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## THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS (1900) 235

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*V, 317 Gesammelte Schriften*

In an earlier essay<sup>1</sup> I have discussed the representation of individuation in art and particularly in poetry. We have now to deal with the problem of the *scientific* knowledge of individuals and indeed the main forms of singular human existence in general. Is such knowledge possible, and what means are at our disposal to attain it?

It is a problem of the greatest significance. Action everywhere presupposes the understanding of other persons; much of our happiness as human beings derives from being able to feel the states of mind of others; the entire science of philology and of history is based on the presupposition that such reunderstanding of what is singular can be raised to objectivity. The historical consciousness developed on this basis has enabled modern man to hold the entire past of humanity present within himself: Beyond the limits of his own time he peers into past cultures, appropriating their energies and taking pleasure in their charm, with a consequent increase in his own happiness. And when the systematic human sciences go on to derive more general lawful relations and more inclusive connections from this objective apprehension of what is singular, the processes of understanding and interpretation still remain basic. Thus, these disciplines, like history itself, depend for their methodological certainty upon whether the understanding of what is singular may be raised to the level of universal validity. So at the threshold of the human sciences we encounter a problem specific to them alone and quite distinct from all conceptual knowledge of nature.

Human sciences have indeed the advantage over the natural sciences that their object is not sensory appearance as such, no mere

<sup>1</sup> This essay was first published in the *Festschrift: Philosophische Abhandlungen, Christoph Sigwart zu seinen 70. Geburtstag 28 März 1900 gewidmet* (Tübingen, 1900), pp. 185-202. Reprinted in Dilthey, *GS*, V, 317-38. Pagination in the margins refers to *GS* V. This is a revised and expanded version of a translation by Fredric Jameson originally published in *New Literary History*, volume 3, no. 2, 1972, 22944.

<sup>2</sup> "Die Kunst als erste Darstellung der menschlichgeschichtlichen Welt in ihrer Individuation," in "Beiträge zum Studium der Individualität (1895-96)," *GS* V, 273-303. See also *SW* 2.

## HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 236

V, 3 I 8 reflection of reality within consciousness, but is rather first and foremost an inner reality, a nexus experienced from within. Yet the very way in which this reality is given in inner experience raises great difficulties for its objective apprehension. It is not the purpose of the present essay to deal with those difficulties. Moreover, the inner experience through which I attain reflexive awareness of my own condition can never by itself bring me to a consciousness of my own individuality. I experience the latter only through a comparison of myself with others; at

that point alone I become aware of what distinguishes me from others, and Goethe was only too right when he said that this most crucial of all our experiences is also one of the most difficult, and that our insight into the extent, nature, and limits of our powers remains at best incomplete. But the existence of other people is given us at first only from the outside, in facts available to sense, that is, in gestures, sounds, and actions. Only through a process of re-creation of that which is available to the senses do we complete this inner experience. Everything-material, structure, the most individual traits of such a completion-must be carried over from our own sense of life. Thus the problem is: How can one quite individually structured consciousness bring an alien individuality of a completely different type to objective knowledge through such re-creation? What kind of process is this, in appearance so different from the other modes of conceptual knowledge?

*Understanding* is what we call this process by which an inside is conferred on a complex of external sensory signs. Such is ordinary usage; and the precise psychological terminology that we so desperately need can come into being only if such carefully defined, clear, and usefully delimited expressions are equally respected by all writers. The understanding of *nature-interpretatio naturae* - is a metaphor. Even the apprehension of our own states can only be called understanding in a figurative sense. To be sure, I say: "I can't understand how I could have acted thus," and even, "I don't understand myself anymore." Yet what I mean by this is that an objectification of my own being in the external world now stands before me as that of a stranger and that I am unable to interpret it, or alternatively that I suddenly find myself in a state that I stare at, so to speak, as something alien to me. We therefore call understanding that process by which we recognize, behind signs given to our senses, that psychic reality of which they are the expression.

Such understanding ranges from grasping the babblings of children to *Hamlet* or the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Through stone and 319 marble, musical notes, gestures, words, and texts, actions, economic

## THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS 237

regulations and constitutions, the same human spirit addresses us and demands interpretation. Indeed, the process of understanding, insofar as it is determined by common conditions and epistemological means, must everywhere have the same characteristics. It is thus the same in its essential features. If, for instance, I wish to understand Leonardo, my interpretation of his actions, paintings, sketches, and writings coheres as a single homogeneous and unified process.

