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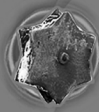
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Where Philosophy Meets Poetry in Nietzsche's Writings from 1872-1873

Lorenzo Serini

Abstract

The quarrel between poetry and philosophy is certainly one of the principle problems of Nietzsche's thinking, and this is so on many levels: his works are often relegated to poetry by certain philosophers and scholars; Nietzsche perceives himself not only as a philosopher but also as a poet; and poetry – and art in general – plays a fundamental role in his philosophy. Of course, all these levels are essentially intertwined and perhaps can be reduced to the last one: for Nietzsche poetry has a crucial philosophical relevance.

The aim of my paper is to individuate where philosophy meets poetry within Nietzsche's thinking and, thus, to show the relevance that he ascribes to poetry in his philosophical project. In order to do so, I will locate the quarrel between poetry and philosophy in Nietzsche's theory of language: in the first place, in fact, poetry and philosophy meets in their common linguistic medium. And, secondly, I will include the quarrel between poetry and philosophy into the wider framework of Nietzsche's reflection on the conflict between art and science. However, this approa-

ch runs into a great interpretative difficulty: Nietzsche's thinking about art and science changes many times over the years; and, therefore, the location of philosophy in the territory of art or science becomes more difficult due to the variable time.

The question of whether philosophy is more akin to poetry or science, in Nietzsche's writings, takes place within the wider problem of the conflict between art and science, which absorbs his investigation throughout his career, and describes the trajectory of his thinking. Nevertheless, over the years he changes position regarding this dispute. To oversimplify: in his early writings, Nietzsche advocates art and criticises science; in his middle-period writings, he reevaluates science against art; and, in his later writings, he seems to retrieve both art and science, by focusing on their conflicting but necessary relationship. Accordingly, in his oscillation between art and science, over the years Nietzsche changes also his idea about the relationship between philosophy and poetry.

For this reason, in my paper I will narrow my focus to Nietzsche's mostly unpublished writings from 1872-1873 to look at his thinking on art, science, and philosophy in the period of transition from The Birth of Tragedy (1869-1872) to Human All Too Human (1876-1878). The unpublished writings and notebooks from this period of change are very important, I think, to understand his way to deal with the relationship between poetry and philosophy: here young Nietzsche – without the responsibility of speaking in public – begins to distance himself from

the ‘metaphysic of the artist’ presented in The Birth of Tragedy, which is overtly committed – and therefore restricted – to the Schopenhauerian philosophy and the Wagnerian cultural project. In his unpublished thinking from 1872-1873 Nietzsche tries to develop a «language of his very own»¹ and attempts a new, non-metaphysical, solution to the problem of the tragic; and, in doing so, he often wonders about the role and the nature of philosophy, in relation to art and science. In this context the quarrel between poetry and philosophy is thus especially evident and heated. Moreover, as I wish to show in this work, Nietzsche, in experimenting new paths of thinking, lays the foundations for his mature philosophy.

1 In “An Attempt of Self-Critique” (1886) Nietzsche retrospectively confesses that in *The Birth of Tragedy* he forced himself to express his thinking in the Schopenhauerian and Kantian languages: «I now regret very much that I did not yet have the courage (or immodesty=) at that time to permit myself a *language of my very own* for such personal views and acts of daring, labouring instead to express strange and new evaluations in Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulations, things which fundamentally ran counter to both the spirit and taste of Kant and Schopenhauer» (BT “Attempt”, § 6, p. 10).

Introduction

In the first part of this paper I will deal with Nietzsche's early theories of language and knowledge, in which the young philosopher – still disciple of Schopenhauer – argues that the entire world of representation is in fact only appearance, unreality, and does not correspond to the things-in-themselves, i.e. the objects independent from consciousness in the external world. For Nietzsche our linguistic and conceptual way to represent the world unavoidably manipulates it, and creates a human world – made of words and concepts (e.g. God, soul, good, truth, etc.) – that does not exist aside from human beings¹.

That is to say, our linguistic and conceptual knowledge does not lead us to grasp the truth, beyond appearance, but only to reaffirm untruth as a necessary condition of life, by creating 'lies' (i.e. linguistic and conceptual entities that do not correspond to reality) to interpret the world and survive in it. Hence, Nietzsche concludes that

1 See, for example, the following note from 1872-1873: «Our intellect is a surface force, it is *superficial*. This is also called 'subjective'. The intellect knows through *concepts*: i.e. our thinking is a process of categorisation, of naming. Thus it is something that boils down to an arbitrary decision by man and does not reach the thing in itself» (WEN 1872-1873, 19[66], p. 113).

even language and knowledge are the results of *the fundamental tendency of human beings towards untruth*, the unreal, namely, art; and in this sense, the world of appearance produced by our linguistic and conceptual representation is to be understood as an aesthetic phenomenon.

This is the first point in which, I think, philosophy meets poetry. In the unpublished writings from 1872-1873, Nietzsche states the impossibility of metaphysics rejecting every theory of knowledge based on the correspondence paradigm of truth, and, in doing so, he circumscribes philosophy to the realm of appearance, unreality, art with the fundamental creative task of «the construction of the [human, LS] world»². Thus, philosophy is itself a form of poetry in so much as it does not pursue the truth – it does not take language to be a neuter medium capable of grasping it, but uses language as an artistic means for new creations.

In the second part of this paper, I will take into account the creativity that Nietzsche ascribes to philosophy in its relationship to art; and, in more detail, I will show that, in his view, philosophy – and this is so, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to his last notes about the will to power – has the fundamental existential task of the affirmation of life. Notoriously, Nietzsche's philosophy originates

² *Ivi*, 19[47], p. 198.

from the Schopenhauerian problems of pessimism, and also its later developments (e.g. the problem of nihilism) never loses the sight of this pivotal concern: for Nietzsche – and Schopenhauer – life itself is meaningless, there is no god or any other metaphysical ground that provides an order or a scope for existence; and, in this scenario human beings, as conscious animals, are cursed because they can acquire the terrible insight that their suffering is completely unjustified in an aimless universe.

Human beings, in their endless attempt to know more about existence, continually stumble upon the limits of their knowledge (i.e. impossibility to go beyond appearance) and relapse into the unknowable and meaningless kernel of life. Thus, *the human tendency towards truth*, namely, science, ends up unveiling the illusory nature of human beings' spiritual business, namely, culture, which is the realm of all human artistic creations to attach sense to nature. Human beings through art, i.e. their tendency towards untruth, transfigure nature by adapting things to the themselves and build up their anthropomorphic world of culture in order to orient their lives towards an aim. As things stand, Nietzsche believes that philosophy cannot help but take into consideration this fundamental problem of culture regarding the existential and practical dimension of all the artistic means to affirm of life.

Nevertheless, in 1872-1873 Nietzsche abandons any metaphysical explanation of art and existence and attempts a non-metaphysical response to the problem of pessimism that paves the way for *Human All Too Human*: art is simply the human (all too human) way to shape, reshape, and further shape life and create an anthropomorphic world, in which it is possible to live.

This is the second point in which, I think, philosophy meets poetry – and more in general art. In 1872-1873 Nietzsche argues that in philosophy science cannot be separated from art for the purpose of a life-affirming culture. In this sense, for Nietzsche philosophy is poetry in so much as it is not reduced to theory of knowledge but takes on the existential and practical task to teach how to affirm life, by artistically inventing a great – non-metaphysical – interpretation of the world.

1. Philosophy Meets Poetry in Language

1.1. Language as Art

In this section I will deal with Nietzsche's early theory of language³ in "Description of Ancient

³ On Nietzsche's early theory of language see Crawford (1988).

