Article

The Deceptiveness of the Verb *To Be* and the Conception of Metaphor in Nietzsche's Philosophy

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Abstract: This article aims to show the relevance of Nietzsche's philosophy of metaphor. Against the metaphysical tradition, Nietzsche understands that language develops from evolution and realizes that its fundament does not rest in logical principles but rather in metaphors, and that false beliefs derive from erroneous values. In order to understand the role of the verb "to be" in constructing false beliefs, I analyse Nietzsche's interpretation of Parmenides' philosophy of being. Nietzsche claims that the logical consequence of Parmenides' metaphysical thought, according to which our language descends from the true transcendent world, is that concepts represent the essence of things. I claim that, for Nietzsche, this belief is erroneous, as far as he states that there is no essence or substance, no transcendent world beyond the empirical one, which our language comes from. Our language as well as our knowledge derive from our body, which demonstrates that the body is one with the soul. Insofar as we develop our language by creating metaphors starting from our bodily sensations, Nietzsche considers metaphors as the fundament of our language and points out that they become concepts only to express the same meaning.

Keywords: Nietzsche, theory of metaphor, philosophy of language, metaphor and ethics

Almost one century after Nietzsche, one of the most relevant theorists of metaphor, George Lakoff, speculates whether our language is purely abstract and metaphysical (or transcendental, the term used here), or if our body and metaphors are the *conditio sine qua non* of language, by posing this question: "Do meaningful thought and reason essentially concern the nature of the organism doing the thinking—including the nature of its body, its interactions in its environment, its social character, and so

on?"[1] This study aims to show the reason why Nietzsche's thought is fundamental for the development of the theory of metaphor of the twentieth century, by focusing on such aspects of Nietzsche's thought as the empirical and naturalistic approach to speculation, the refusal of the hiatus between soul and body, of ontology and metaphysics, and finally the idea that our language is embodied.

Such speculation arises from an essential dichotomy within the Western tradition, in which the idea of the division between body and soul, subject and object, superficiality and depth is rooted: it has been fixed by Christianity and crystallized by the Cartesian separation between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, in which the body is considered a mere non-thinking machine. From this perspective, our language was conceived as having no connection with our body: Since it came to us from a transcendent dimension, it was seen as perfect in itself in purely theoretical terms. In the twentieth century, the attempts within the field of logic to create an impeccable enclosed system, in which language should be perfectly regularized, still adhered to the scheme of dualism. The perfection of language consisted in the idea that the identity of words and objects, which means that a word has only one meaning, exists: according to Wittgenstein's first conception of language as expressed in the *Tractatus*, where the philosopher writes that "in the proposition a name is representative of an object,"[2] that "objects can only be named" and that therefore, "signs are their representatives […] I can only speak *about* them."[3] Consequently, whenever it is possible to use a word in two or more different ways, as in everyday life, or whenever two words "that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way,"[4] errors and confusion are the result. This is the case in which the verb "to be" seems a copula, "as a sign for identity, and as an expression of existence"[5]; therefore, "in order to avoid such errors, we must make use of a sign-language that excludes them by not using … in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification."[6]

Even though in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein conceives language as founded on the homology (or formal identity) between words and facts, that is, between propositions and states of affairs, in the *Philosophical Investigations* he considers language as a cauldron of language-games, linked in a complex net by similarities of different linguistic families. Our language, in other

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[1] George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xvi.

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (London-New York: Routledge, 2010), §3.22, p. 15.

[3] *Ibid.*, §3.221, p. 15.

[4] *Ibid.*, §3.323, p. 18.

[5] *Ibid.*, §3.323, p. 18.

[6] *Ibid.*, §3.325, p. 19.

words, is created by a metaphorical process and it is described as labyrinth-like—"an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses."[7] All elements of this labyrinthine city are different language games, some of which linked by some sort of familiarity. In this metaphorical city, the homology between words and facts is only one language-game amongst many possible ones. By means of this change of perspective, Wittgenstein paves the way to the modern conception of metaphor considered as a cognitive process of the human being.

