# A Dialogue between Pragmatism and Existentialism: W. James and F. Nietzsche on Truth

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**Abstract**. In this article, I elucidate the ways in which pragmatism and existentialism can be viewed as compatible by focusing on the notion of truth. For this purpose, I explore James' pragmatic method and Nietzsche's critical approach to 'will to truth' to reveal the notable link between them. Both thinkers react against the idea of truth as absolute, fixed, and indifferent to individuals' practical needs. Accordingly, they argue that truth, conceived pre-theoretically, is a process immanent to subjects' concrete experiences of life. I critically examine, through pragmatic and existentialistic considerations, how these philosophers question truth within the framework of the individual's existence as an acting agent.
**Keywords**: existentialism, James, Nietzsche, pragmatism, truth

## Pragmatizmo ir egzistencializmo dialogas: W. Jamesas ir F. Nietzsche apie tiesą

**Santrauka**. Straipsnyje atskleidžiu tam tikrą pragmatizmo ir egzistencializmo suderinamumą tiesos sampratos aspektu. Siekdamas pagrįsti šį suartėjimą, tyrinėju Jameso pragmatinį metodą ir Nietzschės kritinį požiūrį į „valią tiesai". Abu mąstytojai stoja prieš absoliučios, fiksuotos ir praktinių individo poreikių nepaisančios tiesos idėją. Atitinkamai, abu jie teigia, kad tiesa, suprantama ikiteoriškai, yra procesas, imanentiškas konkrečiai subjektų gyvenimo patirčiai. Pasitelkdamas pragmatinius ir egzistencialistinius svarstymus, aš kritiškai tyrinėju, kaip šie filosofai kvestionavo tiesą individo kaip veikėjo egzistencijos kontekste.
**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** egzistencializmas, Jamesas, Nietzsche, pragmatizmas, tiesa

## Introduction

The intellectual climate of the late 19th century generally exhibits a philosophical attitude against the mechanistic understanding of the world which dwells on 'eternal idols'. Pragmatism and existentialism, in this sense, primarily take notice of the qualitative aspects of human existence by focusing on life itself and its ubiquitous dynamism. In tandem with their fundamental opposition to traditional metaphysics, they both react particularly against idealistic systems, scientism, and disinterested approaches.[1] I will try to articulate in this paper how pragmatic and existential attitudes bring light into life's dynamism in the context of truth. My main purpose is to demonstrate that James' pragmatic understanding of truth and Nietzsche's critical or existential approach share noteworthy common characteristics even though there are some disparities between them.[2] I will label James' consideration 'existentialistic pragmatism' and compare it with Nietzsche's peculiarly existential viewpoint under the theme of truth.[3] The main discursive axis here can be found in their overt interest in concrete life experiences which shape humans' worldly existence. In considering a problem or anticipating a situation, human agents practically and effectively participate in the making or constitution of worldly experiences. Against the background of the whole discussion on truth, this notion takes philosophy as a matter of transformative practice in turning our face to the future in order to show that the world in which we live is always open to novelty or change. For both pragmatism and existentialism, then, truth as correspondence to some independent reality is incapable to do justice to the idea of truth as an ongoing *process*. To argue this, I will first shed light on the existentialistic aspect or dimension of James' pragmatism and uncover the pragmatic motif running through Nietzsche's philosophy. At the end, I will discuss on what grounds Nietzsche's ideas can be seen as compatible or concordant with James' theory as I examine certain crucial dynamics of the two views.

## Truth in James' pragmatism

James' theory is evidently related to his idea of the pragmatic method, particularly in terms of its critique of a static, 'atemporal',[4] and unconditional conception of truth. In *Pragmatism,* he characterizes this method as a practice which allows us to settle philosophical disputes by anticipating the consequences of a belief and seeing if those consequences actually occur. Pragmatism is especially operational in determining whether a

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[1] I draw attention to intellectualism which broadly maintains that whatever is represented or conceived in concepts expresses the ultimate structure of reality.

