# Wittgenstein and Nietzsche on Language and Knowledge

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**abstract:** This chapter explores Nietzsche’s and Wittgenstein’s views on language and knowledge, establishing a philosophical dialogue between two different positions, which, I argue, are based on a similar anti-essentialist and instrumentalist concern.I will first focus on Nietzsche’s conception of language as the expression of valuational perspectives developing through the natural and cultural history of mankind. I will then consider Wittgenstein’s account of language as the inherited background of our practical engagement with the world. Finally, by bringing Nietzsche’s and Wittgenstein’s views together, I will reflect on the crucial strategic move they make in their respective battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.

**keywords:** truth; meaning; world-picture; form of life; perspectivism.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, § 109, Wittgenstein famously argues that “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language”. Similarly, in the *Blue Book* (p. 27), he observes that “philosophy (…) is the fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert upon us”. In this chapter, I will try to explore to what extent this view of philosophy can be applied to Nietzsche.[[1]](#footnote-1) In doing so, it is not my intention to argue that the Nietzschean conception of proper philosophical activity is exhausted by this definition – I am fully aware that Nietzsche’s writings contain much more than a critical reflection on our linguistic engagement with the world and that what he believes philosophy can and should do goes far beyond this thematic framework. On the other hand, however, Nietzsche’s interest in language seems to be a fundamental reference for his considerations on ethics, aesthetic, anthropology, and the like. That is, based on the idea that our experience of states of affairs is constantly translated into a human form of expression which, according to Nietzsche, does not literally reproduce what is described, he deals with language not only to reflect on epistemological issues such as the extent to which we have access to both the outer and the inner world and how we interpret or eventually “know” it, but also to develop further considerations on the role of language in our life. Thus, our philosophical interest in how the forms of expression we ordinarily use shape our world-picture need not be limited to the linguistic investigation that seems to characterize Wittgenstein’s approach, for it leads us through different paths which may also be relevant. In the following pages, I will try to elaborate on this, starting from the apparent agreement between Wittgenstein’s and Nietzsche’s remarks on the function and value of language, knowledge, and truth. I would like to make it clear that my aim is not to find direct correspondences between their views but only to explore issues that Nietzsche and Wittgenstein seem to have addressed in comparable – and sometimes even consistent – ways.

The philosophical dialogue between Nietzsche and Wittgenstein that I will attempt to outline in the following sections will be structured as follows. In Section 1, I will deal with Nietzsche’s criticism of the traditional philosophical approach and will explore the basic tenets of his reflections on language. Section 2 will provide a tentative comparison between these reflections and how Wittgenstein approached the issue of language in *The Blue and Brown Books*, *Philosophical Investigations*, and *On Certainty*. In Section 3, I will therefore argue that the Nietzschean concept of the “herd perspective” may be interpreted as a Wittgensteinian world-picture or form of life. Finally, Section 4 will be devoted to a tentative approach to the similarity between Wittgenstein’s and Nietzsche’s views of language and knowledge in light of the broad pragmatist strategy that can be attributed to their philosophical attitudes.

## **1. On the Prejudices of Philosophers**

In his late period (1885-1888), Nietzsche was especially concerned with the prejudiced view held by the philosophers of his time. For him, their prejudice consisted in attributing a greater value to “truth” than to “illusion” – in devaluating the world of the appearances, the world of our actual experience, as a fabricated and misleading picture of a realm of pure essences with reference to which the value of those appearances was supposed to be assessable. As Nietzsche argues in BGE 2, “the prejudices by which metaphysicians of all ages can be recognized” is typified by the view that “things of the highest value must have another, separate origin *of their own* – they cannot be derived from this ephemeral, seductive, deceptive, lowly world, from this mad chaos of confusion and desire”. As he continues, “from these ‘beliefs’ they try to acquire their ‘knowledge,’ to acquire something that will end up being solemnly christened as ‘the truth’”. The metaphysicians believe especially “in opposition of values”; i.e. they pretend that “true” and “false”, as well as “good” and “bad”, “beautiful” and “ugly”, etc., are radically contraposed. Moreover, they argue that these contrapositions can be justified with reference to a context that is separate from that of the evaluation itself. “But”, Nietzsche continues, “we can doubt, first, whether opposites even exist and, second, whether the popular valuations and value oppositions that have earned the metaphysicians’ seal of approval might not only be foreground appraisals. Perhaps they are merely provisional perspectives, perhaps they are not even viewed head-on” (BGE 2). The aim of the “new breed of philosophers” foretold by Nietzsche (*ibid.*) is therefore to deal with these fundamental prejudices – and to finally be rid of them.

Furthermore, Nietzsche deplores the philosophers’ “lack of historical sense, (…) their hatred of the very idea of becoming” (TI, “Reason” 1). Philosophers – especially metaphysicians – fail to see that concepts do not have a fixed meaning, that they are the product of an historical and cultural development, and that their value resides precisely in this. On the contrary, the Western tradition attributed great value to those features that were believed to stand still, eternally stuck in a state of unchanging perfection. But this is a mere illusion for Nietzsche, for he thinks that the things we pretend to “know” and the values we pretend to be the principles of our judgements are in fact a mere product of our valuational perspectives (individual, human, cultural, etc.). In Nietzschean terms, we might say that the “eternal idols” we fervently believe in are merely an expression of our creative engagement with the world, and the reason we believe in them is the important role they have played in the natural and cultural history of mankind (cf. e.g. HH I, 16 and GS 110). Furthermore, these idols have no hidden essence, nothing that could justify their value once and for all. They are in fact hollow, and Nietzsche argues that, as a philosopher, one should reveal this lack of content by sounding them out (TI, Preface). The *revaluation of all values* of which Nietzsche speaks, for example, in the *Genealogy of Morals* and *Twilight of the Idols* may be interpreted accordingly, as an attempt to provide a historico-critical analysis of the “old truths” that constitute the frame of reference of our being-in-the-world and, consequently, to reassess the value of the principles of our world-description based on a non-essentialist justification of their meaning. But this can be done only by *genealogically* tracing the origin of our evaluations and examining their natural and cultural foundation. In fact, this seems to be the only way for us to appreciate the “fluidity” of both the form and the meaning of most of the concepts we use daily, the historical and perspectival character of which we have forgotten (cf. GM II 12).

