

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

CHANGES IN THE HERMENEUTICS OF UNDERSTANDING: COMPARING
FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER'S 'UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR'
WITH PAUL RICOEUR'S 'UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD OF THE TEXT'.

by

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Abstract

The Philosophy of Hermeneutics and the concept of “understanding” have gone through many changes because they are embedded in prevailing world-views. In the modernist (Romanticist) era of Friedrich Schleiermacher, to understand the author, the individual and his or her intentions, was of great importance. Paul Ricoeur, a contemporary who often incorporates the “hermeneutics of suspicion”, places the emphasis on the “world of the text”. His attention is on the language of the text rather than on the author’s intention. As the text reveals itself, it increases the self-understanding of the reader.

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Introduction

This thesis will explore how the meaning of, and the approach to, “understanding” has changed in hermeneutics from the modernist approach of Friedrich Schleiermacher to the contemporary position of Paul Ricoeur. When David E. Klemm points out that, “understanding is the fundamental mode of our being in the world...[it is] more basic to our humanness than our use of tools,” one could easily be misled to think of understanding as a never changing absolute.¹ However, when one looks at the hermeneutics of understanding, one realizes that this is not the case. For instance, Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his “Art of Understanding”, is concerned about the grammatical and psychological aspects of the author.² Paul Ricoeur changes the focus from understanding the author to understanding the text. He goes beyond the mind of the author and his intent to the product, to what the text will reveal.³

Thus, this thesis will explore the most pertinent concepts of each theory. It will point to the changes which have occurred between the different world-views and how these have effected the concept of understanding. Further, each theory will be evaluated in terms of its own merits as well as how it is situated in the world view of today. Therefore, the discussion will be on both

¹ David E. Klemm. *Hermeneutical Inquiry: The Interpretation of Texts*. Atlanta: Scholar's press. 1986: 25.

² Ibid. : 56.

³ Ibid. : 225.

the contributions and limitations of each theory and, most important, the differences between them.

Chapter One will give an overview of the life and work of Friedrich Schleiermacher.⁴ The most important influences on his development can be traced to Kant, Spinoza, Schlegel (the Romantic movement) and Plato.⁵ Although Schleiermacher lived in the Romantic milieu, his book *On Religion* shows that he was greatly influenced by many, but not by all of its aspects.⁶ Schleiermacher outlines the foundations for a general hermeneutics which consists of two tasks: (a) the grammatical and (b) the technical (psychological) aspect which are needed to understand the mind of the author.⁷

Opinions with regard to Schleiermacher remain divided. However, though many scholars of today recognize Schleiermacher's contributions, they usually make changes to his particular theories in the light of post-modernist challenges to a modernist form of hermeneutics.

Chapter Two presents a radically different view of the hermeneutics of understanding.⁸ The chapter outlines briefly Ricoeur's life, his education and

⁴ B. A. Gerrish. "Schleiermacher, Friedrich (1768-1834)". *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Mircea Eliade, Ed. in Chief. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Vol 13. 1987: 108-113.

⁵ B. A. Gerrish. *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1984: 108.

⁶ Richard Crouter, Ed. *Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996: 23.

⁷ Jean Grondin. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1994:69.

⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Interpretation Theory*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press. 1976: 75.

his philosophy. According to Klemm, Ricoeur builds his hermeneutics on two lines of thought, an epistemology which develops from Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and an ontology which is based on Heidegger. Ricoeur attempts to connect these two.⁹ He is also attempting to establish a general hermeneutics, but one which is based on understanding that is applicable to the interpretation of texts.¹⁰ Ricoeur develops his theories out of the disillusionment with the modern ideals of Kant (the rationalist critique) and the (Romanticist) endeavors of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Ricoeur maintains, that the hermeneutical process is a linguistic one and language is the subject for hermeneutical philosophy.¹¹ The Chapter will also discuss Ricoeur's emphasis on the text and how the change occurs from identifying with the writer of a text to understanding more of oneself through the critical evaluation of the text.

Chapter Three addresses the basis of philosophical thinking for hermeneutics. Here, Michel Philibert presents Ricoeur as an innovative, autonomous and creative thinker.¹² Ricoeur will be described in the light of what he learned from his predecessors with a special focus on Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger and their respective hermeneutic theories of understanding.

⁹ David Klemm. *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur: A Constructive Analysis*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press. 1983: 26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 12.

¹² Michel Philibert. "The Philosophic Method of Paul Ricoeur." Charles E. Reagan, Ed. *Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. 1979: 134-39. (p. 136).

Chapter Three will also show, particularly, how much Ricoeur was indebted to Heidegger.¹³ However, Ricoeur points out that, with Heidegger, we are always going back to the foundations but we are incapable to begin a movement of return. He maintains that such an approach to understanding is unbalanced. Ricoeur sees understanding no longer as an act of psychological empathy but rather as a particularly intricate process of critical evaluation.¹⁴

Chapter Four will discuss the basic need for philosophy to discuss “understanding” and “interpretation”. Which of these will be the starting point depends on the era of either “modern” or “postmodern” paradigms. This is also the difference between Schleiermacher and Ricoeur who are representative of these different eras, respectively.

In Chapter Four both Schleiermacher and Ricoeur will be presented, again, to illustrate how much they are embedded in their respective environments and the ways in which these allow or obstruct insights. The Chapter will also address some modern day philosophers who do not agree with Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of “the world of the text”. Especially A. D. Hirsch maintains that, if the author is not needed as an anchor point for his or her meaning, then one can have as many “meanings as readers” of a text.¹⁵ For Hirsch, the only meaning of a text is the author’s meaning. Ricoeur instead looks to the

¹³ Richard Palmer. *Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1969: 125.

¹⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Interpretation Theory*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press. 1976: 92.

¹⁵ E. D. Hirsch, Jr. *The Aims of Interpretation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1962. Also: “Objective Interpretation”. *Critical Theory since Plato*. Hazard Adams, Ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Janovich Inc. 1977: 1176-94. (Hirsch attacks the “most possible meanings we can find...the better (idea).

"thrown-ness" into the world as the situation from which language is "forthcoming" (which he borrowed from Heidegger). Thus, Ricoeur bases his hermeneutics on "understanding" one's "situatedness" and mediates the text with the help of the dialectic between understanding and explanation.¹⁶ According to Klemm, this difference thus introduced by reflexive and critical evaluation, "calls into question the whole development of modern culture."¹⁷

The Chapter concludes with an observation regarding the changes that have been demonstrated from a modern to a postmodern depiction and appreciation of understanding.

¹⁶ David Klemm. 1983: 91.

¹⁷ David Klemm. 1986: 20.

Chapter I

Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics as the "Art of Understanding"

Schleiermacher was a preacher as well as a professor. He shows that it was possible to be both devout and intellectually honest. His lectures serve the ends of understanding not persuasion [and are of great] help to understand him better.¹⁸

This chapter will deal with "understanding" and how Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 -1834) uses this term in his theory of hermeneutics, namely, "how to understand the author". It will be necessary to give a brief overview of his life in order to show how and why he developed this approach. It will also be important to understand some of the theorists who helped shape hermeneutics and trace their possible influence on him. Furthermore, there must be an opportunity to compare his approach with that of his contemporaries with whom he was not only acquainted but who influenced him, one way or the other. Finally, the chapter will point to some present day views and appraisals of Schleiermacher's theories. The emphasis is on why Schleiermacher is interested in understanding the author, whether it is useful, and how he managed to make this a focal point.

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher was born in November 1768 in Breslau, Lower Silesia, which was part of Prussia. His father, Gottlieb, was a reform pastor and a chaplain in the Army of Frederick the Great. He

¹⁸ B. A. Gerrish. *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1984:12.

encountered the Moravian community at Gnadenfrei and underwent a “spiritual re-awakening”. Five years later (1783), his son had his own “new birth” at the age of fourteen.¹⁹ The influence of Moravian pietism lasted throughout Schleiermacher’s life. In 1802, looking back, he wrote after his father’s death, that it was “here [that] I awoke to the consciousness of the relations of man to a higher world...[but] then it was only germinating; [now] I have become a *Herrnhuter* again, only of a higher order.”²⁰ This expression may indicate that the “experience” he had, had been reflected upon and become incorporated into his world-view.

Schleiermacher attended the Moravian seminary which offered an enlightened humanistic curriculum of languages (Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, English) and mathematics, “along with the experiential, biblical piety of the Brethren”.²¹ He found the theological pedagogy narrow, so he attended a secret club in which Goethe and Kant were debated. As a result, he experienced a disillusionment with religion and moved to attend the rationalist University of Halle (1787-89). He passed his theological examinations in 1790 in Berlin and then became, from 1790-93, house tutor (*Hofmeister*) at Schlobitten in East Prussia. Richard Crouter (1996) points out, that this “apprenticeship” among an upper-class royalist family served as

¹⁹ B. A. Gerrish. “Schleiermacher, Friedrich (1768-1834)”. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Mircea Eliade, Ed. in Chief. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Vol. 13. 1987: 108-113.

²⁰ Richard Crouter, Ed. *Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996: xii.

²¹ Ibid.

"a window on the world".²² These years coincide with the revolutionary events in France, including the growing radicalism of the Jacobins. Schleiermacher found the execution of the king "repugnant" even though he shared the enthusiasm of the movement's aspirations. At the same time, as Crouter suggests, life amongst the upper classes provided a "taste of the literary and cultural milieu that soon became Schleiermacher's own in Berlin."²³

Crouter says that his appointment as tutor was very fruitful because it allowed Schleiermacher to continue a process of philosophical and theological self-education. He found himself in the midst of an important, though varied and challenging, cultural context which was almost entirely focused on responding to the German Enlightenment. The scholars who were outstanding introduced new theories and then responded to one another.²⁴ Schleiermacher was drawn into this context and its influences on him were both positive and negative. For instance, he embraced Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) rationalism, e.g., that the mind interacts with sense impressions, but he strongly rejected Kant's dualism between phenomena and noumena. B. A. Gerrish says, furthermore, that Schleiermacher was "troubled by Kant's overriding emphasis on the moral law and...[the insistence] that this morality requires "transcendental" (as distinct from

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

merely psychological) freedom.”²⁵ Rather, as Gerrish points out, Schleiermacher had become acquainted with another philosophical option in the work of Barukh Spinoza (1632-1677). His reflections on this philosophy seems to have led him to his earliest thoughts on the concept of the “individual” which appears to be the endpoint of Spinoza’s monistic and religious vision of nature, “as filtered through the pantheistic debate.”²⁶ The individual was also much emphasized in romanticism, where the individual, in his or her act of creation, exhibits a unique expression.

There were other strong influences on Schleiermacher which can be traced through his subsequent writings, including his hermeneutical theories. Richard A. Niebuhr, in the article on Schleiermacher, mentions such an influence, namely, classical Greek. He recounts that when Schleiermacher began the translation of Plato, his mind became “imbued with the philosophy of the author of the *Republic*.”²⁷ Although this influence is but one of many, *Plato’s dialectic* and a *Greek ethos* remain as a strong backdrop throughout Schleiermacher’s works. However, the influence which is most often, and most closely, connected with Schleiermacher today is his friendship with Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829) and his circle; in short, the Romantic movement. As Niebuhr mentions, Schleiermacher emerges not only as a

²⁵ Gerrish. 1984: 108.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Richard R. Niebuhr. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Paul Edwards, Ed. in Chief. New York: Macmillan Press Co. Inc. & The Free Press. Vol. 7. 1967: 316-320.

member of the movement but as an “interpreter of religion to the Romantic world view as epitomized by Schlegel.”²⁸ In Schleiermacher’s book, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (first edition 1799) it becomes apparent which of the Romantic ideals he accepts. These are individuality, the importance of humanity, and empirically based knowledge rather than purely rational metaphysics, amongst others. However, in *On Religion* it also becomes apparent how strongly he disagrees with the Romantic view on religion.²⁹ Thus, to call Schleiermacher a “Romantic” would be misleading. There were many philosophical strands interwoven in the thoughts and works of this versatile scholar, but he seems to have managed to make a special combination of them all, measured perhaps against his earlier religious experience. He developed his own theories in his book *On Religion*, where the “Second Speech” is virtually a confession of faith.³⁰

In Halle (1804), he lectured on a variety of subjects such as: Philosophy of Ethics, Theology, New Testament, and Hermeneutics. By 1810 he was Professor of Theology at the University of Berlin and lectured on an even greater variety of subjects. He remained in Berlin until his death in 1834.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 316.

²⁹ Crouter. 1996: 23. Note especially in the “Second Speech”, “It is because you place humanity in opposition to the universe and do not RECEIVE IT from the hand of religion as part of the universe and as something HOLY.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*: xxiv. Crouter says that, “Schleiermacher, as a philosophical realist, sees that the realms of human selfhood (spirit, freedom) and the world (nature) cry out for reconciliation not just intellectually but at the level of human existence.”

³¹ Niebuhr, 1987: 316.

Besides lecturing as Professor and espousing his now maturing ideas in his books, Schleiermacher was also preaching at several Churches. His foremost concern seems to have been to actualize a new basis in Protestant theology. He succeeded in his efforts and is known, because of them, as the "father of modern Protestant Theology". Schleiermacher sums up his position in this quotation:

If one were to conceive religious interest and scientific spirit to be conjoined in the highest degree and with the finest balance for the purpose of theoretical and practical activity alike, that would be the idea of a "prince of the Church".³²

It is in his book *On Religion* (1799) that Schleiermacher first locates religion or piety in feeling, not in knowing or doing, and "distinguishes it from all other feelings as the feeling of absolute dependence."³³ His particular contrast between feeling and intellect had begun to emerge as a cardinal point which is well illustrated in the "Second Speech". Thus, Gerrish says that, "Schleiermacher insisted that Christian theology must be (in his terms) 'empirical' and not 'speculative rational metaphysics'....It must start from what is actually or factually given in religious experience."³⁴ While this emphasis on phenomena might seem similar to Kant, Schleiermacher will differ in his appreciation of feeling, which Kant confined to aesthetics not

³² Friedrich Schleiermacher. "Church Leadership and the Scientific Spirit". *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*. Terrence N. Tice, Transl. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press. 1988: 5, Paragraph 9. Ft.13 (Meaning a person who is spiritually dominant, like Luther - not like in the Catholic Church).

