

AGAINST 'ENGLISH HAPPINESS':
PIGOU'S ETHICAL QUEST AND NIETZSCHE

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ABSTRACT

This article considers Pigou's handling of Nietzsche's criticism of morality. His reception of Nietzsche was remarkably sympathetic, because Pigou too criticised hedonistic utilitarianism and reacted to nihilism. Pigou considered the *Übermensch* as the German philosopher's most important contribution, being an antidote to the nihilistic approach to life originated by the crisis of traditional religious values. Pigou examined it with reference to the ideal of intrinsic goodness pursued in most of his early philosophical writings in accordance with G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, another cornerstone of his philosophical formation. Arguably inspired by Nietzsche's condemnation of democracy and egalitarianism, some of Pigou's writings endorsed eugenic principles and revealed an ambivalent attitude toward political and economic inequality, in contrast with his more famous arguments in favour of income redistribution in *Wealth and Welfare* and *The Economics of Welfare*. Pigou's writings also reveal his awareness of the complex relationship between economic welfare and well-being, a distinction possibly influenced by Nietzsche's accusation of British political economy for its shallow view of happiness.

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"Mankind does not strive for happiness; only the Englishman does that".

F. NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of The Idols* (1895)

INTRODUCTION

The April 1908 issue of *The International Journal of Ethics* features A.C. Pigou's "The Ethics of Nietzsche" (*EN*). It seems odd that the future author

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of *Wealth and Welfare* (WW, 1912) and *The Economics of Welfare* (EW, 1st ed. 1920), soon to be appointed Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge as Marshall's successor, tackled the controversial German philosopher. Both in moral science and political philosophy, Pigou's Cambridge had its roots in J.S. Mill's democratic, egalitarian, and feminist reformism – quite the opposite of Nietzsche's vision. Therefore, the fact that Pigou thoroughly engaged with *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is both surprising and significant. In the first place, it reveals Pigou's dissatisfaction with the philosophical insularity of contemporary Cambridge. Moreover, it discloses some connections between Nietzsche's philosophy and Pigou's economic and social thought, offering new insights into Nietzsche's influence on economics.¹

When *EN* appeared in print, the German philosopher had just begun to captivate the British public after an initially hostile reception. This was due to the shocking novelty of Nietzsche's theories, the virulent attack to them by Max Nordau's popular *Degeneration* (1895), and the poor quality of the first English translations (Thatcher 1970). Nietzsche's reputation in Britain reached its peak between 1909 and 1913.² Intellectuals and publicists of very different political orientations incorporated elements of his theories in their artistic and social views.³ However, apart from Pigou, no contemporary British economist paid public attention to Nietzsche.

It is likely that Pigou's literary inclinations played a part in drawing him to an author who was a poet as much as a philosopher.⁴ One imagines that Pigou was taken aback by *Zarathustra*, which was so incongruous with the philosophical atmosphere of contemporary Cambridge, dominated first by Henry Sidgwick and then by G.E. Moore. Yet, in contrast to Leonard Woolf's and Bertrand Russell's claim that the German philosopher was snubbed by all serious Cambridge intellectuals,⁵ Pigou was not outraged

¹ These studies have hitherto mainly focused on the similarities and differences between the philosopher's views and those of the German Historical School. See H. REINERT and E.H. REINERT 2006: 55 ss.; S.A. REINERT and E.H. REINERT 2006: 111; SEDGWICK 2007; ROBB 2009.

² After the outbreak of WWI Nietzsche was associated with anti-democratic and political-aggressive ideologies and his reputation deteriorated. See MARTIN 2003 and AKEHURST 2010.

³ THATCHER 1970; STONE 2002.

⁴ After a long neglect by historians, two complete biographies of Pigou have recently appeared: ASLANBEIGUI and OAKES 2015 and KUMEKAWA 2017. See also MCLURE and KNIGHT 2012.

⁵ "I do not think that Nietzsche ever had any important influence in England. I believe that more people in Oxford than Cambridge paid attention to him, but they were not the most able people. I should add that I consistently thought ill of Nietzsche, and I may be biased about his influence" (Russell quoted by IRONSIDE 1996: 46). Leonard Woolf wrote that Nietzsche "was practically ignored by almost everyone known by me in the last seventy years, and I cannot remember even a discussion about him", as quoted by THATCHER 1970: 267.

by Nietzsche's vehement anti-moral tirades, which he analysed with a balanced and open-minded attitude. There were in fact unexpected similarities between the two authors. On the political level, both were sceptical about democracy and egalitarianism, although to a different extent.⁶ From the philosophical standpoint, both were critical of hedonistic utilitarianism, and sought a different moral perspective to come to terms with the ostensible senselessness of life without succumbing to nihilism.

