



## Science and the Classical Ideal in Nietzsche's Philological Writings

### Ciência e o ideal clássico nos escritos filológicos de Nietzsche

Eduardo Nasser<sup>1</sup>  
eduardo.nasser@ufpe.br

**Abstract:** In this article, I intend to show that, as the Nietzschean philology has the education (*Bildung*) as the main goal, the search for the classical ideal in the Greco-Roman antiquity is a priority, a feature that contradicts the scientific impulses, which when taken in isolation, are contrary to the very essence of education. However, we will also see that Nietzsche's aim will not be to neutralize the scientific impulses, but to place them in the service of the educational purpose. In other words, the scientific tendencies of philology, namely history and linguistics, would have to contribute, in this sense, not to the knowledge of the truth, but to the determination of the classical ideal.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche; philology; classical ideal; science; linguistics.

**Resumo:** Neste artigo, pretendo mostrar que, como a filologia nietzschiana tem como objetivo principal a educação (*Bildung*), a busca pelo ideal clássico na antiguidade greco-romana é prioritária, característica que contradiz os impulsos científicos, que, quando tomadas isoladamente, são contrárias à própria essência da educação. No entanto, veremos também que o objetivo de Nietzsche não será neutralizar os impulsos científicos, mas colocá-los a serviço do propósito educacional. Ou seja, as tendências científicas da filologia, nomeadamente a história e a linguística, deveriam contribuir, neste sentido, não para o conhecimento da verdade, mas para a determinação do ideal clássico.

**Palavras-chave:** Nietzsche; filologia; ideal clássico; Ciência; linguística.

---

1 Professor na Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE) e membro do GEN – Grupo de Estudos Nietzsche.

After Nietzsche's first publications, such as *Zur Geschichte der Theognideischen Spruchsammlung* and *De Laertii Diogenis fontibus*, which reflect, at least publicly, his loyalty to the historicist orientation adopted by a great majority of the philologists of his time, he begins to incorporate humanistic principles when handling classical antiquity, particularly when he begins teaching in Basel. This tendency is noticeable in the notion of philology that he then formulates, based on scientific, pedagogical and aesthetic impulses, this latter being committed to the idealization of the Greco-Roman antiquity. It is true that this is not an entirely unusual approach when one considers that the academic studies of antiquity, from Wolf and Creuzer until Nietzsche's contemporaries, such as Curtius, aimed to adapt the idealization of the Greco-Roman antiquity to scientific demands. However, it should be noted that since 1830, this endeavor already faced resistance – take for instance Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, a name well known to Nietzsche's students, who regarded the preoccupations with the *classical* as a sign of deviation from the genuine task of philology<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, one can better comprehend the motive as to why Nietzsche seeks to integrate the neo-humanistic principles of names such as Winckelmann and Goethe to his philology as a peculiar decision, even though perceiving the classical normative principles in Archaic Greece of the V and VI Centuries BC, the Greece of the pre-socratics, ancient lyrics and Homer<sup>3</sup>. Taking this into account, I intended to show that, as the Nietzschean philology has the education (*Bildung*) as the main goal, the search for the classical ideal in the Greco-Roman antiquity is a priority, a feature that contradicts the scientific impulses, which when taken in isolation, are contrary to the very essence of education. However, we will also see that Nietzsche's aim will not be to neutralize the scientific impulses, but to place them in the service of the educational purpose. In other words, the scientific tendencies of philology, namely history and linguistics, would have to contribute,

2 As Reinhardt (1966) says, nowhere besides Germany one can find the passionate surrender to both tendencies: “first humanism, then historicism” (p. 338). See also Christ, 1988, p. 22 – 27. Horstmann, 1975, p. 35 – 37; 53 – 54.

3 It is not unusual to find studies that portray the young Nietzsche as an anti-classicist, if we consider the concept of classic as a historical category, based on the neo-humanist tradition. It is in this sense, that Cancik (1995), for example, sees Nietzsche as an anti-classicist, given that Nietzsche intends to take “the Greek archaic culture as a normative model” (p. 35 – 49). However, the fact is that Nietzsche polemicizes in various moments, in a more or less direct manner, with the image of the classical Greeks spread by neo-humanists, having in view to reformulate and not to dissolve the idealism of the classical. In this respect, see *The Birth of Tragedy* §15, §19, §20, §21, Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 97 – 102, 120 – 140; *Unpublished Fragments* 1869-70, 3[74], Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 7, p. 80; *Unpublished Fragments* 1870-71, 5[94], 7[91], Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 7, p. 118, 159; *Unpublished Fragments* 1870 – 72, 8[39], Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 7, p. 238; *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books* §5, *Homer's Contest*, Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 783 – 792; *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.4, p. 215. As Landfester notes, Nietzsche is an anti-classicist only in the sense that he opposes to the neo-humanists classical Greece. Still, his concern would be to elaborate a new concept of classical, of a romantic imprint. See Landfester, 2002, p. 97, 100 – 108. See also: Pöschl, 1979, p. 148 and 149. Siemens, 2004, p. 395 and 396.

in this sense, not to the knowledge of the truth, but to the determination of the classical ideal.