How might this premise be relevant to an investigation into Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, and how is it related to their view of language? First, we can appreciate the apparent agreement between the philosophical approach to the ordinary depiction of the world which Nietzsche tries to outline in his late works and Wittgenstein’s description of philosophy as a “fight against the fascination which our forms of expression exert upon us”. Second, it should be recalled that for Nietzsche, the world-picture we assume as the background of our engagement with the world is couched in language – and sometimes even depends on it. In *Twilight of the Idols*, for example, Nietzsche decries language for introducing us to a mind-set where we cannot avoid making use of unity, identity, permanence, substance, and all the metaphysical entities made up by the prejudice of reason (TI, “Reason” 5). And this is not limited to the ontological plane. On the contrary, Nietzsche’s concern with how we depict states of affairs is focused on the general dogmatic approach that he considers to be the most distinct trait of Western philosophy. For him, the “seduction of grammar” has influenced our overall conception of the world and drove the philosophers to speculate on the actual existence of substance entities and absolute values (cf. BGE, *Preface*). As a result, we believe our world to be as *we* categorize it; we believe it to be understandable and knowable when we reduce its features into restricted artificial dichotomies such as “subject and object”, “cause and effect”, “good and bad”, etc. But this, for Nietzsche, is a terrible mistake, for we basically mistake a *human* *representation* of the world for a *truthful explanation* of it. In other words, we treat our human, all too human “criterion of truth” as a “criterion of reality”, and the “categories of reason” as much more than a mere “adjustment of the world for utilitarian ends” (FP 1888, 14[153]). On the contrary, Nietzsche maintains that what we ordinarily call “truths” are only conventional and provisional resting points in our active relationship with the world, which is biology- and culture-laden.[[2]](#footnote-2)

A deeper exploration of this issue may reveal further features that Nietzsche’s view apparently shares with Wittgenstein’s. When Nietzsche reflects on the origin of our world-picture in the first edition of *The* *Gay Science*, he famously observes that during the evolutionary history of mankind “the intellect produced nothing but errors; some of them turned out to be useful and species-preserving. (…) Such erroneous articles of faith were passed on by inheritance further and further, and finally almost become part of the basic endowment of the species” (GS 110). These “basic errors” have been “incorporated since time immemorial”, and consequently “even in knowledge those propositions became the norms according to which one determined ‘true’ and ‘untrue’” (*ibid.*). However, “the *strength* of knowledge lies not in its degree of truth, but in its age, its embeddedness, its character of condition of life” (*ibid.*). Accordingly, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche remarks that “that which we now call the world is the outcome of a host of errors and fantasies which 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 – as treasure: for the value of our humanity depends upon it” (HH I 16). Furthermore, Nietzsche maintains that human experience “has gradually become, is indeed still fully in the course of becoming, and should thus not be regarded as a fixed object”, and he therefore argues that the world-picture we refer to as the background of our practical activity is in fact a product of our experience itself: “We have for millennia made moral, aesthetic, religious demands on the world, [and it] has gradually become so marvellously variegated, frightful, meaningful, soulful, it has acquired colour – but we have been the colourists: it is the human intellect that has made appearance appear and transported its erroneous basic conceptions into things. (...) The [very] idea of the world spun out of intellectual errors we have inherited” (*ibid.*).

Our language conveys all this and fixes, once and for all, that inherited world-picture. In fact, Nietzsche argues that the words we use are the expression of an intellectual systematization involving all levels of human engagement with the world (epistemic, moral, aesthetic, etc.). Yet when we use names such as “subject”, “object”, “will”, “cause”, “good”, “bad”, “ugly”, and the like, we ordinarily conceive of them as an adequate expression of a state of affairs, not the result of an ongoing process of depicting world-events. That is, we attribute the greatest value to these concepts and to the dichotomies they imply while at the same time devaluing our actual experience as a merely “apparent” realm (cf. TI, “True World”). Why is this? Why – to use Nietzsche’s words – has man “for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates*”, pretending “that in language he possessed knowledge of the world” (HH I 11)? Why was “the sculptor of language (…) not so modest as to believe that he was only giving things designations”, instead believing “that with words he was expressing supreme knowledge of things” (*ibid.*)?

Nietzsche gave some thought to these questions in the 1873 unpublished writing *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*,whichis worth considering in order to glean further elements that may allow us to compare Wittgenstein and Nietzsche on language.[[3]](#footnote-3) In *On Truth and Lie*, Nietzsche conveys his critical attitude towards the idea that language is “the full and adequate expression of all realities” (TL, p. 143). For him, language is only a matter of legislation; its origins rest in the establishment of conventions and designations which might be fruitful for the preservation of social groups (*ibid.*). Within this picture, words are mere “tokens of designation”, and what counts as the “truth” and a “lie” depends on *how we* *use* these tokens (*ibid.*). Nietzsche further defends the metaphorical value of “truths”, insofar as they are the mere translation of neural stimulations into concepts “which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical, and binding” (TL, p. 146).[[4]](#footnote-4) Notably, Nietzsche conceives of this translation as a creative determination and not as the sort of direct mirroring that is at work in the correspondence conception of truth endorsed by common sense naïve realism (cf. HH I, 11). Nietzsche is quite clear on this and argues, for example, that “where words are concerned, what matters is never truth, never the full and adequate expression” (TL, p. 144). Furthermore, he remarks that truthfulness is only a *moral obligation* imposed by society, “i.e. the obligation to use the customary metaphors, or (…) firmly established conventions” (TL, p. 146). But if our judgements are based on social or cultural agreement, then, contrary to what is ordinarily believed, the value of truth and lies is not fixed and unchanging, but rather depends on the context within which these evaluations are made.