Aristotle was the first philosopher to understand that metaphor is not only a language figure but also a fundamental cognitive process, which permits to achieve that non-rigorous knowledge necessary to perform good actions, i.e., *phronesis* (wisdom). After centuries, during which it has been considered as a mere rhetorical ornament, metaphor was rehabilitated in the eighteenth century by Giambattista Vico, even though "only in the twentieth century did psychologists and linguists question and make further investigations into what Vico had examined."[8] As Christian Emden writes, even today authors who are interested in the philosophical study of metaphor rarely mention Nietzsche's position, and in general "the implications of his approach have not always been taken seriously—at least partly because his position is far from clear."[9]

The Nietzschean contribution is fundamental because his conception lays the foundation for modern thought by understanding that the importance of metaphor consists in a particular way to use the verb *to be*, thanks to which one can nullify the value of the concept of truth, the identity of words and things, the division between subject and object, body and mind, and senses and intellect. To sum up, according to Western traditional philosophy, we organize reality through categories and concepts, which are independent of the human body. This belief is described in synthesis by Damasio in *Descartes' error* as:

> the abyssal separation between body and mind, between
> the   sizable,   dimensioned,   mechanically   operated,

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[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), aph. 18, p. 8.

[8] "È solo nel ventesimo secolo che quanto esaminato da Vico è stato sottoposto ad ulteriori indagini da parte di psicologi e linguisti." Marcel Danesi, "Metafora e l'interconnessione dei sistemi rappresentativi: osservazioni su un recente volume sul ruolo della metafora nel pensiero e nella cultura," in *Rivista di studi italiani*, 17:2 (1999): 182.
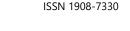
[9] Christian J. Emden, *Nietzsche on Language, Consciousness, and the Body* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 61.

> infinitely divisible body stuff, on the one hand, and the unsizable, unidimensioned, un-pushpullable, nondivisibile mind stuff; the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgment, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body.[10]

Because humans believe that the "capacity for disembodied reason" makes them different from animals, they maintain that their quintessence is transcendent reason and consequently believe that "our essential humanness has nothing to do with our connection to nature or to art or to music or to anything of the senses," but with the metaphysical world alone.[11]

At the time of Nietzsche, reason was generally considered the *noble* part of humans, i.e., the part that elevated them above the animal condition, ruled by the power of passions and material needs, to the condition of the divine. According to Nietzsche, Parmenides is the father of such a dichotomy, since he represents a watershed between two different ways of thinking: the pre-Socratic philosophy, above all Anaximander's view, according to which the Being and non-Being coexist; and Socratic philosophy. If at first Parmenides seems to follow Anaximander's philosophy,[12] he later on turns to the pure absolute abstraction of logics and affirms that only Being exists while Becoming does not: Being is *unity* or the good, while Becoming is *duality* or the illogical coexistence of good and evil. He arrives to deny the existence of the empirical world because it is characterized by the becoming in which there *are* good qualities like light, "fieriness, warmth, weightlessness, rarification, activity and masculinity"[13] and bad qualities that *are* the negation and the absence of the good ones. The system of values derived from this dichotomy is quite clear: *what is*, i.e., what *exists*, is good; *what is not*, i.e., what *does not exist* (the negation of what exists), is bad. Nietzsche states that Parmenides denies that the negation of a quality can *be real* (i.e., can *exist*), because if negation is ontologically *non-being*, it cannot therefore *be* anything: by following this logical inference, he establishes the tautology A=A (A *is* A)

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[10] Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Book, 1994), 249-250.

[11] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 21-22.

[12] Unlike the other Pre-Socratic thinkers, Anaximander believes that the principle of all things (*apereion*) is not something material like water or fire but rather the immaterial without limits; *apereion* semantically indicates both the infinite and what has no limits but is not immobile. In fact, the eternal movement of the *apereion* creates the opposites (hot-cold, wet-dry, and so on) and from them the world comes into being.

