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SCHLEIERMACHER'S HERMENEUTIC AND ITS CRITICS

The critics of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic are legion and its defenders few – due, to a great extent, to the popularity of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and its attack on Schleiermacher. I believe that the critics of Schleiermacher have not understood him very well and the failure of his hermeneutics to gain very much respect lies, at least partially, to a lack of understanding of what he had to say. Besides, if we look at contemporary scholars who focus on the study of language and how it functions we will find that they often have views very much like those found in Schleiermacher's discussion of hermeneutics.

What is it that the contemporary critics of Schleiermacher fail to take into consideration? Schleiermacher presents his hermeneutic as an answer to a particular question. The question he asks is, 'What is it that enables us to communicate by means of language? How is it that we are able to understand one another by means of language?' He begins with the assumption that we are able to understand one another by means of language but does not deny that the failure to achieve an understanding of one another is fairly common. He wishes to say, however, that those who work at this problem can learn to become better at it. What is important is that we understand what makes for successful communication in order to know the types of things that can be done to improve communication. Note that from his perspective hermeneutics is applicable to all contexts where language is used to communicate with one another, and not just to the interpretation of something foreign or to works of literature. Schleiermacher says, 'I often make use of hermeneutics in personal conversation...' (1977, p. 181).

What are the appropriate responses to this type of analysis, besides just accepting what he has to say? A person may present an alternative analysis, or suggest improvements and modifications in Schleiermacher's views, which is my own reaction. The critics of Schleiermacher take neither of these approaches. A person could also just argue that Schleiermacher's analysis and recommendations are flawed for one reason or another, and have nothing positive to say about what it is that makes for successful communication, but even this type of response is seldom heard. The critics of Schleiermacher seem to be unaware of the problem he is addressing. Rather than address the problem that interests Schleiermacher Gadamer has another project he pursues. He is interested in describing how 'understanding'

functions. I use quotes here because he is not interested in Schleiermacher's project of how understanding is achieved but rather interested in a purely descriptive (phenomenological) task of describing contexts where we speak of understanding something. Since 'understanding' often does not achieve understanding of another person it is difficult to see how Gadamer's project is supposed to be a relevant reaction to an analysis of how understanding of one another is achieved by means of language – unless a study of 'understanding' is supposed to show the achievement of understanding one another is not possible. Gadamer never says this, however. It should be possible for someone to identify with both Schleiermacher's project and Gadamer's project without being inconsistent. This leads to the suspicion that Schleiermacher's project has not been understood very well.

In this paper I am going to outline Schleiermacher's hermeneutic as it is found in his lecture notes, which were edited by Heinz Kimmerle and translated into English as *Hermeneutics: the Handwritten Manuscripts* (1977). All of my quotations will be from this book. When I outline his hermeneutic I will point out the ties between it and recent work in the philosophy of language and also point out what seems to me to be mistaken interpretations of his hermeneutic. Later we will look briefly at Gadamer's response to Schleiermacher. I shall conclude by making a criticism of Schleiermacher.

SCHLEIERMACHER'S HERMENEUTIC

How do we achieve an understanding of one another by means of language? Schleiermacher's answer to this involves four claims: 1. The understanding of language requires seeing it in terms of the actions of persons. 2. These actions are to be seen in the context of communication. 3. These actions seen in the context of communication are both a manifestation of language and a manifestation of a person. 4. Understanding takes place when we can see how a linguistic act is both, at the same time, a manifestation of a language and a person.

The third claim here leads Schleiermacher to draw a distinction between grammatical interpretation, which studies speech acts as a manifestation of language, and technical interpretation, also called 'psychological interpretation', which studies speech acts as a manifestation of a person. Schleiermacher organized his lectures on the basis of these distinctions. An introductory section that briefly explained his hermeneutic was followed by a section on grammatical interpretation which was followed by a section on technical interpretation. We are going to examine the four claims and then look briefly at what he had to say about grammatical interpretation and technical interpretation.