## **2. Family Resemblances**

Elaborating on what has been explored thus far, we can now tentatively compare Nietzsche’s view with Wittgenstein’s. As a preliminary remark, we can say that the frameworks underlying their interest in language are quite different, for likewise are their aims. In particular, one might argue that Nietzsche’s engagement with the value and function of language should be seen as part of his overall diagnosis of the anthropological degeneration of Western society (cf. e.g. GM, Preface and III, 24-27; BGE 203; and Schacht 2006), while for Wittgenstein language is of *primary* interest to philosophical investigation.[[5]](#footnote-5) In addition, Nietzsche seems to be convinced that inquiry into the origin of the intellectual “articles of faith” reproduced by our language may allow us to counter the dogmatic worldview. That is, Nietzsche is especially interested in stressing how the forms of expression we use arose, because he believes it to be crucial to his philosophical project that we disclose the actual role they played (and continue to play) in our engagement with the world, namely as nothing more than fruitful means of communication with no metaphysical value. Wittgenstein may agree with this conclusion, but at the same time he seems to give few or even no emphasis to such a genealogical examination, also arguing that it is not *explanation* that should interest us but *description* alone (PI 109 and 126). In *On Certainty,* § 559, Wittgenstein remarks that “the language-game (…) is there – like our life” and maintains that our aim as philosophers is only to reflect on how language works and “how the concepts that make up the different regions of our language actually function” (McGinn 1997, p. 13; cf. also Gray 2012, p. 115).

With that said, if we look at Wittgenstein’s and Nietzsche’s general approaches to language as a phenomenon pertaining to each of us as human beings in relations with each other, we may find comparable features at the basis of their philosophical views. For example, both Wittgenstein and Nietzsche agree that language is an instrument for communication and that the meaning of the words we use lacks an essentialist foundation. Similarly to what Nietzsche argues, for example, in *On Truth and Lie*, right after the remark on philosophy as a fight against the fascination exerted upon us by our forms of expression, in the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein states that “words have those meanings which we have given them” (BB, p. 27), and a few page later he reiterates that “a word hasn’t got a meaning given to it, as it were, by a power independent of us (…). A word has the meaning someone has given to it” (BB, p. 28). It should also be noted that, for Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word originates in its use *in practice*, and the word itself is like “a label [which] would only have a meaning to us in so far as we made a particular use of it” (BB, p. 69). By focusing on the practical foundation of meaning, Wittgenstein further argues that it may occur that,

impressed by merely seeing a label on a thing, [we] forget that what makes these labels important is their use. In this way we sometimes believe that we have named something when we make the gesture of pointing and utter words like ‘This is...’ (the formula of the ostensive definition). We say we call something ‘toothache,’ and think that the word has received a definite function in the dealings we carry out with language when, under certain circumstances, we have pointed to our cheek and said: ‘This is toothache’”. (*ibid.*)[[6]](#footnote-6)

Thus, it seems that Wittgenstein and Nietzsche would have agreed that meaning is something that we attribute to words and that it does not depend on the adequacy of each word to convey the object it denotes (cf. e.g. OC 191). On the contrary, we should “think of words as instruments characterized by their use” (BB, p. 67; cf. PI 569) and conceive of the meaning of a word only as “a kind of employment of it” (OC 61), trying not to be deceived by their practical fruitfulness as means of communication. But this is what in fact happens, as both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein remark. That is, “we easily forget how much a notation, a form of expression, may mean to us” (BB, p. 57), and consequently we forget that the “truths” we rely on are in fact illusions (TL, p. 146). Therefore, we ordinarily – although erroneously – believe that great value attaches to our language, as if with words we could establish a definition (i.e., a function) once and for all. But meanings have no fixed character at all. Rather, they change; they are flexible, fluid. Nietzsche expresses this by talking of a “*mobile* army of metaphors” (my emphasis), while Wittgenstein observes that “the meanings of words change with the concepts”, which may themselves change “when language-game change” (OC 65; cf. also BB 67).[[7]](#footnote-7) We can understand this view as the principle of a shared philosophical project aimed at stressing the merely instrumental value of language and of words, i.e. notations, i.e. “forms of expression” – one that allows humankind to look at the world in an unprejudiced way.

This leads us to another important feature that can be found in both Wittgenstein’s and Nietzsche’s reflections, that is, a view of language as the background of our practical engagement with the world – the background of our evaluations and actions, of our epistemic and practical behaviour. As is well known, Wittgenstein calls this “substratum of all my enquiring and asserting” a “world-picture” (*Weltbild*; OC 162), further arguing that it is something that we do not invent on our own but rather learn in childhood.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is the “matter-of course foundation” of how we look at the world and practically engage it (OC 167), “the conceptual environment within which we live” and which “provides the criteria of correctness” for our judgements (Boncompagni 2016, pp. 116-7; cf. also Kober 2017, pp. 450, 453-4). It is a neutral – i.e. neither true nor false – framework of reference for our knowledge claims, the realm of *certainty*, which Wittgenstein contrasts with *knowledge* (cf. OC 205). At the same time, however, each world-picture has its own origin; that is, the “inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false” (OC 94) must be the product of a natural, historical, or cultural development – and for this reason it must be value-laden. I would like to stress this point because I think that, although Nietzsche’s sensibility to epistemological concerns such as the difference between “certainty” and “knowledge” was not as sharp as Wittgenstein’s, and given that both their aims and the background of their philosophical investigations differed, one can argue that their views on the linguistic framework of our engagement with the world do converge on some important details, which are therefore worth considering in detail.

For example, it could be argued that the Wittgensteinian concept of a “world-picture” can be applied properly to Nietzsche’s view in *Human, all too Human* and *The Gay Science*. As noted above, the intellectual representation of a state of affairs is described by Nietzsche as a picturing activity that is based on the human perspective. Nietzsche indeed stresses that “we are the colourists” of the marvellous painting that is our world of representation, whose traits replicate our “moral, aesthetic, and religious demands” (HH I 16). This conceptual framework is in fact, for Nietzsche, the *inherited background* of our further evaluations, which of course presupposes a series of judgements on which we instinctively rely. Although it would be wrong to say that this view is a proper anticipation of Wittgenstein’s ideas, given the subtle and yet relevant differences between them, the similarity between Nietzsche’s remarks on the human world of representations and Wittgenstein’s conception of a “world-picture” is nevertheless palpable. This resemblance can be further appreciated if we compare OC 94 with the above considered § 110 of *The* *Gay Science*, where Nietzsche refers to the basic intellectual errors inherited by humankind as “the norms according to which one determined ‘true’ and ‘untrue’”. GS 354 is also significant, for in this aphorism Nietzsche traces the origin of consciousness and language to our instinctive need for communication, arguing that we can only access the world from what he calls “the *herd perspective*”. In fact, it could be argued that the herd perspective can be interpreted as a Wittgensteinian world-picture or form of life – as I will try to show in the next section.

