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Phil 591- Hermeneutics
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Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics
(New Haven and London: Yale university Press, 1994)
Outline on Chapter V (pp. 91-105)

“Heidegger: Hermeneutics as the Interpretation of Existence”

Main Topics

- I. Heidegger’s elevation of hermeneutics to the **center** of philosophical concern, by an explication of the ontology of factual life.
- II. Consequent re-definition of the roles of understanding and interpretation and the resultant task of philosophical hermeneutics.
- III. Later Heidegger’s concept of hermeneutics (after the *Kehre* (“turn”)).

Skeleton of the Outline

- I. Foreword
- II. The “Fore” of Fore-Understanding
- III. Its Transparency in Interpretation
- IV. The Idea of a Philosophical Hermeneutics of Facticity
- V. The Derivative Status of Statements?
- VI. Hermeneutics after the Turn

I. Foreword (91-92)

- 1> The failure of Bockh, Schleiermacher, Droysen and Dilthey to develop a **unified** conception of hermeneutics.
 - i)As a result hermeneutical reflection remained peripheral to philosophy.
- 2> Heidegger’s critique of his predecessors- Dilthey, Yorck and Husserl (**Truth and Method, pp. 254-259**).
- 3> Development of Heidegger’s hermeneutic initiatives during his 1920s lecture course, “*Hermeneutics of Facticity*”; although these initiatives were later superimposed by ontological questions about the originary meaning of being in “*Being and Time*.”

II. The “Fore” of Fore-Understanding (92-95)

- 1> Definition of the “fore-structure” of understanding
 - i) Rudolf Bultmann’s formulation: human understanding takes its direction from the **fore-understanding** deriving from its **particular existential situation** and this fore-understanding stakes out the **thematic framework** and **parameters** of every interpretation (92).
 - ii) It is the philosophical description of the **pre-predicative level of existence** (94).

- 2> Significance of the fore-structure in hermeneutic inquiry
 - i) Fore-structure is “**fore**” to **assertion**, if not language itself (93).
 - ii) Human Dasein is characterized by an **interpretative tendency** special to it that comes *be-fore* every statement- a *disposition* the fundamental character of which is *care* and which is always under threat of being **concealed** by the fact that propositional judgments take the center stage (93).
 - iii) Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity is an *interpretation of Dasein’s care structure*, which expresses itself before and behind every judgment and which has its most elemental manifestation in **understanding** (93).

- 3> Heidegger’s **universal** hermeneutical understanding and its contrast to the tradition
 - i) Earlier, understanding had been understood as **theoretical intelligere** (Ex: in Droysen and Dilthey). Heidegger considered such **epistemological** understanding to be secondary to a more **universal** understanding (93).
 - ii) Understanding is more like **readiness** or **facility** than *knowledge*. It is an **unexpressed capacity**, an **art**, a **know-how**. (Ex: An athlete “understands” how to play soccer). These capacities are not limited to special accomplishments, but are interwoven through our whole lives. We *understand* to care for things, to be with people, and so forth (93).
 - iii) **Universal** understanding is an “*existential*” understanding, because it is a way of **existing**, a **fundamental mode of being** by which we “deal” with the world and get around (93).
 - iv) What enables this concern for objects in the world is the **fundamental care of Dasein**, namely **its concern for itself**.

From care stems the specific character of our understanding as *project*. Understanding, then means: **to realize this or that project of understanding, instead of some other** (95).

- v) We don't first encounter "naked" things and then give a "subjective" understanding of them; rather our involvement with the world **always already** takes the form of **interpretative projects**; hence the concept of understanding is **universalized**. The ineluctable **thrownness** and **historicity** of Dasein are the distinctive features of its "**facticity**" (95).
- vi) Thus the context of understanding for Heidegger, is Dasein's "**factual life**" or its **existential situation**. The scientist's theoretical-epistemological understanding of the world, is but a subspecies of the universal understanding (94).

4> The call for **interpretation**

- i) As our everyday understanding (which involves interpretative projects corresponding to the hermeneutic "as") is **implicit**, the task of hermeneutics is the *explicit elucidation of the fore-structure pre-given by history*. This elucidation is called **interpretation** (95).
- ii) Because we are *not* at the mercy of the fore-structure of pre-given interpretation, the hermeneutic circle is not "vicious"; and hence interpretation is possible (95).

IV. Its Transparency in Interpretation (96-98)

1> The task of interpretation

- i) In traditional hermeneutics, **interpretation leads to understanding**. But for Heidegger, understanding comes first, and interpretation consists in **cultivating [Ausbildung] or extending** this understanding. Interpreting is **explicating** (96).
- ii) Interpretation is fundamentally **critical**. As an aspect of Dasein's care for its own being, Dasein is capable of "**self-elucidation**" (96).
- iii) "**In interpretation the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself**" (96).
- iv) Interpretation helps the *fore-understanding achieve transparency*. It explicates and brings to the **open** (96).

- v) This is required as understanding has a tendency to **mistake** itself. Interpretation's **critical** impulse lies in **avoiding** (or in **correcting**) this self-misunderstanding and in responding to the need of appropriating, strengthening and securing every act of understanding (96).

