

Hermeneutic reason as the “Art of understanding”

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Originally, hermeneutics was the interpretation of important texts. In the 19th century, hermeneutics transformed into a science about the meaning and interpretation of all expressions. In the 20th century, Martin Heidegger radicalized hermeneutics, indicating that understanding (the essence of hermeneutics) is not a technical or intellectual operation, but a way of being. The central point of reference in the article is the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricœur. The central idea of Gadamer’s philosophy is understanding, which is connected with the so-called “rehabilitation of practical philosophy”. In such philosophy, the question concerning wisdom and thinking about the best possible way of life occupies an important place. Gadamer in his philosophy indicated the conditions of understanding. One of the main elements of his concept is hermeneutic experience, a negative experience, meaning awareness of the finite nature of all understanding. Complementation of Gadamer’s concept could be the hermeneutics of Paul Ricœur. He believed that there is not a correct method of interpretation and the best way to understand is the “conflict of hermeneutics”. Ricœur discerned two forms of hermeneutics: “hermeneutics of trust” and “hermeneutics of suspicion”. The idea of hermeneutics is developed as an art of understanding, indicating the conditions and possibilities of interpreting texts, symbols and metaphors. An interesting addition to the philosophy of Gadamer and Ricœur is Hans Blumenberg’s concept of metaphorology. He identified three basic positions of metaphors and the functions they perform: traditional, understanding a metaphor as inaccurate; pre-conceptual speech; and the unavoidable and irreplaceable nature of a metaphor. Under this concept lies the science of images through which man grasps himself and the world. Blumenberg explored the functions of various metaphors depicting truth (light, nudity), human life (sea travel, hiking, climbing) or the world (clock, machine, organism). Absolute metaphors, in addition to presenting the picture of the whole of reality, also play the role of orienting patterns, directing action. They contain certain value systems that determine attitudes, expectations, longings, interests, and indicate important or indifferent things or spheres, incline to certain actions or omissions.

Keywords: hermeneutics, understanding, interpretation, prejudgments, hermeneutic experience, metaphor.

Originally, hermeneutics was a technical discipline connected with the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, classical texts and law. Gradually its scope of influence and importance grew. In the 19th century thanks to the work of, among others, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Droysen, hermeneutics transformed into a science about the meaning and interpretation of all expressions. Later, Wilhelm Dilthey expanded its scope, making hermeneutics the methodological basis of the humanities, and Martin Heidegger

universalized hermeneutics to a greater extent, indicating that understanding (the essence of hermeneutics) is not a technical or intellectual operation, but a way of being. Thus, he placed hermeneutics at the center of philosophical considerations. In contemporary hermeneutical thought, the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur figures prominently. The central idea of Gadamer's philosophy is understanding, which is connected with the so-called "rehabilitation of practical philosophy". In such philosophy, the question about wisdom and thinking about the best possible way of life plays a central role. One of the main tasks of philosophy understood in this manner is striving to achieve by understanding the most possible "proximity of things", as Gadamer emphasizes — the Greek idea of truth as *aletheia* originally meant just "closeness to things" [1, p. 18]. Here the question arises: is the truth available to us in its full dimension? According to Gadamer, this is rather the ideal goal, the horizon towards which we are heading, but we never achieve it because our understanding is always limited and imperfect. It is always based on some necessary initial assumptions and it is conditioned by the situation in which we find ourselves. We are always subject to the influence of the "effected history". The essence of understanding, in Gadamer's view, is hermeneutic experience: something that changes the thinking man, extends his horizon. Real experience is negative because it means a liberation from certain obviousness. This experience changes man, undermining his current knowledge about the world, but also knowledge about himself.

