

## Лекция 7. What is a Text?

Since the place of texts is central to pedagogical communication, our self - understanding of the text is crucial not only for our critical understanding of prevailing treatment of texts in the contemporary pedagogical practice but also for searching for an appropriate way of dealing with texts. What is a text? Concerning the nature of the text, there is a prevailing myth that the text has one correct meaning and to understand it is to identify with this correct meaning. In fact, current typical treatment of texts in education tends to be governed by this presupposition. Teachers tend to teach, willynilly, a set of correct meanings of given texts. Students learn and memorize them and are evaluated in terms of these correct meanings.

Freire's (1970) characterization of the prevailing oppressive mode of education as the "banking concept of education" and Pinar's (1984) "postman" metaphor of the teacher in such a form of education show the pervasiveness of this presupposition in the field of education.

Within the hermeneutic point of view, this presupposition should be questioned, for this view of text is not only incorrect but also misleading. Although the nature of the text has been one of the fundamental themes for hermeneutic reflection since Schleiermacher, Ricoeur's recent analysis of the text seems to be insightful (1977). He characterized the text as "a discourse fixed by writing" by means of the very character of *langue* (language) which is different from the spoken discourse, *parole* (speech). He unfolded the nature of the text in terms of its distinctive traits from those of the spoken discourse: atemporality; impersonality on the speaker's side; the lack of the world; and the absence of the particular interlocutor. Thus he showed the untenability of the prevailing myth about the text, emphasizing from the beginning the alienated nature of any text. In this sense, there is a parallel between Ricoeur's insights into the text and those of Gadamer who has pointed out that "all writing is ... a kind of alienated speech" (1982, p. 354).

This alienated character of the text already implies the inevitability and

importance of interpretation, and thus the centrality of hermeneutics in reading the text. Like Gadamer, who envisaged that the alienated character of the text itself requires our “transformation back into speech and meaning,” that is, the real task of hermeneutics (1982, pp. 354-355), Ricoeur also points out that “interpretation is the ‘remedy’ for the weakness of [written] discourse” (1977, p. 320). This hermeneutic insight concerning the meaning of the text signifies the centrality of interpretation in the pedagogical situation of communication of meaning. In this sense of text interpretation, the main task for communication of meaning through texts cannot be the identification of the objectified correct meaning of the text. Instead, this task can more properly be understood as the remedy for the weakness of the text.

#### Place of Preunderstanding in Interpretation

As seen above, the interpretation of the given texts, as the remedy for the weakness, takes an important place in the pedagogical situation. But how and to what degree is it possible to cure the weakness of the text through our interpretation? In examining this question, we need to underscore the self-understanding about our acts of interpretation. The hermeneutic insight on the circularity of understanding seems to be helpful in this context. Since the emergence of modern science, there has been a prevailing myth about scientific objectivity which is reflected in the Cartesian epistemological model. Within this myth, objectivity is conceived as “not purely subjective,” “unbiased,” or “disinterested,” the highest ideal of which can be achieved only by means of scientific proof, that is, the empirical verification (Hoy, 1978). In the hermeneutic reflection, this prevailing myth is questioned.

According to scientific objectivity, any preunderstandings based on our lived experience are surpassed by the objectified proposition or law attained by means of the scientific methodological procedure. But unless we have no preunderstanding of ‘love’ or ‘friendship’ and our actual lived experiences with lovers or friends, how can it be possible for us to understand the meaning of ‘love’ or ‘friendship’ proposed by a text? It is in this sense that the prevailing myth of

scientific objectivity can be called the tyranny of ‘a presupposition,’ or ‘the prejudice against prejudices,’ as Gadamer characterized. For this myth tends to lead us to delegitimize our lived experience and preunderstandings by means of a prejudice of the scientific methodological ideal.

It is in this context that Heidegger’s reflective disclosure of the circular structure of understanding comes to us in a meaningful way. According to Heidegger, as we have seen, our understanding always presupposes preunderstanding of the whole because we cannot understand at all without our preunderstanding. This insight may be visible when we take the above example; it may be hardly possible to understand the meaning of ‘love’ or ‘friendship’ inscribed in the text unless the reader has any preunderstanding of it. This implies not only that our preunderstanding is inescapable, but also that it is to be rehabilitated for our authentic understanding of the text. Heidegger’s insight into the circularity embedded in our act of understanding suggests that there can be no presuppositionless interpretation and that our preunderstanding is the most fundamental foundation of all interpretations and understandings.

With relation to the pedagogical communication of meaning, the hermeneutic insight into the circularity of understanding and the centrality of the preunderstanding allows us to be aware of our act of interpreting of the text. It is not only impossible but also misleading to remove our own as well as students’ preunderstanding when we interpret a text. Rather our preunderstanding of the world addressed by a text, which can be called our historical horizon, should be recognized, expressed, and summoned in the process of text interpretation. This is not only because our preunderstanding is the inescapable starting point for the interpretation of the text, but also because it is only possible through awareness of our horizon to go beyond it, instead of overvaluing what is nearest to us without awareness of it. This implies that the concern with our own preunderstanding is not to preserve it but to go beyond it. But how is it possible to go beyond our own preunderstanding? This question leads us to the next reflection.