[13] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greek* (Washington: Regnery, 2001), §9, p. 72.

and states that "only total perversity of thinking" could have committed this "crime against logic"[14] by thinking that A = non A (A *is not* A). Moreover, what *is not* cannot be thought about, it does not therefore exist because only thinkable things are, and what exists cannot be destroyed or changed because in this case it would become "non-being." This logical reasoning leads to admit that the *it is* is unique, immutable, and eternal, while the *it is not* is multiple, mutable, and transient. From an epistemological point of view, the conflict between *to be* and *not to be* derives from the different knowledge that we acquire either from our senses or reason. Although by observing and experiencing the real world, Parmenides sees that it is composed by different and caduceus things, his reason forces him to admit that multiplicity does not exist. On the one hand, there is the truth of tautology and logical principles, like *tertium non datur*, according to which one thing either *is* or *is not*; on the other hand, there is mendaciousness, according to which the non-existent coexists with the existent, which is to say that both Being and Becoming exist. In Parmenides' view, such a logical confusion is created by our senses because they produce only illusions; therefore, "nothing may be learned from them" since "all the manifold colourful world known to experience, all the transformations of its qualities, all the orderliness of its ups and down, are cast aside mercilessly as mere semblance and illusion."[15]

From the Parmenidean division of real and illusory world derive the metaphysical traditional thought and the Christian religion that identifies the Being with God, or the eternal and stable truth. This idea is expressed by the proposition *God is that who is*, i.e., tautologically speaking, *God is the same as himself*: God is God. With the advent of Christianity, the figure of Christ resolves this contradiction, since as a man he is destined to die (thus representing Becoming), but as the son of God he is also destined to eternal life (thus embodying Being). The mortal part of Christ is the body, while the perpetual part is the soul that can be also called *nous* (intellect) or *psyche*. The separation between body and mind, as well as the positive value accorded to the latter, confirmed by the power of the logical identity, was thus definitively established. Eventually, by taking the habit of using the verb *to be* as the manifestation of substance (Being), concepts "instead of being corrected and tested against reality (considering that they are in fact derived from it) […] are supposed to measure and direct reality,"[16] and thinking has been identified with the Being. If reality is Being and Being is thought, then thought is reality and also possesses its characteristics like stability, universality, and undoubtedness; in other words, we are real because we

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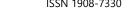
[14] *Ibid*, §10, p. 77.
[15] *Ibid*, §10, p. 79.
[16] *Ibid*, §12, p. 87.

think and not because we have a body, or, as Descartes states: *cogitamus ergo sumus*.

The metaphysical division between body and mind was based on a dualism that postulated limitedness, imperfection, partiality, and instability as the essential characteristics of the body; whereas, on the other hand, limitlessness, perfection, impartiality, and stability constituted transcendent reason. Because of reason, one can believe it possible to abstract oneself from the practical world, and by so doing, observe, evaluate and understand reality. By means of reason, one can believe to be able to grasp the essence of things and to describe them in an objective and universal way, thereby eventually attaining the *Truth*. Nietzsche is aware of the difficulty in extirpating such beliefs based on the power of the verb *to be* that creates the illusion of identity because, as Maturana and Varela wrote a few decades later, "we tend to live in a world of certainty, of undoubted, rock-ribbed perceptions: our convictions prove that things are the way we see them and there is no alternative to what we hold as true. This is our daily situation, our cultural condition, our common way of being human."[17] We are born into a predetermined system of traditional values, which we need to consider true since they cannot be questioned before we start believing that they are valid. As soon as we are born, we are trained to believe in the validity of these *truths* and not to doubt, even if they are misleading. In fact, for Nietzsche these so-called *truths* are nothing but artificial beliefs by which we represent and interpret the world.

Once they are acquired as true, these beliefs can be changed only by letting doubt filter into the mind. Doubt allows wondering whether what we have been taught is the *Truth* or something else; in other words, because of doubt, we have the possibility of reaching beyond the limit of metaphysics, i.e., of realizing that *ascertained Truth* is only a value created by us, a paradigm among a wide range of possible paradigms. According to Nietzsche, to be anchored in the paradigm of *Truth* has a moral value and means to live a decadent life.[18] The ethical responsibility of philosophers consists in

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[17] Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge. The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 18.

