

Hroch, Jaroslav

## Summary

In: Hroch, Jaroslav. *Filosofická hermeneutika v dějinách a v současnosti*.  
2. vyd. V Brně: Masarykova univerzita, 2003, pp. 188-196

ISBN 8086251187 (Georgetown)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/123421>

Access Date: 24. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

## SUMMARY

This book deals with the history of philosophical hermeneutics extending from the origin of hermeneutic concepts in German philosophical thought (J. G. Herder, W. von Humboldt, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, J. G. Droysen, W. Dilthey) through European hermeneutic philosophy in twentieth century (M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer, J. Habermas, K.-O. Apel, P. Ricoeur, V. S. Gorskij, G. I. Ruzavin, H. R. Jauss) to the theories of understanding in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy (P. Winch, C. Taylor, P. de Man, H. Bloom, R. Rorty). *The first chapter* (which also consist short survey of hermeneutical thought from the Ancient Greeks to the modern era) is devoted mainly to hermeneutic theories in German philosophy in eighteenth and nineteenth century (J. G. Herder, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, W. von Humboldt, J. G. Droysen, W. Dilthey). According to the author of this monograph, the primary contribution to the origin of modern philosophical hermeneutics was based on pervading theories of understanding from Romanticism and Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, hermeneutic theories were in force in which understanding and explanation did not require continuity with a dogmatic tradition, but, above all, an exact critique of historic sources. In contrast to the Enlightenment with its concepts characterized by strict rationalism, the hermeneutics of Romanticism pays attention to the ability of a human being to transform himself into a different person, to fuse with the object which is to be understood. That is to say hermeneutic theories of Romanticism are based, from an ontological and epistemological point of view, on the notion that there is a fundamental union between nature and the subject of understanding. (This concept was expressed in F. W. J. Schelling's philosophy of identity.) In this connection the theories of German Romanticism conceive a picture of nature as a great current of sympathy, as an inner voice, inner source and mainly inner power („Kraft“). The hermeneutic theories of Johan Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Johann Gustav Droysen are based on this conception of *Kraft*.

The theories of understanding in German Romanticism are also characterized by the opinion that we could understand the language of nature only on the condition that we reject calculating reason and open ourselves up to the élan of nature within, because mere calculating and analytic reason cannot grasp the depth, profundity and completeness of Being. According to the author of this monograph J. G. Herder's conception of *hearing* („Hören“) nature anticipated and obviously also inspired Heidegger's conception of *listening to being* („Seinshören“).

Contemporary conceptions of hermeneutics and the philosophy of language were anticipated by anthropologically oriented theory of understanding in the works of W. von Humboldt. In the development of Humboldt's phi-

losophy the category of reason (*Verstand, Vernunft*) gradually lost its significance, typical for German classical idealism, and was replaced by *speech* („*Sprache*“). However, this change from reason to speech is also a turn towards a hermeneutically oriented philosophy. That is to say that Humboldt comprehended philosophy as a branch of culture stemming from the possibilities of human self-recognition. But according to him this process of self-recognition can be realized only in the teleologically structured flow of speech conceived as the inner power within a human being. Philosophy, for Humboldt, is a comprehending reflexion („*verstehende Reflexion*“) which stems from the methodological reflection on man's inner ability and competence to speak („*Sprachfähigkeit*“).

As far as the hermeneutics of *F. D. E. Schleiermacher* is concerned, in its conception the main presumption of understanding is our ability to reproduce the creative process which preceded the origin of a certain work of art or historical text. Schleiermacher conceives of understanding as the reproduction of an original creation. In this connection, he distinguishes between two different methodical forms of interpretation: *grammatical* and *psychological* or technical. *Grammatical* interpretation attempts to determine the sense of words in terms of the sentences of which they are a part and the sentences in terms of a text as a whole. *Psychological* interpretation enables to grasp the personality and individuality of the author by means of inner experience and sympathy. Here, the method of divination in which the interpreter transforms himself into the other and is able to identify with the author whose work is being studied is also used. Schleiermacher's theory concerning the analogy between dialogue and artistic thinking and especially his conception of speech as a „free, creative activity“ anticipates the fundamental thesis of modern philosophical hermeneutics, namely, that speech („*Sprache*“) is the ontological foundation and starting point of the process of understanding.

