses and to which he attributes a deep anthropological meaning.

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[7] According to John Dewey (1908, 85), the briefest and most comprehensive formula for the pragmatic method is: „The attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts." This approach is also emphasized by Bertrand Russell in his review of James's and Schiller's works on pragmatism and humanism (Russell 1909).

[8] As I argued elsewhere (Gori 2013, 82), this view can be compared with Nietzsche's observation that „truth is not something that's there and must be found out, discovered, but something that *must be made* and that provides the name for a *process* – or rather for a will to overcome, a will that left to itself has no end: inserting truth as a *processus in infinitum*, an *active determining*, not a becoming conscious of something that is 'in itself' fixed and determinate" (Nietzsche 2003, 155).

III. The problem of the value of truth

During his late period of activity, Nietzsche is especially concerned with the problem of the „will to truth" (see e.g. „Beyond Good and Evil," § 1 and „On the Genealogy of Morality", III, § 24). That problem arises from his reflections on European culture and its morality, a culture that, Nietzsche agues, took its fire „from the flame lit by the thousand-year old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth; that truth is divine" (Nietzsche 2001, 112). As is well-known, Nietzsche thinks that it is time to call into question the value of that belief, and to consider if the human being should keep on referring to it as a principle of his epistemological and moral orientation. The fundamental question that Nietzsche poses is thus related to the very possibility of presupposing that „*metaphysical faith*": „What if precisely this becomes more and more unbelievable, when nothing any longer turns out to be divine except for error, blindness and lies – and what if God himself turned out to be our oldest lie?" (Nietzsche 2001, 112-113). Nietzsche deals with that question also at the end of the *Genealogy*: after having argued that the „gap in every philosophy" consists in the fact that, so far, „truth was not *allowed* to be a problem," he defines as his own task to tentatively „*call into question* (…) the value of truth" (Nietzsche 2006, 113). In the „Genealogy of Morality", Nietzsche stresses the importance of a critique of truth for Western culture and its anthropology. The problem of the „will to truth" is in fact at the origin of the nihilistic process of anthropological degeneration that, in Nietzsche's view, characterizes European morality; a morality that, according to him, „were to blame if man, as species, never reached his *highest potential power and splendour*" (Nietzsche 2006, 8). In his paper on „Nietzsche and Philosophical Anthropology", Richard Schacht focuses on this remark and argues that Nietzsche is fundamentally concerned with the anthropological question of the type of man and „with how it will turn out" (Schacht 2006, 122).[9] Moreover, Schacht writes that „it is Nietzsche's chief preliminary concern to understand humankind as it has come to

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[9] I recently dealt with Nietzsche's interest for the anthropological question in „Twilight of the Idols". In that text, Nietzsche is especially concerned with the diagnosis of the Western European (declined) type of man. See on this Gori 2015.

P. Gori - *Pragmatism, Perspectivism, Anthropology*   11

be, what has contributed to its development (…), and what this can teach us about what we have to work with" (ibid.).[10] Moralities are precisely „among the devices that have significantly affected the shaping of human reality" (ibid., 121); therefore, an investigation of their principles must be the first step of Nietzsche's philosophical project aimed at a *revaluation* of ourselves (i.e., of what we are as human beings), our world description, our culture and – our values. In the preface to „Twilight of the Idols", Nietzsche declares that his *Revaluation of all Values* can only be realized by means of sounding out the „*eternal* idols," that is, through a critique of the old truths and beliefs that pertain to the history of European culture (see Nietzsche 2005b, 137).[11] The question of truth, therefore, plays a fundamental role in Nietzsche: it is the very core of the Christian-European culture, which expresses both its strengths and weaknesses. Truth is in fact a powerful notion, an idea that allowed the Platonic metaphysics to dominate the cultural development of Western thought. But that power slowly and restlessly consumed what it had helped creating; it destroyed from the inside the system of thought that was grounded on „the concept of truthfulness, which was taken more and more seriously" (Nietzsche 2006, 119), and only lately revealed how dangerous it is. According to Nietzsche, the destruction of „Christianity *as a morality*" that he believes is about to occur, is indeed the final step of „a two-thousand-year discipline in truth-telling" that started with Plato and which characterized European thought (ibid.). Nietzsche pretends to be the prophet of this „self-overcoming" that will happen „after Christian truthfulness (…) finally draw[s] the *strongest conclusion*, that *against* itself" – that is, „when it asks itself, '*What does all will to truth mean?*'" (ibid.).