[18] According to Nietzsche, moral values have been created when the so-called slaves, viz., people who do not have the courage to accept the eternal return which would force them to carry the responsibility for what happens (knowing oneself, good and evil, the non-existence of God, and freedom), ruled over society with feelings of resentment against the gayness of life. Nietzsche writes in *The Genealogy of Morals*: "The revolt of the slaves in morals begins in the very principle of resentment becoming creative and giving birth to values – a resentment experienced by creatures who, deprived as they are of the proper outlet of action, are forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals, Good and Evils* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918), "Good and Bad," §10, p. 18. Moral values have been created not to give power to the best individual (a wise man who possesses courage, freedom, knowledge of himself, and is able to direct and create his own destiny, to carry the responsibility

unmasking false truths. In order to do that, they should stop using the verb *to be* as the metaphysical tool for establishing identities of words and objects, and they should rather use it as the metaphorical connection between different elements. By transferring the attention to this different perspective, philosophers would be able to destroy the metaphysical *Truths* and to open the door to radical renovation. From Nietzsche's perspective, philosophers must neither follow nor create systems, truths and values; instead, their activity should be the therapy that permits to discover and extirpate errors and false beliefs. Philosophy must "emphasize the *relativity* and *anthropomorphic* character of all knowledge, as well as the all pervasive ruling power of *illusion*."[19] Philosophical activity is a constant process of self-education that proceeds not by logical deductions but "by means of metaphor."[20] Unfortunately, according to Nietzsche, philosophers very often fail to do this because they cannot get rid of the weight of the traditional language of ontology and of its consequent moral system of values that in *Zarathustra* are metaphorically referred to as "lead-drop thoughts."[21] This impediment derives from the lack of sense for history, from a refusal to accept the *becoming*, from a need to find a cause-effect relationship in everything, and from an inclination to conceive things *sub specie aeterni.* By thinking thus, such philosophers "kill and stuff the things they worship, these lords of concept idolatry—they become mortal dangers to everything they worship."[22] Rather than admitting the impossibility of perceiving and knowing the substance of things that do not exist, these philosophers state that the cause of this impossibility lies in the limitations of the body and senses: the latter are fluid and prevent us from seeing the truth that is eternal, universal and fixed. The moral motto that derives from this metaphysical

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for his own life and who does not feel hatred or desire of revenge and who finally loves life as expression of the unity of body and mind) but to that who "is nether sincere nor naïf, nor honest and candid with himself" (*ibid.*, *19*-20). The slaves conduct a decadent life because they scarify the life itself by believing in another world where they will one day be happy as pure immortal spirits. Because of the fear of the unknown, diversity and death, they reject the power to will that instead moves human beings to change and to evolve. They create values founded on the idea of a division of body and soul, interior and exterior, true and false, feelings and reason. Decadence, therefore, is characterised by blind belief in the transcendent truth of moral values that, being against nature, deny life.

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Philosophe: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge," in *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/StruggleBetweenArtAndKnowledge/ThePhilosopher_djvu.txt>, aph. 41.
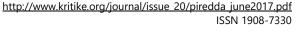
[20] *Ibid.*, aph. 90.

[21] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124.

[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 167.

view calls on people to "get rid of sense-deception, becoming, history, lies … say no to everyone who believes in the senses … and above all, get rid of the body, this miserable *idée fixe* of the senses! Full of all the errors of logic, refuted, impossible even, although it is imprudent enough to act as if it were real."[23] Moreover, philosophers tend to confuse the *last* thing (the abstract truth of the concept) with the *first* thing (the sensation), since they do not suppose it possible that supreme values might derive from something inferior to them. Thus, at the end of the process of abstraction from a thing to a word, there is a total revolution which "is the last, emptiest, most meagre idea of all, and it is put first, as cause in itself, as *ens realissimus*."[24] Finally, philosophers are wrong in thinking that there is causality between subjects and objects, since these are linked only by an *aesthetic* relationship which is "an allusive transference, a stammering translation into a quite different language. For which purpose a middle sphere and mediating force is certainly required which can freely invent and freely create poetry."[25]

For Nietzsche, we cannot attain objective knowledge because there is no metaphysical place or omniscient mind where objective knowledge, including our language, is stored. What we call knowledge is only an interpretation made by humans, forged by our senses, feelings, and perceptions; and human language is not poured into the brain from outside but depends on the evolution of the human being.[26] However, they tend to

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[23] *Ibid.*, 167.

[24] *Ibid.*, 169.

