

Лекция 6. “proper achievement of language”

-----For Gadamer, it is through the “proper achievement of language” that this fusion of horizons in our understanding can take place at all. This makes language take a central place in hermeneutics. But what is language? What is the operation of language in our understanding? We may be able to see, in Gadamer’s reflection on language, that there is a penetrated experience of belonging in the sphere of language like that which is expressed in his reflection on prejudice. Gadamer’s insight into language can be captured by his single sentence: “Being that can be understood is language” (1982, p. 432), which has a parallel character of

Heidegger’s signification of language as the “existential constitution of *Dasein*’s disclosedness” (1962, pp. 203-214). This insight brings to light the primordial kind of belonging in our experience of language, as Gadamer wrote: “language is a central point where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original unity” (1982, p. 431). Thus, for Gadamer, the hermeneutic problem was not a problem of the correct mastery of language, but that of correctly coming to an understanding of what happens in the medium of language.

Although Gadamer’s contributions to the development of modern hermeneutics are manifold, a fundamental significance of his efforts can be situated within the tension between the alienating distanciation and the experience of belonging. Following Heidegger, Gadamer put the whole foundation of the sciences into question in terms of “the prejudice against prejudices.” But, unlike Heidegger, Gadamer goes further in his efforts to search for an encompassing and universal foundation of sciences, especially of human sciences, in terms of the rehabilitation of the experience of belonging, especially of the “effective historical consciousness,” the “fusion of horizons,” and the “universal linguality” (*Sprachlichkeit*), in human experience. This line of Gadamer’s effort can be signified as a “path of descending dialectic” character of his enterprise in Plato’s terms. In this context, it seems to be meaningful to be reminded that Ricoeur characterized Gadamer’s endeavor as “the beginning of the movement of return

from ontology towards epistemological problems” (1981, p. 60). Nevertheless, his preference for tradition and belonging over evolution and distancing, and also understanding over explanation, called forth questions from another line of hermeneutics. These conflicts became fundamental themes of further hermeneutic reflection, particularly that of Ricoeur.

A. Dialectical Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur

We may understand the meaning of the word *dialectic* neither as a skill or technique to win in an argument, nor as a methodological device to reduce contradictory aspects of things to one totality, but as an art of thinking to make the truth of things, which appears in a paradoxical form, reveal itself (Gadamer, 1982). The hermeneutic enterprise of Ricoeur can be characterized as “dialectical hermeneutics.” In an age of the crisis of foundations, Ricoeur seems to be well aware of newly emerging disciplines such as phenomenology, existentialism, critical theories, structuralism, ordinary language philosophy, and of diverse and conflicting presuppositions among them. For him this situation is disastrous, especially for the human sciences which require our fundamental reflection. With this basic aporia, Ricoeur attempted throughout his works to disclose the origin of contradictions among conflicting presuppositions and to go beyond the current unhappy situation of the human sciences.

With respect to hermeneutics, Ricoeur’s insight on the conflict between explanation and understanding, where the dialectic character in his enterprise is deeply embedded, can be regarded as the summit of his reflection on the foundation of hermeneutics as well as on the human sciences. On the one hand, this insight seems to be significant in the sense that it opens the primordial linkage between belonging and distancing in our act of interpretation of the written text as well as the text metaphor. On the other hand, it also provides a possibility of valid interpretation going beyond both extremes of absolutism and skepticism in interpretation through the dialogue between ontology and epistemology.

As previously seen, there has been in the development of modern

hermeneutics a fundamental dichotomy of understanding and explanation since Dilthey's claim that "nature we explain, the life of soul we understand." It has been claimed that unlike the natural sciences the human sciences are to be characterized in terms of understanding rather than explanation, and many efforts have been given to the disclosure of the dynamic structure of understanding. This situation of exclusiveness, for Ricoeur, is misleading and problematic since it undermines the status of the human sciences as sciences. He described this situation as follows:

Explanation has been expelled from the field of human sciences; but the conflict reappears at the very heart of the concept of interpretation between, on the one hand, the intuitive and unverifiable character of the psychologizing concept of understanding to which interpretation is subordinated, and on the other hand the demand for objectivity which belongs to the very notion of human science. (1981, p. 151)

Ricoeur viewed that this situation leads us to a deep antinomy, as implied in the very title of

Gadamer's work *Truth and Method*; either we adopt the methodological attitude and lose the ontological density of the reality we study, or we adopt the attitude of truth and must then renounce the objectivity of the human sciences. He characterized his effort in this situation as "a rejection of this alternative and an attempt to overcome it" (p. 131).