---

In the first lines of *Homer and Classical Philology* – the published version of *On the Personality of Homer*, the inaugural lecture presented in Basel in 1869 –, Nietzsche points out that the absence of an understanding about classical philology is caused by the “inorganic state of aggregation of different scientific activities which are only interconnected through the name ‘philology’” (*Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.1, p. 249). Nietzsche does not reject interdisciplinarity as being constitutive of philology in the proper sense; but he makes two amendments. First, he follows the path similar to Heyne and Wolf, aiming to imprint an *organic* character to this multiplicity<sup>4</sup>. However, and secondly, it is not only about a systematization of special fields of science, but a *fusion* of contradictory impulses (*Triebe*), namely, scientific and ethical-aesthetic, whose unification would be possible by another orientation, equally inherent to philology, pedagogy. From the pedagogical perspective it becomes evident that the impulses are assembled in a hierarchical manner, in an “apparent monarchy” (*Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.1, p. 250), whose organization takes place through the primacy of the *practical*. As we read in the manuscript of the presentation – which is different in some respects from the published version under the title *Homer and Classical Philology* –, philology “owes its existence not to a scientific impulse but to a practical necessity” (*Drafts Notebook*, Nietzsche, \_\_, sheet 50a). Thus, the scientific impulses of the philologist, both historical and linguistic, must be moderated in view of educational purposes. In case this aspiration does not take place, the task of philology is not completed, since the production of knowledge, by itself, has no practical value.

If we place ourselves scientifically in antiquity, we can try to apprehend what has passed with the eyes of the historian or, as the researcher of nature, categorize and compare the linguistic forms of the ancient masterpieces, at best bringing them back to some morphological laws: we will always lose the wonderful educational (*Bildende*) element, the genuine aroma of the ancient atmosphere; we will forget that longing stimulus that with the power of instinct, as the most gracious charioteer, leads our senses and enjoyment towards the Greeks (*Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.1, p. 252).

Taking into account the pedagogical orientation to avoid this outcome, the philologist needs to use an evaluative and selective procedure on the accumulated knowledge. This is a characteristic of the esthete, who knows how to “dig up a buried ideal world and confront the present with the classical and eternally exemplary mirror” (*Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.1, p. 249 and

4 About this tendency in Heyne and Wolf, see Horstmann, 1978, p. 31 – 34.

250). Familiar with different concepts of classical<sup>5</sup>, Nietzsche retains the normative meaning of the concept, mobilizing it in order to avoid the reducibility of philology to a simple scholarly endeavor; he maintains the humanistic expectation of a return to the Greco-Roman antiquity alive with the purpose of finding there universal principals that could become a role model to the present. The philologist must also reach the “ideal antiquity” (*Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.1, p. 254), which justifies Nietzsche’s efforts to reconnect the “artistic friends of antiquity” – and here he considers particularly Goethe and the classicist Weimar circle –, to the classical philology. In the inaugural lecture, one of the greatest concerns is to undo the misunderstanding, brought about mainly by the so-called “Homeric Question” produced after the publication of Wolf’s *Prolegomena*, in which the neo-humanists perceived the philologist as an “opponent and devastator of antiquity and ancient ideals” (*Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.1, p. 252).

This topic will be recaptured and, in several aspects deepened, in the course given in 1871, *Introduction to the Study of Classical Philology* – whose manuscript title is *Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same* – and in the 1872 conferences, *On the Future of our Educational Institutions*<sup>6</sup>. In the 1871 course, Nietzsche resumes his pluralist vision in which the philologist is constituted by means of the fusion of three types of impulses; now he talks about “pedagogical inclination”, “delight with antiquity” and “voracity for pure knowledge”, which fuse into the ideal figure of the “superior teacher” (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 366). Although in the inaugural lecture Nietzsche mentions the impossibility of a concrete achievement of this ideal figure<sup>7</sup>, it is in the *Encyclopedia* that he explores with greatest attention the fact that, in reality, the tendency is of one of the three impulses to prevail. In this sense, the impulse that prevails the most, due to its easy dissemination, is the impulse towards knowledge, the scientific impulse, peculiar to the “historian or the linguist (*Sprachforscher*)”. It is an impulse that, when dominant, generates only the scholar, who abominates the educational effort and due to its “lack of aesthetic”, does not comprehend the “classical antiquity” (*Encyclopedia of*

5 As we see on the *Encyclopedia*, Nietzsche was familiarized with various meanings of classical: as a political, literary and esthetic category. See *Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 341. Still on the different contexts of the use of classical in Nietzsche, see Siemens, 2004, p. 406.