³³ Gerrish. 1984:16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 21. (A more detailed discussion on feeling can be found on page 30.)

religion. According to Gerrish, these views are of paramount importance to anyone who wants to appreciate Schleiermacher.³⁵

Feeling and understanding are of crucial importance in the development of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. Here "understanding" not only includes, but demands, the understanding of the author who created the text or any work. Thus, feeling or intuition is also intimately related to Schleiermacher's notion of understanding the mind of the author. It is the key term for an appreciation of his theory of hermeneutics. And although he will change the emphasis on particular words like feeling, intuition, and later, divination, these various terms appear to be a development of his thought: the "groping" for the "right" word which will ultimately convey what he means. In his "General Theory and The Art of Interpretation", Section II, he says that:

[5:3] [As] each person represents one locus where a given language takes shape in a particular way, and his speech can be understood only in the context of the totality of the language...he [also] is a person who is a constantly developing spirit, and his speaking can be understood as only one moment in this development to all others....

[6:2] Nor can an act of speaking be understood as a modification of the language unless it is also understood as a moment in the development of the person.³⁶

To understand a literary work (in Schleiermacher's terms), one must first attempt to "gain an overview of the whole" in order to rule out the trivial and

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 23.

³⁶ Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, Ed. "Schleiermacher: General Theory and Art of Understanding". *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. New York: Continuum. 1985: 75. (Selections from the English trans. J. Duke and J. Forstman of the Kimmerle edit.).

insignificant. But then one backs up and takes a harder look at the individual parts. In this act he believes that the most important task of hermeneutics is to grasp the author's intention. Thus, to single out one term, rather than to treat it as part of an author's overall thoughts, may easily lead to misunderstandings.³⁷ An author's terminology is not meant to create isolated focal points (singularities), but are parts of a whole which must be kept in focus. Thus the constant interaction of the part and the whole is vital because of the dependence of one on the other. It provides the basis of what Schleiermacher terms the "hermeneutic circle".

This correlates with Gerrish's approach to Schleiermacher who says that, in recent years, Schleiermacher has come under attack for an unjustifiable psychologizing of the interpretive task. Gerrish says that, to the contrary, Schleiermacher's terminology fits "rather well in the task of understanding theological texts by pre-eminently autobiographical thinkers like, for instance, Luther."³⁸ The attempt in this Chapter is to show that critics of Schleiermacher who have taken terms like: "psychologizing, intuition or divinatory" as focal points in themselves, in isolation of his overall thoughts, might have missed the point which Schleiermacher himself had in mind, which is always the part in relation to the whole. One needs to focus

³⁷ For instance: see in Cassell's *German English/English German Dictionary*. 1969: 168 the German word *fühlen* is translated as 'feeling'; but also: 'to consider'; 'belief so to be'; 'be aware of'. Closely related to the meaning of Schleiermacher's intention is *Die Fühlkraft*: faculty of perception. The noun: *Gefühl* can mean *Ansicht*; *bewusst werden*, which translates better as 'opinion' or 'sensitivity' rather than 'feeling'. A shared language pool, the place in a text (semantics, context) are of greater importance than psychology.

³⁸ Gerrish. 1984: 24. Notice further how the above two paragraphs are pertinent to Schleiermacher himself.

attention on the topic of “understanding” as an “art” (*Kunst*) in the way in which Schleiermacher meant it: namely that the “two hermeneutic tasks [of understanding the common language and its unique usage of the writer] are completely equal...Neither task is higher than the other.”³⁹ To help appreciate what Schleiermacher meant by the act of understanding, a brief discourse on a few of the important fore-runners of Schleiermacher is in order. This is because his theory of hermeneutics is built on, and has incorporated some of, these previous attempts to enunciate theories on the topic of “hermeneutics”.

Kurt Mueller-Vollmer points out that the etymology of the term *hermeneutics* carries an obvious relation to *Hermes*, messenger god of the Greeks. The term is complex and understanding is but one of the aspects.⁴⁰ Mueller-Vollmer says that one strand of its historical development arose out of the need of the Protestant movement to prove that the Holy Scriptures are self-sufficient (the principle of perspicuity) and Schleiermacher would have subscribed to this view. His further emphasis on the interpreter might have been in order to “authenticate” him, in the sense proposed by the reformer Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520-1575).⁴¹ The latter is well recognized for setting up a firm basis for the development of Protestant hermeneutics. He

³⁹ Mueller-Vollmer. 1985: 75.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 2. Ft. 3. Flacius Illyricus.. Neudruck aus dem *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*, (1567) (Which was Flacius' historical treatise). See Lutz Geldsetzer. “Preface”. J. M. Chladenius, *Einleitung zur Richtigen Auslegung vernuenftiger Reden und Schriften. Nachdruck der Ausgabe Leipzig. (1742) 1969.* Also: Robert Kolb. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. 5: 347-48

advanced two principles: (a) Scriptures had not been understood properly because of insufficient knowledge and inadequate preparation of the interpreter (but a thorough linguistic and hermeneutic training could remedy the situation). And (b) Scriptures contained an internal coherence and continuity, therefore the interpreter had to explicate each passage in the light of the overall continuity of the scriptures. Flacius Illyricus thus delivered Biblical interpretation from the restrictions of the Catholic Church against interpretation but created a new system of norms which made it necessary to have some degree of consensus amongst scriptural exegetes. Without it, the unity of the scriptural authority of the Protestant Church would have faltered.⁴²

As Mueller-Vollmer points out, three other tendencies were instrumental in the rise of modern hermeneutics besides the influence of the Protestant Reformers. These are the developments in classical philology, jurisprudence and philosophy.⁴³ For instance, the grammatical interpretation of classical philology was a common basis for theological, classical and legal exegesis. Then, particularly in legal interpretation, the "purpose (*Absicht*) of the law" and the "intention of the lawgiver" have to be "considered in logical interpretation". Mueller-Vollmer says that, for instance, Christian Wolff (1679-1754) insisted that the "completeness" of [any] account can only be

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.: 2. Ft. 4. (H.G. Gadamer in *Seminar: Philosophische Hermeneutik* (1976). (Sect. C. Bibl.). Pp. 7-30.

ascertained by referring to the author's intention (*Absicht*).⁴⁴ This intention did not carry the psychological meaning which it often has today, nor did it have the connotation which Schleiermacher and the other Romantics would ascribe to a literary work namely, an expression of an author's individuality.⁴⁵ For Wolff, the issue was not the "meaning" of a given work, but the "adherence to the generic requirements of a particular discourse", e.g., natural history, church history, and so forth.

But the word "understanding" has still more different applications. For instance, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), the historian, says that the interpretation of individual phenomena is a type of understanding which must occur in the light of an overriding, cohesive whole which itself is not observable. The interpreter must apply this idea of the whole in order to "understand".⁴⁶ According to Mueller-Vollmer, this involves what later came to be called the "hermeneutic circle", as employed by Schleiermacher. He says that, according to Humboldt, there is an apparent paradox which is always overcome by the historian because he had begun his work with an "intuition" of an "invisible coherence" which unites individual parts so that he can begin an historical interpretation.⁴⁷

A further contribution attributed to Humboldt is his theory that, "every act

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 4. Ft.12. (Christian Wolff. *Vernunftige Gedanken* (1713). *Gesammelte Werke*, I. Abteilung. Vol. I).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 9. Humboldt was a contemporary of Schleiermacher and one of the Romantics.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 16.

of comprehension (*Begreifen*) presupposes, as a condition of its possibility, the existence of an analogue in the person who is comprehending and in the phenomena actually comprehended by him". Mueller-Vollmer points out that this constitutes, according to Humboldt, a "precursive primary correspondence between subject and object" which can be found in the "commonality of the language which is shared by speaker and addressee in their common linguistic competence."⁴⁸ These correspond to the above mentioned theory on a commonality of language, which was introduced by Schleiermacher. In this way, subject and object stand in a "pre-given correspondence to each other". Humboldt calls them the "pre-existing basis of understanding (*Vorgängige Grundlage des Begreifens*)."⁴⁹ It shows that understanding is not necessarily limited to a linguistic analysis of a text, though it is certainly one component. It also involves a comprehension of a specific world context and an individual's situatedness in it. Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-84)⁵⁰ appears to sum up this direction of interpretation when he says that, "Understanding is the most perfect knowledge (*das vollkommenste Erkennen*) that is attainable for us humans."⁵¹

When understanding and knowledge are viewed as only able to harmonize

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 17.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 19 Johann Gustav Droysen is another contemporary of Schleiermacher.

⁵¹ Ibid.

within a given context, as was the case in the work of Friedrich Ast, then hermeneutics is regarded as regional.⁵² Ast is called by Richard Palmer one of the “great luminaries in the philology of the day” and Schleiermacher acknowledges his contributions as one of the inspirations for his “general” as opposed to “regional” hermeneutics. Palmer says that Schleiermacher developed his concept of hermeneutics from its “earliest groping formulations as *Aphorisms* in 1805-06⁵³ in more or less explicit critical dialogue with Ast.”⁵⁴ When he finalized his conception of a new hermeneutics in the Compendium of 1819, Schleiermacher refers in its first sentence to the famous philologist. Palmer suggests that some knowledge of Schleiermacher’s forerunners is necessary in order to fully appreciate his theory. Furthermore, many of their conceptions are of continuing importance to hermeneutics as a whole.

Palmer mentions that Ast explains that the basic aim of philological study is to grasp the “spirit” of antiquity.⁵⁵ He says that the outer forms all point to an inner form, an inner unity of being, which is harmonious in its parts and may be called the *Geist* of antiquity. For him, philology is not a “matter of dusty manuscripts and dry pedantry about grammar”; it does not treat the empirical as an end in itself but as a means to grasp the *outer* and *inner*

⁵² Friedrich Ast (1778-1841), a forerunner of Schleiermacher.

⁵³ G. L. Ormiston & A. D. Schrift. *The Hermeneutic Tradition*. Albany: State of University Press. 1990. On pp. 57-82 are the “Aphorisms on Hermeneutics from 1805 and 1809/10”; on pp.83-84 are “Translators’ Notes”; on pp. 85-100 are “Outline of the 1819 Lectures”, trans. Jan Wojcik and Roland Haas.

⁵⁴ Richard Palmer. *Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.1969:75.

⁵⁵ Ast in *Grundlinien der Grammatik: Hermeneutik und Kritik* (1808).

content of a work as a unity in order to understand the *Geist*. "This unity points to the unity of *spirit*, the source of the inner unity of individual works."⁵⁶ In order to study these texts of antiquity, Ast suggests that we need grammar. But to understand and explain a text correctly, the study of ancient languages must always be bound up with hermeneutics. Palmer points out, however, that Ast clearly differentiates two tasks. Hermeneutics is the theory of "extracting the *geistige* (spiritual) meaning of the text...which we can apprehend (understand) because *Geist* is the focal point of all life and its permanent formative principle."⁵⁷ Palmer says that, therefore, in Ast we find the "spiritual unity" (*Einheit des Geistes*) as the basic conception of the hermeneutical circle.⁵⁸

Palmer mentions that Schleiermacher credits Ast with asserting this basic principle of the hermeneutic circle⁵⁹ and further, he quotes Ast who says that, "the *Geist* of an individual author cannot be grasped apart from placing it in its higher relationship [to the whole]."⁶⁰ This theory of *Geist* was fundamental to Ast's hermeneutics which he ultimately divides into three parts of understanding: (1) the historical; (2) the grammatical (language) and (3) the spiritual or *geistige*.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Palmer. 1969: 76.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 77.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* "Geist is the source of development and all becoming The imprint of the spirit of the whole (*Geist des Ganzen*) is found in the individual part; the part is understood from the whole and the whole from the inner harmony of its parts." (GGHK. Vol. I.1978:41).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Quote from: *Hermeneutik*: 141.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Ft. 9 (GGHK. Vol. VI. Pp.174-75.)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

According to Palmer, the first two parts of hermeneutics had already been developed by Johann Semler (1725-91) and J. A. Ernesti (1708-91) respectively.⁶² It is the third of these which is Ast's distinctive contribution which then becomes "developed further in Schleiermacher and the great nineteenth-century philologist August Boeckh (1785-1867)."⁶³ In Ast there is also found a new concept of the "process of understanding itself" as *Nachbildung*, reproduction. Thus, Ast views this process of understanding as a repetition of the creative process. As Palmer suggests, with this concept of "understanding" as *Nachbildung*, combined with the search for the *Geist* or spirit of a work, hermeneutics moves beyond the philological and theological hermeneutics of the preceding ages.⁶⁴

After Ast, it is more obvious that "understanding" is a kind of "pivotal force" in hermeneutics. From now on one must ask even more explicitly: what is it that must be understood; how, in what terms, under which conditions can this be extrapolated? Palmer points out that in the rationalist hermeneutics of the Enlightenment there was no basis for relating the artist's creative process to that of the reader. But in the idealist hermeneutics of Ast and Schleiermacher the processes are clearly grounded in the fundamental operations of understanding.⁶⁵ Palmer mentions that in the realist literary

⁶² Johann Semler was a pioneer in the application of historical-critical methods to the Bible (mentioned by Klemm. 1986: 17). Johann August Ernesti. Also Klemm. 1986: 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*: 78. (That Boeckh was a student of Schleiermacher is mentioned by Jean Grondin. 1994: 4.)

⁶⁴ Palmer. 1969 :80.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Also in Klemm, who calls understanding a "first-order activity, because it is by its very nature direct and immediate." 1986: 33.

interpretation, still practiced by many American critics today, the question of the process of creation is irrelevant. But for the phenomenological hermeneutics of the present day, both creation and interpretation are still grounded in a process of understanding (though its definition has changed from Schleiermacher's).⁶⁶

When Schleiermacher addresses the phenomenon of understanding as central to hermeneutics in his *Aphorisms* (1805)⁶⁷, he already indicates his departure from Ast. Mueller-Vollmer points out that Schleiermacher attempts to refine earlier ideas into his project of a "general hermeneutics". He seeks to uncover the interpretative techniques which operate universally within understanding in contrast to previously used regional hermeneutics which addressed only specific issues.⁶⁸ Mueller-Vollmer says that as part of Schleiermacher's program there is, on the one hand, his intention to bring together the tools of philology, biblical hermeneutics, and juristics to create a universal art of understanding based on formalized rules. But on the other hand, there is his distinction between grammatical and technical (psychological) interpretation. In addition, there is the postulate of the hermeneutical circle, which is the interaction of the grammatical and technical aspects and shows the relationship between them:

[T]he meaning of every word in a given passage must be determined

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Gayle Ormiston & Alan D. Schrift. 1990: 57-83.