Rhetoric [*Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik*]", an unpublished text that he writes in 1872-1873 in preparation for the course held at the University of Basel in 1874. In this text Nietzsche develops the claim that rhetoric is not only a conscious art of language but language is in essence rhetoric. And so, he remarks that language is not a natural (i.e. literal) expression of things but is grounded in poetry – and art.

In these years, Nietzsche is heavily influenced⁴ by the reading of Gustav Gerber's *Language as Art* [*Die Sprache als Kunst*]⁵: in his notebooks and especially in "Description of Ancient Rhetoric" and in "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" [*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn*] (1873), he re-elaborates – and even copies, to the letter – Gerber's work⁶. In his thinking on *Language as Art*, Nietzsche comes to the conclusion that «the tropes [i.e. rhetorical figures, LS] are not only occasionally added to words but constitute their most proper nature» and that «what is usually called language is actually all figuration»⁷.

Given that, in his lecture on the ancient rhetoric Nietzsche argues that rhetoric is not only a particular use of language, but is its only possible use: language does not represent things for what they

4 On Nietzsche's reading of Gerber's *Language as Art* see Meijers, (1988); Crawford, (1988), pp. 199-219; and Zavatta (2013), pp. 21-43.

5 See Crescenzi (1994).

6 Meijers & Stingelin, (1988), pp. 350-368.

7 LR §3, p. 25.

are in themselves but, on the contrary, artistically transfers them into tropes for communicative purposes. As things stand, for Nietzsche rhetoric is not simply a «conscious application of artistic means of speaking»⁸ as in the case of poetry: where the poet intentionally alters the natural use of language by means of tropes (e.g. synecdoche, metaphor, and metonym) in order to enhance its expressive power. The rhetorical expression is in fact the unconscious means always operative in language, even in its alleged natural use:

It is not difficult to prove that what is called ‘rhetorical’, as a means of conscious art, had been active as a means of unconscious art in language and its development, indeed, that the rhetorical is a further development, guided by the clear light of the understanding, of the artistic means which are already found in language. There is obviously no unrhetorical ‘naturalness’ of language to which one could appeal; language itself is the result of purely rhetorical arts⁹.

Hence, Nietzsche states that language is rhetoric in essence, and that even in its ordinary – and scientific – use, namely, the so-called proper expression, it is always a form of unconscious poetry.

Language is not a neutral medium and, through its artistic operation, unavoidably contaminates

⁸ *Ivi*, §3, p. 21.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

its object, transposing it into something else; and, in doing so, it never expresses things properly, as they are in themselves. For this reason, Nietzsche affirms that «*language is rhetoric*, because it desires to convey only a *doxa* [opinion], not an *episteme* [knowledge]»¹⁰: in his view, through linguistic representation the «full essence of things will never be grasped» because language is only meant «to convey [*übertragen*] to others a subjective impulse and its acceptance»¹¹.

In “Description of Ancient Rhetoric” Nietzsche, following Gerber, goes even further explaining the inner workings of language – i.e. the ‘artistic means which are already found in language’ – in terms of figures of speech, which structure our cognitive experience, by rhetorically simplifying and expressing the world in relation to perception. In this sense, for Nietzsche words and concepts formation is to be understood as the result of the unconscious operations of tropes – in particular, of (i) synecdoche, (ii) metaphor, and (iii) metonymy – that artistically create the realm of linguistic representation. I will now focus on these three rhetorical figures in more depth.

(i.) *Synecdoche* is the figure of speech in which «the whole is known from a small part»¹², and,

¹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 23.

¹¹ *Ivi*, p. 21.

¹² *Ivi*, §7, p. 57.

for Nietzsche, describes the process of word-concept formation (i.e. abstraction) from intuition. He observes that when we form a word and the related concept, by means of synecdoche, «a partial perception takes the place of the entire and complete intuition»¹³: we unconsciously simplify the richness and complexity of the intuitive object by isolating and fixing a thing in an abstract image (i.e. word-concept), namely, an artefact unity, which does not exist in the external world.

Language, through this unconscious activity of synecdoche, «never expresses something completely but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent to it [language]»¹⁴; and, as Nietzsche specifies in the notebooks from 1872-1873, «we obtain the concept by *ignoring* individual characteristics (...) but the nature of things does not correspond to this»¹⁵. That is to say, in our conceptualisation and denomination of the world, by presenting a part for the whole – and, at the same time, ignoring the others – we unconsciously create unities in place of the complexity of intuition.

Every word-concept thus turns out to be only the result of the human way to rhetorically *translate* intuition into linguistic entities, which do not exist independently of our consciousness in the external

¹³ *Ivi*, §3, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ WEN 1872-1873, 19[236], p. 157.

world, and which are only relevant for the human need of communication.

It is important to note that in 1872-1873 in his thinking on synecdoche Nietzsche prepares his attack to the 'popular prejudice' – shared both by philosophy and common opinion (i.e. 'the herd') – that linguistic unities exist in the external world: for instance, in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) he criticises Schopenhauer – along with other philosophers and common opinion – for taking the 'will' to be a unity when, in reality, is «something complicated, something unified only in a word»¹⁶. And precisely for this reason, Nietzsche argues that language, in its working as a synecdoche, proves to be unable to disclose the essence of things: it only «stresses the most outstanding characteristic»¹⁷ in a unity and does not take into account their intuitive individualities and complexities.

(ii.) In 1872-1873 Nietzsche provides two intertwined definitions of *metaphor*. On the one hand, in his lecture he takes into consideration the Aristotelian notion of metaphor as «carrying over [Übertragung]»¹⁸, transference, or transposition.

On the other, in the notebooks from the same years, Nietzsche writes that «metaphor means

16 BGE 19.

17 LR §7, p. 57.

18 *Ivi*, p. 55.

treating as *equal* something that one has recognised to be *similar* in one point»¹⁹. According to these definitions, metaphor is for Nietzsche the operation of carrying over, transposition, and transference [Übertragung] of something from a sphere to a different one and, the consequent analogical equation of the two different spheres.

Given that, metaphor plays a fundamental role in Nietzsche's early philosophy: it explains the artistic relationship between the two essentially different realms of representation and the external world. Nietzsche asserts that our representation of the world is metaphorical: the forms of both our intuition (i.e. space and time, and causality)²⁰ and abstraction (i.e. denomination and conceptualisation)²¹ do not correspond to the structure of the world in itself; nevertheless, they are fundamental analogical transpositions of something irreducibly other from us, in order to craft our interpretation of the world, that is the world for us, appearance²².

19 WEN 1872-1873, 19[249], p. 160.

20 «Time, space and causality are only *metaphors* by which we interpret things for ourselves» (*Ivi*, 19[210], p. 149).

21 «The concept comes into being though the equation of the non-identical: i.e. through the illusion that there is something identical, through the assumption of identities» (*Ivi*, 23[11], p. 165). (See also TL 1, p. 256).

22 In young Nietzsche's view, the notion of metaphor provides an answer to the Kantian problem of the legitimate application of categories to the objects of experience: on the one hand, we are not legitimated to apply our categories to the external world, because they are two completely different spheres, but, on the other, we are able – and have to – interpret the world, by metaphorically adapt it to us, in order to survive.

Hence, for Nietzsche metaphor is the fundamental unconscious operation that governs our relationship with the external world. This is particularly evident in “On Truth and Lies in a Extra-Moral Sense” (1873) – which I will deal with in the next section – where Nietzsche presents metaphor as the key concept of his theory of knowledge.

(iii.) *Metonymy* consists in «the substitution of the cause for what we say a thing in place of the thing to which we refer»²³. For Nietzsche metonymy is another fundamental operation inherent in abstraction: «*abstractions* are *metonymies*, i.e. inversions of cause and effect [...], every concept is a metonymy»²⁴. Nietzsche claims that the substitution of cause and effect is at the heart of word and concept formation: «these concepts, which owe their origin only to experience, are proposed *a priori* to be the intrinsic essences of things: we attribute to the appearances as their cause that which still is only an effect»²⁵.

