Response

Anthony J. Steinbock
DePaul University

In his text, "Nietzsche's Hermeneutic Significance," Schrift maintains that Nietzsche's exegetical approach avoids a dogmatism without lapsing into an unmitigated relativistic subjectivism by retaining both extremes as limits, using them to circumscribe a hermeneutic which "remains attentive to" and "links" a philological rigour and a perspectivism. Though his attempt to approach a seemingly irresovable perplexity is noteworthy, I do not believe it is as adequate as it could be. Schrift does, however, make note of an insight which, in spite of his ultimate position, provides a basis for understanding Nietzsche's hermeneutic. This insight, which will merit the focus of my attention, centers on understanding human interpretation as a mode of the will to power. I regret that the limitations of space will not permit a more lengthy discussion or a more detailed development of a textual hermeneutic than I shall present here; I therefore willfully hold a host of questions in abeyance in order that I might concentrate on and develop the foundation, certainly necessary, for a hermeneutical understanding. I shall now indicate briefly the direction a fruitful study of Nietzsche's hermeneutic might take.

1. Will to Power as Interpret-ing. All that is, all be-ing, is, according to Nietzsche, the will to power (der Wille zur Macht) manifest through life.[1] Will to power is characterized as interpretive or transformative activity; it creates, construes and moulds varigated modalities of the organic process, modes which are articulated in varying degrees of power (Macht).[2] Within this realm of interpretive manifestations, there is a unique species of life which can purposefully appropriate the fundamental exegetical activity and, in turn, interpret be-ing. It is the human species as a qualitatively distinct modality which is intrinsically the interpretation, i.e., creation of being. On the basis of this understanding, Nietzsche argues, the notion of uninterpreted be-ing is simply a hopeless and abstract chimera. All be-ing which is the will to power expressed as life is only intelligible, only accessible to human life through an interpretive,

which is to say, transformative process. Ultimately, not only is the will to power interpretive activity in and through which it is itself transformed, but human being as an interpretation interprets and modifies itself by coinciding with and directing the creative thrust which is will to power. Will to power, then, as interpretive activity serves as ground for human interpretation which itself is a mode of the fundamental creative force.[3]

What is implied in understanding the exegetical process as the will to power where human beings are concerned can be put concisely: not only must a dogmatic position of hermeneutics be relativised, but the relativistic one also must be relativised. The "resolution" of hermeneutical theories which tend to vascilate from one correct interpretation to many correct ones is not to be found in any reconciliation of the extremes, but rather in treating all distinctions on this level as "relative" or superfluous to the creative process.[4] In other words, the dogmatist and relativist stances are already abstract and presuppose what they both try and need to explain; they cannot therefore be employed to explain, even as limits, what they presuppose, namely, interpretation as creative activity.

The dynamic perspective of interpretation as creative activity indeed accounts for much that is rich, provocative and ambiguous in Nietzsche's thought. One notion specifically, regarded by some to be equivocal, is Nietzsche's notion of "truth." Because his conception of truth is so intimately intertwined with that of interpretation it warrants clarification here. I shall first discuss the significance of "truth," and then more precisely the process of interpretation.

2. Truth. By working within the context of the dynamic structure of reality as the will to power, Nietzsche can and does adamantly refuse to worship at the shrine of Reason, a Reason which peers through the curtain from behind the world scene and determines truth. Understandably, Nietzsche rejects any kind of unconditional, universal, selbständig realm of truth. The belief that one can possess and accumulate truth as, for example, in the compilation of a Cartesian "body of knowledge" is, according to Nietzsche, "one of the most seductive doctrines" which coagulates the diastolic and systolic structure of life.

The musty, gloomy, insipid seriousness of those who quest for truth is more dangerous than any frivolity, Nietzsche claims; the will to determinate truth "is more fateful than error and ignorance, because it cuts off the forces that work toward enlightenment and knowledge," viz., the creative élan.[5] In fact he contends such a will to "truth" is perhaps a maleficently concealed will to death, or again, an impotence of the

will to create.[6] The epistemological desire--the desire for "solid facts"--reveals precisely the inherent pessimism in the search for established truth. The specious pre-fabrication of truth is born from and nurtured by an emptiness, the lack of trust in oneself to create, the lack of adventurous courage to transform.[7] "That there could be a 'truth' which one could somehow approach"--exclaims Nietzsche in the Will to Power.[8] Yet such is the promulgation Western Civilization has spewed forth, the rancid regurgitation, the approbated truth which the impotent willed ingests, relishing in it a restful repose, a refuge from action, a simulated but almost too real death.