⁶⁸ Mueller-Vollmer. 1985: 13.

in relation to its coexistence with the words surrounding it. Discourse is composed of two "elements", the whole of language and the mind of the thinker - the art of understanding must grasp their interaction.⁶⁹

By 1819 Schleiermacher was ready to open his lectures on hermeneutics with the programmatic assertion that his fundamental aim was to "frame a general hermeneutics as the Art of Understanding (*Kunstlehre*)."⁷⁰ This understanding, according to Schleiermacher, is the same for all types of texts. He suggests that each field has different theoretical tools for its own peculiar problems (regional hermeneutics) but that beneath these differences lies a more fundamental unity which is shared by all of these (general hermeneutics). For instance, he suggests that since texts are always in language, grammar is universally necessary to find the meaning of sentences, regardless of their regional discipline. Since:

[A] general idea interacts with the grammatical structure to form the meaning, no matter what the type of document. If the principles of all understanding of language were formulated, these would comprise a general hermeneutics. Such a hermeneutics could serve as the basis and core of all "special" hermeneutics.⁷¹

As Palmer suggests, Schleiermacher was looking for a way to establish the foundations of all hermeneutics: the act of understanding as an act of a living, feeling, intuiting human being. Earlier Schleiermacher had, in his *On Religion*, already rejected metaphysics and morals as a basis for the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Palmer. 1969: 84.

⁷¹ Ibid.

phenomenology of religion. For him, religion had to do with living, acting, and feeling in relation to human being's creaturely dependence on God, says Palmer.⁷² And similarly, Schleiermacher related *hermeneutics* to a "concrete, existing, acting human being in the process of understanding dialogue".⁷³ According to Schleiermacher, by starting with the conditions that pertain to all dialogue and the examination of the concrete, which is involved in all understanding, we have the core of a viable "hermeneutics" which then serves all special hermeneutic needs. He also states that the art of explanation falls outside of hermeneutics. It is his opinion that, "explication imperceptibly becomes the art of rhetorical formulation instead of the art of understanding".⁷⁴ This, says Palmer, is one of Schleiermacher's most significant insights, for it "marks hermeneutics as the art of understanding rather than of explaining."⁷⁵

The starting point of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is the question: "how is all, or any, utterance, whether spoken or written, really understood"? The situation is one of dialogical relationship. The reader or hearer receives a series of words, and suddenly, "through some mysterious process, can divine their meaning."⁷⁶ The true *locus* of hermeneutics then for Schleiermacher is the art of hearing. It consists initially in a speaker constructing a sentence.

⁷² Ibid.: 85.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 85-86.

⁷⁶ Ibid.: 86.

The hearer then penetrates its structures as well as the actual thoughts of the speaker. Thus, hearing as understanding consists of these two interacting moments, the "grammatical" and the "technical" (psychological). And, according to Palmer, the latter encompasses, in the larger sense, an intuition of the author's psychic life.⁷⁷ He points out that the principle of this reconstruction of an utterance presupposes the hermeneutic circle which consists of both part and whole relationship as well as grammatical and psychological components. For Schleiermacher, both the grammatical and the psychological axes are always present and continuously interacting in understanding all aspects of the speaker.

Jean Grondin expresses his view of the above in the following way. He says that every expression follows a "prescribed syntax of pattern of usage and is to that extent supra-individual." Schleiermacher calls this aspect of language the "grammatical side of interpretation".⁷⁸ It is based in the total context "constituted by the total possibilities of a language".⁷⁹ However, says Grondin, an expression is not merely the vehicle of a "fundamentally supra-individual language; it is also the manifestation of an individual mind."⁸⁰ People do not always mean the same thing by the same words. If such were the case, there would be "only grammar". There is, however, the other side

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Jean Grondin. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.1994:69.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

of interpretation, which is that of the individual mind that uses language in a unique and personal way. This second aspect is called by Schleiermacher the psychological or technical interpretation. According to Grondin, the purely syntactic view of language must then be superseded by what the “utterance really is trying to say”. The purpose is to understand a “mind that discloses itself. A soul that manifests itself through the language it brings forth from within.”⁸¹

Thus, Schleiermacher’s universal hermeneutics consists of two tasks and consequently two forms: the grammatical and the technical (psychological). He further had the ambition to “regulate” the act of understanding *kunstmaessig* (methodologically). He distinguishes between a “stricter” and a “laxer” practice of interpretation which, in turn, reflect two fundamentally different hermeneutic purposes. He chooses for himself the “stricter” practice which implies the fact that “misunderstanding occurs of its own accord and must be avoided”. Based on this premise, Schleiermacher argues that [therefore] “understanding must be consciously sought at every point.”⁸²

In a similar vein, Wolfgang Ludwig Schneider, in *Objectives Verstehen* (1991), writes that Schleiermacher outlined in his introduction to the first article of *Hermeneutik und Kritik* that: “on the one hand all speeches are a

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.: 70. Grondin says that Schleiermacher describes classical hermeneutics that limited itself to specific passages, while he employs the stricter practice which begins with the fact that misunderstanding occurs of its own accord and understanding must be sought at every point. 69-70.

form in which language comes forth (*zum Vorschein*) and each single form is only a place in which language appears." Two ways are open to understand language: one is understanding (*das Verstehen*) out of the "totality of the thought and life of an author"; the other is out of the totality of the "linguistic system in which the author is situated."⁸³ According to Schneider, both types of interpretation are in principle related to one another as "equal moments of a whole". Differences are found only in the weight which both can have in the interpretation of a text.⁸⁴ Every speech thus has a two-fold connection. It brings into expression (*Ausdruck*) the originality of its thought as it is embedded in the totality of its life (*im Lebenszusammenhang eingebettetes Denken*) and, in this way, puts into the totality of language the stamp of its individuality.⁸⁵ One can perceive in this way of thought that the idea of part/whole is still seen as a circle, a unified whole, out of which one can investigate the phenomena of its diverse moments.

At this point mention can be made that the approach which is taken in this chapter is also an attempt at an understanding of understanding, namely, that of Schleiermacher's theory of hermeneutics. In this process it has become clear that there are differing view-points, since scholars obviously have their own trajectories of thought from which they view Schleiermacher.

⁸³ Wolfgang Ludwig Schneider. *Objectives Verstehen: Rekonstruktion eines Paradigmas*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, GmbH. 1991: 29-30. My translation.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: 30. My translation.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* My translation.

To give an overview of them and, at the same time, exemplify Schleiermacher's (supposedly) own thoughts is far beyond the confines of this writing. Thus, there is an acute awareness of how difficult it really is to understand an author: to understand what he says; and what he means. Here are the basic tenets of Schleiermacher's theory on which all later scholars can agree: (1) Two major axes are involved in understanding texts: (a) the grammatical, referring to the totality of a spoken language; and (b) the technical (psychological) which is the unique use of this possible language by individuals. Further, (2) Schleiermacher uses the hermeneutic circle of part and whole, the grammatical and technical. But then, as Anthony C. Thiselton observes, Schleiermacher's complex theory includes other dialectics, or circles namely, the interaction between the general and the particular; the regional and the universal; thinking and understanding. Furthermore, Schleiermacher is well aware, according to Thiselton, that understanding is always "provisional". It may be on the level of a common conversation, or it may be in relation to the creative expression of an individual's distinctive thought. But on any level, it is an ongoing process which is never complete.⁸⁶

The contemporary assessments of Schleiermacher diverge. For instance, Palmer suggests that Schleiermacher sought not only an informal set of rules, but the laws by which understanding operates. He was looking for a science,

⁸⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. 1992: 218-19.

which “could guide the process of extracting meaning from a text”.⁸⁷ It was also his intention to unite religion and science or, in other words, “the man of religion and the science of philology”. In his footnote, Palmer uses a quotation by Richard R. Niebuhr who says that, “Interpretation was for Schleiermacher something personal and creative as well as scientific...[it went] far beyond the principles of philological science into the realm of art.”⁸⁸ Palmer also asserts that Schleiermacher advanced beyond a language-centered hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher himself always maintained that hermeneutics as the art of understanding must include unique aspects of the author, e.g., his “total” psychic make-up. He insisted that it is important to not only understand the author but to understand him better than he himself. Whether this is at all possible is the basis of contemporary criticism of Schleiermacher. Paul Ricoeur would add that such a task is impossible. Grondin describes this hotly debated issue and expands it beyond a simple literary view point. He says “the end of understanding is not the meaning that I find in the subject matter but rather the meaning of that [which] appears in the reconstructed viewpoint of the author.”⁸⁹ On the other hand, Palmer ends his observations of Schleiermacher by saying that his was a dialogical hermeneutic which “regrettably did not realize the ‘creative implications of its dialogical nature’.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*:91.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Ft. 7. (Richard R. Niebuhr. *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*. 1964:72-134).

⁸⁹ Grondin. 1994: 71.

[Schleiermacher] was 'blinded by his desire for laws and systematic' coherence." Palmer also does not accept that it is possible by intuition or divination to understand the purpose of the author.⁹⁰

Anthony C. Thiselton approaches his overview of Schleiermacher's works and time from a different angle. Although he mentions Schleiermacher's presence in the Romantic circle, he warns that this is just a "part" of the scholar who did not share all of the attitudes of the Romantics but did believe in the creative power of feeling and in the importance of the lived experience. Thiselton mentions Schleiermacher's deep pious feeling, together with his great concern for intellectual integrity. The "feeling" of which he speaks is thus for Thiselton not simply one generated by human persons but part of a deep spiritual orientation. It is a religious experience which, for Schleiermacher, constitutes a living understanding.

It is an activity of grace which Schleiermacher described in nearly the same manner as that the pietists used to describe their conversion experience. Man can contribute nothing to it. Intuition and feelings are not activities of the human spirit; rather they represent that primal act of the spirit in which reality is not yet divided into subject and object. Intuition does not mean sense perception... [but] allowing the infinite present in the finite to work upon it.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Palmer. 1969: 75

⁹¹ Thiselton 1992: 211-212. (His quotation of Martin Redeker. *Schleiermacher's Life and Thought*. 173:35.)

According to Louis Dupré, Schleiermacher never lost the deep insight which he gained from his religious experience as a child. Dupré accepts an evolution of, but not a break in, Schleiermacher's thought. He elaborates the differences between his use of "feeling", "intuition" and "aesthetics". He points to Schleiermacher's insistence that the religious experience is "feeling" by which he means a "pure consciousness", that is, consciousness before it becomes conscious of something. For Dupré, Schleiermacher's contemplation "is an ek-stasis, a complete surrender to a totality which transcends the self, although the self is part of it."⁹² Schleiermacher's hermeneutic understanding, for both Thiselton and Dupré, is thus closely related to his religious orientation which is basically one of belonging to a transcendental totality that is realized by a feeling of intimate relationship.

Opinion regarding Schleiermacher remains divided. The debate concerns his notion of understanding. Schleiermacher theorized the hermeneutic circle as a relationship of the inter-dependent part/whole into which the interpreter must make a "leap of faith". Only then can he/she hope to find the interaction of the grammatical (shared language) and the technical (unique language-use) so as to get "behind the text" and understand the style and uniqueness of the author by divination. Grondin says that this is more a process of guessing (*divinare*) and not necessarily psychologizing.⁹³ Others, like Thiselton and

⁹² Louis Dupré. "Toward a Revaluation of Schleiermacher's Philosophy and religion". *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. XLIV No. 2. 1984.

⁹³ Grondin. 1994: 71.

Dupré, see this as not simply psychologizing, but as a type of spiritual experience. Paul Ricoeur, however, will change the focus away from understanding as having anything to do with the mind of the author in either of these senses (which he regards as impossible), to that of understanding “the world of the text.”

Chapter II

Paul Ricoeur's Approach to Understanding in the Field of Hermeneutics

To understand is to generate a new event beginning from
the text in which the initial event has been objectified.⁹⁴

This chapter will present a very different view with regards to understanding than that which was held by Schleiermacher. Paul Ricoeur (1913 -) does not seek to understand the author, but the text. This he points out in his working definition of hermeneutics which he describes as "the theories of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts."⁹⁵ Thus, while Schleiermacher was interested in the author who wrote the text, Ricoeur places the importance of what needs to be understood as the subject of the text itself, the injunction of the text. He maintains that the focal point is the meaning of the text because it is "the direction which is opened up for thought".⁹⁶ This involves a process by which the world of the text can disclose its sense and thereby allow the reader to interact with it in a reciprocal mode.⁹⁷

In this chapter a brief outline of Ricoeur's life and his basic philosophy will help to understand his theories. He has been a prolific writer whose thoughts

⁹⁴ From Paul Ricoeur. *Interpretation Theory*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press. 1976: 75.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: 92.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*: 92.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: 93.

appear in many articles, books and lectures which, to some readers, seem at times to be repetitious. However, according to David Pellauer, it is a fact that "the shape of Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory has steadily developed within a larger area and the significance of the text, as central to that theory, is well established."⁹⁸ Therefore, it will be necessary to carefully tease out various basic concepts which not only underlie, but have helped to shape, his theory as it is today.

Paul Ricoeur was born in 1913 in Valence, France and received his education at a time when European thought was dominated by the ideas of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1969), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973). The existentialist Marcel was working in Paris when Ricoeur registered at the Sorbonne as a graduate student in the late 1930s. According to John B. Thompson, Marcel had a deep and lasting influence on Ricoeur's thought, "directing it towards the formulation of a concrete ontology which would be infused with the themes of freedom, finitude and hope".⁹⁹ However, Ricoeur believed that a pursuit of this goal demanded a more rigorous and systematic method than that which was employed by Marcel. He found it in the phenomenological writings of Edmund Husserl.

⁹⁸ David Pellauer. "The Significance of the Text in Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory." Charles E. Reagan, Ed. *Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. 1979: 98-99.

⁹⁹ Paul Ricoeur. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. John B. Thompson, Ed. and Trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995: 2.