[2] In the fourth section, I will treat the question of God as a focal point where James' insight and Nietzsche's position differ from each other.

[3] I am using the term 'existentialistic' as separately from 'existential' just to convey the idea that the former has broader philosophical implications and connotations, especially in the context of such controversial views as those of Nietzsche and James.

[4] In employing this term, I have in mind an analogy between the mechanistic conception of time, which consists of successive 'nows', and the characterization of truth as a non-dynamic, pre-determined entity.

notion makes a difference in the practical realm (to wit, in the *Life-world*) over another notion. In line with Peirce's theory of meaning,[5] James claims that, to grasp an object clearly, "we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare" (James 1922: 46–47). Every difference in concepts must reveal and instantiate itself in concrete situations, that is, in facts to be tested for significance. Away from rationalism and traditional empiricism, James regards philosophy as searching for the practical difference of a notion that is accepted as true at certain points of our life. More precisely, he states, there can be "no difference in abstract truth that does not express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequence upon that fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere, and somewhen" (*ibid*.: 50).

By associating pragmatism with *radical empiricism,* James opposes to well-rooted habits of empiricist philosophers. He, for instance, overtly objects to the atomistic theory of ideas, particularly the notion of experience as cognitive. Contrary to the 'mentalistic tradition', he conceives experience to be holistic, active, and thoroughly *effective* rather than cognitively inert. He emphatically criticizes empiricism and rationalism for their inadequacy to capture experience as an integrated whole in which (theoretically or practically) our human needs reside. By offering a materialistic and mechanical portrayal of the world, contemporary empiricists reduce values and beliefs to psychological processes. Moreover, rationalists consider the universe as a closed whole by neglecting contingencies and ambiguities of life. This critique points in the direction of an *existentialistic pragmatism* where lived experience of the individual is taken into account by making room for qualitative aspects of 'being-in-the-world' and raising questions about the alleged throne of natural sciences. In the face of all dogmas, including declared truth and pertinent suppositions of certitude, pragmatism reveals the 'open air' by diverging from "abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles" and leading towards "concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards actions, and towards power" (*ibid*.: 51). Here, James refers basically to the dynamic structure of experience. When the practical consequence of a concept (its cash-value) is questioned within the stream of experience, one can realize that there is no final answer that would halt the inquiry and indicate unchangeable realities. This can also be viewed in James' approach to the perennial problem of the status of *values*. In relation to future experience, values emerge thoroughly in practice. We have then the initial insight into James' idea of truth aligned with an *existentialistic* attitude: Facts are value-based, and values are constantly being formed in the dynamism of experience, giving rise to truth as *process*.

Our experience is made up of parts that are internally connected. An idea turns out to be true as long as it allows us to establish a linkage between other parts of our experience. Instead of regarding experience as a succession of phenomena, James says, we should consider it as consisting of parts that can be unified through true ideas. He emphasizes

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[5] For Peirce, we can find out whether concepts are meaningful or not by appealing to concrete results they produce.

the power of truth at work when he maintains that "any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true *instrumentally*" (*ibid*.: 58). Against the correspondence and coherence accounts of truth where 'true' is treated as a given and inert predicate of things, James defends an 'instrumentalist' view. Supposing truth to be something static, for him, conflicts with the whole idea of flux of experience which defines our reality. Unlike what 'inert' theories suppose, human agents do not passively view and copy the world, but rather constantly and effectively take part in it. The crucial matter for James is truth's actually lending itself to action rather than its correctness in representing reality. Accordingly, Jadi Lima describes James' pragmatic characterization of truth in terms of "dynamic happening that inter-related to the rest of our life" (Lima 2018: 146). Within the organic relatedness of experience, a recent idea is accepted as *true* if it provides least alteration of old opinions and utmost continuity of a belief system. The adaptation of an idea as 'true' then depends on each individual's own sense, internal dynamics of cognitive satisfaction, and "a certain *practical consequences* of that idea" (*ibid*.: 146–147). In other words, the evolution of old truths through the affiliation of new ones entirely takes place according to the individual's subjective reasons, his/her dynamic engagement with the world. As James points out, "the possession of truth, so far from being here an end in itself, is only a preliminary means towards other vital satisfactions" (James 1922: 203). His account accordingly transforms the *static* notion of correspondence ('copying' reality) into dynamic relations between particular thoughts and the totality of past experiences. Contrary to the intellectualist tendency, James formulates 'agreement with reality' in relation to the process of verification and validation:

