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The Ubiquity of Hermeneutics

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NIETZSCHE AND THE UBIQUITY OF HERMENEUTICS

Babette Babich

Hermeneutics and interpretation in Nietzsche

To understand Nietzsche in the context of hermeneutics is to understand not only Nietzsche's philosophy of interpretation (Figl 1982a, 1984) but his perspective on perspective (Cox 1997) or "perspectivalism" (Babich 1994: 116f). In turn, given his background familiarity with hermeneutic methodology, this also corresponds to Nietzsche's own approach as an interpreter of texts and antiquity as of the life, the culture, the history of ancient Greece (see the range of contributions to Jensen and Heit 2014 as well as Ugolini 2003; Figl 1984; and Pöschl 1979). And to do this, just to the extent that Nietzsche specifically reflects on interpretation as such, entails a hermeneutics of hermeneutics.

In this connection, although not otherwise concerned with hermeneutics, the analytically minded Hegel and Nietzsche scholar, Richard Schacht begins his reflections on "Nietzsche on Philosophy, Interpretation and Truth" by pointing out that not only would Nietzsche seemingly "reduce" all philosophy to the level of interpretation and hence merely *derivative* activity (here it is important to note that the defining claims about which the analytic-continental division continue to swirl have to do with anxieties regarding interpretation and influence as opposed to supposed or pretended "originality") but Nietzsche seems to characterize "his own philosophical activity as interpretive, even though this would appear to place his own position on a par with those he rejects and brands as 'lies,' 'errors,' and 'fictions.'" (Schacht 1984: 75). As Nietzsche reflects: "Granted this too is only interpretation – and you will be eager enough to raise this objection? – well, so much the better" (Nietzsche 1973: 34). Very few of Nietzsche's predictions regarding the reception of his own work have had the same impact and analytic philosophers have been worriedly objecting to and thereby interpreting the same point for decades now.

But invoking Nietzsche's hermeneutics of hermeneutics remains elusive despite its obviousness. This may be due to the absence of the word hermeneutics, as Nietzsche does not focus specifically on the term itself but speaks in the broader conventional

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1 framework of the nineteenth century analyzing the methods of philology (see Benne
2 2006; Babich 2010) and the terms Nietzsche uses include *interpretation*, *explication*,
3 *exposition*, *explanation*, *poetizing*, and so on. Thus Nietzsche does not do anything so
4 comfortably convenient for today's scholarship on hermeneutics as his predecessor
5 Friedrich Schleiermacher (whom Nietzsche otherwise cites in connection with clas-
6 sical texts/theology, but for a discussion of Schleiermacher himself, see Hamacher
7 1990b). Defining hermeneutics as the "art of understanding," Schleiermacher care-
8 fully defers a complete or what he names a "perfect" definition of a "general her-
9 meneutics" (Schleiermacher 1994: 73), speaking of a general hermeneutics a bit in the
10 spirit of the fragment known as the "Oldest System Program." Now the authorship
11 of this fragment continues to be disputed and this is to Nietzsche's mind the real
12 meaning of a hermeneutic challenge, with claims of authorship for Hölderlin (of
13 whom it would be convenient for philosophy to have him as its author and which
14 attribution works very well simply because the text is included in an influential
15 translation of his prose writings in English: Hölderlin 1988, where simply reading
16 that citation here in the text seemingly settles the attribution) or Hegel in whose
17 handwriting the text happened to have been written (and for which case, although
18 Hegel is in no need of it to assure his philosophical credentials, the Hegelian Otto
19 Pöggeler has argued very precisely – see Pöggeler 1965) or Schelling (it was certainly
20 published for the first time in Schelling's name by Franz Rosenzweig in 1917, see
21 also, Gordon 2005: 126) or else some other name history has not otherwise trans-
22 mitted to us. The "Oldest System Program" is thus both an analogy to Schleierma-
23 cher's deferred definition of a "general" hermeneutics and an illustration of the
24 durability of hermeneutic disputes with regard to matters of interpretation: the sheer
25 fact that a text is written in author's own hand does not suffice to make the case for
26 authorship (Hegel) nor indeed does the imprimatur of a publisher (nor yet the edi-
27 torial attestation by Rosenzweig, a putatively neutral other) nor yet the easy accessi-
28 bility of a translated conventionality (Pfauf).

