

# Hermeneutic Trend: A Gadamerian Temporality Frame

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## Abstract

Any worthwhile study of social and political philosophy presupposes a certain acquaintance with some of its basic concepts. This paper is almost exclusively concerned with the concept of 'Hermeneutics'. Hence, the field of both philosophy and social sciences are full of new perspectives, theories, methodologies and movements which are all lively, exciting and through provoking 'Hermeneutics' have relevance and significance in the realms of both philosophy and the social sciences.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutic Circle Biblical Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, Relativism

## Hermeneutics: Meaning

The term hermeneutics has recently become quite popular among the students of philosophy and social sciences, but what the term implies is neither very novel nor very modern. Hermeneutics originally meant, the 'Science or Art of Interpretation of text' (Timothy 2007:103) which were often incomplete, ambiguous, or indistinct and in this sense hermeneutics goes back to the ancient or classical period, where find various interpretations of Greek, Latin and Sanskrit texts and also a particular tradition of continental philosophy. The need of philological and exegetical studies was recognized by most philosophers and other speculative thinker of all ages.

In India, especially felt the presence of such a hermeneutic atmosphere for both Indian philosophy and religion have been sustained by such a board constructive outlook. Interpretation and reinterpretation of the Vedas, since the ancient days, constitute the basic structure of India philosophy and culture. All the six orthodox of diverse interpretations wither positive or negative of the Vedas. Hence Indian philosophy may be regarded as the hermeneutics of the Vedas. The discussion of similar classical texts reveals that just as hermeneutics presupposes tradition, the latter in its tarn, accommodates the impact

of hermeneutics quietly, yet continuously through the passing of times.

The Greek word 'hermeneuein' means to express, explain, translate or interpret, hermeneia is interpretation and so on, often the interpretation of a scared message. Plato called poets the 'hermenes' interpreters of the gods. Philosophers interpreted homer allegorically. Augustine interpreted the Old Testament as allegory. Using Neoplatonic concepts and recording the rise of the soul above the literal and the moral senses of the text to its spiritual sense. Allegoric interpretation remained the norm through the middle age with the reforming, especially in Germany, hermeneia became more explicit and systematic (Inwood 1998:1).

The word 'hermeneutica' the art of interpretation, appeared in the title of J.C. Dannhaver's 1654 work 'Scared hermeneutics: the method of expanding Holy Scripture'. Protestants had to interpret the Bible properly; they appeasted to it against Roman Catholicism. They rejected allegorical interpretation and insisted on the letter of the text, hoping to retrieve its meaning from distortions introduced by the church and by scholasticism.

Biblical exegesis did not remain isolated from interpretation of other texts. Spinoza in Theological biblical exegesis can

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be only be the light of reason common to all. For Spinoza, biblical Hermeneutics become biblical criticism, and this involved history. Since reports of miracles fall short of rational standards of belief, we must explain why the authors of the Bible and their contemporaries believed in miracles (*Ibid*).

Johun Ernesti declare in his manual of hermeneutics that the 'verbal sense of Scripture must be determined in the some way in which we ascertain that of other books'. Other texts in need of interpretation were legal documents and the works of classical antiquity, and there disciplines also contributed t hermeneutics. Significant advances were made by two classicists, Friedrich Ast and Friedrich August Wolf. Ast, in *Elements of Grammar, hermeneutics and Criticism* (1808) distinguished, different levels of understanding a text. The first is 'historical' establishing the authentic text by comparing different manuscripts and deploying knowledge of the history and other writings of the period; to this understanding corresponds the 'hermeneutics of the letter'. The second is grammatical. Corresponding to the 'hermeneutics of the sense'. We understand the meaning of the words and sentences in the text. The third is spiritual, i.e., ascend from the literal meaning to the spirit (Geist) of the author and of the society (spirit means outlook, mentality, or worldview. It need have no theological or philosophical connotation).

In his lecturer on the encyclopedia of classical studies from 1785 to 1807, Wolf defined hermeneutics as the 'Science of the rules by which the meaning of signs is discerned'. Its aim is to 'grasp the written or even morely spoken have them grasped'. This involves not only knowledge of the language, a knowledge of the author's life of the history and geography of their country. An interpreter should ideally know everything known by the author. Wolf proposed many rules for handing problems of interpretation, but insisted that an interpretation needs a 'lightness of soul' that quickly attunes itself to foreign thoughts' knowing rules is not enough we need a skill in applying rules which no rule can guarantee.