2> What about textual interpretation?

- i) It is necessary to make our **own situation transparent** so that we can appreciate the **otherness** and alterity of the text- that is, we should not let our **unelucidated prejudices** to dominate the text unwittingly and so **conceal** what is proper to it (97).
- ii) Interpreters who deny their hermeneutic situation, run the risk of embracing the text **uncritically** and thereby only **misread** things into the text (97).
- iii) Heidegger instead of avoiding the hermeneutic circle (which belongs to the ontological care-structure of Dasein), uses the same to **overcome historicism and subjectivism**. The point is not to get rid of our fore-conceptions, but by a reflective foregrounding of one's own fore-structure open up a ***genuine dialogue*** between the subject matter and the other's unfamiliar thought (97).
- iv) The objective is to show genuine "**care**" for the text, to **let the meaning** of the text **emerge** into the **open**. This can be done only by **regulating** one's **implicit interpretative dispositions** as much as possible, so that one can avoid one's understanding being dictated by "fancies and popular conceptions" (97-98).

V. The Idea of a Philosophical Hermeneutics of Facticity (98-100)

1> Hermeneutics as a philosophical program

- i) Hermeneutics is to be taken in the "**the primordial signification of the word, where it designates the business of interpreting.**" The subject matter of hermeneutics is **not the theory of interpretation but interpretation itself** (98). Heidegger does not *first* ask what *this* or *that meaning* is, but *how* something like **meaning** is possible at all for Dasein.
- ii) Hermeneutics, that has achieved the status of philosophy, heightens the **self-transparency** of Dasein, a process in which philosophical **clarification** furthers the interpretative activity that Dasein is always performing (98).

- iii) Thus hermeneutics refers to, “**the unified way of engaging, beginning, accessing and explaining facticity,**” which presents “**intimations of possible modes of being aware**” (98).
- iv) However, each individual Dasein has to open up its own path to self-transparency; hermeneutics itself does not carve out a trail of awareness. “**In hermeneutics the possibility is of Dasein’s becoming and being for itself understandingly**” (99).
- v) Philosophical hermeneutics gets its importance from the fact that Dasein has a natural **propensity** to overlook itself and thereby relieve itself of the burden of self-elucidation. Hence a critical hermeneutics of facticity has the task of **calling** Dasein back to itself (99). (**Become what you are!**)
- vi) It has the task of **dismantling** or **deconstructing** the traditional explications of Dasein (99). Philosophical assertions have the character of **indications**, which are realized and concretized in an act of personal appropriation.
- v) Heidegger calls for “**hermeneutic concepts**”- that are expressions not merely capable of reflecting a neutral, present-at-hand fact; rather they are “accessible only in **repeated new interpretations**” (100).

VI. The Derivative Status of Statements? (100-102)

1> Hermeneutics and language

- i) Although the apophantic “as” is *secondary* to the hermeneutic “as,” Dasein’s self-interpretation does not take place outside language.
- ii) But we should be beware of statements monopolizing our **view** of language to produce a modification of the **fundamental hermeneutic relation to the world** (100).
- iii) Although an assertion “reifies” the original hermeneutical relation, language is not impotent. **Language is rooted in the care structure of Dasein.** The interpreter should avoid the objectifying view of language and must attend to what is **tacitly** meant (though not **openly expressed**) (101).
- iv) In “*Being and Time*,” Heidegger considers the **linguistic** nature of our understanding and interpreting by stressing the **originary** character of “**discourse**” [Rede], which is the self-interpretation of Dasein as it manifests itself in its usual **unselfconscious** use of language (101-102).

VII. Hermeneutics after the Turn (102-105)

1> What is the "Turn"?

- i) The "turn" is heralded as the shift in Heidegger's thinking, whereby Dasein is no longer considered the potential agent of its interpretative projects; rather it receives them beforehand from the subliminal **history of being** (103). Being **speaks through** Dasein.

2> Later Heidegger: On the way to language *and* hermeneutics

- i) Heidegger declares language as the "**house of being**," as if it were thereafter to take over Dasein's role as the **originary and untranscendable revelation of Being** (102).
- ii) However, he warns against mistaking propositions for the full expression of philosophical truth in "*Beitrage zur Philosophie*" (102). So there is a need to preserve the hermeneutic character of language that is manifest in the struggle to find the right words (102-103).
- iii) Thus in his later works Heidegger continues the destruction of tradition, by achieving a **reflexive appropriation of our understanding's historical situation. Interpretation elucidates the history of Being**. He dethrones human subjectivity by radicalizing the concept of thrownness (**situatedness in the history of Being**) and **finitude** (103).
- iv) In "*On the Way to Language*," Heidegger defines *hermeneuein* as, "**the exposition which brings tidings because it can listen to a message. Hermeneutics means the exposition of tidings that call for a hearing** (104).
- v) The bringing of tidings is only possible through language. *Language underlies "the hermeneutical relation."* Language is nothing but the communication of tidings to be understood by an interpretative hearing (104). *Hermeneutics is another word for language* (105).