The fundamental aim of Nietzsche's philosophy was how to overcome "the conviction that life is meaningless or not worth living".⁷ Nietzsche's nihilism was the consequence of the 'death of God', amounting to the assumption, typical of modernity, that a belief in a superior Being or in an afterlife had become untenable. A similar perspective inspired Pigou's philosophical works. For all their detached and academic tone, they were underpinned by the moral deadlock and existential despair originating from the realization that earthly sufferings were not to be redeemed by belief in God. Yet, Pigou avoided any attack on religion and upheld its value in enhancing moral motivation (Donnini Macciò: 2017). For Nietzsche the ideals of Christian morality had lost their credibility, but they still maintained their grip on humanity, hindering the affirmation of human excellence and producing the decay of European civilisation. Nietzsche aimed at a reappraisal (or "transvaluation") of values in favour of life-enhancing instincts, while favouring the breeding of individuals of higher physical and intellectual qualities. Echoes of Nietzsche's reflections on inequality and eugenics feature in Pigou's economic writings, evidencing a conflict with his better-known arguments in favour of a more equal distribution of the means of happiness.

Philosophy and economics were closely intertwined in Pigou's perspective, especially before the publication of *WW* in 1912. To assess what Pigou made of Nietzsche's ethics, it is necessary to set *EN* in the context of the young Pigou's philosophical interests. This is the subject of the following section, which briefly discusses Pigou's ethical writings as well as the philosophical foundations of *WW* and *EW*. The third section illustrates Pigou's interpretation of Nietzsche's criticism of morality. In the fourth section Pigou's alleged "analytic hierarchicalism" (Peart and Levy 2005, 2008) is addressed in relation to Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism. The fifth section

⁶ Nietzsche's political thought still remains "the most contentious and controversial aspect of Nietzsche's studies" (ANSELL-PEARSON 1994: 2). See DETWILER 1990, LEITER 2015 and SHAW 2007.

⁷ REGINSTER 2006: 8. In Nietzsche's own words, "a nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought not to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist" [NIETZSCHE 1968 (1883-1888): 318].

tackles Pigou's interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. The conclusion assesses the significance of Pigou's analysis of Nietzsche to the economist's intellectual biography.

1. PIGOU'S EARLY ESSAYS ON PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

The study on Nietzsche was the last of a series of essays on religion and ethics published by Pigou in the first decade of the twentieth century. The first was *Robert Browning as a Religious Teacher* (RB, 1901),⁸ a work introducing the main themes of Pigou's subsequent philosophical reflections: the existence of God, the meaning of good and evil, and the impossibility of philosophical optimism.

To Pigou, Browning's poetry amounted to a philosophical system based on the beliefs that God's existence was intuitively self-evident, that His love would ultimately save all, and, therefore, that evil was ultimately illusory in the perspective of eternity. Browning's denial of the reality of evil appeared to Pigou contrary to human experience, incompatible with any ethical theory, and morally dangerous. Conversely, Pigou upheld a philosophical pessimism coupled with religious agnosticism.⁹ In "The Optimism of Browning and Meredith" (1905; 1908a), he criticised the belief that good would eventually prevail over evil, either because of divine redemption, as in Browning, or thanks to the development of a perfected humanity, as in Meredith, whose utopia was marred by the inescapability of death in Pigou's view.¹⁰ In insisting on the concrete reality of evil, and on the necessity of a firm moral perspective to tackle it, Pigou, like Nietzsche, showed a fascination with the meaning of human suffering which he sublimated later on in his analysis of the economic evils of society. Sharing Browning's critical assessment of psychological hedonism, Pigou stated that the individual was not "an inert mass, chained [...] to the irresistible power of imagined pain and pleasure" (RB: 103). An anti-hedonistic attitude was to remain a constant of Pigou as a philosopher as well as an

⁸ The essay won the Burney Prize, awarded to writings on a "moral or metaphysical subject, on the existence, nature, and attributes of God, or on the truth or evidence of Christian religion" (CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY 1901: 613). Pigou submitted it for a King's prize fellowship, without success. See Mc Lure 2011. Robert Browning (1812-1889) was one of the most celebrated and popular Victorian poets and playwrights.

⁹ Pigou partakes in the attitude to religion of many late Victorian intellectuals, though, apparently, without the 'storm and stress' (SIDGWICK 1898: 33) of the religious crisis suffered by both Sidgwick and Marshall (MEDEMA 2008).

¹⁰ PIGOU 1908a: 138. George Meredith (1828-1909) was an English poet and novelist influenced by German Romanticism and idealism.

economist. Also like Browning, Pigou rejected moral determinism – the idea that every human decision or action was the inevitable and necessary consequence of antecedent conditions – and pointed to a “limited” but “efficient” freedom of the will, as suggested by common sense (*RB*: 103; 1908a: 65-69, 79).