## Hermeneutics: Definitions and types

Hermeneutics is a special technique of text interpretation. It there is scope for critical thinking. The central point of this approach is 'Verstehen' that is, understanding. The focus is not on what to understand but on how. It is about understanding how we understand the world, about the process, the rules, the pattern the implicit conditions, and the ways in which explanation and understanding are transmitted to people from generation to generation (Saratakos 2005:312).

Hermeneutics since its origin, had two primary intentions; first to ascertain the exact meaning content of a text, word, or sentence. Secondly to discover the messages and

significations contained in symbolic forms. Gradually, as its scope extended its task also became multifarious. The various supporters and exponents of hermeneutics gave various definitions from their own specific perspective. Richard Palmer in his book 'Hermeneutics' discussed six such major definitions of the term in a chronological order: 1) The theory of biblical exegesis or biblical hermeneutics<sup>1</sup> 2) General philological methodology 3) The science of linguistic understanding 4) The science of linguistic understanding 5) The methodological foundation of human sciences 6) Phenomenology<sup>2</sup> of existence and of existential understanding; and The systems of interpretation, both recollective and iconoclastic, used by man to reach the meaning behind myths and symbols (Palmer 1982:33)

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century a special emphasis on hermeneutics as a specific methodology of philosophy and the social sciences can be notices and it is not very difficult to follow the reasons for such a sudden renewed interest in hermeneutics. Since the days of the Enlightenment there was a tendency to extend the model of the natural sciences to the studies of history, society and human life. The modern exponents hermeneutics does not merely imply interpretation of the classical, lost and historical texts but also include exploring the meanings and milieu of all human actions, events and artifacts which are the manifestations of human creativity and subjectivity. It is necessary to understand the context or the atmosphere in which they have their origin and being and this consequently reveals the perspective from which the creators and actors view the world of experiences. From its textual and 'regional' character, hermeneutics thus becomes general and multi-dimensional. Hence we see the resurrection or rejuvenation of hermeneutics in the modern period.

Understanding becomes a very complex process. Leading researchers and theories is to various levels of human life, and taker various forms.

A) Critical Hermeneutics b) Dialogic Hermeneutics c) Objective Hermeneutics

Objective Hermeneutics was introduced by 'Overmann' and deals with interactions embedded in text and with the reconstruction of objective structures of meaning in texts.

Basic assumptions of objective hermeneutics

- Behind individual actions there are latent structures of meaning.
- Latent structures of meaning exist independently and ultimately become autonomous forms of reality for the interacting people, guiding their action, regardless of whether they are aware of their existence.
- Individual actions are expressions of latent, objective structures (Sarantakos 2005:313).

Hermeneutics is a literary model, method or it is a mode of inquiry, but it is distinct from positivism. The claim about historicality of human existence plurality of historical works. On the other, Hermeneutic mode of understanding postulates a high degree of consensus and homogeneity within a society. It recognizes the plurality and incommensurability of world-views over spatial and temporal boundaries, but it does not seriously consider the existence of different world views and language games within a society (Mahajan 1992:71). Hermeneutics criticize the Enlightenment conception of history as homogeneous. Hermeneutics argues for the heterogeneity of cultures, values and modes of societal organization. So they consider man as member of a particular historical work sharing values, practices, language etc. So they argue that we can understand the actions of people. And recover the link between life and experience contributes in these expressions only by reconstructing the life of the 'other'.

The application of Hermeneutics rests on the assumption that members of society at a given moment in time live and act in a common sphere i.e., the existence of shared practices and meaning.

The existence of shared meaning and practice does not imply that all members of the society observe and perform the same practice. Then communication among the members of a particular society presupposes the existence of inter-subjective meanings and understanding impose just this background of common references i.e., shared linguistic or nonlinguistic practice. The objective mind represents this common background of meaning and practice.

### **Hermeneutics distinction between other modes of inquiry**

- Celebrating plurality and difference.
- Historical situatedness of object.
- The acknowledgment of the distinctiveness of historical words and historicality of existence.
- Notion of inter-subjective meaning.
- Plurality of perception and construction of parallel narratives.