How is it possible to overcome this antinomy? At what price? Among Ricoeur's efforts to unfold the dialectic characteristic between understanding and explanation, his reattention to the positive and productive function of distanciation, and thus the inevitable necessity of a dialectic between participation and distanciation seem to be paramount in this context. Ricoeur basically agreed with Heidegger and Gadamer that understanding is not tied to the understanding of other's subjectivity, but is a structure of being-in-the-world, that is, the projection of our own possibilities at the very heart of the situations in which we find ourselves. Hence, for Ricoeur, what must be interpreted in a text is "a proposed world in which I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of our ownmost possibilities" (1981, p. 142). He called this "proposed world" as "the world of the text" which corresponds to Gadamer's notion of "the matter of the text." Like Gadamer, who viewed that understanding is application (*Anwendung*),

he also regarded the appropriation (*Aneignung*), as the application of the text to the present situation of the reader, is the end of interpretation. He expressed that: Ultimately, what I appropriate is a proposed world. The latter is not *behind* the text, as a hidden intention would be, but *in front of it*, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals. Henceforth, to understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text*. (p. 143)

But, unlike Heidegger and Gadamer, Ricoeur claimed that distanciation is the necessary condition of understanding. He viewed that the text, as a discourse fixed by writing, is not merely the inscription of some anterior speech; instead, it is really a text when it inscribes what the discourse means. This implies that the writing-reading relation is not a particular case of the speaking-answering relation because, unlike the situation of dialogue, the writer does not respond to the reader in a reading situation: “the reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading” (p. 144). This suggests that the text itself is a product of distanciation where both the actual author and ostensive reference of the text are absent. But this is not to be regarded merely as negative, for it is by virtue of the distanciation that the reader can participate in the world unfolded in front of the text instead of limiting one’s understanding to a particular event or a particular person’s subjectivity. Ricoeur viewed that “the effective historical consciousness” contains within itself the moment of this distanciation since “the history of effect is precisely what takes place under the condition of historical distance” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 160). He also viewed that the dialectic between participation and distanciation is the key to Gadamer’s concept of “a fusion of horizons.” Ricoeur wrote:

Where there is a situation, there is a horizon which may either be narrowed or expanded. This makes possible communication at a distance between two differently situated consciousnesses. Their intentions blend in the distant and open horizon. We do not live therefore within closed horizons or within a unique horizon. The tension between the self and the other, between the near and the far is accomplished on the distant horizon. (1973, p. 160)

Ricoeur’s insight on the dialectic between participation and distanciation unfolds the critical moment embedded in our interpretative acts (1973; 1981). It is in this sense that we can see a possible rapprochement between hermeneutics and critical social theory. In fact he endeavors to show the mutual complementarity without abolishing the distinctive characteristics of each. Reflecting on the origins of the

debate between two poles which are especially culminated in that between Gadamer (1982) and Habermas (1977), Ricoeur characterized their fundamental gestures as follows:

The gesture of hermeneutics is a humble one of acknowledging the historical conditions to which all human understanding is subsumed in the reign of finitude; that of the critique of ideology is a proud gesture of defiance directed against the distortions of human communication. (1981, p. 87)

Ricoeur (1973) viewed that each speaks from a different place which has its own legitimacy, but he emphasized the complementary character between these two orders of sciences and two modalities of interests basically in terms of the dialectic between participation and distanciation in our history. Allegedly, on the one hand, the interest in emancipation would be empty and anemic unless it received a concrete content from our practical interest in communication and unless it is not also confirmed by our capacity of creative reinterpretation of our cultural

heritage. On the other hand, a hermeneutics (or a practical interest) would no longer be hermeneutics of traditions if it would cut itself off from the regulative idea of emancipation. He wrote:

The moment these two interests become radically separate, then hermeneutics and critique will themselves be no more than . . . ideologies! (1981, p. 100)

