

Лекция 8. Location of the Meaning of a Text

Our reflection on the place of preunderstanding in the act of interpretation shows that it is a circular process between our preunderstanding and new understanding. Then, within this process, what is it to be interpreted? No doubt it is the text. But it must be remembered that the text, because of its alienated nature, does not express its meaning for us in the same way that a person does. Hence, through interpretation, we need to secure its meaning. But where does the meaning of a text lie? This question has been central in hermeneutic reflection, for the very answer to this question is crucial in our way of dealing with the text. Concerning this question, in order to move beyond the prevailing reified treatment of the text, two distinctive answers seem possible: on the side of the author's subjectivity or on the side of the reader's subjectivity. In the hermeneutic tradition, the former treatment of the text can be found in the insight of Dilthey who regarded the text, the great works of art, as the objectified expressions of life experience, the truth of which is fixed. Within this insight, the meaning of the text lies in the objectified mind of the author. Hirsch's (1967) recent formulation of the author's intention as the ground of valid interpretation can be seen as the revival of this insight. The latter type of formulation about the meaning of the text can be found in the reception theory of Iser (1978) or Fish (1980), where it is held that the meaning of the text relies on the reader's subjectivity. Within this formulation, as Fish claims, "reading is not a matter of discovering what the text means, but a process of experiencing what it does to you" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 85).

Reflecting on our act of reading texts, we may not deny the inevitable involvement of both subjective dimensions of the author and the reader. Without personal experience we can neither write nor understand a text at all. Nevertheless, our reflection on our act of reading also leads us to recognize that unlike Diltheyan beliefs, there are few texts which tell us the fixed truth. Even if it is there, we cannot understand it without our own interpretation made possible by virtue of our own lived experience. It also allows us to see that, unlike the implications of reception theory, our interpretation of the text is neither always

nor necessarily arbitrary. At this moment of our reflection, we need to note the distinctive ideology embedded in both extremes: the totalitarian ideology in the Diltheyan formulation, as Crossman (1980) points out, where the author becomes the king, and the “liberal humanist ideology” in the receptionistic formulation, as Eagleton characterized (1983, p. 79), where the reader becomes the king. We may hardly regard both extremes as a possibly true remedy for the weakness of the text. The limitations of both have already been seen in the discussion of Gadamer’s insight into the I-Thou relations.

How, then, is it possible to go beyond both extremes without exclusive denial of the inevitable involvement of subjectivity in our text interpretation? To this question, Ricoeur’s insight into the world of the text is helpful. He showed us by disclosing the alienated nature of the text that the author’s intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide (1977, pp. 316-322). With respect to the subjectivity of the reader, he pointed to the distancing moments in our reflective reading where we find ourselves through losing ourselves (1981, p. 145), unlike within the naive understanding wherein one encaves himself within his own subjectivity. According to Ricoeur’s insight, what is interpreted is neither the author’s intention nor the arbitrary fancy of the reader. Rather what is interpreted is “the proposed world” unfolded in front of the text, where we could inhabit and wherein we could project one of our own possibilities.

This hermeneutic insight on the meaning of a text seems to provide us significant implications, not only for the self-understanding of our interpretive acts, but also for the appropriate way of dealing with the text. Relating this insight to the pedagogical situation, what is to be interpreted is the world which is unfolded in front of a given text and to which this text belongs. This world cannot be regarded as that of the author’s subjectivity or that of our own subjectivity as a reader; it is the world which the text itself discloses to us and to which we could belong and project one of our own possibilities of being-in-the-world. It seems by virtue of this self-understanding that we can reorient to the world of the text going beyond not only the reified treatment of the text, but also both the

totalitarian and anarchic treatment of it.