

A Nietzschean Critique of Metaphysical Philosophy

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Abstract: This article provides a new account of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysical philosophy. After framing Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical project (Section 1), I suggest that to understand the logic of his critique we should reconstruct a taxonomy which distinguishes between 'rich metaphysics' and 'thin metaphysics' (Section 2). I then consider Nietzsche's methodological critique of 'rich metaphysics', arguing that his position, which alleges motivational bias against 'rich metaphysics', is not compelling, since even granting that previous 'rich metaphysicians' exemplified such bias there is no necessity to a new 'rich metaphysician' doing so (Section 3). Nonetheless, there is much of interest in the second aspect of Nietzsche's critique, understood in terms of indifference to 'thin metaphysics', which I consider in Section 4. I argue that the existing readings are unsatisfactory, and as an alternative we should think of this idea in sceptical terms by drawing on an argument from 'thin metaphysical' disagreement.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Rich Metaphysics, Thin Metaphysics, Metaphysical Indifference, Scepticism, Disagreement

Introduction

Peter Poellner has recently written that 'one of the interpretative issues that has traditionally divided interpreters of Nietzsche's philosophy is whether Nietzsche is, fundamentally, or at least among other things, a metaphysician. In asking this question, I take it that we are asking whether Nietzsche asserts a view about the basic characteristics or properties of reality, or of all entities'.¹

If we look at the published works from 1878 onwards the answer seems to be no, as he is persistently critical of the project of traditional metaphysics, broadly (for now) understood as providing knowledge about the basic characteristics of what exists at the most fundamental level of reality. Not only does Nietzsche seemingly refrain from providing any comprehensive metaphysics, but he says ‘all positive metaphysics is an error’ (*HH* 20).² In works of the 1880s he asks ‘what is “appearance” to me now! Certainly not the opposite of some essence – what could I say about any essence except name the predicates of its appearance’ (*GS* 54). In *Beyond Good and Evil* he claims metaphysical philosophers ‘all act as if they have discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic[...][when in fact] they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract – and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact’ (*BGE* 5), adding that ‘to explain how the strangest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really come about, it is always good[...]to begin by asking: what morality is it (is *he* -) getting at?’ (*BGE* 6). Later in *Twilight of the Idols* his critical attitude to metaphysics reaches its apex. He claims that ‘for thousands of years, philosophers have been using only mummified concepts, nothing real makes it through their hands alive[...]they all believe, desperately even, in being’ (*TI* III 1), and ‘being is an empty fiction’ (*TI* III 2). He also charts a progression through various metaphysical positions on the nature of the ‘True World’ [Wahre Welt], documenting the ‘history of an error’, concluding that ‘the true world is gone’ and ‘we got rid of the illusory world along with the true one’ (*TI* ‘How The “True World” Finally Became a Fable’ [hereafter *TI* ‘Fable’]).³

One interpretative position suggested by these passages is that Nietzsche is sceptical about the project, undertaken by both historical and contemporary philosophers, of attempting to show that metaphysical beliefs are candidates for knowledge by arguing that they are true, and rationally

justified.⁴ So, as well as opposing the metaphysics of particular philosophers (typically Plato, Kant, and Schopenhauer), it could be argued that Nietzsche thinks there is something problematic about the metaphysical enterprise as such.⁵ This latter claim is important if he is to be thought of as anti-metaphysical in something resembling a contemporary sense; it is now commonplace, and correct, to think that the denial of a metaphysical claim (e.g. there are no unchanging substances) is a metaphysical claim. One feature of the above passages is that they are not obviously denials of metaphysical claims in this sense (i.e. ‘negative’ metaphysical claims); rather Nietzsche seems to question the legitimacy of metaphysical inquiry and some of the key concepts that constitute it. Note, I am not suggesting this is the only way such passages can be read, but rather a *prima facie* interpretative position one might draw from them (I provide more context for my reading of these passages as supporting my interpretation in the main sections of the article).⁶

However, the aim of this article is not merely to suggest Nietzsche is recognizably anti-metaphysical in the above sense, but that he has a distinctive way of carving up and criticising metaphysical philosophy. My main thesis is as follows: we can make a distinction in Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysical philosophy – in a way not sufficiently recognised in the literature – between what I call ‘rich metaphysics’ and ‘thin metaphysics’ (I define these different types of metaphysics in Section 2). Furthermore, once we make this distinction we can also see that Nietzsche has different critical responses to the different types of metaphysics. I argue that he engages in a ‘methodological critique’ of ‘rich metaphysics’ and recommends indifference to ‘thin metaphysics’. With regard to Nietzsche’s metaphysical indifference I argue that none of the existing interpretations are satisfactory and suggest an alternative sceptical reading, drawing on an argument from ‘thin metaphysical’ disagreement. If my interpretation of Nietzsche’s critique

of metaphysics is correct, he provides us with a set of distinctions for identifying what kind of metaphysics we are dealing with, and suggests means by which we might criticize them. This seems a modest achievement, however in a historical and contemporary context in which metaphysical views often strain common sense, it is important to have ways of gaining clarity on their nature and potential ways of criticising them; Nietzsche, so interpreted, provides us with distinctive materials for this task.

The discussion proceeds as follows. Section 1 provides the necessary framing for a discussion of Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical position. Section 2 argues that to understand the logic of his critique we can reconstruct a taxonomy which distinguishes between 'rich metaphysics' and 'thin metaphysics'. Section 3 considers his methodological critique of rich metaphysics, arguing that his position, which alleges motivational bias against 'rich metaphysics', is not compelling. Finally, Section 4 considers the second aspect of Nietzsche's critique, understood in terms of indifference to 'thin metaphysics'.

1. Framing Nietzsche's Anti-Metaphysical Project

Understanding Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical position requires an account of both (1) his conception of metaphysical philosophy and (2) the argumentation given for his critical stance towards it. The importance of clarifying (1) should not be underestimated. If, for example, Nietzsche believes there is only one type of metaphysics, and that all tokens of that type share in the same error, then although, from an interpretative standpoint, it might make sense to say he regards the 'metaphysical enterprise' to be problematic, we might question whether Nietzsche has shown that; even if we accept whatever criticisms he has of metaphysics we would require a separate argument for thinking metaphysics is exhausted by whatever characterization he gives

of it. If no such argument were forthcoming then the logical space would admit varieties of metaphysics to which his criticisms do not apply, and there might even be room for Nietzsche to offer his own metaphysics, as long as it fell outside the remit of the traditional ‘metaphysical enterprise’.⁷ So, depending what we put into (1), the claim that Nietzsche thinks there is something problematic about the metaphysical enterprise might be correct only in a qualified sense.