The central themes of *RB* reappeared in a series of articles published between 1905 and 1908, and collected, together with the essay on Nietzsche, in *The Problem of Theism and Other Essays* (*PT*, 1908a).¹¹ This book was the final product of Pigou’s interest in ethics and religion before the publication of his main economic treatises. Christian theism was the belief in the existence of “a powerful spiritual Being who wills the good” (*PT*: 21). The essays countered the arguments for it and, from the perspective of G.E. Moore’s ethical intuitionism,¹² assessed the definitions of good given by various philosophical and religious systems. Moore’s distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goodness¹³ was the key heuristic tool employed by Pigou to tackle Nietzsche’s ethics. Moore’s ‘ideal utilitarianism’ (Rashdall 1907) – a consequentialist approach which valued actions not in terms of the happiness or pleasure they produced, as in classical utilitarianism, but in terms of the goodness of their consequences – substantiated Pigou’s philosophical outlook. Indeed, the starting point of Pigou’s *Wealth and Welfare* was a reflection on the general notion of good/welfare. Quoting Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (1903), Pigou observed there that welfare was synonymous with the philosophical good, since it did not include “material things or conditions” but only states of consciousness, and could be “brought under the category of greater and less” (*WW*: 3).¹⁴

However, Pigou specified that the subject of economics was economic welfare, the part of welfare “arising in connection with the earning and spending of the national dividend”. Such a distinction arguably followed

¹¹ The essays are: “The Ethics of the Gospels” (1907b), “Some Points of Ethical Controversy” (1907c, included in *PT* with the title “The Problem of Good”), “The Optimism of Browning and Meredith” (1905), “The Ethics of Nietzsche” (1908c), and three original essays – “The General Nature of Reality”, “The Problem of Theism”, and “Free Will”.

¹² Borrowing the example from Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (1903: 7), Pigou wrote that it was possible to recognize some things to be good and some bad, “just as we perceive that some are yellow and other red” (1908a: 82).

¹³ This distinction is repeatedly stressed in Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (1903: 18 ss., 94 ss., 146, 164, 171 ss., 194) and features with comparable recurrence in Pigou (1906: 372; 1907: 280; 1908a: 80, 105, 130, 117; 1908b: 9; 1912: 9, 59; 1920: 14; 1923: 80-81).

¹⁴ “Welfare means the same thing as good. It, too, cannot be defined, in the sense of being analyzed in its parts. At the same time, we can say, and indeed it is the chief task of ethics to say, whether, and in what way, particular things belong to welfare” (*WW*: 3).

from the necessity, so dear to Alfred Marshall, to draw up the boundaries of the discipline. Unfortunately, Pigou only hinted at the relationship between “general” (in the sense of ‘overall’) welfare and “economic” welfare. He acknowledged that this relationship was complex, and often uncertain; in an *ante litteram* formulation of Easterlin’s paradox, he cautioned the reader that changes in economic welfare did not always have an equivalent effect on general welfare (or, in today’s term, well-being), and that they could even vary in opposite directions. For instance, non-economic welfare depended on both how income was earned, the quality of the working environment and consumption patterns (some acts of consumption had debasing, and other elevating, influences on the individual). “Any rigid inference from effects on economic welfare to effects on total welfare is out of the question”; however, concluded Pigou, in absence of special knowledge, the effects of a change in economic welfare on total welfare would generally be “equivalent in direction, though not in magnitude” (*WW*: 11; *EW*: 20). Economic welfare, besides being a good proxy for general well-being, had the advantage of being measurable by money, so that its study was crucial “to help forward the betterment of social life” (*WW*: 4). In *EW* most of the openly philosophical content of *WW* was dropped, including the equation of good with welfare and all the references to Moore, but there remained the idea of welfare as consisting in states of consciousness.

Pigou was dissatisfied with the narrow concept of good provided by psychological hedonism, which he defined “an untenable and exploded doctrine” (Pigou 1903: 67). Moore’s *Principia Ethica* featured the most popular criticism of hedonistic utilitarianism in early 20th century Cambridge, so that J.M. Keynes credited Moore with liberating his generation from the negative influence of the “over-valuation of the economic criterion” brought about by the Benthamite tradition, “the worm which has been gnawing at the insides of modern civilization and is responsible for its present moral decay” [Keynes 1972 (1938): 445-446]. Like Keynes, Pigou was in search of a fuller notion of good and was influenced by Moore. But Nietzsche’s fierce attack on utilitarianism could not fail to attract his attention.

2. PIGOU’S VINDICATION OF NIETZSCHE’S CRITIQUE OF MORALITY

The intent of Pigou’s essay on Nietzsche was to reject the commonest misinterpretations of the German philosopher’s theories. Pigou believed that, by applying the end-means distinction to Nietzsche’s often contradictory, and apparently immoral or anti-moral, statements, their true meaning

could emerge, and it would appear much less controversial than usually maintained.¹⁵