6 We follow here Holzer, who had already pointed to a very close connection between the texts of the *Encyclopedia* and of *On the Future*. See Holzer, 1910, p. XIII and XIV. We will see further on that this connection could be philologically justified.

7 “The mentioned basic diverse tendencies (of philology) emerged at certain time periods, sometimes with a greater emphasis, sometimes with a lesser one, according to the degree of culture and the development of taste in the respective period; and in turn individuals representing that science always tend to understand the orientations that most correspond to their power and will as the central orientations of philology, so that evaluation in philology, in the public’s opinion, depends very much on the personality impetus of philologists!” (*Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.1, p. 250).



*Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 366 and 367).

In the *Encyclopedia* and *On the Future*, Nietzsche carefully examines the negative impact of the desire for knowledge in the education of both the philologist and of the secondary school student (*Gymnasium*). Let us begin with the first case. In Nietzsche's understanding, of the three constitutive impulses of the ideal philologist, the most important to be developed, and also most challenging, is the pedagogical one, which requires a specific preparation. This takes place through a series of spiritual exercises: the contact with the German classics, the development of artistic activities, reading of classics from antiquity, appreciation of classical art and familiarity with the idealist philosophy. Nietzsche does not explain all these practices in detail; however, he makes observations on some of them, which gives us an idea of what he has in mind, namely the generation of a determined set of temperaments and intellectual abilities in face of the present and reality. For example, the contact with names such as "Winckelmann, Lessing, Schiller, Goethe", the "great moderns", stimulates nostalgia, a feeling that serves as a condition to establish an authentic connection with classical antiquity. On the other hand, the reading of the "genuine classics, which create a vivid impression: tragedy, the writing of historians (Tacitus, Sallust), the Ciceronian discourses. Homer. The Persian War" (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 369), evoke a feeling of affection with that material. The contact with idealist philosophers such as Plato and Kant, at last, works as means for the philologist to "correct his naive visions of reality" (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 372), making him more suitable for abstraction, generalization and contemplation. However, when dominated uniquely by the desire for knowledge, the philologist is converted to a mere historian, dedicating himself uniquely to examining the details and privileging a realist perspective<sup>8</sup>.

In the context of the secondary school, the scientific impulse, when predominant, will have equally damaging effects. For the prioritization of the scientific education coincides with the suspension of educational presumptions in the secondary school, that is, it's a contradiction to talk about a scientific education. This is especially noticeable within the formal scope. The secondary schooling has in its core the formal education, aimed at the learning of the mother tongue, which

8 Nietzsche seems to have in mind the direction given to philology by Boeckh's school. As we read on the notes written between 1868-69, entitled *Encyclopedia of Philology* – which will later be of great importance to the composition of the 1871 course manuscript – with Boeckh, "the difference between philology and history disappears" (*Unpublished Fragments* 1868-69, 75[3], Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. I.5, p. 196). Besides contesting the idealist purpose, Boeckh integrates philology to history, given there would be no justification for philology to be restricted to the Greco-Roman antiquity. Thus, what is considered classical philology would be nothing more than the study of a moment in world history. See Muhlack, 1979, p. 237 – 239. Horstmann, 1992, p. 73 – 76 and 93 – 99.

does not benefit from the scholarly tendency. In the first place, Nietzsche understands that the authentic formal teaching revolves around the German classics. This contact serves both as a mediator with the classics of antiquity, too complex for students that age, as well as a more elementary formal canon for learning, writing and using words with rigor, that is, to perfect the German. However, when the education is guided by the scholarly treatment of the languages, the practical approach gives way to a historical view of the language as a deceased body, which does not contribute to the perfecting of the most basic, the mother tongue. “We find everywhere the tendency to deal with the Mother Tongue through historical erudition: that is, it is considered as if it was a dead language and as if there was no obligation towards the present and future of this language” (*On the Future of our Educational Institutions*, Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 677).

Another problem identified by Nietzsche in the scholarly approach to languages is in the trivialization of classical languages. He considers here, above all, the threats arising from the influence of linguistics within the secondary school, which tends to despise the Greek and Latin superiority. For the teaching of Greek and Latin functions as a resource which minimizes the decline of the mother tongue.