## **3. The Herd Perspective as a Form of Life**

In his 2017 paper *The Epistemological Investigations of* On Certainty,MichaelKoberargues that, for Wittgenstein, “the notion of world picture describes a familiar cultural or anthropological phenomenon: the intuitive, practical (cf. OC 103, 167; PI 129) rather than discursive sharing of views exhibited in customs or institutions somehow overlapping, supporting, or supplementing each other (OC 102, 275, 281, 298)” (Kober 2017, pp. 450-1). Kober further observes that “a world-picture is not necessarily a theory of the world, although it guides the behaviour of those holding fast to it. (…) A world-picture serves as a basis, a foundation (*Grundlage*, OC 167) or a ‘point of departure’ (OC 105) of a community’s looking at the world, though it contains both certainties and knowledge claims resting on them” (*ibid.*, p. 450). Moreover, Kober helps us to better appreciate the notion of a “form of life”, which is related to Wittgenstein’s reflection on language, insofar as the latter argues that “the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (PI 23. Cf. also PI 19). As Kober remarks (2017, pp. 449-450), for Wittgenstein “forms of life consist of a plurality of language-games. They are not related to individual performers, but require a community sharing practices, customs, uses, institutions. (…) The notion of a form of life describes, or labels, the setting in which language-games are practiced, i.e., the concept of a practice or a language-game has to be linked with the concept of a community”.Finally, Kober (2017, p. 449) deals with Wittgenstein’s conception of certainty by focusing on its groundedness in shared practices and thus its relation to “a community or a form of life whose members are engaged in these practices”. For Kober (2017, p. 443), in the notes in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein aims to explore “the epistemic foundations of our practices” and to *contextualize* “*our knowledge and our certainty within our practices*”. Therefore, certainty should be seen not as a strict indubitability but rather as “what is (…) not doubted within ongoing acting” (*ibid.*). “Certainties”, Kober continues, “induce you to follow them, if you want to participate in certain practices of one community or another – that is, they determine your acting if you want to communicate with others” (*ibid*, pp. 458-9). I will use these definitions of the mutually related notions of a world-picture, language-games, forms of life, and certainty as a reference for my further remarks.[[9]](#footnote-9) In what follows, I will focus in particular on the relationship between these notions and their social or communitarian framework, in an attempt to argue that this may be a crucial element of comparison between Wittgenstein’s and Nietzsche’s view of language and knowledge.

Before turning to Nietzsche’s GS 354, let me just add a few considerations on the Wittgensteinian concept of a “form of life”, which will be relevant to the comparison I would like to suggest. Following Cavell (1989), Daniel Whiting argues that “one can distinguish ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ senses of ‘form of life’. The vertical, broadly-speaking biological, sense concerns the *life form* all human beings share, with all its physiological peculiarities. (…) The horizontal, broadly-speaking social, sense concerns *ways of life*, which humans might or might not share” (Whiting 2017, p. 424). As Whiting further remarks, Wittgenstein seems to view language-games as depending on certain “very general facts of nature” (PI II 241), but also on “a whole culture”’ (LC 8). They are therefore an expression of perspectival viewpoints which “reflect their participants’ sense for what is or is not important” (Whiting 2017, p. 424), and, most significantly, they can change depending on the framework in which they are based. Wittgenstein in fact remarks that “an education quite different from ours might be the foundation of quite different concepts” (Z 387) and that “an entirely different game is played in different ages” (LC 8; I owe both references to Whiting). Thus, Wittgenstein seems to endorse a relativistic conception of judgement – but not in the detrimental sense of a complete lack of principles of judgement. The relativization in fact concerns only the foundation of our truth- (or value-)claims, which are not fixed, as has traditionally been thought (cf. on this Boncompagni 2016, pp. 8 and 123). Couched in the actual use we make of our language, the meaning of words is fluid, for Wittgenstein: “When language-games change, then there is a change of concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of the words change” (OC 65. Cf. also BB, pp. 56, 67, and 69). Therefore, our certainties themselves, i.e. the inherited background ofthe truth-values *we* attribute to states of affairs, aren’t fixed at all, for they reflect a context that can change both synchronically (different frames of reference or language-games may exist at the same time) and diachronically (the rules of a language-game may change at different times).

As I will try to show, it is possible to ascribe to the herd perspective that Nietzsche outlines in GS 354 almost all of the abovementioned features that pertain to forms of life. In that text, Nietzsche conceives of consciousness as the product of the biological history of humankind, arguing that “*consciousness has developed only under the pressure of the need to communicate*”. He further argues that “consciousness is really just a net connecting one person with another. (…) Consciousness was necessary, was useful, only between persons (…) and it has developed only in proportion to that usefulness” (GS 354). Nietzsche’s fundamental idea is that thinking is an activity that takes place at the unconscious level, independently of our being aware of it. In fact, he argues that we are unaware of most of our thought, while “the thinking which becomes conscious is only the smallest part of it (…) – for only that conscious thinking *takes place in words, that is, in communication symbols* [*Mittheilungszeichen*]. (…) In short, the development of language and the development of consciousness (…) go hand in hand” (GS 354). This is already of some interest for our purposes here; indeed, it allows us to argue that Nietzsche agrees with Wittgenstein that we should give thought to the social foundation of our linguistic practices, focusing especially on how language works as a means of communication. Nietzsche indeed remarks that “language serves as a bridge between persons”, also claiming that this connection is made possible through the invention of “signs” (*Zeichen*), i.e. words. Thus, the aforementioned instrumentalist view of language seems to be reiterated here. But the most important observation, to my mind, can be found in what Nietzsche goes on to argue, namely that

consciousness actually belongs not to man’s existence as an individual but rather to the community- and herd-aspects of his nature; that accordingly, it is finely developed only in relation to its usefulness to community or herd; and that consequently each of us (…) will always bring to consciousness precisely that in ourselves which is “non-individual”, that which is “average”; that due to the nature of consciousness (…) our thoughts themselves are continually as it were *outvoted* and translated back into the herd perspective. (GS 354)

How we look at the world is therefore couched in an inherited background which has been naturally selected along the history of humankind because of its fruitfulness for the preservation of the species (we may want to avoid utilitarian language). Nietzsche appears to be arguing something even subtler, however. He mentions not only the community but the *herd*, a crucial concept in Nietzsche’s critical engagement with European-Christian morality. He in fact repeatedly deplores the detrimental effect morality has had on the development of the human type (GM, Preface6), given that it brought about the “degeneration and diminution of humanity into the perfect herd animal” (BGE 203; cf. also BGE 199, 201 and 202). Therefore, the herd-perspective is not at all a neutral frame of reference. On the contrary, is it value-laden, which means that any judgment we are capable of pronouncing is morally oriented, and it may take significant effort for us (philosophers) to win the fight against the forms of expression that determine our cultural framework.