The argument that evil sometimes produces good effects, and that, conversely, the good may bring about evil, was central to Nietzsche, according to Pigou. Nietzsche's point that suffering was the fundamental source of elevation for humanity was an example. Pigou referred to *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche had written that only "the discipline of suffering – of great suffering – know ye not that it is only this discipline that has produced all the elevation of humanity hitherto?" (Nietzsche 1906: 117, quoted in *EN*: 111). For Nietzsche, suffering was the stimulus to human creativity, as epitomised by the life of great geniuses like Beethoven (and himself). Hence the "Beyond-man" continued his discipline of suffering indefinitely ("Beyond-man" was Alexander Tille's rendition of *Übermensch*; "Overhuman" is adopted in the following). Nietzsche scathingly criticised Christianity, but, quite paradoxically, he recognized that, by enforcing moral oppression, it had been fundamental in forging humanity. Social and economic inequality was another instance of evil (according to current morality) producing good results. Nietzsche considered an ethics based on pity and equality as an obstacle to human excellence, since all great human achievements needed the submission of the uneducated masses and of women,¹⁶ a submission acting as "foundation and scaffolding" (*EN*: 113) for the elevation of superior individuals destined to fulfil higher duties.

Pigou reported these statements but did not comment on them. There are echoes of these Nietzschean arguments in several of his writings, at any rate. An instance was "Eugenics and Some Wage Problems", the Galton Lecture he gave the Eugenic Society in 1923. Here he argued that a good society was composed by two kinds of men. "Intrinsically good" individuals, "attuned to the beautiful in nature and in art [...] simple and sincere, whose passions are controlled, and sympathies developed", and contributing to non-economic welfare, should exist alongside "instrumentally good" individuals, who enabled society "to grow up and maintain itself" (1923: 81) by advancing material welfare. It was up to society to decide which human type to promote, granted that favouring the latter over the former implied the sacrifice of non-economic welfare to economic welfare.¹⁷ Pigou

¹⁵ Pigou's sources are Alexander Tille's first English translation of Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1896), and Helen Zimmermann's translation of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1906).

¹⁶ As stressed by BURCH (2014: 204), in Nietzsche women are usually associated with decadence and corruption. On Pigou's alleged dismissive attitude to women, see ASLANBEIGUI 1997.

¹⁷ The example of the two classes of individuals reappeared in *EW*. Quoting his former teacher G.L. Dickinson's *Letters from John Chinaman* (1901b), a book that upheld the moral supe-

stressed above all that diversity was necessary to a good society. To explain, he referred to Nietzsche:

We need the qualities that are a means to good as well as those that are inherently good. A world containing nothing but Nietzschean supermen would destroy itself in war: one consisting of nothing, but St. Francis of Assisi, would perish of its own pity. It would not function any more than a man would function whose body consisted solely of the most honourable part of the brain, or an engine consisting only exclusively of perfect pistons. To secure the greatest sum of ultimate good, we need a balance (Pigou 1923: 81-82).

The example of the all-brain individual reminds of the parable of the “reverse cripple” in *Zarathustra* (see section 4 below). Both explicit and implicit references reveal that Pigou had his readings of Nietzsche in mind while making these points.

Above all, Pigou argued in *EN* that Nietzsche’s provocative attacks on the foundations of Christian morality – sympathy, altruism, and piety – had been misunderstood. The German philosopher had shocked many, in fact, by claiming that those values were more dangerous than vices, as they enfeebled both mind and body, hampering human flourishing. Pigou tried to defuse the controversial content of the above argument. He denied that in *Zarathustra* Nietzsche, “himself tender and pitiful” (*EN*: 115), intended to reject either compassion or religion as such. “It is not really sympathy for his neighbour that Nietzsche condemns, but certain kinds of anti-social action resulting from that sympathy [...] It is a misunderstanding of Nietzsche to assert that he condemns sympathy and love”. Rather, Pigou added, “what he condemns is the direction which they at present take” (*EN*:116-117). Pigou seems to imply that, if it were possible to redirect the compassionate instincts to protect the best individuals as much as lower ones, Nietzsche’s denunciation would not be warranted. Pigou’s interpretation appears in line with recent Nietzsche scholarship, such as Leiter (2002) and Richardson (2006: 175).¹⁸

Sanitizing Nietzsche, however, was not so simple. Granted that altruism corrupted and weakened the spirit, he proposed ethical “revaluings”

riority of Eastern civilisations over Western individualism and materialism, Pigou stressed that, even if the book’s claim was perhaps exaggerate, it was indeed possible that “effort devoted to the production of people which are good instruments may involve a failure to produce people who are good men” (*EW*: 14).

¹⁸ As LEITER (2002: 124) has remarked: “If there were a social order in which morality existed – and in which it served the interests of “lower” types – without having any effects on potentially “higher men”, then one would imagine that Nietzsche should have no objections”. This was also Pigou’s opinion.

from pity into hardness, and from altruism into selfishness. There was also a political side: Nietzsche advocated a shift from equality into rank ordering, and from efforts towards social improvement into breeding of 'higher' men.¹⁹ Hence Nietzsche's denunciation of liberal democracy, egalitarianism, and the related social thinking. Particularly dismissive arguments were levelled against British utilitarians, *in primis* Bentham and J.S. Mill. Nietzsche found their emphasis on what he considered a petty concept of happiness especially contemptible. As Leiter (2002: 130) has argued, "by the hedonistic doctrine of well-being, Nietzsche takes utilitarians to have in mind 'English happiness,' namely, 'comfort and fashion'" (Nietzsche 1906: § 228). Pleasure, contentment, and security were The Last Men's aims. "We have discovered happiness' the last men say, blinking" (Nietzsche 1908: 13). Hedonist utilitarianism was the philosophy of the despicable, and Nietzsche's exhortation was unequivocal:

Surpass these masters of to-day, O my brethren, the petty folk. They are the greatest danger for beyond-man! Surpass, ye higher men, the petty virtues, the petty policies, the grains-of-sand-regards, the swarming of ants, the miserable ease, the 'happiness of the greatest number' (Nietzsche 1908: 393).