To put it differently, metonym leads us to the natural – but false – belief that our linguistic and conceptual representation of the world (i.e. the effect) is, in fact, the true world as it is (i.e. the cause of our representation): in this way, we are spontaneously led to believe that things in the external world are like

²³ LR §7, p. 59.

²⁴ WEN 1872-873, 19[204], p. 148.

²⁵ LR §7, p. 59.

we linguistically and conceptually represent them, and that our consciousness, in experiencing them, simply mirrors their forms. Thus, we invert the cause and the effect of our knowledge of the world, by unconsciously taking the result of abstraction (i.e. conceptual-linguistic entities) to be the origin of our experience in the world outside representation.

Nietzsche's early reflections on metonym set the stage for his later thinking about this unconscious inversion of cause and effect. For instance, in *Twilight of Idols* (1889) Nietzsche asserts that one of "The Great Four Errors" – and perhaps the most dangerous – is precisely «*the error of confusing cause and effect*»²⁶; and, moreover, again in *Twilight of Idols* he coins the word «causal drive [*Ursachentrieb*]» to address the unconscious positing of imaginary causes that in 1872-1873 he regards as metonymy²⁷.

Bearing this in mind, for Nietzsche metonymy – combined with synecdoche and metaphor – is nothing else than the ontological claim implicit in language, according to which we believe that the true world (i.e. the cause) corresponds to our linguistic way to categorise it (i.e. the effect). In this sense, in the

26 TI "The Great Four Errors", 1.

27 *Ivi*, 4. Luca Lupo (2006) explains this unconscious construction of causes as the ground of consciousness. He retraces the 'causal drive' that Nietzsche mentions in *Twilight of Idols* in *Daybreak* 119, where the German philosopher argues that the 'poetic reason [*dichtende Vernunft*]' creates our experience – both in dream and awake life – precisely by inventing causes. And, ultimately, he tracks it down to 'the drive to create metaphors' in "On Truth and Lie", which is profoundly linked with Nietzsche's reflections on rhetoric. See also Lupo Luca, (2012), pp. 179-196.

notebooks Nietzsche claims that metonymy is «the essence of synthetic judgment»²⁸: in fact, in applying synthetic judgments

we assume popular metaphysics, i.e. the one that regards effects as causes. The concept 'pencil' is mistaken for the 'thing' pencil. The 'is' in the synthetic judgment is false: it contains a transference [*Übertragung*] between which there never be an equation are juxtaposed²⁹.

And so, in 1872-1873 Nietzsche anticipates his renown claim that synthetic judgments are false in *Beyond Good and Evil* 4 and 11 (1886): our judgments about reality are a «*false equation*»³⁰ that we formulate – and we have to formulate – in order to create – and believe in – a simplified world in which we can survive.

This argument is a cornerstone of Nietzsche's philosophy: he reaffirms it in 1873 in "On Truth and Lie", and re-elaborates it throughout his philosophy. For instance, again in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche spells this point out: in spite of their falseness, synthetic judgments «are the most indispensable to us, and that without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the wholly invented world of the unconditioned and self-identical, without a constant falsification of

²⁸ WEN 1872-1873, 19[242], p. 158.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*. As seen above, the equation is false precisely because it is only metaphorical, namely, the rhetorical transposition of one sphere into an entirely different one.

the world through numbers, people could not live – that a renunciation of false judgments would be a renunciation of life, a negation of life»³¹.

Nietzsche argues that in synthetic judgments we unconsciously take what is rhetorical to be true and we assume ‘popular metaphysics’, the powerful belief rooted in language, the belief in truth, namely, the illusion that our rhetorical representation of the world corresponds to its essence. And so, for Nietzsche the belief in truth is fundamental to human life: «life needs illusions, i.e. untruths taken to be truth»³². As the unconscious art inherent in language is so strong, he remarks that both the ‘herd’ (i.e. common opinion) and philosophers agree in mistaking our poetry of the world for reality: «the deceptions in language and in philosophy are at first unconscious and it is very difficult to bring them to consciousness»³³.

For this reason, from 1872-1873 Nietzsche promotes a critique of the belief in truth with the aim to show the rhetorical origin of our knowledge of the world, by bringing to light the unconscious art in language. Hence, as language is poetry in essence, Nietzsche rejects the notion of truth as correspondence, and refuses to reduce the philosophical inquiry to epistemology; in fact, he assigns philosophy

31 BGE 4. This is what is called ‘moral fictionalism’. On Nietzsche’s moral fictionalism see Hussain (2007), pp. 157-191.

32 WEN 1872-1873, 19[43], p. 107.

33 *Ivi*, 19[216], p. 150.

a creative role, more akin to its poetic nature: the role to create new metaphors to interpret the world. This is especially evident in “On Truth and Lie”, which will be the subject of the next section.

1.2. Language as Putative Science

I have borrowed the title of this section from the title of aphorism 11 in *Human All Too Human* that, I think, concisely and effectively summarises Nietzsche's theories of language and knowledge in “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”³⁴. In his unpublished essay “On Truth and Lie” Nietzsche continues his thinking on the poetic essence of language – and representation – and develops a sort

³⁴ «*Language as putative science.* – The significance of language for the evolution for culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To what extent man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world. The sculptor of language was not so modest as to believe that he was only giving things designations, he conceived rather that with words he was expressing supreme knowledge of things. Here, too, it is the *belief that the truth has been found* out of which the mightiest sources of energy have flown. A great deal later – only now – it dawns on men that in their belief in language they have propagated a tremendous error. Happily, it is too late for the evolution of reason, which depends on this belief, to be again put back. – *Logic* too depends on the presuppositions with which nothing in the real world corresponds, for example on the presupposition that there are identical things, that the same thing is identical at different points of time: but this science came into existence through the opposite belief (that such conditions do obtain in the real world)» (HH 11).

of negative epistemology³⁵, in which he explains knowledge in terms of metaphor, as a series of artistic transpositions from the nerve stimulus to intuition, and from intuition to abstraction. He thus reaffirms the conclusion that the knowing subject is always an «*artistically creative subject*»³⁶, which necessarily manipulates things in order to relate to them. That is to say, even the entire realm of consciousness, for Nietzsche, is to be understood as a form of poetry³⁷.

The process of knowledge, as it is presented by Nietzsche, originates in the physiological dynamics occurring in the sentient organism and, through a series of metaphorical transferences, ends in the «entirely new and different sphere» of words and concepts³⁸. The ultimate product of knowledge (i.e. words and concepts) is thus mediated by two metaphors, and therefore unavoidably separated from the nature of the thing that occasioned the cognitive process.

In more detail, (0) the nerve stimulus, which determines a change in the physiological condition of

35 See Schrift (1985).

36 TL 1, p. 259.

37 Nietzsche famously reaffirms – and re-elaborates – this conclusion in *Daybreak* (1881): in aphorism 119, he regards our experience of the world as the result of an «inventive reasoning [*dichtende Vernunft*] faculty» – literally translating, poetic reason –, which is in place both during the dream state and the waking life and continuously interprets our nervous stimuli (D 119). On Nietzsche's poetic reason see Rosen (1969), Lupo (2006 & 2012), and Lossi (2012).

38 «A nerve stimulus first transformed into an image – the first metaphor! The image then reproduced in a sound – the second metaphor! And at each time a complete overlapping of the sphere concerned, right into the middle of an entirely new and different one» (TL 1, p. 256).

the organism, is «the prerequisite of all intuitions»³⁹. At this basic stage, the stimulus is given as something passive to perception, that immediately perceives it «*as an activity*»⁴⁰, and produces the intuition of causality: that is to say, instead of the stimulus itself we perceive it – by means of metonymy – as the action of our senses upon a thing in the external world that causes our perception. As seen above, here occurs the first transposition.