### **Hermeneutics: Preview**

The following are the main figures related to 'Hermeneutics' Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 - 1834) an active member of the Romantic movement, who helped the transition from 'regional' to 'general' hermeneutics by extending its scope from philology to history and life as a whole and thus laid the foundation of historical hermeneutics. He did not like to confine hermeneutics to philology, exegesis and art criticism; rather he wanted to transcend such particular or

regional application to arrive at a technology that would apply to all the experiences of human life.

Schleiermacher viewed hermeneutics as a 'science' or art of understanding. He felt that understanding as a reconstructive process consists of two phases. i.e., (1) the composition or construction of a text or sentence by an author and grasping its meaning by an interpreter or hearer. This gradually leads to the distinction between grammatical interpretation and psychological interpretation. The grammatical interpretation is concerned with the characteristics of the discourses which are common to a culture by locating the text according to the laws of the language which the author has used. The psychological interpretation, on the other hand, wants to focus on the singularity, originality and contextuality of the author's message. In order to comprehend the meaning that the author wants to convey the interpreter has to submerge his own identity in that of the author by rationally recapturing his milieu (Routledge encyclopedia 1998).

Though grammatical form or language becomes the instrument of expression, the task of 'positive' interpretation would be to grasp the subjectivity of the author from this common language – medium. Instead of being language centered, hermeneutics should be subjectivity centered. This psychological interpretation is being described as 'divinatory' process of apprehending the inner origin of the composition of a work, a recreation of a creative art (Ibid).

Schleiermacher welded these partial theories into a single discipline, embracing the interpretation of all texts, regardless of genre and doctrines, he interpreted Heraclitus and Plato as well as the Bible. At each level of interpretation we are involved in a hermeneutical circle. (Inwood 1998:2).

Hermeneutical circle means, we cannot know the correct regarding of a passage in a text unless we know, roughly, the text as a whole; we cannot know the text as a whole unless we know particular passages. We cannot know the meaning of a word unless we know the meaning of surrounding words and of the text as a whole. Not only is there circularity with each level of interpretation but also between levels. (Sarantakos 2005:313).

The hermeneutics circle is less mysterious than often supposed. A text need not be uniformly problematic. In 1813 Schleiermacher wrote 'essentially and inwardly, through and its expression are completely the same'. This suggests that what we understand is the literal meaning of text, what the words mean or meant. In 1819, he wrote 'the art can develop its rules only from a positive formula and this is the historical and divinatory, objective and subjective reconstructing of a given utterance'. When Schleiermacher aimed to reconstruct the verbal meaning of a text in the belief that thought and its expression are identical.

## Wilhelm Dilthey view on hermeneutics

Wilhelm Dilthey father of modern hermeneutics. Dilthey owed his acquaintance with hermeneutics to his theological training, but he used it to answer the question 'How do the social or human sciences differ from the natural sciences?' While the natural science, explain the social sciences understand (Vestehen). They understand not simply texts and utterances, but any meaningful 'objectification' or 'expression' of human life: gestures actions, one's own or another's life, paintings, institutions, societies, past events Dilthey argues, the outer manifestation of human action explore the inner meaning (Eg. Pikaso- Gornika symbol of peace).

First, the understanding of simple expressions such as an utterance, an action or a gesture of fear. Hence there is no gulf between the expression and the experience expressed. We understand immediately with no inference.

Dilthey (1833 - 1911) was not even one year old whom Schleiermacher died in 1834; yet Dilthey successfully inherited this constructive tradition and carried Schleiermacher's project further, which gradually flourished as he methodological foundation of the human sciences. Whom Dilthey talked about the hermeneutic method be often incorporated the ideas of Vico, Burckhardt and Schleiermacher. Like Schleiermacher, Dilthey also believed that hermeneutics was primarily an epistemological problem and as such it encompassed philosophy over and above philology & exegesis.

Hermeneutics, thus, becomes the foundation of all human sciences. Here one marks the negative yet strong influence of Kantianism. Kant's a historical approach led him to give us the foundation and justification of natural sciences and mathematics in 'pre' reason. Dilthey's 'Critique of Historical Reason' offers both a critique and a supplement of that reason; it provides epistemological foundation of the sciences of culture, Spirit & History. In this, the influence of Nietzsche and Droysen. It was Nietzsche who brought about a new style of interpretation, and by interpretation be referred not merely to a philosophical skill, but emphasized the unmasking of pretended meaning and signification. Droysen in his turn, made a demarcation of the field of knowledge into the areas of the natural sciences, involving explanation and the cultural sciences, involving understanding and interpretation.