In stark opposition to the traditional inertial conception of truth which inspires conformity, superficial contentment and the disparagement of the creative will, Nietzsche brandishes "error" or "untruth." But what has been misleadingly labeled "error" is really for Nietzsche creative activity, activity which is viewed by the standard of static truth as untruth, deception, nihilism, etc. Moreover, that one could even attempt to "dismantle" static truth and its propagations is due precisely to the fact that the latter were artifically constructed in the first place.[9] Rather than Nietzsche's "error" presupposing a fixed truth, his notion grounds truth as well as a correlative type of error.

In yet another interrelated sense, "untruth" as the transformative Macht is the foundation of cognition. To be sure, "/b/efore there is 'thought' there must have been 'invention'."[10] Insofar as the misnomered untruth can be taken as creative activity, it is ontologically prior even to life and surpasses the rigid categories of "truth" and "error," "morality" and "immorality." "To recognize untruth as the condition of life," writes Nietzsche, "certainly means resisting accustomed value feelings in a dangerous way; and a philosophy that risks this would by that token place itself beyond good and evil."[11]

When one comes to grip with Nietzsche's interpretive process as creative, and consequently beyond good and evil, the "closed" sense of truth can be said to occlude the transforming structure because it tends to reify its own condition, namely, will to power. Strictly speaking, the creative force can be neither truth in a determined manner, nor error juxtaposed to this truth. In another quite radical sense, however, one would have to concede that interpretive activity is, for Nietzsche, nothing but "true." To understand the creative life force as "true" in the latter sense would be to understand it as indeterminate and open. This is not to say this process is not concrete. On the contrary, as articulated it is manifest fully, but in such a way that it allows its own internal transformation, its own self-overcoming.

A sensitivity to the transforming function as an intrinsic openness to its own self-overcoming reveals for Nietzsche that what is (be-ing) true is the enhancement of the creative will to power.[12] The significance of this statement will become clearer as I consider more precisely the process of interpreting.

3. Interpret-ing. Because the creative force articulates itself, for example, in the form of human life (which is, in a unique way, a purposeful interpretive process), human beings can never be understood meaningfully as fixed or finished. The human species is a bridge, a becoming, a passing from and groping towards, a terminus a quo and a terminus ad quem. The trodden path cannot be plotted; since the future is still open, even the meaning of the present and past cannot be determined definitively. Human being, as the capacity to transform, is not, in Nietzsche's terms, a "subject," i.e., a static entity, detachable from its activity. Nor where interpreting is concerned is there a permanent, completed "object" (Gegenstand) standing over against a "subject." "To make a kind of perspective in seeing the cause of seeing . . . is what happened in the invention of the 'subject,' the 'I'!"[13] Put differently, there is not "P" that can be predicated of an "s," no "I" that feels or thinks, no "subject" that wills; there is no point behind a line of acts to which one could retreat or from which one could execute acts. The notion of subject, and with it a neutral position, eine Schwundstufe, is an abstract imposition upon the interpretive process. Instead, the individual as exegetical activity is an immediate and direct engagement, a qualitative becoming different in and through its active creativity.[14]

By considering the human individual as a qualitative becoming, one can understand Nietzsche's loath for a carrion civilization which reeks from the systematic abnegation of its creative capacity, his repugnance for a culture which opts for a stagnant security in the face of the invitation to transform the full and inexhaustible amiguity. Not even being able to ask questions in the presence of the overabundance is what gives rise to Nietzsche's disdain, and what he finds in the human species most contemptible.[15]

Since the individual is creatively becoming, a manifestation and creation of the will to power, Nietzsche hesitates to specify in any substantialistic way who the interpreter might be. He does, however, risk certain reservations in order to evoke a sense of the noble spirit. The interpreter is or will be the "genuine philosopher," the artist, the Übermensch. The Übermensch is the one who takes up the fundamental interpretative force which it is and recasts it anew. Under the artist's chisel, a new spirit is forged, a unique transformation of the will to power is brought

to expression. "With a creative hand they reach for the future," Nietzsche lauds, "and all that is and has been becomes a means for them, an instrument, a hammer. Their 'knowing' is creating, their creating is a legislation, their will to truth is--will to power."[16] The genuine philosophers--those who are overrich in will--are never really anything; their life is affirmed as a process, directed towards the future in the form of self-overcoming.