An important aspect of understanding is rooted in language. "Consciousness — writes Gadamer — never faces the world, reaching — in a state out of language — for the tools of understanding. Our entire experience of the world, and in particular hermeneutic experience, develops from and within the language" [1, p. 59]. Knowledge is a form of interpretation, and any being that can be understood is a kind of language. Therefore, understanding as an interpretation can be considered as a variety of "reading in the book of the world". Everything can be treated as a kind of text, and of course, it also applies to any images that we try to understand by interpreting them with the help of language [2, p. 332–334]. Gadamer emphasizes that understanding is always hypothetical: "Anyone who wants to understand a text always makes a certain project. He create a sense of the whole as soon as the first meaning is marked in the text and during understanding he is still revising it" [3, p. 271].

The same mechanism appears in all understandable relations with the world, both in the case of relationships with other people, and in the attempt to self-understand or understand the world. Each interpretation comes from the initial concepts, which are gradually replaced by more adequate concepts. Understanding is a continuous activity consisting of continuous creation of subsequent projects and seeking confirmation in things. Developing accurate, adequate projects is a constant task of understanding, but it is an endless process, never concluding. Understanding is never complete or final — it is one of the ways in which human finitude makes itself felt. Furthermore, Gadamer points out that there is no other "objectivity" apart from confirming the preliminary idea by developing it. Of course, these initial projects may be better or worse, more or less adequate, but understanding then develops its proper possibility when the initial beliefs are not arbitrary. Therefore, when we are interpreting the text, we should try not to use the language of our own use, but to try to understand the text based on the use of language in the spirit of the author or the spirit of his time and culture. We fill the difference between our own use of language and the author's way of understanding when we experience the resistance of the

text, when the text “stops” us when we do not know what the author is actually saying. Then it is necessary to suspend the validity of our language usage. The problem of giving up, or at least modifying our language, is equally relevant to the content of our initial beliefs because the essence of understanding is not seeking confirmation of your own prejudices, but to hear what the text tells us. A necessary condition is openness to the view of another. As Gadamer writes: “Whoever wants to understand a text should accept what this text has to say to him. Therefore, hermeneutical consciousness must already be sensitive to the otherness of the text. Such sensitivity, however, does not presuppose either a content ‘neutrality’ or, more importantly, self-liquidation, but it contains a conscious assimilation of one’s own preliminary beliefs and prejudices” [3, p. 273].

Self-conscious understanding must therefore not only make initial anticipations of meaning, but also make them aware in order to be able to control them. The dominance of unconscious prejudices means that we become deaf to the author who speaks to us, to a message that carries a text or image, and finally we become deaf to the voice of tradition. Gadamer believes that the model of hermeneutic understanding is conversation and it has the structure of questions and answers. When we try to interpret the text, we should behave as if it was an answer to a question. This becomes possible “thanks to obtaining a hermeneutic horizon. We recognize it now as the horizon of the question, the horizon within which the direction of the meaning of the text is determined. Whoever, therefore, wants to understand must go back with a question beyond what is said. He must understand this as an answer to a basic question. So, going back to this, what is said, it necessarily goes beyond that” [3, p. 375].

Gadamer indicates the communicative and social character of statements, each statement is already an answer and always refers to the underlying question, but both this answer and the question are always addressed to someone. Each statement has an addressee and its own situational horizon, an irremovable feature of any statements is their historicity and finitude, because, like all human creations, they have their source in the history and finitude of human beings in general. He emphasizes that understanding is not just a reconstruction of a structure of meaning, but it always means an agreement: “To understand the past is — accordingly — to hear what it wants to tell us as truth. The primacy of the question over the statement means in hermeneutics that every question that we understand is asked by ourselves” [4, p. 55].

Complementation of Gadamer’s concept could be Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. He “insists that human existence can be viewed only in the mirror of its external manifestations — the objects and acts, symbolized signs in which it is expressed — and that immediate consciousness and self-consciousness, far from being transparent, can harbor illusions and mystification. Consequently, self-understanding must be mediated through the interpretation and critique of the scattered signs of the self in the world” [5, p. 351]. He believed that “there is not a correct method of interpretation and the best way to understand is “conflict of hermeneutics”. Ricoeur discerned two forms of hermeneutics: “hermeneutics of trust” and “hermeneutics of suspicion”. Hermeneutics of trust are aimed at “recollecting and restoring the fullness of meaning in symbolism”, and “hermeneutics of suspicion” are aimed at “reducing and demystifying symbolism by unmasking the proved forces that are concealed within it” [5, p. 352].

