

Annotation: How to read philosophical texts

It might be helpful to provide you with a general rule concerning the reading of classical philosophical texts. If a philosophical text is understandable after the first reading it is not a “philosophical” text in the strict sense of this word. The experience of not “being able to make head or tail” of a text is part and parcel of the philosophical practice of thinking. Some authors, like Plato, are able to hide this confusing feature of their writings so that you may read them without realising that you did not get the point of their considerations. However, philosophical texts that spare the reader from “narcissistic injuries” will never contain more than worn out thinking stances. They do not enable you to learn, what Martin Heidegger called, the “craftwork of thinking”.

If you do not know how to cope with this challenging feature of philosophical texts you may recall a directive Schleiermacher gave with regard to Plato: ‘Even within a single text the particular can only be understood from out of the whole, and a cursory reading to get an overview of the whole must therefore precede the more precise explication.’¹

¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Philosophie Platons*. Hrsg. und eingel. von Peter M. Steiner ; mit Beiträgen von Andreas Arndt und Jörg Jantzen (Hamburg 1996, 27.