I want to present an alternative to such a qualified view of Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics. One of the central claims of this article is that Nietzsche distinguishes between different types of metaphysics – one of which I call ‘rich metaphysics’, and the other ‘thin metaphysics’ – in a way which arguably exhausts the logical space of possibilities for types of metaphysics, as views about the ‘basic characteristics of reality...or of all entities’.⁸ So, specifying (1) turns out to be a more complex task than it might first appear. Concerning (2), and building on this taxonomy, I also claim his critique consists of two aspects: first an attempt to refute ‘rich metaphysics’ and second, that we should be indifferent to ‘thin metaphysics’ – as such Nietzsche has different critical responses to different types of metaphysics.⁹

Before specifying these types of metaphysics in Section 2, I want to address a qualification to the picture presented so far of Nietzsche as an anti-metaphysical philosopher. Nietzsche’s notebooks of the 1880s, which were later collated by his sister and named *The Will to Power*, contain numerous metaphysical reflections. Some interpreters, at times drawing nearly exclusively on this material, have presented Nietzsche’s *will to power* thesis as his metaphysical *tour de force* – that is, as a characterization of all reality at the fundamental level. There he says, ‘and do you know what “the world” is to me?[...] *This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!*’ (KSA 11:38[12]).¹⁰ Whatever the rational merits of the metaphysical claims in those

notebooks are it is clear that, a small handful of passages notwithstanding,¹¹ Nietzsche's published works, at least from 1878 onwards, do not provide a comprehensive metaphysics.¹² I return in the conclusion to what stance one might take towards Nietzsche's *will to power* metaphysics, depending on the type of metaphysics it is categorized as. Relatedly, my interpretation also leaves open how best to understand those comparatively isolated instances of seemingly positive 'metaphysical' claims Nietzsche makes in later works, such as that the world contains no egos (*BGE* 17) or that human beings are *essentially* composed of drives and affects (*BGE* 12). These claims do not constitute a view about the fundamental properties of *all* entities in the way the *will to power* metaphysics does, and their precise status as 'metaphysical' would – within the context of my interpretation of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics – turn on what they claim to be knowledge of (i.e. a "real" world different from the "apparent" world of experience) and how they are established or argued for (see Section 2 for more detail on these points). That being said, my aim is to develop and reconstruct an account of those passages in the published works in which Nietzsche presents himself – in a sense I substantively clarify in what follows – as an anti-metaphysical philosopher. I leave aside the question of how to resolve this interpretation with passages, either in notebooks or a small number of published writings, which might vitiate that project.¹³

2. Taxonomy of Metaphysics

Motivating a distinction in Nietzsche's texts

Although there are only a small number of passages in which Nietzsche provides a detailed explanation of his anti-metaphysical position, some of the central materials for understanding it can be found in passages from his 1878 work *HH*. In one such passage he says:

It is true, there could be a metaphysical world; the absolute possibility of it can hardly be contested. We see all things through the human head and cannot cut this head off; and yet the question remains as to what part of the world would still be there if one had in fact cut it off[...]what has up to now made metaphysical assumptions *valuable, terrible, pleasurable* for them, what engendered such assumptions, is passion, error, and self-deception; the worst of all methods of knowledge[...]have taught us to believe in them. When we have revealed these methods to be the foundation of all existing religions and metaphysics, we have refuted them. That other possibility remains, but we cannot even begin to do anything with it, much less to allow happiness, salvation, and life to hang from the spider threads of such a possibility. – For we could assert nothing at all about the metaphysical world except its otherness; it would be a thing with negative characteristics. – Even if the existence of such a world were to be proven so well, any knowledge of it would certainly still be the most irrelevant of all knowledge.

(HH 9)

First, we should note that Nietzsche does not deny what he calls the ‘absolute possibility’ of a metaphysical world; he is not claiming that the conception of reality *as it is in itself* – its having some ultimate or intrinsic nature – is plainly incoherent.¹⁴ Yet, at the same time he tells us we will come to see ‘all existing religions and metaphysics’ as having been ‘refuted’ [widerlegt] (HH 9). These claims are *prima facie* incompatible, since if all metaphysics has been (or will come to be) refuted this undermines the sense of speculation about metaphysical knowledge, even as a merely ‘absolute’, i.e. logical or conceptual, possibility.

However, we can make a distinction between two different types of metaphysics in this passage. On the one hand, we have what Nietzsche refers to as ‘metaphysical assumptions’ and elsewhere as ‘positive’ metaphysics (*HH* 20), and on the other, that which concerns the ‘absolute possibility of a metaphysical world’ (*HH* 9).¹⁵ It is helpful to have labels for these different types of metaphysics, so I refer to the first aspect of Nietzsche’s critique as rich metaphysics (hereafter RM), and the second as thin metaphysics (hereafter TM). Nevertheless, precisely what Nietzsche means by ‘positive’ metaphysics in *HH* 20 (what I call RM) is ambiguous, and the context of the passage which talks of ‘superstitious and religious concepts’ – citing the example of a ‘positive’ metaphysical assumption as ‘belief in angels’ (*HH* 20) – does not obviously provide substantive guidance. It is worth noting that in the first passage of *HH*, Nietzsche rejects so-called ‘metaphysical philosophy’ which he partly specifies as the view that entities have what he calls ‘a miraculous source in the very kernel and being of the ‘thing in itself’” (*HH* 1), namely a source in some non-empirical world. This seems close to the kind of ‘positive metaphysics’ he has in mind in *HH* 20. As we shall see this point about a non-empirical or “real” world (and ostensibly positive characterizations of it) and its relation to the empirical world, is important to his understanding of RM. Although a more precise characterization of RM (and TM) is given in the proceeding subsection, with more supporting passages and analysis.

Building on the above taxonomy, and with these different targets in mind, we can also specify Nietzsche’s critical attitudes towards each. Put simply for now, it is the ‘positive metaphysics’ (RM) Nietzsche wants to refute, and as the end of *HH* 9 suggests, it is that ‘other possibility’ (TM) which he claims we should be in some sense indifferent towards.¹⁶ Making this distinction between different critical responses to different types of metaphysics, allows us to see that Nietzsche is not globally indifferent to metaphysics – after all he is concerned with showing that

‘every positive metaphysics is an error’ (*HH* 20).¹⁷ It also helps us to see that whatever this ‘other’ metaphysics is, its possibility qualifies the view that for Nietzsche *all* metaphysics is to be rejected out of hand.

Before specifying these different types of metaphysics more thoroughly, and Nietzsche’s different critical attitudes to them, it is worth pausing to consider whether this taxonomy – distinguishing between RM and TM – is exegetically plausible as the framework for Nietzsche’s anti-metaphysical position outside of *HH*. In fact, a similar distinction seems to be present in an important passage on metaphysics in Nietzsche’s later works. In *TI* ‘Fable’ Nietzsche distinguishes between different types of metaphysics. In steps one and two he describes something close to RM (associated with Platonism and Christianity) which claims the ‘true world is attainable’ and knowable ‘for a man who is wise, pious, virtuous’, or at least such knowledge is ‘promised to the man who is wise, pious, virtuous’. Such metaphysical views could therefore be thought of as making ‘positive assumptions’ (*HH* 9) about some non-empirical world. In steps 3 and 4 he then considers something akin to TM, which tells us the true world is ‘unattainable, unprovable, unpromisable, but the very thought of it a consolation, an obligation, an imperative’, echoing his description in *HH* 9 about a kind of metaphysics understood in terms of speculation surrounding the ‘absolute’ possibility of a metaphysical world.¹⁸ It is worth emphasizing again, this suggests Nietzsche’s anti-metaphysical position does not obviously include the claim that *all* metaphysical inquiry is impossible, or to be rejected out of hand, but rather suggests a nuanced response to metaphysics which distinguishes between different types and different critical responses.

