

NIETZSCHE

— AND THE —

QUESTION OF INTERPRETATION

Between
Hermeneutics
and
Deconstruction

ALAN D. SCHRIFT

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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.

To Joan, Leonard and Mitchell Schrift,
and again, to Jill

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List of Abbreviations

All references to Nietzsche's writings have been included in the body of the text, denoted by the following abbreviations. Unless otherwise specified, Roman numerals denote the volume number of a set of collected works or a standard subdivision within a single work in which the sections are numbered consecutively, and Arabic numerals denote the section number rather than the page number. While the available English translations of Nietzsche's texts, especially those of W. Kaufmann and J. Hollingdale (see [Bibliography](#)), have been consulted, these translations frequently have been altered to reflect more accurately the emphasis and style of the original German texts, and the ultimate responsibility for the translations which appear in the following pages must be mine. In a number of instances, I have found it helpful to include parts of the original German text in addition to the translation. In these cases, the original is placed within brackets immediately following its English translation. Also, in order to differentiate Nietzsche's use of ellipsis points from my editorial omissions of certain words or passages within a citation, I have marked all editorial omissions with ellipsis points between brackets as follows: [...].

Collected editions of Nietzsche's work.

GOA = *Nietzsches Werke (Grossoktavausgabe)*.

MA = *Nietzsches Gesammelte Werke (Musarionausgabe)*.

KGW = *Nietzsche Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Edited by Giorgio Colli and Maurizio Montinari. I have used the accepted convention in citing references from this edition: Roman numeral (designating volume number), followed by Arabic numeral (designating band number), followed by the fragment number. For example, the abbreviation “*KGW*, V 2: 4[78]” refers to Abteilung VI, Band 2, fragment 4[78].

WDB = *Werke in drei Bänden*. Edited by Karl Schlechta.

Writings not published by Nietzsche.

HCP = “Homer and Classical Philology” (*Homer und die klassische Philologie*), 1869.

P = “The Last Philosopher. The Philosopher. Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge” (*Der letzte Philosoph. Der Philosoph. Betrachtungen über den Kampf von Kunst und Erkenntniss*), 1872.

PT = “On the Pathos of Truth” (*Ueber das Pathos der Wahrheit*), 1872.

FEI = “On the Future of our Educational Institutions” (*Ueber die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten*), 1872.

HC = “Homer's Contest” (*Homer's Wettkampf*), 1872.

Rh = “Introduction to Rhetoric” (*Rhetorik*), 1872/74.

PCP = “The Philosopher as Cultural Physician” (*Der Philosoph als Arzt der Cultur*), 1873.

OTL = “On Truth and Lies in an Extramoral Sense” (*Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge aussermoralischen Sinne*), 1873.

PHT = “Thoughts on the Meditation: Philosophy in Hard Times” (*Gedanken zu der Betrachtung*).

Die Philosophie in Bedrängniss), 1873.

PTAG = "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks" (*Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*), 1873.

WPh = "We Philologists" (*Wir Philologen*), 1874/75.

SSW = "The Struggle between Science and Wisdom" (*Wissenschaft und Weisheit im Kampfe*), 1875.

WP = *The Will to Power* (*Der Wille zur Macht*), a selection of excerpts from Nietzsche's notebooks of the 1880s.

Works published or prepared for publication by Nietzsche.

BT = *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*), 1872.

DS = *David Strauss, the Writer and the Confessor* (*David Strauss, der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller*), 1873.

H = *On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life* (*Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*), 1874.

SE = *Schopenhauer as Educator* (*Schopenhauer als Erzieher*), 1874.

WB = *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (*Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*), 1876.

HAH = *Human, All-too-Human* (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*), 1878.

AOM = *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (*Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche*), 1879.

WS = *The Wanderer and his Shadow* (*Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*), 1880.

D = *Daybreak* (*Morgenröte*), 1881.

GS = *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*), 1882.

Z = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Also sprach Zarathustra*), 1883/84/85.

BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil* (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*), 1886.

GM = *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*), 1887.

CW = *The Case of Wagner* (*Der Fall Wagner*), 1888.

TI = *Twilight of the Idols* (*Götzen-Dämmerung*), 1888.

NCW = *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (*Nietzsche contra Wagner*), 1888.

A = *The Antichrist* (*Der Antichrist*), 1888.

EH = *Ecce Homo* (*Ecce Homo*), 1888.

Preface

This text arose out of a desire to work on a project that merged my two primary philosophical interests: Nietzsche's philosophy and hermeneutic theory. I saw in Nietzsche's various comments on interpretation an untapped resource for furthering our understanding of what happens when we interpret texts. In addition, the multiplicity of diverse interpretations of Nietzsche's thought made hermeneutics a promising prospect for exploring a pluralistic approach to interpretation. As I read the interpretations of Kaufmann, Danto, Heidegger, Jaspers, Deleuze, Derrida, Magnus, Nehama, Kofman, Granier, and others, one thing became increasingly clear to me: as much can be learned about what goes on in Nietzsche's texts from interpretations that one believes to be largely, if not entirely, misreading of those texts as can be learned from interpretations with which one is in complete sympathy. Moreover, it struck me that this was itself a very Nietzschean phenomenon.

What interested me in particular about hermeneutic theory was the problem of avoiding interpretive dogmatism without relinquishing all hope for judging between interpretations. The tension between the dogmatic assertion of one correct interpretation and the relativistic acceptance of any interpretation seemed to me to be not only the central issue in hermeneutics. It was also the point of conflict between two of the most powerful styles of interpreting Nietzsche: those of Heidegger and various French post-structuralists. Moreover, this tension appeared to me to be at the heart of Nietzsche's own philosophizing, and the fact that he had been and could be read as a relativist or as a dogmatist did not seem to be insignificant.