29 If Nietzsche by his profession is concerned with such textual points he goes fur-
30 ther *as philosopher*, in Arthur Danto's title phrasing (1965) borrowed just a bit from
31 the neo-Kantian expositor of both Kant and Nietzsche, Hans Vaihinger, *Nietzsche als*
32 *Philosoph* (1902) and to this extent it is essential to speak in Nietzsche's case of the
33 *ubiquity*, as it were, of *hermeneutics*. To invoke Cox's expression, interpretation for
34 Nietzsche "goes all the way down and all the way up" (Cox 1999: 139). Nietzsche
35 thus deploys hermeneutics as part and parcel and even as the motor of his philoso-
36 phy, claiming that everything is interpretation, by which "everything" Nietzsche
37 means *everything*: and he means the claim in its most logically articulated or con-
38 sequent sense: to say that everything is interpretation entails that everything is
39 interpreted and, to the extent that Nietzsche speaks against the fiction of the subject
40 as a phantom of grammar (Gadamer picks up on just this point), Nietzsche also
41 makes the object ontological claim that *everything* (including the text itself) is an
42 interpreter. In this sense, the world itself, nature, the entire cosmos as such is for
43 Nietzsche hermeneutic through and through.

44 In this empirically comprehensive and very literal sense, the ubiquity of herme-
45 neutics in Nietzsche's thinking corresponds to the heart of Nietzsche's doctrine of
46 the world "as" will to power. Hence, among the several subtitles Nietzsche gives to

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1 his provisional (and never completed) book project: *The Will to Power*, it is no
2 coincidence that a prominent variant is an “attempt at,” not, as is more commonly
3 cited (and *pace* both Karl Löwith in an older tradition and Bernard Reginster more
4 recently) “a Revaluation of Values” but “An Attempt at a New Explication [*Ausle-*
5 *gung*] of all Events” (Nietzsche 1980: 11, 619; the formula recurs on 629 and again in
6 Vol. 12, 19 and 94, etc.). That Nietzsche intends to articulate this “new” schema of
7 explication as literally or fundamentally as possible is manifest in the aphorism
8 sketch immediately detailing the sense of his title with regard to the scientific expla-
9 nation of nature itself: “The Explication of Nature: we introduce ourselves into it”
10 (Nietzsche 1980: 622), a point Nietzsche was inclined to repeat throughout his work,
11 reflecting on what he calls our tendency to “anthropomorphize nature” (Nietzsche
12 1980: 12, 16), a point to be considered in connection with his recommendation in his
13 *The Gay Science* that “it will do to consider science as an attempt to humanize things
14 as faithfully as possible” (Nietzsche 1974: 172–73) together with his even more
15 explicit reflection there that “Mathematics is merely the means for general and ulti-
16 mate knowledge of the human” (Nietzsche 1974: 215, trans. modified). For
17 Nietzsche, the natural scientist is engaged in hermeneutic interpretation, interpreting
18 nature after our own all-too human muster (and what other muster would be avail-
19 able to us?). Nietzsche continues to affirm, as if in the event that his point were not
20 yet clear enough, that we have in all such cases to do with “world-interpretation, not
21 world-explanation” (Nietzsche 1980: 12, 41). The point regarding the distinction
22 Nietzsche repeatedly highlights between interpretation or description as opposed to
23 explanation is important for Nietzsche. As he argues, the world for him, qua “chaos
24 to all eternity” (Nietzsche 1974: 168) and in the most classic sense *chaos* (Babich
25 2006: 171f), entails that is “there is no factual state [*Thatbestand*].” In other words:
26 “everything is fluid, ungraspable, elusive; the most lasting things are just our opi-
27 nions” (Nietzsche 1980: 12, 100), amounting to a tissue of new interpretations
28 imposed over hardened versions of the same, all of them mere “cyphers” (Nietzsche
29 1980: 12, 100). Asking “What is the only thing that knowledge can be?” the response
30 for Nietzsche is “Interpretation” (Nietzsche 1980: 104).