Consider the question Schleiermacher is seeking to answer: How do we achieve an understanding of one another by means of language? Note that it presupposes that hermeneutics is concerned entirely with the interpretation

of language. In a recent article in this journal Vincent Brümmer (1991) introduces a discussion of the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Schleiermacher by quoting Hector Berlioz, who expresses a negative reaction to what some Germans had said about the way he wrote his opera based on Goethe's *Faust*. He was criticized because the context of the original story was Germany but the opening action in his opera took place in Hungary. Because of the creativity of this interpretation of *Faust* Brümmer treats it as compatible with Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics but not Schleiermacher's approach. In other words, Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics, Brümmer says, sanctions creativity and what he calls 'conceptual innovations' in interpretation but Schleiermacher's approach does not. Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is merely interested in discovering original meanings. If, however, Schleiermacher's hermeneutic was designed to address the problem of what makes understanding of one another by means of language possible, then it was not designed to have anything to say about the creation or interpretation of works of art. In fact Schleiermacher says, 'the spirit of antiquity is to be found not only in a certain type of written works but also in the graphic arts and who knows where else, (but) hermeneutics deals only with what is produced in language' (p. 209). Gadamer's hermeneutic differs on this point. The first part of his major work, *Truth and Method*, has as its title, 'The question of truth as it emerges in the experience of art'. To treat the appropriateness of creativity in an artist who writes an opera based on a story as reflecting negatively on Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is to be unjust to Schleiermacher and to miss a basic point behind his hermeneutic, i.e. his interest in understanding how we are able to communicate and understand one another by means of language.

If we consider only the interpretation of linguistic activity, however, Brümmer will still want to make his point that Gadamer's approach, and not Schleiermacher's approach, is compatible with creativity and conceptual innovations, and that because of this Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics has advantages not found in Schleiermacher. Two issues exist here. To what extent are creativity and conceptual innovations a good thing in interpretation and to what extent is Schleiermacher's hermeneutic compatible with them?

Two types of creativity and innovation need to be distinguished. If a scholar discovers a culture with a religious orientation that is significantly different from known religious traditions and wishes to understand it, then creativity and innovation are likely to be required to understand that religious orientation. The scholar is going to be forced to learn to think about life and see life in a new way, and Schleiermacher's approach to hermeneutics recognizes this. A different type of creativity sometimes comes upon the scene when people assess and evaluate what is written. When one philosopher is impressed by a second philosopher but at the same time finds difficulties in what that philosopher says, what sometimes happens is that the first phil-

osopher will become creative and innovative in reworking the views of the second philosopher to avoid the perceived problems. This was Aristotle's reaction to Plato. In no way was Schleiermacher critical of those who would critically assess what they read and introduce conceptual innovations to address perceived problems. From his perspective a critical dialogue with a text in working out an assessment of it can be an important, worthwhile task, but not the task of hermeneutics. Whereas Gadamer builds this type of dialogue into hermeneutics Schleiermacher keeps it on the outside because it is not relevant to answering the question he is seeking to answer. To consider Schleiermacher's hermeneutic as lacking something here because it does not include this is to misunderstand his hermeneutic and its basic point.

It seems to me that from Gadamer's perspective the distinction between being innovative for the sake of understanding a work and being innovative for the sake of evaluating a work is a distinction that he does not want to recognize. He seems to think that any innovation on behalf of understanding a work will contain hidden evaluations of the interpreter and that therefore the distinction ought to be rejected. Here we see analogies with Freud and Marx and a kinship with what is sometimes called neo-modernism. This distinction, however, plays an important role in shaping the lives and ideals of many scholars, and I suggest that we should be cautious in not throwing out the baby with the bath water.

To the reader who agrees with Gadamer on this point I want to say the following. Gadamer's view here has nothing to do with the basic question Schleiermacher is attempting to answer by means of his hermeneutic, i.e. the question of determining what enables us to understand one another by means of language, unless Gadamer takes the view that people can never communicate and understand one another by means of language, which he never says. Let us consider the four claims by which he answers that question.

LANGUAGE AND THE ACTION OF PERSONS

In criticizing the traditional fourfold theory of meaning Schleiermacher says, 'if one regards understanding as the task of hermeneutics and adheres to the insight [*Anschauung*] that thought is to be treated neither as something objective nor as a thing, but as an act [*factum*], all the false dialectical distinctions among the various senses [*Sinnen*] can be avoided' (p. 43). The reference here to 'the various senses' is a reference to the traditional view that scripture has a variety of meanings embedded within it. The common view was that there were four types of meaning embedded in it – literal, moral, anagogical, and allegorical. (See Thomas's *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 1, a. 10). Schleiermacher's claim is that talk of there being a set number of meanings assumes that thoughts are like objects in nature, objects to be sorted out into a set of types or kinds. Thought, he wishes to say, is to be understood

as an action, not a thing, and thus meanings are to be understood in terms of these actions, instead of being understood as a kind of thing.