What is demanded of and essential to such interpreting or creating is "honesty." By honesty Nietzsche does not mean loyality to something or someone, and certainly not to norms of a morality which already conceives life devoid of its dynamic element. Honesty is the one virtue which belongs only to those who sharpen the cutting edge of their stylus, the will to power, and fashion the world in terms of this will. Honesty, to put it differently, is an affirmation of oneself; what oneself is is the power to create. Interpreting entails regarding oneself as the transformative capacity which one is and appropriating the creative thrust in such a way that one coincides with and thereby enhances it.[17]

Unfortunately, the term "error" carries with it the connotation of random caprice. But again, creativity or untruth only appears arbitrary when viewed from a traditional attitude toward truth as self-subsistent and unpredictable. Contrary to the connotation of untruth as capricious, creativity is not aimless. Nietzsche explains that the characteristic mark of greatness is "being able to be as manifold as whole, as ample as full," which is to say that vigour of will implies highly orientated and purposeful activity.[18] One should, according to Nietzsche, "see with as many eyes as possible," i.e., perpetually interpret. But since interpreting is creating, the diversity must be enveloped in and directed towards the fortification of will to power. The individual who appropriates will to power in such a way that the directedness coincides with creativity which is will to power, is qualified as noble. The noble life as a modality of will to power, however, is not definable or given prior to its actual articulation in the individual. That the noble life cannot be established in advance or abstractly precludes the possibility of constructing normative ethics or political systems which function as bases for conformity. The noble life is radically unique and brought to expression spontaneously only in and through the concrete lived directedness, the creative individual.

Nonetheless, when Nietzsche states "there are many kinds of eyes," suggesting that there are any number of perspectives, he is not countenancing in the least that all perspectives or interpretations which augment will to power share an equal or common status; perspectivism

neither implies nor can be synonymous with relativism. To maintain that there is a perspectivism without relativism is to understand perspectivism as the lived concrete historical act-ivity through which the creative thrust discloses itself and becomes articulated.[19] As noted above, a perspective, which is the living in and through an act, for example, seeing, cannot be degraded to the level of a "subject" that sees. Accordingly, as a directedness which varies qualitatively, interpreting differs hierarchically. Interpreting differs to the extent that the distinct mode of living coincides with the creative will.[20] Furthermore, since the will to power is localized and articulated in the noble life which is unfolding, the qualitative uniqueness of an act cannot be given in advance; it is even quite possible that it may not be recognized in the present, or that it may remain unrecognized. This contingency, ambiguity, and apparent lacuna, however, would not imply abstention from evaluations of further activity; it would require that any interpretive act be weighed against the exigencies of an historical situation.

As a further clarification, it should be noted that the affirmation of the will to power as life does not mean simply will to the longevity of life (ζωή). "A living thing," Nietzsche writes, "seeks above all to discharge its strength--life is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results."[21] Certainly it is incumbent upon the Übermensch to endure. Those who pursue the artistic life must exhibit an authentic love for vitality. The will to power, however, is not reducible to the vital sphere merely. One could not say, for example, that simply because the deferent willed and their morality has continued to persist for centuries that their interpretive activity has fostered the will to power. In their somnolence, this type of life (ζωή) seeks immunity from risk, struggle, etc., in favor of an inert "well-being." In Nietzsche's words, this is no desired end; it is a slothful "state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible--that makes his destruction desirable."[22] The Übermensch, on the other hand, cherishes life, but will live it on the edge, "where cutting winds are at their worst," "among the distant fields of ice and rock." The artist will use its vital strength as a tool, even wager it for self-aggrandisement of creativity, to heighten the ability to interpret.