Ricoeur became a prisoner of war early on in WW II and, while in Germany, he was allowed to read the works of Husserl, Heidegger and Jaspers. Following the war he taught at the University of Strasbourg (1946-1957). In 1947 Ricoeur published his study of *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers*. He also completed a translation of, and commentary upon, Husserl's *Ideen I* through which he established himself as a leading authority on phenomenology. In 1948 he was elected to a chair in the history of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg. According to Thompson, he committed himself to read, every year, the collected works of one great philosopher, from Plato and Aristotle to Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. Ricoeur's ambitions and his "highly original project on the *philosophy of the will* express this welter of influence on his thought", says Thompson.¹⁰⁰

In 1957 Ricoeur was appointed to a chair in general philosophy at the Sorbonne. There he encountered new forms of personal and textual analysis, mainly psychoanalysis and structuralism. Although he did not follow these trends, he could not ignore them either. Some of his major books are encounters with these challenges which, according to Thompson, are presented in a "direct and cogent manner" as, for instance in (1) his study of Sigmund Freud, and (2) on the methodology of structuralism.¹⁰¹ Ricoeur had

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*: 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*: 1 (Ricoeur's study of Freud, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1965). Denis Savage, Trans. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1974; and 2) on structuralism, *The Conflict of Interpretation: Essays in Hermeneutics* (1969). Don Ihde, Ed. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1974.

chosen to teach at Nanterre in 1966 and was consequently appointed Dean in 1969. He left there in 1970 but returned in 1973. At that time he combined his appointment with a part-time professorship to the chair at the University of Chicago which was formerly held by Paul Tillich.

Walter J. Lowe says that Ricoeur's is not a philosophy which lends itself to a "tidy summary". Ricoeur has often sought, in and through his various experiences, to locate an underlying human intention and act. His work is profoundly humanistic. In his criticism of others, he is less apt to see them as "wrong" but rather "one-sided".¹⁰² For instance, says David Klemm, Ricoeur's major attempt was to: "present a philosophical anthropology which would respond to the question 'what does it mean to be human?' and his theories on hermeneutics are only a part of this larger question."¹⁰³ It is for many scholars a too ambitious enterprise, but Klemm points out that, out of this necessity, Ricoeur follows in fact two lines of thought. The first is a continuation of the epistemological field as it was defined by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), but without their respective references to psychological transpositions. Rather, he builds his program on a "sustained reflection on the nature and function of language".¹⁰⁴ And the second is the thought which "runs from Kant through

¹⁰² Walter J. Lowe. "Introduction". Ricoeur. *Fallible Man*. Charles A. Kelbley, Trans. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1986: vii-ix.

¹⁰³ David Klemm. *The Hermeneutical Theories of Paul Ricoeur: A Constructive Analysis*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press. 1983: 26.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Fichte and Heidegger and which has a primary concern with the being of the self as revelatory of being as such.”¹⁰⁵ Klemm points out how Ricoeur connects these two lines in his thought:

His interpretation theory was engendered out of conviction that in a significant sense man is language and that, since writing is the full development of language, laying out the principles of textual meaning may uncover something that points to the being of man and ultimately to being itself.¹⁰⁶

This second line of thought can be found in his contributions to philosophical anthropology and ontology. His indebtedness to Martin Heidegger, in particular, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

During the time that he held two appointments and developed his work in both France and America, Ricoeur also assumed directorship of the *Centre d'études phénoménologiques et herméneutiques* in Paris and, as Thompson says, it was during this period that Ricoeur became more deeply preoccupied with problems of language and entered more exclusively into dialogue with hermeneutics.¹⁰⁷ The particular theories which took shape within this period will be the central issues of this chapter.

As Klemm points out, Ricoeur agrees with Heidegger, for the most part, on the ontological turn which the latter discusses in *Being and Time*.¹⁰⁸ However, Ricoeur does not totally accept his ideas. Instead, Ricoeur decides

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: 36.

¹⁰⁷ Ricoeur. 1995: 3-4.

¹⁰⁸ Klemm. 1983: 27. (Quoting Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*, 12th ed. 1972.)

to return to the task, begun by Schleiermacher and Dilthey,¹⁰⁹ to work out the epistemological-methodological part of hermeneutic theory. This part is neglected by Heidegger, but it is important to Ricoeur. He wants to find a theory which will point out how textual understanding is possible and how methods of interpretation can be described from basic principles. It is his wish to present an "*organon* for exegesis"; a "foundation for the historical sciences"; and a "basis for arbitration between rival interpretations".¹¹⁰

The reasons which Ricoeur gives for the approaches mentioned above are outlined in *The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflections*¹¹¹ and which are, as Klemm points out, reminiscent of, and almost *verbatim* quotes made earlier by Schleiermacher:

There does not exist a general hermeneutics, that is a general theory of interpretation, a general canon for exegesis; there are only various separate and contrasting theories.¹¹²

It is thus obvious that in the time between Schleiermacher and Ricoeur the basic aim of a "general hermeneutics" had not been accomplished. Whether it ever will be is an open question, because with each new generation of scholars the focal point shifts with respect to "what constitutes a basis for understanding". Ricoeur follows the line of thought represented by Schleiermacher and Dilthey because, like these predecessors, he is concerned

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* [F. D. E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911)].

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Paul Ricoeur. "Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflections." *Conflict of Interpretation: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1974.

¹¹² Klemm. 1983: 25. Ft. 45. (Quote from Paul Ricoeur. *Conflict of Interpretation*. 1974:317.)

with the development of a general theory of interpretation based on a description of the process of ordinary understanding but with the special applicability to the interpretation of texts."¹¹³

Thus, according to Klemm, while Heidegger turns hermeneutics into an ontology of understanding, Ricoeur takes a "long route in hermeneutics through semantics and the theory of the text."¹¹⁴ Ricoeur hopes, says Klemm, that, in the end, he will "contribute to Heidegger's ontological project by carrying a methodological discussion successively, by stages, to its ontological conclusion."¹¹⁵ Ricoeur sees his work placed within the goals established by Heidegger but wants to "think forward"¹¹⁶ the epistemological-methodological project of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Therefore, Ricoeur says in *Existence and Hermeneutics*: "It is the desire for this ontology which animates our enterprise [to be] touched [and] inspired by an ontology of understanding."¹¹⁷

A total contrast to this "understanding" can be found in pre-modern times in which "knowing" was the focal point. As Peter L. Berger points out: previous to modern times, "Human existence is essentially and inevitably externalizing activity [and] in the course of externalization men pour out meaning into reality. " In their never-ending building of a humanly meaning-

¹¹³ *Ibid.*: 25.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 27.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 28.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* (In the sense of bringing forward.)

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* Ricoeur. "Existence and Hermeneutics". *Conflict of Interpretation*. 1974: 6-7.

ful world, no understanding is sought because the objectification of this “*cosmization*”¹¹⁸ implies, according to Berger, identification with this humanly meaningful world. Klemm refers to this “world-ordering” as an ongoing human activity, a process, a structure of “reenactment and participation” in which “understanding” is a “social practice” of myth, symbol and ritual. No “self” needs to “understand” an “other”; no chasm exists between the self and reality.¹¹⁹

Klemm mentions further that it is through hermeneutics by which this unthematized dimension is brought to light in modern systems of analysis. He says that, “Hermeneutical theory is a child of modernity [and] Schleiermacher’s theory of understanding [falls] within the context of the demands of modern thought in contrast to pre-critical thought (pre-modern thought).”¹²⁰ The modern paradigm breaks away from the pre-modern and requests a fully autonomous critical consciousness. Klemm mentions that, with this turn, the human being becomes a “mere reed” in an infinite universe, though at least “a *thinking reed*” (after Pascal), which can become aware of its finitude.¹²¹

Since Kant brought forth his fundamental point namely, “that human reason is limited and finite”, it is generally accepted that “now finitude per-

¹¹⁸ Peter Berger. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Doubleday. 1990: 26-27. He apparently coined that word.

¹¹⁹ Klemm. 1986: 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*: 3-4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*: 15.

vades our [human] being, although we are tempted to transgress it". Thus, as Klemm points out, there arose the necessity to question the possibility of knowledge about, [and understanding of] realities that "transcend human experience".¹²² In time, however, a post-modernist stance eventually developed out of the disillusionment with the modern ideals of Kant's rationalist critique and the Romanticist endeavors of Schleiermacher and Dilthey.

Ricoeur is regarded by Klemm as postmodern. This is because his self-reflexive form of hermeneutics allows that there is only and always a mediated understanding. Both Schleiermacher and Ricoeur place the "mediation" within the medium of language, one way or another. But, while Schleiermacher uses the psychological method to create the hermeneutical circle between all of language and that part of it which is used by the author, Ricoeur uses language itself to bring the understanding of meaning from unmediated intuition to mediated text. According to Klemm, "the hermeneutical process is a linguistic one, and the direct object of attention for hermeneutical philosophy is language."¹²³ But even though the content of our understanding is based on the comprehension of the meaning of linguistic signs, the ultimate basis for Ricoeur is in being, the true ontology of understanding. This movement from the epistemology of Schleiermacher and

¹²² *Ibid.*: 17.

¹²³ Klemm. 1983: 12.

Dilthey towards the fundamental ontology of Heidegger can be called, according to Klemm, a “second Copernican reversal”.¹²⁴

For Ricoeur, the language of the text incorporates meaning as the “world of the text”. And that world of the text, as mediated through language, is the “opening up” for further dialectics between the context (horizon) of the text and the context (horizon) of the reader. It also is the basis of an arch between the *Erklaren* (explication, expression) of the objective sense of the text and the *Verstehen* (understanding) or personal appropriation which occurs in the reading of a text. Understanding and explanation are no longer opposites as they were in Dilthey’s theory and thus constitute a dichotomy according to Ricoeur.¹²⁵ Rather, says Ricoeur, explanation leads to understanding, and understanding, in turn, enhances further explanation. This is his version of the hermeneutic circle which operates more in the manner of a hermeneutic spiral. Ricoeur views this “dialectic of explanation and understanding” as central and explains it as follows:

With the dialectic of explanation and understanding, I hope to provide my interpretation theory with an analysis of writing...To the extent that the act of reading is the counterpart to the act of writing, the dialectic of event and meaning generates a correlative dialectic in reading between understanding (*verstehen*) and explanation (*erklaren*). A dialectical structure of reading therefore corresponds to the dialectical structure of discourse.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Klemm. 1986: 27. It plays on Kant’s *Copernican Revolution*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*: 230. He quotes from Paul Ricoeur. “What is a Text?”. *Explanation and Interpretation* (1970). See also Ricoeur 1976: 72 (Ricoeur shows the contrast of natural vs. Human science).

¹²⁶ Ricoeur. 1976: 71.

Ricoeur maintains that, since “understanding and explanation tend to overlap and to pass into each other” there need no longer be an “inchoative polarity” between these two as there was in Romantic hermeneutics. In his point of view, however, these are but two phases of a unique process which first moves from understanding to explaining and then moves from explaining to comprehension. This second part, comprehension, is a more sophisticated mode of understanding which is both supported and expanded by explanatory procedures. In the beginning, understanding is a “guess” and only at the later stage, after explanatory and critical evaluation, can it be called “comprehension”, or “comprehensive understanding”.¹²⁷

To make this point clear, Ricoeur outlines the central process of an hermeneutic circle of explanation and understanding. Instead of positing them as two opposites in the way Dilthey did, Ricoeur points to a three-fold movement which becomes the basis of his interpretation theory and constitutes the hermeneutic circle. Then, in a further dialectical movement, he opens the “circle” into a “spiral”. In his words, “as phases of a unique process,...this dialectic [is] first a move from understanding to explaining and then...a move from explaining to comprehension.”¹²⁸ Thus, in the first movement, one “grasps” the meaning of the text as a whole in a first, simple understanding which he calls the first *naïveté*.

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 74.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Ricoeur sees the second movement of explanation as involving “distanciation and critical evaluation”. Both are linked to the full objectivization of the “meaning” of the text. For instance, through distanciation, understanding takes place in a “non-psychological and properly semantic space” which is centered on the text rather than on “the mental intentions and subjective meanings of the author”.¹²⁹ However, this critical evaluation cannot be based on absolutely verifiable truths. Rather, as Ricoeur says, it depends on the logic of “probability” in which validation by way of argument is the measure of assessment, rather than empirical verification. This means that the explanation of meaning, which occurs in the second movement, has more of a personal resonance than it has definite logical proof. However, the “truth” of the text now rests no longer with the author but “in the text in and of itself”.¹³⁰ Ricoeur maintains that the second, more sophisticated, understanding can only be supported by explanatory procedures whereas the initial understanding or “guess” (even a “good guess”) must be substantiated by critical evaluation and argument.

This self-reflexive form of understanding then leads to the third movement which is, according to Ricoeur, not only an understanding, but a sophisticated mode of comprehension which he calls a second *naïveté*. He compares this to the first *naïveté* and its mode of understanding which is a

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*: 76-78.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*: 74.

"guess", because "the author's intention is out of our reach". Ricoeur thus distances himself here from the *Romanticists* and from any attempt to "understand the author better than he himself".¹³¹ According to Ricoeur, interpretation is not a matter of finding the psychic space of the author but rather, "understanding takes place when the dialectic of explanation and understanding begins." In this way, explanation and understanding are no longer contradictory but, he suggests, they belong to a unique hermeneutical arc which integrates them within the overall conception of reading."¹³² Further, Ricoeur maintains that this is the real recovery of meaning.¹³³ Thus, from the integrating arc comes about a circle, or spiral, when explanation leads to further understanding and this, in turn, can stimulate the reader to inquire more and thus encourages further explanation.

The second *naïveté*, as the final part of the process of interpretation, culminates in the "act of appropriation", by which Ricoeur means, "making it [the meaning of the text] one's own".¹³⁴ Ricoeur maintains that this making the "world of the text one's own" is possible only because there is nothing "hidden" behind it. Rather, the text opens up, in front of itself, a "proposition of a mode of being in the world".¹³⁵ Thus, interpretation discloses

¹³¹ *Ibid.*: 75.

¹³² Ricoeur. 1995: 15.

¹³³ *Ibid.*: 64.

¹³⁴ Ricoeur. 1976: 91-93.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*: 94.

new modes of being to be understood and to “generate new events, beginning from the text”.¹³⁶ This is the ultimate grounding of the text.