What is not being said here, but being assumed, is that thought and speaking are, in a sense, two aspects of the same thing. Schleiermacher says, 'speaking (is) only the outer side of thinking', 'speaking is the medium for the communality of thought', and 'a person thinks by means of speaking' (p. 97). For him thinking is internalized speaking and speaking is externalized thought, and thus both thought and language are to be understood in terms of actions. Another assumption here is that actions are to be understood by reference to human intentions. Thus rather than ask what type of meaning a word or expression has in a particular passage, we should ask what so and so meant in performing the act of saying such and such. This is not to say, however, that meaning is entirely a matter of the author's intentions – a point that will be clarified later.

In his second University address Schleiermacher attacks the traditional view of meaning in a different way. Here he points out that talk of different types of meanings has led people to talk of different kinds of interpretation. At the time he was writing scholars had introduced the phrase 'grammatical-historical interpretation' to refer to the importance of paying attention to grammar and historical context in interpreting a passage – something with which Schleiermacher agreed. He says, however, 'the phrase is used in opposition to dogmatic and allegorical interpretations, as if these represented independent types of interpretation, regardless of whether or not they are justified' (p. 213). To this he adds, 'All these innovations seem to stem from the belief that there are various kinds of interpretation from which interpreters can freely choose. But were that so, it would no longer be worth the effort to speak or write' (p. 214). In other words, speaking and writing are actions that need to be understood to a great extent by reference to human intentions, but if whatever is spoken or written has various meanings and the interpreter can freely choose between interpretations, then speaking and writing become pointless. If the interpreter can freely choose between types of interpretation then the intentions of the author are irrelevant. This strikes me as a sound argument that deserves to be taken seriously.

Above I suggested that Gadamer's method of describing how 'understanding' functions should be compatible with Schleiermacher's project of seeking to understand what makes understanding of one another by means of language possible. In his discussion of Schleiermacher and Gadamer Brümmer (1992) seems to recognize this point but then to draw a mistaken inference from it. He infers from this that whether an interpreter uses Schleiermacher's approach to interpretation or Gadamer's approach is a matter of what the interests of the interpreter are. He says, 'There are a wide variety of ways of approaching a text, and the one we choose is determined in the end by the aims with which we are reading the text' (p. 454). Schleiermacher's response to this is to say that if the decision lies in the hands of the interpreter then

the point and purpose of language, of achieving an understanding of one another, is given up. Since various interpretations of texts develop through the passage of time and interpreters like to find new meanings some kind of social utility could exist in forgetting about what the author meant and what the text meant in its historical context, but attention needs to be given to the cost paid by such a project. The basic point of language, to achieve an understanding of one another by means of it, is given up.

It would be unfair to suggest, however, that Brümmer would have the interpreter just disregard original meanings of a text. He says that in interpretation a "distance" should be maintained between the interpreter and the text. This means that the interpreter ought not just read into a text all of his or her favourite meanings. He says, 'One way of maintaining this distance between interpreter and text is by pursuing the hermeneutic dialogue with the intention of the author or, more generally, with a "natural" interpretation of the text, i.e. one which is plausible against the background in which the text was written' (p. 458). Here the word 'interpretation' is used not in its evaluative sense of how to assess properly what is written but, as Schleiermacher does, in the sense of how to achieve a proper understanding of what is written. The right question at this point is, How we are to achieve this proper understanding. Either Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is being introduced in a larger context, a context that makes creative assessment of a text to be a part of hermeneutics, or some revised version of Schleiermacher is being suggested for this context. It is not clear which is the case, but obviously this should be the focus of any critique of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic.

An interesting analogy exists between Schleiermacher's approach to hermeneutics and what is being said by persons who are doing speech act theory – a movement within the philosophy of language. The beginnings of this methodology go back to John Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, (1962) and the development and refinement in its methodology have been carried out by John Searle and Paul Grice. In listing the issues that are of concern to contemporary philosophy of language John Searle (1969) raises the question, 'How is it possible that when a speaker stands before a hearer and emits an acoustic blast such remarkable things occur as: the speaker meaning something; the sounds he emits mean something: the hearer understand what is meant...?' (p. 3). Note that this is like Schleiermacher asking what makes it possible to understand one another by means of language. In answering his question Searle says, 'The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act' (1969, p. 16). In other words, both philosophers say that seeing language as the actions of persons is important to understanding a speaker or author.