Understanding has various degrees. These are determined first of all by interest. If our interest is limited, so also is our understanding. How impatiently do we listen to many arguments, merely extracting the point that happens to be important to us practically, without any interest in the inner life of the speaker; at other times we passionately attempt to seize the innermost reality of a speaker through his every facial expression, his every word. Yet even the most attentive concentration can develop into a rule-guided procedure-one by which a measurable degree of objectivity can be reached-only where the objectification of life has been fixed, so that we can return to it again and again. Such *rule-guided understanding of fixed and relatively permanent objectifications of life is what we call exegesis or interpretation*. In this sense there is also an art of interpretation whose objects are statues or paintings, and Friedrich August Wolf<sup>3</sup> already called for archaeological hermeneutics and critique. Welcker<sup>4</sup> agreed with the need for such a hermeneutic, and Preller<sup>5</sup> tried to work it out. Yet Preller himself had already pointed out that such interpretation of mute works is everywhere dependent on literature for its elucidation.

That is indeed the immeasurable significance of literature for our understanding of spiritual life and of history, for only in language does human inner life find its complete, exhaustive, and objectively understandable expression. That is why the art of understanding centers on the exegesis or interpretation of those remains of human reality preserved in written form.

The interpretation of such remains, along with the critical procedures inseparable from it, constituted the point of departure for *philology*. Philology is in its essence a personal skill and virtuosity in dealing with what has been preserved in writing. Other types of

J Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), classical philologist and educational theorist; author of *Prolegomena ad Homerum*.

4 Karl Theodor Welcker (1790-1869), liberal politician and professor of public law.

S Ludwig Preller (1809-61), German philologist and historian.

## HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 238

interpretation of monuments or historically transmitted actions can prosper only in association with philology and its findings. We can always make mistakes about the motivation of the agents of history; 320 they themselves can spread misconceptions about their own motives. But the work of a great poet or discoverer, a religious genius or an authentic philosopher can never be anything but a true expression of his psychic life; in a human society filled with lies, such a work is always true, and unlike every other objectification registered in signs, it is capable of complete and objective interpretation; indeed, it is only in the light of such works that we begin to understand other artistic monuments of an age and the historical actions of contemporaries.

This art of interpretation has developed in a manner as slow, gradual, and lawlike as the experimental investigation of nature itself. It originated in the personal and inspired virtuosity of the philologist, where it continues to flourish. Thus its tradition is predominantly handed down through personal contact with the great practitioners of exegesis or with their works. At the same time every art is conducted according to rules, which teach us how to overcome difficulties. They bequeath the results of the personal skill. Hence from early on there developed from the art of exegesis the exposition of its rules. And from conflict about these rules, from the struggle of various tendencies in the interpretation of fundamental works and the subsequent need to establish a basis for such rules, the science of hermeneutics itself came into being. Hermeneutics is the theory of the rules of interpreting written monuments.

Because hermeneutics determines the possibility of universally valid interpretation on the basis of an analysis of understanding, it ultimately arrives at a solution to the quite general problem with which the present essay began. The analysis of understanding takes its place beside that of inner experience, and both together demonstrate the possibility and the limits of universally valid knowledge in the human sciences, to the extent that these disciplines are conditioned by the way psychic facts are originally given to us.

I would now like to demonstrate this lawlike evolution through the history of hermeneutics: how philological virtuosity developed out of the need for insightful and universally valid understanding, whence a promulgation of rules, and the ordering of those rules toward a goal further defined by the development of the sciences at any given time, until finally an adequate foundation for the formation of rules was discovered in the analysis of understanding itself.

## THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS 239

V, 321 In Greece the art of interpreting (*hermeneia*) the poets developed out of the requirements of the educational system. In the age of the Greek enlightenment, spirited interpretations and critiques of Homer and other poets were a favorite intellectual pastime wherever Greek was spoken. A more solid foundation arose when interpretation came in contact with rhetoric among the Sophists and in the schools of rhetors. For rhetoric encompassed the general principles of literary composition insofar as they pertained to eloquence. Aristotle, the great classifier and dissector of the organic world, of political states, and of literary productions, taught in his *Rhetoric* how to divide a literary whole into its parts, how to distinguish the various stylistic forms, how to judge the effects of rhythm, periods, metaphor. The *Rhetorica ad Alexandrinum*<sup>6</sup> expresses these fundamental definitions of rhetorically effective elements in yet simpler form, under the headings of example, enthymeme, aphorism, irony, metaphor, and antithesis. And Aristotle's *Poetics* took as its express subject matter the inner and outer form and the effective elements of poetry. These are derived from poetry's substantive or final purpose and from its varieties.