To bring both of these issues to the fore, I tried to construct a text that would enact a pluralistic interpretive approach. This meant refraining from refuting all of the other Nietzsche interpretations currently in circulation, while arguing that my interpretation of Nietzsche was the correct one. For the reader who is looking for definitive refutations of the Heideggerian or French interpretations of Nietzsche, what follows will be disappointing, for that is not what I sought to do. Instead, I wanted to display Heidegger's, Derrida's and several other post-structuralist interpretations at their best, articulating both what they offer the reader and what I find they miss. To do this meant, especially in the cases of Heidegger and Derrida, lengthy and detailed exegeses which would introduce the interpretations to those who, by training or disposition, were unable or unwilling to read the interpretations. I try to provide clear restatements that follow the text's own developments while holding my critical comments to a few selective intrusions during the exposition and several discussions in the notes. I believe that my success in clarifying these interpretations is a function of not interrupting their explication with frequent objections and digressions. While these exegetical summaries might not be necessary for the Nietzsche specialist, who in addition to [Part Three](#), may be more interested in the opening and concluding remarks to each of the first two parts and the critical comments and intertextual connections drawn in the notes, my hope is to make Heidegger's and Derrida's readings accessible to anyone who might pick up my work with the intention of reading about Nietzsche's own perspectives on interpretation.

The real novelty of my discussion, I believe, is to be found in the third part, where I work out a Nietzschean approach to interpretation. Although there have been many books written on Nietzsche in the last two decades, and many more books will no doubt be written in the next few years, there has not been a discussion in English that focuses on Nietzsche's interpretive practices. This is not to say that Nietzsche's impact on current interpretation theory has gone unrecognized. In fact, precisely the

opposite is the case, as most philosophical interpretations of Nietzsche at the very least mention Nietzsche's influence, and it is almost *de rigueur* for literary theorists to invoke Nietzsche when discussions of interpretive practices arise. But what is missing in all these invocations is a sustained analysis of the various things Nietzsche says about and does with interpretation. I hope that this work will at least begin to fill this gap in the literature on Nietzsche's impact on current interpretive practices.

This study has evolved over many years, and has undergone both major and minor changes in response to the thoughtful comments of several people. In particular, I would like to single out four individuals whose conversations helped me to understand, and whose friendship and encouragement gave me the confidence to continue working on this project and seek its publication: Bernd Magnus, Gayle L. Ormiston, Richard E. Palmer, and Calvin O. Schrag. I am certain they will each continue to question certain of my formulations, but I hope they also see and take some pleasure in those places where my own understanding of the texts I discuss has been informed by our conversations together. Many others have had an impact on the construction of this text, both directly and indirectly, and I would like to acknowledge and thank David B. Allison, David C. Hoy, Djelal Kadir, David F. Krell, Virgil Lokke, William L. McBride, Richard Schacht, Richard Schmitt, Charlene and Hans Siegfried, two anonymous reviewers at Routledge, the Program Committees and members of the Nietzsche Society and the North American Nietzsche Society who heard parts of this work presented in several forums, and my colleagues at Grinnell College, Purdue University, and Clarkson University.

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Finally, I would like once again to acknowledge the encouragement and love of my parents Joan and Leonard, my brother Mitchell, and my wife Jill. Without your support, this book would not have been possible and to all of you it is dedicated.

Parts of this work have been published previously: several paragraphs from the Introduction appear in a slightly different form in the "Editors' Introduction" to *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Aristotle to Ricoeur*, edited by Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, 1990 by The State University of New York Press; an earlier version of part of [Chapter One](#) appears in "Violence or Violation? Heidegger on Thinking 'about' Nietzsche," *Tulane Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. XXXII (Fall 1984); an earlier version of [Chapter Two](#) appears in *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1983); parts of [Chapter Three](#) appear in "Foucault and Derrida on Nietzsche and the 'end(s)' of 'man,'" in *Exceedingly Nietzsche: Aspects of Contemporary Nietzsche-Interpretation*, edited by David Farrell Krell and David Wood, 1988 by Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd.; an earlier version of [Chapter Four](#) appears in *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 14 (1984), by Humanities Press International, Inc.; an earlier version of [Chapter Five](#) appears in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (July 1985); parts of [Chapters Six](#) and Seven appear in "Between Perspectivism and Philology: Genealogy as Hermeneutic," *Nietzsche-Studien*, Band 16, 1987 by Walter de Gruyter, and "Genealogy and the Transvaluation of Philology," *International Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. XX, No. 2 (1988); several

paragraphs from [Chapter Seven](#) appear in different form in “Reading, Writing, Text: Nietzsche
Deconstruction of Author-ity,” *International Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2 (1985). I thank
the editors and publishers for their kind permission to republish these sections.

An aphorism, properly stamped and molded, has not been “deciphered” when it has simply been read; rather one has then to begin its interpretation, for which is required an art of interpretation.

—Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Because I still like him, I can foresee the impatience of the bad reader: this is the way I name and accuse the fearful reader, the reader in a hurry to be determined, decided upon deciding (in order to annul, in other words to bring back to oneself, one has to wish to know in advance what to expect, one wishes to expect what has happened, one wishes to expect (oneself)). Now, it is bad, and I know no other definition of the bad, it is bad to predestine one's reading, it is always bad to foretell. It is bad for the reader, no longer to like retracing one's steps.

—Derrida, *The Post Card*

Introduction

Nietzsche, in whose light and shadow all of us today, with our “for him” or “against him,” are thinking and writing [...]

—Martin Heidegger, *Zur Seinsfrage*

[O]ne is much more of an artist than one knows.