The formation of positivism, accompanied by the division of European philosophy into scientific and anthropological streams, contributed to the origin of the philosophical hermeneutics as a relatively completed methodological and epistemological theory within German philosophic and historical thought by the second half of the nineteenth century. The main categories of this new concept of hermeneutics have been worked out by the German historian *J. G. Droysen*, together with his methodology of historical inquiry. The importance of Droysen's hermeneutics lies in his emphasizing the historical situatedness of understanding and its connection with the meaningful creative activity of a human being participating in ethical communities. Understanding is therefore the essential property of man and this property represents the basis of moral being. According to Droysen, the sensuous spiritual nature of mankind manifests itself in every inner process to sensuous perception and in every outer expression reflecting the inner processes. In being perceived, the outer expression provokes the same inner processes by projecting itself into the inner of the perceiver.

In his conception of historical understanding, Droysen argues that we cannot grasp the events in the past via the concept of historical fact but we ought to comprehend history as the process of effects, a complex of cause and consequence, purpose and realization. This process of „effective history“ („Wirkungsgeschichte“) can be comprehended by different interpreters in different interrelations. This method of historic understanding requires grasping the structure and interrelations among individual historical facts (or the products of human culture) especially from the point of their meaning and influence in a specific period. It is also obvious that J. G. Droysen anticipates the contemporary aesthetics of reception (H. R. Jauss), which is hermeneutically oriented.

Droysen's notions of *Ausdruck* (expression), *Wirkungsgeschichte* (effective history), *Wirkungszusammenhang* (effective context, relationship) were used in the categorial structure of W. Dilthey's hermeneutics. According to Dilthey, the process of understanding moves forward with the course of life itself and the starting point of the process of understanding is an experience that in one sense cannot be repeated. In essence, this experience could be reduced to the lived experience („Erlebnis“). *Erlebnis*, which expresses the intensity and wholeness of human experience, constitutes the basis upon which it is possible to apply the hermeneutic circle to the process of understanding.

Dilthey, in philosophy from his last period, distinguished so-called higher forms of understanding from elementary ones. The elementary forms of understanding grow from the interests of practical life and are connected with concrete purposeful activity. He conceives the concept of a higher form of understanding as the creative, intellectual reproduction of structured wholes. This hermeneutic reproduction is based on our ability to grasp interrelated connections among objective meanings formed by social and cultural life. From Dilthey's point of view, this higher type of understanding is equivalent to the common process of the practical and communicative orientation of human beings in the world.

*The second chapter* of the book deals with the conceptions of understanding in European continental philosophy in twentieth century (M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer, J. Habermas, K.-O. Apel, P. Ricoeur, V. S. Gorskij, G. I. Ruzavin, H. R. Jauss). The author begins this part of his publication with an attempt to elucidate *M. Heidegger's* concept of hermeneutics. Contrary to traditional hermeneutics, Heidegger stresses the ontological character of the hermeneutic process. In this context, there is also a difference between the ontological conceptions of the relation between human beings and the world: Whereas, for instance, Husserl views the common world as the product of transcendental subjectivity, thus he refers to the question of how the objective world is constituted in consciousness, Heidegger insists on the situatedness or „thrownness“ („Geworfenheit“) of human being in the world („Dasein“) that cannot be analyzed by objective sciences. One of the most substantial properties of *Dasein* is its effort to understand being. In his conception of funda-

mental ontology, Heidegger maintains that understanding is one of the original and essential properties of *Dasein* because living human beings understand themselves in a continuous process of interpretation, self-interpretation and re-interpretation, along with a constant effort to create and realize intentions and goals. As the way in which a human life understands itself is conditioned by time, the structure of understanding has the character of a projection (i.e. it refers to future) and Heidegger therefore considers understanding to be a so-called „thrown projection“. On the other hand, it is interesting that Heidegger's conception of understanding is also based on purposeful human activity in the life-world („Lebenswelt“). However, Heidegger conceives the life-world as a set of things with which we are in connection, and these things are endowed with meaning and sense. Understanding is, therefore, also conceived as the ability of a human being to find a social and practical orientation in the life-world.