The safest remedy, contained in the current secondary school institutions is, in any case, the seriousness with which the Latin and Greek languages are treated during a long sequence of years: here, one learns to respect a language fixed by rules, by grammar, by the lexicon (*On the Future of our Educational Institutions*, Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 688).

It is certainly not a matter of finding within the teaching of classical languages a completely satisfying means to correct the decline of German. Nietzsche makes it clear that the seriousness experimented in the Latin and Greek classes in the secondary school are soon followed by the undisciplined attitude, stimulated by the language teacher himself, who understands the German language as a domain in which “one can rest relieved once again from the rigorous discipline of the Latin and Greek” (*On the Future of our Educational Institutions*, Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 688). Even so, the fact is that we have in these languages the most elementary rhetorical and rhythmical models, which are, then, valuable for education, even as a counterpoint for the languages used in modernity. As Nietzsche states, we are “stylistically rudimentary empiricists”; “we know almost nothing about the rhythm of speech, period, from the choices of words, end of sentences, from the basic color of the regular and consciously retained tone”, so that we “should, therefore, necessarily consider the Greek and Roman rhetoric: moreover the rhythm” (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 393 and 394).

However, linguistics ignores this superiority of the classical languages. On section 13 of the *Encyclopedia*, Nietzsche turns to the situation that prevails in his time, pointing to the existence of two large groups of students, the critics and the

comparative linguists, deprived of the most elevated goal. This criticism can be better understood when one verifies that the “natural sciences and comparative linguistics are almost in the same level” (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 389). Nietzsche returns to his understanding, elaborated in the time of *Homer and Classical philology*, that linguistics can be a natural science due to its commitment to the discovery of laws, such as the sound and morphological laws which determine the development of languages in a network of genealogical relations<sup>9</sup>. For the secondary school embedded in the classical trend, this type of approach should be irrelevant. The fact that the linguist considers Greek and Latin as “languages among others” in the genetic chain of languages has nothing to do with the secondary education, based in the classical ideal; it is indifferent for the secondary school, for example, to know whether there is agreement between the “carcass” of Greek and Latin with the “other languages” (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 389).

This passage of the *Encyclopedia* is of particular importance, given that it synthesizes Nietzsche's hesitations towards linguistics. In it, we find the support for the moment in which Nietzsche shows himself more critical of linguistics, in *On the Future of our Educational Institutions*. In the third conference, in which he lists a series of unfruitful relations with antiquity disseminated in modernity, linguistics stands out. At this point, Nietzsche recovers the arguments of section 13 of the *Encyclopedia*, at times literally<sup>10</sup>. However, it is important to note how he is much less severe towards linguistics in the *Encyclopedia* than in *On the Future*. As we will see, in the course, linguistics also contributes to the particularization of classical languages. This is an exemplary case, which reveals how the scientific impulse can be moderated by the aesthetic and pedagogical impulses.

9 In a note from the period of *Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche praises “the progress of comparative linguistics”, adding that “here laws are discovered and one enters into the natural sciences” (*Unpublished Fragments* 1867-68, 57[30], Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. I.4, p. 398).

10 „Dann kommen solche Verirrungen vor, daß Jemand die griech. Stunden vornehmlich benutzt, um über das Wesen der Sprache aufzuklären“ (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 389). „Und nun fängt er lustig, sogleich bei Homer an, zu etymologisieren und das Lithauische oder das Kirchenslawische, vor allem aber das heilige Sanskrit zu Hilfe zu nehmen, als ob die griechischen Schulstunden nur der Vorwand für eine allgemeine Einleitung in das Sprachstudium seien“ (*On the Future of our Educational Institutions*, Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 704). „Für den klass. Philologen darf Griech. u. Latein nie eine Sprache neben vielen andern sein: ob ihr Knochengerüst mit den andern Sprachen übereinstimmt, ist für das Gymnasium ganz gleichgültig“ (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 389). „Ich meine doch, sagte der Begleiter, es käme gerade darauf an, daß ein Lehrer der klassischen Bildung seine Griechen und Römer eben nicht mit den anderen, mit den barbarischen Völkern verwechselte, und daß für ihn Griechisch und Lateinisch nie eine Sprache neben anderen sein könne: gerade für seine klassische Tendenz ist es gleichgültig, ob das Knochengerüste dieser Sprachen mit dem anderer Sprachen übereinstimme und verwandt sei“ (*On the Future of our Educational Institutions*, Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 704).