Nietzsche's observations on the will to truth suggest a possible alternative way to the one that led humanity to *décadence*. At the end of the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche writes that the „*kernel*" of the ascetic ideal that dominated European culture

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[10] Later in this paper, I will say something about Nietzsche's diagnosis of the effects of European morality on the type of man.

[11] It is worth noting that Nietzsche announces as forthcoming „The Will to Power. Attempt to a Revaluation of all values" in „On the Genealogy of Morality", III, § 27, a section devoted to the problematization of the will to truth.

consists in an „unconditional will to truth," a „faith in a *metaphysical* value, a *value as such of truth*" that can be found in all the historical realizations of that ideal (Nietzsche 2006, 112).[12] This view defines the object of Nietzsche's late *task*, and makes it possible to guess what strategy he has in mind in order to achieve his aim. To call truth into question means to discuss not the actual agreement of an idea with reality, but rather the *value* we ordinarily attribute to that idea itself. If Nietzsche aims to invalidate the effects of European morality on the type of man (see Nietzsche 2002, 91-92) and to accomplish the „counter-movement" that he calls *revaluation of values* (Nietzsche 1999, 190), he thus must abandon the „moral prejudice that the truth is worth more than appearance" (Nietzsche 2002, 35) and uphold a view that contrasts the dogmatism first defended by Plato and then by Christianity (Nietzsche 2002, 4). That type of thought is, according to Nietzsche, the one affirming the *perspectival character* of existence, and that attributes value to human knowledge not as a way to outline an adequate image of reality (i.e. to know reality as it is *in itself*), but rather as a means for the conservation of life (ibid.). As Nietzsche argues in „Beyond Good and Evil", § 34, the ordinary dichotomy between „true" and „false" must be abandoned, and we should consider the „world of appearances" as the only stage of our entire knowledge (ibid., 35). This means that the value of our knowledge is limited. No „objective knowledge" can be affirmed, and the needed principles of both our theoretical and practical orientation can only have a relative validity. Therefore, Nietzsche's late perspectival thought can be interpreted as an alternative to the common-sense metaphysical commitment and its belief in the truthfulness of the „categories of reason," ordinarily conceived as a „criterion of truth and reality" (Nietzsche 1999, 336).[13]

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[12] In „On the Genealogy of Morality", III, § 25, Nietzsche also writes that both science and the ascetic ideal „overestimate truth (more correctly: they share the same faith that truth can*not* be assessed or criticized)."

[13] The criticism of the realistic view implied in ordinary language is also a characteristic feature of James's observations. In a late paper included in the collection of essays „The Pluralistic Universe" (1908), James argues: „When we name and class [an immediate experience], we say for the first time what it is, and all these whats are abstract names or concepts. Each concept means a particular *kind* of thing, and as things seem once for all to have been created in kinds, a far more efficient handling of a given bit of experience

As has been demonstrated during the last decades, this anti-metaphysical view is grounded on the outcomes of modern science, which profoundly influenced Nietzsche (see on this e.g. Brobjer/Moore 2004, Heit/Abel/Brusotti 2012, and Heit/Heller 2014). The development of Kantianism and Evolutionism, in particular, stimulated science to criticise its own principles, with the aim of getting rid of the remnants of ancient metaphysics. That was the cultural framework of Nietzsche's reflections: a post-positivistic debate that called into question the value of human knowledge and the very possibility of a „knowledge" and a „truth" as they were traditionally conceived.

On the basis of what has been argued above, it is possible to say that Nietzsche's perspectivism rests upon the same grounds as Jamesian pragmatism. Both these views are primarily concerned with the relativization of human knowledge that follows from modern epistemology, and they both deal with the problem of the value of truth and its anthropological consequences. Therefore, perspectivism seems to be consistent with pragmatism. To sustain that hypothesis, something more must be said about the *humanistic* feature of Nietzschean perspectivism.[14] On this subject, aphorism 354 of „The Gay Science" – the only published text in which Nietzsche does not only talk of „*perspectivism*," but also gives us a proper definition of that term – is of particular relevance:

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begins as soon as we have classed the various parts of it. Once classed, a thing can be treated by the law of its class, and the advantages are endless. Both theoretically and practically this power of framing abstract concepts is one of the sublimest of our human prerogatives. We come back into the concrete from our journey into these abstractions, with an increase both of vision and of power. It is no wonder that earlier thinkers, forgetting that concepts are only man-made extracts from the temporal flux, should have ended by treating them as a superior type of being, bright, changeless, true, divine, and utterly opposed in nature to the turbid, restless lower world. The latter then appears as but their corruption and falsification" (James 1977, 559). This view can especially be compared with Nietzsche's observation that „mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world," and that man „really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world" (Nietzsche 2005a, 16). On this, see Gori 2017.