—*Beyond Good and Evil*, 192

In the past half-century, philosophers on the European continent have, with increasing frequency, come to characterize their investigations as “hermeneutical” or “interpretive.” This hermeneutic turn indicates a rejection of the traditional concept of philosophy as the pursuit of metaphysical and epistemological foundations upon which to erect a philosophical system. Such metaphysical and epistemological foundationalism appears incapable of satisfactorily solving many of the problems with which it confronts itself, and the reason for this incapacity has come to be viewed not as a function of the particular systems which have been propounded, but rather as a function of the project of seeking metaphysical and epistemological foundations itself. We thus find many proponents of the hermeneutical turn describing their various projects in such terms as a *rethinking* of metaphysics¹ or moving *beyond* epistemology.² However, by emphasizing the interpretive nature of all understanding instead of the traditional pursuit of firm foundations, the proponents of this view are themselves faced with the problem of devising some standard or standards by which to adjudicate competing interpretations. This is to say, if there are no foundations of knowledge or, to put this another way, if there is no single “correct” interpretation, does it make any sense to speak of “incorrect” interpretations? This problem in effect confronts any approach to interpretation with the following basic dilemma: if we are to avoid positing one interpretation as correct (which would ultimately entail a return to some sort of foundationalism), then how can we avoid lapsing into an unmitigated relativism in which all interpretations are regarded as equally legitimate? Any successful approach to interpretation must confront this basic hermeneutical dilemma, and in [Parts One](#) and [Two](#) of this study, I examine two leading interpretive approaches (those of Heidegger and deconstruction) in an effort to discern whether or not they succeed in resolving this dilemma. In [Part Three](#), I show that Nietzsche's text provides some important insights for a successful resolution, and I develop these insights into an approach which, while drawing on the resources of deconstruction, nevertheless provides an alternative to the Heideggerian and deconstructive approaches examined in [Parts One](#) and [Two](#). Before moving to these analyses, it will be helpful first to contextualize this problem by briefly surveying the recent history of hermeneutic theory³ with an eye toward disclosing the pervasiveness of this hermeneutical dilemma.

Although the term “hermeneutics” as an approach to textual interpretation has a history which dates back to Aristotle (who found the topic of sufficient importance that he devoted to it an entire treatise, *Peri Herm0113;neias* [*On Interpretation*]), the modern use of the term can be traced more directly to the work of two nineteenth-century thinkers: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. Schleiermacher is credited with taking the first steps toward developing a *general* hermeneutic methodology, in contrast to a variety of *regional* hermeneutic approaches.⁴ Prior to Schleiermacher, the task of textual interpretation was thought to require different interpretive methods depending on

the type of text to be interpreted. Thus, legal texts gave rise to a juridical hermeneutic, sacred scripture to a biblical hermeneutic, literary texts to a philological hermeneutic, etc. Schleiermacher's project of a "general hermeneutics" sought to uncover the interpretive techniques which operate *universally* within understanding. For our present purposes, the techniques uncovered by Schleiermacher are not as significant as the end toward which they were directed. In Schleiermacher's view, the task of hermeneutics is essentially psychological: the goal of hermeneutics is to understand the "original" meaning of the text, which is to say, "to understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author."⁵ To attain this goal, one must psychologically reconstruct the author; the interpreter must project her- or himself "inside" the author and reconstruct the author's original imposition of a univocal sense.⁶ This conception of hermeneutics reveals a basic limitation on the activity of interpretation: interpretation is always guided by the author's intended meaning and any interpretive activity aims to approximate as closely as possible this "original" authorial intent.

Dilthey, for his part, follows Schleiermacher in calling for a general hermeneutics, but in so doing he broadens the scope of hermeneutical application. Like Schleiermacher, Dilthey sees hermeneutics as the "methodology of the understanding of recorded expressions,"⁷ but he criticizes Schleiermacher for limiting hermeneutics to the analysis of "understanding which is a reshaping or reconstruction on the basis of its relationship to the process of literary creation."⁸ Dilthey regards hermeneutics as having a wider epistemological application than that acknowledged by Schleiermacher, and he broadened the scope of the methodology of understanding to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge of *all* aspects of mental (*geistige*) life. Dilthey thus writes that, in addition to Schleiermacher's "philological procedures," hermeneutics has

a second task which is indeed its main one: it is to counteract the constant irruption of romantic whim and skeptical subjectivity into the realm of history by laying the historical foundations of valid interpretation on which all certainty in history rests. Absorbed into the context of epistemology, logic and methodology of the human studies the theory of interpretation becomes a vital link between philosophy and the historical disciplines, an essential part of the foundations of the human sciences.⁹

In this remark, we see Dilthey's central task: in an effort to respond to the anti-Hegelian positivism of his day, Dilthey's hermeneutic method will put the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) on as secure a foundation as the scientific method had provided for the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). It will do so by providing a definitive answer to the question "How is historical knowledge possible?" For Dilthey, the question of the possibility of historical knowledge raises the question of how a knowing subject comes to know *objectively* that which has been *subjectively* created. Dilthey answers that we will attain such objective knowledge "if the individual processes which combine in the creation of this system can be sorted out and it can be shown what part each of them plays, both in the construction of the historical course of events in the mind-constructed world and in the discovery of its systematic nature."¹⁰ Unfortunately, the way Dilthey explicates this answer reiterates, at the level of historical understanding, the psychologistic mistake which he had accused Schleiermacher at the level of literary understanding:

Understanding is a rediscovery of the I in the Thou: the mind rediscovers itself at ever higher levels of complex involvement: this identity of the mind in the I and the Thou, in every subject of a community, in every system of a culture and finally, in the totality of mind and universal history, makes successful cooperation between different processes in the human sciences

Dilthey avoids the problems of psychologism associated with Schleiermacher's hermeneutics by directing understanding toward the reconstruction of the historical product, whether it is an event or an object, rather than toward the reproduction of the psychic state of the author. Nevertheless, Dilthey continues to locate the meaning of historical events in the mental processes of the historical agents involved, in their productions, and in our objective psychological reconstruction of them.