The starting point of his deliberations on the problem of understanding is reflection on the consequences of transforming discourse from speech into writing, and thus into

the system of signs and text. Contrary to appearances, it means more than just consolidating speech in some material, because the text receives independence from the author, becomes autonomous, and its meaning ceases to coincide with what the author wanted to say. As a result of this transformation, distance between the author's world and the world of the text appears. In the autonomy of text, Ricoeur sees the essential feature that provides the superiority of text over speech. Therefore, he emphasizes that "it is essential for a literary work, for a work of art in general, to go beyond the psychosocial conditions of its origin and to open itself to this endless sequence of readings, which themselves are embedded in various socio-cultural contexts. In short, both the psychological and the sociological position, the text should free itself from its context, so that it can then be put in a different context, in a new situation: and this is, says Ricoeur, what the act of reading is doing" [6, p. 237].

This detachment from a specific context takes place not only on the part of the author, but also the recipient. Thanks to this, the text ceases to be addressed to a specific recipient, and it becomes addressed to everyone. The consequence of the autonomy of the text is the distance, which is not only constitutive for the text as a writing, but is also a condition of interpretation. Distance is not only a limitation, which understanding should overcome, but also a condition of understanding. Contrary to the Romantic tradition, Ricoeur states that the relationship between interpretation and objectification is not so much oppositional, but rather complementary. In the Romantic tradition, the hermeneutic task was to equate with the author, to understand his intention, meanwhile for Ricoeur the main task of hermeneutics is related to the concept of the "world of text".

The world of the text is a fictional world, but it is this irreducible dimension of the reference of fiction and literature that establishes the most fundamental hermeneutic problem because interpretation means to explain this kind of "being-in-the world" that is included in the text. What has to be interpreted in the text is a certain proposition of the world that could become ours, in which we could live "to incorporate one of these possibilities into our lives". The text mediates in self-understanding, but unlike dialogue, the addressee of the text is not directly given, but it is "created, established by the work itself. The work designates its readers and thus creates its subjective addressee" [6, p. 243]. This raises the problem of adopting or applying, referring the text to the current situation of the reader. In the case of writing, the acquisition is of a special character, because it is related to the distance. Assimilation is mediated by all the structural objectivities included in the text. Ricoeur highlights that: "Contrary to the tradition of the cogito and against the idea of the subject that he knew himself through direct intuition, it must be said that we understand ourselves only by taking an indirectly way among human signs preserved in the works of culture. What would we know about love and hate, about ethical feelings and, in general, about everything that we call ourselves, if it was not expressed and formulated by literature? Therefore, what seems to be the most contradictory to subjectivity and what structural analysis extracts as the mere textuality of the text is an indispensable medium through which we can only understand ourselves" [6, p. 243–244]. What we ultimately absorb is a proposal of the world, which the text shows and reveals. Therefore, to understand means understanding oneself in the face of a text. It concerns exposure to the text, to obtain from it oneself "extended" by the proposition of existence corresponding in the most appropriate way to the proposal of the world presented in the work. Understanding is the way of constituting the "I" through the text.

As Ricœur paradoxically claims, subjectivity obtains as much as it can suspend itself, as it can become unreal: "As a reader, says Ricœur, I find myself only when I'm lost. Reading introduces me to the variations of the imagination proper to the ego. The rules of the game are such that the transformation of the world is at the same time a ludic transformation of the ego" (6, p. 244). Each text reveals a certain world. Interpreting a text means trying to learn the world designed by the text. Assimilation is the culminating moment of reading or the reception of a work of art. Interpretation concerns the ability of the work to reveal the world, and the reader's relation to the text is a relation to the world that this work presents. Adoption is not so much an agreement, but rather a relation of understanding the world conveyed by a work, understanding is an extension of the "self through communing with the worlds proposed by the text" [6, p. 273].