This emphasis upon human actions leads both to emphasize the importance of seeing language as tied to human intentions. The reason for this, I believe, is that actions are by their very nature tied up with human intentions. In attacking traditional hermeneutics for treating thoughts and meanings as types of objects Schleiermacher was criticizing it for divorcing thoughts and meanings from human intentions. In talking about noises and marks tied to human communication Searle says, 'not only must I assume the noise or mark to have been produced as a result of intentional behavior, but I must also assume that the intentions are a very special kind peculiar to speech acts' (1969, pp. 16–17).

Another interesting similarity is found in what Schleiermacher and Searle say about metaphor. Consider the line, 'All of the world is a stage.' The problem of metaphor is the problem of understanding how such talk ends up making sense. The traditional emphasis upon different kinds of meaning has led some to claim that metaphor involves words taking upon a special type of meaning. Both Searle and Schleiermacher criticize this view and emphasize the point that in metaphor words continue to have their ordinary meanings. Referring to metaphors, Schleiermacher says:

words retain their literal meaning and the author relies on a combination of ideas to make the words exercise their effects. Technical allusions develop in this way: word plays, the use of proverbs, allegory, where grammatical interpretation is entirely appropriate and the question about the author's actual meaning belongs to technical interpretation (p. 74).

Grammatical interpretation, for Schleiermacher, involves the study of speech acts perceived as a manifestation of language, as opposed to a manifestation of a person, which is the concern of technical interpretation. Having just said that for Schleiermacher discounting the intentions of the author leads to giving up on the basic point of communication it may seem odd to hear him say here that interpretations should consider meanings that exist apart from the intentions of the author. To say, however, that the intentions of the author play an important role in communication is not to deny that other factors also play an important role. Later we will look at what Schleiermacher says about grammatical interpretation. What we need to know here is that it includes the study of the meaning of words, which is seen as something beyond the intentions of a particular speaker. For Schleiermacher understanding metaphor forces a person to draw a distinction between word meaning and the intentions of a particular speaker, which in this situation are different. In metaphor an author or speaker uses language with its normal meaning to produce special effects on an audience. Words continue to have their ordinary meanings but what the author means is different. Searle makes this same point. Words, he says, have only their standard meanings and in interpreting metaphor 'we are... talking about possible speaker's intentions', which are not tied to word meanings (1979, p. 77).

LANGUAGE AND THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNICATION

The second claim important to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is that linguistic acts are to be understood as playing their role in the context of communication. Since authors and speakers normally communicate to certain people the interpreter is to think of the audience addressed. 'The interpreter,' Schleiermacher tells us, 'must try to become the immediate reader of a text' (p. 43). 'The interpreter must (then) establish the same relationship between himself and the author as existed between the author and his original audience' (p. 216). Since what is said is said to an audience, the interpreter should assume the position of the original audience. 'No text,' Schleiermacher reminds us, 'is intended in such a way that its hearers could not possibly have understood it' (p. 58).

Here again we have a significant analogy with speech act theorists because they too see language primarily as a tool by which people communicate with one another. This has led them to work out views of the nature of communication. A fruit of this endeavour has been to shed light on pragmatic implication, sometimes called 'contextual implication'. Irony, satire, just being funny, and being serious are a matter of what people (pragmatically) imply when they speak. Words like 'Yankee', 'American', and 'Pharisee' often carry pragmatic implications that are different from logical implications, and different pragmatic implications depending upon context. In his study of the creation stories of Genesis Conrad Hyers (1984) claims that the statement 'these are the generations of the heavens and the earth' (Gen. 2:4) is to be understood as irony and the statement 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3) implied that there was no god of light – something that was not a logical implication. Obviously a hermeneutical theory ought to shed light on this phenomenon and help us determine what is being pragmatically implied. Among speech act theorists the most influential study of communication and pragmatic implication is found in H. P. Grice's article, 'The Logic of Conversations'. My article 'What Determines a Pragmatic Implication?' gives a critique of Grice and a related but different view of communication and pragmatic implication.

UNDERSTANDING AS THE COINHERENCE OF TWO MOMENTS

The third claim important to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is that linguistic acts are both a manifestation of language and a manifestation of a person. The fourth claim is that understanding takes place when we see how a linguistic act manifests both a language and a person. This is his statement:

Just as every act of speaking is related to both the totality of the language and the totality of the speaker's thoughts, so understanding a speech always involves two moments: to understand what is said in the context of the language with its possibilities, and to understand it as a fact in the thinking of the speaker...

Accordingly, each person represents one locus where a given language takes shape in a particular way, and his speech can be understood only in the context of the totality of the language. But then too he is a person who is a constantly developing spirit, and his speaking can be understood as only one moment in this development in relation to all others. Understanding takes place only in the co-inherence of these two moments (pp. 97–8).

