

Alber Thesen Philosophie

9

Luca Pellarin

# Franz C. Overbeck

Beyond Theology, Within Limits

VERLAG KARL ALBER



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Revision of the doctoral thesis *Franz C. Overbeck. Beyond Theology, Within Limits* submitted in Erfurt on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2022 and defended in Erfurt on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2023 by Dr. Luca Pellarin at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies of the University of Erfurt (Germany) and at the Karl Franz University of Graz (Austria). Fiume Veneto (Italy), 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

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*To Ale and Lorenzo,  
and to Solja, »my family, by choice«*



## Endorsements

»Luca Pellarin's book begins with a brilliant reconstruction of the complex reception of Franz C. Overbeck's work. A theologian and church historian, Overbeck had lively philosophical interests, as evidenced by the nature of his library. His *Kirchenlexikon*, compiled mainly in the last phase of his life, demonstrates the breadth of his attentions, always discreetly cultivated within the bounds of extensive yet self-aware knowledge. Overbeck's interpretation of the relationship between the Christian message and culture, as simple as it is radical (›Christians must be children, but they cannot‹), has lost none of its relevance and modernity in an age increasingly inundated with eschatological scenarios such as ours. Pellarin's study allows for a well-documented and stimulating approach to a thinker as untimely as he is contemporary«.

Giovanni Filoramo, emeritus professor of History of Christianity at the University of Turin, Italy

»The Basel-based theologian and church historian Franz C. Overbeck was an enfant terrible for theology. With his emphasis on the anti-cultural aspects of early Christianity and its literature, he radically challenged the synthesis of liberal and conservative theologies with history, philosophy, and the humanities, paving the way for some breakthroughs in the early twentieth century, including the ›theology of crisis‹ and form criticism, which opened the door to new directions in the study of the Jesus tradition. Luca Pellarin's captivating volume offers a multifaceted approach to Overbeck's work ›beyond theology‹, with a special focus on the ›boundaries‹ that Overbeck perceived and sometimes transgressed. Pellarin analyses Overbeck's philosophical library as a source of his non-theological interests. He explores his struggle with Harnack and theological liberalism, paying particular attention to his reception of selected non-theological authors from Goethe and Feuerbach to Nietzsche. He discusses concepts of ›modernity‹ and its limits asking to what extent individualism is a chase after fading idols. Finally, Pellarin critically examines Overbeck's view of the transformation of eschatology from its apocalyptic roots to Christian doctrine, from imminence to immanence, reflecting on the implications for Christianity and culture in our time. Pellarin's book is a fascinating exercise in the history of an eccentric scholar fertilised for questions of today«.

Jörg Frey, full professor of New Testament at the University of Zurich, Switzerland

## Endorsements

»Friedrich Nietzsche's close friend Franz C. Overbeck was one of the most brilliant European intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His critical analysis of bourgeois Christianity as well as his fascinating critique of modern nationalism are still of major importance today. Luca Pellarin now presents a very intelligent new reading of Overbeck's central ideas. He describes Overbeck's theological roots and philosophical library with the utmost precision, and then goes on to examine the Basle New Testament scholar's battle with the prominent Berlin church historian Adolf Harnack, who ended up castigated as bourgeois and superficial. Ultimately, Pellarin portrays Overbeck as a ›countercurrent‹ thinker, and why should this be relevant for contemporary discourses on religion and society? Because Overbeck develops a profane understanding of the Christian churches that leads to a much better grasp of what it means to be modern. This is a brilliant book, which I read with great intellectual fun«.

Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, emeritus professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at the University of Munich, Germany

»The book's approach is creative, intelligent, and at times provocative in portraying an isolated but undeniably relevant figure, Franz C. Overbeck, who has only recently been rediscovered in his speculative autonomy from and fruitful interaction with his philosopher friend Friedrich Nietzsche. Luca Pellarin's accurate characterisation of Overbeck as a secluded and ›counter-current‹ thinker and theologian is supported by meticulous, targeted research into his education, philosophical readings, polemics, and reception, guided by keywords such as ›resonance‹ and ›retrospection‹. This very characterisation and rediscovery of Overbeck, an original thinker despite and yet because of his ›methodological prudence‹, who has too often and for too long been overshadowed by and interpreted in the light of Nietzsche, helps to unveil his active engagement as a theorist and to define his ›historical awareness‹, as well as his profound and lasting influence on his friend«.