It will be helpful to take these three movements and examine each of them in more detail in order to appreciate Ricoeur’s method of understanding texts. The first movement concerns itself with “merely” grasping the meaning of a text. Klemm says that for Ricoeur, “the initial moment in reading a text is defined by understanding”.¹³⁷ Although it is at a naive level because we only “guess” at the meaning, the interplay of explanation and understanding begins here. Klemm suggests further that the “initial impression can be tested, corrected and deepened by recourse to the objective structure of the text.”¹³⁸ He quotes Ricoeur who maintains that “understanding is the non-methodical moment which, in the sciences of interpretation, comes together with the methodical moment of explanation. Understanding precedes, accompanies, closes, and thus envelops explanation.”¹³⁹ At the same time, explanation develops understanding analytically. There is, according to Ricoeur, a highly mediated dialectic between understanding and explanation. It is, says Ricoeur, the interaction between two forms of knowing: subjective and objective. Explanation, however, cannot remain solely at the theoretical

¹³⁶ Ibid.: 73. Used as quotation on p. 32 of this thesis.

¹³⁷ Klemm. 1983: 91.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

level. Ricoeur states that if it is "isolated from this concrete process, it is a mere abstraction, an artifact of methodology."¹⁴⁰

Ricoeur maintains that, since we can no longer return to any alleged intentions, or to the situation of the author, the only recourse we have is a guess. However, there are no rules for making "good guesses". According to E. D. Hirsch, "the act of understanding is at first a genial (or mistaken) guess and there are no methods for making them; no rules for generating insights. The methodological activity of the interpreter commences when we begin to test and criticize our guess."¹⁴¹ Ricoeur explains that, in his opinion, guessing corresponds to Schleiermacher's psychological mode, and validation to what the latter called the grammatical aspect. Thus, a guess is for Ricoeur the subjective aspect, and validation, the objective method of interpretation. He compares the text to a work of art and says that a work of discourse is more than a "linear sequence of sentences". It is a "holistic process".¹⁴² Ricoeur also believes that the text has a kind of *plurovocity*¹⁴³ which opens it to a plurality of constructions [of meanings] and understandings.

Thus, Ricoeur sees the text as a whole which may be viewed, like an object, from different sides. It depends which sentence is considered the "cornerstone of the text", says Ricoeur. This means that reading, as well as

¹⁴⁰ Ricoeur. 1976: 73.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 77. Ft.2. (A quote by E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1967:203.)

¹⁴² *Ibid.*: 76.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*: An explanation of the "surplus of meaning" a word can have, depending on the meaning of the sentence, can be found in Ricoeur (1976).

understanding, always implies some kind of “one-sidedness” which, however, “grounds the guess character of interpretation”, according to Ricoeur.¹⁴⁴ But such a step is in need of further refinement. This objective phase is also often referred to as the “hermeneutics of suspicion”, and involves the “distanciation and critical evaluation” of a text. When Ricoeur says that the procedures for validation of this phase are closer to the logic of probability than to empirical verification he means that “an interpretation is more probable in the light of what we know...[rather than] showing that a conclusion is true.” For Ricoeur, hermeneutic is thus an “argumentative discipline..., a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability.”¹⁴⁵

Ricoeur holds that it is the “balance between the genius of guessing and the scientific character of validation” which constitutes the dialectic between “understanding and explanation”. He further maintains that, since guess and validation are circularly related as “subjective” and “objective” approaches to the text, we are now able to “give an acceptable meaning of the concept of the hermeneutical circle.”¹⁴⁶ According to Ricoeur, both of the above mentioned approaches to a text are needed to understand its meaning. (This is in contrast to the romantic version, often attributed to Schleiermacher, where only the subjective mode is of importance).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.: 78.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.: 79.

Ricoeur also points out that, in ordinary language, words have more than one meaning. These can only be grasped by the semantics of a sentence because their meaning is related to the nexus of sentences which, in turn, belongs only to particular contexts.¹⁴⁷ These contexts become the basis for understanding on a deeper level within the framework of the hermeneutical circle. As the reader of a text engages in this process he or she, after critical reflection, can choose to make the world of the text his or her own.

Ricoeur points to an important shift in the theory of hermeneutics with regards to what is considered as the "theory of fixation of life-expressions by writing". He suggests that the "inner connection", which gives a document its capacity to be understood by another person, is something "similar to the ideality that Frege and Husserl recognized as the meaning of a proposition". Ricoeur says that, "if the comparison holds, then the act of understanding (*verstehen*) is less *historisch* and more *logisch* than Dilthey (1900) had claimed it was."¹⁴⁸ Ricoeur is in agreement with this "anti-historicist trend" because, he says, it is the "implicit presupposition of the 'explanatory' procedures". This is illustrated in the dialectic between explanation and understanding or comprehension where the text is objectified and dehistoricized and becomes the "necessary mediator between writer and reader".¹⁴⁹ Ricoeur refers to the final mode of understanding, appropriation as

¹⁴⁷ Ricoeur. 1995: 12.

¹⁴⁸ Ricoeur. 1976: 90-91.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.: 91.

an “existential concept”. To “make one’s own” what was previously “foreign” remains to him the “ultimate aim of all hermeneutics”.¹⁵⁰ In this way Ricoeur refines and links the connection (*Zusammenhang*) of the epistemological-methodological theory of Schleiermacher and the ontology of Heidegger.

Ricoeur, however, makes it very clear that what is understood and thus appropriated is the meaning of a text. There is no connection to the Romanticist theories which promote the intention of the author, supposedly hidden behind the text; nor to the actual historical situation, or *Zeitgeist*, of the author. These meanings must be taken into consideration but they are not determinative. For Ricoeur, the most important factor is the meaning of the text itself, which is conceived in a dynamic way. This establishes the direction of thought which is opened up by the text. It is the resultant meaning that is appropriated so as to disclose a new mode of being-in-the-world. For Ricoeur, this testifies to the power of the disclosure of the text and it is far removed from the Romanticist ideal of “coinciding with a foreign psyche”. Such an approach, involving a possible new way of looking at things, by following the direction which the text is pointing towards, indicates, according to Ricoeur, “the genuine referential power of the text”.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 92.

Ricoeur states that this link between meaning and appropriation is not only the cornerstone of a hermeneutic which can overcome the shortcomings of historicism but can “remain faithful to the original intention of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics.”¹⁵² And he continues by saying that, “the process of distancing, of atemporalization, to which I connected the phase of explanation, is the fundamental presupposition for this enlarging the horizon of the text.”¹⁵³ Rather than projecting the *a priori* of one’s own self-understanding onto the text, interpretation allows the process of new modes of being which give to the reader new ways of understanding him- or herself. Thus, appropriation does not constitute an act of possession but rather implies a moment of “dispossession, towards a greater self-understanding”. Since understanding comes out of the text and its “universal power of world-disclosure” it ultimately gives a “critical/reflective self” to the formerly “imperialistic/narcissistic ego” which Ricoeur claims precedes it. It is the text, which has inherent this “power of disclosure and which, as it opens before the reader, gives a self to the ego”, says Ricoeur.¹⁵⁴ The emphasis has changed from identifying with the writer of a text, to understanding more of oneself by means of an openness to, yet critical evaluation of, the meaning of a text.

¹⁵² Ibid.: 93.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.: 95.

Chapter III

Ricoeur's Debts and Responses to some of his Predecessors: Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger

According to Michael Philibert,¹⁵⁵ the reason for philosophical thinking in the Western world can be found in three sources and one of them is the work of previous philosophers. He mentions Ricoeur's philosophical approach and points out how the latter keeps a "delicate balance in the interpretation of present situations both in light of the philosophical tradition, and in the re-interpretation [of the latter] as he views it in the current situation."¹⁵⁶ Thus, Philibert points out that, while Ricoeur pays attention to past philosophers, he is, at the same time, designing new and original approaches to contemporary problems. By keeping all of these in a balanced perspective he allows them to re-enforce rather than inhibit one another. Philibert says that Ricoeur uses the studies of his predecessors in two ways namely, either to have a better understanding of the philosophical theory under consideration and thus to take a better hold [of this philosophy], or to advance the issue in new ways. As he uses both of the above, he shows that he is a good listener as well as a creative thinker.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Michel Philibert. "The Philosophic Method of Paul Ricoeur." Charles E. Reagan, Ed. *Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. 1979: 134-39.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.: 134.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

This is in accordance with Jean Grondin's statement in which he says that, "for hermeneutics there can never be a new beginning", which would effectively mean that there are only creative [different] points of view from which one can unfold one's interpretation of a text at hand.¹⁵⁸ Besides, as Philibert suggests, Ricoeur's explications may help to understand further how he unites his attention to others with his own creative thinking. This makes him "a true champion in creative attention," so much so, that one anticipates always some new insight.¹⁵⁹ This innovative kind of thinking, Philibert says, is deeply grounded in listening. Therefore, Ricoeur must be well anchored in the ways and means of being an "autonomous and responsible thinker". Such a trait, Philibert suggests, shows that Ricoeur is not only involved in reforms of his own thinking but that his thoughts are always taking place "within the bounds of plain reason".¹⁶⁰

The scope of this Chapter does not allow the discussion of either the great number of preceding philosophers or the variety of subjects arising out of their many works upon which Ricoeur will build his own theories. Only three scholars will be identified and how their theories influenced Ricoeur's thoughts and his responses to them namely, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger. Beginning, in chronological order, there is Friedrich Schleiermacher, who is called by some "the father of

¹⁵⁸ Jean Grondin. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1991:91.

¹⁵⁹ Philibert. 1979:136.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 139.

hermeneutics". Some of his major theories which are of particular importance in this context here,¹⁶¹ are: (1) the need for a "general hermeneutics" which can be applied to all texts, regardless of their nature; (2) that such a hermeneutics involves two axes: (a) the grammatical aspect (philology) and (b) the technical, which was later referred to as the psychological, aspect because it pertains to the individual expression of the writer; and (3) the importance which Schleiermacher placed on "understanding the author". Grondin says that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is still based on the traditionally held theory that understanding follows from interpretation [and is thus founded on the author's intention].¹⁶²

Schleiermacher's intent to create a "general hermeneutics" was based on the diversity as well as some contradictions which he found between the various disciplines of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the scholars representing them. For instance, Van A. Harvey mentions that modern hermeneutics originated in the attempt to solve problems which concerned the interpretation of texts and he points to Schleiermacher as the major figure who consolidated existing theories and who argued that all texts have a basic parameter for interpretative procedures.¹⁶³ In Schleiermacher's opinion, it is the nature of language which is the means for understanding a writing.

¹⁶¹ For more details, see this thesis, Chapter One.

¹⁶² Grondin, 1991: 95.

¹⁶³ Van A. Harvey. "Hermeneutics". *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Mircea Eliade, Ed. in Chief. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Vol. 6. 1987: 279-87.

and which must, therefore, be common to all texts. He argued that scriptures do not require a special type of interpretation once the underlying structure could be observed. According to Philibert, this basic sentiment is shared by Ricoeur who is not only aware of Schleiermacher's theories but, as he responds to them, modifies them in the light of subsequent developments. In many regards, Ricoeur grounds his own hermeneutical theories on similar foundations of epistemology, albeit from a different point of view.¹⁶⁴

Although Ricoeur appreciates Schleiermacher's epistemological approach, he does not agree with the latter's specific theories. However, Ricoeur concedes that, "it is the discernment of a central and unitary problematic which is Schleiermacher's achievement."¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, Ricoeur acknowledges Schleiermacher's attempt to raise exegesis and philology to the level of an independent "art" (*Kunstlehre*) which is not restricted to a mere collection of "unconnected operations".¹⁶⁶ With this, says Ricoeur, an inversion of the general problematic occurs which he sees as "fully comparable to that which Kantian philosophy had effected elsewhere."¹⁶⁷ Yet, Ricoeur adds, it is easy to see how, "in a Kantian climate", one would have formed such a project of relating the rules of interpretation not to the

¹⁶⁴ See this thesis, Chapter Two.

¹⁶⁵ Ricoeur. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. John B. Thompson, Ed. and Trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995: 45.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

diversity and the probability of texts, "...but to a central operation which unifies the diverse aspects of interpretation."¹⁶⁸

According to Ricoeur, in the Kantian influenced Romantic climate of Schleiermacher's time, one finds, as the most fundamental conviction, the idea that "mind is the creative unconscious at work in gifted individuals."¹⁶⁹ This point of view Ricoeur will not share. (Rather, he will shift the emphasis from "mind" to the ontology of *Dasein* which he finds in Heidegger's thoughts). Ricoeur sees Schleiermacher's hermeneutical program as involved in what he calls, "a double filiation" and says that: (a) it is "Romantic by its appeal to a living relation with the process of creation; but (b) it is [also] critical by its wish to elaborate the universally valid rules of understanding."¹⁷⁰

As a result, according to Ricoeur, Schleiermacher left his hermeneutical program with an *aporia*, with two distinct forms of interpretation, which are the grammatical and the technical (psychological) axes which comprise his hermeneutic circle. But, Ricoeur maintains, the grammatical, which is based on the common discourse of a culture, and the technical interpretation, which is based on the individuality of the author's appropriation of that culture, can never be practiced at the same time. He says that Schleiermacher himself makes this clear when he says that, "to consider the

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 45-46.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: 46.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 46.

common language is to forget the writer; ...to understand an individual author is to forget his language."¹⁷¹ Thus, Ricoeur suggests that, "not only does one form of interpretation exclude the other, but each demands distinct talents [which create] an excess. In the first case, this gives rise to pedantry, [while] an excess of the second gives rise to nebulosity."¹⁷²

Ricoeur points out that even then, psychological interpretation¹⁷³ can never be restricted to identification with the author. Rather, it implies "critical motifs in the activity of *comparaison* because an individuality can only be grasped by comparison and contrast."¹⁷⁴ This more complex understanding of hermeneutics, according to Ricoeur, also includes technical and discursive elements. Ricoeur argues that the inherent obstacles of Schleiermacher's program can only be overcome "...by shifting the emphasis...towards the sense and reference of the work itself."¹⁷⁵ Therefore, Ricoeur does not accept the two theoretical axes of Schleiermacher as a dialectic of an hermeneutic circle but as an *aporia* which Ricoeur himself attempts to overcome. He does, however, maintain the idea of the hermeneutic circle after he re-works it according to his own definitions.

Ricoeur also suggests that, "as we are in every way children of criticism; we seek to go beyond criticism by means of criticism; [but] by a criticism

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: 47.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Psychological replaced 'technical' interpretation.