31 As Nietzsche explains:

32
33 whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again rein-
34 terpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some
35 power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing,
36 a becoming master, and all subduing and becoming master involves a new-
37 interpreting, an adaptation through which any previous “meaning” and
38 “purpose” are necessarily obscured or even obliterated.

(Nietzsche 1967b: 77, trans. modified)

40
41 Nietzsche’s claim for the ubiquity of interpretation recurs in his unpublished notes,
42 restating the point made above that everything interprets and is interpreted in its
43 turn, articulating:

44
45 the world, seen as such and such, experienced, interpreted, such that
46 organic life can sustain itself through this perspective of interpretation. The

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1 human being is not only an individual but the ongoing life of organic total-
2 ity in one specific lineage. In that [the human being] endures, is thereby
3 demonstrated that a species of interpretation (if also always improved) has
4 also come to stand, that the system of interpretation has not changed.
5 “Adaptation”

(Nietzsche 1980: 12, 251)

6
7
8 When Alexander Nehamas (1985) raises the question of interpretation as he does
9 in the context of his reading of *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, he contributes to (and
10 further inspires) a debate on the range of possible interpretations. For analytic
11 scholars in particular the question is a crucial one, although this issue is also a concern
12 for the more metaphysically minded hermeneutic theorist Jean Grondin in his
13 own discussion of Nietzsche and hermeneutics (Grondin 2010; see also Joisten 2004).

14 What is at stake here is truth and this is regarded as threatened by a range of
15 possibilities (will they be infinite? can they be limited? etc.). Nietzsche himself says of
16 textual interpretation: “The same text supports countless [*unzählige*] interpretations”
17 (Nietzsche 1980: 12, 39). Much of the literature has turned upon the translation of
18 *countless* as *infinite* but Nietzsche’s point could not be clearer, as his claim is the
19 careful assertion of interpretive modesty: “there is no ‘correct’ interpretation”
20 (Nietzsche 1980: 12, 39).

21 However we read him, from a classically continental or an analytic or even a
22 metaphysically intermediate perspective, Nietzsche is quintessentially a philosopher
23 of interpretation and as such he is a hermeneutic thinker who takes up the task of
24 a specific reflection on interpretation. There is no way to understand Nietzsche’s
25 philosophy apart from hermeneutics.

26 But within hermeneutics one must also have recourse to his thought. Without
27 attending to Nietzsche’s influence on the hermeneutic tradition one can risk not only
28 failing to understand Heidegger’s contribution to hermeneutics (Gadamer 1975: 228)
29 but also, perhaps predictably given that Heidegger’s hermeneutics is explicitly phe-
30 nomenological (to wit, Heidegger 1988 and 1997), one can miss the growing attention
31 recently paid to Nietzsche and phenomenology.¹

32 Thus the scholar does well, in a hermeneutic context, to consider the traditional
33 array of readings considering the relation between Nietzsche and hermeneutics. Here
34 one might for comprehensive scope, focusing on the European context, begin with
35 Hoffman’s 1994 study of Nietzsche and the philosophical hermeneutic tradition
36 where, just for the Anglophone reader seeking an overview, Gary Brent Madison’s
37 account of Nietzsche’s influence on thinkers from Rorty to Derrida and Gadamer
38 remains outstanding (Madison 2001) among a range of other scholarly studies
39 focusing on Nietzsche and hermeneutics.²