Kant felt that it was not proper to identify the culture sciences with the natural sciences as their aims and objectives are basically divergent. The natural sciences seek to eliminate all references to human experiences, which characterize the human and cultural sciences. Hence, Dilthey argued that the difference between the natural and human sciences was not basically explainable in terms of a special way of knowing and that it was to be grasped

content wise.

Dilthey argued that, understanding is a process of interpreting the 'objectification of life' the external expressions of human experiences and activity. The understanding of others is mediated by these common objectification and not immediately available through empathy.

A very interesting part of Dilthey's contribution is that though he recognized the role of historicity and subjectivity, he did not ignore the question of inter subjectively and objectively. He argued that although the primary aim of interpretation was to understand objects and events as expressions of the lives of human beings, the point to be borne in mind was that we are not merely atomic individuals. We are interrelated in the 'life community'; we share a collective life and by this we transcend our own narrow sphere and the horizon of universal history gradually becomes a hermeneutic field. Diltheyian hermeneutics, thus stresses the merging off the individual with the knowledge of universal history. 'It is the universalization of the individual'. By sharing the common form of life we rise above the narrow confines of our individuals lives.

It has been objected that Dilthey's meta science failed to harmonise properly his concern with hermeneutics with that from scientific objectively. Bleicher in his book "Contemporary Hermeneutics" remarks 'By dealing with the problem of objectively in such terms Dilthey seems to have fallen behind his own intentions to establish the Human science as a non – scientific study of man and high standard of reflection'. Such difficulties, however, have not prevented the common factors from realizing the importance of Dilthey's contribution to the social sciences and he is still being remembered for his insightful arguments in favour of the historicity of man, society and knowledge.

In the 1870's Dilthey regarded psychology as the foundation of the social sciences. Later hermeneutics displaced psychology. What interests the social sciences is not the 'soul', an individual's world. The meaning of a play is independent of its author's 'soul'. Even if a work expresses joy or grief, they are states not of the author but of the 'ideal person' in whose mouth he puts his experiences. Psychological life, even one's own, is known by the interpretation of its expressions. 'Man knows himself only in history, never by introspection' interpretation of history does not capture the essence of humans in a form

Historical studies depend, Dilthey held, on our awareness of a human life as a coherent, 'historical' whole, embedded in a historical context, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) also connected questions about the meaning of life. Texts like St. Pauls letters cannot be understood from dictionaries and grammar – books alone; we need to understand the lives and situation of the author and his audience. In the case



of any text, but especially those of a difficult philosopher such as Aristotle, we need to explore our 'hermeneutical situation', the situation shaped by the past, which impose on us the presuppositions we bring to the understanding of the text.

Heidegger moves on, in his lectures of 1923 to a 'hermeneutic of facility', an interpretation of the human being ('Dasein' type of being, we call human being) and everyday life. (Clark 2002:3) Heidegger describes the philosophical project of his major work 'Being and Time' as a hermeneutic phenomenology. Here he applies the term in its wider sense that includes a philosophical interpretation of all human existence.

Hermeneutic circle, it is the relationship a reader and a text or as is the case for other classical hermeneuticians

Since philosophy is itself an aspects of human existence, philosophical interpretation will also have to account for its possibility. Besides, philosophy becomes hermeneutical also as it contains a circular reflection on its own nature. In the process of understanding, the parts and to comprehend the parts it is essential to have some conception of the totality. Classical hermeneuticians were mainly concerned with such circularity in interpreting texts primarily, but it is Heidegger and Gadamer who repeatedly insist that interpretation and the consequent hermeneutic circle are the basic conditions for the possibility of all human experiences and inquiries. Through such hermeneutic circle is present in all human understanding, this is especially prominent in the human sciences. Such historical and cultural sciences are characterized by historically the distinctive ontological aspect of the human being whose existence is always spatiotemporally embedded. (Sheeman1998:2)

Heidegger wanted to attack the Cartesian and the Husserlian foundationalist enterprise to give a presupposition less starting point and reiterated the need for grasping the historical and interpretative nature of all human understanding.