One further reason to accept the taxonomy is that it makes minimally coherent two critical views Nietzsche frequently expresses about metaphysics; (1) metaphysics needs to be ‘refuted’

[widerlegt], and so criticised for its errors – a view which is expressed not only in *Human, all too Human*, but in the works of the 1880s (see *A* 10, 15; *TI* III 3, 5, V 6) – and (2) we should be in some sense indifferent to metaphysics – again a view present in *HA* 9, and expressed in nearly all the works of the 1880s (see *BGE* 4, 34; *GM* III 24; *TI* ‘Fable’; see Section 4 for discussion of these passages). If the target of these critical stances was the same then his position is arguably incoherent, since either we should put our efforts into showing metaphysics to be erroneous or we should be indifferent to it. If we accept the above taxonomy this apparent incoherence can be overcome, since different instances of metaphysics can be identified as either RM or TM, to which Nietzsche recommends different critical responses.

Rich Metaphysics and Thin Metaphysics

I now provide a detailed account of the different types of metaphysics. As a first attempt at defining RM we could say the following:

- (1) *The knowledge claim*: RM posits a metaphysical world about which it claims to have knowledge in terms of positive characteristics.

However, this definition is problematic, since it could be read as running together two claims which should be distinguished, and so might be ambiguous. Namely, (i) RM makes knowledge claims about the nature of reality and (ii) RM provides knowledge of a ‘metaphysical world’ which is distinct from the reality we experience, which is ‘posited’ in opposition to that ‘apparent’ world. To avoid this ambiguity, and to capture one of Nietzsche’s recurrent points about certain kinds of metaphysics, namely their distinction between the ‘real’ and ‘apparent’

world, we need to amend (1). In a later work, Nietzsche talks of those who ‘divide the world into a “true” half and an “illusory” one’, specifically mentioning Kant and Christianity (TI III 6), so we might amend (1) as follows:

(1*) *The amended knowledge claim*: RM posits a ‘real’ metaphysical world about which it claims to have knowledge in terms of positive characteristics, characteristics that are not those of the ‘apparent’ world we experience.

(1*) covers several of the metaphysical philosophies that are the target of the first aspect of Nietzsche’s critique, for example, Kant’s distinction between noumenal and phenomenal reality (on the Strawsonian ‘Two-World’ reading),¹⁹ and the Ideal Forms of Plato. According to Nietzsche what these have in common is the positing of a ‘second’ metaphysical world, about which positive claims are made, and which is different in its fundamental characteristics from the ‘apparent’ world of experience.²⁰ However, it might be responded that (1*) cannot include Kant (on whatever reading of him, Strawsonian, one-world or two-worlds, etc.), since while Kant may postulate a metaphysical (noumenal) world or realm he denies we can have any knowledge of it (i.e. Kant’s epistemic humility). In this context, however, note that Nietzsche is sceptical of the Kantian distinction between having knowledge and *mere believing* (or thinking), and relatedly claims – in agreement with Friedrich Lange – that Kant violates any epistemic humility regarding ‘things-in-themselves’ by way of his metaphysically-informed ethics, which he takes to surreptitiously reintroduce a positive noumenal metaphysics. Nietzsche talks of how for Kant ‘A hidden path to the old ideal lay open; the concept of a *true* world’, the concept of morality as

the *essence* of the world' (*A* 10, see also *BGE* 11). In this sense while (1*) may not capture neo-Kantian sceptical position (e.g. Lange), it is reasonably accurate to Nietzsche's view of Kant.²¹

However, even with these caveats, this characterization of RM is also problematic since it could suggest a disconnection between the 'real' metaphysical world and the world of experience: if the 'apparent' world we experience, *ex hypothesi*, exhausts our experience then we might ask how RM could establish their claims, other than perhaps by *a priori* reasoning. Yet, if this were the case it would involve a mischaracterization of some of those RM which are Nietzsche's targets across his corpus. For example, consider Schopenhauer's characterization of the remit of metaphysics: '[Metaphysics] never really goes beyond experience, but only discloses the true understanding of the world which lies before it in experience. It is neither, according to the definition of metaphysics which even Kant repeats, a science of mere conceptions, nor is it a system of deductions from *a priori* principles[...]it is the rational knowledge, drawn from the perception of the external actual world and the information which the most intimate fact of self-consciousness affords us concerning it'.²²

So, contrary to there being a disconnection between the 'true' metaphysical world and our experience of the 'apparent' world, metaphysics of the kind described, and practiced, by Schopenhauer seeks to establish an epistemic relation between the two. According to Schopenhauer, arguments for metaphysical claims can be based on an interpretation of experience. For example, his own metaphysics is offered as an inference to best explanation argument, part of which involves extending experiences of a kind of first-personal bodily agency as *Will* to the ground of all reality.²³ An account of Nietzsche's critique of rich metaphysical philosophy should be able to adequately capture one of its most frequent targets in Schopenhauer's metaphysics.

Given these considerations, we can supplement (1*) with an additional claim:

(2) *The epistemic relation claim*: RM presents arguments for accepting certain metaphysical claims about the ‘real’ world by recourse to relevant features identified in an interpretation of the ‘apparent’ world we experience.

Nietzsche suggests this criterion is central to certain kinds of metaphysics when he says ‘philosophers are given to place themselves in front of life and experience – in front of what they call the world of appearance – as in front of a painting that has been unrolled once and for all and shows the same incidents unalterably fixed: they think that one has to interpret these incidents correctly in order to draw any conclusion about the entity which produced the painting and therefore about the thing in itself’ (HH 16).

However, matters are more complex. Although (2) captures Schopenhauer’s metaphysical project, it is less applicable to the variety of ways in which RM claims have been argued for in the history of philosophy, and so it might overlook too many ‘metaphysical assumptions’ that I want to argue are also targeted by the first aspect of Nietzsche’s critique.

In order to capture a broader range of metaphysical views we can introduce an amendment to (2) by looking at the example of Christian metaphysics. In line with (2), Christian metaphysics frequently argues for an interpretation of experience – think of the way divine intervention is offered as an explanation for a range of phenomena, which suggests we can (sometimes) observe the effects of God in the world. In this sense (2) fits aspects of Christian metaphysics. Yet, as shown by scholastic religious philosophers, such as Anselm and Aquinas, Christian metaphysicians also provide *a priori* arguments for theism, such as the Ontological argument.²⁴

This argument is not based on an interpretation of experience, but might still be relevant to our practical engagement, broadly understood, with the world. For example, if the Ontological argument were sound, and God's existence were rationally indisputable, then we might have to reconsider a number of philosophical assumptions, such as whether human life is finite or not (consider how the promise of an infinite life might change our behaviour in 'this world'), or how causality works (i.e. whether the notion of a *causa sui* is a nomological impossibility). In this sense, a relation between the world we experience and the 'real' metaphysical world need not be directly established by arguments based on interpretations of experience. Rather, it can be established indirectly by the way the truth-status of certain metaphysical views, regardless of how they are argued for, affects aspects of the lives we lead in the world we do experience. Nietzsche is aware of the importance of this practical dimension to metaphysics when he says 'even if Christian belief could not be disproved, Pascal, in view of a dreadful possibility that it might yet be true, considered it prudent in the highest sense to be a Christian' (*WLN* 2 [144]).