[14] Richard L. Howey (1973, 152) focused on Nietzsche's „faith in the possibility of the human being" and on his „profound humanism" in order to argue that Nietzsche developed a philosophical anthropology. As for Howey (ibid., 107), philosophical anthropology is „a perspective which centers around the life-concerns of the human being" and contrasts metaphysical views of man. Nietzsche's humanism and *anthropocentrism*, that is, Nietzsche's new theory of man that refuses to „ground man's existence and his values in some form of transcendence" (ibid., 159; see also 165), can thus be seen as an expression of that kind of anthropological concern. Finally, Howey claims that „perspectivism is the framework for Nietzsche's philosophical anthropology" (ibid., 160).

This is what *I* consider to be true phenomenalism and perspectivism: that due to the nature of *animal consciousness*, the world of which we can become conscious is merely a surface- and sign-world, a world turned into generalities and thereby debased to its lowest common denominator, – that everything which enters consciousness thereby *becomes* shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, a sign, a herd-mark; that all becoming conscious involves a vast and thorough corruption, falsification, superficialization, and generalization. (…) As one might guess, it is not the opposition between subject and object which concerns me here; I leave that distinction to those epistemologists who have got tangled up in the snares of grammar (of folk metaphysics). Even less am I concerned with the opposition between „thing in itself" and appearance: for we „know" far too little to even be entitled to *make* that distinction. We simply have no organ for *knowing*, for „truth": we „know" (or believe or imagine) exactly as much as it is *useful* to the human herd, to the species. (Nietzsche 2001, 213-214)

In this text, Nietzsche declares his scepticism about the validity of our knowledge. More precisely, he pretends to be agnostic with regards to purely metaphysical questions such as the opposition between subject and object, or the distinction between a „true" and an „apparent world." He stresses the superficial character of our consciousness and, consequently, the fact that we „know" nothing in the traditional sense.[15] If we want to talk of „knowledge", we need to re-define that notion and conceive it as limited to the „herd-perspective". Two aspects of this last statement are worth noting for the aim of the present paper: 1) in „Gay Science", § 354, Nietzsche develops his criticism of truth by paying particular attention to the type of man generated by Christian morality – the *herd animal*. That is to say, according to Nietzsche, any claim we make about reality is shaped by our morality; everything we see and know is interpreted through the moral values pertaining to our culture and on which our anthropological development depends. Therefore, perspectivism is strictly connected with anthropology. 2) This fundamental and unavoidable interpretive activity of the human being involves that the world we

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[15] See James's lecture on „Pragmatism and Humanism" (James 1907, 248): „It is only the smallest and recentest fraction of the first two parts of reality that comes to us without the human touch, and that fraction has immediately to become humanized, in the sense of being squared, assimilated, or in same way adapted to the humanized mass already there".

know is a human world. Thus, Nietzsche's perspectivism is a humanism. According to him, it is not possible for us to outline an adequate image of reality and to know it as it is *in itself*, before it has been „turned into generalities" and falsified by our intellectual and valuational activity. This is what Nietzsche means with „phenomenalism," a word that in „Gay Science", § 354, he uses as a synonym of perspectivism, and that must be further stressed, for it can establish a direct connection with Jamesian pragmatism.

Phenomenalism is a philosophical movement that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century, and that included Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius as the most important contenders (see Halbfass 1989, 483ff.). The main outcome of their work is a development of positivism in an anti-metaphysical direction. That research program started from the philosophy of Kant and its problematic approach to the „thing in itself," a fundamental question of modern epistemology that has been debated by many thinkers that Nietzsche read (e.g. F. Lange, A. Spir, and G. Teichmüller). Phenomenalism is agnostic about that issue: according to that view, the problem of the „thing in itself" cannot even be posed, for it rests beyond the physiological limits of human knowledge. Moreover, phenomenalist thinkers argue that it is not possible to reach an adequate knowledge of the world; therefore, the traditional notion of „truth" as „agreement of an idea with reality" must be abandoned, and the notion of truth has to be re-defined in instrumental and pragmatic terms. This view is consistent with Nietzsche's remarks from *The Gay Science* quoted above, and it can be argued that a phenomenalist conception of knowledge is the actual premise of Nietzschean perspectivism. An investigation of Nietzsche's notebooks supports this hypothesis. For example, the famous note in which Nietzsche argues „against the positivism which halts at phenomena" that „facts are just what there aren't, there are only interpretations", contains several elements that can be referred to the phenomenalist view:

