

Schleiermacher лекция 4

Schleiermacher's epoch-making hermeneutic project of general hermeneutics as the art of understanding was rooted in his discontent with the status of hermeneutics in his own time. This discontent is reflected in his remark:

Hermeneutics as the art of understanding does not exist as a general field, only a particularity of specialized hermeneutics. (Palmer, 1969, p. 84)

He elucidated [Г'л(j)usIdeIt],]объяснить that this art of understanding is, in its essence, the same regardless of the kind of text—legal documents, religious scripture, or works of literature—even though there are certainly differences among diverse kinds of texts. There can be, he asserted, утверждать principles or rules **embedded** in all understanding of various texts which would provide the basis of all special hermeneutics. Nevertheless, such a hermeneutics had never existed. For Schleiermacher, thus, the fundamental task of hermeneutics as the art of understanding was to formulate these rules or principles.

It seems to be important in this project that Schleiermacher contrasted two poles (столб) of interpretation: “grammatical” interpretation and “psychological” or “divinatoryгадание, предсказание;” interpretation. The former dealt with objective and general laws based on language, and the latter focused on the individuality of the author, his peculiar genius. According to Schleiermacher, Just as every speech has a twofold relationship, both to the whole of the language and to the collected thinking of the speaker, so also there exists in all understanding of speech two moments: understanding it as something drawn out of language and as a ‘fact’ in the thinking of the speaker. (Palmer, 1969, p. 88)

In Schleiermacher⁵s initial efforts to search for the general condition of reliable understanding of text interpretation in the direction of the author's individual spirit, there was a kind of balance between two modes of interpretation. Language skill, here, remained as the key for understanding the speaker in what is spoken. But later, there was a decisive shift in his insight, that is, the exclusive emphasis on “psychological” interpretation. According to his insight, “to consider the common language is to forget the writer; whereas to understand an individual author is to forget his language” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 47). The first interpretation was regarded as objective but negative, because it indicates the limits of

understanding. Hence the proper task of hermeneutics, for Schleiermacher, was to be captured by the second interpretation through which one can understand the subjectivity of an author who speaks.

Although this psychological character of Schleiermacher's insight has been called into question, Schleiermacher's contribution to modern hermeneutics is remarkable. He unfolded the complex and dynamic world of the text and its primordial connectedness to individual human life. And it is by Schleiermacher's contribution that hermeneutics is seen no longer merely as a method or subdiscipline of theology, literature, or law, but as the art of understanding any utterance in language.

Dilthey took up the project of general hermeneutics proposed by Schleiermacher and pursued this project in the wider context of historical or human sciences. Carrying out this project, he was well aware of Kantian philosophy and was familiar with the newly emerging positivism of Comte and Mill in the late nineteenth century. He regarded that Kantian epistemology developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* was successful in providing the solid condition of reliable knowledge in the field of natural sciences. But he also recognized its limitations in the historical or human sciences, because the objects of human sciences “appear as coming from within, as a reality,” unlike objects of natural sciences which “appear to consciousness as coming from outside, as phenomena” (Howard, 1982, p. 15).

Dilthey adopted the sharp dichotomy between the methods of the natural and the historical sciences offered by a German historiographer J.G. Droysen: “explanation” (*Ergänzen*) for the natural sciences, and “understanding” (*Verstehen*) for the human sciences (Howard, 1982). He accepted that nature, because it appears as “non-self” and an impersonal object, can be interpreted in the explanatory terms of mathematical and ahistorical principles.

However, he did not believe that life can belong to the same category. He claimed: for the natural sciences an ordering of nature is achieved only through a succession by means of linking hypotheses. For the human sciences, on the contrary, the connectedness of psychic life is given as an original and general formation. Nature we explain, the life of the soul we understand, (p. 15-16)

For Dilthey, our experience of culture or human phenomena cannot be relegated to an impersonal category which can be explained by mathematical and ahistorical formulas, because in such cultural phenomena as historical documents or works of art, there is the fundamental “connectedness” (*Zusammenhang*) of psychic life. Hence he believed that human phenomena are not to be explained but to be understood.

What is, then, the operation of psychic life as the distinctive character of human phenomena in the human sciences? Dilthey classified the various aspects of human life, which are not in the realm of metaphysics but in that of lived experience (*Erlebnis*) itself, into three major categories: ideas, actions, and expressions of lived experience. He regarded ideas and actions as “manifestations of life” (*Lebens'ausserungen*), and that in the “expressions of lived experience” (*Erlebnisausdrucke*), human inner experience comes to fullest expression. But Dilthey used the term “expression” (*Ausdruck*), not as an embodiment of one’s naked feeling but as a kind of “objectification” of the mind (Palmer, 1969, pp. 111-114). He claimed that the expression “contain[s] more of the context of inner life than any introspection can perceive, for it rises up out of the depth which consciousness never lights up” (1969, p. 113). He

sought for the ideal of this expression in great works of art:

No truly great work of art can try to mirror a reality foreign to the inner content [*geistigen Gehalt*] of its author. Indeed, it does not wish to say anything at all about its author. True in itself, it stands there fixed, visible, enduring, (p. 113)

Such a formulation of expressions of lived experience in terms of great works of art seems to be deeply significant in the sense that it allowed him, at least at the theoretical level, to establish the condition of reliable knowledge in the human sciences within Kantian epistemology. Dilthey believed that the difference between natural and human sciences does not lie in their ways of knowing but in the distinctive character of their contents. Thus the remaining task for Dilthey was to objectify the contents of human sciences without destroying their connectedness to life. Dilthey pursued this task by means of objectifying the great works of art as the expressions of lived experience, the truth of which is fixed,

visible, and enduring.