> The essential thing is the process of being guided. Any idea that helps us to *deal*, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, that does not entangle our progress in frustrations, that *fits*, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement. It will hold true of that reality. (*ibid*.: 213)

All in all, the notion of truth in the understanding of James involves existentialistic aspects from several points of view. First, an idea is regarded as *true* or *false* with respect to its cash-value (effectiveness) in the individual's actual life. Secondly, since "we live in a world of realities that can be infinitely useful or infinitely harmful" (*ibid*.: 202), truth must accordingly be seen not as a terminal point for all inquiry; rather, true ideas are functional tools that serve practical purposes. Thirdly, truth is always conditional to internal modes of experience as it is recognized in the active involvement of the individual.

## The pragmatic leitmotif in Nietzsche's critical approach to truth

Nietzsche's position remarkably echoes a pragmatic tune with a strict rejection of some unconditional truth *an sich* regardless of the individual's existence in the context of his/her practical needs. Truth is something "that must be created and that gives a name

to a process" (Nietzsche 1968: 298), but not correspondence to a discourse-independent reality. To endorse his critical philosophy in this direction – to wit, in opposition to established metaphysical claims – Nietzsche emphasizes "will to truth" that always compelled philosophers to grasp the presumed truthfulness in offering solutions to certain theoretical predicaments. On behalf of unchanging reality, metaphysicians classify this world through oppositions, such as *false* versus *true*, *wrong* versus *right*, and so on (Nietzsche 1966: 10). Yet, these oppositions, for Nietzsche, are necessary in attaining practical aims rather than capturing truth *qua* correspondence. The question is not the falseness or truthfulness of a judgment, but is "to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating" (*ibid*.: 11). Without fabricating logic, "without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical," he contends, "man could not live" (*ibid*.: 12). He spells out an anti-intellectual tendency which stands against the whole notion of a 'conceptual' relationship between man and the world, geared towards an absolute truth. The crux here is the instrumental role of judgments in cultivating and preserving life. Pietro Gori explicates this point from pragmatic perspective as he states that "the fruitfulness and operational efficiency of our sensorial and intellectual apparatus can be evaluated from another standpoint, e.g., in the light of how much it helps to preserve life" (Gori 2016: 37). Faith in unconditional truth, Nietzsche notes, is the most fundamental constitutive element of the metaphysicians' dogmatism. Since the phenomenal world is considered as the realm of illusions, that which exists truthfully is regarded as the exact opposite of *phainomena*. In a strikingly pragmatic mood, he writes:

> Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too, there stand valuations or, more clearly, physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life. For example, that the definite should be worth more than the indefinite, and mere appearance worth less than "truth"—such estimates might be ... a certain kind of *niaiserie* which may be necessary for the preservation of just such beings as we are. Supposing, that is, that not just man is the "measure of things." (Nietzsche 1966: 11)

Nietzsche's critical attitude to *will to truth* indicates life's dynamism in terms of its open possibilities. His views on 'facts' and 'interpretations' specifying his perspectivism manifest this. In a clearly anti-positivist manner, he contends that nothing would exist in the absence of human interpretation. A fact is not metaphysically constituted by itself. In Nietzsche's words, "In so far as the word 'knowledge' has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is interpretable otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings" (Nietzsche 1968: 267). When this aphorism is evaluated in the light of Nietzsche's emphasis on life's concreteness, we can realize that he characterizes *existence* itself as interpretative – in a positive sense. There are no *essential* or *ontologically robust* facts, there is no existence comprising a closed, static, and mechanical system. Our existence in this world is intertwined with the dynamic power of life to be always open to 'create'. At the core of this interweaving lies the flexibility and open-endedness of interpretations rather than metaphysically privileged objective facts. Consequently,