40 The hermeneutic issue here is inevitably the problem of interpreting Nietzsche.
41 Thus there is no end of dispute among authors who insist that they have got
42 Nietzsche right (or what is the same, that others have got him wrong) and of course,
43 and from a Nietzschean, as from one or other hermeneutic perspective (and there
44 are many), this should go without saying (Allison 2001). In addition there is the
45 problem already pointed to by noting Gadamer’s reference to Nietzsche and Hei-
46 degger (and his own particular orientation to hermeneutics and phenomenology),

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1 Dilthey's hermeneutics in addition to Gadamer's own, Ricoeur's hermeneutics,
2 and also Vattimo's, and so on. Hermeneutics itself, as a discipline and like every
3 discipline, requires a hermeneutic.
4

5 6 **Understanding understanding in Nietzsche's hermeneutics** 7

8 For Gadamer, understanding is inevitably understanding *otherwise*: "we understand
9 in a different way if we understand at all" (Gadamer 1975: 264). Thus Gadamer
10 articulates a Heideggerian recuperation of the creative impetus in Schleiermacher's
11 own emphases upon the interpretive project of reading another: "understanding is
12 not merely a reproductive, but a productive attitude as well" (Gadamer 1975: 264).
13 Acts of understanding are themselves hermeneutic: creating new meaning in each
14 case. This point recurs in Hamacher's philologically attuned reading of what he calls
15 the hermeneutic imperative between Immanuel Kant's philosophy of practical reason
16 and Nietzsche's interpretive philology. Hamacher's own hermeneutic imperative is
17 drawn from Schleiermacher's definition of hermeneutics, glossed as the "art" of
18 "understanding correctly the speech of another, especially written speech"
19 (Schleiermacher, cited in Hamacher 1990b: 19). In this way, "hermeneutics lives in
20 fact off the collapse of its own project 'since each [soul] is in its individual existence
21 the non-existence of the other' and therefore 'non-understanding refuses to dissolve
22 itself completely.'" (Hamacher 1990b: 19)

23 If Schleiermacher's goal was what he called "complete understanding," that is, to
24 understand "the utterer better than he understands himself" (Schleiermacher 1998:
25 266), the directionality of this project goes in two directions inasmuch as it assumes
26 that the original speaker (or author) may not understand everything that comes to
27 expression in what is said. Here the full force of Gadamer's point becomes clear:
28 understanding is not identical with what is understood, it does not simply reproduce
29 it but comprehends the prior context for the original speaker's own understanding
30 of what is said while at the same time anticipating and exceeding the one who inter-
31 prets understandingly.

32 Ernst Behler, the Schlegel scholar and theorist of specifically literary hermeneutics
33 offers a reflection between Nietzsche and Jacques Derrida (and Gilles Deleuze and
34 thereby Heidegger). For Behler, Nietzsche's explicitly masked writing should compel
35 our attention, as Nietzsche himself presents his own work as a "self-dissembling
36 writing, groundless thought ... that brings all apodictic statements into question
37 through the consideration of new possibilities" (Behler 1991: 20). Nietzsche's own
38 esotericism remains elusive not only because one must come to terms with Nietz-
39 sche's reflections on the prime authors of political and philosophic esotericism and
40 its tactics, namely Machiavelli and Descartes, including Catholicism (Nietzsche
41 invokes the Jesuits) and Swiss Protestantism (Calvinism) as well as the preludes to
42 political philosophy already at work in Nietzsche's classical philology, raising the
43 complicated question of Nietzsche's Hellenism before turning to Nietzsche's reflec-
44 tions on truth and lie.

45 The ubiquity of hermeneutics begins at the outset with Nietzsche's own reading of
46 Anaximander in his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Writing as the first

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1 Greek philosopher, Anaximander who was able to discern “in the multiplicity of
2 things that have come-to-be a sum of injustices that must be atoned for, he grasped
3 with bold fingers the tangle of the profoundest problem in ethics” (Nietzsche 1971: 48).