The art of interpretation and its codification in terms of rules took a second important step forward with Alexandrian philology. The literary heritage of Greece was gathered in libraries, reviews of texts were prepared, and critical results were inscribed therein through an ingenious system of critical notation. Inauthentic texts were removed, and inventories of all the remaining ones made. Philology had now established itself as the art of textual verification based on intimate linguistic knowledge, higher criticism, exegesis, and evaluation. It was one of the last and most characteristic creations of the Greek spirit, for from Homer onward joy in human discourse had been one of its mightiest impulses. The great Alexandrian philologists already began to become conscious of the rules inherent in their intuitive practice. Aristarchus<sup>7</sup> consciously followed the principle of establishing Homeric usage in as strict and thoroughgoing a fashion as possible and basing his textual deter-

6 Aristotle, *Rhetorica ad Alexandrinum*, with an English trans. by H. Rackham (London/Cambridge [Mass.], 1957).

7 Aristarchus (ca. 217-145 B.C.), founder of a grammatical and critical school in Alexandria.

## HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 240

minations and clarifications upon it. Hipparchus<sup>8</sup> deliberately grounded objective interpretation upon literary and historical research by discovering the sources of the *Phaenomena* of Aratus<sup>9</sup> and interpreting that poem on the basis of that research. Inauthentic poems were recognized among those traditionally attributed to Hesiod 322; a great number of verses were excised from Homer's epics as was the last book of the *Iliad*; and, even more unanimously, parts of the penultimate and the last book of the *Odyssey* were found to be of more recent origin; all of these findings were made possible through the virtuoso use of the principle of analogy. According to that principle, for a given work, a canon of usage, intellectual content, inner coherence, and aesthetic value was established, allowing everything that contradicted this canon to be excluded. The application of such an ethico-aesthetic canon by Zenodotus<sup>10</sup> and Aristarchus can be clearly seen from the way they gave reasons for some of their antitheses," derived from them: "dia to aprepes" ["because it is unfitting"], or in other words, "quid heroum vel deorum gravitatem minus dec ere videbatur" ["if something seemed to be less suitable to the dignity of heroes or gods"]. Aristarchus also appealed to the authority of Aristotle.

This methodological awareness of the proper methods for interpretation was strengthened in the Alexandrian School by their opposition to the philology of Pergamum. An opposition of hermeneutic tendencies that had world-historical significance! For it returned again in a new form in Christian theology, and two great historical views of poets and religious writers were influenced by it.

Crates of Mallus<sup>H</sup> introduced the Stoic principle of allegorical interpretation into Pergamene philology. The lasting influence of this interpretive method came first and foremost from its ability to resolve the contradictions between inherited religious texts and more abstract and purely [philosophical] world-views. Hence the need for [the allegorical approach by] the interpreters of the Vedas, Homer, the Bible, and the Koran-an art as indispensable as it was futile. This approach was nonetheless based on a profound insight

8 Hipparchus (fl. 160 B.C.), Greek astronomer, wrote commentary on Aratus.

9 Aratus (fl. 270 B.C.), author of two Greek astronomical poems, based on Eudoxus according to Hipparchus.

10 Zenodotus (ca. 325-260 B.C), Greek grammarian, first superintendent of the library in Alexandria; first critical editor of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

11 Reading *Atthesen* as *Antithesen*.

12 Crates of Mallus in Cilicia, lived during the reign of Ptolemy Philometor, contemporary of Aristarchus, founder of the Pergamene school of grammar.

## THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS 241

into literary and religious productivity. Homer was a seer, and the contradiction in him between profound insights and crude sensuous imagery can only be explained by regarding the imagery as a mere means of literary presentation. And when this relation was conceived as a deliberate shrouding of a pneumatic sense in images, the allegorical method came into being.

### 2

If I am not mistaken, the same opposition returns in a new form in the struggle between the theological schools of Alexandria and Antioch. A common principle of both was naturally that an inner link of prophecy and fulfillment relates the Old to the New Testament. Such a link had indeed been implied by the use of prophecy and prototypes in the New Testament itself. 323 Now insofar as the Christian Church developed on the basis of such a presupposition, it became involved in a complicated struggle with its adversaries about the interpretation of Holy Scripture. Against the Jews the Church used allegorical interpretation to transfer the doctrine of the logos back into the Old Testament; but, on the other hand, it had to defend itself against a too thoroughgoing application of the allegorical method by the Gnostics. Following in the footsteps of Philo, '3 both Justin<sup>4</sup> and Irenaeus<sup>5</sup> tried to develop rules for the limits and proper application of the allegorical method. Tertullian<sup>6</sup> adopted their strategy in the same conflict with the Jews and the Gnostics. On the other hand, he developed fruitful rules for a better kind of interpretive procedure, to which he did not always remain true. The most consistent working out of the opposed tendencies came in the Greek Church. The school of Antioch explicated its texts only by means of grammatical-historical principles. Theodorus of Antioch saw in the Song of Songs nothing but an epithalamium. He understood Job as nothing more than the literary reworking of a traditional historical tale. He dismissed the headings of the Psalms and

13 Philo Judaeus (20 B.C.-A.D. 40), Jewish Hellenistic philosopher who interpreted Hebrew Scripture in terms of Greek philosophy, e.g., Plato's *Timaeus*.

14 Justin Martyr (ca. 100-ca. 165), Greek theologian. One of the Fathers of the Church.

15 St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, in Gaul, during the latter part of the second century after Christ, most active in opposing the Gnostics.