In the move from Dilthey to Martin Heidegger, a fundamental shift in the approach to hermeneutics takes place. Whereas Dilthey and Schleiermacher had conceived hermeneutics to be at bottom an epistemological endeavor, Heidegger situates hermeneutics in the realm of ontology. This is to say that for Heidegger hermeneutics is no longer directed toward discovering the epistemological foundations of the human sciences or the methodological principles which can lead to objective knowledge in the human sciences. Rather, it seeks to uncover the ontological conditions which underlie such claims to knowledge. As a methodology of understanding, Heidegger views the hermeneutic projects of Dilthey and Schleiermacher as having evolved from hermeneutics in its primordial signification, "through which the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possesses, are *made known* to Dasein's understanding of Being."¹² The hermeneutic of Dasein, "as a *analytic of existence*," is thus, for Heidegger, the point of departure for philosophy conceived as a "universal phenomenological ontology."¹³ This is to say, the first step on the way to fundamental ontology, as the uncovering of the meaning of Being, will be a hermeneutic inquiry into the structures of Being implicated in the activities of understanding and interpretation.

Although Heidegger stopped speaking of his own project as "hermeneutical" shortly after the publication of *Being and Time*, the importance and influence of his situating hermeneutics within ontology rather than epistemology should not be underestimated, and it would not be incorrect to view much of subsequent hermeneutical reflection as, in part, entangled within the controversy over whether hermeneutics belongs in one or the other of these realms. A number of different camps within the hermeneutic tradition have developed since Heidegger's move beyond the conception of hermeneutics as a methodology of understanding, and between these camps a number of critical dialogues have emerged.¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer most clearly follows the Heideggerian program of phenomenological hermeneutics in his elaboration of the later Heideggerian insight into the "linguisticity" (*Sprachlichkeit*) of understanding and ontology. For Gadamer, "language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized [and] the mode or realization of language is interpretation."¹⁵ Like Heidegger, Gadamer rejects limiting the scope of hermeneutical inquiry to problems conceived as the study of "the phenomenon of understanding and of the correct interpretation of what has been understood," to problems "proper to the methodology of the human sciences."¹⁶ Rather, insofar as all understanding is mediated through language, the task of hermeneutics is conceived as a descriptive ontological analysis of the linguistically-mediated dialogue between the tradition and the reflective appropriation of it.¹⁷ Gadamer thus concludes that "language constitutes the hermeneutic event proper not as language, whether as grammar or as lexicon, but in the coming into language of that which has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once assimilation and interpretation." Insofar as language is a central point where "I" and world "manifest their original unity," Gadamer locates within language a "universal ontological structure." Language is "Being that can be understood,"¹⁹ and the ontological significance of linguisticity for Gadamerian hermeneutical reflection cannot be overestimated.

In the debates and dialogues which have surrounded Gadamerian hermeneutics, we can see the focus on issues of interpretive dogmatism and relativism. On the one hand, Gadamer has been accused by the objectivist camp of being relativistic in his approach to interpretation. Both Emilio Betti and D. Hirsch, Jr., two major spokespersons for “objective hermeneutics,” have objected to Gadamer’s rejection of method on the grounds that such a lack of methodology threatens the objective status of interpretation. Both Betti and Hirsch argue for the essential autonomy of the object to be interpreted and they criticize Gadamer’s dialogical approach for inserting the subject into the hermeneutic circle. This insertion, in their views, inevitably leads to both subjectivism and relativism, with the consequence that hermeneutics is unable to distinguish correct from incorrect interpretations. For Betti, Gadamer’s subjectivist position

tends toward the confounding of interpretation and meaning-inference [*Sinngebung*] and the removing of the canon of the autonomy of the object, with the consequence of putting into doubt the objectivity of the results of interpretive procedures in all the human sciences. It is my opinion that it is our duty as guardians and practitioners of the study of history to protect this kind of objectivity and to provide evidence of the epistemological condition of its possibility. [...] The obvious difficulty with the hermeneutical method proposed by Gadamer seems to lie, for me, in that it enables a substantive agreement between text and reader—i.e., between the apparently easily accessible meaning of a text and the subjective conception of the reader—to be formed without, however, guaranteeing the correctness of understanding; for that it would be necessary that the understanding arrived at corresponded fully to the meaning underlying the text as an objectivation of mind. Only then would the objectivity of the result be guaranteed on the basis of a reliable process of interpretation.²⁰

Betti concludes that whereas Gadamer concerns himself with a *quaestio facti*, that of “ascertaining what actually happens in the activity of thought apparent in interpretation,” the proper task of hermeneutics is to provide a solution to the *quaestio juris*, “i.e., what one should aim for in the task of interpretation, what methods to use and what guidelines to follow in the correct execution of the task.”²¹

Hirsch follows Betti in this critique of Gadamer’s subjectivism and relativism, as we can see in the following explication of the goal of interpretation:

The interpreter’s primary task is to reproduce in himself the author’s “logic,” his attitudes, his cultural givens, in short, his world. Even though the process of verification is highly complex and difficult, the ultimate verificative principle is very simple—the imaginative reconstruction of the speaking subject.²²