Given the above we can make a disjunctive amendment to (2):

(2*) *The disjunctive relation claim*: RM either present arguments for accepting certain metaphysical claims about the 'real' world by recourse to relevant features identified in an interpretation of the 'apparent' world we experience, or argue (if sometimes only implicitly) that the truth-status of certain metaphysical claims has a practical relevance for us in our 'apparent' world.²⁵

So, RM will always seek to establish an either epistemic or practical relation between the world we experience, and the 'true' metaphysical world. Either way, the claims made by RM are not

‘irrelevant’ (HH 9), and so are not candidates for indifference. We can also see that (2*) allows a broader range of metaphysical philosophy to be the target of Nietzsche’s critique of RM, since RM can use *a priori* methods in arguing for certain positive claims about a ‘true’ metaphysical world as different from the world of appearance (1*). However, (2*) stipulates that for a metaphysics to count as an instance of RM it must supplement (1*) with a claim to an epistemic or practical relation with the world we experience. Taken together, (1*) and (2*) are sufficient to characterize RM.

Moving on, the taxonomy can be completed by explaining thin metaphysics (TM). In the same way as RM can partly be defined in terms of its ways of establishing an epistemic or practical relation to the world we experience, TM can be defined by the absence of such relations. In other words, TM does not claim (2*) but maintains (1*). Poellner gives a number of examples that fit this characterization:

Among these purely theoretical claims are many that historical and contemporary metaphysics have been, and continue to be, preoccupied by. They include the following familiar staples: that the real spatial world consists of absolute, non-perspectival objects (Descartes, Locke); that there are no non-perspectival spatial objects (Berkeley, Kant, sometimes Nietzsche); that the world does not include phenomenal consciousness among its ultimate realities (physicalism); that the real world consists only of consciousness and its objects (idealism).

(Poellner, “Nietzschean Freedom”, 176).

Section 4 argues that it is this ‘purely theoretical’ metaphysics which Nietzsche thinks we should be indifferent towards.

3. Nietzsche’s Methodological Critique of RM

We now have the target for the first aspect of Nietzsche’s critique. Nevertheless, RM is a complex family of views that are not uniform in the way they seek to establish their claims. Nietzsche therefore takes on a significant argumentative burden in claiming to be able to show that ‘every positive metaphysics is an error’ (*HH* 20) and that the ‘true world’, about which RM offers positive characteristics, is a ‘refuted idea’ (*TI* ‘Fable’, see also *HH* 9; *A* 50). I now consider one way Nietzsche seeks to discharge this task, which turns out to be largely unsuccessful.²⁶

According to *HH* 9, what would bring about a refutation of RM is revealing its methods to be based in ‘passion, error, and self-deception[...]when we have revealed these methods to be the foundation of all existing religions and metaphysics, we have refuted [widerlegt] them’ (*HH* 9). This reasoning is faulty if by refutation Nietzsche means showing some claim to be false, since the method for acquiring a belief and its truth-value do not stand in this kind of entailment relation. However, Nietzsche qualifies his hyperbole when he says ‘if we mistrust metaphysics, this has by and large the same consequences as if it had been directly refuted and we were no longer *allowed* to believe in it’ (*HH* 21).²⁷ Nietzsche’s logic is that revealing a flawed methodology can bring about mistrust towards RM, which he claims has the same effect as providing an actual refutation.

It helps to illuminate this idea with an example. Grant, for sake of argument, that we know a specific belief held by an individual was acquired by dubious methods. In light of such

information, we might think two things follow: (a) the specific belief would become an object of suspicion and (b) other claims of the individual would also be rendered suspicious. Still, how exactly (b) follows is problematic, since the relation between (a) and (b) is not one of entailment: that I am suspicious of the reasons why an individual holds a particular belief need not make me suspicious of all their beliefs. However, what the example shows is the individual has, at least sometimes, a defective method for acquiring beliefs, revealing epistemic bad faith. So, mistrust of the individual as a source of knowledge seems reasonable, given knowledge of his flawed methods, and it is this kind of mistrust Nietzsche thinks we should have towards RM.²⁸

Nevertheless, even if we accept the logic of this methodological critique, for its conclusion to follow Nietzsche has to show RM possesses a flawed methodology. In fact, he expends some effort trying to show this. First, he tells us how those who claim access to the metaphysical world ‘deceive themselves because those things so deeply enrapture them and make them so deeply unhappy’, presupposing ‘whatever lies closest to his heart must also be the essence and heart of things’ (*HH* 4). Compare this claim to Schopenhauer’s statement that it is ‘consideration of the suffering and misery of life, that gives the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of the world’.²⁹ For Nietzsche, this is an example of a flawed methodology driven by a ‘passion’ (*HH* 9), in Schopenhauer’s case a melancholy about human life which makes the search for a metaphysical explanation central to philosophical inquiry. Second, Nietzsche describes how metaphysical philosophy claims to be driven by only a pure ‘will to truth’, yet desires that ‘the significance of [metaphysical] knowledge for life *ought* to seem as great as possible’ (*HH* 6). In this sense, what is important for RM is not truth *per se*, but rather those truths which can play a role in rendering existence meaningful in the ‘highest’ possible way by giving it a metaphysical significance. In other words, there would be a

‘morality’ RM would be ‘getting at’ (*BGE* 6).³⁰

The problem is that these claims are essentially accusations of motivational bias and verifying them is difficult.³¹ If we could adduce evidence of motivational bias across the historical canon of RM, then that might bring about an attitude of mistrust. However, even if, for sake of argument, we grant this as far as RM prior to Nietzsche goes, could a new practitioner of RM not claim his methods are not the same? The answer is yes: nothing in Nietzsche’s methodological critique rules such a response out. So, even if Nietzsche could convince us of the epistemic bad faith of previous RM, this does not have any overriding significance for the prospects of RM in the future. So, Nietzsche’s methodological critique of RM is not particularly compelling.

However, consider the following qualification. What might be needed to improve the prospects of Nietzsche’s critique of RM are naturalized re-descriptions of the relations RM draws from, without any metaphysical assumptions (see Section 2).³² The pattern of critique could be something like the following. (1) Philosopher X makes RM claim C, (2) C is based on either an epistemic or practical relation to the world we experience, call the experiences it appeals to E. (3) E can also be accounted for by some naturalistic explanation, and (4) we can also provide a psychological explanation of why Philosopher X makes claim C (e.g. ‘moral’ prejudices). So, given we can both explain E, and the psychological motivation for C, without claiming C – providing a non-metaphysical naturalistic re-description – then given naturalistic explanations are preferable in being more ontologically parsimonious (i.e. do not involve claims about additional “real” metaphysical worlds, and faculties for gaining knowledge of them) we have a reason to reject, or at least withhold assent to, claim C.³³ Note, such a critique would, in Step 4, use the methodological critique in service of a more complex critique.

While this naturalistic argument against RM could be a more powerful means of critique than

the methodological critique alone, it would have to proceed on a case by case basis, and so it would lose the ‘catch all’ character of the methodological critique. So, although this naturalistic argument might be more successful than the methodological critique alone, applying it to even just one case of a specific RM claim would be a separate undertaking. Here I have just gestured at the form it could take.