Interpretation is a peculiar dialectic of distance, striving for the objectification of meaning and assimilation, which is an individual existential act. Assimilation means to make something mine that was previously "someone else's". According to the intention of this word, the goal of all hermeneutics is to overcome cultural distance and historical alienation. Interpretation connects, equates, modernises and makes similar. This purpose is achieved only to the extent that it updates the meaning of the work for the current recipient. Acquiring is the proper term for updating the meaning of the message returned to someone. "Interpretation is complete when the act of reading triggers something on the shape of an event, an event of discourse occurring in the present tense. Like acquiring, the interpretation becomes an event" [6, p. 277]. The way of existence is to acquire a game that is a specific experience that transforms its participants. Although it needs participants to exist, in the game the player is not the master of the game, but a participant. The game has a dynamic character, it is a specific movement to and from, requiring active interaction. At the same time, the game has rules that limit the player and sets limits for him and the field of the game. In the game, nothing seems to be serious, but it reveals something real, thanks to the game something becomes visible, something can exist. Ricœur compares the interpretation of the text to the game in which the figure of the author appears, and we have the role of the reader. Successfully performing this role requires a reduction of "narcissism", the desire to find only yourself in the text, to dominate. "Renunciation is the basic moment of assimilation and distinguishes it from all forms of "taking possession". Acquiring is also and above all the consent to the independence of the text. Reading is a releasing assimilation... By letting go to what the text refers to, the ego frees itself from itself" [6, p. 286]. According to Ricœur, the bond between assimilation and uncovering is the central idea of hermeneutics. Assimilation is a way of realizing and this is what Gadamer referred to as the "melting of horizons".

An important place in hermeneutic philosophy is occupied by reflection on symbolic thinking, especially on the place and role of metaphors in human thinking. Ricœur sees a metaphor "as an act of semantic impertinence, in which a lexically odd or foreign attribute is predicated to a subject: the result of the tension or interaction between the two terms is a new semantic pertinence, the creation of new meaning. In the creation of new meaning metaphor redescribe reality" [5, p. 353].

An interesting supplement to his reflections on symbolic thinking and the role of metaphors in thinking is the concept of Hans Blumenberg's metaphorology. He pointed out three basic positions on metaphors and the functions they perform. The first could be described as traditional. In traditional philosophy, the question about the meaning of

a metaphor is associated primarily with rhetoric. A metaphor is considered as an adornment of the language, although it does not extend the expression but makes it more attractive. Another position is related to the understanding of metaphor as inaccurate, pre-conceptual speech. The metaphorical approach is a prelude to a clear, conceptual approach to the problem. The transition from “metaphor to concept” is approached in a similar way like the transition from “myth to logos” [7, p. 10]. The third position enhances the metaphor, pointing to its unavoidable and irreplaceable nature as forms of thinking, a metaphor provides abstract thinking, devoid of sensory data, intuitions taken from the world of phenomena. Furthermore, as Hannah Arendt writes: “All philosophical concepts are metaphors, petrified analogies, and their real sense is revealed when we reach into their original context, which enlivened the mind of a philosopher who uses these concepts for the first time” [8, p. 157].

This third way of thinking about a metaphor is presented by Blumenberg in his concept of metaphorology as a reflection on the images through which man is trying to understand the world and his place in this world. The basic subject of his reflections about the place and function of metaphors are “absolute metaphors”. Blumenberg emphasizes their explanatory function. “Absolute metaphors answer the most basic questions, for which we do not have “scientific” answers, but at the same time it is not possible to eliminate them because it is not that we put them, but rather we find them embedded in the foundations of our life” [7, p. 19]. Blumenberg divides these questions into theoretical questions on the whole and pragmatic, which he also describes as orientating, because they determine the directions of action. Absolute metaphors have an explanatory and directional function. The theoretical function consists of delineating the whole horizon. Absolute metaphors depict the whole picture by structuring it. Blumenberg believes that by starting from absolute metaphors depicting a certain picture of the world and man, certain consequences can be derived that mark the historically changing horizon of meaning. Absolute metaphors occur not only in mythical thinking, metaphysics or philosophy, but also in science.