The picture here is that language and its meanings are embedded in a community and develop like an organism through speaking, i.e. people shape language. On the other hand, we are also shaped by language. 'The linguistic heritage', he says, 'modifies the spirit' (p. 99). A language is like an organism in that 'every element is determinable in a special way by the other elements', (p. 100), i.e. the parts are related to one another like an organism, and it is constantly developing and changing like an organism. This should remind the reader of Hegel.

In what ways do the elements of a language determine one another? Schleiermacher does not say, but there is an obvious way this happens. With respect to types of objects or types of qualities, languages divide up members of a type in different ways, and what a particular member means is tied to what other members of that type mean. Consider colour words. What 'red' and 'yellow' mean depends in part on whether orange is recognized as a colour. In Persian orange is not recognized as a colour. What 'blue' means is determined in part by whether purple is recognized as a colour. What 'chair' refers to is determined in part by how 'couch' is defined. In Persian anything which is stuffed is not categorized with chairs but with couches. In other words, a word's meaning is determined by the other words present in the language and the system used for categorizing things.

Whereas a language is portrayed as analogous to an organism, a person is a type of organism. Schleiermacher refers to a person as 'a constantly developing spirit'. 'His speaking can be understood as only one moment in this development in relation to all others' (p. 98). In other words, a speech act is an action of an agent to be understood in terms of its relationship to other actions of that agent – an agent who is constantly developing.

Understanding a speech act as a manifestation of a person requires seeing it also as a manifestation of language, and vice versa. Schleiermacher says:

An act of speaking cannot even be understood as a moment in a person's development unless it is also understood in relation to the language. This is because the linguistic heritage modifies the spirit. 2. Nor can an act of speaking be understood as a modification of the language unless it is also understood as a moment in the development of the person (later addition: because an individual is able to influence a language by speaking, which is how a language develops.) (p. 99).

Schleiermacher's view here seems basically sound and his distinctions correspond to the two kinds of meaning – linguistic meaning, embedded in the language, and speaker meaning, which is tied to the intentions of the speaker. Language is a community phenomenon where standards for proper usage

are embedded in the community and its practices. To be introduced properly to a language is to be introduced to a community and its practices. This was a point emphasized by Wittgenstein. Words and what is said thus have meanings that are independent of the intentions of the particular speaker. We thus sometimes ask what 'it means', referring to a word, phrase or sentence in a particular context. At the same time, speaking is an action which manifests the intentions of the speaker – the intentions of one who we presume knows the language. Normally what an expression means in a particular context is what the speaker intends to convey by using that expression. No mystery exists here because in order to speak a person must first know the language, and thus normally what 'it means' will also be what the speaker intends to convey by the use of an expression. The word 'normally' is important here. We have seen that in a metaphor what 'it means' and what the person means are different.

Consider an analogy with game playing. In playing a game actions are a manifestation of the rules of the game and at the same time are a manifestation of the players and the personalities of those players. In the same way linguistic acts are a manifestation of language and a manifestation of the persons and the personalities of those who use the language.

If linguistic acts are both a manifestation of a language and a manifestation of the person who uses the language, the appropriate question then becomes how do we determine what 'it means' and what the author means? To answer this Schleiermacher divides up the job of hermeneutics into two tasks – studying speech acts as a manifestation of language and studying speech acts as a manifestation of a person. The former he refers to as grammatical interpretation and the latter he refers to as technical or psychological interpretation. 'These two hermeneutical tasks,' he says, 'are completely equal, and it would be incorrect to label grammatical interpretation the 'lower' and psychological interpretation the 'higher' task' (p. 99). The distinction here, Schleiermacher says, belongs to the realm of hermeneutical theory. In practice these two types of interpretation function together.

GRAMMATICAL INTERPRETATION

In speaking of grammatical interpretation Schleiermacher says, 'The vocabulary and the history of an author's age together form a whole from which his writings must be understood as a part' (p. 113). To illustrate this the reader might consider what would be necessary to explain the meanings of 'cold war', 'star wars', 'summit', and 'glasnost'. For Schleiermacher the study of history requires a study of culture and the shared lives of people out of which the events of the past arise. 'The common life (of a people)', he says, '...develops and is bound together with language' (p. 204). In other words, language helps bind the lives of people together and is part of their shared life. Out of people's shared interests and a sharing of life arise various

types of speech activities which are called 'genre'. Greeting one another, introducing one another, talk about the weather, telling a joke, popular songs, reciting poetry, rapping, and letters to the editor are all types of genre. In an early aphorism Schleiermacher says, 'The whole is first understood as genre. – New genres develop from larger spheres, and, in the final analysis, out of life itself' (p. 60). Schleiermacher's perspective here is similar to Wittgenstein's emphasis on the multiple uses of language and his emphasis on the close tie that exists between the language of a people and the life of a people.