Given what has been shown thus far, the similarities between the Wittgensteinian conceptions of a “world-picture” and a “form of life” and the Nietzschean “herd perspective” are evident.[[10]](#footnote-10) Nietzsche describes the frame of reference of our being in the world by stressing the influence of our need for communication on its development. Conscious thinking arises both as a natural, i.e. biological, feature and as a social one. It embeds a well-defined attitude towards the world which can be properly described as a cultural or anthropological phenomenon that guides the behaviour of those who hold fast to it (cf. Kober 2017, p. 450). The herd perspective is thus the “point of departure” of a community’s perspective on the world, a viewpoint which finds expression in the language we use. In fact, Nietzsche seems to endorse Wittgenstein’s view that “the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (PI 23). Most importantly, he is especially concerned with the social features lying at the origin of the herd perspective, in a way which resembles Wittgenstein’s approach to language and language-games. Indeed, we can apply to Nietzsche’s herd perspective the same remarks that Kober (2017: 449-450) makes regarding forms of life: the herd perspective, too, is “not related to individual performers, but require[s] a community sharing practices, customs, uses, institutions. (…) [It] describes, or labels, the setting in which language-games are practiced”.

There is one final aspect to be considered and which may ultimately allow us to conclude that the herd perspective can in fact be interpreted as a Wittgensteinian form of life: the contextualization of knowledge within the human world-picture and the consequent revaluation of the value of “truth” which is implied in Nietzschean perspectivism.[[11]](#footnote-11) In the final part of GS 354, Nietzsche provides us with the only proper definition of *perspectivism* that can be encountered in his published writings:[[12]](#footnote-12) “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 (…) – that everything which enters consciousness thereby *becomes* (…) a sign, a herd-mark [*Zeichen, Heerden-Merkzeichen*]” (GS 354). This is consistent with what has been argued above: we are only conscious of those thoughts that reach the higher (superficial) level of our mental awareness and which are therefore translated into words, i.e. communication symbols or herd-marks.[[13]](#footnote-13) These words are the frame of reference of our action and behaviour; they represent the perspective on the world that *we*, as members of a social or cultural community, share. This is of some interest because, contrary to what Nietzsche remarks in other classic passages devoted to our perspectival engagement with the world (namely FP 1886-87, 7[60] and GM III 12), in GS 354 perspectivism is presented as the *shared* view of a group of individuals playing the same language-game.[[14]](#footnote-14) But it closely resembles what Wittgenstein has in mind when he reflects on the meaningfulness of our linguistic tokens: our individual relationship with the world always depends on shared viewpoints, on the perspective provided by the rules of the language-game we are playing.

These premises imply an important consequence: if our engagement with states of affairs can only be perspectival (in the aforementioned sense), if there is no way for us to access the world directly and describe it literally (or “truthfully”, according to the correspondence theory of truth), then our very concept of “knowledge” must be reconceived. Accordingly, in GS 354 Nietzsche argues that “we simply have no organ for *knowing*, for ‘truth’: we ‘know’ (or believe or imagine) exactly as much as is *useful* to the human herd, to the species.” By stating this, Nietzsche apparently agrees with Wittgenstein that “knowledge” rests on a different plane than our certainties, i.e. that we can only “distinguish between true and false” against the background we inherit (for example by learning it in our childhood; OC 94 and 167; GS 110).[[15]](#footnote-15) It would therefore be appropriate to give up the ordinary idea of knowledge as an adequate description of the world and instead endorse a contextualist view which focuses on the dependence of our judgements on their frame of reference (whether biological, historical, cultural, etc.).[[16]](#footnote-16) That framework is where the language-game is actually played; therefore, it is only with reference to it that we can assess the meaning of the words we use. As noted above, this implies a relativization of the value of our knowledge claims which does not necessarily lead to nihilism about values, for truth and falsehood can in fact still be adopted as meaningful categories, but only if we conceive of them in a new, re-valued way – that is, only if we view them as the result of perspectival judgements couched in shared linguistic practices (on this, cf. e.g. BGE 34).

## **4. Pragmatist Humanism**

What has been argued thus far allows us to offer some closing thoughts on the similarity between Wittgenstein’s and Nietzsche’s views of language and knowledge, which I have tentatively explored in this chapter. What I would like to argue in this final section is that the agreement between their views may be profitably approached by focusing on the broad pragmatist commitment that both seem to endorse, namely the idea that the human viewpoint is the sole reference and actual justification of our judgements.[[17]](#footnote-17) Both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein in fact focus on humankind (and its social and cultural dimension) as the frame of reference of our value- and knowledge-claims; they both maintain that what can be assessed as “true” or “false” lies within the human context, within the human perspective, and it is only with reference to our practical activity that our words acquire their meaning. “We behold all things through the human head and cannot cut off this head”, Nietzsche writes in *Human, all too Human* I, § 9, and in 1887 he reiterates that “we cannot look around the corner” and avoid seeing ourselves under our perspectival forms (GS 374). Although it can be argued that “there *might* be (…) other kinds of intellects and perspectives”, and therefore that the world “*includes infinite interpretations*” (*ibid.*), Nietzsche continues, it would seem that we are stuck within *our own* perspective or form of life.[[18]](#footnote-18) Similarly, for Wittgenstein it is impossible for us to consider our world-picture in a neutral and unprejudiced way (cf. Kober 2017, p. 465-466): as a precondition of our valuational activity, a world-picture cannot be judged as true or correct (OC 162). On the contrary, truth can only be determined within the framework of a language-game, which is a *practical* framework.[[19]](#footnote-19) Therefore, we can agree with Kober that “if one accepts Wittgenstein’s descriptive conception of knowledge, [one must admit that] any question as regards the truth of a sentence or a theory is embedded within a certain practice” (Kober 2017, p. 465), and, consequently, one must consider that practice the *sole* justification of our knowledge-claims.

