

Hermeneutics: interpretation theory in schleiermacher

Philosophy



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The paper "Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher" is an outstanding example of an essay on philosophy. Hermeneutics has been a popularly used word in German philosophical circles for a long time. However, when it was introduced into English language discourse, it came with a fair amount of puzzlement and confusion. This always seems to be the defining attribute of hermeneutics. A look at the history of the word and the concept reveals that it has something to do with the biblical interpretation of theories and textual strategies. However, the density of the word often results in a feeling of unfamiliarity and in some cases confusion, especially considering the fact that it has been explored and popularized by such philosophical thinkers as Gadamer, Dilthey, Schleiermacher and Heidegger (Kisiel, 1971). This is why the work of Richard Palmer is regarded as an important one, giving a much-needed insight into the discipline of hermeneutics in general. Palmer explains this in what he calls three directions of meaning; to say, to explain and to translate, as well as 6 modern definitions. Perhaps the most important aspect of his work, though, is the context that the word is placed in through the explanation of the more than 150 years history of German philosophy that it is associated with. This historical account is important in explaining away the expansion of scope from a technique of interpretation of biblical meaning to a way of understanding the conditions of understanding in general. A lot of the deconstruction of hermeneutics for Palmer is based largely on the work and perspectives of Gadamer, who attempted to go deeper than utterances in order to attempt to understand the intentions and mental processes of the author. Throughout his work in the classic book, Palmer relies on various

untranslated texts, providing various definitions of the term before going much deeper into the understanding of hermeneutics as espoused by Heidegger and later developed by Gadamer (Palmer, 1969). It is important to form a conceptual understanding of hermeneutics without regarding it through the eyes of the (theological) psychologists whose perspectives were reviewed by Palmer. The term is thought to have originated from the story of Hermes, the son of Zeus, who interpreted messages from the Greek gods. He was not always a messenger though. He sometimes became a trickster, and it was never easy to determine just what role he was playing. Understanding and interpretation is not always a straightforward thing, and this is the historical basis of hermeneutics. One of the biggest issues over the years has always been that of defining interpretation, especially with the advent of physical and social science. Some see it as a strict science or theory of knowledge useful in human sciences, while others look at it as a reflective method of looking at everyday lived experiences. This is the dilemma that Dilthey's work is based on, the difficulties involved in reconciling interpretation as a normal lived understanding and as a strictly scientific theory. Heidegger also reiterated this but took the perspective that scientific knowledge was generally indebted or superior to the lived understanding. The debate between the primacy of either the lived understanding or the scientific methods is what Gadamer immersed himself into. He drew from the Heidegger hermeneutics perspective to build an ontological model of social science based on the belief that there is no difference between interpretations in social sciences and in ordinary life. As a psychological research technique, hermeneutics faces much of the same obstacles it

always has when it came to its conceptualization. Attempting to conduct academic research from a hermeneutics perspective is often faced with a lot of difficulties and sometimes resistance. Any researcher looking to approach things from a hermeneutics point of view often has to contend with the academic, ethical and funding bodies looking to understand it satisfactorily (McCaffrey, Raffin-Bouchal, & Moules, 2012). In fact, Gadamer has been quoted as saying it is not necessarily a methodology of the human sciences. Still, this does not necessarily mean it is useless as a scientific research method. When applied as a method of research inquiry, it should neither be regarded as a strict science as one would think about mathematics or the expert know-how of an operational procedure. Instead, it should be viewed as a unique technique, one that comes from the practice itself and has to relate back to the practice. Hermeneutics is especially important in evaluating non-measurable. When evaluating existential dimensions like anxiety, joy or inner peace, or any other variations, it is difficult to measure, regardless of how well concepts are operationalized. Through hermeneutic strategies, one might be able to grasp the meanings of these dimensions (Odman, 2007). Geertz (1983) described hermeneutics as a word whose Greek origins, the relationship to theology and the pretentiousness of professors often throws people off. Underneath all the fuss about interpretation, though, one often realizes that it is a relatively new presentation of what everyone has been talking about (Geertz, 1983). It is a way of evaluating interpretation and understanding and has been applied across many disciplines.