(1) In intuition the stimulus is metaphorically transferred into an image. The intuitive image is the *first metaphor*: «time, space and causality are only metaphors by which we interpret things for ourselves»⁴¹.

(2) At this stage of the process, language intervenes and transposes the intuitive images in word-concept, namely, «the image of the image»⁴². The linguistic-conceptual image is the *second metaphor*: «the concept comes into being through the equation of the non-identical: i.e. through the illusion that there is something identical, through the assumption of identities»⁴³.

As things stand, in Nietzsche's account of knowledge, the problem of truth arises only and solely at this linguistic level: «at this point what is

39 WEN 1873-1873, 23[10], p. 165.

40 *Ivi*, 19[209], p. 149.

41 *Ivi*, 19[210], p. 149.

42 *Ivi*, 7[175], p. 57.

43 *Ivi*, 23[11], p. 165.

henceforth to be called ‘truth’ is fixed, i.e. universally valid and binding designation of things is invented and the legislation of language supplies the first laws of truth»⁴⁴. The origin of truth is the result of two metaphoric transpositions and the invention of – and the agreement on – a designation of things⁴⁵, and, thus it has nothing to do with the essence of things. The so-called truth, for Nietzsche, simply «appears as a social need»⁴⁶ in the realm of morality; and precisely as a moral source, truth means a lot to human beings: «the highest and purest life is possible in the belief that one has the truth. The belief in truth is necessary for man»⁴⁷.

Given that, in “On Truth and Lie” Nietzsche aims to reject the paradigm of truth as correspondence, that is «the adequate expression of an object in the subject»⁴⁸: knowledge, both at the level of intuition and abstraction, is in fact only a metaphoric process, namely, the *inadequate* expression of the object⁴⁹. The linguistic domain of truth is the last stage and the final result of the metaphorization, and, as a such, is – so to speak – the most distant from the true nature

44 TL 1, p. 255.

45 Moreover, Nietzsche observes that at this moral stage, lie arises too, together with truth, as a contrary or, at least, different denomination. I will come back on this later with greater detail, because for Nietzsche poetry springs precisely from the possibility of lie, as a different denomination of things.

46 WEN 1872-1873, 19[75], p. 142.

47 *Ibidem*.

48 TL 1, p. 260.

49 See Section 1.1. of this paper.

of the object⁵⁰: (0) the external object interacts with us in a physiological level through a nervous stimulus, (1) which is metaphorically transferred in intuition and, then, (2) further transposed in the abstract dimension of words and concepts, in which truth arises out of convention as a moral need.

Each stage of the metaphorical process turns out to be a further estrangement of the subject from the object; and thus, abstract knowledge, by means of words and concepts, cannot grasp the truth, as the essence of things⁵¹.

(1) Nietzsche argues that the criterion of «correct perception»⁵² is self-contradictory and absurd: there is no perception, among the different perceptions of all sentient organisms, which is «more corresponding» to reality and, therefore, more true⁵³. And so, he concludes that «feeling

50 In this sense Nietzsche remarks that (0) the stimulus is – so to speak – closer to the essence of things: «the only thing given as such is the stimulus» (WEN 1872-1873, 19[209], 139) and not the word-concept, which is a second order metaphorization of it.

51 «We believe that we know something about the thing themselves when we talk about trees, colours, snow and flowers, and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things which do not correspond in the slightest to the original entities» (TL 1, p. 256).

52 *Ivi*, p. 260.

53 Here, Nietzsche adopts the first mode developed by the ancient sceptics to achieve the suspension of judgment (Sextus Empiricus, 2000, p. 13). On Nietzsche and the ancient sceptical tradition see Berry (2011). Moreover, Nietzsche in the notebooks compares the human perception with the vegetal perception as following: «To the plant the world is such – to us such and such. If we compare the two forces of perception, we regard our conception of the world as more correct, i.e. as more corresponding to the truth. (...) *To the plant the whole world is plant, to us man*» (WEN 1872-1873, 19[159], p. 138).

[*Empfindung*] nowhere leads to the truth, but is content to receive stimuli and, as it were, play blind games on the back of things»⁵⁴.

If the paradigm of truth as correspondence does not work at the level of intuition, *a fortiori* it does not work at the level of the second order metaphor, which is the result of a further transposition. Indeed, (2) Nietzsche claims that language is not «the adequate expression of all realities»⁵⁵ but only the human way to interpret the world for ourselves: in word-concept formation we arbitrarily simplify⁵⁶ the intuitive images in abstract and general unities that «do not correspond in the slightest to the original entities»⁵⁷. Nevertheless, language, as the product of instinct, is necessary to human beings because it allows individuals to communicate and find an agreement in order to preserve their lives in society.

Hence, Nietzsche concludes that ‘truth’ in a *moral sense* (i.e. the valid and binding designation of things) is in fact a lie in an *extra-moral sense* because it is not the adequate expression of the object, it does not say things as they are, it is only the metaphorical product

54 TL 1, p. 260.

55 *Ivi*, p. 255.

56 «As certainly the concept of leaf is formed by arbitrarily shelving these individual differences or forgetting the distinguishing features. This is what gives the impression that in nature, apart from leaves, there is such a thing as ‘leaf’. (...) We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking the individual and the real, while nature knows no forms or concepts and therefore no species either, but only an X which, for us, is inaccessible and indefinable» (*Ivi*, pp. 256-257).

57 *Ivi*, p. 256.

of our linguistic instinct. 'Truth', in its conceptual and linguistic form, is a lie in an *extra-moral sense* in so much as it presents itself as corresponding to things but is in fact only the human transfiguration of them for the construction of the *moral* world. In this sense, our greatest words-concepts (i.e. soul, god, good, etc.) are not true, they do not correspond to existent entities in nature; they are artistic creations of human beings, they are metaphors, namely, necessary lies about the essence of the world, which, nevertheless, orient our moral life.

In "On Truth and Lie" Nietzsche, having rejected the correspondence theory of truth, Nietzsche provides an alternative paradigm of truth, which is based on the poetical nature of language: truth is

a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, decorated and which, after lengthy use, seem firm, canonical and binding to a people: truths are illusions that are no longer remembered as being illusions, metaphors that have become worn and stripped of their sensuous force, coins that have lost their design and are now considered only as a metal and no longer as coins⁵⁸.

Truth, in Nietzsche's account, is the product of the «fundamental drive of man», «drive to create

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, p. 257.

metaphors»⁵⁹: that is to say, the human necessary tendency to poetically and rhetorically interpret the world to live in it. Thus, truth has nothing to do with the thing-in-itself but finds its origin in art and poetry, it is only appearance that – as seen in the first section, is forgotten to be an artistic creation and is taken as reality.

Having explained the metaphoric – and, in general, rhetoric – nature of truth, another key thing to notice in this sort of definition is that Nietzsche regards truth as a ‘mobile army of metaphors’, that, ‘after lengthy use’, has lost its dynamicity and force, and has been fixed in convention. This is a fundamental point of Nietzsche’s aesthetic paradigm of truth: the conflict between *creativity* and *convention*.

On the one hand, our linguistic products have an *artistic origin*: they are rooted in «the primal force of human imagination»⁶⁰ that constantly interprets – and reinterprets – the world creating new metaphors. In particular, the «architectural genius»⁶¹ of human beings consists in their exclusive capacity to transpose intuitive metaphors into words-concepts and, in doing so, to build the extremely complex human world. For Nietzsche, unlike other animals that are blindly driven by instinct, human beings are able and have to «manufacture» their own building-

59 *Ivi*, 2, p. 262.