The interpretation of Dasein' and of being in general involves interpretation of texts. All deliberate interpretation takes place in the basis of Dasein's historicity, that is, on the basis of a pre-reflective understanding of being from within a concrete situation that has intrinsic relation to the interpreter's past and future. He feels that all interpretations, even scientific ones, are conditioned by the concrete situation of the interpreter. There is no presupposition less, bias or prejudice – free interpretation, for while the interpreter may alienate himself from this or that situation, he cannot free himself from his own facticity, from the ontological conditions of having a finite temporal situation as the horizon within which the beings he understands have their initial meaning for him.

Later, Heidegger avoided the word 'Hermeneutics'. But he continued to interpret texts, poetical as well as philosophical, in his quest for the meaning of being.

### Gadamerian Hermeneutics

Hans – Georg Gadamer is the decisive figure in the development of twentieth century hermeneutics. Gadamer developed a distinctive and thoroughly dialogical approach, grounded in platonic – Aristotelian as well as Heideggerian thinking, that rejects subjectivism and relativism, reject any simple notion of interpretive method, and grounds understanding in the linguistically mediated happening of tradition. Gadamer's work can be seen as concentrated in four main areas: the first and clearly the most influential, is the development and elaboration of a philosophical hermeneutics the second is the dialogue within philosophy and within the history of philosophy, with respect to Plato and Aristotle in particular but also with Hegel and Heidegger; the third is the engagement with literature, Particularly poetry and with art and the fourth is what Gadamer himself terms 'Practical Philosophy' (Gadamer, 2001, 78-85) encompassing contemporary political and ethical issues. The dialogical character of Gadamer's approach is evident, not merely in the central theoretical role he gives to the concept of dialogue in his thinking, but also in the discursive and dialogue, even 'conversational', character of his writing, as well as in his own personal commitment to intellectual engagement and exchange. Indeed, he is one of the few philosophers for whom the 'interview' has become a significant category of philosophical output.

Gadamerian Hermeneutical foundations mainly focused on dialogue and phronesis Gadamer's thinking began and always remained connected with Greek thought, especially that of Plato and Aristotle. In this respect, Gadamer's early engagement with Plato, which lay at the core of his philosophical direction of thinking. Moreover, the dialectical structure of platonic questioning also provides the model for a way of understanding that is open to the matter at issue through bringing oneself into question along with the matter itself. Under the influence of Heidegger, Gadamer also took up, as a central element in his thinking, the idea of phronesis (practical wisdom) that appears in Book VI of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics. For Heidegger the concept of phronesis is important, not only as a means of giving emphasis to our practical 'being – in – the world' over and against theoretical apprehension, but it can additionally be seen as constituting mode of apprehension, but it can additionally be seen as constituting mode of insight into our own concrete situation. Gadamer conceives of understanding and interpretation is as just such a practically oriented mode of insight that has its own rationality irreducible to any simple role or set of rules, that cannot be directly taught, and that is always oriented to the particular

case at hand. The concept of phronesis can itself be seen as providing a certain elaboration of the dialogue conception of understanding Gadamer philosophical hermeneutics.

According to Gadamerian Hermeneutics, the meaning of an act or a text / practice, is not something which is the act itself: rather meaning is always meaning for someone such that "is relative to an interpreter. According to it meaning never involves just one element (agents and their intentions) but two (that to be interpreted acts, texts and the like) and their interpreters. Meaning arises out of the relationship between an act and those trying to understand it, it is the product of an interaction of two subjects.

On a Gadamerian account, meaning is both multivalent and dyadic: multivalent because any international act or its product will have many meanings depending on the interpreter involved and dyadic because meaning depending on the interpreter involved; and dyadic because meaning only emerges out of the relation between two subjects (the agent and the interpreter). Gadamer rejected Subjectivism and Relativism<sup>3</sup>. Gadamer described his philosophical hermeneutics a precisely an attempt to take up an elaborate this line of thinking from the later Heidegger.

Gadamer's emphasis on prior hermeneutic involvement, whether in the experience of art. Gadamer attempting to retrieve a positive conception of prejudice as pre judgment that was lost during the Renaissance. In 'Truth and Method'. Gadamer redeploys the notion of our prior hermeneutical situatedness as it is worked out in more particular fashion in Heidegger's Being and Time (1927) in terms of the fore – structures of understanding. The fact that understanding operates by means of such anticipatory structures means that 'anticipation of completeness'. (Gadamer 1975)

Gadamer formulates it thus: "A philosophical Hermeneutics will come to be result that understanding is only possible if the understander brings his own presupposition into action. The productive contribution of the interpreter belongs in an irreversible way to the meaning of the understanding itself" (Amaladass 2001:110) Gadamer's positive conception of prejudice as pre-judgment is connected with a number of different ideas in his hermeneutics.