Indeed, Raffaelli has stressed that Marshall was led to express something akin to a Nietzschean ode to strength by his concern with the ethical aspects of social evolution: "The Ideal is not comfort, but life, vigour" (Marshall Papers, 5/9, in Raffaelli 2003: 99). However, although with some inconsistencies, Marshall never openly deviated from the utilitarian tradition in its 'higher', Millian version, as argued by Keynes (1933: 64).²⁰

3. A NIETZSCHEAN IN CAMBRIDGE?

The need to enhance both industrial efficiency and military power by improving the quality of the population was widely felt and hotly debated at the beginning of the 20th century (Searle 1971). The distinction between the "respectable" poor and the "residuum" was common in debates on social policies (MacKenzie 1976: 516). The eugenic movement was then gaining growing consent among Cambridge academics. Two of Pigou's teachers, Marshall and Lowes Dickinson, were charter members of the

¹⁹ RICHARDSON (2006: 6) admonished not to confuse these views with the advocacy of social practices based on competition and the survival of the fittest by Social Darwinism.

²⁰ By contrast, SHOVE (1942: 305-306), WHITAKER (1977: 165-166, 183, 195) and MATTHEWS (1990: 26) emphasized Marshall's distance from utilitarianism.

Cambridge Eugenic Society. The former, who devoted a chapter to population issues in *Principles of Economics* (1890, Book IV, ch. 5; see Groenewegen 1995: 446), was particularly interested in the ‘hereditary’ causes of poverty. Dickinson was vice president of the Cambridge Eugenic Society, supported neo-Malthusian policies, and mentioned Nietzsche’s aristocratic ideal in both *The Meaning of Good* (1901a: 53-61) and *Justice and Liberty* (1908: 15-17).²¹ J.M. Keynes was another distinguished member, and treasurer, of the Eugenic Society (Singerman 2016).²²

The eugenic movement expressed themes and standpoints deeply rooted in Edwardian culture. Influential Fabian reformers like Sidney and Beatrice Webb upheld a peculiar version of eugenics, resting on a mix of environmentalist and biological arguments, and ultimately calling for state intervention to better the material conditions of the lower classes (Searle 1981: 240 ss.; for a divergent interpretation see MacKenzie 1976). Pigou’s position on equality reveal the ambivalences characterising contemporary New Liberal thinking. Pigou was obviously affected by the progressive and humanitarian tradition of J.S. Mill, assessing the individual as an institutional and historical construction and emphasising nurture above nature, but he was also influenced by the intellectual climate of his own time, permeated by eugenic ideas, which he filtered through the radical anti-egalitarianism of Nietzsche’s philosophy.

Nietzsche’s scathing references to egalitarianism are in fact copious (Anomaly 2005). His theory of the death of God implied that there was no basis for crediting all humanity with equal moral worth. The utilitarian (and Christian) faith in human equality, as expressed by Bentham’s dictum “everybody to count as one, nobody for more than one”, was for him “slave morality”, whereas inequality was the main drive towards individual perfection in the age of democracy.²³ Harsh eugenic measures were needed, nurturing biologically outstanding individuals and limiting the number of the weak ones:

²¹ Dickinson (1862-1932) taught Analytical and Deductive Politics at Cambridge from 1896 to 1920 and lectured in Political Science at LSE. He collaborated with Marshall in the establishment of the Economic Tripos and became the first Secretary of the newly created Economics Board.

²² According to SCHUMPETER [2006 (1954): 757-758], Pigou was the only eminent economist of the time to pay serious attention to the relationship between redistribution and quality of the population; this claim was not wholly accurate even with respect to other Cambridge economists, as indicated above.

²³ “This practice of unequal ‘self-regard’ will drive the individual to ‘overcome’ his contemptible current condition, to make of himself something higher and better. The alternative attitude – which Nietzsche regarded as ‘democratic’ and which embraces ‘equal regard’ – has the opposite result: as Nietzsche says: ‘Democracy represents the disbelief in great human beings [...] Everyone is equal to everyone else’ (NIETZSCHE 1968: 752)” (LEITER 2002: 136).