we cannot ascribe any unchanging ontology to facts, but we can engage in their compliance with our practical interests by offering or entertaining interpretations. In line with Arthur Danto, I suggest that Nietzsche's focus assumes the instrumental sense of truth which liberates us from truth "in the *deep* sense," and thus allow us to "impose ourselves in such a way as to be transformed into fantastically more vital creatures" (Danto 2005: 81).[6] Not merely human beings, but "every center of force," Nietzsche argues, "construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint […] according to its own force" (Nietzsche 1968: 339). Here, we see a challenge to a particular (mechanistic) comprehension of the world, one that posits indisputable principles shaping our theoretical involvement. This specific ontological criticism, I argue, gives way to Nietzsche's perspectivism. In maneuvering away from absolute principles, he says, "it is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against" (*ibid*.: 267). He employs the term 'perspective' not to denote the mind's role in reflecting truth from a particular vantage point. With an anti-intellectualist tendency, he affirms that our practical requirements and biological instincts determine the nature of human perspectives in concordance with life's inherent dynamism. As Rossella Fabbrichesi notes, "to live means to be 'partial', *to be* (in) *perspective*, without being able to be situated in different perspectives, and even less in panoramic ones" (Fabbrichesi 2009: 3). Her statement here clarifies Nietzsche's claim that: "for a sense must always be projected into them before there can be 'facts'" (Nietzsche 1968: 301). Under the question of 'what is that?' always lies 'what is that for *me*?' (*ibid*.: 301). Ultimately, the main reason behind my intention to link Nietzsche's perspectival notion of truth with different possibilities of life has to do with the element of 'interpretation'. In a non-static life that necessarily contains diversity, when we attribute meaning by interpretation, occurrences show up as 'facts' – things that are made by us. Far from being an explanation, this interpreting activity makes a reference to our attributing some meaning to things since "everything is in flux, incomprehensible, elusive; what is relatively most enduring is—our opinions" (*ibid*.: 327). Truth therefore expresses "a will to overcome that has in itself no end—introducing truth, as a *processus in infinitum*, an active determining—not a becoming-conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined" (*ibid*.: 298). Nietzsche's confirmation of truth as an infinite process is related, I believe, to humans' continuous sense-making or meaning-generating activity. To put it pragmatically, as long as we endure, we endlessly interpret the world in accordance with our opinions and perspectives formed *via* practical interaction with/in the world.

## Truth as a way of existence: existentialism and pragmatism

Up to this point, I have tried to expose James' position against 'given truth' and Nietzsche's critical attitude that bears prominent pragmatic marks. Now, by placing existentialism to the center and proceeding over science, morality, and religion, I will analyze these two

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[6]  I contrue Danto's pertinent perspective provided in his (2005) as a kind of 'pragmatic existentialism'.

approaches more closely. I consider existentialism, in a nutshell, as problematizing the concrete relationship between existence and truth.[7] Both pragmatism and existentialism overtly emphasize this relationship within the context of the flux of life. When Nietzsche and James question the traditional notion of truth, they simultaneously dig into our manners of being in the world in the form of some agency, and strive to maintain a firm touch with the realities of *bios*. They unapologetically prioritize existence over essence as a discursive axis of their inquiry. The objective man, Nietzsche asserts, "is no goal, no conclusion and sunrise, no complementary man in whom the *rest* of existence is justified" (Nietzsche 1966: 128). He is only "a delicate, carefully dusted, fine, mobile pot for forms that still has to wait for some content and substance in order to 'shape' itself accordingly" (*ibid*.). The relationship between existence and truth goes beyond the objective (conceptual) relation of subject to object since our existence is found embedded in the world to be understood and/or accounted for. We are not disinterested cognitive subjects striving to explain a mind-independent realm of existence but are human agents always adding value to the world. Maureen Finnigan points out this existential motif in conjunction with the affective elements in human reason: "Reason is not autonomous, but convoluted. Thinking is not simply comprised of reason, but is an aggregate of instincts, drives, passions, emotions, will—*and reason*" (Finnigan 2000: 3–4).