This insight into the dialectic between participation and distanciation based on the characteristics of the text also provides a significant ground for Ricoeur's reflection on the operation between understanding and explanation in text interpretation. In his view, the Romanticist attempt to solve the methodological paradox in human sciences is inappropriate because it tries to apply the dialogical situation to text interpretation as the standard for the hermeneutic operation. In his view, we have to re-establish a unique paradigm for text interpretation, because the relation between writing and reading is irreducible to the dialogical relation between speaking and hearing. Following the structuralists' insights, he characterized the main features of the text as follows: (1) the fixation of meaning, (2) its dissociation from the mental intention of the author, (3) the display of non-

ostensive references, and (4) the universal ranges of its addressees (1977). These four traits taken together, he claimed, constitute the “objectivity” of the text, from which a possibility of explanation is derived. Here it must be noted that neither objectivity nor explanation is derived from another field but from within, as he made clear:

There is no transfer from one region of reality to another—let us say, from the sphere of facts to the sphere of signs. It is within the same sphere of signs that the process of objectification takes place and gives rise to explanatory procedures, (p. 328)

On this ground, Ricoeur tried to show us the dialectic between understanding and explanation operating in the interpretation of the text. Introducing Hirsch’s (1967) insights as an example, he stated that although there are no rules for making good guesses there are methods for validating guesses. He regarded this dialectic between guessing and validation as a figure of the dialectic between understanding and explanation. Ricoeur made it clear that what governs this process of validation is not a logic of empirical verification but a logic of probability. In the actual situation of reading, the text does not speak the way a person speaks.

This weakness of the text can only be rescued by our interpretation which basically depends on our guesses of its meaning as a whole. In this process, we may question the validity or probability of our interpretation through which we protect ourselves from the merely arbitrary guess. This process of validation, which is basically preceded by explanation, in turn leads us to reach a better understanding of the world unfolded by the text, and also makes it possible for us to communicate with one another about the world of the text. This seems to be a projected world which Ricoeur tried to disclose for us by the dialectic between explanation and understanding. He described the significance of this insight in text interpretation as follows:

If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal and may be assimilated to so called “rules of thumb.” The text is a limited field of possible constructions. The logic of validation allows us to move between two limits of dogmatism and skepticism. It is always possible to argue for or against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, to arbitrate between them and to seek for an agreement, even if this agreement remains beyond our reach. (1977, p. 331)

Ricoeur's contribution to the development of modern hermeneutics seems to be prominent in many aspects. The insights on the dialectic between participation and distanciation, the dialectic between understanding and explanation, and the reflective analysis on the nature of the written text not only allows us to situate hermeneutics in a wider context of social and natural sciences, but it also shows us the possibility of a comprehensive foundation for hermeneutics and the human sciences. Ricoeur's re-introduction of epistemology through distanciation and explanation, but not in the derivative sense from the other sciences, can be regarded as a summit of his hermeneutic enterprise. Through this we may situate our acts of interpretation in the wider context of science.

F. Reflection: размышление, обдумывание; Relevances важность of Hermeneutic Insights способность to Pedagogical Communication

We have seen the development of modern hermeneutics in terms of significant efforts mainly of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, who have endeavored пытаться, прилагать усилия to disclose hermeneutics as a foundation for the historical or human sciences, against the pervasive [pə'veɪsɪv], распространяющийся, domination of positivistic thought. In this process, we have seen a variety of contradictions and transformations of insights. What we need to do here is to find their proper place within the possible totality of our interpretive acts. The task of hermeneutics itself may contain the temporal and infinite character like that of understanding, calling for further reflection through actual participation in the world of the text and text interpretation. As Gadamer pointed out with reference to the 'effective historical consciousness,') понимание, осознание 3) сознательность 4) самосознание 5) разум, умственные способности to understand the history of hermeneutic tradition does not simply mean to become solidified into the self-alienation утеря чувств реальности собственного "я", самоотчуждение of past consciousness, rather it means we overtake it in our own present horizon of understanding. Gadamer's insight into historical understanding seems to show the most significant value of our horizons as historical beings. What are the insights

of hermeneutics for self-understanding of our interpretive acts in the present situation? The insights of modern hermeneutics seem very significant for pedagogy, since the pedagogical situation basically consists of activities for exchange or communication of meaning of the world on the basis of diverse interpretations. What insights of hermeneutics are significant for the pedagogical communication of meaning? What are the contributory aspects of hermeneutics for the self-understanding of our interpretive acts in the classroom? Although there can be many different ways of characterizing the significant insights of hermeneutics, some fundamental aspects can be addressed.