By this formulation it became clear that the human sciences must focus on texts, especially great texts as the objectified expressions of lived experience.

Everything in which the spirit of man has objectified itself falls in the area of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Their circumstance is as wide as understanding, and understanding has its true object in the objectification of life itself. (Palmer, 1969, p. 112)

For Dilthey, the task of the human sciences became the reconstructing or reproducing the objectified and fixed truth of life expressed in the great texts through an orderly and systematic manner of understanding. By this characterization, human sciences become inevitably historical as well as hermeneutical, and the art of understanding becomes central for this task.

Thus Dilthey's lifelong project of general hermeneutics as the foundation of human sciences appeared to be settled through the distinction between the natural and human sciences, the thesis of lived experience and life, and the interpretation of life as expressions of lived experience through great works of art. But his acceptance of Romanticist philosophy and Kantian epistemology seems to have caused him to subordinate the hermeneutic problem to the psychological problem of knowledge of others, and thus prevented him from going beyond the field of interpretation for the source of all objectification (Ricoeur, 1981).

Nevertheless, the significance of his effort in the history of modern hermeneutics should not be overlooked. First of all, he placed hermeneutics in the wider context of human sciences and animated the text by restoring its connectedness to life. Especially his insightful disclosure of dynamic dimensions in human understanding, such as temporality, circularity, historicity, and incompleteness of understanding, is significant, still remaining as fundamental themes of human understanding.

A. **Fundamentalization of Hermeneutics:** Martin Heidegger

As we have seen, Dilthey's formulation of hermeneutics was basically within the Kantian epistemological presupposition as implied both in one of Dilthey's major works. *Critique of Historical Reason* and in his fundamental

question: How is historical knowledge possible? Under this presupposition, hermeneutics remained merely one variety of the theory of knowledge and thus claims to the truth of interpretation relied basically on its methodological ideal. In this historical context, it is Heidegger who raised the radical question of this epistemological presupposition itself.

Heidegger's hermeneutic enterprise, although it may hardly be simplified, can be characterized as "going to the foundation." His metaphorical notion of metaphysics expressed in the Preface of "What is Metaphysics?" shows this character in his effort. He posed a question of ingredients of the soil, as a ground or foundation of a tree, in Descartes' metaphorical formulation of metaphysics, where metaphysics is viewed as roots, physics as trunk, other sciences as branches (Heidegger, 1949). As implied in this metaphor, Heidegger's whole lifelong enterprise can be viewed as efforts to go to the ground or foundation, even though it always remains "bottomless" in Derrida's term (1976), or "infinite" in Levinas' language (1979).

Of course, Heidegger could not and did not start his enterprise at the zero point. Behind him there were Western philosophical traditions. He was well aware of Dilthey's project of general hermeneutics and Husserl's phenomenological enterprise. But his effort was not merely to accept and develop their ideas, but to radicalize them through his disclosure of *Dasein*, the "being-there that we are," and its relation to Being which, for him, has been a question forgotten in Western intellectual history.

In the introduction to his major work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger radicalized the traditional presuppositions of being, where "being" was conceived as universal, indefinable, and self-evident. By these presuppositions, he argued, "we have made plain not only that the question of Being lacks an answer, but that the question itself is obscure and without direction"

(1962, p. 24). Thus he claimed, the question of the meaning of being should be re-asked and

reformulated. For this, Heidegger unfolded *Dasein* and its relation to Being. In his formulation, *Dasein* designates the place where the question of Being arises; it is a being within

Being rather than a subject for which there is an object. He described this fundamental

relationship of *Dasein* to Being as follows:

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it.

But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, and this implies that, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 32)

For Heidegger, Being is not a kind of objective entity which is, as traditionally believed in

Western metaphysics, universal, undefinable, and self-evident apart from human existence.

Instead, it is a reflection on the irreducible givenness of human existence, *Dasein*, which always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself.

With this fundamental relationship of Being to *Dasein*, Heidegger raised the question about the foundation of traditional sciences. In history, for example what is philosophically primary is for him neither “a theory of the concept-formation of historiography, nor the theory of historiographical knowledge, and nor the theory of history as the object of historiography,” but the “interpretation of authentically historical beings as regards their historicity” (1962, p. 30). Here, hermeneutics, not as the methodology of human sciences in its derivative sense, but as an explication of the ontological ground upon which these sciences are constructed, becomes central in all human sciences.