Blumenberg reflects on the role of various metaphors in culture, such as the metaphor of truth (for instance light, nudity) or human life (like sea voyage, wandering or climbing). Another basic question, in addition to the question about truth, man or life, is the question about the world: what is it? There have been various answers provided: it is a polis, a city, a living being, a theater, a clock, a machine. Jean Paul in *Auswahl aus der Teufels Papieren* replied to this question as follows:

I will never regret being able, as good as possible, as good as it is allowed, to teach everyone here what the world really is. It can be a dead end in a big city of God or just a provincial city compared to other planets. It is a children’s sidewalk or trolley of humanity who wants to teach human how to walk. Maybe it is... something behind the scenes and changing room to another world, in which we will play our roles not without applause. Or there is a dark chamber (camera obscura) in which the ray brings and paints the inverted and compressed pictures of the more beautiful chamber; <...> or it is a counter of an invisible denominator; or maybe is it nearly nothing? [7, p. 25–26]

Absolute metaphors do not indicate any detailed relationships present in reality, but most importantly they provide a picture of the whole. In addition to presenting the image of reality as a whole, they also function as certain patterns that play an approximate, directional, role. They contain certain systems of values that determine attitudes, expectations, longings, interests and indicate things or indifferent spheres, induce some actions or omis-

sions. The history of human culture perceived through the prism of absolute metaphors makes us realize that from the very beginning, we humans are still struggling with these simple, naive questions: from where? where to? for what? Unfortunately, all the answers, even if at the beginning they pretend to be objective, rational or scientific, upon a closer look end up being another story easing the pain of existence. The Hermeneutic reason that allows us to understand this, ultimately, turns out to be very close to Socratic wisdom as an awareness of human finiteness.

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Герменевтический разум как «искусство понимания»

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Основным ориентиром в статье является герменевтическая философия Ханса-Георга Гадамера и Поля Рикёра. Центральная идея философии Гадамера — понимание, которое связано с так называемой реабилитацией практической философии. В такой философии очень важное место занимают вопрос о мудрости и размышления о наилучшем образе жизни. Гадамер в своей философии указывает условия понимания. Одним из основных элементов его концепции является герменевтический опыт, негативный опыт, означающий осознание конечности всего понимания. Дополнением концепции Гадамера может быть герменевтика П. Рикёра, который считал, что «нет правильного метода интерпретации», и лучший способ понять — это «конфликт герменевтики». Рикёр различает две формы герменевтики: «герменевтика доверия» и «герменевтика подозрения» и развивает идею герменевтики как искусства понимания, указывая на условия и возможности интерпретации текстов, символов и метафор. Интересным дополнением к философии Гадамера и Рикёра является концепция метафорологии Хан-

са Блюменберга, указавшего на три основные позиции в отношении метафор и функций, которые они выполняют: традиционную; понимающую метафору как неточную, доконцептуальную речь; указывающую на неизбежную и незаменимую природу метафоры. Под этой концепцией метафорологии лежит наука об образах, с помощью которых человек схватывает себя и мир. Блюменберг исследует функции различных метафор, которые изображают правду (свет, нагота), человеческую жизнь (морские путешествия, походы, скалолазание) или мир (часы, машина, организм). Абсолютные метафоры, помимо представления картины всей реальности, также играют роль ориентировочных ориентиров, направляющих действие. Они содержат определенные системы ценностей, которые устанавливают отношения, ожидания, стремления, интересы и указывают на важные или безразличные вещи или сферы, склоняются к определенным действиям или упущениям.

Ключевые слова: герменевтика, понимание, интерпретация, предрассудки, герменевтический опыт, метафора.

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