[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," in *The Birth of Tragedy. And Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 148.

[26] As Emden demonstrates in *Nietzsche's Naturalism*, Nietzsche was deeply interested in the nineteenth-century science by which he was definitely influenced, above all by Darwin's theory of evolution. Nevertheless, Nietzsche did not share with the English naturalist the idea that evolution is caused merely by natural selection. According to Emden, however, Nietzsche has not an anti-Darwinian position, because he "is highly critical of popular Darwinism, in particular its social and political conclusions." Christian Emden, *Philosophy and the Life Sciences in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 43. From the biological point of view, since organisms have to constantly find strategies in order to stay in homeostasis, they have to adapt to their environment. The human being is a complex organism shaped in depth by culture and by social rules. By taking into account these premises, Nietzsche discerns between those who have the will only to live, viz., a fable and sick form of life aimed at adaptation, conservation and stabilization of existence; and those who possess the will to power, which urges the human being to evolve, viz., to know and to realise him-herself. This individual is not that who gains the upper hand in society, but the best, who freely provokes a gap between him-herself and the mass of mediocre individuals. For Nietzsche, therefore, evolution is caused not only by the principle of natural selection because the role of our environment is not sufficient to elucidate how variation happens: evolution is caused also by the will to power. Eventually, Nietzsche substitutes the moral values of our society with the values of naturalism *stricto sensu*. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes: "Every naturalism is morality – which is to say: every healthy morality – is governed by an instinct of life […] but anti-natural morality, on the other hand, which is to say almost every morality that has been taught, revered, or preached so far,

forget what the origin of language is and to convince themselves that language descends from the metaphysical Platonic world. According to this perspective, there exist two different kinds of concepts: those which we discover through experience (*a posteriori*), and those which are innate in our mind and represent what is fixed, eternal and objectively true (*a priori*). It is clear that the exclusion of the body and senses in favour of an ontological and metaphysical conception of knowledge leads to consider the observing subject as separate from the observed object, and to admit the existence of a univocal language founded on logical principles and on the correspondence between words and things. Nietzsche does not deny that words can represent things; for example, the word *table* represents an object that is constituted by a surface and four legs on which it is possible to place things, but Nietzsche denies that the word *table* can be used *only* to represent a table, i.e., that it represents (or *is*) the substance of the object "table." By denying that names are the *ousia* (Being), Nietzsche calls into question the validity of the metaphysical system that confers a value of truth on the word, according to which the word is not a mere conventional expression, but the truth. From this perspective, if a word has no *relationship of identity* with the object, it must then be deceitful and false. In Nietzsche's view, this conception of language is completely inappropriate and false, insofar as it implies that the word is an ontological expression for the thing. It also implies that the subject should not only be in an ontological relation with an object, but that the subject should also hold the predominant position, from which he can observe the object and seize its substance. This is impossible for Nietzsche, as he expresses in *The Will to Power*:

> The logical-metaphysical postulates, the belief in substance, accident, attribute, etc., derive their convincing force from our habit of regarding all our deeds as consequences of our will—so that the ego, as substance, does not vanish in the multiplicity of change. But there is no such thing as will. We have no categories at all that permit us to distinguish a "world in itself" from a "world of appearance." All our categories of
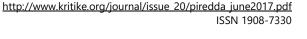
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explicitly turns its back on the instincts of life – it condemns these instincts." Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, "Morality as Anti-Nature," §4, p. 174. For a deeper insight into the relationship among Nietzsche, naturalism and evolutionism I suggest Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche. Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and Ronald Osborn, *Humanism and the Death of God: Searching for the Good After Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

reason are of sensual origin: derived from the empirical world.[27]