4 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s politico-historically modulated reflections on Nietz-
5 sche’s *Untimely Mediations* on history are connected with “mimesis,” that is, the
6 hermeneutic effort to understand those who are historical and those who are not (let
7 us take care to highlight, as Nietzsche reminds us, that the Greeks themselves are not
8 “historical”). For Lacoue-Labarthe, “everything in fact is a problem of birth, that is
9 to say of origin” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990: 223).

10 But what are the origins of philosophy? How can we speak of a tradition that itself
11 grows out of what is spoken (and is therefore eternally lost to us) and is steeped in a
12 reflection (this is the force of Plato’s *Phaedrus* as of his *Seventh Letter*) on that orality?³
13 Far beyond scholarly debates on esoteric matters of the hermeneutics of antiquity
14 (from Nietzsche himself to Ong and Illich) and the post-modern quivering of digital
15 networks and the coded ideal of the imaginary hacker (Kittler) there is also the ontic
16 fact of facticity as the classicist Nietzsche always emphasized this. Thus as Kittler
17 reminds us, citing Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre!*, “‘Literature,’ Goethe
18 wrote, ‘is the fragment of fragments; the least of what had happened and of what had
19 been spoken was written down; of what had been written down, only the smallest
20 fraction was preserved’” (Kittler 1987: 105). Inevitably, we know of the past no more
21 than what has come down to us where the determination of that transmission is
22 already a problem (see again the contributions to Jensen and Heit) whereby the
23 parsing and evaluation of all such transmission is itself a matter of interpretation:
24 hermeneutics and context.

25
26 ***Hermeneutics and the leavings of the past***

27 Like Goethe cited above on the fragments of literature, the classicist philosopher,
28 Frances MacDonal Cornford in his 1935 Oxford lecture, “The Unwritten Philoso-
29 phy,” emphasized the yet more literal fragmentary condition of philology inasmuch as:
30

31
32 the literature, the history, the philosophy, we have inherited from the
33 ancient world bear much the same relation to the total product in those
34 fields that the contents of the Ashmolean bear to the cities and temples,
35 theatres and houses, that once formed the complete and familiar scene of
36 ancient life.

(Cornford 1967: 28)

37
38
39 Catherine Osborne (1987) has reprised the force of the point Cornford makes
40 regarding the circumspection required to approach the text *fragments* we happen to
41 have. It has taken Pierre Hadot and Marcel Detienne (popularized for generalist
42 theorists by Michel Foucault) for today’s scholars to begin to understand Cornford’s
43 point, as indeed Osborne’s point, which unfortunately does not mean that we shall
44 all be going forth to deploy philology as Nietzsche recommended. Cornford’s ana-
45 logy as we cited it highlights the advantage of archeology as the physical happen-
46 stance for the bits we do have, the ruins of the past. The “monumental” point of the

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1 analogy, to use Nietzsche's terminology, contrasts Nietzsche's "antiquarian" philology
2 with the "few potsherds" from which an expert can reconstitute an entire "a
3 krater of Euphronius" (Cornford 1967: 29). Today Cornford's example has a more
4 dramatic illustration in the wake of the "monumental" 1962 discoveries in a complex
5 of tombs at Derveni, including the Derveni Papyrus and the Derveni Krater
6 (a volute krater, featuring glorious repoussé Dionysiac designs crafted in heretofore
7 unknown bronze alloy). Down to its material constitution, the Derveni Krater
8 remains a mystery, featuring maenads, satyrs, and a monosandalic figure (be it Pentheus
9 or Jason as classically supposed or even, as I ~~suppose~~, Empedocles) and with
10 all its picture-book obviousness did not simplify the ~~reading~~ of the charred scroll,
11 debates about which continue. Significantly, Anton Fackelmann, a papyrology
12 librarian at the Vienna National Library who first unrolled the Derveni Papyrus
13 managed to do so using an ingenious technique using plant fluids freshly crushed
14 from living papyrus plants to reconstitute the carbonized substance of the text itself,
15 literally offering "blood" to the vanished ghosts of the past (Fackelmann 1970, and
16 see too Babich 2013b: 235). ~~Thus we are apprised to review the reconstructions and~~
17 ~~rehabilitations of the past, whereby in the interim, since Nietzsche's and Cornford's~~
18 ~~warnings if certainly not because of them, scholars today~~ decry the damage done by
19 nineteenth and twentieth century reconstructions.