4. Metaphysical Indifference

Framing Metaphysical Indifference

This section examines the second aspect of Nietzsche’s critique in terms of his metaphysical indifference to TM. To begin I highlight some of the key passages and explain why we should read them as suggesting metaphysical indifference. I then explain the problems with existing interpretations and suggest my own. However, first it helps to remind ourselves of the definition of TM established at the close of Section 2. There it was said TM can be defined by the absence of epistemic or practical relations to the world we experience; in other words, TM does *not* present arguments for accepting certain metaphysical claims about the ‘real’ world by recourse to relevant features identified in an interpretation of the ‘apparent’ world we experience, or argue (if sometimes only implicitly) that the truth-status of certain metaphysical claims has a practical relevance for us in our ‘apparent’ world. It nonetheless posits a ‘real’ metaphysical world about which it claims to have knowledge in terms of characteristics that are not those of the ‘apparent’ world we experience. As such the methodology of TM is purely a priori argumentation, without recourse to experiential considerations, either epistemic or practical. It is in this sense that we can think of TM as ‘purely theoretical’ metaphysical inquiry.³⁴

HH 9’s claim that a specific kind of metaphysical knowledge (i.e. thin metaphysical

knowledge) would be the ‘most irrelevant of all knowledge’ (*HH* 9) suggests Nietzsche is recommending indifference to metaphysics. In *HH* 10 he also talks of the ‘harmlessness of metaphysics in the future’, suggesting ‘our strongest interest in the purely theoretical problem of the “thing in itself” and “appearance” ceases’ (*HH* 10). In later passages he writes that we should ‘not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment’ (*BGE* 4), asks ‘why shouldn’t the world *that is relevant to us* – be a fiction?’ (*BGE* 34), and talks of his ideal type as relinquishing ‘*faith in truth*’ (*GM* III 24).³⁵ Taking these passages together, we might be drawn to Poellner’s conclusion that ‘Nietzsche’s ‘free spirits *par excellence*’ (*GM* III 24) are indifferent as to whether the life-world which engages their practical concerns might turn out to be ‘fictional’ in the light of purely theoretical truths established by a priori metaphysical enquiry’,³⁶ that is by TM truths.

However, in these later passages (*BGE* 4, 34; *GM* III 24) Nietzsche could be questioning the value of truth whatsoever, and therefore highlighting the way false judgements of all kinds might be prudentially necessary for human flourishing.³⁷ So, citing these passages as support of metaphysical indifferentism might elide a distinction between Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics and his critique of the value of truth. Although, the former idea is *jejune*: it does not seem striking to think that, for the majority of people at least, there are values more important than truth, and certain practices might be more conducive to their flourishing than the search for truth. Also, if we interpret these passages as critiquing the value of truth whatsoever and as a statement of some Nietzschean normative ideal (which *GM* III 24 is), then they run against the grain of Nietzsche’s claim that ‘happiness and virtue are not arguments’ (*BGE* 39), and that ‘the strength of a spirit would be proportionate to how much of the “truth” he could withstand’ (*BGE* 39). He even claims that his free-spirited philosopher should be ‘dry, clear, and *without illusions*’

(*BGE* 39, my emphasis). Finally, in *GM* III 24, he emphasizes that the ‘faith in truth’ which is at issue is ‘faith in a *metaphysical* value, a value as such of truth’ (*GM* III 24). While these quotes are extracts of complex passages, and there is no claim to capture all Nietzsche intends, there seems enough motivation to follow Poellner when he claims that ‘in order to really take seriously the radicality Nietzsche himself sees in his position, we should take him to be proposing a quite novel way of interpreting the relation between our practical, necessary evaluating, ‘life’, and our theoretical, and in particular our metaphysical, beliefs’.³⁸ Indeed, if we look at more of *BGE* 34 we find Nietzsche talking of ‘life’ in terms of ‘perspectival valuations and appearances’, the ostensible fictionality of which does not move a metaphysically indifferent subject from being in some sense practically committed to that ‘life’ world, as the world ‘*that is relevant to us*’ (*BGE* 34).

The standard interpretation of metaphysical indifference

In order to clarify metaphysical indifference in more detail, I consider an example of a hypothetical conflict between a TM truth and a practical commitment, where what is meant by practical is something essentially dependent on what is experientially accessible in reference to some of the beliefs or judgements underwriting it. However, the following discussion is motivated not only by Nietzsche telling us that even if we possessed TM knowledge, even if it was ‘proven so well’, it would nonetheless ‘be the most irrelevant of all knowledge’ (*HH* 9), but also by the claim that we should ‘not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment’ (*BGE* 4), which suggests a known true judgement with which it conflicts. In the context of such remarks it is reasonable to try to gain more clarity on the kind of conflict Nietzsche seems to be suggesting a metaphysical indifferent subject would not be moved by.

Moreover, doing so will allow me to explain the standard interpretation of metaphysical indifference, and its problems.

Given the above it seems reasonable to ask what the attitude of metaphysical indifference would suggest if, for example, physicalist-reductionist metaphysics were proven true, where the latter is understood as the view that phenomenal consciousness is not among the most basic realities of the world, and that in virtue of this phenomenal consciousness is not causally efficacious (i.e. a metaphysical version of epiphenomenalism). At first glance Nietzsche's recommendation seems straightforward. Insofar as someone was metaphysically indifferent, the physicalist-reductionist claim, even if it was 'proven so well' (*HH* 9), i.e. proven by purely theoretical *a priori* means, would not provide a sufficient reason for a revision of practical commitments which depend on the fundamental role that the 'fictional' causal efficacy of phenomenal consciousness plays in them. An example of this type of practical commitment can be found in ideas about the role conscious thought plays in deliberation about how to act. Some philosophers have argued that it is an essential part of our self-conception as agents that our conscious deliberations can be causally efficacious in determining how we act, and such a belief is not something we could be easily persuaded to give up on, in part because of the self-alienation that would involve.³⁹ Interpreted in terms of metaphysical indifference, this belief in the causal efficacy of consciousness, and the practices it supports, could be one we should not give up when confronted with the conflicting physicalist-reductionist TM truth. As such one would 'not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment' (*BGE* 4), where the falsity of a judgement is understood as a *metaphysically* false judgement in the light of a conflicting (yet proven) TM claim. I call this the standard interpretation of metaphysical indifferentism, which finds expression in Poellner's discussion.⁴⁰ In what follows I explain why

the standard interpretation is both philosophically and exegetically problematic, and then provide my alternative.

One problem is that according to the conflict as set out above I seem required to make logically inconsistent judgements, insofar as the true judgement concerning the TM claim directly undermines the grounds for judgements implied in my practical commitments.⁴¹ For example, if I believed that the causal efficacy of phenomenal consciousness is a fiction, it is hard to see how I could make that judgement and sincerely maintain myself in practices which I also believe to depend on its opposite, that phenomenal consciousness can be causally efficacious.

We can see why this problem arises if we examine the idea of deciding to believe. Drawing on a point made by Bernard Williams, belief is, at least in part, a passive state (or perhaps better, is an evidence-guided state) in the sense that its propositional content aims at truth.⁴² However, believing *p* is not merely a matter of accepting *p as true*, since other cognitive attitudes like hypothesizing also involve accepting their propositional content *as true*, but for other purposes. Contrastingly, belief involves, as David Velleman puts it, ‘the aim of getting the truth-value of that particular proposition right, by regarding the proposition as true only if it really is’.⁴³

So, if belief has the constitutive aim of accepting *p* as true only if it really is true, then deciding to believe is an incoherent project, since believing at will disregards this constitutive aim, and therefore undermines the status of the cognitive state I have acquired as something that aims at representing reality as it in fact is. As such, the project would be self-defeating, since both before and after I could not sincerely hold that what I was aiming at, or indeed what I acquired, was belief. Recognizing this point does not involve denying that it is possible for people to be motivated to believe things they, on some level, know to be false, possessing non-truth-centred motives for belief. Yet to do so requires either mental partitioning, or deliberately

steering oneself away from contradicting evidence, since in virtue of aiming at the truth beliefs are highly sensitive to evidential considerations. So, even if I managed to get myself into a state of belief irrespective of its truth, say by successful self-deception, maintaining the belief becomes difficult without yet more mental division and self-deception.⁴⁴

Framed in terms of the preceding discussion and the example of this section we can say the following. Someone could not believe that physicalist-reductionist metaphysics were true and not have this belief negatively impact on practical commitments dependent on the opposite belief without self-deception or flouting the requirements of what constitutes holding a belief. Yet, this is what the standard interpretation of metaphysical indifference seems to require. So, if Nietzsche's metaphysical indifference amounts to this, then there seems little to recommend it, insofar as it would involve a cultivated form of epistemic irrationality regarding TM beliefs. Note, the issue is not whether we are both capable of and often do engage in self-deception – Nietzsche recognizes, and often emphasises, our ability for motivated self-deception and irrationality of various kinds (see *HH* 251; *GS* 107).