16 Tertullian (ca. A.D. 160-ca. 240), early attracted to Stoicism; converted to Christianity (ca. 195).

## HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 242

denied any direct reference to Christ in a considerable portion of the Messianic prophecies. He did not accept a dual sense in the texts themselves, but only a higher unity between the processes involved. By contrast, Philo, Clement,<sup>7</sup> and Origen<sup>8</sup> distinguished a pneumatic and a literal meaning within texts themselves.

For the development from the art of interpretation toward a hermeneutics, which raises practice to a level of scientific consciousness, this conflict contributes the further step of producing the first fully worked out hermeneutical theories that we know of. There already, according to Philo, existed *kanones* and *nomoi tes allegorias*, which were applied in the Old Testament and whose knowledge must form the basis for its interpretation. This is the source from which Origen, in the fourth book of his *On First Principles*, and St. Augustine, in the third book of his *On Christian Doctrine*, worked out a coherently expounded hermeneutic theory. In opposition to it, the school of Antioch presented two works that have unfortunately been lost: the *Tis diaphora theorias kai allegorias* (The Conflict between Theory and Allegory) of Diodorus<sup>9</sup> and the *De allegoria et historia contra Origenem* (Concerning Allegory and History contra Origen) of Theodorus.

### 3

Interpretation and its codification entered a new stage with the Renaissance. Because one was separated by language, living conditions, and nationality from classical and Christian antiquity, interpretation<sup>324</sup> became even more than in ancient Rome a matter of transposing oneself into an alien spiritual life through linguistic, factual, and historical studies. And in many cases this new philology, learning, and criticism had to work with mere secondhand reports and fragmentary remains. So it had to be creative and constructive in a new way. In this period, philology, hermeneutics, and criticism attained a higher level, and a considerable hermeneutical

17 Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150 - ca. 215), contributed to the fusion of Hellenistic and Christian thought; teacher of Origen.

18 Origen (ca. 185-254), Christian theologian and exegete of the Bible, foremost member of catechetical school at Alexandria, strongly influenced by Platonic and Stoic thought.

19 Diodorus of Antioch, lived during the latter part of the fourth century A.D., rejected allegorical explanations of the Scriptures.

## THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS 243

literature survives from the following four hundred years. It is divided into two currents, for classical and Biblical writings were the two great forces being appropriated. The philological codification of classical studies was known by the term *ars critica*. Such works, including those of Scioppius Clericus, and the unfinished one of Valesius,<sup>10</sup> included a set of hermeneutical rules in their opening sections. Countless essays and prefaces dealt with *de interpretatione*. But the

ultimate constitution of hermeneutics stems from Biblical interpretation. The first important work of this kind, and perhaps the most profound, was the *Cla vis* of Flacius (1567).

Here for the first time the essential rules for interpretation that had already been worked out were connected with a systematic doctrine, and this was done by means of the postulate that a universally valid understanding was to be reached through the orderly and skillful application of such rules. Flacius came to this systematic view, which indeed dominates hermeneutics, through his involvement in the struggles of the sixteenth century. He had to fight on two fronts. Both the Anabaptists and post-Reformation Catholics were insisting on the obscurity of Holy Scripture. In opposing that view, Flacius relied especially on Calvin's exegesis, in which there was a constant movement from interpretation to its principles. The most urgent mission of Lutheran scholars of that day was to refute the Catholic doctrine of tradition, which had just been newly formulated. The claim of tradition to govern the interpretation of Scripture could be upheld against the Protestant principle of the Bible's supremacy only by denying that a valid interpretation could be worked out on the basis of Scripture alone. The Council of Trent, which met from 1545 to 1563, dealt with this problem beginning with its fourth session. The first authentic edition of its decrees appeared in 1564. In 1581, somewhat after the appearance of Flacius's works, Bellarmine/<sup>22</sup> the representative of Tridentine Catholicism, mounted the most astute attack on the intelligibility of the Bible in a polemic work that sought to demonstrate the need of completing Scriptural interpretation with tradition. In connection with these conflicts, Flacius undertook to prove the possibility of 325 universally valid interpretation through hermeneutics. And in his attempt to do justice to this problem he became conscious of the

20 Gaspar Scioppius (1576-1649), author of *Observationes linguae Latinae*.

21 Henri Valesius (originally Henri de Valois) (1603-76), French historian of Church history.

22 St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), Italian cardinal.

## HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 244

means and rules for its solution in a way that no earlier [versions of] hermeneutics had done.