Vivetta Vivarelli, retired full professor of German Literature at the University of Florence, Italy



## Summary

This book stems from a few impressions and ensuing considerations triggered by reading the pages of the *œuvre* of the theologian Franz C. Overbeck (1837–1905). The pages are above all those of his *Kirchenlexicon*, an extensive collection of reflections gathered for the purpose of carrying out the never accomplished project of writing a secular, or profane, history of the church; Overbeck is above all »the late Overbeck« (1897–1905), the sick and tired Basel-based professor of New Testament and Early Church History who resolved to enter »early« retirement to take care of his writings and his health. The (albeit on the whole meagre) often extra-theological reception that Overbeck »enjoyed« and the breadth of themes covered by the entries of his *Kirchenlexicon*, whose vast majority date from the very last decade of his life, are only some of the reasons behind the attempt to understand if and to what extent one can speak of an »Overbeck ›beyond theology«, of an Overbeck who might thus be deemed as a »theorist of culture«. A lengthy introduction outlining his profile and the (non-)pervasiveness of his thought and setting out the working hypotheses is followed up by four chapters, each articulated through the implementation of a different methodology. In the first of them, which is more strictly historical-philosophical and results from archival research, I analyse the catalogue of Overbeck's »philosophical library«, which is singled out as a paradigm of the theologian's »other« interests, and dwell on his (meticulous) working habits. The second chapter is instead dedicated to the study of the extra-theological implications and repercussions of his battle against the prominent Baltic Lutheran theologian Adolf von Harnack; while in the first of its two broad sections I proceed by resorting to a »newly«-designed retrospective approach, in the second I advance by closely observing a set of selected excerpts from the *Kirchenlexicon* where Overbeck pauses on six non-theologians or non-primarily-theologians with the exact intention of castigating Harnack. As for the third chapter, organised

## Summary

as a line-by-line scrutiny of a sort of aphorism drafted by Overbeck, its pages convey a comprehensive perspective on what, according to him, »modernity« means, on how, when, and to what extent the words »modernity« and »modern« can or should be used, and on how modern his modernity is. Finally, in the fourth and last chapter, »born and bred« out of the desire to test and possibly refine the theory of resonance, in the frame of reference of whose »research program« this volume was conceived and developed, and gradually progressed around a captivating parallel and by enforcing historical and sociological imagination, I explore the transformation that was undergone by Christian eschatology along with its (supposedly) initial apocalyptic afflatus. From the very beginning to the very end of this study, the preferential tool for gaining access to Overbeck's writing production and personality – the latter being always highly (critically) regarded – is the concept of the »limit«. The limit is that of Overbeck's extensive yet not all-encompassing philosophical and, more at large, extra-theological knowledge and of the ways he mobilises it. The limit is his discretion in venturing into disciplinary fields other than his own, without ever arrogating to himself a voice or standing as a judge in »foreign« matters. The limit is the sense with which Overbeck would like to see his contemporaries and fellow theologians clothed: only those who are endowed with it are worthy of being called »modern«. The limit is the horizon of meaning of the lives of the first Christ believers and, in many respects, of ours too.

Luca Pellarin (1992) holds a double Ph.D. degree in Religious Studies and in Philosophy. He was born in Friuli, north-eastern Italy, and trained in Turin, Milan, Erfurt, and Graz, with educational and research stays at other institutes in continental Europe. His primary research interests lie in the history of contemporary Christian thought. ORCID: 0000-0003-2364-1487.