20 Nietzsche, who mixed his own metaphors of monumental and antiquarian philology,
21 laments in his early philological *Nachlass* that "we stand in field of shards"
22 (cited in Babich 2006: 47). Not only have we only fragments, as Cornford and
23 Osborne also emphasize and as dramatically illustrated by the task of reconstituting
24 and then reconstructing so recent a find as the Derveni papyrus, of the bits we have
25 almost nothing that has not been "altered" (Nietzsche thought *damaged*) by the
26 efforts of the same experts who create the "facts" of the past: "antiquity disintegrates
27 under the hands of the philologists!" (Nietzsche 1980, 7: 353). But if Nietzsche began
28 his career with a call for renewed hermeneutic solicitude in his own field and if in
29 the 1970s this ~~inspired~~ William Arrowsmith to feature ~~a series of translations~~ in the
30 ~~classics~~ journal *Arion*, beginning with ~~his own~~ translation of Nietzsche's notes for
31 "We Philologists," (Nietzsche 1973-4), Nietzsche's hermeneutic recommendations ~~to~~
32 ~~his own colleagues~~, combining Apollonian rigor with Dionysian inspiration, could
33 not describe a more difficult task. ~~In the interim~~, scholarship has preferred the grey
34 security of a Wilamowitz to the gaiety and light feet of a Nietzsche. The dancing
35 philology Nietzsche recommended was, if anything, more arduous than the
36 mechanical tread of the alternative path in the field of classics.

37 Like Heidegger, who arguably inspired today's philosophical (as opposed to theological
38 or juridical) approach to hermeneutics with his 1927 *Being and Time*, we may
39 recall Leopold von Ranke's oft cited dictum "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*." Read in
40 context, Ranke articulates a methodologically reticent restriction, claiming less
41 rather than more for his own project as he sought to ~~delimit~~ his efforts ~~from~~ the
42 lofty ideals traditionally expected of history: "To history has been assigned the office
43 of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages. To such
44 high offices this work does not aspire: It wants only to show what actually happened
45 (*wie es eingenlich gewesen*)" (Ranke 1824: vi). Ranke's modesty coheres with Nietzsche's
46 critique of what he called the "educational institutions" of his own day and the

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1 same ideal of *Paideia* that would continue in classics and in history into our own
2 times. Hence if Nietzsche emphasized, beginning with his own inaugural lecture at
3 Basel, that it is common to pronounce a classical education indispensable for a civi-
4 lized citizenry, the conviction tends to be undermined by the typically deficient
5 character of that education: just how much culture does a citizen need in order to be
6 an ideal citizen? In his *Daybreak*, Nietzsche proposes that we “point to the finest
7 teachers at our grammar schools,” and laugh at them, inviting us to make this
8 question our own question in every case:
9

10 are they the products of formal education? And if not, how can they teach
11 it? And the classics! Did we learn anything of that which these same ancients
12 taught their young people? Did we learn to speak or write as they did? Did
13 we practice unceasingly the fencing-art of conversation, dialectics? Did we
14 learn to move as beautifully and proudly as they did, to write, to throw, to
15 box as they did? Did we learn anything of the asceticism practiced by all
16 Greek philosophers? Were we trained in a single one of the antique virtues
17 and in the manner in which the ancients practiced it? ... Did we learn even
18 the ancient languages in the way we learn those of living nations – namely so
19 as to speak them with ease and fluency? Not one real piece of ability, of new
20 capacity out of years of effort!