When we turn from Nietzsche to James' view, the latter is also seen to contribute significantly to the problematization of neglecting certain crucial aspects of human experience under a tribunal of empirical data. By emphasizing our pre-theoretical nature, James considers emotions, feelings, hopes, and beliefs as arising from the actual, concrete, and worldly existence of the individual. In an existentialistic manner, he analyzes these 'unscientific' channels of life to figure out the basis for an individual's relation to truth. A belief is true, for James, if it can be valued as an advantageous tool for action in an individual's life, that is, as ultimately supporting and sustaining that person's existence:

> If there be any life that it is really better we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then it would be really *better for us* to believe in that idea, *unless, indeed, belief in it incidentally clashed with other greater vital benefits.*

> 'What would be better for us to believe'! This sounds very like a definition of truth. (James 1922: 76–77)

What is better for us is on a par with what is true for us. The sort of attitude I have displayed above can be characterized as *existentialistic pragmatism*. In this view, truth is what functions best in combining all finite human experiences without leaving anything out. If an individual believes in something, along with his/her pertinent emotions, instincts, desires, and so on, it becomes his/her truth as it unites his/her past experiences,

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[7] As a corollary of my previous distinction of 'existential' and 'existentialistic', I am using the term 'existentialism' specifically and tendentiously for the purposes of my juxtaposition of the philosophical notions of *existence* and *truth*.

present actions, and future expectations. As a result of this existentialistic compounding or – to use a Heideggerian term – 'gathering', it determines in actuality one's way of existing in the world. What must be underlined here is the 'organic relatedness' (interconnectedness) of an individual's total horizon of worldly experiences. James' way of treating the notion of belief has the consequence that the internal dynamism of experience can be recognized when the relationship between truth and belief is asserted in an existential manner which accredits the primacy of the practical. Truth – which, in actual practice, is equivalent to 'good' – is only a means for opening one's self to new experiences and future hopes through satisfaction. As James states, when an experience prompts a genuinely insightful thought, of any nature, "we dip by that thought's guidance into the particulars of experience again and make advantageous connexion (*sic!*) with them" (*ibid*.: 205).

Steering away from the Platonic approach and attempting to shed light on the existence of the individual, Nietzsche shares the same insight in evaluating truth's relation to belief. What is true is a belief which obviously comprises a set of values, and which relates in a rather straightforward fashion to the individuals' survival. Belief, he says, is a fundamental prerequisite for all living beings, therefore, "what is needed is that something must be held to be true—*not* that something is true" (Nietzsche 1968: 276). If worldly truth is not discovered but manufactured, the very idea of 'belief' brings to bear *the act of* producing truth. Believing in something is a primordial quality, "a kind of affirmation the first intellectual activity" (*ibid*.: 275). That is to say, truth is constructed in conformity to valuations that are formed through beliefs, and "in valuations are expressed conditions of preservation and growth" (*ibid*.). This point is crucial for us to understand Nietzsche's critical and existential philosophy under the themes of *life* and *value*. To resist 'accustomed value feelings', he declares, we should "recognize untruth as a condition of life" (1966: 12). In that sense, truth is a belief that is specified as an unavoidable circumstance of life, as one's own prospect of action. It is not something that one comfortably and passively gets hold of; rather, it is an interest that one constantly grows and confirms naturally by faith. In conjunction with beliefs and values, truth is always in a contingent process of being made. Nietzsche's existential inclination here is evidently not alien to James' emphasis on the dynamic, interrelated, and integrated character of experience to make a peculiarly qualified room for *beliefs*. He admits that "there are passional tendencies and volitions which run before and others which come after belief" (James 1919: 11). Everything is found to be profoundly interconnected in our non-intellectual nature that affects our convictions. For this reason, "the state of things is evidently far from simple; and pure insight and logic, whatever they might do ideally, are not the only things that really do produce our creeds" (*ibid*.). Truth hence is not a mere belief independent of an act of faith that reveals the depth of our being. James regards anything given to our web of beliefs as a *hypothesis*. The value of a hypothesis, for him, is not an intrinsic property that characterizes its liveness or deadness for an individual. Rather, "the maximum of liveness in a hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably" (*ibid*.: 3). Pure logic and knowledge are not capable of revealing our ambitious nature.