In a 1992 lecture, Hilary Putnam argued that “even if Wittgenstein was not in the strict sense a ‘pragmatist’ (…), he shares with pragmatism (…) a central – perhaps *the* central – emphasis: the emphasis on the primacy of practice” (Putnam 1995, p. 52). Commenting on this, David Backhurst and Cheryl Misak (2017, p. 733) observe that there is indeed a sense in which we may agree with Putnam, given that Wittgenstein invites us to see mind and meaning “in their relation to human activity, as aspects of our natural history. Accordingly, explanation of mind and meaning finds its terminus in an appeal to practice – to custom, traditions, and forms of life”. Furthermore, they argue that “Wittgenstein and the pragmatists are united” in a defence of the view that “we should think of ideas, concepts, beliefs, and theories, not on the model of pictorial representations of reality, but as tools or instruments we deploy in our engagement with the world” (*ibid.*). But these observations can be applied to Nietzsche as well. As I have tried to show in the previous sections, Nietzsche in fact maintains that the human world-representation – the “apparent” world of our actual knowledge – is the framework we inherit from the historical past of humankind. In addition, he argues that language and especially its tokens are the product of human practices aimed at communication, valuable only as fruitful designations of states of affairs. Finally, one of the basic tenets of Nietzsche’s attempt to develop a new (unprejudiced and anti-dogmatic) philosophical attitude is the idea that if we want to enlighten the various features of human life – and eventually understand them properly – we must deal with their origins as natural and cultural phenomena. That is, we must look at the practical framework of customs, traditions, etc., out of which they arose and with reference to which their significance may be justified. Thus, it is possible to say that both Wittgenstein and Nietzsche defended a form of anti-essentialism about knowledge according to which (i) the meaning of *our* world can be determined within *our* world itself and (ii) it is nonsense to search for it beyond the boundaries of our actual experience and practice – i.e. beyond the boundaries of our form of life (cf. on this Haak 1982, p. 170 and Gray 2012, p. 115).

In a 2012 paper, SamiPihlström stressed the pragmatist feature of Wittgenstein’s view based on a conception of pragmatism which is much more nuanced and philosophically significant than the “mythical pragmatism (which the real pragmatists all scorned) which says ‘It’s true (for you) if it is good for you’” (Putnam 1995, p. 51). For Pihlström (2012, §22), pragmatism should be seen first and foremost as an attempt to focus on the humanly contextualized word-representation, which is the only one we can develop. We look at the world from our human standpoint and we pronounce our judgements accordingly; therefore, each judgement is value-laden, for it depends on the individual (not necessarily subjective, but also social, cultural, etc.) perspective which represents its frame of reference. Therefore, things have no meaning *in themselves*, independently of our judgement activity; there is no hidden essence which we might grasp, and the only value we can attribute to states of affairs is a *human* value that can be assessed only within the boundaries of our inherited background.

With this definition of pragmatism in mind, Pihlström (2012, § 7) finds it “easy to suggest at a general level that Wittgenstein provides us with a ‘pragmatist’ picture of human language-use and meaning”, for his “later philosophy generally can be read as an attempt to show that it is only against the background of our human form(s) of life, our habits of doing various things together in common environments, that meanings are possible.” This pragmatist point, Pihlström continues, “is highlighted by the fact that (…) the notion of language [that appears in Wittgenstein] must be construed (…) as a genuine human practice within the natural world” and that “the possibility of language and meaning is grounded in (…) habits of action whose radical contingency and continuous historical development are among their key features” (Pihlström 2012, § 9 and 39). Finally, Pihlström stresses that Wittgenstein leaves no room for a “higher standpoint for us to adopt than the humanly accessible perspectives internal to our language-games”, an observation which allows us to further compare Wittgenstein’s view with Nietzsche’s and to ascribe to both the pragmatist commitment outlined thus far. As noted above, in reflecting on the herd perspective as the inherited background of all our judgements, Nietzsche indeed remarks that any access to the world as it is in itself is precluded to us, and therefore no “knowledge” is possible – if we conceive of it as an adequate description of the state of affairs. For him, the world we “know” is only a representation based on one among several possible ways of conceptualizing reality. Any attempt to consider *our* world-picture as the single correct or privileged interpretation of experience is ill-founded, for there is no metaphysical foundation for it, as inquiry into its origin may reveal.

But if language does not mirror an independent reality, if our engagement with the world can only be perspectival, should we give up all attempts to provide a meaningful description of it, that is, a description that might be consistently justified? Pragmatist thinkers aim precisely to answer this question in a non-sceptical way, arguing that, although deprived of metaphysical references, we can still assess the value of our judgement claims based on their *function*. I think that both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein adopted a consistent strategy.[[20]](#footnote-20) Indeed, their focus on the human perspective may be seen as an attempt to determine the context within which knowledge claims *can* be meaningfully assessed, leaving aside any metaphysical foundation that, for them, does not pertain to language. They indeed maintain that the *role* that language plays in our practical engagement with the world and in our social activities is the proper background against which we can *determine* the meaning of the words we use. It is only when a word is actually employed and thus “incorporated into our language” that it *becomes* meaningful (OC 61; PI 43), but “it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of language-game” (OC 204), the latter being superficial, perspectival –, which means that its significance isn’t grounded on a direct correspondence with the world (GS 354; PI 92 and 116; OC 90 and 215). Yet ordinary language deceives us and makes us believe it is the expression of a metaphysical reality. Fascinated by our forms of expression (e.g. because of their practical fruitfulness as a means of communication), we forget that they are the mere product of a natural and historical ongoing process involving a variety of language-games that may themselves change in time (which implies the sort of synchronic and diachronic relativism mentioned in Section 3; on this, cf. e.g. HH I 16, BB 67 and OC 65). The philosophical attitude that Nietzsche and Wittgenstein outline (with the due differences, of course) aims especially to rid us of this fundamental prejudice: by focusing on how language actually *works* within our lives (cf. e.g. OC 147), we can appreciate what the words we use do *in deed* mean (OC 342), thus making a crucial strategic move in the battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.

## **List of abbreviations**

*Nietzsche’s writings*

TL = *On Truth and Lie in an Extramoral Sense*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press 1999.

HH = *Human, All Too Human*, Cambridge University Press 1996.

BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil*, Cambridge University Press 2002.

GM = *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Cambridge University Press 2006.

GS = *The Gay Science*. Cambridge University Press 2001.

TI = *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*,Cambridge University Press 2005.

*Wittgenstein’s writings*

BB = *The Blue and the Brown Books*, Blackwell 1958.

PI = *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell 1958.

OC = *On Certainty*, Blackwell 1969.

LC = *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, Blackwell 1966.

Z = *Zettel*, Blackwell 1967.

TS 213 = *The Big Typescript* TS 213, Blackwell 2013.

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1. An early interesting attempt to reflect on the correspondence and terminological coherence between Nietzsche’s view of grammar as the seductor of thought and Wittgenstein’s concern with philosophy in PI 109 and 110 is provided in Steuer 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the late notebooks, for example, Nietzsche argues 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 (…). Inserting truth as a *processus in infinitum*, an *active determining*, *not* a becoming conscious of something that is ‘in itself’ fixed and determinate” (FP 1887, 9[91]). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Relevant studies on Nietzsche’s *On Truth and Lie* and the beginning of his reflection on language include, e.g., Crawford 1988 and Reuter 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On Nietzsche’s view of metaphors and the relationship between language and knowledge, see Emden 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I agree with Maria Alvarez and Aaron Ridley that “Nietzsche, unlike Wittgenstein, is not primarily interested in the concepts of understanding, language, meaning, thinking, etc., but in ethics and human excellence, and in the effects that the historical character of our experience has on these. His remarks about language are thus subservient to a quite different sort of project” (Alvarez and Ridley 2005, p. 12). For that reason, I am not interested in defending any of the four theses that Alvarez and Ridley discuss in their paper and that refer to the general claim that “Nietzsche was more of a Wittgensteinian that he might be” (*ibid.*, p. 2). Also, I think that it is possible to consistently reflect on the striking resemblances between Nietzsche’s and Wittgenstein’s views (especially on language) without necessarily attempting to either “construe Nietzsche as a proto-Wittgensteinian about language” or argue that these resemblances are an indication that Nietzsche arrived at Wittgenstein’s insights first (*ibid.*, p. 15). The view that “for Wittgenstein, language is not the means, but the actual object of a philosophical research” is also defended in Steuer 1995, p. 502. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. These remarks may be compared with the following passage from TL (p. 145): “We call a man honest; we ask, ‘Why did he act so honestly today?’ Our answer is usually: ‘Because of his honesty.’ Honesty! (…) We have no knowledge of an essential quality which might be called honesty, but we do know of numerous individualized and hence non-equivalent actions which we equate with each other by omitting what is unlike, and which we now designate as honest actions; finally we formulate from them a *qualitas occulta* with the name ‘honesty’”. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of fluidity in *On Certainty*, § 96: “It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid proposition hardened, and hard ones became fluid.” Walter Kaufmann stresses this parallel between Nietzsche and Wittgenstein in his edition of Nietzsche’s works. For a discussion on this, cf. Alvarez and Ridley 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. On Wittgenstein’s “world-picture”, cf. especially Hamilton 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As is well known, Wittgenstein conceives of certainties “as a form of life” (OC 358) and as “something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified”, like a world-picture (OC 359). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It is interesting to note that Wittgenstein mentions the *herd* in an important passage from the *Big Typescript* (TS 213/423): “Human beings are deeply imbedded in philosophical, i.e. grammatical confusion. And freeing them from these presupposes extricating them from the immensely diverse associations they are caught up in. One must, as it were, regroup their entire language. – But of course this language developed as it did because of human beings had – and have – the tendency to think *this way*. Therefore extricating them only works with those who live in an instinctive state of dissatisfaction with language. Not with those who, following all of their instincts, live within *the very* herd that has created this language as its proper expression.” It is clear how this passage is relevant for this chapter. In a paper devoted to that text, Stefan Majetschak comments that “Wittgenstein’s clear and direct reference to Nietzsche is astonishing; it can hardly be considered a mere coincidence of words and thoughts, of which Wittgenstein could be unaware” (Majetschak 2006, p. 73). As an explanation, Majetschak argues that Wittgenstein could have encountered references to Nietzsche’s view of the issue in the work of Paul Ernst. But it seems to be much more plausible that, in this case, the bridge between Nietzsche and Wittgenstein was Fritz Mauthner, as argued by Janet Lungstrum in a 1995 paper. Indeed, Mauthner’s *Beiträge zur einer Kritik der Sprache* (1901-1902) and *Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (1910-1911) “received much public attention during Wittgenstein’s formative years in Vienna“ and in these works Mauthner “publicized an implicitly Nietzschean insistence on the underlying metaphoricity of language” (Lungstum 1995, pp. 302-3). Most importantly, Lungstrum observes that Mauthner echoes Nietzsche in his own mention of the “herd instinct” (*Herdeninstinkt*; Mauthner 1906, p. 90), the “herd language”, and the “herd life” (*Herdensprache* and *Herdenleben;* Mautner 1901-1902, I, pp. 39-40). The latter may be the actual source of Wittgenstein’s remark in TS 213/423, for in that text Mauthner also refers to the human instincts and develops some considerations that are consistent with Wittgenstein’s. In particular, both the authors refer to the herd in a significantly different way than Nietzsche. While that notion is philosophically relevant for Nietzsche, who attributes to the herd a moral value and mentions the herd instinct and the herd animal in crucial passages of his *oeuvre*, both Mauthner and Wittgenstein talks of the herd as the “average viewpoint” of mankind. This difference in facts reflects the dissimilarity between Nietzsche’s and Wittgenstein’s philosophical projects that, as I have mentioned, undermines any attempt to establish an actual correspondence between their views on language.