Society, as great trustee of life, is responsible *before* life itself for every failed life, – it also has to pay for it: hence it should prevent it. Society *should* prevent procreation in many cases: for this it may hold in readiness, without regard to descent, rank and spirit, the hardest measures of constraint, withdrawals of freedom, in some cases castration (Nietzsche 1968 [1888]: 734, quoted in Richardson 2006: 198).

There is a Nietzschean flavour in Pigou's contribution to the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded* (1909), where he proposed a "large expenditure" to prevent the reproduction of the mentally defective and thus ensure the higher good of society. The initial sentence in the following passage reminds of Nietzsche's above citation:

We are trustees for the inherent quality as well as for the material welfare of future generations. A cause that makes strongly towards race deterioration is operating and is known. It is in our power, with but little severity to any living person, to remove that cause. Those parents whose children it may be necessary to withdraw from their care may, indeed, suffer pain. This is a real evil, but it is temporary, and, in comparison with the enduring good that must result to the race, it is small. In this matter, ignorant as we still are, there is knowledge enough to warrant action of a definite kind. The general policy that ought to be pursued is beyond dispute. The time has arrived for legislation (Pigou 1909: 100).

This standpoint had an economic side as well. As is well known, Pigou suggested a fundamental principle of welfare economics in *WW*, namely distributive justice. Later developed by his disciple Hugh Dalton, it features in economic textbooks as the Pigou-Dalton rule: any addition to the share of the national dividend accruing to the poor, to be accomplished through either "interferences with the natural cause of wages" or taxation, enhances economic welfare. Interestingly though, Pigou qualified this principle by distinguishing between the effects of redistribution to two different classes of indigents. Young people, and adults in an early stage of sickness or unemployment, should receive resources from the state to improve industrial efficiency, but no investment of public funds could prove profitable in the case of the "morally, mentally or physically degenerate". In their case, "the utmost that can be done is to seclude them permanently from opportunities of parasitism upon others, of spreading their moral contagion, and of breeding offspring of like character to themselves" (*WW*: 363). Though Pigou admitted that such individuals should be cared for by society, he also stressed that "our main effort must be, by education and, still more, by restriction to propagation among the mentally and physically unfit, to cut off at the source this stream of tainted lives" (*WW*: 36). Pigou's choice of words here is telling: the expression "tainted life" recalls the "failed life" of

Nietzsche's quote above. Pigou supported "permanent segregation" and even sterilization to improve "the general economic welfare of the community" not only in *WW* but also in (1907a: 269), and (*EW*: 95: 112).

Nevertheless, historians are divided on Pigou's treatment of inequality and eugenics. Among those who have described Pigou as a convinced eugenicist and supporter of inequality are Peart and Levy (2002; 2005; 2008). They have argued for a crucial transition in the history of economics from the "analytic egalitarianism" of the classics to the "analytic hierarchicalism" of the neo-classical economists. The former believed in human equality, ascribing differences to accident or luck, and considered everyone equally capable of making economic decisions. The classics considered sympathy, a sentiment that fostered a view of others as equals, a crucial element in moral judgment. But when the Darwinian revolution proclaimed the importance of inherited characteristics, the acknowledgment of natural inequalities led to the idea of ranking among individuals, and eugenics entered economics. Economists began to question the utilitarian view counting one individual's happiness as valuable as any others', and many took a sceptical stance toward democracy. Peart and Levy, who view F.Y. Edgeworth as the foremost analytic hierarchicalist, include Marshall and Pigou in that group –, the latter for his correlation between poverty and bad habits (lack of foresight, indulgence, etc.), as well as for his endorsement of segregation or sterilization of the mentally defective (see above). Pigou's most recent biography advances a similar view, stressing his paternalism, and even disrespect, to the indigent (Kumegawa 2017: 78).

Other interpreters have argued instead that, though Pigou denied that individuals had the same capacity for happiness and endorsed eugenic policies, to him the social environment was as responsible of the quality of the population as inheritance and breeding (Guidi 2008). "Environments, as individuals, have children", Pigou observed (*EW*: 115). Pigou accordingly maintained, *contra* most eugenicists, that improving economic welfare had positive effects on the human stock, so that redistributive policies were beneficial.

Pigou's reflections on democracy, however, seem coherent with the hierarchicalist paradigm of Peart and Levy. In *The Unity of Political and Economic Science*, Pigou defined a "fallacy" the view that "pure democracy" led to the greatest "legislative good" (Pigou 1906: 379). The democratic argument that everyone was the best judge of his/her own interest rested on the erroneous assumption that one was always the best judge of what he/she *ought* to want. "Even ... if it were true that freedom of each did conduce to a maximum satisfaction of the desires of all, it would not follow that it conduced to their maximum *good* or *true* satisfaction. This conclusion is obviously applicable to both economics and politics" (Pigou 1906: 380). In

the same vein, there was the claim that "the poor, as entrepreneurs of investment in themselves and in their children, are abnormally incompetent" (WW: 358-9). These passages signal Pigou's anxieties about the potentially negative effects of mass enfranchisement on both economic efficiency and human quality. It is not surprising that he turned to the Overhuman as a corrective.