¹⁷⁴ Ricoeur. 1995: 47.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

that is no longer reductive but restorative.”¹⁷⁶ And while it was Schleiermacher’s intention to mediate by knowing the psychic space of the author, Ricoeur aims at a mediated immediacy of meaning through his conviction that “by interpretation...we can hear again.”¹⁷⁷ He attempts to de-psychologize Schleiermacher’s Romantic hermeneutics insofar as we do not need to “hear an author” but to become able to “hear” what the text proclaims. In this way, he wants to overcome what he perceives as “the extreme perplexity on the part of the founder of modern hermeneutics.”¹⁷⁸

Therefore, Ricoeur grounds his hermeneutic circle in the language of the text itself. One of the forms of dialectic he introduces is that between sense and reference. Both belong to the objective side of discourse. According to Ricoeur, this involves an understanding of the meaning of a discourse in terms of the “what”, which is its sense, and the “about what”, which is its reference. Ricoeur says that this distinction was introduced into modern philosophy by Gottlob Frege.¹⁷⁹ According to Ricoeur, this dialectic of sense and reference says something about the relation of language (sense) and the ontological condition of being-in-the-world (reference), which are the two

¹⁷⁶ Klemm. 1983: 20. Ft. 7. (from Ricoeur. *Symbolism of Evil*. 1967:14)

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*: Ft. 9 (Ricoeur. SE. 1967: 349).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* (Klemm suggests to read Dilthey. *Aufbau*. 1927: 277).

¹⁷⁹ Ricoeur. 1976: 19. Ft. 6.(G. Frege. “On Sense and Reference”, trans. Max Black. *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1970: 56-78).

approaches he wants to connect. Ricoeur thus expands on the idea of Frege when he says that, ultimately, we are not satisfied by the sense alone, but we presuppose an ontological reference.¹⁸⁰

It is an important contribution when Ricoeur asks, "If language were not fundamentally referential, would or could it be meaningful?" Here he brings together the experience of being-in-the-world and language. Ricoeur posits that from the understanding of the ontological condition, there will result an expression in speech.¹⁸¹ In this way, Ricoeur attempts to free the psychologizing conception of hermeneutics as it was inherited from Schleiermacher and place it into the "dialectic of event and meaning in discourse and dialectic of sense and reference in meaning itself."¹⁸² Ricoeur concludes by arguing that, since these dialectical polarities are inherent in every discourse, there is no need for positing the psyche of an individual author in order to understand a text. While one needs to appreciate the context in which a text was written, so as to appreciate its intentionality, there is no need to identify with the author.

According to Klemm, the hermeneutic implication of Ricoeur's position can now be seen more clearly. Ricoeur attempts to stay a middle course between a purely objective structuralist and the subjective Romanticist approach

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.: 21. See especially Ft..8.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.: 23.

though he still, at times, borrows aspects from both.¹⁸³ For instance, Ricoeur undercuts the assumptions of the psychological hermeneutics which neglect the meaning or referential side of the event-making dialectic as is shown above. Yet, According to Klemm, there still remains the problem of how understanding moves from sense to reference. This will involve another development.

Ricoeur perceives the contributions which Wilhelm Dilthey made as a continuation of the project which was initiated by Schleiermacher. But, according to Ricoeur, Dilthey's major contribution was basically an attempt to "reform his predecessor's epistemology". Ricoeur says, however, that Dilthey's developments did not move the process of understanding towards a new approach, "on the side of ontology" but remained with certain limitations.¹⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Ricoeur credits Dilthey with the perception of the magnitude of the problem inherent in the *aporia* of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. But, at the same time, says Ricoeur, with the work of Dilthey begins another, even greater, opposition - namely that between explanation and understanding which, as Ricoeur points out, has profound consequences for hermeneutics. This is because, Ricoeur maintains, understanding still remains linked to the "sphere of psychological intuition".¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Klemm. 1983: 79.

¹⁸⁴ Ricoeur. 1995: 48.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.: 49

Understanding, as the mode posited by Dilthey appropriate to the human sciences, then is in conflict with his attempt to ground explanation in the natural sciences. Thus, Ricoeur suggests, Dilthey's search for the distinctive feature of understanding ends in yet another *aporia*, e.g., his attempt to endow the human sciences with a methodology and an epistemology which would make them equally respectable to those of the natural sciences. Dilthey poses not only the question, "how is historical knowledge possible"? but asks more fundamentally, "how are the human sciences possible"?¹⁸⁶

According to Ricoeur, with regard to the concept of understanding, Dilthey is still focused in the neo-Kantian spirit of his time which conceived that "man, no matter how alien, can be known by man" because he is not alien in the sense of an "unknowable thing". He thus confines understanding of texts to the "law of understanding another person who expresses himself therein".¹⁸⁷ With this, says Ricoeur, Dilthey, even more so than Schleiermacher, brings the central *aporia* of a hermeneutics to light which is between what a text says and who says it. For Dilthey, the hermeneutics of a text is constantly "shifted away from its sense and its reference". Ricoeur wants to unfold the text no longer towards its author or his/her language but towards its immanent sense and the world which opens up and discloses itself.¹⁸⁸ This, says Ricoeur, cannot happen within the binary epistemology

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.: 52.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.: 53.

which was set up by Schleiermacher and later continued by Dilthey. It becomes, therefore, important for Ricoeur to deal with the *aporia* between understanding and explanation. This becomes the central theory of his own hermeneutics in the circular, or spiral process of: (1) guess as preliminary understanding (or first naïveté); (2) distanciation (explanation); and (3) appropriation (informed understanding and second naïveté).¹⁸⁹

Ricoeur was also influenced by the work of Martin Heidegger. The contributions of Heidegger (1889-1976) consist in an attempt to “dig beneath the epistemological enterprise itself, in order to uncover its properly ontological conditions.”¹⁹⁰ Like Dilthey, Heidegger wanted a method that would disclose life in terms of itself and, as he says, the phenomenology of Husserl had opened up the realm of the pre-conceptual apprehending of phenomena.¹⁹¹ In this “realm”, Heidegger saw the “vital medium” of a human being’s historical *being-in-the-world* or *Dasein*. For Heidegger this *being* discloses itself in “lived experience” and thus escapes the “conceptualizing, spatializing, and atemporal categories of idea-centered thinking.”¹⁹² Heidegger developed a form of hermeneutical phenomenology which was different from his predecessors because it was not based on a factual “laying-open of consciousness”. Instead, it became a means of “disclosing being, in all its

¹⁸⁹ See Chapter Two in this thesis for details.

¹⁹⁰ Ricoeur. 1995: 53..

¹⁹¹ Richard E. Palmer. *Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1969:124.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*:125. See also p. 127; according to Heidegger: “that which shows itself, the manifested revealed... [which] can become visible; can be brought to light, identified by the Greeks with *das Seiende*, what is.”

facticity and historicity.”¹⁹³ In effect, says Palmer, hermeneutics is still the theory of understanding, but “understanding is now differently (ontologically) defined”.¹⁹⁴ It is the shift from the epistemology to the ontology of understanding which introduces a totally different focal point for interpretation.

Ricoeur sees the shift of this movement as equally momentous as that in Schleiermacher from regional to general hermeneutics. In particular, Heidegger provides Ricoeur with a basis for the latter’s attempt to ground the epistemological structure in an ontological view of understanding which Ricoeur finds in Heidegger’s ontological view of *Dasein*; of the being-there that we are. In this basic notion of *Dasein* there is, as part of its structure of being, an ontological pre-understanding of being. Ricoeur says that its foundation unfolds through the process of clarification of this pre-understanding (*Vorverstehen*) which is not bound by rules.¹⁹⁵

Ricoeur carefully observes the ontology of *Dasein* in which one first must find oneself and then orient oneself within being by feeling. He suggests that this is not simply a phenomenon of “articulation and discourse”. He grants that Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, has outlined by means of carefully designed “revelatory experiences” a link to a more fundamental reality than that of subject-object relation. This is the unitary foundation upon which

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*: 127.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 130.

¹⁹⁵ Ricoeur. 1995: 54.

Ricoeur builds his theory of understanding and which, in time, will include language.¹⁹⁶

Ricoeur says that it is the philosophical task of “ontological foundation” to seek to unfold the fundamental concepts which determine the *prior* understanding of the [any] region.¹⁹⁷ And, as Heidegger suggests, philosophical hermeneutics will be the “explication of beings with regard to their primal state of being.”¹⁹⁸ In contrast to Schleiermacher and Dilthey, who sought understanding of another person, Ricoeur points out that Heidegger severs communication with others as a basis for understanding completely, and replaces it with understanding in a primordial sense which is rooted in one’s situation. This is, according to Heidegger, the “fundamental understanding of one’s position within being.”¹⁹⁹

Ricoeur says that this shift of the “philosophical locus” is just “as important” as the movement from the “problem of method towards the problem of being.”²⁰⁰ Ricoeur suggests that, by making understanding worldly, Heidegger de-psychologizes it. Ricoeur refers here to the way in which being-in-the-world (*Dasein*), replaces the other (author). He also takes an explicit stand against some interpreters of Heidegger who stress the idea of a being-towards-death, which Ricoeur calls “complete misunder-

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*: 56

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: 54

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: 55. Ft. 9.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*: 56

standings".²⁰¹ For instance, Marjorie Grene reached the conclusion that, for Heidegger, "authenticity meant the discovery of the ontological possibility of death."²⁰² But Ricoeur suggests that it is not "sufficiently recognized that Heidegger meant these analyses as part of a meditation on the worldliness of the world" which seeks essentially to "shatter the pretensions of the knowing subject which sets itself up as the measure of objectivity."²⁰³ Such attempts at self-sufficiency Heidegger calls "inauthentic". Thus, Ricoeur supports the "unity" of *Dasein* against the type of subject-object split which he had found in the hermeneutics of his predecessors. Instead of a duality, what now emerges, according to Ricoeur, is the triad of (1) pre-understanding; (2) understanding; (3) interpretation. He points to the fact that, before there is a text, there is a pre-understanding which seeks to express itself. This is not a theory of knowledge but a foundation [of understanding] from which interpretation can rise. From this pre-understanding, which comes before knowledge, and which arises from a fundamental ontology, can result an anticipatory structure of understanding and knowledge. Ricoeur points here to Heidegger's position that, what is decisive is "not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Marjorie Grene. "Heidegger, Martin". *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Paul Edwards, Ed. in Chief. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & the Free Press. Vol. 3. 1965: 454-65.

²⁰³ Ricoeur. 1995: 56.

way,"²⁰⁴ by which he means that there needs to be an awareness and acknowledgment of the presuppositions that precede and inform understanding and further knowing.

Grondin explains this and says that, in this fore-structure the "fore" implies an appreciation of a predisposition toward meaning, if not language itself, which means that, "human *Dasein* is characterized by an interpretative tendency special to it [which] comes be-fore any statement."²⁰⁵ It is based on Heidegger's theory that understanding is less a kind of "knowledge" than that it is a subjective "knowing" as, for instance, "knowing one's way around (*Sichauskennen*)."²⁰⁶ Grondin says that, Heidegger looks at the scientist's epistemological understanding as a sub-species of such mastery. Thus, to understand a subject in a theoretical manner means, in fact, to be able to cope with it so that one can proceed from there.²⁰⁷ But, for Heidegger, this does not constitute understanding.

Grondin suggests that, in Dilthey, understanding rose to the status of an autonomous process of knowledge that "served to ground the historical sciences of man and explain their methodological uniqueness."²⁰⁸ Heidegger, however, considers such epistemological understanding to be secondary and derivative from a still more fundamental hermeneutical understanding. He

²⁰⁴ *Ibid* : 58. (See also Ft. 9).

²⁰⁵ Grondin. 1991: 93.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*.: 94.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*.: 93.

points to an understanding which is “more like readiness or facility than knowledge.”²⁰⁹ Because, says Heidegger, everyday understanding is so implicit, as a mode of being, it is not even thematized. Therefore, everything one does in one’s life-world is already pre-interpreted by this anticipatory understanding which is its most elemental manifestation. Thus, there is a primary interpretive fore-understanding of the world which operates, according to Heidegger, on the level of *Dasein*.²¹⁰ But, as Grondin suggests, Heidegger assures us that we are not “blindly at the mercy of this fore-structure, of pre-given prejudices.” But rather, that it is the goal and the movement of the “explicit elucidation of the fore-structure”, which he calls “interpretation”, to make known those prejudices.²¹¹

The importance of Heidegger’s hermeneutics is his overturning of the previously held concept that understanding follows from interpretation. Now, the primary concern is that understanding and interpretation consist in “merely cultivating or extending this understanding [of fore-structure].”²¹² It means to realize, according to Heidegger, that understanding lives from in, or from a, “certain situation-specific interpretive disposition” which is, literally, the unfolding of *Dasein*’s understanding of itself. Heidegger says that, “in

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*: 95.

²¹² *Ibid.*

interpretation, understanding does not become something different; it becomes itself."²¹³

Some of these basic ideas which Heidegger introduces become the foundations of Ricoeur's theories. For instance, he takes from Heidegger the example that, in order to interpret a text, it is necessary to make our own situation and presuppositions transparent so that we can appreciate precisely the otherness or alterity of the text.²¹⁴ This, for Ricoeur, is the only way to reflect upon a text which, in turn, is necessary because, in such reflection, one can learn something from one's own fore-structures. As a result one regulates one's own interpretive dispositions so that the otherness of things can be disclosed and appear against one's own background. Grondin says that there is a circular relationship between interpretation and understanding as well as between the interpretation and the fore-structure "which nourishes it." However, Ricoeur will also develop a hermeneutics of suspicion, which questions how these fore-structures may distort the meaning of a text.

One further point which Ricoeur finds relevant in Heidegger is that, "to understand is to hear". The deeper meaning in this context acknowledges that, before one can speak (produce), one needs to hear (receive). Heidegger says that, "this priority of hearing marks the fundamental relation of speech to an opening towards the world and towards others."²¹⁵ Palmer suggests

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.: 97.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

further that, for Heidegger, speech, or language, which takes place in the world, brings something to light. It is a situation coming to explicitness through words.

