# PART I

# The Importance of Methodical Hermeneutics

## Introduction[1]

Because of the confusion created by recent literature on hermeneutics, it has become more and more difficult in a few paragraphs to say what hermeneutics is and what it is concerned with. At one time this was a rather easy task; lately the basic issues have become so clouded, that one must begin by distinguishing a number of quite different conceptions of hermeneutics, before one can turn to the most important and urgent issues at hand. This confusion is due mainly to the publications of Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and others, who used the term "hermeneutics" in senses quite different from the one originally given to the term in the nineteenth century.

To bring some order into the chaos created in this way, Seebohm[2] has suggested that in the recent literature one should distinguish between five different positions in regard to hermeneutics, beginning with the one developed by Boeckh, whose work can be considered as the source of the entire modern hermeneutic movement during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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[1]The issues raised in Part I of this book have been the subject of discussions, in courses and seminars on hermeneutics presented for a number of years at The Pennsylvania State University. For these discussions the publications of Boeckh, Dilthey, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Seebohm, and many others were selected. The most important of these publications will be listed below (See Bibliography, Part I, p. 182).

The same ideas were used for my "Introduction" to the Festschrift for Professor Seebohm, entitled *Phenomenology on Kant, German Idealism, Hermeneutics and Logic*, edited by O.K. Wiegand, R.J. Dostal, L. Embree, J. Kockelmans, and J.N. Mohanty (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), pp. 1–24. In this volume is also contained a complete bibliography of the publications by Seebohm (pp. 337–344), of which I will mention below only those publications, which I have actually used in Part I of this volume.

[2]Seebohm, Thomas, "Boeckh and Dilthey: The Development of Methodological Hermeneutics," in *Man and World*, 17 (1984), pp. 557–87; cf. also "The Problem of Hermeneutics in Recent Anglo-American Literature, Part I" in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 10 (1977), pp. 180–98; Part II, Ibid., 10 (1977), pp. 263–75; *Zur Kritik der Hermeneutischen Vernunft*, Bonn; Bouvier, 1972; "The Significance of the Phenomenology of Written Discourse for Hermeneutics," in J.J. Pilotta, ed., *Interpersonal Communication: Essays in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America, 1982), pp. 141–59; "The New Hermeneutics: Other Trends in the Human Sciences from the Standpoint of Transcendental Phenomenology," in H.J. Silverman, J. Sallis and T.M. Seebohm, eds., in *Continental Philosophy in America* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1983), pp. 64–89. "Die Begründung der Hermeneutik Diltheys in Husserls transcendentaler Phänomenologie," in E.W. Orth, ed., *Dilthey in die philosophie der Gegenwart* (Freiburg, München, Alber, 1985), pp. 97–124; "Hermeneutics," in L. Embree, et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), pp. 308–312; "Falsehood as the Prime Mover of Hermeneutics" in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, N.S. 7 (1992), pp. 1–24.

Although in the present volume I am concerned mainly with the changes which Dilthey has introduced in the methodical hermeneutics of Boeckh, I must nonetheless start with a few very brief observations on Boeckh's methodical hermeneutics which Dilthey presupposes.

## Article 1. Boeckh's Hermeneutical Methodology

Boeckh used the term "hermeneutics" for one aspect or part of the philological-historical method; the second aspect or part of the same method was called "critique." For Boeckh "hermeneutics" is the scientific methodology of the study of what is known already, i.e., the scientific methodology of philology, or the scientific study of the methods which explain the meaning of the texts, in which philologists express their opinions and insights about the meaning of the literary works of a certain era or epoch. Boeckh discussed these methods systematically in his *Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften.* This book was translated in part under the title *On Interpretation and Criticism.*[3]

According to Boeckh the aim of these methods, for which he developed a refined hermeneutic system, is to deliver interpretations of texts that are objectively valid. He accepted as a foundation of this system a principle, first introduced by Protestant hermeneutics, and which Schleiermacher later called *the first canon.* This principle states that a text must be understood from the perspective of its contemporary readers, not from that of the interpreter. It was also Boeckh's merit to have removed the ambiguities of Schleiermacher's formulation of a *second canon,* which demands that each text must be understood from its parts and that each part must be understood from the relevant whole (*hermeneutic circle*). For that purpose Boeckh specified four different wholes which must be distinguished here, namely (i) the whole of the *language* to which the text belongs; (ii) the whole of *the context of the text in question,* (iii) the whole of all *the works of the author,* (iv) and finally, *the text itself,* taken as a whole. The first two wholes were to be studied within "lower hermeneutics," and these two parts of the method were called *grammatical* and *historical* hermeneutics and critique, respectively. The last two wholes were to be dealt with in "higher hermeneutics," namely, in *individual* and *generic* hermeneutics and critique, under the headings of "style" and "genre."