If we wanted to continue to use the concept of substance and to affirm that the name is indeed the essence of the object, then we would be admitting that the essence should be limited to the most commonly used meaning, since the word can be effectively used in different ways and with different meanings. The problem is that we use the same grammatical form, *is*, to represent different things, among which the logical identity of word and object (the table *is* red) coexists with the metaphor (the sea *is* a table). From the point of view of logic, the link of the two metaphorical members realized by the verb *to be* is a contradiction that creates confusion and falsity, since it affirms that *A is A* but also that *A is –A* (that A is not identical to A), because there is no relationship of identity between the word and the object. Consequently, if one for example affirms that *children are men*, one speaks the *truth* because *children* as a subcategory of *men* (the human being in general) stays in a relationship of identity with *men*; but if one affirms that *children are angels*, one speaks the *false* because *children* is not a subcategory of *angels*. For Nietzsche, this kind of reasoning is highly problematic, if not misleading, because it is set on an already given value of the verb *to be*. For Nietzsche, the etymology of the concept of *being* reveals not a metaphysical but rather an empirical birth since the verb *esse*, in his opinion, originally meant *to breathe*. He writes that man "comprehends their existence [of things] as a 'breathing' by analogy with his own" and even if the "original meaning of the word was soon blurred" it is still clear that "man imagines the existence of other things by analogy with his own existence."[28] Practically, it happens that man "projects his conviction that he himself breathes and lives by means of a metaphor, i.e., a non-logical process, upon all other things."[29] One believes that the verb *to be* creates *real* identity, while it only expresses connections and relationships between things; also, "the 'is' in a synthetic judgment is false; it includes a transference. Two different spheres, between which there can never be an equation, are placed next to each other."[30]

Moreover, Nietzsche thinks that contradiction does not exist in nature but is rather a merely useful principle for communicating effectively; if one cannot simultaneously affirm and deny the same thing, it is only because one lacks the ability to do it. In fact, the principle of contradiction, considered as the most certain one, presupposes an already given definition

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[27] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1968), aph. 488, p. 270.

[28] Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greek*, §11, p. 84.

[29] *Ibid*., §11, 84.

[30] Nietzsche, "The Philosophe: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge," aph. 152.

of reality, according to which "opposite attributes could not be ascribed to it. Or the proposition means: opposite attributes should not be ascribed to it. In that case, logic would be an imperative not to know the true, but to posit and arrange a world that shall be called true by us."[31] Thus, logical principles are not the innate fundaments of our language; they are instead the instruments with which we can create a linguistic interpretation of reality: "Logic is the attempt to comprehend the actual world by means of a scheme of being posited by ourselves; more correctly, to make it formulatable and calculable for us."[32] The fact that people need to believe in logic and in its principles and categories demonstrates "only their usefulness for life, proved by experience: not something that is true."[33] Therefore, the belief that one can possess the essence of things by means of language, and that it is possible to state a truth about reality, is in itself false: "We believe that when we speak of trees, colours, snow, and flowers, we have knowledge of the things themselves, and yet we possess only metaphors of things which in no way correspond to the original entities."[34]

For Nietzsche, there exists no ontological link between subject and object, or between word and thing. No concept is innate in us, all conceptual thought instead derives from our way of perceiving and interpreting reality; it derives from our ability to see connections, similarities and dissimilarities amongst things, since "all the knowledge which is of assistance to us involves the *identification of things which are not the same*, of things which are only similar. In other words, such knowledge is essentially illogical."[35] This means that the ground of knowledge is the net of the analogical associations in which objects can no longer be conceived as things in themselves, but as things connected with each other into a net of relationships. Since the word indicates "the most general relationship which connects all things, as does the word 'nonbeing'," we can use the verb *to be* to indicate different meanings: "I may say of a tree that 'it is' in distinction to things which are not trees; I may say 'it is coming to be' in distinction to itself seen at a different time; I may say 'it is not,' as for example in 'it is not yet a tree' when I am looking at a shrub."[36] To ground language and knowledge into analogical associations coming from our bodily experience, basically consisting of emotions and sensations,[37] also means to deny another deceitful metaphysical value, namely the supremacy

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[31] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aph. 516, p. 279.

[32] *Ibid.*, aph. 516, p. 280.

[33] *Ibid.*, aph. 507, p. 276.

[34] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," 144.

[35] Nietzsche, "The Philosophe: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge," aph. 150.

[36] Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greek*, §11, p. 83.