If the exegete comes up against difficulties in his text, he overcomes them by means of a sublime aid, namely, by referring to the textual context given in living Christian religious faith. If we now translate this from its dogmatic mode of thought into our own, the hermeneutic value of religious experience becomes a simple instance of a more general principle, according to which every interpretive procedure contains as a factor the reference to a real context. Alongside this religious principle of interpretation there exist other, more properly rational ones. The first of these is grammatical interpretation. But besides this, Flacius was the first to grasp the importance of a psychological or technical principle of interpretation, according to which individual passages are to be interpreted in the light of the intention and composition of the whole work. He also pioneered in methodically drawing on the results of rhetoric about the inner coherence of a literary work, its composition, and its effective elements for the sake of technical interpretation. The reworking of Aristotelian rhetoric by Melanchthon had prepared the way for this. Flacius is fully conscious of having first used methodically, for the sake of a univocal determination of individual passages, [a criterion inherent in a work's] context, purpose, proportion, and coherence of its separate parts. He evaluates the hermeneutical value of this criterion from the general perspective of method in general: "And indeed the individual parts of a whole everywhere draw their comprehensibility from their relationship to that whole and to the other parts."<sup>23</sup> He searches for

such inner form in the very style and individual effective elements of a work, and already sketches what is for this period a most sensitive characterization of the Pauline and Johannine styles. It represented great progress, even if it remained within the limits of the rhetorical viewpoint. For Melancthon and Flacius, each written work is composed according to rules and is understood according to rules. It is a kind of logical automaton, clothed with style, images, and figures of speech.

The formal deficiencies in the work of Flacius were overcome in Baumgarten's hermeneutics, where a second great theological-hermeneutical tendency began to make its presence felt. Through Baumgarten's *Nachrichten von einer Hallischen Bibliothek*, the En-

23 Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* (Basel, 1580), I, preface, P.3.

## THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS 245

glish freethinkers and scholars who examined the Old Testament in the light of ethnology began to take their place beside the Dutch exegetes in the consciousness of the Germans. Semler and Michaelis<sup>326</sup> were influenced by their contact with Baumgarten and his work. Michaelis was the first to apply a unified historical view of language, history, nature, and law to an interpretation of the Old Testament. Semler, the predecessor of the great Christian Baur, demolished the unity of the New Testament canon, set up the requirement that each individual book be grasped according to its own local character, then connected them into a new unity that was implicit in the living and historical conception of an initial struggle in the Church between Judaizing Christians and those following a more liberal dispensation. In his propaedeutic to theological hermeneutics, Semler was equally decisive in deriving hermeneutics as a whole from two basic elements: interpretation based on linguistic usage and that based on historical circumstances. At this point the liberation of exegesis from dogma was complete; the Grammatico-Historical School was founded. The sensitive and careful mind of Ernesti then provided the classic text for this new hermeneutics in his *Institutio interpretis*. Schleiermacher still used it to develop his own hermeneutics from it. To be sure, all these gains were made within certain fixed limits. In the hands of these exegetes the composition and the intellectual content of all the writings of a given age resolved themselves into the same threads of locally and temporally conditioned ideas. According to this pragmatic conception of history, human nature, ever self-identical in its religious and ethical formation, is limited by place and time in a merely external fashion. Such a conception is unhistorical.

Up to this point, classical and Biblical hermeneutics developed separately side by side. But should they not have been understood as applications of some more general mode of interpretation? Wolff's disciple Meier took this step in his essay on the general art of exegesis, published in 1757. He defined the idea of his science in as general a way as possible, as the science of projecting the rules to be observed in any interpretation of signs. But the book only proves, once again, that one cannot found a new science from the perspective of architectonics and symmetry. That way only ends up constructing blind windows through which no one can see. An effective hermeneutics could only develop in a mind where a virtuoso skill of philological interpretation was united with a genuine capacity for philosophical thought. Such a one was Schleiermacher.

## HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 246



Let us sketch the intellectual environment in which he worked: Winckelmann's interpretation of works of art, Herder's congenial 327 empathic projection into the soul of other peoples and ages, the new aesthetic standpoint, and the philology influenced by it, namely, that of Heyne, of F. A. Wolf and his disciples, among whom Heindorf pursued his Plato studies in closest association with Schleiermacher himself. All of this converged in Schleiermacher with the characteristic approach of German transcendental philosophy that seeks a creative capacity underlying what is given in consciousness - a capacity that is unconscious of itself but functions in a unified fashion to produce the overall form of the world in us. The conjunction of these two moments led to an art of interpretation specific to Schleiermacher as well as to the definitive foundation of a scientific hermeneutics.

Until then hermeneutics had been at best an assemblage of rules whose parts, the individual rules themselves, were held together by the aim of giving an interpretation of general validity. Hermeneutics had separated the various functions-grammatical, historical, aesthetico-rhetorical, and material-which worked together in the process of interpretation. And, after centuries of philological virtuosity, it had become conscious of the rules according to which such functions had to operate. Schleiermacher now sought for an analysis of the understanding that lay behind these rules-in other words, the knowledge of the purposive activity of understanding itself, and from this knowledge he derived the possibility of universally valid interpretation, along with its means, limits, and rules. However, he was able to analyze understanding as a re-creation or reconstruction only in its living relation to the process of literary production itself. In the intuitive grasp of the creative process by which a literary work comes into being, he saw the basic condition for grasping the other procedure, which understands the whole of the work out of individual signs and the spiritual intent of its creator out of that whole.