Methodical hermeneutics thus distinguishes a hierarchy of levels, the work to be done at the lower levels is presupposed at the higher levels.

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[3](Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1966) and (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968).

Assumptions at the higher levels which clash with those discovered at the lower levels must be rejected. Violations of this principle lead to vicious circularities.

According to Boeckh, the employment of the method does not claim to lead to the final truth or to the one and only "true" and definitive interpretation of the text, even though most interpreters will take their interpretations that way. Rather the use of the method is to lead to the elimination of errors. The method does not verify, but rather falsifies erroneous interpretations. Furthermore, the method reaches its limits at the generic level, because the rules of the methods do not apply to "eminent texts" or to the works of genius, for in that case the standards of critique can be found only by means of the interpretation of the eminent text itself. I shall return to this issue in what follows.

By critique, on the other hand, Boeckh understands that philological performance through which the subject matter of a text becomes understood, not by itself and for its own sake, but for the establishment of a relation or reference to something else, namely its conditioning circumstances. Thus critique is concerned only with the understanding of the relation between what is communicated in a text and its own conditioning circumstances. Critique is to be divided into the same sections into which interpretation was divided, namely grammatical, individual, historical and generic critique, because each domain has its own conditioning circumstances. Critique has a threefold task: 1) It must investigate whether a literary work is in keeping with the grammatical, literal meaning of the text, with its historical basis, with the individuality of the author, and with the characteristics of its genre. 2) When something is not in keeping, one must examine how it might be made more conformable. 3) Finally, it must investigate whether the form handed down is the original or not.

Boeckh's hermeneutics outlined above with many simplifications to be sure, was the result of a long historical development, to which many scholars have made important contributions; at least three phases must be distinguished:

1. Hermeneutics as the art of grammar, the *Techne Grammatike*, the method of philology introduced by Hellenistic philologists.
2. The hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers and some Medieval theologians.
3. The hermeneutics of the Reformation from Flacius to Ernesti and Semler.

This latter conception of hermeneutics had been the source of Schleiermacher's "general, methodical hermeneutics."

To avoid misunderstanding, it is of utmost importance to stress that Boeckh used the term "text" here to refer to texts in the primary and ordinary sense, i.e., the written or printed documents in which an author communicates his ideas to his audience. Concretely, Boeckh had in mind the literary works of

well-known Greek and Latin authors of Antiquity, written by poets, dramatists, historians, religious writers, theologians, philosophers, legal scholars, and "scientists," who lived in the era of Greek and Latin Antiquity. I myself take the term "text" in this book *in an analogous sense* for the written documents in which creative scientists explain and articulate their original conceptions and discoveries concerning the meaning of experiments or scientific theories. It is essential to exclude here two possible conceptions which suggest themselves almost spontaneously. 1) What I have in mind here are not the texts in which *historians of science* describe and explain the opinions of the creative and original scientists, with whose ideas and works they are concerned as historians. For it is obvious that the works of historians are manifestly texts in the sense of Boeckh's hermeneutics and critique. Yet 2) by "text" I do not mean either what often has been called "the book of nature." For that title refers to what all scientists try to explain, but which as such is not yet a text in any definable sense of the term, until it has become someone's conception and articulation of that conception. Thus the latter expression refers to the totality of all natural phenomena. Rather what I here understand by "texts" is the very subject matter of the texts produced by historians, i.e., the facts of nature, or the phenomena *as understood and somehow articulated scientifically by the original, creative scientists themselves* on the basis of assumptions or hypotheses, which are often determined mainly by the education these scientists received. This explains why it was important for my conception of physics, to conclude the first volume of *Ideas* with reflections on the history of physics.

In what follows here as well as in Part III, of this volume I will have to return to this, to explain other similar terms employed by Dilthey, such as "text tradition," "eminent text," "texts of genius," etc. But for now I would like first to turn to Dilthey's own contributions to hermeneutics and critique, where these and other expressions will be introduced in their proper context.

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Ideas for a Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the Natural Sciences
Volume II: On the Importance of Methodical Hermeneutics for a Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the Natural Sciences
Kockelmans, J.J.
2002, XV, 211 p., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-1-4020-0650-0