As he puts it, "our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth" stands for "a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up?" (*ibid*.: 9). This remark reminds one of Nietzsche's well-known assertions: "How is truth proved? By the feeling of enhanced power—by utility—by indispensability—in short, by advantages (namely, presuppositions concerning what truth *ought* to be like for us to recognize it) […] What one always wanted was faith—and *not* truth" (Nietzsche 1968: 249–250). Intellectual responses of the individual stem from the internal dynamism of passions, sentiments, motives, affections, and practical needs. Just to mention a related notion, one can talk about experience as lived in the "symphony of qualitative multiplicity."[8] Neither scientific facts nor moral values can play a leading role in this concrete multitude. In that regard, meta-scientific/ethical positions of James and Nietzsche echo each other in their affirmation of life's richness and revaluation of truth. The question of God, however, points to a momentous difference between Nietzsche's radical stance and James' naïve pragmatism, which I will address at the end of the paper.

Science, according to Nietzsche, inevitably involves asceticism which denies life in the guidance of unconditional will to truth. Although it is capable of destroying established ideals, it replaces them with nothing since it is not able to re-evaluate values. Within an anti-reductionist attitude, Nietzsche opposes science's hegemony and celebrates life's ambiguity in which all interpretations (true or untrue) are *possibilized*. Scientific interpretation, which utilizes calculable units, is one of them that derives its existence from a faith but becomes meaningless. As Brian Leiter suggests, the faith here is the exaggeration of truth accompanied by "a will to *non-perspectival* truth, to truth as known from no particular perspective at all" (Leiter 2005: 268).[9] Nietzsche does not object to science outright, but the criterion for him is whether the structures of science enhance life by recognizing knowledge as perspectival. For Danto, this is a pragmatic criterion that questions "whether 'truth' means anything more than the facilitation of life" (Danto 2005: 54). Further, for James, science should not operate as a system for not falling into dogmatism. It becomes dogmatic when it blindly clings to particular inventions and is closed to other possibilities. In this way, science denies itself as it essentially "stands for a method and for no fixed belief" (James 1919: 323). Ironically, it is associated with a belief that "non-mechanical categories are irrational ways of conceiving and explaining even such things as human life" (*ibid*.: 324). Refraining from error at the expense of attaining the truth, for James, is the chief formula of science's *technique*. Such a principle ignores the faith, defined by James as "belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible," upon which science is rested (*ibid*.: 90). When faith is reinforced in rational and autocratic panache, science becomes contradictory to life's nature, working with hypotheses. Integrated to practical affairs, science takes place through the collaboration of intellect, will, and passion. To neglect this, James insists, is to deny human condition and its role in scientific

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[8] I am referring to Bergson's concept of qualitative multiplicity (duration) in which psychic states are intertwined as different from spatial time where measurable units are juxtaposed distinctly from each other.

[9] For further discussion, see: Leiter 2005: 264–279.

enterprise. Both Nietzsche and James, accordingly, protest against science's apathy that creates a closed system. This theme can also be seen in their reaction against morality.