In order to solve the problem thus posed, however, he needed a new psychological-historical viewpoint. Beginning with the connection that arose between Greek interpretation and rhetoric as the theory of the rules for a specific kind of literary production, we have followed this relation [between the psychological and the historical] that now concerns us. But the apprehension of the two kinds of

#### THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS 247

procedures had always been formulated in logical and rhetorical terms. The categories used were always those of making logical connections and order. The [resulting] logical product was then adorned with style, figure, and image. Now, however, wholly new ideas are applied to the understanding of the literary product. A unified and creative capacity, unconscious of its own formative efficacy, is seen 328 as appropriating the first impulses toward a work and as shaping them. Receptivity and autonomous formation are inseparable in this process. Individuality manifests itself here in every detail and in each single word. The highest expression of this creative capacity is the outer and inner form of the literary work. And now this work is approached [by someone with] the insatiable need to complete his own individuality through the contemplation of other individualities. Understanding and interpretation are thus always active in life itself, and they reach their fulfillment in the rule-guided exegesis of life-filled works and their connection in the spirit of their creator. Such was the form that this new viewpoint assumed in Schleiermacher's mind.

Schleiermacher's bold design for a general hermeneutics was, however, further influenced by the fact that his contemporaries, and he himself, had developed the new psychological-historical modes of thought into a new philological art of interpretation. With Schiller, Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Schlegel brothers, German culture had turned its attention from literary production to a reunderstanding of the historical world. It was a powerful movement that influenced Boeckh, Dissen, Welcker, Hegel, Ranke, and Savigny. Friedrich Schlegel became Schleiermacher's mentor in philology. The concepts developed by the former in his brilliant essays on Greek poetry, Goethe, and Boccaccio were those of the inner form of a work, of the developmental history of a given writer, and of literature as a self-articulated whole. And behind such individual achievements of a reconstructive philological art there lay for Schlegel the plan for a science of criticism, an *ars critica*, which would be based on a theory of a productive literary capacity. How close this plan is to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and criticism!

And from Schlegel also came the plan for a translation of Plato. Here the technique of the new interpretation was worked out, which was then applied by Boeckh and Dissen to Pindar. Plato must be understood as a philosophical artist. The goal of the interpretation is the unity between the character of Plato's philosophizing and the artistic form of Plato's works. Philosophy is here still part of life,

#### HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 248

life intermingled with conversation, and its literary exposition is only a way of fixing it for memory. So it had to be dialogue, and a dialogue of such an artistic form that it requires its readers to recreate the living interchange of thoughts. Yet at the same time, according to the strict unity of Platonic thought, each dialogue must be a continuation of something earlier, must prepare for something to come, and thus spin out the threads of the various parts of philosophy 329 . When one follows the relations of the various dialogues to each other, there comes into view the overall nexus of the main works, which reveals Plato's innermost intention. According to Schleiermacher, a real understanding of Plato can only be achieved by grasping this skillfully constructed nexus. The chronological sequence of the various works, although it often coincides with this nexus, is of less moment. Boeckh was later to remark in his review article that this masterful work first opened up Plato philology.

In Schleiermacher philological virtuosity was uniquely joined with philosophical genius. For he had been formed by transcendental philosophy, which provided the first adequate conceptual instruments for the general formulation and solution of the problem of hermeneutics. Out of this the general science and theory of the rules of interpretation emerged.

Schleiermacher worked out a first draft in the autumn of 1804, in relation to a reading of Ernesti's *Institutio interpretis* as an opening lecture for his course on exegesis at Halle. We possess this version of his hermeneutics in a very ineffective form only. It was Boeckh, a student of Schleiermacher from the period in Halle, who gave this version an effective formulation in the splendid lectures on the subject in his *Enzyklopadie*.

I now outline those points in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics that seem to me crucial for its further development.

All interpretation of written works is merely the rule-guided working out of the process of understanding that pervades our whole life and pertains to every kind of speech and writing. The analysis of understanding is therefore the groundwork for the codification of interpretation. The

latter can be realized, however, only in conjunction with the analysis of the production of literary works. Only this relation between understanding and literary production can ground the nexus of rules that determines the means and limits of interpretation.