60 *Ivi*, p. 259.

61 *Ibidem*.

blocks⁶²: whereas other animals' creativity is strictly bounded – and therefore limited – to instinct (i.e. spiders build their webs and bees their hives); human beings, conscious authors of their own webs of words-concepts, are freer to artistically create their world by means of language⁶³.

In this sense, the value of words-concepts, according to Nietzsche, is not grounded in their alleged truth (i.e. in their correspondence to the world): the world built by humans, through their linguistic instinct, is in fact not truer than the one built by spiders or bees, it is simply more complex. The value of words-concepts lies rather in their artistic force, namely, their power to create and change the human world. And so, Nietzsche's criterion to evaluate our 'truths' becomes that of advantage and disadvantage for human life. That is to say, the human beings' greatest task to create – and improve – the human world is not a matter of truth but rather a matter of art.

On the other hand, Nietzsche, here deeply influenced by Schopenhauer's epistemology, identifies a problem in the artistic creation of linguistic metaphors. In the process of abstraction the fluidity of intuitive metaphors is «petrified»: our intuitions are «caught (...), skinned, killed and

62 *Ibidem*.

63 See Bertino Andrea (2011), p. 3-34.

mummified (...) to be preserved as a *word-concept*»⁶⁴ for communicative purposes.

The word-concept – artistically produced by the fundamental drive to create metaphors in response to an actual need – simplifies⁶⁵ the richness of intuition, in order to be stored in consciousness and, then, communicated. Although abstraction is «extremely important» for human beings⁶⁶, Nietzsche remarks that in this process, in order to fix and share the second order metaphors, they unconsciously forget the metaphoric nature of their artistic products. From the word-concept formation, for Nietzsche, spontaneously follows the powerful belief that our denomination of things corresponds to the thing-in-themselves, and that our metaphors are in fact universal and valid truths:

Only the oblivion of that primitive world of metaphors, only the congealment and solidification of what was originally a hot and liquid mass of images and pouring out of the primal force of human imagination, only the invincible belief that *this* sun, *this* window, *this* table is a truth in itself –, in short, only

64 WEN 1872-1873, 19[226], p. 154-155.

65 «Every word immediately becomes a concept precisely because it is not intended to serve as a reminder of the unique, entirely individualised primal experience to which it owes its existence, but because it has to fit at one and the same time countless more or less similar cases which, strictly speaking, are never equal or, in other words, are always unequal» (TL 1, p. 256).

66 «Abstraction is an extremely important product. It is a lasting impression, captured and solidified in the memory, which fits very many phenomena and which therefore is very rough and inadequate to apply to any individual case» (WEN 1872-1873, 19[217], p. 151).

forgetting that he [man, LS] is himself a subject, and an *artistically creative* subject at that enable man to live with a degree of peace, certainty and consistency⁶⁷.

Hence, a word-concept is preserved as a mummy, only as a «*residue of a metaphor*»⁶⁸, which has lost its vividness and creative power; and so, it is labelled as true and taken as a real entity in the external world. In this way, abstraction leads to the concomitant process of conventionalisation: as soon as a metaphor is fixed, through language, in a word-concept to be communicated, it becomes a conventional truth, namely, a shared and habitual designation of things.

Convention, in Nietzsche's account of truth, is an inartistic force – opposed to poetic creation – that is, anyway, necessary to communicate and find an agreement in society: «society, in order to exist», obliges individuals «to use the customary metaphors» and to regard them as truths⁶⁹. Truth is therefore not only a second order metaphor – that does not correspond to things-in-themselves – produced by the human poetic forces, but also and unavoidably the product of conventionality, that is the agreed and habitual designation of things. As Nietzsche explicitly writes in a notebook from 1872-1873:

67 TL 1, p. 259.

68 TL 1, p. 258.

69 *Ivi*, p. 257.

In political society a firm agreement is necessary; it is based on the usual employment of metaphors. Any unusual employment upsets society, indeed destroys it. Thus employing every word as the mass does is a political convention and morality. Being true simply means not departing from the usual meaning of things. The true is that which is, in contrast to the non-real. The first convention concerns what is to be regarded as 'being'. But the drive to be true, transferred to nature, generates the belief that nature must also be true towards us. The drive for knowledge is based on this transference. What is first understood by 'true' is only what is usually the accustomed metaphor that is, only an illusion which has become habitual through frequent use and is no longer perceived as illusion: a forgotten metaphor, i.e. a metaphor which is no longer remembered as a metaphor.⁷⁰

In light of this, the alleged truth, as the universal and valid designation of things, is the product of the moral need of agreement and of the oblivion of its metaphorical nature. In the process of conventionalisation what is originally only a metaphorical interpretation of things is, unconsciously, fixed as the proper designation: through the shared habit of employing the same metaphors, we forget that we are operating only with our poetic creations. Thus, the *belief* in truth, necessary for human beings to live in society, is

70 WEN 1872-1873, 19[229], p. 155.

formed when we no longer remember – and perceive – our metaphors as metaphors⁷¹.

This for Nietzsche can be a problem. Although conventional truth makes society possible, he claims that the application of our belief in truth, which comes into being in morality, to the world is illegitimate⁷²: in doing so, «knowledge is merely working with the most popular metaphors»⁷³ and is reduced to passive repetition of the designation of things habitually accepted by the majority of people.

In the second section of “On Truth and Lie” Nietzsche argues that human creativity is anyway «barely tamed» by abstraction and conventionality⁷⁴: the human drive to create metaphors is, in fact, always operative in the fluid exchange between individuals and their environment, especially, at an intuitive level. He claims that this fundamental drive of human beings

Continually confuses the conceptual categories and cells by introducing new transferences metaphors and metonymies, and it continually reveals the desire to make the

71 «The most common metaphors, the usual ones, are now regarded as truths and as the standard by which to measure the rarer ones. Actually what prevails here is only the difference between habituation and novelty, frequency and rarity. Knowledge is merely working with the most popular metaphors, i.e. an imitation that is no longer perceived as imitation. Therefore it naturally cannot penetrate the realm of truth» (Ivi, 19[226], p. 154-155).

72 «Truth appears as a social need: through metastasis it is then applied to everything that does not need it» (Ivi, 9[175] p. 142).

73 Ivi, 19[226], p. 154-155.

74 TL 2, p. 262.

existing world of wreaking man as colourful, irregular, free of consequences, incoherent, delightful and eternally new, as the world of dreams⁷⁵.

In this scenario, lie acquires a fundamental philosophical relevance for Nietzsche. If truth, as seen above, consists in ‘the usual employment of metaphors’ that founds the social agreement, lie, on the contrary, is ‘the unusual employment of metaphors’ that ‘upsets’ and eventually ‘destroys’ society; and precisely for this reason, lie from a moral standpoint is regarded as something bad.

Nevertheless, in Nietzsche’s view, to lie, being untrue, means also to speak «in *forbidden metaphors* and outrageous combinations of concepts, in order to live up to the impression of the powerful present intuition in a creative manner, at least by shattering and deriding the old conceptual barriers»⁷⁶. In this sense, being untrue means departing from the usual meaning of things and has the positive effect of reawakening the human creativity imprisoned in convention⁷⁷. For Nietzsche the liar

uses the valid designations, the words, in order to make the unreal appear as real: he says, for example, ‘I am rich’, when the correct designation of this condition would be ‘poor’.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ *Ivi*, p. 263. On the critical and constructive power of metaphor see Kofman (1972/1993), p. 60 and Babich (2006), pp. 3-96.

⁷⁷ See Mayer Branco Maria João (2011), pp. 35-62.