4. THE NATURE OF THE OVERHUMAN AND THE GOSPELS' ETHICS

The theory of the Overhuman captured the imagination of the British public, not least because it lent itself to various readings, among which the eugenics-inspired ones were paramount. To name an author who was very influential in diffusing Nietzsche's ideas in Britain, G.B. Shaw's interpretation of the *Übermensch* in his play *Man and Superman* (1903) was eminently political, asserting the necessity to breed 'higher individuals' to advance the socialist ideal. Whereas Nietzsche had conceived of the Overhuman as an antidote to the nihilism that menaced to swallow the spirit of contemporary Europe, Shaw "employed the Superman concept to infuse dynamism in a socialist doctrine endangered by inertia" (Thatcher 1970: 200; see also Searle 1971: 95). Shaw's perspective was common in Fabian circles but was criticised by Marxists, because it implied the primacy of a change in the individual over a change in society.

Pigou's Overhuman appears closer to Nietzsche's intention, inasmuch as the discussion of the topic in *EN* was strictly philosophical and free from political overtones. It also reveals Pigou's attitude toward Nietzsche's perfectionist ethics. In tune with modern interpreters, Pigou understood the Overhuman as Nietzsche's main contribution to a positive moral theory, whose features he strove to assess. To start with, for Pigou the Overhuman should not be intended as some higher form of existence, or as a condition to be achieved after death. Rather, Pigou believed that the Overhuman shared a fundamental ambiguity with the Christian Kingdom of God. Both could be viewed either as present, or as future, "states of the heart", in the sense that both Nietzsche and Christianity aspired to "a future time when this good thing, now rarely and spasmodically seen, will dominate the world" (*EN*: 120). Pigou, on the contrary, was interested in the good here and now, as he aspired to pin down the qualities of the 'intrinsically good' individual.

The point was that to Pigou the *Übermensch* embodied Nietzsche's version of Moore's intrinsic goodness. If Moore prized love and aesthetic appreciation, the Overhuman displayed a "loft spirituality", a "noble morality", and "pride in himself"; he was brave, unconcerned, great and lonely, and fearless (*EN*: 121). Above all, the Overhuman was endowed with ex-

treme forms of good and evil traits, whereas the common individual featured only moderate doses of good and evil. With the parable of the “reverse cripple” – a man possessing too much of one body organ and too little of all others – Nietzsche posited the idea of a full and harmonious development of all human qualities, good and evil alike. However, as Pigou stressed, not only were some of these characteristics conflicting, but the exact meaning of ‘fullness’ and ‘harmony’ was not explained. Therefore, for Pigou (and he believed this conclusion held for Nietzsche, too) the traits pertaining to the Overhuman remained undetermined. Today’s scholarship claims that Nietzsche did not supply a substantive set of criteria for determining excellence, and that his ethical perfectionism was characterized by the absence of a *telos*, so that the development of one’s qualities was an unending process (Meakins 2014). What is more, since Nietzsche’s self-overcoming involved both questioning and ultimately abandoning a self-evaluative framework (Mitchell 2016), Pigou was right in stressing that the Overhuman’s features were, at the very least, particularly difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, he believed that the Overhuman, a “dim ghost”, could inspire the “man of practice”.

The Overhuman’s traits resemble those of Thomas Carlyle’s hero (1841). However, as evidenced by Meakins (2014), there were differences between Nietzsche’s and Carlyle’s ethical perfectionisms. Of Carlyle, Nietzsche wrote that he was “absurd, muddle-headed, lacking [...] real power of intellect, real depth of intellectual perception, in short, philosophy” (1906: 236). Nietzsche criticized the romantic hero-worship expounded by Carlyle as an empty, emotive, and fanatic caricature of greatness, discouraging true self-development and creativeness – an assessment which may help explain Pigou’s apparent lack of interest for the English writer.

Pigou’s research on intrinsic goodness continued in another essay featuring in *PT*, “The Ethics of the Gospels”, an assessment of Jesus’ ethical teachings. Pigou maintained that the moral side of Jesus’ teachings was incomplete, unsystematic, and somewhat concealed by its theological parts (which he was not interested in). Once again, the most important point was for him to ascertain what was intrinsically good for Jesus. The answer was love, a kind of love consisting in a complete devotion to one’s ideal, without purpose of reward or self-aggrandizement. Love was both an end in itself and a means to the good to Jesus, and “the right object, Jesus tells us, is God and Man, and furthermore, not Man merely, but every man, for every man is our neighbour”. That love should be universal, though, seemed questionable to Pigou, because “all men are not alike” (*PT*: 107).²⁴

²⁴ Remember Zarathustra’s claim: “Beyond-man is my care; with me, he and not man is

However, the Scriptures lacked clarity about Jesus' intention, so that, concluded Pigou, "we are without guidance as to the way in which our love were (*sic*) best distributed" (*PT*: 108).