First of all, we need to remember that, even though the ideal philologist prioritizes the education enabled by the classical ideal, he should not for that purpose, discard the scientific impulse. In part, he is a scholar and, in this sense, should have as one of his goals as educator to “familiarize the youth with the scientific spirit” (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 368). As far as the classical languages are concerned, this means he is engaged with the view propagated by history and linguistics, knowingly, that these languages are products of a particular people and find themselves within a broad genealogy. In this aspect, Nietzsche distances himself from Wolf’s tradition, given he does not see Greek as an originary and independent language<sup>11</sup>. Since *The Infancy of Peoples*, Nietzsche demonstrates his affinity with the genealogical view of languages (See *The Infancy of Peoples*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol I.2, p. 237) and, since the end of the 1860s, a greater acceptance of the thesis of the Indo-Germanic as the original language from which the classical languages derive from (See *Unpublished Fragments* 1868, 66[2], Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. I. 5, p. 27)<sup>12</sup>. In this regard, what Nietzsche brings forth in chapter 2 of the course *On Latin Grammar* is of great relevance. Through paraphrases of the work *Compendium der Vergleichenden Grammatik* and the article *Kurzer Abriss der Geschichte der Italienischen Sprachen*, both from August Schleicher, he adheres to a dynamic, typological thesis, in which the languages are formed in a continuous and gradual development, divided into stages of ascension (prehistoric) and decline (historic), intertwined in a ramified network. Within this framework, both Latin and Greek are presented as derived languages (See *On Latin Grammar*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.2, p. 192 – 194)<sup>13</sup>.

In brief, “a temporary concern with the results of the comparison of languages is also of great value to the classical philologist: in truth, it is inevitable to him as a scholar” (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 390). However, we must note that Nietzsche does not esteem linguistics solely for its scholarly gains; it can also be valuable in a pedagogical context. For the educator, the value of the “studies of comparative linguistics” is in the “comprehension of the *classical*” (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 390). It is important to emphasize that the need of the classical surpasses the understanding of philology as a science committed to the knowledge of truth. Nietzsche certainly insists that the “classical tendency” aims to “get closer scientifically to antiquity”.

11 Wolf (1831) understands that Greek would be an original language that does not merely borrow elements from foreign languages. “Through their genius and their own strength, they develop the germ of the language” (p. 48).

12 The thesis of classical languages as derivatives of the original Indo-Germanic language will be a position that Nietzsche will maintain later. See *Unpublished Fragments* 1873, 29[47], Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 645.

13 Chapter 2 of the course *On Latin Grammar* was elaborated by Nietzsche through paraphrases of Theodor Benfey, Max Müller and August Schleicher. I will soon publish a paper detailing the passages assimilated by Nietzsche, as well as the theoretical consequences of these selections.



But it can only be so when the scientific tendency is directed itself towards the purpose of circumscribing the classic.

I demand the scientific impulse to be dominated by the classical tendency: with this, the *means* which is that scientific tendency does not become an *end in itself*, and nor the only end. Method and knowledge are just *means*" (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 392).

We find here again the considerations made in *Homer and Classical Philology* about the valued and selective production of knowledge. Nietzsche's demand contradicts the knowledge deprived of value; knowledge must be guided by a valued desideratum, represented by the classical tendency. Instead of a mere scholarly compilation, one must gather the knowledge acquired with the educational purpose in mind – and, this way, what was an end becomes a means. In concrete terms, and back to the linguistic case, this means that the linguist cannot limit himself to an impartial investigation of the natural languages. In the service of the classical ideal, he must contribute to exhibit the specificity of the "Greek and Latin before our modern world. For when *we* speak of classicity (*Klassicität*) in our modern world, we do not consider the Indians, Babylonians and Egyptians" (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 390).

With the subordinate role linguistics has towards the classical tendency, there is a change in the mobilization of the comparative method: instead of going after structural similarities between languages in general with the objective of building genealogical trees, the purpose is to individualize them. This is a perspective that linguistics achieves when it is no longer limited to the *external realm* of languages, morphological and phonetic, and it turns to the *internal realm*. In this sense, the great contribution of linguistics would not be logical, but psychological. The point is that certain linguists would have noted that the interiority of language is not entirely reducible to logic, embracing also a psychological domain<sup>14</sup>. This virtue is evidenced in section 13 of the *Encyclopedia*, when Nietzsche emphasizes that, with linguistics, we achieve a "vivid vision of language as an expression of the soul of the people" (*Volksseele*), which represents an overcoming of the philology of language, restricted to a "rigid formalism" (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 390)<sup>15</sup>. In this context,

14 Curtius (1862), in a text that Nietzsche knew well, clearly points to the fact that linguistics unveils a new conception of language, no longer reducing it to logical categories, but seeing it as arising "from the instinctual life of the people" (p. 9). Although traces of a psychological approach have antecedents in Karl Moritz, Bernhardt, Heyse and, most famously W. Humboldt, the linguist's psychological tendency gains a programmatic character with Steinthal. See Knobloch, 1988, p. 57 – 86.