He misuses the firm conventions by arbitrarily exchanging or even reversing the names. If he does this in a selfish and incidentally harmful way society will no longer trust him and he will be excluded as a result⁷⁸.

Not all the liars are, in fact, harmful. According to Nietzsche, some of them are extremely important⁷⁹, and this is the case of poets and artists: they are liars too⁸⁰, who 'make the unreal appear as real'. If the so-called truth is necessary for the stability of society and for the legitimacy of morality, Nietzsche argues that lie – meaning, the unreal, the realm of art and poetry – has the fundamental task to cultivate human beings and to drive them beyond the condition of mere survival towards the realm of culture and greatness⁸¹.

Poetry – and art in general – turns out to be a form of lie – the beautiful lie – grounded on the fundamental drive to create metaphors: human beings in state of poetry, by employing forbidden

78 TL 1, p. 255.

79 «The epic story-teller is allowed to lie, because in that area no harmful effects are to be expected. – Thus, where the lie is regarded as pleasant it is allowed: beautiful and grace of the lie, provided it does not harm. Similarly, the priest invents the myths of his gods: the li justifies their sublimity. It is extraordinary difficult to reawaken the mythical sense of the free lie. The great Greek philosophers still live entirely in this entitlement to lie» (WEN 1872-1873, 19[97], p. 122).

80 See, for example, Nietzsche's critique of poets who «take pleasure in lies» (HH 154) in *Human All Too Human*; and his notorious chapter "On Poets" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Zarathustra – a poet – claims that «poets lie too much» (Z II, p. 99-101).

81 «The foundations of everything great and living rest on illusion» (WEN 1872-1873, 19[180], p. 144).

metaphors, detach themselves from conventionality, and reclaim their creativity, their «stimulus»⁸² to reshape the human world⁸³. And in this, for Nietzsche, philosophy meets poetry: unmasking the metaphorical nature of truth, philosophy brings back human beings to their creative drive, so that, in the standpoint of poetry, the unreal, humans are in the position to criticise the present and «help to create the future»⁸⁴.

82 «But the rare and unusual is the more attractive – the lie is perceived as stimulus. Poetry» (*Ivi*, 19[226], p. 154-155).

83 This point is surprisingly made clear by Nietzsche in 1879, when he seems to resolve the quarrel between poetry and philosophy through science. In *Assorted Opinion and Maxims* (1879), he stresses the educative and creative role of ancient Greek poets against the decadence of the modern ones: «*Poets no longer teachers.* - Strange though it may sound to our age, there were once poets and artists whose souls were beyond the passions and their raptures and convulsions and who therefore took pleasure in purer materials, worthier men, more delicate combinations and resolutions. If today's great artists are mostly unchainers of the will and for that reason under certain circumstances liberators of life, those earlier artists were tamers of the will, transformers of animals, creators of men, and in general sculptors and remodellers of life: whereas the fame of those of today may lie in unharnessing, unfettering, destroying. The older Greeks demanded of the poet that he should be a teacher of adults: but how embarrassed a poet would be now if this was demanded of him – he who was no good teacher of himself and thus himself failed to become a fine poem, a fair statue, but at best as it were the modest, attractive ruins of a temple, though at the same time a cave of desires, overgrown with flowers, thistles and poisonous weeds, and dwelt in or haunted by snakes, reptiles, birds and spiders – an object inspiring sad reflections on why the noblest and most precious must nowadays grow up straightway as a ruin without any past or future perfection» (AOM 173).

84 Again in *Assorted Opinion and Maxims* (1879), Nietzsche assigns the poet the task to «help to create the future»: «*The poet as signpost to the future.* – That poetic power available to men of today which is not used up in the depiction of life ought to be dedicated, not so much to the representation of the contemporary world or to the reanimation and imaginative reconstruction of the past, but to signposting the future: – not, though, as if the poet could, like a fabulous economist, figuratively anticipate the kind of conditions nations and societies would prosper better under and how they could then be brought about. What he will do, rather, is emulate the artists of earlier times

In the second part of this paper, I will deal more extensively with the modality of this poetic creation.

2. Philosophy Meets Poetry in Culture for the Existential Task of the Affirmation of Life

2.1. The Quarrel Between Art and Science 'Through the Prism of Life'

In this section I will deal with "An Attempt at Self-Criticism", the 1886 preface to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, where Nietzsche retrospectively explains his thinking about the quarrel between art and science in 1872. Here, he asserts that at each stage of his philosophy his reflection on art and science in fact concerns the problem of life and that the quarrel must be understood as the conflict between two opposite attitudes towards life.

In "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" Nietzsche states that, although the metaphysical theory presented in his first philosophical attempt is untenable, he still

who *imaginatively developed* the existing images of the gods and imaginatively develop a fair image of man; he will scent out those cases in which, in the *midst* of our modern world and reality and without any artificial withdrawal from or warding off of this world, the great and beautiful soul is still possible, still able to embody itself in the harmonious and well-proportioned and thus acquire visibility, duration and the status of a model, and in so doing through the excitation of envy and emulation help to create the future» (*Ivi* 99).

identifies himself with its principle task: «*to look at science through the prism of the artist, but also to look at art through the prism of life*»⁸⁵. Sixteen years after the writing of his «impossible book»⁸⁶, Nietzsche continues to focus on the problem addressed in it: the quarrel between art and science in relation to life.

As he declares in retrospect, the great merit of *The Birth of Tragedy*, is to collocate the problem of science in the territory of art and life, on the one hand, by looking at science from the standpoint of art, and, on the other, by looking at art – and, thus, at science too – ‘through the prism of life’. Through this twofold look, in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche recognises science «as something problematic and questionable»⁸⁷ with regard to art and life, and, at the same time, aims to resolve that problem by means of art. But what is the problem of science that can be only detected within the standpoint of art? And what is the standpoint of art in relation to life?

The common response to these questions lies in a formula written down in a notebook from 1872-1873: «absolute knowledge leads to *pessimism*; art is the remedy against it»⁸⁸. Nietzsche’s philosophy, indeed, initiates as the attempt to overcome the Schopenhauerian problem of pessimism: «the consequence of recognising the absolute illogicality

85 BT, “Attempt”, 2.

86 *Ibidem*.

87 *Ibidem*.

88 WEN 1872-1873, 19[52], p. 110.

of the world order»⁸⁹. Pessimism is, for Nietzsche, an extremely dangerous way to think and evaluate the world, which deprives it of meaning and, ultimately, leads to negative and unhealthy attitudes towards life. And so, from the beginning of his philosophical career, Nietzsche, disciple of Schopenhauer, is mainly concerned with the problem of the justification of human existence against pessimism:, that is to say, how to affirm life in a world without aim [*Ziel*].

The Birth of Tragedy – and with it, the birth of the quarrel between art and science – is to be read in the light of the practical-existential problem of the affirmation of life. As Daniel Came has observed, Nietzsche focuses on art with practical-existential motives: «that is to say, Nietzsche was interested, not in the nature of art as such, but in the relationship between ‘art’ and ‘life’, and in the role that art can play in discharging the principle tasks he set himself as a philosopher – to identify the conditions of the affirmation of life, cultural renewal, and exemplary human living»⁹⁰.

Given that, science is, for young Nietzsche, a problem in so far as, by pursuing truth for truth sake, it does not take into account the existential need of aim in human life. He remarks that the uncontrolled drive to knowledge – in particular in the 19th century natural sciences – tends to disenchant the

89 *Ivi*, 3[51], p. 21.

90 Came (2014), “Introduction”, p. 1.

world by revealing the absence of a metaphysical ground in human existence and, in doing so, leads to pessimism. For this reason, Nietzsche, in his early writings, concludes that science, if not controlled and counterbalanced, produces dangerous effects on human culture and interferes with the artistic task of the affirmation of life.