One response – as a modification of the standard interpretation of metaphysical indifference – would be to deny the status of belief to one side of the conflict, such that some of our practical commitments, namely those which conflict with a TM truth, need not involve beliefs proper, but rather can have the status of make-believe. As such, metaphysical indifference might overcome the above difficulties insofar as it involves a kind of epistemic fictionalism.⁴⁵

However, it is unclear if this fictionalist proposal fares any better than the standard interpretation. If what is being suggested is something like imaginative pretence, then successfully maintaining that activity requires an awareness that one is sustaining it by one's conscious efforts, on pain of falling into illusion: successful pretence is dependent on knowing

the true beliefs one is flouting and taking steps to avoid ‘breaking character’. In this sense, imaginative pretence does not merely involve content known to be false, but involves representing p when one knows not- p . It involves, as Husserl says, a consciousness of a conflict, which no matter how dim, involves one in ‘concealing something in reality’.⁴⁶ Yet, the idea that some of our representations of reality should involve this kind of make-believe when we are confronted with truths which undermine the grounds of our practical commitments is problematic. For example, could we really maintain practical commitments which depend on belief in the efficacy of phenomenal consciousness whilst making the judgement ‘conscious efficacy is make-believe’? Note, the claim is not that it is illegitimate to hold any make-believe representational attitudes whatsoever, but rather that it is problematic to do so in cases in which the grounds for important practical commitments have been challenged. In this sense, the idea of someone who is engaging in make-believe in these contexts seems both psychologically unappealing and runs against the grain of Nietzsche’s claim that ‘the strength of a spirit would be proportionate to how much of the “truth” he could withstand’ (*BGE* 39), which on the epistemic fictionalist reading is not very much. Therefore, the fictionalist modification of the standard interpretation of metaphysical indifference is also unsatisfactory.

The Argument from TM disagreement.

I now provide my own reading of metaphysical indifference which targets the justification for a TM claim. Typically questions of justification, where we are interested in questioning the rational grounds for certain claims, are thought of in terms of scepticism. However, to see how this sceptical reading might work we need to step back from the way the discussion has been framed so far. The previous set up made the situation as difficult as possible by asking how

metaphysical indifference can be defensible when a TM claim has been proven. Yet, a sceptic might say that although it is a possibility that a TM claim could be ‘proven so well’ (HH 9) – by exclusively *a priori* methods – it is very unlikely such a proof will be forthcoming. However, what could the basis for a sceptical position about the prospects of TM be? The most compelling grounds arise from what I call the argument from TM disagreement. Before discussing this argument, it helps to say something about arguments from disagreement more generally.

First, the kind of agreement required to secure justification is rational consensus. Second, it is not enough that there is agreement on which claims are true, but we require explanations why (epistemic luck will not do). So, arguments from disagreement should not appeal to folk disagreement, but rather that of experts, that is disagreement among competent inquirers, who have understood the issues at hand, such that they are very unlikely to make unwarranted inferences, or accept the conclusions of invalid arguments. Taking these points together, arguments from disagreement need to show the *lack* of rational consensus among expert inquirers on the truth of any substantive knowledge claim in the candidate domain, including the rational grounds for any such claim. If this can be shown, then it is reasonable to withdraw confidence in the prospects of achieving knowledge in that domain and adopt a sceptical attitude.

In terms of TM, the Nietzschean sceptic might appeal to the constant disagreement, for over 2000 years, about all of the answers to the fundamental questions in TM; there never having been expert consensus on what the correct position is, or the rational grounds for it. They could cite this as a significant data point which provides a good reason for doubting that a TM claim is ever likely to be rationally justified, warranting the withdrawal of confidence in the prospects of achieving TM knowledge. This sceptical interpretation of metaphysical indifference might be what Nietzsche has in mind when he says we should not allow ‘life to hang from the spider

threads of such a possibility' (*HH* 9), and seems to be part of the logic for his anti-metaphysical position when he remarks, 'the true world – unattainable? At any rate, unattained' (*TI* 'Fable'). He also says 'we have no *need* whatsoever for these certainties about the uttermost horizons in order for humanity to live fully and fitly[...]what is now needed with regard to those final things [i.e. TM] is not knowledge against belief, but rather indifference toward belief and supposed knowledge in those areas' (*WS* 16). It could also be argued that part of the motivation for Nietzsche's search for a 'moral' (i.e. psychological-evaluative) explanation for metaphysical claims and disputes (*BGE* 5, 6, 11), stems from his thinking that since there have been no *a priori* arguments about TM views compelling enough to command expert inquirers to rational consensus, then a different explanation for persisting attachment to these metaphysical claims is required.

So, there are exegetical grounds for reading Nietzsche's metaphysical indifference in sceptical terms, as based on an argument from TM disagreement, yet more needs to be said about potential responses. A first response to arguments from disagreement in defence of the candidate domain is to point to widespread disagreement among experts in other disciplines, where confidence in the possibility of knowledge has not been withdrawn (e.g. the physical sciences). Naturally, the success of this response is dependent on showing that widespread disagreement among experts is typical of these other disciplines. However, even granting this for the sake of argument, can this response work in the case of TM? A rejoinder might be to point out that although TM is not distinctive in involving expert disagreement, the degree of disagreement is a striking feature of its history. At least for portions of their intellectual history, the physical sciences have enjoyed expert consensus, even if consensus was overturned (usually in favour of a new consensus). Whereas there has never been a point in the history of TM where, for example, the majority of

such metaphysicians were mind-body dualists, or Berkeleyan idealists. Rather, there have always been a significant number of metaphysicians arguing for the contradictory position to the others held at the time, suggesting that TM disagreement is intractable.

Relatedly, we might also add that TM positions do not typically admit of cumulative building upon other positions. So, although there have been significant instances of expert disagreement in other domains, there are important examples of cumulative progress. In contrast, it is difficult to imagine something similar in TM. Rather, TM positions can often be characterized in terms of their rejection a different TM; for example, think of the opposed standpoints of idealism and materialism (or contemporary physicalism). This is not to deny progress can be made in terms of increasingly dialectically refined formulations of the relevant positions, but what would be needed to rebut the argument from disagreement on this point is evidence TM is heading towards rapprochement.