15 Nietzsche already showed a critical disposition towards this formalist tendency, albeit indirectly, when adopting Boeckh's hermeneutical model, in which understanding would not be given

comparative linguistics should provide results taking into account phraseology, which is where we find the “characteristic of people” in language (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 395)<sup>16</sup>.

It is with this psychological approach that linguistics can help in the identification of the classical languages, those that develop sophisticated resources to express the temperament of a people. As we read in chapter 4 of the course *On Latin Grammar*, “the highest point in literature” is also the highest point in the development of language, it is the “classical period”, moment in which a people finds means to “an adequate expression in style, in the character of construction of phrases, in the appreciation of words” (*On Latin Grammar*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.2, p. 200). In view of these languages, and going back to the *Encyclopedia*, the comparison must be made within languages already developed, i.e., which are not situated within the prehistoric period of the becoming, for it is only at this stage that a language can achieve the attribute of classical.

The feeling of language (*Sprachgefühl*) is thus achieved by *comparing styles at the height of language development*: as opposed to the *prehistoric* language development, which is related to etymology. It is only at this point that language is treated as *art*: here it becomes classical for us (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 394).

When linguistics is mobilized towards the classical ideal, the diachronic approach of genealogical appreciations gives way to a synchronic view. It is clarifying here to mention Nietzsche’s critique of Ritschl’s historical grammar. If we go back to the aforementioned passage from the course *On Latin Grammar*, where Nietzsche determines that the classical language is one that has complete expressive resources for a people, it can be said that it is a legacy of Ritschl<sup>17</sup>; there we find an

through a clear exposition of terms and their concise connections, but by analogies, through a progressive approximation. That is, the understanding of a work from the past could not be given by, for instance, Hemann’s *simplicitas*, since the meaning of the expressions used by an author in the past is irreducible to logical forms, which demands this way, a type of historical approach. To minimize the strangeness before an ancient author’s work, it would be necessary to consider a vast variety of elements such as “word, sound, stylistics, author’s character, the time, the case in discussion” (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 373).

16 Nietzsche uses a Humboldtian reasoning when he promotes a connection between grammatical forms and national character, or between exterior and interior – which also imprints an irreconcilable rupture with Schleicher’s typological model adopted in the course *On Latin Grammar*. On the connection between external structure of language and national character in Humboldt, see Manchester, 1985, 116 – 122. For a succinct view of the differences between Humboldt and Schleicher, in particular the incompatibilities between Schleicher’s naturalistic view of language as an autonomous organism and Humboldt’s theory of language as an expression of the spirit of people, see Greenberg, 1974, p. 39.

17 Benne had already identified the similarities between the aforementioned passage from the course *On Latin Grammar* with Ritschl’s course notes. Benne seems to suggest that Nietzsche

incorporation of notes made by Nietzsche as a University student while in Ritschl's courses. Within them we also read that the classical consists of a period in which the "most elevated education creates an adequate form" (*University Notebooks*, Nietzsche, \_\_, sheet 4 and 5. *University Notebooks*, Nietzsche, 1866/67, sheet 13)<sup>18</sup>. One could suppose, then, that Nietzsche is only claiming that the method of comparative linguistics is complemented by the historical grammar, which turns towards languages in a particularized manner. However, in the *Encyclopedia*, he also clarifies that he does not promote something similar to historical grammar, given that the latter aims to "bring to light the becoming", understanding the "finished language that came into being only as a moment, not the most important" (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 396). Nietzsche recovers in this passage the content of his notes on Ritschl's courses in which the historical treatment of languages is portrayed in relation "to life, movement, and progress", in a way that "the finished language is just a moment and not even the most important" (*University Notebooks*, Nietzsche, 1866/67, sheet 7). In these notes, it becomes clear that the finished or completed language, the classical language, is not privileged. "The complete formation of language (*Sprachbildung*) that became in the classical period is just an element of its material" (*University Notebooks*, Nietzsche, 1865, sheet 3); "the classical language is, therefore, only an element of our grammar" (*University Notebooks*, Nietzsche, \_\_, sheet 2). Meaning, even though historical grammar restricts the wider scope of linguistics, it continues to have a diachronic vision that Nietzsche wants to avoid when dealing with classical languages. This does not mean that he considers impossible to study "the classical talent of the ancients already in the becoming of their language". But that would still be too arduous a task, and he clearly gives up on taking it further (*Encyclopedia of Classical Philology and Introduction to the Study of the Same*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.3, p. 394).