In the section of the book devoted to *H.-G. Gadamer*, the author begins with the analysis of the first period of Gadamer's philosophic development. In his book *Platos dialektische Ethik* (1931), Gadamer has analyzed the structural features of the Socratic and Platonic dialogues, which are based on the principle of Logos that supersedes the subjective opinions of the discussion partners, and thus enables a new understanding of the subject-matter at issue. Here Gadamer's studies on Hegel from the thirties are also analyzed. Gadamer's thesis on the analogy between Hegel's concept of spirit („Geist“) and principle of Christian love anticipated his conception of hermeneutic rationality in the sense of a communicative appurtenance and inter-human solidarity which enables the unification of practice and theory, the epistemological and ethical dimension of human life's reality.

In his book *Wahrheit und Methode* (in a certain continuity with Heidegger's fundamental ontology), Gadamer places stress on the historical and lingual dimension of understanding, which is also the most important property of a human being. Gadamer's thesis of a dialectical, historical and projecting character of understanding is based on the theory that there is fundamental ontological connection between understanding and speech events („sprachliches Geschehen“). The process of understanding which issues from the tradition of the Socratic dialogue, enables one to find the way to truth and simultaneously preserve, by means of „openness“ for the other partner of communication, the stable coexistence between the interpreter and the object of interpretation.

In his relation to Gadamer's hermeneutics, *J. Habermas* criticizes its over-estimating of authority in the process of interpretation and knowledge. In his book *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, he argues that an adequate understanding of meanings in the cultural sciences must be connected with a practical epistemological interest. Contrary to the empirical-analytic sciences, which are, according to Habermas, very frequently influenced by conceptions of social engineering (i.e. the manipulation of human beings and society), hermeneutic theory

ought to be connected to critical social science, with the aim of public self-reflection and the emancipation of men as subjects. Social actions can only be comprehended in an objective framework that is constituted conjointly by language, labour, and domination. In his conception of the so-called deep hermeneutics, Habermas proposes the application of certain methodological principles of psychoanalytic diagnostic and therapy. The theory of understanding based on the instigations of psychoanalysis ought to grasp the essential features and characteristic traits of systematically distorted communication within modern industrial society. At the beginning of the eighties, Habermas reflected on the problems of understanding together with his analysis of the life-world („Lebenswelt“) and *communicative action*.

In a certain accordance with Habermas's philosophical thought, K.-O. Apel established his hermeneutical theory on the conception of human society as a communicative society. The aim of social science methodology is, therefore, to pursue a dialectical mediation of communicative understanding (especially human self-understanding) through scientific objectivation and explanation of human behaviour and human history. The dialectical mediation of communicative understanding through causal explanation could be a model for a philosophical understanding of all those types of critically oriented social sciences which have a relation to the practice of life. Based on this, K.-O. Apel founded the philosophical and methodological tradition using the thesis of complementarity of understanding and explanation.

The principle of the complementary nature of explanation and understanding is also used, from a specific point of view, in the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. He locates his theory of explanation and understanding within the conception of *discourse*, in which he strives to connect the tradition of structural linguistics with tradition of existentialism and hermeneutics. That is to say, Ricoeur comprehends discourse as a sentence which has the character of linguistic usage or a language-event. Discourse is always realized temporally and in the present, whereas the language system is virtual and outside time. Whereas language lacks a subject, discourse, according to Ricoeur, refers back to its speaker. Discourse is always about something, it is in discourse that all messages are exchanged. It is also in discourse that the symbolic function of language is realized. Ricoeur maintains that it is just this relative, but it is the original autonomy of speech products, the symbol and sign of human activity (e.g. in the form of works of art, of philosophy, etc.), which leads to the *dialectic of distantiation and appropriation* between the text and its reader. This in turn enables the enriching of the interpreter's individuality through new experience and to extend his cultural horizon and create a critical attitude to world. According to Ricoeur, there is a certain analogy between the social and ethical dimension in the conception of hermeneutics analyzed above: this is the process of self-understanding of man on the basis of his ability to orientate, with critical distance, in the world of philosophical conceptions, ideologies, signs, symbols and archetypes and in this way, by means of a special „detour“ in

knowledge, to reach an understanding of interpreted social reality as well as to find one's own life orientation.