We cannot determine any fact „in itself": perhaps it's nonsensical to want to do such a thing. „Everything is subjective," you say: but that itself is an *interpretation*, for the „subject" is not something given but a fiction added on, tucked behind. (…) Inasmuch as the word „knowledge" has any meaning at all, the

world is knowable: but it is variously *interpretable*; it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. „Perspectivism" (Nietzsche 2003, 139).

A *contextual interpretation* of that note – that is, an analysis that considers the relationship of these observations with Nietzsche's published and unpublished texts, his readings, and, more broadly, his historical and cultural framework – shows the close similarity between Nietzsche's view and the post-positivist conceptions of phenomenalist thinkers. The rejection of the existence of „facts in themselves;" the deconstruction of the subject as something „given;" the idea that an interpretative character pertains to „knowledge," and that, consequently, a redefinition of this latter notion is needed; all these are theses coherent with a phenomenalist epistemology grounded on the modern development of Kantianism and deeply influenced by Evolutionism.[16]

As one can argue from the quoted note, Nietzsche connects these ideas to his newly-coined notion of *perspectivism*.[17] By that name, therefore, he means a humanist and phenomenalist conception of our knowledge. According to that view, the traditional theory of knowledge and truth must be abandoned, for it is not possible to go beyond the limits of our „apparent world." The new theory of knowledge to be developed will, therefore, reject the idea of absolute „truths" or universal „facts". On the contrary, it will admit the merely relative validity of our ideas and concepts. That does not mean that the very notion of truth will be rejected, that „there is no truth". Phenomenalism (and/or perspectivism) only undermines the *value* that we attribute to the elements of our world-description, with no interest in defending any kind of epistemological nihilism.

The importance of this connection between perspectivism and phenomenalism for the present research lies in the fact that James's pragmatism also rests upon the latter view.[18]

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[16] On Nietzsche's engagement with phenomenalism, see Gori 2012. A thorough investigation of Nietzsche's note from 1886-87 and her phenomenalist content can be found in Gori 2016, chapter 2.

[17] Nietzsche finds the idea of a perspectival view in Gustav Teichmüller's book „Die wirkliche und die scheinbare Welt", but the noun *Perspektivismus* has been coined by him.

[18] In his „Pragmatism", James refers to Ernst Mach and his school several times (James 1907, 57 and 190), and his view of truth is inspired by Mach's definition of „knowledge" and „error" (see Hiebert 1976, xxvi).

In the early 1900s, this was stressed by Hans Kleinpeter, a pupil of Ernst Mach who popularized the phenomenalistic worldview and explored the similarities between that conception and the ideas of both Nietzsche and James.[19] According to Kleinpeter, Nietzsche is „one of the most important phenomenalists" (Kleinpeter 1913, 27),[20] but also „the first true upholder of pragmatism" (Kleinpeter 1912, 406). Moreover, Kleinpeter argues that Mach, Nietzsche and James defended the same epistemological view, which is grounded on a „biological [that is, evolutionary] conception of knowledge" and in the consequent idea that „there is no absolute and a priori truth" (Kleinpeter 1912, 406 and 1913, 143). If one wants to avoid the nihilistic option which rejects the very possibility of finding principles of orientation in the world, one must attribute a merely relative value to truth and admit that „words, concepts and theories are only instruments for our practical activity" (Kleinpeter 1912, 406). It is worth noting that Kleinpeter's interpretation of pragmatism does not focus on its purely theoretical side, as contemporary readings usually do. On the contrary, Kleinpeter stresses that pragmatism aims to „get rid of the meaningless words and purely metaphysical disputes" (Kleinpeter 1912, 406) and „is interested in human life" (ibid.) and in our character of active beings. On that point especially, Kleinpeter finds a similarity between James's and Nietzsche's views. In dealing with the epistemological relativism that follows from the phenomenalistic conception of knowledge, both James and Nietzsche looked at the practical plane, the plane of the concrete form of life, and on that plane they found the principles for a new evaluation of logically irrelevant views. Thus, Kleinpeter supports the idea that perspectivism is consistent with pragmatism, but he also shows that these views have much more in common than a mere method for evaluating ideas such as: „*p*

The influence of Mach's psychology and epistemology on James has been explored e.g. by Gerald Holton (1992) and Judith Ryan (1989).