Taking into account this methodological perspective guided by the classical ideal, linguistics would not be limited to considering Greek and Latin, classical languages, in the dynamic and generalizing perspective of the genealogy of Indo-Germanic languages, i.e., as languages among others within the genetic network of development. On the contrary, one begins to consider these languages as those that express the highest level of completeness through the overcoming of the

---

is limiting himself to appropriating Ritschl's approach to classicism, at least up to the *History of Greek Literature* course. In my understanding, this could not be the case due to Nietzsche's criticism of historical grammar already in the *Encyclopedia*, as I show throughout the text. See Benne, 2005, p. 300 and 301.

18 Nietzsche literally reproduces in the manuscript of the course *On Latin Grammar* the table containing the main representatives of different poetic genres that we find in Ritschl's course notes. This finding supports the hypothesis, already mentioned above, that Nietzsche consulted these notes when composing this course. See *On Latin Grammar*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.2, p. 201. *University Notebooks*, Nietzsche, 1866/67, sheet 17. *University Notebooks*, Nietzsche, \_\_, sheet 6.

languages from which they descend from. This reasoning of overcoming determines Nietzsche's classicism standards in the following years, especially regarding the Greeks (See *Unpublished Fragments* 1872-73, 19[196], Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 7, p. 479), either in the field of Philosophy (See *The Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 1, p. 806), Science (See *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.4, p. 211, 212, 219, 232, 233) or Mythology. On this last point, it is relevant to mention the course *The Religious Worship of the Greeks*, when Nietzsche, relying on the comparative point of view, recognizes the foreign origins of the Greek myths, adding, however that "anything that the Greek borrows, they build into something more beautiful"; "their brightest side is the assimilation and overcoming of the foreign" (*The Religious Worship of the Greeks*, Nietzsche, 1967ff., vol. II.5, p. 377). One can note here that the argumentative structure is analogous to the defense of the superiority of classical languages elaborated years before.

### Conclusion

We have seen that, even though it is never fully achieved, the ideal philologist, to Nietzsche, serves as a regulatory principle for the actual philologist, encouraging him to put his scientific impulse at the service of aesthetic and pedagogical impulses, the ones that envision the classical ideal. It became evident in the exemplary case of linguistics that the implications of this subordination are essentially of a methodological nature. When guided by the classical ideal, the comparative linguistics method not only disregards its generalizing (*nomothetic*) inclination, typical of the natural sciences, in favor of a tendency towards singularity (*idiographic*), but also adopts a selective procedure. In short, rather than converting merely into a historical science, linguistics becomes a type of valuative history<sup>19</sup>. Even with the maintenance of the nomothetic use of the comparative method, it gains the condition of accessory in this context.

However, we have also seen that the organicist project that Nietzsche elaborates for his ideal philology could never completely emancipate itself from the scientific impulse, in a way that the classical, as a normative category, must be historically considered, a gesture that certainly separates Nietzsche from the old humanism. We know that, under the classical perspective, comparative linguistics serves as instrument to determine the classical languages that have the value of a norm. Nevertheless, under the scientific perspective, the comparative procedure exposes that the Greek and Latin are derived languages that belong to a genealogical chain. This is a perspective that contributes to the weakening of classicism, after all, how could that which has a supra-temporal norm value also possess a temporal character? Nietzsche experiences this conflict and, in the last two *Untimely Meditation* – in particular the unpublished *Untimely Meditation*,

<sup>19</sup> For a broader investigation into the valuative history in Nietzschean youth writings, see Nasser, 2017, p. 57 – 95.



*We, Philologists* –, we find clear signs of growing incongruences with the previous classicism. This deviation can certainly be seen as effects of varied causes: one can consider Nietzsche's cultural valorization of India, in Schopenhauer's path, or his acceptance of Wagner's thesis of the artwork constituted through revolution instead of an imitation of the Greeks<sup>20</sup>. Be as it may, one of the main *theoretical* reasons is found on Nietzsche's greater recognition of the scientific perspective when dealing with the past, more historicist and fond of cultural pluralism, made possible precisely by linguistics. He is emphatic in this respect, on *We, Philologists*, when he says that the unjustified preference for antiquity, result of a combination of prejudices, is gradually eliminated by history and linguistics (*Unpublished Fragments* 1868-69, 3[4], Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 8, p. 14 and 15). In summary, the organicist project envisioned by Nietzsche of the ideal philology carries in itself the core for its self-destruction.