4. Towards a Textual Hermeneutic. I have in the course of this text attempted to develop the sense in which interpretation can be understood as creative activity. Fundamentally, the will to power is an interpretive, that is, creative process. Insofar as human beings appropriate the will to power and creatively direct it, interpretive activity can be under-

stood as a mode of this basic process. "Textual interpreting," moreover, can be understood as yet a further refinement of this fundamental transformative function. On the basis of what I have ventured here, some salient yet tentative points of a textual hermeneutic can be suggested for consideration:

(i) Just as a "subject" is understood as an imposition on the interpretive process, so too is an "author." An author is superfluous when conceived as separate from its activity, that is, as a static entity. Where a textual hermeneutic is concerned, however, the dynamic process, the interpreter, can be understood as the "writer," or more accurately, the lived writing activity. Hence, as interpreting is a qualitative becoming, writing too is creative activity, a mode of artistry in and through which the transformation of the blank page or silence in turn modifies the "writing."

(ii) Since an "object" is said to be extraneous to interpreting, a hermeneutical enterprise cannot be concerned with anything claimed to confine permanent fixed meanings, i.e., safeguards of truths, e.g., "books," "articles," etc. Instead, a hermeneutic could be understood to attend to "texts." A text is perpetually in the process of creation and is inherently open to the development and transformation of its "texture."

(iii) Accordingly, "honesty" in a textual hermeneutic does not imply loyality to "truths" or meanings instored by an "author." Honesty, rather, as a "virtue" of the hermeneut is the affirmation of the text as an invitation or openness to continued creation, i.e., interpreting.

(iv) Because the texture of the text is not closed, the text allows another style of interpreting, namely, the "reader."[23] The reader, or the internal coherency of the activity reading, is not a collector of established, imparted truths. "Reading," too, can be understood as creative, that is, interpretive activity which enhances qualitatively the textual texture.

NOTES

[1]Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), text references, Sec. 4, 3, 32; hereafter cited as BGE.

[2]Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans., Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), Sec. 643; hereafter cited as WP.

[3]BGE, Sec. 36, 2; WP, 643, 678, 556.

[4]More specifically, such attempts inadequate to the creative process would include: remaining attentive to both extremes, seeking a balance between them, the imposition of a nexus, an "inbetween" if this means employing the extremes as stricutres, a sysntheis, or any other sort of juxtaposition or mediation on this level of thought.

[5]WP, Sec. 452.

[6]Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs, trans., Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), Sec. 344; WP, Sec. 585.

[7]WP, Sec. 591, 578, 592, 477.

[8]WP, Sec. 451, emphasis mine; cf. also 537.

[9]WP, Sec. 584; cf. also Secs. 1-134.

[10]WP, Sec. 544, emphasis mine. Hence, interpretation as creative activity cannot be qualified epistemologically.

[11]BGE, Sec. 3, 32.

[12]WP, Sec. 534.

[13]WP, Sec. 548, emphasis mine.

[14]WP, Sec. 548, 549, 556, 617; cf. fn. 19.

[15]"Is not life a hundred times too short--for boredom? One really would have to believe in eternal life to--." BGE, Sec. 227.

[16]BGE, Sec. 211.

[17]A case could be made that insofar as one coincides with the creative élan, one is not only enhancing oneself, but all be-ing. That is, one would be contributing to the development of others as well, not, however, and this is Nietzsche's concern I believe, as "subjects" but to another as activity, as the will to power. What distinguishes the Übermensch so uniquely is the way in which the will to power is taken up and directed, hence the distinction of and emphasis upon the individual.

[18]BGE, Sec. 212.

[19]A persepctive is the lived-through internal coherency of acts through which the creative force discloses itself. It cannot therefore be equated with a "relativistic subjectivism." This further implies that one could not parallel a dogmatism-relativism with "philological rigour-perspectivism" as Schrift attempts. Clearly, the "philology" would itself seem to exhibit the contrast within itself, namely the "rigour" and the "playfulness." But even here, if playfulness is to be understood as "creative appropriation," it too could not be juxtaposed to any extreme. The activity "seeing," for example, or the activity "interpreting" are concrete modes of a lived continuity. This is the basis, in other worlds, of any "contrast."

[20]WP, cf., e.g., Sec. 592.

[21]BGE, Sec. 13.

[22]BGE, Sec. 225.

[23]The "reader" could also include the "listener," "speaker," etc.