[19] His main contribution to the history of philosophy is a book titled „Der Phänomenalismus. Eine naturwissenschaftliche Weltanschauung" (1913). In 1911, René Berthelot also compared Nietzschean perspectivism with James's pragmatism, in the first volume of his work „Un romantisme utilitaire. Étude sur le mouvement pragmatiste" (Berthelot 1911). On these interpretations, see Gori 2016, chapter 4.

[20] Moreover, on November 9th, 1912, Kleinpeter wrote to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche that, in his view, Nietzsche was a „pure phenomenalist." On this, see Gori 2011 and 2012.

is true and *q* is false, if *p* works and *q* does not". Perspectivism and pragmatism are consistent because they react to the problems of a specific culture; for they face the fundamental question that epistemology posed to modern and contemporary philosophy – namely, the question of the *value* of truth.

IV. Anthropological privilege

From what has been argued above, it is possible to conclude that the most important similarity between perspectivism and pragmatism lies in their *attitude* towards relativism. This attitude is anti-nihilistic and anti-sceptical, for both Nietzsche and James aim to provide man with new principles of orientation, and do not stop at the „diagnostic moment" revealing the fundamental lack of metaphysical meaning of our all-too-human truths.[21] As for the anthropological question, one can say that it permeates perspectivism as much as pragmatism. Firstly, as shown above, perspectivism follows from a problem that in Nietzsche has a deep philosophical meaning, for it is the very ground of what Schacht called Nietzsche's „genealogical anthropology".[22] Nietzsche's focus on the development of the human being, his interest in „*der Typus ‚Mensch'*" (see Nietzsche 2006, 8 and Schacht 2006, 122) as has been shaped by Christian morality, led him to the fundamental problem of the will to truth as the kernel of the ascetic ideal. His *revaluation of all values* can consequently be interpreted as an attempt to avoid the degenerative consequences of the view that believes „in a *metaphysical* value, a *value as such of truth*" (Nietzsche 2006, 112), and thereby to generate a „healthier", higher human being. Thus, the outcomes of perspectivism, as much as its premises, have an anthropological

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[21] In his paper on „Nietzsche und die Philosophische Anthropologie", Matthias Schlossberger argues that both philosophical anthropology and Nietzsche's philosophy aimed to provide man with new principles, thus contrasting the „lack of orientation" (*Orientierungslosigkeit*) experienced in post-Darwinian Europe (Schlossberger 1997, 147 and 167). Similarly, Sergio Franzese conceives philosophical anthropology as „the attempt to answer the anthropological question raised by Darwinian evolutionism" (Franzese 2008, 53), and from that premise he develops his further interpretation of James as a philosophical anthropologist. On the role played by the notion of „orientation" (*Orientierung*) in modern and contemporary philosophy, see Stegmaier 2008.

[22] That is, „an anthropology attentive to the social and historical as well as biological developments that have contributed to the 'becoming' of the kind of creatures we are" (Schacht 2015, 63).

relevance as well. It is only by accepting a view antithetical to the Platonic-Christian one, namely the idea of a merely relative character of truth, that it would be possible to realize a counter-movement against *décadence* and tentatively attain the „*highest potential power and splendour*" of the type 'man' (Nietzsche 2006, 8).

This observation invokes the question of the validity of Nietzschean perspectivism posed by Brian Leiter (2000). As Leiter argues, it does not seem possible to attribute to Nietzsche's criticism of Christian morality an „epistemic privilege – being veridical, being better justified – over its target" (ibid., 277). I agree with Leiter that the revaluation of values that follows from Nietzsche's perspectivism has no metaphysical privilege, for it cannot be demonstrated that it is more „truthful" or better justified (in absolute terms) than the rejected morality. But this does not mean that *no privilege at all* can be found. On the contrary, I believe that Nietzsche's perspectivism can prove its validity on purely pragmatic and anthropological grounds. In other words, Pihlström's above-quoted remark about pragmatism can be applied to Nietzsche's view, and it can be argued that perspectivism, too, „is true by its own lights, on its own standards of acceptance (…) related to the satisfactoriness and moral consequences of a belief" (Pihlström 1998, 125). Moreover, there is hardly any doubt that Nietzsche thought that „in choosing her or his philosophical orientation (…), an individual makes an existential choice, in which her or his unique existence as the particular individual she or he happens to be is at stake" (ibid., 125-126).