(Nietzsche 1982: 115–16)

21
22
23 Nietzsche’s question here is even more timely in our era of austerity as this goes
24 hand in glove with the wholesale redesigning of the university and the re-definition
25 of philosophy as handmaiden to the natural sciences and no more.

26 If, historically, contextually, hermeneutically speaking, the past is a foreign country,
27 it is a country overrun not with tourists but colonialist archaeologists, each staking a
28 particular national claim (thus French archaeology – ~~and~~ you know this if you have
29 perhaps been to Delphi – differs from the German version with its concerns that
30 likewise vary from the British, and nor are today’s Greeks excluded from such scho-
31 larly imperialism). But where both Cornford and Nietzsche (Nietzsche here being the
32 good student of the archaeological philologist Otto Jahn, as well as influenced by
33 Semper, and other experts of the ~~physical or~~ object remainders or ruins of the past)
34 would have argued that while physical detritus gives us an abundance of information
35 by comparison, the fragment that is the text, even a new text, tells us almost nothing.

36 We have already recalled Cornford’s “The Unwritten Philosophy” and Platonists,
37 especially of the Straussian kind, have borrowed the title of his lecture for their own,
38 and ~~this~~ resonates in Hans Joachim Krämer’s reflections, *Plato and the Foundations of*
39 *Metaphysics*.⁴ However we need more than a reference to the Tübingen school or to
40 Strauss in order to comprehend Nietzsche’s notion of the esoteric. For that one
41 must go back before such modern precipitates of a tradition shrouded in the meta-
42 phors of the obscure. John Hamilton (2003) approaches this without – this may be
43 inevitable – framing the problem adequately and it goes without saying that he does
44 not resolve it.

45 Nietzsche was enduringly concerned with the archaeology of knowledge of his own
46 discipline, the “monumental” as opposed to the “antiquarian” legacies of traditional

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1 philology and both contra the “critical” philology he advocated for his own part. In
2 the Alexandrian tradition, ~~that is~~, the “antiquarian” legacy of scholarship to the cur-
3 rent day; inexorably translate the past into the present on the terms of the present.
4 Pernicious for Nietzsche is the lack of any kind of self-awareness in this project, let
5 alone self-doubt. Thus Nietzsche compares such Alexandrianism to the Romans as
6 they appropriated their Etruscans and their Greeks: “How deliberately and recklessly
7 they brushed the dust off the wings of the butterfly that is called moment” (Nietzsche
8 1974: 137). Notoriously, in the case of the Romans, “Not only did one omit what was
9 historical: one also added allusions to the present and above all, struck out the name
10 of the poet and replaced it with one’s own” (Nietzsche 1974: 137). Here, Nietzsche
11 laments the danger to scholarship that is scholarship itself. Thus almost in Ranke’s
12 sense we read Nietzsche as he expresses the then-standard view, a perspective on
13 scholarship that has not changed to this day: “Ought we not make new for ourselves
14 what is old and find ourselves in it? Should we not have the right to breathe our own
15 soul into this dead body?” (Nietzsche 1974: 137, trans. modified).
16