[37] This will also ground the thesis of *Descartes' Error*, where Damasio claims that it is not possible to talk about consciousness without taking into account emotions and feelings.

of the human being due to his reason, from which a further dichotomy is derived: according to this vision of life, passions and sensations of the body diminish the human toward the animal state, while reason elevates it toward the perfection of God. The gulf between these visions is clear: sensation/ irrationality/descending/evil are opposed to reason/rationality/rising/good. Nietzsche is aware that attributing primacy to the rational faculty and to the soul serves to mask the decadence of our society and to create the illusion of a state of stability necessary to keep our social equilibrium alive. In practical terms, when concepts are not used to enhance the comprehension of the net of relationships that constitutes our reality, but are rather conceived as the representation of the essence of things, they therefore create confusion. Amongst *erroneous* concepts, Nietzsche also includes those that are logical, since "certain and clear concepts allow the sick some hope: they find the order and stability reassuring. Thus, many of our thought patterns provide us with comfort. Logic, for example, convinces us that the world is predictable and orderly."[38] Knowledge begins with the senses and develops by two analogical steps: "the stimulation of a nerve is first translated into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor. And each time there is a complete leap from one sphere into the heart of another new sphere."[39] The first passage leads from a sensorial perception to an image; the second from an image to a word. This double passage involves different abilities, such as the aesthetic recognition of forms, and memory, and consists precisely in seeking out "some likeness between one thing and another, to identify like with like. *Memory* lives by means of this activity and practices it continually. *Confusion* (of one thing with another) is the primal phenomenon. This presupposes the *perception of shapes*."[40] In other words, knowledge is a network of metaphors in which "the most accustomed metaphors, the usual ones, now pass for truths and as standards for measuring the rarer ones. The only intrinsic difference here is the difference between custom and novelty, frequency and rarity."[41]

Nietzsche develops his view of the function of metaphor in the notes for a book which he never finished, the *Philosophenbuch* (*The Philosopher*, 1872-1875), and in his two short essays *Über das Pathos der Wahrheit* (*On the Pathos of Truth*, 1872) and *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn* (*On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense*, 1873). In these books, Nietzsche affirms that

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[38] Paul F. Glenn, "The Politics of Truth: Power in Nietzsche's Epistemology," in *Political Research Quarterly*, 57:4 (2004): 577.

[39] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," 144.

[40] Nietzsche, "The Philosophe: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge," aph. 144.

[41] *Ibid.*, aph. 149.

"*knowing* is nothing but working with the favourite metaphors",[42] and that knowledge is the habit of using some metaphors instead of others. By being repeatedly used to express one same meaning, metaphors become stable images archived in the memory as abstract schemata, in which all particular characteristics of singular objects are lost: "the *omitting* of what is individual provides us with the concept, and with this our knowledge begins: in *categorizing,* in the establishment of classes. But the essence of things does not correspond to this: it is a process of knowledge which does not touch upon the essence of things."[43] When the original impression of data deriving from the senses is transformed, it is "petrified for this purpose; it is captured and stamped by means of concepts. Then it is killed, skinned, mummified and preserved as a concept."[44] This process is necessary because abstraction is a fundamental way for humans to create language, since "it is compatible with very many appearances and is for this reason very rough and inadequate to each particular appearance."[45] When the object is completely stripped of its characteristics and is represented as a general and abstract image, new metaphors cease to occur because when we experience the object again, it is immediately represented in our brain by an already given image/concept: "All the forms which the brain and the nervous system have once produced are often repeated in the same way from then on. The same nervous activity produces the same image again."[46] Thus, what we call knowledge is the crystallization of original metaphors into schemata, which constitute a sort of model with which we interpret the world. Concepts are necessary because without them it would not be possible to attain any knowledge. However, this does not mean that we must consider them true and that we should consequently consider metaphors false. Concepts are born from an intuition that was at first a metaphor derived from the body and created by the imagination, which for Nietzsche "consists in the *quick observation of similarities*."[47] In a second moment, we attribute to metaphor values: from this moment on, we think that the metaphor represents something true, stable, and universal. In other words, as soon as we start attributing always the same meaning to one metaphor, we also start using it as a concept and it thus becomes a stable knowledge within or system of values. Actually, what we call truth is nothing but the remains of the original unstable movement of metaphors:

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[42] *Ibid*., aph. 149.
[43] *Ibid*., aph. 150.
[44] *Ibid*., aph. 149.
[45] *Ibid*., aph. 144.
[46] *Ibid*., aph. 66.
[47] *Ibid*., aph. 60.