---

20 See Neymeyr, 2020, p. 281-282, 415-416, 457.

## Bibliography

- Curtius, Georg. 1862. *Philologie und Sprachwissenschaft*. Leipzig, B.G. Teubner.
- Reinhardt, Karl. 1966. "Die klassische Philologie und das Klassische" In Carl Becker (Hrsg.) *Vermächtnis der Antike. Gesammelte Essays zur Philosophie und Geschichtsschreibung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Christ, Karl. 1988. "Aspekte der Antike-Rezeption in der deutschen Altertumswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts (Einführung – 2. Teil)" In Karl Christ, Arnaldo Momigliano (Hrsg.) *Die Antike im 19. Jahrhundert in Italien und Deutschland. L'Antichità nell'Ottocento in Italia e Germania*. Berlin/Bologna: Duncker&Humboldt / Società editrice il Mulino.
- Horstmann, Axel. 1978. "Die Forschung in der Klassischen Philologie des 19. Jahrhundert" In Alwin Diemer (Hrsg.) *Konzeption und Begriff der Forschung in den Wissenschaften des 19. Jahrhunderts. Referate und Diskussionem des 10. Wissenschaftstheoretischen Kolloquiums 1975*. Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain.
- Cancik, Hubert. 1995. *Nietzsches Antike. Vorlesung*. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler Verlag.
- Landfester, Manfred. 2002. "Nietzsches Geburt der Tragoedie: Antihistorismus und Antiklassizismus zwischen Wissenschaft, Kunst und Philosophie" In Achim Aurnhammer, Thomas Pittrof (Hrsg.) „*Mehr Dionysos als Apoll*“. *Antiklassizistische Antike-Rezeption um 1900*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.
- Pöschl, Victor. 1979. "Nietzsche und die klassische Philologie" In Helmut Flashar, Karlfried Gründer, Axel Horstmann (Hrsg.) *Philologie und Hermeneutik im 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Geschichte und Methodologie der Geisteswissenschaften, I*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Siemens, Herman. 2004. "Nietzsche and the "Classical": Traditional and Innovative Features of Nietzsche's Usage, with Special Reference to Goethe" In Paul Bishop (Ed.) *Nietzsche and Antiquity. His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*. Rochester: Camden House.
- Holzer, Ernst. 1910. "Vorwort" In *Nietzsche's Werke. Band XVII. Philologica*. Leipzig: Alfred Kröner.
- Horstmann, Axel. 1992. *Antike Theoria und moderne Wissenschaft: August Boeckh Konzeption der Philologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Muhlack, Ulrich. 1979. "Klassische Philologie und Geschichtswissenschaft im 19. Jh" In Helmut Flashar, Karlfried Gründer, Axel Horstmann (Hrsg.) *Philologie und Hermeneutik im 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Geschichte und Methodologie der Geisteswissenschaften, I*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Knobloch, Clemens. 1988. *Geschichte der psychologischen Sprachauffassung in Deutschland von 1850 bis 1920*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Manchester, Martin. 1985. *The Philosophical Foundations of Humboldt's Linguistics*

- Doctrines*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Greenberg, Joseph. 1974. *Language Typology. An Historical and Analytic Overview*. The Hague/Paris: Mouton.
- Benne, Christian. 2005. *Nietzsche und die historisch-kritische Philologie*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Nasser, Eduardo. 2017. "Transfigurações do passado: aspectos do problema do tempo na segunda Consideração extemporânea" In *Cadernos Nietzsche*, 38(2).
- Neymeyr, Barbara. 2020. *Kommentar zu Nietzsches Unzeitgemässen Betrachtungen. III. Schopenhauer als Erzieher IV. Richard Wagner in Bayreuth. Bd. 1 / 4*. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1967 ff. *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe (KGW)*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe (KSA)*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1866/67. *Goethe-Schiller-Archiv (GSA) 71/53 Friedrich Ritschl, Einleitung und Anleitung zur lateinischen Grammatik*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( ). *Goethe-Schiller-Archiv (GSA) 71/54 Friedrich Ritschl, Historische Grammatik der lateinische Sprache nebst Einleitung in die römische Epigraphik*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1866. *Goethe-Schiller-Archiv (GSA) 71/55 Friedrich Ritschl, Lateinische Grammatik*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( ). *Goethe-Schiller-Archiv (GSA) 71/79. Laertiana, Notizen zum Lebenslauf (1869), Kollegthemata, Homer-Rede, Briefentwurf, Kollegentwurf, Themata, über Epos und Lyrik*.
- Wolf, Friedrich A. 1831. *Vorlesung über die Encyclopadie der Alterthumswissenschaft*. August Lehnhold, Leipzig.

Revista digital: [www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/modernoscontemporaneos](http://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/modernoscontemporaneos)



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License.