"To understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question". (Gadamer 1960). Understanding has therefore, always a pre-understanding as its presupposition. However, proceed with this pre-understanding is conditioned in many ways. Above all, it concerns the historicity of our being in the world, which to reflect in our language. Thus, it is to be differentiated in terms of:

- The universal (being – with way of self-understanding that is, the pre-understanding, which influences the

whole society arises from the common historical situation of this society. So the irreversible and necessary distance of times, cultures, classes, races is a trans – subjective moment, which bestows eager expectations and life to the understanding" (Gadamer)

- The individual historicity which arises from the individual origin and life – history (ibid)

Gadamerian conception of prejudgment and its role in understanding as itself constituting a version of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutical priority Gadamer, assigns to prejudgment is question in the structure of understanding. While Gadamer has claimed that 'temporal distance' can play a useful role in enabling better to identify those prejudices that exercise problematic influence on understanding. (Gadamer 1975).

Gadamer noted that hermeneutic interpretation is not merely methodological it is a feature of our very human existence. He insists that philosophical hermeneutics is not something which we actually do or ought to do; it is something that happens 'beyond our willing and doing'. Like Heidegger, Gadamer also feels that such interpretation involves 'temporally' and situatedness as its essential aspects. The interpreter cannot transcend his milieu. Here find the fact that he divergence of Gadamer's account from Dilthey's and Schleiermacher's. These two hermeneuticians were influenced by the idea of alienating the knower (or the interpreter) from his own historical situation, for it might have cast a negative influence on true understanding. Such a methodological alienation of the knower from his own historically has been the subject of scathing criticism in Gadamer's writings. Gadamer strongly insists that our historicity, even if it involves presuppositions, choices, or biases, cannot be separated from any interpretation; they do not obscure our view of the past but rather open it up for us. He believes that 'the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world'. (Gadamer 1977: 9)

All understanding, according to this view, involves interpretation and situatedness. There cannot be any a historical, a perspectival, absolute standpoint from which one could view all possible perspectives. The 'tradition'/ classicism play crucial role in Gadamerian Hermeneutics. Understanding, for Gadamer, is thus always an 'effect' of history, while hermeneutical 'consciousness' is itself that mode of being that is conscious of its own historical 'being effected', it is historically – effected consciousness. The Gadamerian account that understanding the meaning of international acts and their products cannot be the re-enactment or recovery of the past intention of agents or ferreting out the intentionality in the acts themselves. Meaningful acts become meaningful only when they

are placed in a specific interpretive context by a specific interpreter. As the interpretive horizons of various interpreters change, new dimensions of meaning will show themselves. This implies that the meaning of acts and their products will not only change over time, but will never be definitively realized. The meaning of any intentional act or its product (the assassination of Lincoln, the signing of the declaration of independence. Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics. Beethoven's Ninth, or the United States Constitution) will be different for different people. Thus it is no accident that the meaning of Caesar's crossing the Rubicon was different for Caesar, Cicero, Hegel and modern day historians like Cowell.

According to Gadamer, identical with an awareness of the hermeneutical situation and he also refers to that situation by means of the phenomenological concept of 'horizon', understanding and interpretation thus always occurs from within a particular 'horizon' that is determined by our historically determined situatedness. Interpretation is not a psychological process of empathy. Rather it is a process of letting the significance of an intentional act or object reveal itself. Gadamer describes interpretation as "fusion of horizons" in which a meaningful act or object emanating from one conceptual world is translated into terms relevant for another. By "horizons" Gadamer captures the situatedness of all interpretations occurring as they do within a tradition of discourse. Moreover, horizons move as those looking at them move, thus by "horizon" Gadamer also hopes to indicate the openness and flexibility of conceptual paradigms. By "fusion" Gadamer means to capture the process in which a past or foreign object speaks to specific interpreters situated in their own cultural milieu. Interpretation might thus best be understood as a process of translation. "Fusion" is a good English translation of the German term "verschmelzung", but it may also be misleading. "Fusion" might suggest that the two horizons become one, that the differences between them are eliminated. But this not what "fusion" means in Gadamerian hermeneutics. In Interpretation a tension is maintained between a past or foreign act or object situated within its own conceptual context and the interpreters situated within their own conceptual contexts. (Gadamer 1975).