> What, then, is truth? A movable army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical, and blinding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins.[48]

The need of humans for believing in something eternal and true comes to be the necessary lie to hide the fact that our language is produced by us, for us, "with the same necessity with as a spider spins … All that conformity to law which we find so imposing in the orbits of the stars and chemical processes is basically identical with those qualities which we ourselves bring to bear on things, so that what we find imposing is our own activity."[49]

By grace of the illusion in believing that the stability of logical principles founds language, the risk of making confusion is actually considerable. We create this kind of mistake almost automatically because, being used to employing language in a fixed and structured way, we forget that the process of its formation is metaphorical and we use no longer the verb *to be* as a means to connect different elements in metaphors but as the ontological expression of identity:

> Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor, only by virtue of the fact that a mass of images, which originally flowed in a hot, liquid stream from the primal power of the human imagination, has become hard and rigid, only because of the invincible faith that this *sun*, this *window*, this *table* is a truth in itself – in short because man forgets himself as a subject, and indeed as *an artistically creating* subject, does he lives with some degree of peace, security, and consistency.[50]

On account of habituation, one forgets "the conventional origin of language, truth, values and forms of life, by enclosing them within traditions and customary habits that are silently accepted and shared…habit permits

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[48] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," 146.

[49] *Ibid.*, 150.

[50] *Ibid.*, 148.

the definitive consolidation of linguistic meanings and truths, and this all happens because their artificial and illusory origin has been forgotten."[51] One can say that "all explaining and knowing is actually nothing but categorizing"[52] meant to create strong knowledge in order to prevent instability and incertitude. Therefore, if we were aware of how we begin to know, we would notice that even if we believe that our knowledge and language are created by rationality, they actually form in an illogical (or better pre-logical) way and that the body and senses play a fundamental role in this process.[53] As Christian Emden notes:

> Nietzsche implicitly suggests that the figurative quality present in the early stages of linguistic development has not been lost completely, and although most aspects of the eighteenth-century debate were marked by the belief that one can observe a shift from myths to logos in the history of thought and language, Nietzsche had to contend that myth, and therefore metaphor, remained prominent paradigms of conceptual thought.[54]

In conclusion, after having analised the problem of the link between the dichotomy concerning soul and body in western society and the role of the verb *to be* and the relationship between the latter and knowledge, one can affirm that for Nietzsche the verb *to be,* and in particular in its third-person form *is*, a number of perils hide, which can produce misleading knowledge that could be difficult to extirpate after it becomes dogmatic. Nietzsche's interpretation of metaphor unfolds a reflection fundamental for clearly recognising mistakes that bring us to believe that the false is true. Nietzsche's observations on metaphor permit us, therefore, to undertake that endeavour aimed at *showing the fly the way out from the bottle* because, as Wittgenstein writes:

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[51] Francesco Tomatis, "Introduzione," in *Su verità e menzogna* (Milano: Bompiani, 2006), 14.

[52] Nietzsche, "The Philosophe: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge," aph. 141, 47.

[53] We see colours, we hear sounds, we perceive spatiality as up and down, left and right, and so on because our body is made in a determined form. Other animals perceive spatiality in a different way and see and hear different colours and sounds because their form of life and their body are different: Nietzsche writes that "if we could communicate with a midge we would hear that it too floats through the air with the very same pathos, feeling that it too contains within itself the flying centre of this world." Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," 141. Our language and knowledge too, therefore, derive from our body: according to Nietzsche, in origin, they are "The stimulation of a nerve is first translated into an image: first metaphor! The image is then imitated by a sound: second metaphor" (*ibid.*).

[54] Emden, *Nietzsche on Language, Consciousness, and the Body*, 64.

> So long as there is a verb "be" that seems to function like "eat" and "drink", so long as there are adjectives "identical," "true," "false," "possible," so long as there is talk about a flow of time and an expanse of space, etc., humans will continue to bump up against the same mysterious difficulties, and stare at something that no explanation seems able to remove.[55]

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[55] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript TS213* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), §312e, p. 424.

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