Heidegger further says that this is not a "disclosure of the speaker but of being-in-the-world in which world is prior to subjective and objective phenomenon and encompasses both."²¹⁶ Klemm also speaks of the "later Heidegger" who says that, language is no longer the expression and feeling for the purpose of communication. Rather it is the "connecting process by which beings come to be...rooted in the openness of the world that constitutes the being of *Dasein*. Thus, language is the address of being itself; the appearance and concealment of being."²¹⁷ Heidegger maintains that, "being is primary over human intention; not human thought but the primacy of being is what enters language."²¹⁸

It appears that here, in the ontology of *Dasein* which Heidegger professes, is where Ricoeur takes up his appreciation of hermeneutics and proposes a methodology based on language which is coming forth from *being-that-is*. Thus, he makes use of the theories which allow him to begin with a pre-understanding in being rather than in mental conjectures. He also agrees with Heidegger that "discourse is the meaningful articulation of the

²¹⁶ Palmer. 1969: 139.

²¹⁷ Klemm. 1986: 136.

²¹⁸ Ibid.: 137.

understandable structure of being-in-the-world.²¹⁹ It is in this way that sense can be linked to reference.

As Grondin mentions, Schleiermacher's and Dilthey's hermeneutics represent an "art", a "technique", of understanding. But Heidegger conceives understanding as taken from the "primordial signification of the world were it designates the business of interpretation."²²⁰ According to Grondin, this is not a theory of interpretation but interpretation itself, in which the subject matter is of a hermeneutics which is to achieve the status of philosophy. In this way, it has as its goal the "interpretation of interpretation" so that Dasein can become "transparent to itself". As Grondin points out, it is the task of each individual Dasein, according to Heidegger, to *open up its own path* to self-transparency.²²¹ This is also in accordance with Ricoeur's statement that the "universal power of world-disclosure gives a critical/reflexive self to the formerly imperialistic/narcissistic ego."²²²

Ricoeur builds his theory of: "guess", "explanation", and "understanding" on Heidegger's notion of the implicit mode-of-being and the anticipatory understanding which brings out each *Dasein's* self-understanding through reflexive, critical search for one's pre-suppositions by which *Dasein* comes to [self-] appropriation. However, Ricoeur perceives in Heidegger an *aporia* as much as he did in other predecessors. It appears that the *aporia* is no longer

²¹⁹ Ibid.: 58.

²²⁰ Grondin. 1991: 98. (See also Ft. 17).

²²¹ Ibid.

between epistemology and ontology but rather that Heidegger has not really resolved a conflict between the two modes of knowing.²²³ According to Ricoeur, Heidegger has merely displaced it somewhere else and thereby aggravated it. Ricoeur suggests that, with Heidegger's philosophy, "we are always engaged in going back to the foundations", but we are left "incapable of beginning the movement of return" which would lead from the "fundamental ontology to the properly epistemological question" with regards to the status of the human sciences. Ricoeur believes that such an emphasis on understanding alone is unbalanced because, "a philosophy which breaks the dialogue with the sciences", is no longer "addressed to anything but itself."²²⁴

Ricoeur's response is his hermeneutical circle whereby the phases of understanding (ontology) and explanation (epistemology) constantly interact. Such a process includes a moment of critique by way of distancing - a hermeneutics of suspicion of the structures of pre-understanding. Thus, the emergent mode of understanding, having the potential of a greater self-understanding, leads to an appropriation of the text and an expansion of the self. Within hermeneutic phenomenology, this is the locus of a more enlarged and enriched horizon, an ontological dimension, located within a

²²² Ricoeur. 1976: 95.

²²³ Ricoeur. 1995: 59

²²⁴ Ibid.: 61.

comprehensive mode of understanding which Ricoeur calls, "the second naïveté".

Though Ricoeur is indebted to his forebears, he has introduced a mode of hermeneutics which is both critical and creative. He has also attempted to integrate understanding with explanation (formerly regarded as subjective and objective poles of knowledge with a corresponding split between the human and social sciences). Understanding has thus developed from being simply a psychological mode of identifying with either the author's or a culture's consciousness (as in Schleiermacher and Dilthey), to a mode whereby one's knowledge of one's self and the world can be enhanced and clarified. For Ricoeur, as influenced by Heidegger, understanding thus is situated within a complex ontological mode of receptivity, which does not try to impose structure of knowing (epistemology) on the world. The resultant openness strives to become an awareness, nevertheless, of the inherent pre-understandings which can distort such openness, particularly to the world disclosed by a text. Ricoeur's introduction of a dialectic of explanation with understanding expands this process, so that any act of understanding must include a reflexive element of critique.

Chapter IV

Conclusion: Contributions made by Schleiermacher and Ricoeur to the Philosophy of Hermeneutics with Regard to Understanding

To be able to discuss “understanding” as a “concept”, one must realize that it has been, either explicitly or implicitly, an important focus of philosophical discussions since antiquity. Understanding has been the goal of (1) exhortation (scriptural proclamation), (2) interpretation (explanation of obscure passages or of special rules) and (3) explication (bringing forth of new appropriations of discourses or dialogues). Palmer describes the “field of hermeneutics” as an effort to describe several modes of understanding. He points in particular “to (1) the event of understanding a text, and (2) the more encompassing question of what understanding and interpretation, as such, are.”²²⁵

The philosophers which have been discussed in this thesis have contributed to the knowledge of both “understanding” and “interpretation” as well as the relationship between them. The most important difference between the scholars can be found in the choice they made concerning

which of the two concepts mentioned above is the most basic, or the most useful, to build their respective theories upon, e.g., “understanding” or “interpretation”. However, this division also represents the difference between the modern and postmodern era, each of which is here represented by Schleiermacher and Ricoeur.

In Schleiermacher’s times, understanding was obtained through interpretation. This is not so for Ricoeur who seeks understanding in the ontological pre-understanding as it was perceived by Heidegger. This then, in turn, makes understanding the basis for interpretation.²²⁶ Thus, modern times, as they are represented by Schleiermacher and Dilthey, seek knowledge in an act of interpretation geared towards understanding. This type of understanding, in turn, “stands in complicity with the desire for absolute knowledge” according to Gayle Ormiston and Alan Schrift.²²⁷ They note further, that from this perspective, the act of interpretation is often perceived, since it centers around the goal of “understanding”, as an “act of creating a connection.”²²⁸ They suggest that this connection should be understood in the sense of Wilhem Dilthey’s notion of *Zusammenhang* (belonging together).²²⁹ Thus, interpretation and understanding, as the act of “creating connections”, re-introduces the concepts of unity and harmony,

²²⁵ Richard E. Palmer. *Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1969: 8.

²²⁶ See the previous Chapter in this thesis.

²²⁷ Gayle L. Ormiston & Alan D. Schrift. *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 1990: 4.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ The German word *Zusammenhang* has various meanings: not just to connect, but stronger, to *belong to*—

especially in the attempt to explain a "totality".²³⁰ According to Dilthey, this notion of *Zusammenhang* should be perceived as "coherence and inter-relation" of the internal structure of a system within a given text. He maintains that connection and understanding correspond to, and depend on, each other.²³¹ This is so in the sense in which he reformulates the Aristotelian usage of the word "interpretation" which maintains that, "to interpret means to make connections". It is the reformulation of an old question with regards to the unity of knowledge and understanding which concerns the unity of the sign and the signified; of the word and the object; of the harmony of language [based on thought] and reality; and of thought and action.²³² All of the above are addressed by both Schleiermacher and Ricoeur but from within their particular contextual frameworks. However, one can find, despite the different views and approaches of these two scholars, also a number of common goals, e.g. a general or unified hermeneutics; an internal structure of their particular systems; and specific theories which mediate meanings.

One can find in both Schleiermacher and Ricoeur, within their particular theories the means to formally mediate unmediated texts (although Schleiermacher suggested unmediated understanding between friends). What was taken as a "given" in the pre-modern era, i. e. the transparency of text

gether; to be seen (*perceived*) together; to come together; to be found (*considered*) together. (My transl.).
²³⁰ Ormiston and Schrift: 1990: 4.

²³¹ *Ibid.* Ft. 12.

and author, was abolished during the Enlightenment. As a result, both scholars formulated new theories, based on different perceptions and assessments of their predecessors, which are revised to explain the coherence and an internal structure of their own system. They adhere to different loci of reference; e.g. Schleiermacher's focus is on "understanding the author" and Ricoeur's is on "understanding the text". How great the difference can be between eras, or paradigms, is pointed out by Grondin.²³³ He notes, for instance, the "vast abyss" which separates Enlightenment Rationalism from the nineteenth Century and the shifts of view-points this implies. He mentions, for instance, the influence of the Kantian Critique, which was, with its separation between phenomena and noumena, perhaps one of the strongest motivations for Schleiermacher to define his "art" (discipline) of a special hermeneutics as the theory of understanding [in which understanding is a harmonious totality, based on interpretation].²³⁴

Grondin says that this does not only "presuppose a break with the belief in an unproblematic, purely rational access to the world".²³⁵ He maintains that the "new" hermeneutics also revitalizes the "ideals of the Greek spirit" [which is, in turn,] "probably the common denominator among the various strands of early Romanticism [of which Schleiermacher is, at least in part, a representative]." According to Grondin, this spirit can easily be discerned, as

²³² Ibid.: 4 - 5.

²³³ Grondin. 1991:64.

²³⁴ Ibid.

a fact, in the works of most of the scholars who are proven to be influential on Schleiermacher.²³⁶

Thus, the negative attitude of Schleiermacher towards the position of pure reason alone, and his quest to re-discover an undivided unity of spirit, through intuition, may have influenced his decision to “create a new hermeneutics” not only incorporating understanding but a circular form of part/whole. It further led Schleiermacher to a new interest in, and approach to, language which may support such a circle.²³⁷ Thus, he also looks at hermeneutics from the perspective of a dialectic and points to (a) an overall, common usage within any given language community. This part, Schleiermacher calls the “grammatical side” of interpretation. Grondin refers to it as the “aspect of the supra-individual” language. On the other hand, (b) there is also the manifestation of an individual mind, which was highly regarded in Romanticism and which Schleiermacher called the “technical” (or psychological) side of interpretation. Together, these two issues were not only of interest to Schleiermacher but have not died out with him. In fact, Grondin says that, “contrary to the tendency to dissolve the understanding of a text into grammar as it was associated with structuralism during the 1960s, hermeneutics today must also pay attention to the other side of

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.: 65. [Ernesti (parts of understanding: historical and grammatical); Ast (inner unity of spirit; understanding as recreating); Wolff (the author’s intention); Humboldt (the basic hermeneutic circle)].

²³⁷ Ibid.:68-69.

interpretation, the individual.”²³⁸ The end and purpose of this particular reference is, according to Grondin, to understand a mind that “discloses itself” through the [unique] language which “it brings forth from within”.²³⁹ But this qualification by Grondin does not support the idea of emphatic identification.

Schleiermacher managed to address two tasks. One was to unite the “regional” hermeneutics of various disciplines into a “general” one, and the second was to give it two forms, (a) the grammatical part and (b) the technical (or psychological) part. In their interaction, these were called the hermeneutical circle which provided, for Schleiermacher, the internal structure of his system. Many scholars have pointed out, however, and Grondin is one of them, that, since there is no complete publication of his hermeneutic lectures by Schleiermacher himself, the ultimate impact of his philosophy on hermeneutics is difficult to appreciate. What is known today is mostly due to the work of his student, Friedrich Lücke, who assembled parts from lecture notes and handwritten manuscripts. This is not really sufficient, especially since Schleiermacher gave nine lectures from notes on his “new hermeneutics” between 1805 and 1832. As Grondin mentions further, Schleiermacher’s notes seem to indicate that he had intended to publish

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

them in a complete work which was, however, never carried out and thus, speculations abound around fragmentary issues.²⁴⁰

As Grondin points out, Schleiermacher was only too aware of the thoughts and theories of his predecessors. In fact, he based some of his own thoughts upon them but, more often, he incorporated them and carried them further.²⁴¹ Grondin also notes that Schleiermacher's fundamental operation of hermeneutics, which is based on understanding, can be, strictly called, an act of reconstruction. This is because, in order to understand a text, one must be able to reconstruct every part, from the ground up, just as the author does. Based on this endeavor, the end of understanding is "not the meaning that I find in the subject matter" but, says Grondin, "the meaning that appears in the reconstructed viewpoint of the author."²⁴² This is in accordance with the view, supposedly held by Schleiermacher in his hermeneutics, of the old maxim that the task of hermeneutics is to, "understand the discourse first as well as, and then better than, its author". And, as Schleiermacher emphasized often, "this involves an infinite task". It is a goal, which is better understood as an unreachable telos, according Grondin, "which makes the possibility of ever deeper understanding in interpretation worthwhile."²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Ibid.: 68.

²⁴¹ For details see Chapter One in this thesis.

²⁴² Ibid.: 71.

²⁴³ Ibid.

Louis Dupré²⁴⁴ points out that a careful reading of Schleiermacher shows how he is struggling with very real problems which are connected to the rational philosophy of Kant. He says that, even beneath a Romantic surface, they have lost none of their significance today. Especially Schleiermacher's descriptions of his own religious experience, which he underwent as a boy, shows a striking similarity to the "phenomenological analysis of man's relation to the transcendent in contemporary thought, particularly in the philosophy of Karl Jaspers."²⁴⁵ As was mentioned above, Dupré perceives an evolution of, but not a break in, Schleiermacher's thought.²⁴⁶ The latter never disavowed his early work, or the continuity of his thought. Dupré points out that Schleiermacher often varies in his expressions but commentators have shown that this can be perceived as an attempt to clarify the original meaning [about understanding] of his ideas.²⁴⁷

Schleiermacher inherited from Kant what Dupré calls, "the problem of human autonomy". He also inherited, from Romanticism, the powerful image of "self-sufficient man". According to Dupre, Schleiermacher addressed these "cultured despisers" [of religion] with their "superhuman ideal of man" in his book *On Religion*.²⁴⁸ Further, says Dupré, Schleiermacher also "bans religion from the sphere of reason altogether and instead assigns it to the sphere of

²⁴⁴ Louis Dupré. "Toward a Revaluation of Schleiermacher's Philosophy of Religion." *The Journal of Religion* Vol. XLIV. 1964: 97-112..

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ In this thesis Chapter One. P. 25.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 1964: 98. Ft. 2. (He changed the original expression: "feeling" into "immediate consciousness".)