A second response to arguments from disagreement is to suggest a lack of ideal epistemic conditions for inquiry in the candidate domain so far, and so point to the prospects of better methods, and as yet undiscovered results from these methods, which might lead to conciliation. For example, Derek Parfit has argued that expert moral disagreement should not motivate scepticism concerning the prospects of moral theory providing us with foundational moral principles, and so of moral philosophers achieving consensus, because the methods of secular moral philosophy are relatively young when compared to the history of religiously influenced moral philosophy.⁴⁷ However, for TM such a response does not work, since it is in the nature of TM that its methods are purely *a priori*, and part of the point of this methodology is that it is not amenable to empirical advancement or the discovery of better methods on which we might pin our hopes. The familiar staples of *a priori* philosophy, for example, syllogistic reasoning, the law

of non-contradiction, rules of inference, have been understood by their practitioners at least since Aristotle, and could not be significantly changed without us no longer doing *a priori* philosophy.

So, TM seems especially susceptible to arguments from disagreement in a way other domains are not due to (1) the intractability of disagreement across its history and (2) the *a priori*, and therefore largely fixed, nature of its methods. Nevertheless, reading Nietzsche's metaphysical indifference in sceptical terms need not also take him to be making an abductive inference from TM disagreement to the claim that the best explanation for this disagreement is that there are no TM facts, and so moving from an epistemic state of affairs to a metaphysical conclusion, as best explanation arguments drawing on disagreement often do.⁴⁸ However, he considers it legitimate to infer that since no rational consensus among experts in TM has ever been achieved, or is likely to be achieved, '*indifference toward belief and supposed knowledge* in those areas' (*WS* 16), is warranted. Therefore, we can interpret Nietzsche's metaphysical indifference along sceptical lines, and in doing so avoid some of the difficulties alternative readings face. In contrast to Poellner's original reading, which once we admit of a TM claim as true ends up recommending a form of epistemic irrationality regarding TM beliefs, the sceptical reading sees TM as only ever attaining the status of 'supposed knowledge' (*WS* 16). So, as Nietzsche notes, we no longer get the conflict of 'knowledge against belief' (*WS* 16). On my reading, metaphysical indifference turns out to be less a matter of mediating between conflicting TM epistemic positions and practical concerns, but rather a global attitude of sceptical indifference to the project of TM, such that its so-called 'results' should not be thought to legitimately command epistemic assent, a position which recommends itself given the distinctive character of TM disagreement.

Conclusion

This article has offered a reading of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysical philosophy, based around a taxonomy of different types of metaphysics, which gave us two critical targets, two means of respective critique, and a new reading of metaphysical indifference towards TM. One of the most interesting aspects of Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical position on this reading is that he resists the quickest route to that kind of position, namely denying that metaphysical inquiry (of at least a certain stripe) is possible, and rather seeks alternative methods for displacing its priority. Furthermore, Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics as reconstructed here provides us with a set of distinctions for identifying what kind of metaphysical claim we are dealing with, and suggests means for critique. To reiterate a point made in the introduction, in a historical and contemporary context in which metaphysical claims often strain common sense, it is important to have ways of gaining further clarity on their nature, and Nietzsche provides us with materials for this project.

The interpretation provided here might also give pause to those who focus on, and freely draw from, Nietzsche's ostensibly positive metaphysical claims, whether in a small handful of published passages or notebook entries. At least one question which those interpreters should answer is how Nietzsche's own metaphysical claims would fare when subjected to the kind of criticisms developed in this article. One suggestion in this context is that if Nietzsche's own *will to power* metaphysics is an instance of TM, that is a position arrived at by exclusively *a priori* metaphysical enquiry,⁴⁹ then by his own lights indifference towards it would not only be a legitimate stance, but one he should 'officially' recommend. Although conjectural, Nietzsche's awareness of this conflict between his metaphysical indifference to TM and his metaphysics of the *will to power*, might have been one motivating factor for not including the latter, as found in his notebooks, in the same detailed form in his published works.

¹Peter Poellner, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysical Sketches: Causality and will to Power’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed. K. Gemes and J. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 675-700, 675. Michael Loux and Dean Zimmerman similarly characterize the metaphysical enterprise as one of providing a ‘comprehensive account of the ontological structure of reality’ (see Loux. M, J. and Zimmerman D, W. “Introduction” in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-10, 1). See also Theodore, *Writing the Book of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), i.

²The seemingly caveat is addressed in Section 1. Translations used are Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967).

³See also *HH* 8, 9, 16, 20, 21; *GS* 151, 354, 372; *BGE* 2, 6, 16, 230; *TI* III 1, 6; *EH* P 2, IV 8;

A 10, 17.

⁴Being rationally justified and true are generally assumed to be necessary conditions for a belief to count as knowledge, although they need not be jointly sufficient (other conditions may also be required).

⁵Such a view accords with readings of Nietzsche as, in some sense, a naturalist (see Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, second edition [London: Routledge, 2015] and Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007]. Anti-metaphysical readings can also be found in Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997) and Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (London: Harvard University Press, 1985).

⁶See P. Van Inwagen, and Meghan Sullivan for this way of characterizing contemporary anti-metaphysicians (Inwagen and Sullivan, “Metaphysics” in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* [Spring 2016 Edition], Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/metaphysics/>>, 2016, 7).

⁷See Richard Schacht for one development of this strategy (Schacht, *Nietzsche* [London: Routledge, 1983], 168). For criticism see Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 206-207.

⁸Peter Poellner, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysical Sketches”, 675-700, 675.

⁹The idea that Nietzsche advocates metaphysical indifference has been argued for by Poellner (see Poellner, ‘Perspectival Truth’ in *Nietzsche*, ed J. Richardson and B. Leiter [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 111-117, and Poellner, ‘Nietzschean Freedom’ in *Nietzsche on Autonomy and Freedom*, ed K. Gemes and S. May [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 170-177). For passages which express this stance see *HH* 9, 10, 16, *WS* 16, *BGE* 4, 34, *GM* III

24, *TI* ‘Fable’, *KSA* 13:14[103].

¹⁰ Translated as *The Will to Power* §1067. See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 4 vols, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979-87/1961); Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 187-202; John Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For criticism of this use of notebook material see Bernard Magnus, “The Use and Abuse of The Will to Power” in *Reading Nietzsche*, ed Robert C. Solomon & Kathleen Marie Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 218-35. For more recent reconstructions of some of Nietzsche’s ‘metaphysical sketches’ in these notebooks see Poellner, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysical Sketches”, and also Galen Strawson, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysics?” in *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*, ed M. Dries and P. J. E Kail (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015), 10-36.

¹¹The main passages in the published works frequently cited as involving metaphysical claims, specifically about the *will to power* thesis, are *BGE* 36 and *GM* II 12. For an explanation of why Nietzsche could not accept the argument put forward in *BGE* 36 for the metaphysical version of the will to power thesis see Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth*, 218-228 (for a recent alternative see Paul Loeb, “Will to Power and Panpsychism: A New Exegesis of *Beyond Good and Evil* 36” in *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*, ed Manuel Dries and P.J.E Kail [Oxford: Oxford University Press], 57-88). For discussion of some of the interpretative issues surrounding *GM* II 12 see Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*: 38, and Leiter, “Nietzsche’s Naturalism Reconsidered” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed K. Gemes and J. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 576-598, 592-594.

¹²The qualification ‘from 1878 onwards’ is intended to highlight the problematic issue of what status to accord to metaphysical aspects of *BT* and *UM*.

¹³For some thoughts on this see Poellner, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysical Sketches”, 695-700.