Dieses Buch geht auf die Eindrücke und Überlegungen zurück, die während des Lesens einiger Seiten aus dem *Œuvre* Franz C. Overbecks (1837–1905) entstanden sind. Es handelt sich vor allem um die Seiten seines *Kirchenlexicons*, einer umfangreichen Sammlung von Betrachtungen, die zur Verwirklichung des nie vollendeten Projekts einer »profanen Kirchengeschichte« zusammengetragen wurden; und es handelt sich vor allem um »den späten Overbeck« (1897–1905), den kranken und müden Basler Professor für Neues Testament und Alte Kirchengeschichte, der sich zur Pflege seiner Schriften und seiner Gesundheit in den »vorzeitigen« Ruhestand begeben hat. Die (wenn auch im Großen und Ganzen spärliche) oft außertheologische Rezeption, die Overbeck »genoss«, und die Breite der Themen, welche die Einträge seines *Kirchenlexicons* abdecken, die in ihrer überwiegenden Mehrzahl aus dem letzten Lebensjahrzehnt stammen, sind nur einige der Gründe für den Versuch zu verstehen, ob und inwieweit man von einem »Overbeck« jenseits der Theologie« sprechen kann, von einem Overbeck also, der als »Kulturtheoretiker« gelten könnte. Nach einer ausführlichen Einleitung, in der die (Nicht-)Durchdringung seines Denkens skizziert sowie die Arbeitshypothesen dargelegt werden, folgen vier Kapitel, welche sich jeweils durch die Anwendung einer anderen Methodik artikulieren. Im ersten, eher historisch-philosophischen Kapitel, das auf Archivrecherchen basiert, wird der Katalog der »philosophischen Bibliothek« Overbecks analysiert, der darin als Paradigma für die »anderen« Interessen des Theologen herausgestellt wird; bei dieser Betrachtung wird auch auf seine (akribischen) Arbeitsgewohnheiten eingegangen. Das zweite Kapitel ist stattdessen der Untersuchung der außertheologischen Implikationen und Auswirkungen seines Kampfes gegen den prominenten baltischen lutherischen Theologen Adolf von Harnack gewidmet; während man im ersten seiner beiden großen Abschnitte mit einem »neu« konzipierten retrospektiven Ansatz vorgeht, kommt man im zweiten durch die genaue Beobachtung einer Reihe ausgewählter Auszüge aus dem *Kirchenlexicon* voran, in denen Overbeck bei sechs Nicht-Theologen oder Nicht-Primär-Theologen mit der genauen Absicht verweilt, Harnack anzugreifen. Das dritte Kapitel, welches als wortwörtliche Prüfung eines »Aphorismus«, die Overbeck entworfen hat, aufgebaut ist, bietet eine ausgedehnte Perspektive auf die Frage, was seiner Meinung nach »Modernität« bedeutet, wie, wann und in welchem

Umfang das Wort »Modernität« verwendet werden sollte und wie modern seine Modernität ist. Im vierten und letzten Kapitel, das aus dem Wunsch heraus entstanden ist, die Resonanztheorie, im Rahmen deren Forschungsprogramms diese Recherche konzipiert und entwickelt wurde, zu prüfen und möglicherweise zu verfeinern, und welches schrittweise aus einem fesselnden Vergleich und ferner mithilfe der historischen und soziologischen Vorstellungskraft gewachsen ist, wird schließlich die Transformation der christlichen Eschatologie sowie ihrer (vermeintlich) anfänglichen apokalyptischen Spannung untersucht. Von Anfang bis Ende dieser Studie ist das bevorzugte Instrument für den Zugang zu Overbecks schriftstellerischer Produktion und seiner, hier stets (kritisch) betrachteten, Persönlichkeit der Begriff der »Grenze«. Die Grenze ist die des ansehnlichen und doch nicht allumfassenden philosophischen und vor allem außertheologischen Wissens Overbecks und der Art und Weise, wie er es mobilisiert. Die Grenze ist die Diskretion, für die er sich einsetzt, wenn er sich in andere Disziplinen als die eigene vorwagt, ohne sich jemals ein Mitspracherecht oder eine Richterposition in »fremden« Angelegenheiten anzumaßen. Die Grenze ist der Sinn, mit dem Overbeck seine Zeitgenossen und Theologenkollegen bekleidet besichtigen möchte: nur wer ihn »trägt« ist würdig, »modern« genannt zu werden. Die Grenze ist der Sinnhorizont des Lebens der ersten Christusgläubigen und, in vielerlei Hinsicht, auch des unseren.

Luca Pellarin (1992) promovierte zweifach in Religionswissenschaften und in Philosophie. Er wurde in Friaul, Nordostitalien, geboren und studierte in Turin, Mailand, Erfurt und Graz, mit Ausbildungs- und Forschungsaufenthalten an anderen Instituten Kontinentaleuropas. Seine Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen im Bereich der Geschichte des zeitgenössischen christlichen Denkens. ORCID: 0000-0003-2364-1487.