This evaluation of perspectivism in pragmatic terms is twofold. First, perspectivism itself is perspectival, that is, it is not – and does not pretend to be – metaphysically-valid.[23] The „truth" it set forth is as relative as the one put forward by rival views; therefore, its validity can only be affirmed on the basis of its fruitfulness, of its outcomes. Secondly, it

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[23] It is not necessary to complain that Nietzsche „does consider his own position superior," as Maudemarie Clark did (Clark 1991, 140f.). Nietzsche, of course, defended his view – as anyone does with his own ideas. But he never pretended to find absolute reasons for that, nor did he claim his position to be universally valid. Nietzsche developed a diagnosis of modern European culture, and he focuses on what should be avoided, in order to allow the proper development of the human being. The evaluation of Nietzsche's view must not neglect that, and should never forget the contingent and experimental character of his philosophy.

can be argued that the „criterion of truth" to be adopted for Nietzschean perspectivism is a sort of „biological utility".[24] That is to say, one must look at the existential and anthropological consequences that believing in that view produces. This can be inferred from Nietzsche's observations, although he never affirmed that one must choose perspectivism for a *positive* outcome. In fact, Nietzsche only suggested that his view is an alternative to the view he invites us to avoid. More precisely, perspectivism is for Nietzsche a view antithetical to the one which determined the declined type of man, the herd animal. If one wants to avoid that anthropological degeneration – and there are no absolute reasons for preferring it – *one possible way* is to accept the perspectival character of existence, and to call into question the value of truth.[25]

On this point, Nietzsche's view seems to be particularly consistent with James's observations on the anthropological value of the ideas we believe in. In the first lecture of „Pragmatism", James talks of ideas which are „helpful in life's practical struggles" (James 1907, 76) and then argues: „If there be any life that it is really better we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then it would be really *better for us* to believe in that idea, *unless, indeed, belief in it incidentally clashed with other greater vital benefits*" (ibid.). As has been argued above, for James the ethical commitment is more important than the metaphysical one. In particular, Pihlström stresses that, in James, the acceptance of a metaphysical stance depends upon the „ethical evaluation" of that position „in terms of [its] potential humanly significant outcome" (Pihlström 2007, § 19). Therefore, since we cannot demonstrate the validity of

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[24] In the posthumous note 14 [153] from 1888, Nietzsche complains that, ordinarily, „instead of seeing in logic and the categories of reason means toward the adjustment of the world for utilitarian ends (basically, toward an expedient falsification), one believed one possessed in them the criterion of truth and reality. The 'criterion of truth' was in fact merely the biological utility of such a system of systematic falsification." (Nietzsche 1999: 336) Therefore, Nietzsche argues that it is permitted to talk of „truth", but only from that point of view, that is, if one attributes to that notion a mere relative, instrumental and utilitarian meaning. On this, see Gori 2013, 74 ff. and 87.

[25] Ken Gemes (1992) also observes that Nietzsche focused on the idea that certain ideas promote life (see e.g. Nietzsche 2003, 16). Moreover, Gemes (1992, 57) argues that Nietzsche „is involved in promoting a perspective that promotes his ideal kind of life [not-declining] at the price of thereby suppressing other, *possibly* equally, valid perspectives".

any idea on purely intellectual grounds, the means to find our way in the world can only be justified by their practical usefulness – in anthropological terms. Nietzsche could be interpreted as supporting that position, too. His rejection of common-sense realism and his affirmation of the purely phenomenal character of human knowledge actually constitute a metaphysical commitment that Nietzsche cannot demonstrate. But it leads us to a different world-conception and, consequently, to a different practical behaviour. That metaphysical commitment can therefore only be justified in terms of its outcomes, depending on the interest of the individual who affirms that particular view. From what has been shown above, it is possible to say that Nietzsche's interest was to criticize the Christian type of man, that he conceived as the product of the faith in the existence of a „true world." Therefore Nietzsche evaluated the outcomes of a metaphysical commitment in purely anthropological terms, as James did.

Hence, the similarity between perspectivism and pragmatism does not only rest on their premises, on the major question they face, but also on their attitude towards that question and on their own criterion of validity. Perspectivism, in particular, can be seen as a form of pragmatism that considers the type of man as the „*cash-value*" of an idea. The anthropological question is therefore crucial for it, and it is the very ground of the comparison between Nietzsche's and James's views that I suggested in this paper. In other words, it can be argued that pragmatism, perspectivism and anthropology constitute a consistent triad.

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