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*Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*


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 factical 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 pregiven by history**. This elucidation is called **interpretation** (95).

ii) Because we are **not** at the mercy of the fore-structure of pregiven 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 understandably” (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).