As the title of Hirsch’s major work makes clear, the task of hermeneutics is to achieve *validity* in interpretation: “The activity of interpretation can lay claim to intellectual respectability only if its results can lay claim to validity.”²³ To be valid, an interpretation must reproduce the “determinative meaning” of the object being interpreted and, in Hirsch’s view, the only meaning which will satisfy this condition of determinacy is the author’s intended meaning: “On purely practical grounds therefore, it is preferable to agree that the meaning of a text is the author’s meaning.”²⁴ For Betti, the appeal to authorial intent is justified on more than “practical” grounds. In fact, it follows directly from the “canon of the hermeneutical autonomy of the object.” To be regarded as autonomous means, for Betti, that the object

should be judged in relation to the standards immanent in the original intention: the intention, that is, which the created forms should correspond to from the point of view of the author and his formative impulse in the course of the creative process; [...] ²⁵

In determining the validity of interpretation according to the degree of correspondence to the author's original intention, the dogmatic character of "objective hermeneutics" is clearly revealed: the text has a single, determinate meaning and any interpretation that does not reproduce this meaning is judged on this ground alone, to be incorrect.

In addition to this objectivistic critique of Gadamer's alleged relativism, we also find a critique of Gadamerian dogmatism. This criticism comes from the perspective of "critical hermeneutics" and has been most forcefully propounded by Jürgen Habermas in his debate with Gadamer. Habermas objects to what he sees as Gadamer's uncritical acceptance of the tradition. For Habermas, the tradition is always appropriated as an authority, and all authority is by its nature authoritarian. Within tradition, certain forces of repression and domination are always operating and in our appropriation of the tradition, we are in danger of appropriating the ideological interests which the tradition has sanctioned. This is not to say, however, that we should simply discard the tradition. Rather, Habermas argues for our appropriating the tradition *critically*: in our discourse with the tradition, we must critically attend to the ideological forces of repression and domination that are always at work *with* the tradition. In refraining from a critique of what the tradition hands down, Habermas sees Gadamer unavoidably accepting the interests which traditional authority has surreptitiously incorporated in the language itself. That is, in uncritically apprehending the language of the tradition, he cannot avoid appropriating the authoritarian values that have infiltrated the language of the tradition itself. Whether Habermas is right in regarding the tradition as necessarily a medium of domination, and whether or not Gadamer has successfully replied to Habermas's criticism of his uncritical acceptance of the ideological domination transmitted through the medium of the linguistic tradition, is not as significant for the present study as is the fact that this debate again focuses our attention on the question of dogmatism and relativism in interpretation. ²⁶ Thus, while on the one hand, Gadamer finds himself responding to Betti and Hirsch's charges of relativism and subjectivism, on the other hand, he is forced to respond in his dialogue with Habermas to the charge of dogmatism. ²⁷

This debate concerning dogmatism and relativism has recently resurfaced with the appearance of a new interpretive approach, one that consciously seeks to distance itself from the hermeneutic tradition precisely in regard to the question of dogmatism. This "deconstructive" approach draws on the insights of both phenomenological hermeneutics and structuralist linguistics in an effort to move beyond the hermeneutic circle to a view of interpretation as infinite play. Jacques Derrida has emerged as the leading spokesperson for this deconstructive approach and, unlike Betti and Hirsch, he does not shy away from but, rather, embellishes the relativistic tendency within phenomenological hermeneutics. For Derrida, reading as a "transformational" activity ²⁸ develops a multiplicity of interpretations from the fundamental polysemy inherent in both linguistic and non-linguistic signs. The deconstructionists thus broaden the scope of interpretive activity to the limit, as the world itself is now viewed as a text to be read and reading becomes a model for all perceptual acts. Regarding the Heideggerian hermeneutic, deconstructionists criticize what they view as a nostalgic longing for the presence of an authentic meaning that serves to guide the hermeneutic procedures of textual deciphering. In criticizing this dogmatic Heideggerian tendency on the grounds that it will put an end to the proliferative play of creative, transformational interpretation, Derrida and other deconstructive interpreters have been frequently criticized for advocating an unmitigated relativism that results in the acceptance of all interpretations as equally legitimate.

The debate between Heideggerian hermeneutics and Derridean deconstruction, which once again manifests the difficulty of avoiding both dogmatism and relativism in interpretation, is at present a central issue in hermeneutic theory that, in addition, raises important questions concerning how we should interpret the history of philosophy. The following study attempts to show that Nietzsche's text can help us to avoid the noxious consequences of this interpretive dilemma in two distinct yet interconnected ways. First, Nietzsche's text will be considered as an object of interpretation. In [Part One](#) and [Two](#), we will examine closely the interpretations of Nietzsche that have been generated from Heidegger's hermeneutic method, as well as a number of post-structural and deconstructive interpretations. Our task, in the first two parts, will not be to confront these interpretive approaches directly. Rather, we will operate on the assumption that a careful examination of what these interpreters actually *do* in their readings, the interpretive moves that they make, may be more significant for evaluating the respective approaches they propose than a critical examination of the methodological procedures which they explicitly claim to be following. Thus, while Heidegger no longer explicitly claims to be engaged in "hermeneutic" analysis when he interprets Nietzsche's thinking, the way his interpretation proceeds reveals a number of implicit methodological assumptions at work within his reading of Nietzsche. The same is true of the deconstructive reading, although they refrain from enumerating the acceptable "protocols of reading," their interpretations implicitly sanction certain protocols and foreclose others. Therefore, in what follows we will examine the *ways* Heidegger and several post-structuralists interpret the Nietzschean text, and through a careful examination and exposition of their interpretive practices, the dogmatic tendency of Heidegger and the relativistic tendency of deconstruction will be displayed.