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*Being about to publish a work like the one you are leafing through, the more finely written (mostly rewritten...), more thoroughly researched, and more consistently argued version of my doctoral thesis, is due to many people's support – of varying intensity, and more or less protracted (even for over thirty years!). Here I mention only those without whose professional contribution this book would be radically different: Nathan G. Alexander, Carlos Garcia-Jane, Solomiya Husak, and Emiliano R. Urciuoli. Further »thanks« for specific suggestions have been entrusted to the footnotes. Those to others, to most, I carry in my heart.*



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## Franz C. Overbeck

Franz Camille Overbeck (Saint Petersburg, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1837 – Basel, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1905) was a Protestant theologian. He grew up in a relatively well-educated and wealthy family of merchants. His father, Franz Heinrich Hermann, was British-German and Lutheran; his Russian-born mother, Johanna Camilla Cercllet, French and Catholic. Although from a very young age Overbeck travelled considerably for the time, his life does not contain significant events. He read theology in Leipzig, Göttingen, Berlin, and Jena, where he worked as a *Privatdozent*, and regarded himself as a »spurious« disciple of the so-called *Tübinger Schule*. From 1870 to 1897 he taught New Testament and Early Church History at the University of Basel, serving as a rector for a short period in 1876. Being physically and mentally exhausted, he took »early« retirement and devoted the last eight years of his life to his studies. Overbeck has been little researched and hardly known by scholars, except for being the roommate – or should one say neighbour? – of the great philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in Basel. Between 1870 and 1875 the two lived in contiguous floors of the same building and later, in January 1889, after the outbreak of Nietzsche's »madness«, Overbeck travelled to Turin to pick up his friend and eventually prevented at least some of Nietzsche's writings from being instrumentalised by the philosopher's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. Overbeck's most famous work, published by himself, is *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* (1873<sup>1</sup>, 1903<sup>2</sup>), a scathing critique of the theology of his time where he argued for the incompatibility between Christianity as »developed«, i. e., settled down, in history and its original nature. Important to recall here, though, is the *Kirchenlexicon*, an extensive collection of reflections Overbeck gathered from 1856 until his death for the purpose of carrying out his never accomplished project of writing a secular, or profane, history of the church (*profane Kirchengeschichte*). It was mainly a small and philologically inaccurate compendium of the *Kirchenlexicon*, *Christentum und Kul-*

Franz C. Overbeck

*tur*, edited posthumously in 1919 by his eccentric pupil Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, that made Overbeck »known« in the twentieth century. Over time the latter became perhaps Overbeck's most famous title. His name, however, remains largely unknown to date.

# Legenda<sup>1</sup>

## a. Symbols

⟨text⟩	Supplement proposed by the editor <sup>2</sup>
[text]	Amendment proposed by the editor
{text}	Deletion of the author
⌈text⌋	Insertion of the author
[x]	Overwriting of single or multiple letters
+text	Garbled text
	Paging in the manuscript
<sup>a</sup>	Reference to the critical apparatus
°	Included in this selection of printed articles
I	Early hand (Leipzig to Basel: time as a student and first teaching positions, ca. 1856–1870)
II	Middle hand (Basel: teaching activity until retirement, ca. 1870–1897)
III	Late hand (Basel: after retirement, ca. 1897–1905)

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1 I follow the official version of the *Overbeck Werke und Nachlaß* (OWN, 1994–2010), which I reproduce here almost *verbatim*.

2 Barbara von Reibnitz (together with Marianne Stauffacher-Schaub).

## b. Overbeck's abbreviations

Most of the (tachygraphical) abbreviations used by Overbeck can be systematised as follows:

a) Ending abbreviations (omission of the final syllable):

- histor.      historisch
- freil.       freilich
- ebendas.    ebendasselbst
- besond.     besonders
- unt.         unter

b) Internal abbreviations (omission of one or more internal vowels, sometimes accompanied by a consonant). For example:

- ht/kt       heit/keit; e. g., Krankht = Krankheit,  
Christlichkt = Christlichkeit
- g           ung/üng/ang; e. g., Behandlg = Behandlung
- d           und/and/end; e. g., Bewdtniss = Bewandtniss
- k           unk, ank; e. g., pkt = punkt
- Omission of ie, eu, au, etc.; e. g., Brf/Bf = Brief, behptet = behauptet

The following abbreviations frequently appear in combination with:

- ursprgli.    ursprünglich
- wahrschl.   wahrscheinlich
- Bdtg         Bedeutung
- Behdlg       Behandlung

In addition to the abovementioned abbreviations, Overbeck often adopts the following ones:

- Xus            Christus (X = griech. chi)
- Xsten        Christen
- Xsthm        Christenthum
- K             Kirche
- Kg./KG.     Kirchengeschichte
- KVV.         Kirchenväter
- WW.         Werke, Wrote
- BB.          Bücher
- Ss.          Seiten