Epistemological and semantical aspects of understanding were also reflected in Russian Marxist philosophy in the 1980s. For instance, *V. A. Shtoff* and *J. M. Shilkov* argue that from the point of epistemology, explanation enables one to grasp both the objective character of processes and relations in nature and the objective dimension of human practical activity. From that point of view, in their opinion, we can argue that logical forms of explanation are the same in both the natural sciences and in the humanities. But it is not possible to speak about immediate, direct understanding of objects in nature because these objects in and of themselves have no purpose, aim or sense. On the other hand, however, according to the Russian philosopher *G. I. Ruzavin* (who is also influenced by *M. M. Bachtin*), it is relevant to speak about the understanding of hypotheses, laws and theories in the natural sciences which reflect the relations between processes and phenomena in the natural world. From a systematic point of view, understanding represents, in Ruzavin's view, the holistic, integral characteristics of a sign system.

At the end of the second chapter, the author of this book devotes himself to *H. R. Jauss* and his aesthetics of reception. The core of this hermeneutically oriented aesthetics (inspired mainly by the German historian *Johann Gustav Droysen* and the Czech philosopher *Karel Kosík*) is rooted in the thesis that an adequate understanding of the works of culture and art is inseparable from the process of their perceiving and perception. Under the influence of Russian formalism and Czech structuralism in literary science, *Husserl's* phenomenology and *Gadamer's* hermeneutics, *H. R. Jauss* works out the basic category of his hermeneutic theory, the horizon of expectation. This category is therefore conceived as the horizon of possibilities tied together with the life experience and life practice of the interpreter. In this context, we can speak about the specific fusion of an interpreter's practical life experience with his cultural and aesthetic lives. This is the point at which the concept of horizon becomes important for *Jauss's* hermeneutically oriented aesthetics, as it should grasp and reflect the dialectic character of the relationship between the private and the public, the individual and the collective in the process of understanding works of art and literature.

In the *third chapter* of this book, the author examines the conceptions of understanding in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy (*P. Winch*, *C. Taylor*, *P. de Man*, *H. Bloom*, *R. Rorty*). Access to the problem of understanding was influenced in Anglo-American thought and in the methodology of the sciences by neo-positivism until the end of the 1950s. Up until this time, in the terminology of philosophy and social science, the English notion „understanding“ had a more general character than the German notion „Verstehen“. The notion of „understanding“ had a meaning similar to the German notion „Begreifen“, and therefore had not been considered to be a specific type of understanding which was necessary to apply to cultural

phenomena and human behaviour. The notion of „understanding“ was, in essence, viewed as synonymous with the notion „comprehension“.

Until the end of the fifties, then, the notion „understanding“ had not been identified in Anglo-American philosophy with the method, but rather with the aim to which all the sciences and their methods are directed. When the neopositivists in the social sciences used the notion „Verstehen“, which had originated in the German hermeneutic tradition, they did not ascribe great epistemological and heuristic value to it. They viewed this notion as an accessory procedure in the mind of the investigator of social processes, who, during his research work, applies the common psychic abilities of empathy and introspection to understand the behaviour of the individual or social group.

Against the original positivistic claims concerning the scientificity and objectivity of social scientific inquiry, *P. Winch* argues that we ought to have in mind the sense of the hermeneutic situation in which the language game constitutes the object of the social sciences. Winch maintains that Wittgenstein's emphasis on how we act in a given context can be very important and inspiring for the conception of understanding in social scientific inquiry. Therefore, an important part of what we mean by understanding in relation to social practices and culture depends on having a context within which we can adequately act.

In his contemporary conception of hermeneutics, Winch claims that understanding another culture is not a matter of understanding the behaviour of all or even most of the individual subjects in it; it is, in fact, understanding the inner maps according to which people of that culture navigate and the destinations they are trying to reach. Such maps will be to a large extent culturally determined.