In the light of their account of truth, they disavow the idea of morality as the essence of values, superior to life. Will to truth, for Nietzsche, is a *moral* principle that attests the "*another world* than that of life, nature and history," a world something truthful beyond life's errors and deceptions (Nietzsche 2001: 201). It negates life as it expresses a will directed not to what the world we exist *is* but, rather, to what the world we exist *is not*. Life intends to sparkle. I seek truth because "I do not want to deceive," and "I do not want to deceive *myself*" (*ibid*.: 200). By denouncing appearance, blaming life, the 'truthful' man demands moral norms that always apply regardless of circumstances. To desire this is to aspire a life that always fixes itself in the service of the 'other world'. Nothing in life, however, is changeless, and "nothing else were 'given' except our world of desires and passions" (Nietzsche 1966: 47). Moral descriptions, Nietzsche says, are merely expressions of our attitude to interpret the phenomena in a moralistic sense. We cannot regard morality as reflecting the absolute truth by imposing forms. Moralistic interpretations, Danto states, "have a use and answer to a need if they are practiced at all" (Danto 2005: 118). What is repudiating life is not these interpretations but a belief that, as Leiter notes, "reality fails to live up to our moral standards, that it must stand condemned before the bar of morality" (Leiter 2018: 2). Similarly, James holds that there is no absolute moral theory behind the moral reflection of human beings. Our moral reflections, he thinks, signify the various situations in which we can find ourselves, and are articulated along common practices. Moral reasoning, however, aims to prescribe the relevance between facts and moral values by ignoring the reality that values and their truth are laid down throughout praxis. Yet, "there can be no final truth in ethics any more than in physics, until the last man has had his experience and said his say" (James 1919: 184). In this context, James disdains those who "imagine an abstract moral order in which the objective truth resides" (*ibid.*: 194) and opts for "chaos forever than an order based on any closet-philosopher's rule" (*ibid.*: 204). Sarin Marchetti explains this attitude in terms of 'moral blindness'. The practice of truth, he writes, is "an inventive one since through experiencing we re-arrange facts in different and before unimagined ways according to our interests" (Marchetti 2010: 20). We and our intuition of reality become poor and morally blind "when we fail to see how the sources of truth are nested in the very meaning those experiences have for those who have them" (*ibid.*: 21). The moral reflection then, in James' existentialistic pragmatism, has a crucial role in gearing the focus from moral principles to the individual's affair with the morality itself. As long as we exist, we give meaning to moral sensibilities by exercising certain values established by our activity. The sole habitation of goodness and badness, therefore, "can be a mind which feels them; and no world composed of merely physical facts can possibly be a world to which ethical propositions apply" (James 1919: 190). If so, is this a reason why James tolerates and offers a belief in God?

For James, since we have a capacity to eagerly act towards a 'moral life', we need to arouse our stormy passions to achieve the compulsory ideals of "living hard, and getting

out of the game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest" (*ibid*.: 213). In doing so, we need a vigorous relief that comes with a belief in God. Without this, he states, "the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power" (*ibid*.: 212). The issue revolves around our readiness to act that is intensified by believing in God. When we direct our will to this belief, "we feel, too, as if the appeal of religion to us were made to our own active good-will" (*ibid*.: 28). Thus, a belief in God stands for an ultimate moral reflection through which we are driven to take action for a better world. On the contrary, in Nietzsche we face the claim that belief in God is a reactive force that utterly denies life. One cannot take an active stance in religious beliefs to promote her life to higher values because the notion of God is invented to signify beyond the practical world and "devaluate the *only* world there is," to wit, "earthly reality" (Nietzsche 2007: 95). The one who believes in God, who is "suffering from itself," totally negates life in opposition to the courageous, free, and "proud man who turned out well, to the yes-saying, future-assured, future-confirming" (*ibid*.: 95). Instead of willingness to act, believing in God, according to Nietzsche, bears the will to nothingness as a means of guaranteeing that life must refute and obliterate itself. God is the *death-end* through which all possibilities, perspectives, and – hence – the becoming of life are annihilated. Affirmation means 'aesthetic justification' of life, that is, experiencing life as inherently meaningful and worthwhile.[10] Nietzsche's point is, as Leiter defends, "our *affective* or emotional attachment to life, which the 'terrible truths,' at least when taken seriously, threaten to undermine" (Leiter 2018: 6). In a world where God overlooks everything, all our actions would be lifeless, and so even if we attain some 'relief' by this belief, as James thinks, this reprieve would be nothing but pseudo-conformism escaping from life. Ultimately, Nietzsche would radically challenge James, asserting that the affirmation of life is what makes possible all interpretations, including the belief in God that James seeks to rationalize within his pragmatic philosophy.