The second contribution which Nietzsche's text makes toward circumventing this dilemma of dogmatism and relativism in interpretation will be explored in [Part Three](#). While there are frequent references to Nietzsche as a forerunner of contemporary hermeneutics, little attention has been paid to the specific contributions to interpretation theory which can be found in the Nietzschean text. The present study is, in large part, an attempt to rectify this situation. The phenomenon of interpretation is a recurrent theme throughout Nietzsche's writings, and within Nietzsche's remarks on interpretation a tension is present which anticipates the current dilemma of dogmatism and relativism. In examining Nietzsche's exposition of this tension, I will propose a pluralistic approach to interpretation and I will argue that this interpretive pluralism circumvents the current hermeneutic dilemma by refusing to be situated within the traditional hermeneutic alternatives of fidelity and violation.

Insofar as pluralism shares with relativism a basic assumption as to the multiplicity of possible interpretations, it should come as no surprise that the approach developed in [Part Three](#) will occasionally resemble deconstruction. This resemblance is not unintended, and there will be several points in the discussion where my own reconstruction of a Nietzschean interpretive approach will approximate the approach of Derrida and other deconstructive interpreters. At times, Nietzsche claimed himself to be a relativist or pluralist, and he was consistent in his renunciation of interpretive dogmatism. As a result, the interpretive approach I develop will have much more in common with Derrida's approach than with Heidegger's. This is not to say that Derrida's interpretive practices are without problems, or that pluralism and relativism are the same. Rather, it is to acknowledge that while affinities exist between my Nietzschean approach and Derrida's, there are also several differences that will emerge as we compare these respective interpretive practices.

Before concluding this introduction, one final disclosure of strategy is in order, and it concerns Nietzsche's remark cited as one of the epigraphs to this introduction regarding one's being more of an artist than one knows. In the interpretation of Nietzsche's text provided in [Part Three](#), I have attempted to exercise a method of interpretive pluralism and, in so doing, this study attempts to dismantle the

traditional border which has separated the activity of interpretation from that of original creation. This is to say, the interpretation which I provide is both a “mere” commentary *and* an “original” creation, but, in being *both at once*, this interpretation seeks to show that no commentary is ever a mere reproduction nor is any act of creation ever wholly original. By affirming an active, transformational approach, the pluralistic account of interpretive construction advocated here seeks to situate itself outside the traditional hermeneutic disjunctions of fidelity/violation, true/false, accurate/inaccurate. Sartre writes, in *What is Literature?* that “for the reader, all is to do and all is already done.”²⁹ I take this, as well as Nietzsche's remark, quite seriously. The interpretation here provided is thus, on the one hand, an exegetical commentary on a number of Nietzsche's remarks on language, metaphor, and rhetoric, perspectivism and philology, and genealogy and interpretation. But, on the other hand, by organizing these various remarks in the ways I do, I produce not a repetition of the Nietzschean text but a new construction of that text which, I believe, *is* original to the extent that it brings to the fore aspects of this text heretofore unrecognized by many of Nietzsche's English-speaking readers. In so doing, my interpretation seeks to situate itself alongside the Heideggerian and Derridean interpretations in accordance with the following strategy. Both Heidegger and Derrida view the Nietzschean text as an occasion for something other than mere exegesis. That is, in addition to the viewing Nietzsche's text as an object of interpretation, for Heidegger this text also provides a space in which he seeks to pursue his own task of the overcoming of metaphysics and the oblivion of Being, while, for Derrida, the Nietzschean text opens a space in which he can critically confront Heidegger's hermeneutic method. In a similar fashion, the interpretation of Nietzsche which follows should be read both as an interpretation *of* Nietzsche's text and as the space in which I seek to confront both the Heideggerian and the deconstructive methods of interpretation, in an effort to contribute to the resolution of the seemingly intractable hermeneutic dilemma of avoiding both dogmatism and unmitigated relativism in interpretation. Whether or not this new construction fits the Nietzschean text, and whether or not it contributes to resolving this hermeneutic dilemma, are questions left to the readers' interpretive play to decide.

Part 1

Heidegger's Nietzsche

Chapter 1

Heidegger Reading Nietzsche

In the usual present-day view what has been said here is a mere product of the farfetched and one-sided Heideggerian method of exegesis, which has already become proverbial. But here we may, indeed, we must ask: Which interpretation is the true one, the one which simply takes over a perspective into which it has fallen, because this perspective, this line of sight, presents itself as familiar and self-evident; or the interpretation which questions the customary perspective from top to bottom, because conceivably—and indeed actually—this line of sight does not lead to what is in need of being seen.

—Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*

Rather than protect Nietzsche from the Heideggerian reading, we should perhaps offer him up to it completely, underwriting that interpretation without reserve.

—Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

To appropriate one of Nietzsche's more famous chapter headings, Heidegger's entire philosophic project can be viewed as an examination of “The History of an Error.” This error is metaphysics whose history Heidegger recounts as the story of the forgetfulness of Being. In this history, Nietzsche occupies a place of singular importance, evidenced by the fact that Heidegger published a great volume of material on Nietzsche (over 1,200 pages devoted specifically to interpretations of Nietzsche) than any other figure in this history. Nietzsche's paramount importance for Heidegger emerges in his viewing Nietzsche's work as the “completion of metaphysics”; Heidegger finds in Nietzsche the most complete expression of the forgetfulness of Being. If Being is to be recovered from this oblivion, philosophy must “overcome metaphysics” and the first step on this path must be confrontation (*Aus-einander-setzung*) with the thought of Nietzsche, seen as the greatest expression of the oblivion of Being.