Understanding is taken to involve a 'fusion of horizons' then it always involves the formation of new context of meaning that enables integration of what is otherwise unfamiliar, strange or anomalous. In this respect, all understanding involves a process of mediation and dialogue between what is familiar and what is alien in which neither remains unaffected. This process of horizontal engagement is an ongoing one that never achieves any final completion or complete elucidation. Gadamer explicitly takes issue with the Hegelian 'philosophy of reflection' (Stanford Encyclopedia).

## Linguistically of Understanding

Hans Gadamer explores another very significant dimension when he describes language as medium of hermeneutic experience. Language is essential for both dialogue and communication, which are fundamental in hermeneutic understanding relating to the I-Thou relationship. Such linguistically then permeates the different levels of personal, social, cultural understanding. (Roy 1989: 64). The basic model of understanding that Gadamer finally arrives at in 'Truth and Method' is that of conversation. Conversation always takes place in language and similarly Gadamer views understanding as always linguistically mediated. Gadamer felt that truth is not an objective statement about fact, truth should be treated as an event or disclosure that happens in language and is historically conditioned.

Gadamer's commitment to the linguistically of understanding also commits him to a view of understanding as essentially a matter of conceptual articulation. This does not rule out the possibility of other modes of understanding, but it goes give primacy to language and conceptuality in hermeneutic experience. In language we articulate the experience of the world. 'Language grows with thought and thought growth with language'. Like Wittgenstein, as well as Davidson, Gadamer thus reject the idea of such thing as a 'private language', language always involves others, just as it always involves the world. Gadamer emphasizes;

"All knowledge of the world of man is communicated linguistically. A first world – orientation fulfills itself in learning to speak. But not only that, the linguistically of our being – in the – world articulates at the end the whole realm of experience". (Taylor 1985:100)

Gadamer claims that language is the universal horizon of hermeneutic experience, he also claims that the hermeneutic experience is itself universal. Gadamer's claim for the universality of hermeneutics was one of the explicit points at issue in the debate between Gadamer and Habermas. For Gadamer, interpretation is a genuine historical life situation that takes place in the medium of language and 'the linguistic quality of understanding is the concretion of effective historical consciousness'. (Roy 1989:64). In this way Gadamer wants to shout the 'Linguistically' of our experience which expresses how we participated in a tradition through the various interpretations of signs, words and texts. Through dialogue and language hermeneutic experience become one with human existence. Even accepting the usefulness of such 'idealism of linguistically' the former emphasized the role of praxis as the key to hermeneutics. All forms of knowledge and interpretation are primarily motivated by interest, which may be technical, manipulatory, and of various other kinds combining Marxism insight with the spirit of hermeneutics, Habermas insists on realizing



economic and material conditions for understanding social actions. In his 'depth hermeneutics', which is revitalized by praxis, Habermas emphasizes the fact that, "without understanding the relationship between labour and class we can't understand tradition.

### Hermeneutic Circle and Hermeneutic Spiral

The circularity known as the 'hermeneutic circle' i.e., a circularity in the act of interpretation (Clark 2007:21)

The idea of hermeneutic circle has figured prominently in discussions of interpretation at least since the work in the nineteenth century of Schleiermacher and Dilthey). The hermeneutic circle is meant to capture the movement which occurs in any act of interpretation. Traditionally this has been described in terms of the relation between part and whole: one can grasp the meaning of the whole (the entire novel); but one can ascertain the meaning of the whole only by knowing the meaning of its constituent parts.

The hermeneutic circle serves as a standard argument for all those who raise a claim to the autonomy of the human sciences Charles Taylor, contends for example:

This is one way of trying to express what has been called the "hermeneutical circle", What we are trying to establish is a certain reading of text or expressions, and what we appeal to as our grounds for this reading can only be other readings. The circle can also be put in terms of part – whole relations. We are trying to establish a reading for the whole text, and for this we appeal to readings of its partial expressions, and yet because we are dealing with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the reading of partial expressions depend on those of others and ultimately of the whole. (Mantzavinos: 299)

A circle in the words is not necessarily a vicious circle. But Gadamer and Heidegger say. A circle is not at all necessarily vicious. The way into the circle can also be constructive".

According to Heidegger, "in an interpretation, the way in which the entity we interpreting is to the conceived can be drawn from the entity itself or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of being".