In conclusion, Pigou's ethical research remained unsettled. Neither the Gospels, nor Nietzsche's philosophy, nor Browning's poetical world could stand the consistency requirements of Pigou's philosophical analysis or underpin a specific and viable ethical stance. Still, all were significant in providing a necessary "inspiration" to human beings.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this article has been to assess why and how Pigou read Nietzsche, not to establish whether Pigou was right in interpreting Nietzsche as he did. It is likely that Pigou was not well equipped in this respect. It is a pillar of Nietzsche scholarship today that interpretation should avoid partial or selective readings, whereas Pigou, at the time of *EN*, was not familiar with the whole of the philosopher's *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, Pigou's article, besides containing original insights into Nietzsche's ethical philosophy, bears witness to the wide range of his philosophical interests, which arguably informed his welfare economics.

Two interrelated issues were especially significant to Pigou: the problem of suffering and that of human excellence, both involving a critique of Judeo-Christian morality as well as of hedonistic utilitarianism. This had implications for Pigou's economic thought, in particular for the relationship between economic welfare and well-being. The German philosopher's handling of evil and suffering, closely related to his perfectionist ethics, was the key point. Pigou, like Nietzsche, was in search of a non-religious moral perspective to deal with suffering and to assess human excellence. The content and meaning of the good, for both individuals and society, was clearly of paramount interest to him. The young Pigou – a trained philosopher – sought answers in Nietzsche and Moore, in the moral teaching of the Gospels, and even in literature and poetry. A few years later, *qua* Marshallian economist, Pigou investigated social sufferings, namely destitution and unemployment. His economic concerns, therefore, lined up with his philosophical quest. But, in the end, he was not successful in translating his ethical views in economic language. After WW he probably felt that his duties as professor of Political Economy and guardian of the

the first and only thing. Not the neighbour, not the poorest one, not the greatest sufferer, not the best one" (NIETZSCHE 1908: 321).

Cambridge Economic Tripos were at odds with his philosophical exercises, and economics took over Pigou's intellectual horizon. From that moment onwards, he strictly limited the ethical forays in his writings.

It is more difficult to ascertain whether, and to what extent, Pigou accepted Nietzsche's philosophy, granted that in *EN* he carefully maintained the objective stance of the impartial analyst. It is apparent, however, that Pigou somehow tried to align Nietzsche with current morality because he felt an affinity with his thought. It may be that these similarities reached on to Pigou's and Nietzsche's conception of the ethical aspects of economic science. It was commonly held that Nietzsche had no interest whatsoever in economics. It has recently emerged, instead, that he did not ignore the discipline, as he studied some economic texts in his youth (van Meerhaeghe 2006). He later abandoned the subject and took a critical stance towards all things economic, especially towards English political economy. Nietzsche loathed its "emphasis on utility, on man as *homo oeconomicus*, the emphasis on social reforms, the striving for wealth and comfort", and upheld "an opposition between money and spirituality, between utility and culture, and between efficiency and final values" (Brobjer 1999: 62). It has also been written that "in Nietzsche's views, social reform consisted not in the institution of the welfare state, but in the realization of a higher type of human being, the Superman" (Thatcher 1970: 57). Possibly, this is what Pigou, the welfare economist with philosophical training, found especially interesting in Nietzsche.

Pigou sympathized with Nietzsche's contempt for shallow materialistic values, as he insisted on the potential trade-offs between economic and non-economic welfare. Though circumscribing the subject matter of economic science to what was measurable by money, and though acknowledging economic welfare as an important part of well-being, Pigou took pains to stress that maximizing the national income was not equivalent to maximizing the good of either the individual or society. Pigou's moral paradigm resembles Keynes's. This consisted in the rejection of the primacy of the economic criterion and of the calculating mentality, the consequences of Benthamism that Nietzsche, too, loathed (Mini 1991, Carabelli and Cedrini 2011). Like Keynes, the young Pigou sensed the limitations of utilitarianism and was drawn to the contemporary philosophers who embodied a departure from that tradition. Pigou turned to Nietzsche instead of drawing inspiration from other British 'Romantic' critics of hedonism and materialism, like Carlyle or John Ruskin. After all, theirs were the kind of attacks on the economic discipline that Marshall aimed to counteract with the institution of the Economic Tripos and the establishment of a Cambridge school nurturing scientists with "cool head and warm hearts" (Marshall 1925: 174). But the unease among some of Marshall's most dis-

tinguished pupils remained, and many were attracted to different ethical approaches. Nietzsche was sufficiently exotic, and his main concerns far enough from economics, to allow Pigou to engage with him without betraying Marshall's teachings.

Ironically, historians of economics have stressed the similarity between Nietzsche's self-regarding ethics and economic individualism, wondering why economists have never tried to appropriate Nietzsche to their field. Backhouse and Drechsler (2006: 1) have concluded sarcastically that "the discipline was not even able to utilize the philosopher most fitting to its mainstream". Pigou would strongly disagree with this remark: he was attracted to Nietzsche for reasons opposite to apologetics.

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