The reference here to spheres refers to spheres of life common to author/speaker and audience. 'The interpreter must be familiar with the whole sphere of life and the relationships between an author and audience' (p. 216). A sphere of life is an area of human interest that people share with one another and the activities that are tied up with that realm of interests. A religious community and its faith constitutes a sphere of life and types of speech activity that play a role in that community – prayers, hymns, 'passing the peace', sermons and creedal confessions – are genre belonging to that sphere of life.

Important to many spheres of life, particularly the religious ones, are the traditions that tie the community together and form the background for understanding the community and its activities. In considering a statement, Schleiermacher says, 'one should construe the meaning from the total pre-given value of language and the heritage common to the author and his reader, for only by reference to this is interpretation possible' (p. 70). The reference here to 'heritage common to the author and his reader' seems to refer to the traditions that they share in common. Schleiermacher, however, does not emphasize and build upon this point. Later we will see that there is a criticism that can be made of his hermeneutic on this point.

Since there are many spheres of life and so many different contexts in which language is used Schleiermacher understandably stresses the importance of paying attention to context. 'The meaning of each word of a passage must be determined by the context in which it occurs' (p. 127). 'Every point needs to be more precisely defined, and that determination is first of all provided by the context. Considered in isolation, every element of language, both formal and material, is indefinite. For any given word or linguistic form we can conceive a certain range of usages... The truth is that in interpretation the task of clarifying what is vague is never-ending' (p. 117). In other words in most situations understanding is not something very simple that just occurs but rather is something that is achieved in terms of degrees.

TECHNICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

This type of interpretation studies language, linguistic acts, as a manifestation of a person. Schleiermacher recognized that all linguistic acts have a

psychological component, because they are the actions of persons, but in discussing this type of interpretation he focuses usually on works that are informative about the qualities and character of a person, the type of work that interested him. This interest led him to say, at one point, that hermeneutics was not equally interested in every linguistic act, e.g. discussions about the weather. Eventually, in a manuscript dated 1832–3, he was led to make what he calls a ‘relative distinction’ between interpretations that relate to the character and important qualities of an author, which he called then ‘psychological interpretations,’ and interpretations that relate only to ‘a particular thought or intention,’ e.g. which he called ‘technical interpretation’ (p. 223). ‘The former,’ he says, ‘focuses more upon how thoughts emerged from the totality of the author’s life. The latter focuses more upon how a set of thoughts arose from a particular thought or intention [*Darstellenwollen*],’ (p. 233). This is a late distinction, however, not present in most of his lecture notes.

In his lecture notes on hermeneutics, dated 1826–7 (p. 168), Schleiermacher says that the first task of ‘technical interpretation’ is to find the inner unity or theme of the work. Schleiermacher draws a distinction here between the theme and the ‘purpose’ of the work, where he uses shock quotes. Schleiermacher is not very clear here, but the distinction seems to be between the real purpose, which is the theme, which may never be stated, and the expressed purpose. The relationship here, he says, varies. The more arbitrary the production of a work the greater the difference. To capture the theme of a work Schleiermacher suggests that we pay attention to its beginning and its end, and then compare them. If this does not establish the unity, we should consider the accentuated passages. These, however, are not always present.

The second task of technical interpretation is to discover ‘the individuality of the composition’ (p. 171). What Schleiermacher seems to have in mind here are the important qualities of the work seen from the perspective of its being a creation of its author. His view here is best understood by looking at what he has to say about the hermeneutical circle, which refers both to grammatical interpretation and technical interpretation. It is important to realize, however, that in practice these two types of interpretation are not separate from one another. The separation is found only in the context of hermeneutical theory.