Along with *P. Winch*, *Ch. Taylor* also emphasizes the situated character of social scientific understanding in his methodological theory, which is especially influenced by Wittgenstein's theory of language games and Gadamer's hermeneutics. Social reality, the actions, practices and norms which the social sciences investigate are constituted within semantic fields or language games and therefore, the possibility of understanding then depends upon familiarity with the relevant language games and their interrelated meanings. Taylor argues that understanding the meaning of an action, social practice or social norm involves understanding the range of contrasted and relevant meanings that form the context of the investigated phenomena. In continuity with Wittgenstein's conception of language games, he introduces the notion of intersubjective meaning as an important methodological category in the process of understanding social reality.

Beginning in the second half of the eighties, Taylor also provides his conception of understanding with a deep ethical dimension and as a consequence of this, influenced by Heidegger and the Augustinian Christian tradition, he constructs his concept of understanding with the reflection of the temporal and spacial structure of a being in the world. Understanding is, therefore, the ability of moral orientation in the world along with the projection of a future



being. This moral orientation can be in a transcendental dimension comprehended as movement in moral space aiming towards the future.

The influence of hermeneutics was first seen in the United States in the second half of the sixties, in the works of literary theoretician E. D. Hirsch, Jr. who was mainly influenced by historically and philologically oriented hermeneutic concepts (E. Betti, to a certain extent W. Dilthey) and who criticised Heideggerian and Gadamerian hermeneutics for their alleged relativism. At the beginning of the seventies, we can speak about the instigations of both hermeneutics and anti-logocentrism within Anglo-American philosophy, in the methodological conceptions of the primary representative of the American Cultural Left, *P. de Man*. He refused the dogma of a distinction between literary and critical language, as well as the concept that there exists a single neutral vocabulary, a certain kind of metalanguage, to be extracted from changing literary traditions. In connection with this demand, Paul de Man puts stress on the self-identity and authenticity of the creative subject, both author's and critical reader's. He has also contributed a great deal to the Derridean polemic against logocentrism and has worked out an inspiring conception of the author's identity.

Paul de Man's literary theory and philosophy, inspired not only by Heideggerian hermeneutics but also by Freud's psychoanalysis, anticipated the conception of the poet's creative identity in the literary and philosophical thought of *H. Bloom*. According to Bloom, the uniqueness of the imaginative identity of the modern author is rooted in misunderstanding. That means the understanding one poet has of another poet's poetry is not only subjective, it is also a more or a less conscious misunderstanding.

In his book *Agon. Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (1982), Harold Bloom, also influenced by gnosticism and psychoanalysis, reassumes his conception of tradition as a constant process of re-interpretation, discontinuity and revision of previous cultural and artistic patterns. An essential feature of a real creative understanding is therefore revisionism characterized by a life and death fight for one's own authenticity. In this connection Bloom rejects the „Kantian“ view of culture as a museum of great philosophical and literary works that refer to something objective or timeless in historical consciousness or in the human imagination. Cultural and philosophical tradition, therefore, represents for Bloom the constant struggle over the very notion and sense of tradition in the form of new readings, proof-readings and re-evaluations. Bloom's emphasis on misprision, incorrect reading and the antithetical character of understanding develops and intensifies the conceptions of post-modern philosophy and deconstructivism, which are focused on tensions and contradictions inherent in the text, to its inconsistencies.

Contrary to essentialism, the main representative of American post-analytic philosophy, *R. Rorty*, emphasizes the creative, self-forming character of understanding which is therefore connected with the self-transformation of man by means of his edification based on communicative processes, such as

reading, artistic creation or, for instance, dialogue within the community. Understanding is based on the process of constant forming and interrelated dialogue of various interpretations, regarded from the beginning as equal and legitimate. On the basis of mediation between the influences of American pragmatism and modern European hermeneutic thought Rorty argues that the only criterion of the adequateness and „rightness“ of understanding and interpretation can be only consensus within historically concrete community which respects the principles of democracy, dialogue, and tolerance.

As far as Richard Rorty's conception of tradition is concerned, we cannot miss an important influence of German hermeneutically oriented philosophy (M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer, J. Habermas). Rorty is especially connected with Gadamer's hermeneutics by dialogical conception of understanding and by a great attention paid to integrative function of interhuman relations. He also endeavours to synthesize the spiritual heritage of European hermeneutics and American pragmatism. This synthesis was successful owing to Rorty's ability to find their common feature in the sense for solidarity and dialogue, in historical attitude to social reality and in emphasizing the practical dimension of philosophy.