In what follows, we will examine Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche as it is presented in three of Heidegger's discussions: his discussion of Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God; his answer to the question “Who is Zarathustra?”; and his interpretation of Nietzsche's discussion of art exhibiting most explicitly Nietzsche's bringing metaphysics to completion through the overturning of Platonism. This examination will be prefaced by a discussion of several basic methodological choices that guide Heidegger's reading, and it will be followed in [Chapter Two](#) by a critical response to Heidegger that returns to these methodological choices and appraises the overall success of Heidegger's method in his interpretation of Nietzsche, while offering several alternative interpretations. The examination itself, which comprises the majority of this first chapter, is largely exegetical and a word of explanation as to the function it serves in my argument is called for. In this chapter, I want to *demonstrate* through a careful exegesis of Heidegger's works on Nietzsche what many readers either *assume* or take on the word of other commentators or critics of Heidegger. As scholarly work, I think it is important to actually look at what Heidegger says and point out the places where he makes the dogmatic interpretive moves that I, and many others, find problematic. This explication is, therefore, a necessary step in confronting the Heideggerian interpretation: it bo

exemplifies the methodological choices discussed in the first section of this chapter and supports my critical comments in the following chapter.

Before beginning this examination, another word regarding my approach to the reading of Heidegger is in order. At the simplest level, there would seem to be two distinct yet interconnected ways to approach a reading of Heidegger's works on Nietzsche. One can view these works from the perspective of Heidegger's philosophical project of overcoming metaphysics and retrieving Being from its oblivion, in which case these works speak primarily about Heidegger, and any insights into Nietzsche's philosophy are incidental and derivative. Or one can view these works as an exegesis of Nietzsche's philosophical corpus, in which case they speak to us primarily about Nietzsche, and only incidentally about Heidegger. While it will often be impossible to keep separate these two strategies of reading, I will emphasize the latter, viewing Heidegger's works on Nietzsche to be works about Nietzsche and *not* about Heidegger. Therefore, these works will be read critically only in terms of their being interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophy and, as such, as examples of Heidegger's method of interpretation; any critical remarks regarding Heidegger's reading of the history of philosophy and his task of overcoming metaphysics will, for the most part, be deferred. William J. Richardson, one of Heidegger's most sympathetic commentators, told the following story when he delivered the 1960 "Suarez Lecture" at Fordham University: "When confronted with the history of criticisms of his interpretation of Kant, Heidegger simply said: 'it may not be good Kant, but it's excellent Heidegger.'"¹ The following examination will not concern itself per se with what is "excellent Heidegger," but will continually raise the question of whether or not Heidegger's interpretation is "good Nietzsche." The question of Heidegger's philosophy proper will be raised only in those sections where we will locate the methodological principles which ground Heidegger's hermeneutic.

Heidegger's Methodological Choices

Broadly viewed, Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche unfolds out of three methodological choices drawn from his meditations on thinking. The first of these choices grounds Heidegger's decision to locate what he calls "Nietzsche's philosophy proper" in his unpublished *Nachlass*, part of which appears under the title *The Will to Power*. Heidegger writes that "The 'doctrine' of a thinker is that which is left unsaid in what he says."² There is a significant ambiguity in the Heideggerian conception of the "unsaid" as it unfolds in his reading of Nietzsche. The "unsaid" alludes to what, as a simple matter of fact, did not come to be expressed by Nietzsche in the works which he saw published. At the same time, it also makes reference to that which *cannot* be said in any form from within the Western metaphysical tradition of which Nietzsche is seen to be a part. Heidegger's application of each of the two senses is revealed in his discussion of the Nietzschean "unsaid." First, the primacy of the unsaid justifies his focusing on Nietzsche's *Nachlass*. If the texts which Nietzsche himself had published are what he said, then to his literary remains, the *Nachlass*, falls the characterization of being unsaid. Heidegger resorts to the idea of the primacy of what remains unsaid in a thinker when he asserts that *The Will to Power*—by which he refers to the "text" that Nietzsche intended to publish with that title and not merely that book titled *The Will to Power* which was constructed from his notebooks by his literary executors—is Nietzsche's philosophical "main structure," his *Hauptwerk*, to which all his published texts stand as an entrance way (*Vorhalle*).

Nietzsche's philosophy proper, the fundamental position on the basis of which he speaks [...] in all the writings he himself published, did not assume a final form and was not itself published in any book, neither in the decade between 1879 and 1889 nor during the years preceding. What Nietzsche himself published during his creative years was always foreground. [...] His

philosophy proper was left behind as posthumous, unpublished work.³

The second use Heidegger makes of the essentiality of what remains unsaid in what a thinker says can be understood in terms of his related notion of the unthought. After *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Heidegger tells us, “Nietzsche never did publish what he really thought.”⁴ Rather, all his published writings after *Zarathustra* are polemical responses to the event of European nihilism. What Nietzsche really thought is to be found in his *Nachlass*, and even there we find what Nietzsche thought only in the form of what is unthought. “What is unthought in a thinker's thought is not a lack inherent in his thought. What is *un*-thought is there in each case only as the *un-thought*. The more original the thinking, the richer will be what is unthought in it” (*WCT*, p. 76). As we will see, what remains unthought in Nietzsche's thinking is the same as what remains unthought in the thinking of Western history as the history of metaphysics: the Truth of Being. Heidegger's principal aim in his exposition of Nietzsche will be to think the thought of the Truth of Being which remains unthought in Nietzsche as the culmination of Western thinking as metaphysics.