SCHLEIERMACHER ON THE HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE

Schleiermacher’s primary discussion of the circle is found in his second address to the Berlin Academy of Sciences. It begins as follows: ‘The hermeneutical principle which Ast has proposed and in several respects developed quite extensively is that just as the whole is understood from the parts, so the parts can be understood only from the whole. This principle is of such consequence for hermeneutics and so incontestable that one cannot even

begin to interpret without using it' (pp. 195–6). The notion that the part is to be understood in terms of a whole of which it is a part applies, Schleiermacher says, to words, sentences and sets of sentences '...just as a word in a given sentence can be fully determined only when it is read in its context... (so also) any set of sentences, large or small, can be understood correctly only in terms of the whole to which it belongs' (p. 198). Amplifying on this point he says,

When we consider the task of interpretation with this principle in mind, we have to say that our increasing understanding of each sentence and of each section, an understanding which we achieve by starting at the beginning and moving forward slowly, is always provisional. It becomes more complete as we are able to see each larger section as a coherent unity... as we push ahead the new material illumines everything we have already treated, until suddenly at the end every part is clear and the whole work is visible in sharp and definite contours (p. 198).

It is not always the case, of course, that every part becomes clear and the whole is seen clearly. Schleiermacher also recognizes that not every work is to be understood as a whole. Some are to be understood as a group of connected wholes. Usually he also emphasizes that works require rereading and rereading – a pattern that normally will lead to a better understanding of the parts and the whole. Understanding is portrayed in this context as being a matter of degree.

The notion of a hermeneutical circle has generated significant confusion. Richard Palmer (1969), a follower of Gadamer, claims that it involves a logical contradiction, *Why?* He says, 'for, if we must grasp the whole before we can understand the parts, then we shall never understand anything. Yet we have asserted that the part derives its meaning from the whole. And surely, on the other hand, we cannot start with a whole, undifferentiated into parts' (p. 87). What Palmer overlooks is that Schleiermacher emphasizes the provisional and imperfect understanding of the whole which is present at the beginning of the study of a text – an understanding which is then revised. This early understanding, he says, can be determined by a number of things: our knowledge of the author as well as the subject matter, by the title, by a reading of the preface as well as a thumbing through of the pages of the text. This provisional view of the whole will then often be revised a number of times as the text is read.

The statement that the parts are understood by reference to the whole can be misleading because the parts have some meaning apart from the whole. Schleiermacher recognized that words and sentences have meaning apart from the context to which they belong. What he says about grammatical interpretation makes this clear. To say that the parts are to be understood by reference to the whole is to say that the significance of the parts is to be determined from the larger whole to which they belong. To say that the meaning of the whole is determined by reference to the parts is to say that the parts place constraints upon what the whole can mean, and that the

meaning of the whole is that which best ties the parts of a work together into a coherent whole.

This is not quite right, however. At this point Schleiermacher refers again to Ast and to the operation of our principle at a higher level. 'Just as a word relates to a sentence, a sentence to a section, and a section to a work as a particular to a totality or a part to a whole, so, too, every speech and every text is a particular or part that can be completely understood only in relation to a still larger whole' (p. 202). Each work belongs to a larger whole in two respects. He says,

First, each work is part of the sphere of literature to which it belongs, and together with other works of similar merit it forms a body of literature. This body of literature helps one to interpret each work with reference to the language. Second, each work is also a part of the author's life, and together with his other acts it forms the totality of his life. Thus it is to be understood only from the totality of the person's acts, inasmuch as it is of influence upon his life and is in keeping with it (p. 202).

Schleiermacher sees these two types of larger wholes as being emphasized by different types of interpreters. He says,

Linguistically-oriented interpreters try to comprehend a work by grasping how it is related to similar works of the same type. They focus on the forms of composition which arise from the nature of the language and of the common life which develops and is bound together with language... The other interpreters, however, want to determine from a composition what kind of person the author is. To do this they identify themselves as much as possible with the moments of creativity and conception which break into the fabric of the author's everyday life like higher inspirations. They seek a vivid insight into every facet of the parts that may illuminate the process of creation... Full understanding requires both of these operations... (p. 204).

Here we have the distinction between language-oriented, grammatical interpretation and person-oriented, technical interpretation. What Palmer deems to involve a logical contradiction ends up being tentative interpretations that become gradually revised in the light of a better understanding of the text, the author, the sphere of literature to which this work belongs, and the common life out of which the literature arises.