The possibility of a universally valid interpretation can be derived from the nature of understanding. In understanding, the individuality of the exegete and that of the author are not opposed to

#### THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS 249

each other like two incomparable facts. Rather, both have been formed upon the substratum of a general human nature, and it is this which makes possible the commonality of people with each other for speech and understanding. Here the relatively formalistic terminology of Schleiermacher can be further elucidated psychologically. All individual differences are not in the last analysis determined by qualitative differences among persons, but rather through 330 graduated differences in their psychic processes. Now inasmuch as the interpreter tentatively projects his own sense of life into another historical milieu, he is able within that perspective to momentarily strengthen and emphasize certain psychic processes and to minimize others, thus making possible within himself a re-creation of an alien form of life.

If we now attend the logical side of this process, [we see] it as one in which from only relatively determinate individual signs a systematic whole is recognized through the constant cooperation of already existent grammatical, logical, and historical knowledge. In present-day terminology, therefore, this logical aspect of understanding consists in the cooperation of induction, the application of general truths to particular cases, and the comparative approach. The next task would be to establish the particular forms that such logical operations and their interaction assume here.

It is at this point that the central difficulty of all interpretive practice makes itself felt. The whole of a work is to be understood from the individual words and their connections with each other, and yet the full understanding of the individual part already presupposes that of the whole. This circle repeats itself in the relation between an individual work and the development and spiritual tendencies of its author, and it returns again in the relation between an individual work and its literary genre. Practically, Schleiermacher resolved this difficulty most elegantly in his preface to Plato's *Republic*, and I find other examples of the same procedure in the notes from his exegetical lectures. (He would begin with a survey of the various divisions, which may be compared to a first rapid reading; then he would tentatively comprehend the whole, and illuminate the various difficulties, pausing reflectively at all those spots that afforded special insight into the composition. Only then did the actual interpretation begin.) Theoretically, we here reach the limits of all interpretation, which is able to fulfill its task only up to a certain point. For all understanding always remains partial and can never be completed. *Individuum est ineffabile*.

The separation of the interpretive process into the grammatical,

#### HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 250

historical, aesthetic, and material modes, which had become accepted in Schleiermacher's day, was rejected by him. These distinctions only reflect the fact that grammatical, historical, aesthetic, and material knowledge must be there when interpretation begins, and be able to influence it at every moment. But the process of interpretation itself can only be resolved into the two aspects [grammatical and psychological] that are involved in knowing a mental creation consisting of linguistic signs. Grammatical interpretation proceeds through the text from connection to con-

nection up to the highest relations that dominate the whole. Psychological interpretation starts by projecting into the creative inner process, and proceeds onward to the outer and inner form of the work, and beyond that to grasp the unity of an author's works in relation to his development and spiritual tendencies.

This is the point at which Schleiermacher begins to masterfully develop rules for the art of interpretation. His theory of inner and outer form is fundamental, and his suggestions for a general theory of literary production from which an organon for literary history can be derived are profound.

The ultimate goal of the hermeneutic process is to understand an author better than he understood himself. This is a principle that is the necessary consequence of the theory of unconscious creation.

## 5

Let us conclude. Understanding can attain the universal validity of interpretation only in relation to written documents. Even though hermeneutics can make philological interpretation conscious of its modes of procedure and of its justification, F. A. Wolf would be right not to deem the usefulness of such a discipline as very great in comparison with its living practice. But above and beyond its practical merit for the business of interpretation, there seems to me to be a further purpose behind such a discipline, indeed its main purpose: to preserve the universal validity of historical interpretation against the inroads of romantic caprice and skeptical subjectivity, and to give a theoretical justification for such validity, upon which all the certainty of historical knowledge is founded. Seen in relation to epistemology, logic, and the methodology of the human sciences, the theory of interpretation becomes an important connecting link between philosophy and the historical sciences, an essential component in the foundation of the human sciences.

### THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS

#### **ADDENDA FROM MANUSCRIPTS** 332

Understanding falls under the general concept of cognition, namely, cognition in the widest sense as a process aimed at universally valid knowledge.

(Thesis I) We call understanding the process in which from sensuously given objectifications of psychic life the latter comes to be known conceptually.

(Thesis 2) As various as the sensuously apprehensible objectifications of psychic life may be, their understanding must have certain common characteristics based on the specific conditions of this mode of cognition.

(Thesis 3) The rule-guided understanding of textually fixed objectifications of life we call exegesis or interpretation.

Interpretation is a product of personal skill and its most perfect application is dependent on a certain kind of genius; the gift of interpretation is based on affinity, intensified by thorough familiarity with an author and constant study: Consider Winckelmann in his dealing with Plato,<sup>4</sup> Schleiermacher's Plato, and so forth. The divinatory aspect of interpretation depends on this.

Due to the indicated difficulty and importance of interpretation, it has been the object of immeasurable human effort. Philology and history aim first of all at [understanding] and so on. It is not easy to imagine the immeasurable amount of scholarly work that has been expended on this.

The power of this understanding increases in the human race in a manner that is just as gradual, lawlike, slow, and difficult as that whereby the power to cognize and control nature increases.