Nietzsche and hermeneutics today

17
18
19
20 Confounding the word-fetishism that is the consequence of today’s digital scho-
21 larship – less reading than skimming and scanning or googling search results and
22 then cobbling the results together as “scholarship” – Nietzsche uses the word
23 “hermeneutic” rarely, and only in connection with critique and textual interpreta-
24 tion (specifically with reference to Schleiermacher’s own usage and thus to Plato
25 and religious texts). But Nietzsche articulated a hermeneutic or critically inter-
26 preative approach to texts as indeed to the discipline of classical philology, history
27 as well as culture and politics, extending his interpretive approach to religion, not
28 merely the received interpretation of the scriptural tradition of his day but begin-
29 ning with his study of the religious service of the Greeks, including the tragic rites.
30 Thus Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations* begins with a critique of the methods of the
31 modernist theologian, David Strauss, as well as a hermeneutic reflection on his-
32 torical approaches for life as he expressed it in this same locus as well as institu-
33 tional reflections on Schopenhauer as educator and so on. Nietzsche went on to
34 write *Human, all too Human* in which he extended his hermeneutics of ancient and
35 modern culture beyond religion to art, and philosophy and science, high and low
36 culture, interpersonal or social interaction in addition to politics and a sustained
37 reflection on the self (his later added volumes would be expanded with aphorisms
38 on the same themes, specifically foregrounding cultural ones related to the arts but
39 also interpretive reflections on first and final themes, life and death, with a final
40 book entitled *The Wanderer and his Shadow*.) These reflections continued in *Day-
41 break* and *The Gay Science*, and, in a different voice, in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,
42 where he advances his doctrines of the world as will to power, the overhuman, and
43 the eternal return of the self-same (for an interpretation of the reference to the
44 wanderer and his shadow, eternal recurrence and death in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke
45 Zarathustra*, see Babich 2010 and 2013b; Loeb 2012, also foregrounds Nietzsche’s
46 classically mortal reflections).

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1 And as to the wide range of his hermeneutic concerns, Nietzsche’s non-traditional
2 hermeneutics of logic and science remains a stumbling block (Babich 2010), as he
3 writes that “natural philosophy is only a world-exposition and world-arrangement
4 (according to us, if I may say so!) and *not* a world-explanation” (Nietzsche 1973: 27).
5 A few aphorisms later, Nietzsche singles out physicists among other natural
6 philosophers (or scientists) by taking them to task for their lack of philological or
7 interpretive expertise, a deficient hermeneutic sense which Nietzsche challenged with
8 methodological precision:
9

10 Let me be pardoned, as an old philologist who cannot desist from the mis-
11 chief of putting his finger on bad modes of interpretation, but “Nature’s
12 conformity to law,” of which you physicists talk so proudly, as though –
13 why, it exists only owing to your interpretation and bad “philology.”

(Nietzsche 1973: 34)

14
15
16 In this, the hermeneutic failure in question is neither to be parsed as interpretation
17 for Nietzsche qua textual explication or articulation but, so he argues, qua attuned
18 to the history of natural observation as to the textuality of theoretical accounts of
19 “nature’s conformity to law.” Conforming to the high road of science, *philology* is
20 hermeneutics in its most rigorous modality. Thus the Nietzsche who began his
21 inaugural lecture in Basel by inverting Seneca at his conclusion, urging that philology
22 *become* philosophy, would come as his thinking evolved to speak more and more
23 of a “lack” of philology (*ein Mangel an Philologie*) (Nietzsche 1973: 59): a lack of
24 hermeneutics. Only by keeping hermeneutics in the equation can we begin to
25 understand ourselves as creative interpreters, the poets of our lives.

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Notes

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33 1 See the contributions to Boubil and Daigle 2013 and Rehberg 2011, including Rudolf
34 Boehme's classic account of Nietzsche and Husserl (Boehme 1968, 1962), see also Babich
35 2013.
36 2 See Benne 2005, 2006; Figal 2000; Figl 1982b, 1984; Riedel 2001; as well as Schrift 1990;
37 Bertman 1973; and many, many others.
38 3 See here the reflections of Walter J. Ong 1982 as well as Ivan Illich 1996 and Friedrich
39 Kittler 1990
40 4 For a contextualization, see Nikulin 2012 and see Drury 1985 for the Straussian esoteric
41 and for the Straussian convention of 'left' Nietzscheans – the reference here links Max
42 Weber and Tracy Strong, see MacIntyre 1981; for "right" Nietzscheans, see Levine 1995
43 and Lambert 1997; for Strauss and hermeneutics, Cantor 1991.
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