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 99. (The Romantic ideal).

consciousness in which existence is still experienced in its totality." Thus, says Dupré [about Schleiermacher],

[R]eligion becomes a moment of consciousness more interior than cognition or desire. To avoid all moral or cognitive consideration, Schleiermacher defines this sphere of consciousness as feeling.²⁴⁹

This feeling which Schleiermacher tries to describe, says Dupré, is no more subjective than objective, because it belongs to a state of consciousness in which subject and object are still basically identical. One may wonder if Schleiermacher attempted, in his hermeneutics, to find that same "neither subject nor object" as a basic consciousness in the psychology of the author. Was the author important to him because in his or her psyche he may find, in "repeated readings", as Grondin says above, the "totality" of a consciousness in which the harmony (connection; *Zusammenhang*) of the text may "become apparent" as "itself"?²⁵⁰ Schleiermacher writes, as Dupré points out, that "you must know how to listen to yourselves before you own consciousness. At least you must be able to reconstruct, from your own consciousness, your own state. You must reflect on the rise of your consciousness."²⁵¹

There have been many speculations about Schleiermacher's change of words with regards to his theory of understanding. According to Dupré, e.g.,

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 100.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 107. "Even though the immediate consciousness has no object..., it still has an intentionality of its own, for it reveals the subject-object totality". An aspect of revelation is present in the notion of feeling. We find it in the first discourse of *On Religion* (ft. 25) and in the *Dialectik* (ft. 26).

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 100.

Schleiermacher states that "feeling" is more basic than "intuition" which intimates a division. However, as Schleiermacher says, "there remains a knowledge that they were originally one, that they issued simultaneously from the fundamental relation of your nature."²⁵² If one points to the issue of language (a) as a whole but also (b) as a unique aspect of the author, might Schleiermacher have wanted to emphasize the circularity of this occurrence²⁵³ rather than set up two differing singularities which Ricoeur later perceives as an irreconcilable *aporia*?

In *On Religion*, Schleiermacher was very specific about the previous point, says Dupre. "Intuition is nothing without feeling: it has neither the right origin nor the right force - nor is feeling anything without intuition. Both are real only when, and because, they are originally one and un-separated."²⁵⁴ Based upon his thoughts about the religious experience, one may assume that there is consistency of development in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as there is in his expositions of the "Art of Understanding"; these are certainly nuances of such a belief in a whole. This is a whole, which is not only found in its parts but in which its parts are consistent with the whole. Thus, his hermeneutical circle, in its interdependence, could be seen as a confession of his faith, rather than as a purely academic theory. While considering such interpretations of his view of consciousness, always keeping in mind that he

²⁵² *Ibid.*: 103.

²⁵³ An inter-dependence in which the dialectic remains within a totality and is thus circular..

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 103. Ft. 13. *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*. Berlin. 1878.

was living in, and influenced by, a strong Romantic environment, his search for the “author” and for the “intent behind the expression” might not only be a reasonable, but a useful theoretical undertaking for a person of such a religious persuasion. To make one further point: Dupre asks, “what made Schleiermacher focus on *feeling* as the essence of the religious experience”?

Dupre answers this question in the following way:

Schleiermacher’s feeling of dependence reveals the transcendental ground of self-consciousness, the point where consciousness is no longer opposed to, but coincides with, reality. Feeling alone suppresses opposition within consciousness and, therefore, also the opposition with the other-than-consciousness. It unites consciousness with all being.²⁵⁵

This brings Dupre to the conclusion that, for Schleiermacher, “the Immediate Consciousness has no object, as thinking and willing do, rather it has an “intentionality of its own”, for it reveals the subject-object totality.”²⁵⁶ This interpretation Dupre finds confirmed by an important passage in *The Christian Faith*.²⁵⁷

Schleiermacher was foremost a “man of religion”, a theologian, who has had a religious experience in his younger years which he then attempts to define in all his major works. Might he be guided, as well, by this religious faith in his theories on understanding in the “philosophy of hermeneutics”?

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 107

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Ft. 26. *The Christian Faith*. H. R. Macintosh and J. S. Stewart, Transl. Edinburgh. 1928. (*Der Christliche Glaube*. Berlin. 1842:18).

Could it be that Schleiermacher tried to find the individual as part of a whole, when he considers the language which the author brings forth from “an individual mind” which is “situated in a common language”? Was he really concerned about the subjectivity of the individual mind, as it is later assumed by Ricoeur, or was he interested in the individual mind because of this “coming forth” of a totality, not-yet-split into objective-subjective parts? Was he looking for the “whole” out of which comes forth its own “intentionality” which allowed a subtle connection of a structure? And most of all, was this his reason to have “interpretation” remain his focal point to find “understanding”?

Today’s new interest in Schleiermacher will doubtless find new answers [and more questions] about his intentions when the known facts of his life-context will be considered together with a new interest in the underlying stream of his religious thought and belief. One can look forward to the nuances which may be teased out from his “art of hermeneutics” in ways not tried before. And, as Dupré points out, these may point to new theories of which Schleiermacher himself was not aware of because the adequate philosophical equipment was lacking in his time.²⁵⁸ What is definitely known is that Schleiermacher wanted to bring about a “general hermeneutics”, as he said in his 1829 Academy Lectures.²⁵⁹ This would be one in which he

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 112.

²⁵⁹ Klemm. 1986: 61.

brought forth the internal structure of his system between the grammatical and the technical (psychological) axes of an author/interpreter. Between those axes occurred an interaction as within a circle. The interpretations which have been built upon these theories in commentaries about his work are, regrettably, lacking total certainty because of gaps in the totality of Schleiermacher's publications and, therefore, of his personal responses to questions of clarification. One point that is clear is that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics does not only have a definite circularity between two axes (grammatical and technical) but that, without these two, he would not have an "internal structure of his system". The evaluations of this system differ among his various interpreters, according to their perceptions and interpretations of his points. Several examples of these evaluations are presented in Chapter One.

However, the "difference of view" between Schleiermacher and Ricoeur is of a greater magnitude than what was mentioned above, because it is based on different paradigms. While Schleiermacher is embedded in the modern era of the nineteenth Century, Ricoeur is part of the contemporary era of the twentieth Century. He has a totally different view for more than one reason. The world changed a great deal from the rationalist optimism of the Enlightenment because of devastating wars and the disappointing depravity of human beings. Further, a number of scholars operating in a critically self-

reflexive mode led philosophy to the art of “suspicion”, of which Ricoeur became one of its “masters”.

The most fundamental difference between Ricoeur and Schleiermacher is that the latter’s locus of interest is in the author who produced the text while Ricoeur is interested in the world of the text and what it wants to proclaim. He deals with what he sees as an *aporia*, which was left by Schleiermacher, by simply removing the “divination” of the “author’s mind”. This change of emphasis from author to text makes the two axes, which Schleiermacher had proclaimed, unnecessary. However, Ricoeur had to deal with yet another *aporia*, which was the legacy of Dilthey, and which pertains to “explanation” and “understanding”.²⁶⁰

In order to place importance on the subject, or on the “injunction” of the text, Ricoeur develops an hermeneutical circle between understanding and explanation to which he refers to as a dialectic. Within the sphere of explanation, Ricoeur introduces a position of “distanciation” and “critical evaluation” (hermeneutics of suspicion) which, as Ricoeur says, are “linked to the full “objectivication” of the “meaning of the text”.²⁶¹ The advantage he sees here is that, through a movement of distanciation, understanding takes place in a non-psychological space. It is in a properly semantic space which is centered on the text rather than on the mental and subjective intentions of

²⁶⁰ Ricoeur. 1995: 43.

²⁶¹ Ricoeur. 1976: 74.

the author.²⁶² As mentioned above, for Ricoeur “understanding takes place when the dialectic of explanation and understanding begins.” These are no longer contradictory but lead to an ongoing discovery of meaning.²⁶³ From the integrating arc comes about a circle, or spiral, when explanation leads to further understanding and this, in turn, encourages further explanation. Thus, interpretation discloses new modes of being to be understood which then generate new events, beginning from the text. In this process of understanding, the reader also experiences a new self-understanding.²⁶⁴ This is also a process which is a linkage of the sense with reference. In this process, the reader, through self-reflection, uncovers his or her own pre-dispositions and in this way gains a greater self-understanding. Ricoeur is of the opinion that pure objectivity does not exist and that nobody can be without pre-suppositions. To discern the mind of the author is of lesser importance than to discover one’s own presuppositions, which can distort the meaning of a text.²⁶⁵

However, there are philosophers who do not want to abandon the importance of the author as the focal point. E. D. Hirsch Jr., for example, notes that “the most vexing problem of construing the meaning of a text lies in grasping the presence of implications, eliminating false or unlikely one’s.

²⁶² Ibid.: 78.

²⁶³ Ricoeur. 1995: 64.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.: 95.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

He insists that, "what a text really means is different from what it might mean."²⁶⁶ Hirsch rejects the idea that the meaning of a text changes in the course of time but agrees that the relevance of a text may vary from age to age (or from culture to culture). But, he says, relevance is a matter for "criticism". It is an activity separate from, but built on, "interpretation" which has to do with the construing of meaning alone. Hirsch firmly maintains that the permanent meaning of a text, the only meaning, is what the author meant. He finds this meaning is determined by the character of the author's intention, and adds that he does not use intention as it is used by modern critics, but as it was used by Husserl, in a sense which corresponds to awareness.²⁶⁷

Hirsch lists the objections which have been raised against the "author as focal point". He attempts to undercut them by describing a general principle which will further clarify his distinction between meaning and reference. Hirsch prefers to interpret Frege's "Sense and Reference" (in contrast to Ricoeur's reading) so that change could be explained by saying that, "the meaning of the text has remained the same, while the relevance of that meaning has shifted."²⁶⁸ This exposition will confirm, according to Hirsch,

²⁶⁶ E. D. Hirsch. "Objective Interpretation". *Critical Theory since Plato*. Hazard Adams, ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Janovich Inc. 197 : 1176-94. Here p. 1176. For this reason, Hirsch attacks the idea that the *more possible meanings we can find, the better*. This is with reference to the idea that, as each reader interprets, beginning from the text,...[it] would lead to an absurd number of interpretations.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: 1177.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 1178. FT. 2 [Hirsch] Gottlob Frege. "Über Sinn und Bedeutung". *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Philosophische Kritik*. 1890:100. One Engl. Trans. can be found in H. Feigl and W. Sellers. *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*. New York. 1949.

that the author's meaning, as represented by the text, is unchanging and "reproducible". Hirsch then tries to show that textual meaning is determined by the psychic act of the author, and "realized by that of the reader". Then, Hirsch describes his own internal structure in which he heavily borrows from Husserl and ends with the "horizon concept" which "limits [defines], in principle, the norms bound by the meaning of the text."²⁶⁹ It thus shows that not all philosophers of today agree with the "masters of suspicion", and Hirsch, in particular, attempts to maintain a modernist approach.

However, a review of the many contemporary texts on *Hermeneutics*, and on the concept of understanding in particular, illustrates the break between the modern views of the Enlightenment and the postmodern qualifications. The two figures that stand out most clearly as representatives of the modern and postmodern approaches are Schleiermacher and Ricoeur. As shown above, Hirsch attempts to bring this opposition into a new focus by trying to minimize the difference in interpretation regarding "intention" and "intentionality". However, it appears that these two great scholars can not so easily be integrated because the basis on which their reasoning rests is so different. Schleiermacher begins with the mind of the author and assumes the reader as similarly constituted. He posits feeling and intuition as prior to any subject-object split, which then becomes the means of the identification of intentions.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.:1189.

On the other hand, Ricoeur looks for the ontology of being, the “thrownness” into the world, which is a situation for the emergence of language, by way of “intentionality”, into a mode of expression and understanding. It is not the author, the individual mind, which is important but what comes forth from his or her awareness which becomes the basis for any text. Thus, for Ricoeur, the interplay of explanation and understanding begins from the first moment. As well, the initial impression can be tested and corrected by recourse to the “objective structure of the text.”²⁷⁰ This is Ricoeur’s mediated dialectic between understanding and explanation.

Therefore one can say that the change from the modern to the postmodern era is as much a break as was experienced in the movement from the pre-modern to the modern world-view. As Klemm points out, “this postmodern turn is the calling into question of the whole development of modern culture.”²⁷¹ Postmodern thinkers can no longer take their intellectual orientation from the modern figures of the Enlightenment. Today’s world-view is no longer oriented towards value-free epistemological structures of “thought” but in the radical critics of Enlightenment and the “masters of suspicion” (Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, and now Ricoeur). A postmodern view understands its finitude, its biases, and the need to re-define “truth”.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Klemm. 1983.:91

²⁷¹ Klemm. 1986: 20.

²⁷² Ibid.: 21.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion illustrates that understanding is no longer a simple act of transparent psychological empathy, but a particularly intricate process of critical evaluation of the personal and social obstacles that can interfere with the act of interpretation, specifically in relation to the written word. As Klemm points out, understanding is a "dialogue with the 'other' about something of mutual recognition".²⁷³ It is furthermore based in the reflexive "I" which is aware of its situatedness. It recognizes, says Klemm, that it "has forgotten to understand".²⁷⁴ When Ricoeur bases his theories of understanding onto the ontological premises of Heidegger he shows that understanding is not a tool, but it is, indeed, the "fundamental mode of our being in the world".²⁷⁵

This more reflexive, less imperialistic mode of being-in-the-world reflects the qualified appreciation of understanding that has emerged in contemporary hermeneutics. To understand is no longer to control, or to empathize. It is, instead, to recognize the limitations and partiality of all pretensions to absolute knowledge.

²⁷³ Ibid.: 23.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.: 25.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

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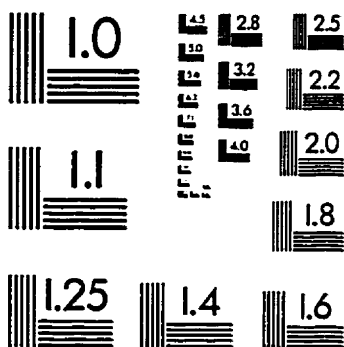
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²⁷⁶ This translation is made on the basis of the text edited by Herman Peiter (1980) in Vol. 7 of Part I of the *Schleiermacher Gesamtausgabe*, now being published in Berlin and New York: de Gruyter. General Ed. Hans Joachim Birkner et al.



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