The danger of science for life, according to Nietzsche, «cannot be recognised within the territory of science»⁹¹ but can be detected only in the territory of art, which its counterweight. As seen above, art is for Nietzsche the “remedy” against the pessimistic outcome of science and, as such, is directly connected to the affirmation of life.

Nietzsche makes this explicit in the conclusion of “On the *Pathos* of Truth” (1872): «art is more powerful than knowledge, because it wants life, while knowledge achieves as its ultimate goal nothing but – destruction»⁹². Hence, the fundamental task of art, in opposition to science, is nothing but the affirmation of life. Bernard Register has nicely spelled this point out: «through his productive life, Nietzsche repeatedly offers the suggestion that affirming life is coming to see it as *beautiful* – that is to say, that affirmation of life is essentially an aesthetic or artistic stance»⁹³.

91 BT “Attempt”, 2.

92 PT, p. 252.

93 Register Bernard, “Art and Affirmation”, in Came (2014), p. 14.

The Birth of Tragedy remains important for Nietzsche even in 1886, after his attempt of self-criticism, precisely because it identifies the crucial problem of the affirmation of life in the conflict between art and science. In the preface to the second edition of his book on tragedy, Nietzsche blames himself only for the naïve and controversial metaphysics of the artist presented as the ultimate resolution of the problem⁹⁴.

As things stand, after *The Birth of Tragedy* – and beginning from 1872-1873 – Nietzsche reinterprets art as the human (all too human) way to transfigure existence in order to live; and, in this non-metaphysical interpretative key, the tragic need for illusion is to be read as the human need of attaching a sense upon existence – which lacks sense – in order to affirm life⁹⁵. This, in Nietzsche's

94 Young Nietzsche – still deeply involved in Schopenhauer's philosophy and in Wagner's cultural ideal – attributes art to the metaphysical essence of existence, as it was created by an artist-like god: in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche famously claims that «art is the highest task and the true metaphysical activity of this life» (BT "Forward"; see also "Attempt" 5), and that «existence and the world appear justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon» (Ivi §5, p. 33; see also §23, p. 113; and "Attempt", 5, p. 8). According, in his metaphysics of the artist, art comes into being with the cosmic task «to complete and perfect existence and thus to seduce us into continuing to live» (Ivi §3, p. 24). On young Nietzsche's metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy* see Han-Pie (2006).

95 For example, in *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (1879), the first part of the second volume of *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche still assigns art «colossal task» to «beatify life, therefore make us ourselves endurable, if possible pleasing to others (...). Then, art is supposed to conceal or reinterpret everything ugly, those painful, dreadful, disgusting things which, all efforts notwithstanding, in accord with the origin of human nature again and again insist on breaking forth» (AOM 174). In *The Gay Science* (1881) he reaffirms the same point, parroting his motto in *The Birth of Tragedy*: «as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us» (GS 107). Or, for instance, in *On the Genealogy*

writings from 1872-1873, must be the fundamental artistic task of philosophy.

2.2. Is Philosophy an Art or a Science?

In 1872-1873 Nietzsche already begins to distance himself from the metaphysics of the artist presented in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and attempts to reformulate the problem of tragic philosophy in non-metaphysical terms. Hence, in the notebooks from this period he is particularly concerned with the problem of the nature and the role of philosophy in respect to the conflict between art and science, and the problem of the affirmation of life. Nietzsche asks himself whether philosophy is an art or a science: whether it pursues to create illusion or rather to unveil delusion. In a note drafted between summer 1872 and the beginning of 1873, Nietzsche provides the following response to these questions:

Great uncertainty as to whether philosophy is an art or a science. It is an art in its purpose and its production. But the means, i.e. representation in concepts, it has in common with science. It is a form of poetry. – It cannot be accommodated in any existing category: therefore we must invent and characterise a species for it. *The description of the philosopher's nature*. He knows

of Morals (1887) speaks of art as the realm «in which *lying* sanctifies itself and the *will to deception* has good conscience on its side» (GM III, 25). Again, in *Twilight of Idols* he asserts that art is «the need to make perfect» and that it «is the great stimulus to life» (TI “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, 9).

through creating poetry, and he creates poetry through knowing. (...) Philosophy does not take the same course as other sciences, even though some of the philosopher's domains are gradually transferred into the hands of science. (...) It is a poetic creation beyond the limits of experience, the continuation of the *mythical drive*; also essentially in images. (...) Overcoming knowledge through *mythopoeic forces*. (...) Most intimate relationship between *philosophers* and the *founders of religion*⁹⁶.

Bearing this in mind, Nietzsche concludes that philosophy cannot be ascribed either to art or science only: it is, in fact, a hybrid discipline composed both of art and science. Accordingly, as Nietzsche already suggests already in 1868, philosophy should be regarded as a sort of «conceptual poetry [Begriffsdichtung]»⁹⁷.

On the one hand, philosophy is an art in its purpose and production because it aims to affirm life, by the poetic creation of a «great and sublime» image of human beings and the world⁹⁸. Philosophy thus configures itself as a form of poetry in its practical and existential task to impose of a value upon existence beyond the mere physical world: and

96 WEN 1872-1873, 16[62], p. 112.

97 In a letter dated April-May 1868, Nietzsche, introducing the subject of his doctoral dissertation to his dear friend Paul Deussen, adopts Albert Lange's definition of philosophy as «conceptual poetry [Begriffsdichtung]». Here, Nietzsche states that philosophy cannot be taken as metaphysics (i.e. theory of the thing-in-itself), but only as a work of art (KSB 1868, 568, p. 269).

98 WEN 1872-1873, 19[51], p. 110.

so, the goal of philosophy is to nourish the realm culture, namely, the, «the rule of *art* over life»⁹⁹.

As George J. Stack has remarked «it is [Friedrich Albert] Lange who suggested to Nietzsche that philosophy is akin to art and poetry»¹⁰⁰: Nietzsche, in fact, derives his idea of philosophy as art from Lange's study of science in *The History of Materialism* (1866)¹⁰¹. Nietzsche borrows Lange's claim that XIX science – and in particular, natural science –, by focusing only on a materialistic approach, loses the overview of culture – that is, the aesthetic and moral ideal of the human life – and therefore fails to provide an aim [Ziel] for existence.

Science, ultimately, presents an image of the universe which is entirely unconcerned with human affairs, and, in doing so, leads to pessimism: by unveiling the absolute illogicality of existence, it pictures a scenario in which life is not desirable to be lived. For this reason, Lange in the last chapter of his book claims that the standpoint of science only does not cover the complexity of human life, and develops the notion of the standpoint of ideal.

Stack explains it as following:

Lange's standpoint of the ideal involves the deliberate projection of an aesthetically

99 *Ivi*, 19[310], p. 162.

100 Stack (1983), p. 20.

101 Nietzsche's reading of Lange's *The History of Materialism* in 1868 heavily influences his thinking about art and science. On Nietzsche's reading of Lange see Stack (1883).

conceived, imaginative, figurative 'truth' as a myth that will have a decidedly religious coloration to it. (...) What Lange proposes is the superimposition of an artistically formed, philosophico-religious ethical ideal on the massive knowledge and accomplishments of the exact sciences¹⁰².

The similarity between Lange's notion of the standpoint of ideal and Nietzsche's account of philosophy as poetry – presented above – is noteworthy¹⁰³: philosophy in its artistic task needs to take care of the existential dimension of human life – which is neglected by science – and create an aesthetic and moral standpoint of the ideal in defence of culture.

On the other hand, philosophy is a science in its means: that is to say, it deals with concepts. It is often argued that young Nietzsche is against science, however this is not completely true. Although his early writings mainly highlight the importance of art for the task of the affirmation of life, for Nietzsche, «it is not a question of destroying science, but of *controlling it*»¹⁰⁴. According to young Nietzsche, philosophy cannot embrace the goal of science

102 *Ivi*, p. 306.