Before moving to Heidegger's second methodological choice, a few critical remarks on Heidegger's emphasis upon the *Nachlass* and the unthought in Nietzsche are called for. Although there is no clear consensus among Nietzsche's commentators as to where to locate Nietzsche's “philosophy proper,” Heidegger's emphasis on the *Nachlass* is both extreme and idiosyncratic. Karl Schlechta, for instance, writes in the postscript to his edition of Nietzsche's works: “I omit the already published *Nachlass* because to my knowledge no *new* central thought is to be found there” (*WDB*, III, p. 1433). Schlechta finds in the *Nachlass* only new variations and different expressions of the basic themes which Nietzsche put forth in his published works. Karl Jaspers, on the other hand, does not assent to the primacy of either the published or posthumous works. In his work on Nietzsche, Jaspers writes that “it must be realized that none of Nietzsche's forms of communication has a privileged character. [...] Nowhere is Nietzsche's work truly centralized: there is no *magnum opus*.”⁵ This debate concerning which texts of Nietzsche, if any, are to be given primacy raises some important questions regarding Nietzsche interpretation, as well as some interesting philosophical questions on the nature of textuality. On this question, Bernd Magnus has suggested a helpful distinction.⁶ He divides Nietzsche's principal commentators into two camps: “lumpers” (including Heidegger, Jaspers, Danto, Schacht, Deleuze, Müller-Lauter), for whom the status of the *Nachlass* is unproblematic, and who treat it on at least a par with Nietzsche's published writings; and “splitters” (including Alderman Hollingdale, Strong, Montinari and himself), who “distinguish sharply between published and unpublished writings.” According to this scheme, I might suggest that rather than being a “lumper,” Heidegger is an “inverse splitter”: he, too, separates sharply between published and unpublished writings, but he gives priority to the *unpublished* writings. It will suffice to say at this point that Heidegger's almost exclusive focus on the unpublished notes should be regarded with suspicion. The extreme care that Nietzsche took in the publishing of those works that appeared during his lifetime must be taken into account when considering what *Nietzsche* thought. And the status of the unpublished notes vis-à-vis his published works must be questioned. Why did some notes remain unpublished? Nietzsche's notes often take the form of “experiments in thought.” He follows the progress, on paper, of some of his ideas and, if this progress results in failure, the notes are set aside, sometimes returned to and sometimes not. One must, in reading the unpublished notes, attend to the question of why the notes remained unpublished. The answer may be that he never got around to finalizing them, or that he found himself in disagreement with the results of his “thought experiment.”⁷ To value these notes *en masse* as the site of Nietzsche's philosophy proper, as Heidegger does, does not do justice to the stylistic care which Nietzsche devoted to bringing his work

to publication.

A few remarks are also called for regarding Heidegger's thinking of what remains unthought in the history of Western philosophy, and this brings us back to the issue raised earlier as to whether Heidegger's exposition of Nietzsche is "good Heidegger" or "good Nietzsche." Richards characterizes Heidegger's reading of the history of Western thinking as the endeavor "to comprehend and express not what another thinker thought/said, but what he did not think/say, could not think/say and why he could not think/say it."⁸ With this idea in mind, we can grasp Heidegger's strategy in his exposition of Nietzsche. What Nietzsche did not and could not think/say is the question of the Truth of Being, and the reason why Nietzsche did not/could not think/say the question of the Truth of Being is that he remained within the metaphysical tradition. Heidegger writes that it is only by conceiving Nietzsche as the culmination of this metaphysical tradition, and then proceeding to the question of the Truth of Being, that we can succeed in arriving at Nietzsche's philosophy proper, a philosophy that, while leaving unthought the question of the Truth of Being, nevertheless opens up the path by which subsequent thinking will be able to think this hitherto unthought thought (see *NI*, p. 10). While we shall defer a discussion of this conception of Nietzsche's place in the history of Western thinking until we have examined more carefully Heidegger's situating Nietzsche as the culmination of metaphysics, nevertheless we must here point out the danger that such a strategy poses for the hermeneutic enterprise. Heidegger declares that our thinking on the tradition requires that we recognize and acknowledge that tradition. "Respecting and acknowledging [*Anerkennen*, recognizing, admitting] is not yet agreement; but it is the necessary precondition for any confrontation" (*WCT*, p. 81. Translation altered.). Yet it is not at all clear that Heidegger's thinking adheres to this requirement. What we come to find in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is the uniform character of the tradition of Western thinking as the forgetfulness of Being and the identity of what is unthought in all thinkers within that tradition, viz., what is unthought is in each case the question of the Truth of Being. Whereas this provides an interesting vantage-point from which to view the unfolding of the tradition of Western metaphysics, the appropriateness of such a vantage-point to each figure within that tradition is a dubious claim. Heidegger argues that what is unthought in Plato and Aristotle is the *same* as what is unthought in such figures as Descartes, Leibniz, Hegel and Nietzsche. The danger that such a strategy poses for hermeneutics is that of dogmatism: the willful reading of a text in accordance with a pre-existing schema of interpretation that is superimposed on the text and with which the text is made to cohere. In our evaluation of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, we must be attentive to this willful appropriation of Nietzsche by Heidegger, and we must be aware of a possible tendency in Heidegger's reading of appropriation's becoming expropriation.⁹ We will be guided in this task by a remark of Nietzsche's regarding the theologian's "*incapacity for philology*."

Philology is to be understood here in a very wide sense as the art of reading well—of being able to read off a fact *without* falsifying it by interpretation, *without* losing caution, patience, subtlety in the desire for understanding. Philology as *ephexis* [undecisiveness] in interpretation. (*A*, 52)¹⁰

That is to say, we must inquire whether or not Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche's thought suffers from this "incapacity for philology";¹¹ whether in his desire to understand Nietzsche as the completion of the metaphysical tradition, Heidegger falsifies Nietzsche's thinking by viewing it under the interpretation of the history of metaphysics as the oblivion of Being.

The second methodological principle that guides Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is that "every thinker thinks only one single thought"¹² (*WCT*, p. 50). Nietzsche, Heidegger tells us, "belongs to the essential thinkers." Heidegger echoes his conclusion from the meditation on thinking when he writes

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