GADAMER'S RESPONSE TO SCHLEIERMACHER

Gadamer's response to Schleiermacher is to say, 'the circle of understanding is not a 'methodological' circle, but describes an ontological structural element in understanding' (p. 261). Ontology is concerned with studying the nature of reality. One of Gadamer's major concerns, which he derives from Heidegger, is to give a descriptive (phenomenological) analysis of the type of reality we have as human beings. For both individuals understanding is a part of that reality and thus both attempt to describe how understanding functions. What does it mean to say that the circle is ontological as opposed

to methodological? The view is that human beings with their understandings are a basic reality that will shape any interpretation that will be given to a text. The person includes the totality of the lived experiences of that individual, the attitudes, interests, feelings and beliefs of that individual. It is by and in terms of such realities that the text is going to have to be understood, not by a impartial, indifferent, heavenly spirit. The claim is made, therefore, that any understanding of a text is going to be shaped very much by the pre-understanding or fore-understanding which is brought to the text. This is not to recognize any arbitrary or capricious methods, but rather is an attempt merely to describe and tell us 'how it is' when it comes to what happens in interpretation. Gadamer's prime interest is in just describing how understanding functions.

For Schleiermacher the hermeneutical circle is methodological because a particular word or passage is to be understood, in part, in terms of both its immediate context and the larger work of which it is a part, and a particular work is to be understood in terms of two other wholes, the author's life and the literature and culture to which the work belongs. To understand a particular work Schleiermacher says that the interpreter posits a provisional meaning of the whole at the beginning of the study of the work, and then this provisional meaning becomes modified again and again as the interpreter becomes exposed more and more to the parts of the work. Schleiermacher does not use the word 'pre-understanding' but he does say that this provisional understanding is likely to take its shape from our prior knowledge of the subject matter and our prior knowledge of the author. He would say, however, that this prior understanding can be radically reshaped as an interpreter becomes exposed to more and more of the content of a text. The whole of a text is to be understood, at least in part, in terms of a coherent understanding of its various parts, but also in terms of the larger wholes of which it is a part.

To deny what Schleiermacher affirms would be to claim that the meaning of a sentence is not tied to its context or the larger wholes to which it belongs, but Gadamer does not make such a claim. It strikes me that his claim that the hermeneutical circle is ontological rather than methodological is like saying that he wants to play chess rather than checkers. He is rejecting Schleiermacher's project. Gadamer's project of analysing the nature of human reality and Schleiermacher's project of trying to understand how we successfully communicate and understand one another by means of language and radically different types of projects that should not conflict with one another. Of course, if the view of human reality is that people cannot successfully communicate with one another, something Gadamer never says, then a problem would arise. The problem is that Gadamer never addresses the concerns and interests of Schleiermacher; never asks the question of whether successful communication is ever possible, and, if so, how come?

The practice of speaking and writing is usually based upon the assumption that communication is possible, but one can never be sure about these things. Any assessment of Schleiermacher should first examine the nature of his project; assess the project, and then assess the extent to which he accomplishes his goal. The net effect of this state of affairs is that one must look at what is being done in the philosophy of language to discover how the concerns and interests of Schleiermacher are being currently addressed.

A CRITICISM

I shall conclude this discussion by making a criticism of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic. Let us suppose that you were to attend a Sunday morning worship service at a church where you did not know the minister but a church whose traditions were familiar to you. Would that lack of knowledge prevent you from understanding the sermon? Knowing the minister may open a dimension of understanding but understanding a sermon usually does not require a knowledge of the person who gives it. A sermon is addressed to a congregation and what is usually important to understand it is an understanding of the faith of a church and its traditions. At one point Schleiermacher refers to the importance of 'the total pre-given value of language and the heritage common to the author and reader' (p. 70) but he does not emphasize this point nor build upon it. In fact in a later rewriting of his lecture notes (p. 117) he omits this reference to heritage.

Schleiermacher makes the point that linguistic acts are both a manifestation of language and a manifestation of the person. This seems to be right. From this he draws the conclusion that it is just as important to see a linguistic act as a manifestation of a person as it is to see that linguistic act as a manifestation of the language. This does not follow. From the fact that linguistic acts are both a manifestation of a person and a manifestation of language it does not follow that both are equally important. The example of the sermon makes this clear. The same applies to scripture where we often do not know the author but can understand much of what is said by understanding the religious tradition which forms the background of what is written. We do not know the authors of the Hindu Vedas and if we go through the Christian ordering of the books of the Old Testament we go through fifteen books before we find one of them – The Book of Nehemiah – where an alleged author is named. What needs to be emphasized is a study of the religious traditions that form the background out of which a book of scripture comes can help us significantly to understand that book. Scholars who emphasize this point are referred to as practicing tradition criticism. One of the differences between recent biblical studies and biblical studies in the nineteenth century is that scholars have come to place a greater emphasis upon understanding the traditions that stand behind scripture.

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