Gadamer view on Hermeneutic circle is that, According to Gadamer:

"A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading. Working out this fore- projection, which is constantly revised in

terms of what emerges as the penetrates into the meaning is understanding what is there". (Mantzavinos: 305)

For Gadamer, the most influential representative of philosophical hermeneutics, sketches out the process of understanding a text as a series of "hermeneutic circles". The reader or the interpreter reads a text with preconceived expectations (pre – conceived opinions and prejudices) and in his work, he makes revision. The understanding of the text however, remains "permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of fore- understanding" (*Ibid*). When this activity has occurred, when understanding has already taken place, the circle of whole and parts is "not dissolved in project understanding" if you will, "but on the contrary is most fully realized". In this classic exposition of the hermeneutic circle, it seems – in contrast to the view of most hermeneutic philosophers that the phenomenon being described is empirical.

- Sarantakos Sotirios (2005): 'Social Research', New York: Palgrave Mac Millan.

'Hermeneutic Spiral is a technique employed to link the unknown whole with the known parts and to arrive at a full understanding. This is based on the assumption that the whole and the parts are interdependent, the context supplies the rules that guide the structure and the action of its parts. In turn, the parts carry the 'Stamp of the context' on them, and knowing the parts enables understanding of the whole, and vice versa. Understanding is circular, hence, the meaning of the sentence is understood when the words are known, and the meaning of the words depends on the context that is on the sentence. (Sarantakos 2005: 313)

### Hermeneutics: A Critical Assessment

Hermeneutics is also an anti-foundationalist philosophy in that it repudiates the project of grounding knowledge in some indubitable, self - justifying acquaintance with things.

- On the one hand, it criticizes enlightenment and scientific rationality of homogenous or homogeneity – postulates high degree of consequences and homogeneity within he society, this is highly contradictory view point.
- It recognizes the heterogeneity of world view over special and temporal boundaries but failed to address heterogeneity and language game in a given society.
- Hermeneutics speaks about shared meaning practices and values but avoid contestation of values and meanings within a society.
- Hermeneutics conception of self and community is adequate only for a society i.e., culturally and ethically homogeneous.
- Major criticisms launched by Eric D. Harish in 1960's in his major work validity in interpretation (1967) attempt to refute the central Gadamerian notion of fusion of horizons



## Post-modernist – criticize hermeneutics circle

Criticisms against plurality of perception and parallel narratives:

- Hermeneutics supports and legitimizes unmitigated relativism
- It supports all values and system of belief as valued and just for Eg. Existence of slavery considered as legitimate as rights of man
- It lacks concern for human rights

I.e. According to Hermeneutics we cannot work for elimination of some sought of thinking and observation (Eg. Case of sati practiced in India)

- Hermeneutics was anti-modern and anti-scientific temperament
- Hermeneutics ignore the positive hemifits of science
- It avoid the possibility of comparison/limited
- Hermeneutics excluder all forms of caused investigation from the domain of social sciences.

## Conclusion

To sum, the account of hermeneutic trend in social science are best understood in terms different from the way they understand themselves. Hermeneutics is highly related to social reality because any social reality is moving through interpretation. Moreover, social reality is always constructed by human beings. Even though, imbibing the influence of this rich heritage hermeneutics and to provide answer to several traditional issues in philosophy and suggest authentic alternatives to solve the controversies in the social science research.

Post- structuralist's perspectives, inevitably of course, have encountered many criticisms on their evolution and its principles. Gadamerian hermeneutics focuses on meaning understood in terms of present significance. Gadamerian hermeneutics spotlights answers to the question, "what is the significance of act 'X' for some particular interpretative community?" Today, Hermeneutic task is multifarious, its scope extended in nature.

## End Notes

1. Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation concerning the books of the Bible. It is part of the broader field of hermeneutics which involves the study of principles for the text and includes all forms of communication.
2. Phenomenology began as the theory of 'consciousness'

as such studies in isolation from the material circumstances. It is a sociological phenomenon. The hope was to determine the nature and content of the various 'mental acts such as belief, emotion, thought and desire.

3. Relativism is the concept of point of view having no absolute truth or validity and have only relative. Subjective values according to differences in participation and consideration. The term is often used to refer to the context of moral principle. When in a relativistic mode of thought principles and ethics are regarded as applicable in only limited context.

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