*For since 1897 I have learned a great deal for myself, and I have finally found my way in life, its events, and especially its significant people who surrounded me (Treitschke, and notably Nietzsche and Rohde).*

F.C. Overbeck, *Kirchenlexicon*, ca. 1856–1905 (entry dated 1902–1905)



# Introduction Against the Current, the Grain, and the Method

This sort of promiscuous admiration was in fact one of the most painful thorns in his flesh, for unaccountable vogues had utterly spoilt certain books and pictures for him that he had once held dear; confronted with the approbation of the mob, he always ended up by discovering some hitherto imperceptible blemish, and promptly rejected them, at the same time wondering whether his flair was not deserting him, his taste getting blunted.<sup>1</sup>

J.-K. Huysmans, *À rebours*, 1884

## 0.1. Against the current(?)

In Peter Callahan's *Against the Current* (2009), Paul Thompson (played by Joseph Fiennes) swims down the Hudson River eager to reach New York City on the same day that five years earlier his wife, pregnant with their first child, was run over by a car while crossing the street. Once there, he plans to kill himself.

As I watched this poignant, stunning movie, I thought that the metaphorically evocative title would describe the opposite of what actually takes place in the scene: the logic being that on his way to the mouth of the river Paul should not be swimming against the current but going with its flow. I was wrong

From the Federal Dam at Troy to its mouth in New York Bay the Hudson suffers from the influence of the ocean currents, behaving as an Atlantic estuary, or, in technical terms, a tidal estuary which ebbs along with the sea (*scil.* ocean) tide.

Paul was swimming against the current.

---

1 Huysmans 1959 (1884): 109.

The German<sup>2</sup> theologian and church historian Franz C. Overbeck (1837–1905)<sup>3</sup> swam all his life against the current. Just consider the »triumvirate«<sup>4</sup> Overbeck-Friedrich Nietzsche-Heinrich Romundt, their »*Contubernium*«,<sup>5</sup> as well as the building where they lived in the first half of the 1870s,<sup>6</sup> the so-called »*Baumannshöhle*«: they were addressed as »*die Giftbude*«, »*die Gifthöhlen(bären)*«, or »*die Gifthütte*«, meaning roughly »the devil's advocates«, »(the bears of) the venomous cave«, or »the party poopers«.<sup>7</sup>

For many of Overbeck's contemporaries, his and his friends' haughty attitude was not something Overbeck should have been proud of. For his readers, too, his always-being-against is, at times, annoying – and not only because he conveyed it in his writings in a (German)<sup>8</sup> dreadfully convoluted syntax and literary »style« that, whatever (among others)<sup>9</sup> the same Nietzsche used to think,<sup>10</sup> was terrible, often verged on the incomprehensible even for native speakers,<sup>11</sup> and won him harsh criticism.<sup>12</sup> In his works Overbeck spent pages and pages on polemics. What is more, polemics were sometimes the very cause of such publications.<sup>13</sup>

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2 Overbeck was »officially« German. However, his origins, his whole biography, the languages he first learned (French, English, and Russian), and a number of reasons that will become clearer as the pages progress, make this designation somewhat inaccurate. I use it for convenience.

3 A short but valuable English introduction to Overbeck is O'Neill 1991; a German one is Peter 1998.

4 Actually, the term »triumvirate« is adopted by Adolf von Harnack, to whom we shall come back at length, in a letter to Moritz von Engelhardt dated January 1875 to refer to the Overbeck-Nietzsche-Erwin Rohde triad. It is hence used here by extension. See Staehelin (Gabathuler) 1962 (*Overbeckiana I*, NL 53 B): 112–113.

5 See, among others, OWN 7,2 [*Nietzsche (Freundschaft) 2a, III*]: 65.

6 Romundt resided at Overbeck and Nietzsche's address during the second part of his stay in Basel, where he arrived in 1872.

7 See, for instance, Staehelin (Gabathuler) 1962 (NL 53 B): 109, 111–113.

8 German was not his mother tongue; see *supra* and *infra*.

9 In a text which often verges on the poetic rather than the scientific (see *infra*), even Karl Barth described it »as stylishly elegant [...] as could be desired«; see Barth 1962 (1920): 56.

10 See, for example, OWN 5 [*Stil (mein) I, III*]: 458–459.

11 See Henry 1995: 2.

12 See Peter 2009: 627–628.

But this is only one side of the story. For in dwelling on this feature of his character and in reporting that he was »a poor stylist who wrote like a kangaroo with a fountain pen«<sup>14</sup> something remains overlooked. The thing is that as annoying as the »grumbler and pessimist«<sup>15</sup> Overbeck was, he was also almost invariably right: Overbeck also went with the current, that is to say, his historical accounts usually turned out to be accurate descriptions of how events actually unfolded.