¹⁴This contrasts with Maudemarie Clark's claim that in his mature thought Nietzsche 'repudiates the thing-in-itself as a contradiction in terms' (Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth*, 102). Nietzsche does at one point in the published corpus seem to claim this. In BGE 16 he says that 'the "thing in itself" contains a *contradiction in adjecto* [contradiction in terms]'. Yet, as Poellner notes, Nietzsche's statement is 'so brief and unexplained as to allow, by itself, for almost any interpretation' (Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 23. See also Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 15 and Beatrice Han Pile, "Transcendental Aspects, Ontological Commitments and Naturalistic Elements in Nietzsche's Thought" *Inquiry* 52.2 (2009): 179-214, 198-199.

¹⁵In HH 21 Nietzsche also talks of 'the *scientific proof*' that a metaphysical world exists. I assume by 'scientific' in this context Nietzsche means purely theoretical, and so, for reasons that will become clear in Section 2, exclusively *a priori* in methodology. The same terminology also seems present in *WS* 16. For discussion of this way of thinking about 'thin metaphysics' see end of Section 2 and Section 4.

¹⁶Clark might therefore be oversimplifying Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics in *HA* when she describes it as a kind of epistemic agnosticism (Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth*, 99-102). Although 8 years later she amended her position, claiming that 'the major project of *Human, all too Human* is to induce scepticism concerning the metaphysical world by showing it to be cognitively superfluous' (Clark, "On Knowledge, Truth, and Value..." in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed C. Janaway [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998], 37-78, 49-53). Although this picks up on the metaphysically indifferent strand it overlooks the different aspects of Nietzsche's critique.

¹⁷An example of a globally quietist approach to metaphysics can be found in Richard Rorty,

Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

¹⁸Clark reads the distinctions between types of metaphysics in this passage as Nietzsche charting his own metaphysical and epistemological development (see Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth*, 109-114).

¹⁹See P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

²⁰See *BGE* 10, *A* 10, *EHP* 2, *TI* III 2, *EH* IV 8.

²¹ I thank Mattia Riccardi for pressing me on this first aspect of the definition of RM.

²² Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation Vol. II*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Edition 1969), 183.

²³Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation Vol. I*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Edition 1969), 105.

²⁴See Anselm, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 82-105 for the Ontological argument. For criticism see Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 81-95.

²⁵ It is worth noting that (2*) may not be able to capture a neo-Kantian like Lange, who seems to accept key aspects of Kant's transcendental theory of experience, but as noted in discussion of (1*) sees Kant's ethics, based on claims about noumenal knowledge, as dogmatic. Lange could therefore be read as genuinely expressing Kantian humility about things in themselves. Nonetheless Lange is a complex case, Nietzsche's relation to whom I do not have space to explore here. Again, I thank Mattia Riccardi for bringing this to my attention.

²⁶There might be other ways in which Nietzsche seeks to critique RM that might be more successful, although I take it that the methodological critique is a central one (see end of Section 3).

²⁷Nietzsche also engages in hyperbolic use of the idea of ‘refutation’ in other passages on metaphysics, see *TI* ‘Fable’; *D* 95; *A* 53; *KSA* 13:15[74].

²⁸See also *HH* 633. Jean-Paul Sartre says something similar about ‘bad faith’ (see Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes [London: Routledge, 2003], 91)

²⁹Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation Vol. II*, 161.

³⁰See also *HH* 15. See also *BGE* 2, 3, 5, 6; *A* 13, 50 for similar points.

³¹ There is potentially a different argument one could take from *HH* 9. Nietzsche could be arguing in the following way: (1) assume that any knowledge of a metaphysical “real” world, as opposed to “apparent” world, would necessarily be negative (2) RM of all stripes attempts to give a positive characterisation of the “real” metaphysical world. Therefore, RM aims at a kind of knowledge that, if we accept (1) we cannot possess. This might be part of what Nietzsche sees as problematic in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, since Schopenhauer could be read – along Kantian lines – as accepting assumption (1), but nonetheless he goes on to provide a ‘positive’ characterization of the “real” metaphysical world as *Will*. While this might count against Schopenhauer’s metaphysics (if the latter can be characterized in this way), the problem is that it not easy to see why any other RM would self-consciously accept (1); rather, they might naturally see denying (1) as a prerequisite for a “positive” characterization of the “real” world.

³²It might be claimed that there is a ‘genealogical’ method at work in Nietzsche’s critique of RM. However, I assume that this is just a different name for the methodological critique considered here. For more on this approach see Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 154-169.

³³For a detailed account of this aspect of Nietzsche project, specifically in relation his critique of morality, see Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 58-83.

³⁴ Poellner, “Nietzschean Freedom”, 176

³⁵See also *KSA* 13:14 [103] where Nietzsche writes that ‘it is of cardinal importance that one should abolish the *real world*. It is the great inspirer of doubt and devaluator in respect of the world *we are*’ (translated as *The Will to Power* §583).

³⁶Poellner, “Nietzschean Freedom”, 177.

³⁷For more on Nietzsche’s critique of the value of truth see Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 213-215 and Ken Gemes, ‘Nietzsche’s Critique of Truth’, in *Nietzsche*, ed J. Richardson and B. Leiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 40-58.

³⁸Poellner, “Nietzschean Freedom”, 170.

³⁹This view goes back to Immanuel Kant (Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor and J. Timmermann [Cambridge University Press, 2012]), but has been defended in recent years by Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and even those with Nietzschean sympathies (see Paul Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], chap.5).

⁴⁰See Poellner, “Perspectival Truth”, 111-117, “Nietzschean Freedom”, 177 (see also Gemes, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Truth”, 45-4). P. F. Strawson suggests something similar when he talks about the potential truth of determinism in the context of how such a thesis might undermine the inter-subjective reactive attitudes he takes to play a central role in human life (see P. F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment* [New York: Routledge, 2008], 57).

⁴¹Poellner more recently concedes as much (see Poellner, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysical Sketches” 698).

⁴²Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 136-151.

⁴³David Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 252. Nietzsche accepts this in KSA 12:9[41].

⁴⁴See Mark Leon, “Rationalizing Belief”, *Philosophy Papers* 21.3 (1992), 299-314, 312, and Velleman, *Possibility of Practical Reason*, 185.

⁴⁵ Reginster suggests a version of this position (see Reginster, “Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche’s Free Spirits”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51.3 [2013], 441-463, 448). See also Nadeem Hussain, “Honest Illusion: Valuing for Nietzsche’s Free Spirits”, in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed B. Leiter and N. Sinhababu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 157-188, although Hussain’s fictionalist reading is concerned with axiology).

⁴⁶Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness and Memory*, trans. J. B. Brough (Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 579. For further discussion of make-believe see Walton, *Mimesis as Make Believe* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1990). For a broader discussion of the theme of fictionalism in Nietzsche’s thought see also Simon Blackburn, “Perspectives, Fictions, Errors, Play” in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed B. Leiter and N. Sinhababu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 281-296.

⁴⁷See Derek Parfit, *On What Matters: Volume One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and for the opposing sceptical view Leiter, “Moral Skepticism and Moral Disagreement in Nietzsche” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics: Volume 9*, ed R. Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 126-151.

⁴⁸See Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), 15-48. Leiter reads Nietzsche as offering something like this kind of best explanation argument against the existence of objective moral values (see Leiter, “Moral Skepticism” 126-151).

⁴⁹See Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 168.