Because there are few interpretive geniuses, interpretation is also practiced by less gifted people who must learn the skill. (Thesis 4a) Therefore, it is necessary that the art of such interpretive geniuses be preserved in terms of the rules that are implicit in their method or as they themselves have brought these rules to consciousness. For every human art refines and improves itself in its practice when it succeeds in handing down the life-results of artists in some form to subsequent artists. The means for artistically shaping understanding only arise where language provides a firm foundation and where

24 Dilthey here refers to Carl Justi, the author of *Winckelmann und seine Zeitgenossen*, 5th ed. (Cologne, 1956).

## HERMENEUTICS AND ITS HISTORY 252

great creations that have lasting value generate controversy through their differing interpretations. Attempts must then be made to resolve this controversy between gifted artists of interpretation by means of universally valid rules. To be sure, what is most stimulating for one's own interpretive skills is contact with an interpretive genius or his work. But life's briefness requires a shortening of the way by means of the fixation of tried methods and the rules involved 333 in them. (Thesis 4b) This theory of the rules of understanding textually fixed objectifications of life we call hermeneutics.

The nature of hermeneutics can thus be determined and its work can be justified to a certain extent. If hermeneutics does not seem to arouse the degree of interest today that exponents of this theory of rules would wish, then it seems to me that this is due to the fact that it has not taken up problems stemming from the current scientific state of affairs and suited to generate a high degree of interest. This science (hermeneutics) has suffered a peculiar fate. It is always the case that it receives attention only when there is a great historical movement, which makes it urgent that singular historical phenomena be understood scientifically. But then the interest in hermeneutics wanes again. Hermeneutics first drew attention when the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures of Christianity became an essential question for Protestantism. Then in relation to the development of historical consciousness in our century, hermeneutics was revived for a time by Schleiermacher and Boeckh. I lived through the period in which Boeckh's *Enzyklopadie*, which is completely permeated by [hermeneutical] problems, counted as the necessary entry into the holiest of holies of philology. If Fr. Aug. Wolf already made deprecatory remarks about the value of hermeneutics for philology, and if in fact this science has found few representatives who were able to advance it, this is because it has exhausted this now dated form. The problem that animated hermeneutics confronts us today again, but in a new and more comprehensive form.

(Thesis 5) Understanding, taken in the now to be formulated wider scope, is the fundamental procedure for all further operations of the human sciences .... Just as in the natural sciences all knowledge of laws is possible only through what is measurable and countable in experience and the rules implicit in it, so each abstract proposition in the human sciences can in the final analysis be justified only through its relation to the mental activity given in lived experience and understanding.

If understanding is basic for the human sciences, then (Thesis 6) the epistemological, logical, and methodological analysis of under-

## THE RISE OF HERMENEUTICS 253

standing is one of the main tasks for the foundation of the human sciences. The importance of this task only becomes fully apparent when one makes explicit the difficulties contained in the nature of understanding with reference to the practice of a universally valid science.

[First Aporia]. Each of us is enclosed, as it were, within his own consciousness. This consciousness is individual and imparts its subjectivity to all that we apprehend. The Sophist Gorgias already expressed the problem that lies here: Even if knowledge existed, the knower could not communicate it to others. For him this problem marks the end of thought. It is necessary to solve this problem. The possibility of grasping what is other or alien is one of the most pro- 334 found epistemological problems. How can an individual bring a sensuously given individual objectification of life to the level of a universally valid objective understanding? The condition that governs this possibility is that in no alien individual objectification can anything appear that is not also contained in the mental life of the one who apprehends it. The same functions and [psychic] constituents are to be found in all individuals. The dispositions of different people differ only in terms of the degree of their intensity. The same external world is reflected in their representational images. Thus human life must contain a capacity [to communicate]. [Processes of] connecting, intensifying, diminishing, and so on. Transposition is transformation.

Second Aporia. From the particular the whole, from the whole again the particular. Moreover, the whole of a work demands moving on to the individuality (of the author), and to the literature to which it stands in relation. Finally, it is the comparative procedure that first allows me to understand each single work, indeed each particular sentence, more thoroughly than I did before. Thus understanding derives from the whole, whereas the whole derives from the particular.

Third Aporia. Each particular psychic state is understood by us only from the external stimuli that aroused it. I understand hate from the harmful intervention in a life. Without this reference, passions would not be imaginable by me. Thus the milieu is indispensable for understanding. When pushed to its limits, understanding is not different from explanation, insofar as the latter is possible in this domain. And explanation in turn has the perfection of understanding as its presupposition...

25 Karl I. Lachmann (1793-1851), professor of philology at the University of Berlin, famous for his critical sense.

26 Otto R. Ribbeck (1827-98), German philologist, known for his critical contributions to the study of Roman literature, including the works of Horace.

27 August Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, trans. by John P. Pritchard (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 8 (trans. revised).

28 "das Erkennen des Erkannten."