Just as I was wrong with regard to Callahan in thinking that Paul was swimming with the current flow, Overbeck's contemporaries likewise were by and large wrong in believing that he was always swimming against the current: possibly they stopped at their first impression, sometimes they lacked historical sensitivity, or awareness. Throughout this study the reader will run across countless evidence for this point.

From its outset I must confess, however, that though personally fascinated by characters that history for some mysterious and bizarre reasons forgot, I also belong to the group of those who find Overbeck's tendency to spoil the spirit of the party, always-being-against, and swimming against the current unbearable. His *Erinnerungen an Friedrich Nietzsche* (1906 – posthumous) are a representative example of his temperament, which from time to time is even resentful – be it often with good motives.<sup>16</sup> One would

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13 Emblematic of this, in different ways, are both the first (1873) and the second (1903) editions of *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie. Streit- und Friedensschrift*; see OWN 1: 155–318.

14 Quispel 2008 (1985): 331.

15 Glomsrud 2009: 41. Mina 1995 tries to set him off in the framework of the categories of »scepticism« and »pessimism«, Sommer 2003b and Sommer 2020b of »scepticism« and »humanism«. For a relatively eccentric reading, see, instead, Pellegrino 2002a.

16 See Overbeck 1906. Whenever an English edition exists, I always refer to it in the bibliography. As for the translations, unless otherwise specified, I always adopted those available in English, except in the case of Overbeck's texts, which I preferred to translate myself. Mine are also the translations of the passages of non-English works in the bibliography (the original is always reproduced in the footnotes). Furthermore, the titles of the (modern) texts mentioned are indicated in the original language in view of the fact that the English versions do not always exist, or at times only translations of portions are available. I seize this opportunity to thank Solomiya Husak and David Palme for helping me translate Overbeck's most intricate passages.

assume that someone who was one of the few lifelong friends of the great philosopher, perhaps the only one loyal enough to go all the way to Turin to pick him up after the outbreak of his »madness«, take care of him, and bring (carry, actually) him back to Basel (7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> January 1889), would depict him with praise. After all, until this day entire generations of high school students consider enrolling at a philosophical faculty after bumping into Nietzsche's texts – *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872), *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (1885), or *Der Antichrist. Fluch auf das Christenthum* (1895), usually. In other words, the unique experience of being one of the few intimates of Nietzsche, his »Wunsch-, Waffen- und Wandnachbar«,<sup>17</sup> should somehow have outweighed the burden and difficulties of dealing with his multifaceted personality. But not in Overbeck's case. His memoirs are profoundly realistic, sometimes maybe too realistic: as needed, he does not mince his words with his friend. The *Erinnerungen* do not lack wonderful tributes, it is true. Yet they deliver a detached description of Nietzsche rather than bearing the joy of sharing a part of the journey of life with one of the most brilliant minds of the time.

Again, this is only one side of the coin. Although perhaps conveying an equivocal impression, one might claim that Overbeck did good for Nietzsche. For one, he stood by him from their first meeting in Basel in 1870 until the very last moment:

Only one is there, only one has always been there since that day when Nietzsche stepped down from the university chair of philology in Basel – has always been there, from afar, watching over the traveller with his gaze and his sensitivity from a safe place, the most faithful of the faithful, Franz Overbeck.<sup>18</sup>

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17 See Nietzsche in Nietzsche/Overbeck/Overbeck-Rothpletz 2000: 10. The epithet appears in a letter from Nietzsche to Overbeck dated 31<sup>st</sup> December 1873. Rather difficult to translate, it can be rendered as »neighbour of aspiration, arms, and ›wall‹«. On this phrase, see Sommer 1997: 10–15.

18 Zweig 1919 (1917): 117. The quote goes on as follows: »For Nietzsche he [*scil.* Overbeck] was not the master like Richard Wagner, not the disciple like Peter Gast, not the kindred spirit like Rohde, not the blood relative like the sister – nothing, nothing but the friend, but the friend who unites in this sole concept all high and low, all great and small acts of trust. For Nietzsche he is everything: the mailman, the one who runs the errands, the accountant, the doctor, the intermediary, the news-conveyor, the eternal comforter, the gentle soother, al-