    It might be worth mentioning that the excerpt from TS 213 contains another important element of connection, albeit indirect, between Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, namely Georg Lichtenberg’s remarks on language. In TS 213/422-3, Wittgenstein writes: “Lichtenberg: ‘Our entire philosophy is correction of the use of language, and therefore the correction of a philosophy – of the most general philosophy.’ /…/ You ask why grammatical problems are so tough and seemingly ineradicable. – Because they are connected with the oldest thought habits, i.e. with the oldest images that are engraved into our language itself. ((Lichtenberg))”. For what I could see, this reference remained unnoticed to the scholarship on Nietzsche’s and Wittgenstein’s views of language, but its importance is undisputable, given that Lichtenberg – one of the few authors cited by Wittgenstein in his writings – is a direct source of Nietzsche’s critical remarks on the “seduction of grammar” (GM I 13. See also BGE *Preface*; 12; 20; 34; and 54; and TI *Reason* 5. The issue is also addressed in GS 354, where Nietzsche refers to “those epistemologists who have got tangled up in the snares of grammar (the folk metaphysics)”. On Nietzsche and Lichtenberg see e.g. Stingelin 1996, sec. 3.3; Sommer 2016, pp. 54-5). This “missing link” may in fact provide a point of reference for any study devoted to the similarity between Wittgenstein and Nietzsche: by relating both the authors to a third view that inspired them one might solve some of the interpretive problems that still concern the relevant literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In fact, one of the seminal studies devoted to a comparison of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein deals with perspectivism: Wallace 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. It might be worth remarking that Nietzsche uses the term “*Perspektivismus*”only once in his published writings, namely in GS 354. Of course, this does not undermine the relevance of the other passages where Nietzsche deals with the perspectival character of life and with perspectival seeing (e.g. BGE, Preface and GM III 12), but at the same time I am firmly convinced that how this issue is addressed in *The Gay Science* is especially significant for appreciating Nietzsche’s view on the issue (I have tried to defend my view, e.g., in Gori 2019a, chap. 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. On Nietzsche’s view of consciousness and his philosophy of mind, see Riccardi 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Of course, the perspective addressed in GS 354 is not the *only* possible viewpoint for humankind. The evolutionary approach to the issue which Nietzsche endorses in that text should not mislead us: the path which led to the herd perspective is only one among several others, each one depending on the environment (biological and/or cultural) that surrounds – and therefore shapes – one’s particular social community. As Nietzsche observes as early as 1873, the actual existence of a variety of languages shows us that states of affairs can be expressed in many ways, which implies that the meaning of the words we use is not an essential property of the world but only the product of a contextual interpretation of it (cf. WL, p. 144). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I am not trying to avoid one of the most delicate questions concerning Nietzsche’s view of knowledge and truth, namely his “falsification thesis”. I simply do not have enough space to deal with it exhaustively. Very briefly, the problem at stake concerns Nietzsche’s coherence in rejecting the idea that we may reach the plane of things in themselves, thus grasping the “true” features of states of affairs, while describing our actual knowledge as an erroneous representation (e.g. HH I 16 and GS 110) or even a falsification (GS 354) of the events we experience (on this, see Clark 1990, Hussain 2004, Andresen 2013, Nehamas 2015 and 2017). I recently tried to make a case for a *fictional realist* approach to the issue as a possible way to make sense of Nietzsche’s reiterated criticism of the ordinary approach to truth and the sceptical phenomenalist tenet he endorses. According to the modern fictionalist view, it is possible to take *as true* a representation a *falsehood* of which we are conscious. Insofar as it leads to productive results relative to particular interests and scopes, an inaccurate representation can in fact be a fruitful means of orientation, and within these boundaries it can be accepted as veridical, i.e. *true enough* (cf. on this Teller 2009; Remhof 2016). I am inclined to maintain that Nietzsche’s perspectivism can be interpreted consistently with this view, namely as the idea that the only “knowable” world is (for us) that of *useful* or *regulative* *fictions*, which are literally false but true enough to be accepted as principles of a world-description (cf. Gori 2019b and 2019a, chap. 2, § 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In the *Blue Book* (p. 25), for example, Wittgenstein argues that “there is no exact usage of the world ‘knowledge’; but we can make up several such usages, which will more or less agree with the ways the word is actually used”. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The question of the relation between Wittgenstein and pragmatism and between Nietzsche and pragmatism is an interesting but delicate one, as shown by the relevant literature on the topic. In this section, I will try to explore this relation by dealing with one feature which may be ascribed to pragmatism, without directly comparing either Wittgenstein or Nietzsche to classic pragmatist thinkers such as Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. On this, I have little to add to the existing scholarship, including e.g. Haack 1982; Goodman 1998 and 2002; Backhurst and Misak 2017; Boncompagni 2016 and 2019; Hingst 1998; Fabbrichesi 2009; Gori 2017 and 2019a. For those who are interested, the 2012 issue IV/2 of the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* hosted a symposium on *Wittgenstein and Pragmatism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Commenting on the comparison between Wittgenstein and Pragmatism, Anna Boncompagni makes the following interesting remark, which I think may be consistently applied to Nietzsche as well: “What emerges is a new way of conceiving the idea of the beginning of philosophical activity, no longer in need of an absolute *primum*, but wholly at ease in the framework of a human *objectivity*, feasible, solid but (and because of its being) to a certain extent changeable” (Boncompagni 2016, p. 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Cf. von Wright 1982, p. 178: “The fragments of a world‐picture underlying the uses of language are not originally and strictly *propositions* at all. The pre‐knowledge is not propositional knowledge. But if this foundation is not propositional, what then is it? It is, one could say, a praxis” (I owe this quotation to Moyal-Sharrock 2017). As is well known, in *On Certainty* (341-343) Wittgenstein maintains that our epistemic practices rest on non-propositional rules – or *hinges*, as he calls them – “whose certainty stems from the foundational role they play in given practices” (Salvatore 2018, p. 251; cf. also Pihlström 2012, sec. 2). On Wittgenstein’s notion of a “form of life” as “a path to evading the epistemic domain” and on the practical nature of certainties, see Boncompagni 2016, p. 72, 126 and 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Of course, this does not imply that Nietzsche and Wittgenstein may have consistent views on the various aspects which pertain to this particular issue. Their conceptions of the metaphysical value of language itself or of our ordinary commitments towards language may be different, for different are their philosophical sensibilities, as remarked above. Nevertheless, it is possible to ascribe to them a comparable *approach*, a comparable *attitude* towards an issue that deeply interested both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. It is this approach itself which is pragmatist at its very core. Staring at the consequences of anti-essentialist and instrumentalist commitments about evaluation claims, pragmatist thinkers do not give up to relativism. Rather, they search for consistent principles of evaluation in the realm of human praxis, thus providing a *practical* meaning to something that had eventually lost any *metaphysical* meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)