103 See, for example, also «The reason why unprovable philosophising still has a value, indeed usually a greater value than a scientific proposition, lies in the aesthetic value of such philosophising (...) Even if it cannot prove itself as a scientific edifice, it is still present as a work of art» (WEN 1872-1873, 19[76], p. 116).

104 *Ivi*, 19[24], p. 99.

because «the uncontrolled drive to truth leads to pessimism» whereas «art is the remedy against it»¹⁰⁵; nevertheless, «there is *no philosophy apart, separate from science: in both, thinking occurs in the same way*»¹⁰⁶. Hence, philosophy is a science in so far as it involves the same conceptual means; but unlike science it is concerned with the aesthetic-moral ideal of greatness.

Given that, philosophy exceeds both art and science: it is an art but not only an art, and, similarly, it is a science but not only a science. For Nietzsche, philosophy has a twofold nature: «it is now science, now art»¹⁰⁷; and so, the quarrel between art and science is reproduced in the figure of the philosopher itself. Philosophy thus emerges precisely from the conflict between art and science and tends towards the reconciliation of the opposites in struggle.

By observing the emergence of philosophy in the ancient Greek culture, Nietzsche explains the birth of this new discipline as the need of a «supreme tribunal» with the crucial task to supervise the quarrel between art and science, «as it were, the security agency against all excesses»¹⁰⁸.

In this sense, when the mythical drive prevails, philosophy tends to restrain it by the «strengthening of the sense of truth as opposed to poetic creation»;

105 *Ivi*, 19[53], p. 110.

106 *Ivi*, 19[76], p. 116. See also «philosophical thinking belongs to the same species as scientific thinking» (WEN 1872-1873, 19[83], p.119).

107 *Ivi*, 23[8], p. 163..

108 *Ivi*, 19[73], p. 115.

on the other hand, when the drive for knowledge tyrannises, philosophy tend to restrain it by the «strengthening of the mystical and mystical, the artistic»¹⁰⁹. Or, in other words, «the philosopher alongside the man of science and the artist» has the task of «restraining the drive for knowledge by means of art, the religious drive for oneness by means of the concept»¹¹⁰.

In the years after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche develops a different conception of tragic philosophy: philosophy emerges from the conflict of art and science and takes up the role of moderator between the two, by drawing «knowledge into an artistic conception of the world»¹¹¹, and, vice versa, by drawing art into the critical standpoint of science¹¹².

Hence, philosophy, like the metaphysics of the artist, aims to remedy, through art, against the pessimistic outcome of science; nevertheless, unlike the metaphysics of the artist, it does so in a non-metaphysical way, through the help of science.

In the light of this, in 1872-1873 Nietzsche introduces the important figure of the philosopher of tragic knowledge:

109 *Ivi*, 23[14], p. 167.

110 *Ivi*, 19[72], p. 115.

111 *Ivi*, 19[52], p. 110.

112 «Truth can be considered only as a remedy against the hostile deceptions» (*Ivi*, 19[253], p. 161. In 1872-1873 Nietzsche already realises that too much art is, in fact, dangerous for life, because it creates a tyrannical illusion that ends up to posses its own creator and to turn her away from reality.

The philosopher of tragic knowledge. He does not restrain the uncontrolled drive for knowledge through a new metaphysics. He establishes no new faith. He feels that the removal of the ground of metaphysics from under foot is tragic and yet he can never be satisfied by the bright whirligig of the sciences. He is building a new life: he restores to art its rights. The philosopher of desperate knowledge will be absorbed by blind science: knowledge at all costs. For the tragic philosopher the image of existence is completed by the fact that the metaphysical only appears in anthropomorphic form. He is not a sceptic. Here a concept must be created: for scepticism is not the goal. The drive for knowledge, having arrived at its limits, turns against itself in order to proceed to a critique of knowledge. Knowledge in the service of the best life. One must want even illusion - that is where the tragic lies¹¹³.

The philosopher of tragic knowledge, unlike the metaphysician of art in *The Birth of Tragedy*, deals with science and with the twilight of metaphysics: for her, there is no alleged truth-in-itself that provides a ground for existence, there is nothing at all beyond physics. And, having realised the impossibility of metaphysics, the tragic philosopher does not want to establish a new one. She is no longer concerned with art as a metaphysical activity, and now she regards the metaphysical need, «which calls

113 *Ivi*, p. 103.

art into being to complete and perfect existence and thus to persuade us into continuing to live»¹¹⁴, as an anthropomorphic (i.e. human all too human) drive to interpret the world.

However, the tragic philosopher, unlike the philosopher of desperate knowledge, is not satisfied by science and its sceptical outcome: she recognises the danger caused by the lost of the metaphysical ground and by the lack of sense in existence. And so, in order to fight against pessimism, the philosopher of tragic knowledge turns to art with the purpose to create a new – non-metaphysical – image of the human being and the world, and, in doing so, to build a new culture and fully affirm life.

In another note from the same period, Nietzsche completes his account of the tragic philosopher of the future as following:

When metaphysics is eliminated, gradually many other things will once more appear *great* to mankind. I believe that philosophers will prefer different areas: I hope those in which they will have a salutary effect on the new culture. A *jurisdiction of greatness*, a 'naming' is connected with philosophy: 'this is great' the philosopher says, elevating man¹¹⁵.

Nietzsche assigns philosophy the fundamental task to create a new culture, a new ideal of greatness,

114 BT §3, p. 24.

115 WEN 1872-1873, 19[83], p. 119.

and, in doing so, to elevate human beings in a non-metaphysical background. The future philosophers, for Nietzsche, will be «creators of language»¹¹⁶: they will acknowledge the poetical essence of our cognitive medium and, accordingly, they will use it in an appropriate way. The future philosophers will not pursue truth for truth sake but will understand that «our salvation lies not in *knowledge* but in *creation*»¹¹⁷: they will take upon themselves the creative task to poetically re-write reality in order to affirm life.

In conclusion, after his naïve attempt at the metaphysics of art in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche realises that, before elevating mankind through a new artistic creation, philosophy needs to demolish the still solid ruins of the ancient metaphysical interpretation. And, in order to do so, philosophy must turn to science to direct its critical force against metaphysics. In these years, Nietzsche prepares the ground for his philosophical project of *Human All Too Human*, which aims to show that the alleged truth-in-itself is nothing but the product of the human (all too human) way to interpret the world, and, accordingly, that what mankind has believed to be the metaphysical world is in fact only an anthropomorphic creation. In this sense, even when Nietzsche's philosophy gets

116 *Ivi* 1874, 37[6], p. 201.

117 *Ivi*, 19[125], p. 130.

closer to science, it does not forget its artistic task: the scientific critique of the ancient products of art turns out to be a means of rediscovering the subdued creativity of human beings. Indeed, in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche states that

Only as creators can we [philosophers] destroy! – But let us also not forget that in the long run it is enough to create new names and valuations and appearances of truth in order to create new ‘things’¹¹⁸.

And also in his later writings – from Zarathustra to his last notebooks – Nietzsche still thinks that philosophy meets poetry in this creative task to cultivate humanity. In the notebooks from 1886-1887, for example, Nietzsche reaffirms that artistic role of philosophy is «to *posit goals* and mould reality accordingly; thus the *interpretation of the deed* and not merely its conceptual *rewriting*»¹¹⁹, because, ultimately, «truth is (...) not something that is there and must be found out, discovered, but something that must be made»¹²⁰.

118 GS 58.

119 WLN 1886-1887, 9[48], p. 151.

120 *Ivi* 1887, 9[91] p. 155.

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