## Concluding Remarks

I have tried to show that pragmatism and existentialism are in the same tune in putting substantial emphasis on the immediacy and concreteness of life. I contend that, in their investigation of the individual's relationship with *truth*, James and Nietzsche dwell on the notions of dynamism, action, finitude, utility, power, survival, and open-endedness. This is not merely a platitudinous statement of theoretical resemblance. Rather, there are interesting mutual implications in the unorthodox ideas of these two thinkers who waged a reputed war against the metaphysical traditions.

In contrast to ordinary conception of truth as 'inertial', Nietzsche and James conceive truth to be in perpetual motion intertwined with the individual's way of existing. This key characterization comes to the scene in two different modes. On the one hand,

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[10]   Leiter's description of the positive attitude towards life in terms of aesthetic justification can be seen in his (2018).

Nietzsche's strong opposition to the mechanical understanding of truth and his frank affirmation of life brings to bear the existential element in a striking fashion. Truth is born out of life without any ontological or divine determination, just as the individual exist in the world without any essence. On the other hand, the way James capitalizes on usefulness and *praxis* in his picture of truth displays clearly the pragmatic dimension of human existence and our accounts of it. Truth is an organic bond that holds all experiences together. In the light of these two attitudes, which purge truth of universality and conceptuality, one can discover the existentialistic aspect of James' ideas and the pragmatic line of Nietzsche's philosophy as follows: James' confirmation of our (metaphysically) 'non-intellectual' nature together with Nietzsche's giving priority to the acts of onto-valuation and interpretation suggest a certain affinity that can be discerned between pragmatism and existentialism *vis-à-vis* the individual's engagement in and involvement with the world *as an acting agent*.

It is against that sort of background that I offer the term 'existentialistic pragmatism' as an apt and fruitful characterization of James' notion of truth. This terminology may serve an elucidatory function with respect to two crucial elements in James' approach (in juxtaposition with Nietzsche's perspective on our human situation). First, James views experience as a whole in constant flux with its interlocking parts and considers truth as a process that works within it. Moreover, for James, truth overtly manifests itself in *praxis* by linking all experiences – including future expectations, sensations, and beliefs – morally or scientifically in every single worldly communication. As I have attempted to show in this paper, for both Nietzsche and James, to exist means – ultimately and naturally – producing truths by valuing, believing, and interpreting. As an inevitable ingredient of practice, truth is effectively equivalent to a kind of formation that incessantly grows by participating in the flow of life. Life perpetually produces and harbors various possibilities. With our passionate nature, by interpreting phenomena and putting it at work, we always act to give some form to our world and ourselves. Seen from the dynamic perspective of life, truth becomes a polymorphic invention that has an intrinsic relation to the genuine existence of finite individuals, encompassing all diversities of life even our moralistic reflections and scientific concerns. As far as human truth is concerned, beyond any 'givenness' (scientific facts and moral norms), this seems like a concise expression or manifestation of both the existentialistic force in pragmatism *à la* James and the pragmatic aspect we can find in Nietzsche's *terra*-bound philosophy. Despite these common points, the different attitudes of these two philosophies on the issue of God shows how their notion of the relationship between life and truth can also diverge. James' understanding of truth prompts him to assert that believing in God is a distinct possibility in life ensuring our ultimate 'willingness to act', whereas Nietzsche positions his idea otherwise. For Nietzsche, I claim, James' articulation on God assumes a 'will-less' subject that denies life and, thus, its way of existence in looking for the ultimate truth. This represents the demise of pragmatism's 'open air' in Nietzsche's existential formula, namely, the affirmation of life.

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