

Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics

JEAN GRONDIN

FOREWORD BY HANS-GEORG GADAMER

TRANSLATED BY JOEL WEINSHEIMER

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For

Paul-Matthieu and Emmanuel

Contents

Foreword by Hans-Georg Gadamer	ix
Preface	xiii
Introduction	1
I On the Prehistory of Hermeneutics	16
1. <i>Linguistic Delimitations</i> , 16	
2. <i>The Semantics of hermeneuein</i> , 20	
3. <i>Allegorical Interpretation of Myth</i> , 23	
4. <i>Philo: The Universality of Allégory</i> , 26	
5. <i>Origen: The Universality of Typology</i> , 28	

6. <i>Augustine: The Universality of the Inner Logos</i> , 32	V <i>Heidegger: Hermeneutics as the Interpretation of Existence</i> 91
7. <i>Luther: Sola Scriptura?</i> 39	1. <i>The "Fore" of Fore-Understanding</i> , 92
8. <i>Flacius: The Universality of the Grammatical</i> , 42	2. <i>Its Transparency in Interpretation</i> , 96
II <i>Hermeneutics between Grammar and Critique</i> 45	3. <i>The Idea of a Philosophical Hermeneutics of Facticity</i> , 98
1. <i>Dannbauer: True Interpretation and Interpretive Truth</i> , 47	4. <i>The Derivative Status of Statements?</i> 100
2. <i>Chladenius: The Universality of the Pedagogical</i> , 50	5. <i>Hermeneutics after the Turn</i> , 102
3. <i>Meier: The Universality of Signs</i> , 56	VI <i>Gadamer and the Universe of Hermeneutics</i> 106
4. <i>Pietism: The Universality of the Affective</i> , 59	1. <i>Back to the Human Sciences</i> , 106
III <i>Romantic Hermeneutics and Schleiermacher</i> 63	2. <i>The Overcoming of Historicist Hermeneutics</i> , 110
1. <i>The Post-Kantian Transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism: Ast and Schlegel</i> , 63	3. <i>Effective History as Principle</i> , 113
2. <i>Schleiermacher's Universalization of Misunderstanding</i> , 67	4. <i>Understanding as Questioning and Therefore Application</i> , 115
3. <i>Limiting Hermeneutics to Psychology?</i> 72	5. <i>Language as Dialogue</i> , 117
4. <i>The Dialectical Ground of Hermeneutics</i> , 73	6. <i>The Universality of the Hermeneutic Universe</i> , 120
IV <i>The Problems of Historicism</i> 76	VII <i>Hermeneutics in Dialogue</i> 124
1. <i>Böckh and the Dawn of Historical Awareness</i> , 76	1. <i>Betti's Epistemological Return to the Inner Spirit</i> , 125
2. <i>Droysen's Universal Historiology: Understanding as Research in the Moral World</i> , 79	2. <i>Habermas's Critique of Hermeneutics in the Name of Agreement</i> , 129
3. <i>Dilthey: On the Way to Hermeneutics</i> , 84	3. <i>The Deconstructive Challenge to Hermeneutics</i> , 135
	Afterword 140
	Notes 145
	Bibliography 169
	Index 229

Foreword

The "universality of hermeneutics" is less the name of a certain position than a demand for a certain kind of distinction. The term *hermeneutics* goes far back and traverses a long history from which there is still much to learn today. However, the term *universality* presents a challenge, as it were—one that indicates not so much a philosophical position as a philosophical task. Thus I am very happy to be able to introduce Jean Grondin's book, already known to me in German, to the English reader. At the outset of the long history of the concept of hermeneutics stands Aristotle's work of that title, which basically treats of propositional logic. Even this narrower way of posing the question, which implies the bracketing out of nonpropositional forms of speech, views itself as being bound up with all the claims for universality that have always been acknowledged as belonging to the universality of logic, the logos, and language. From the beginning, then, it was understood that language

usage, which has assumed such prominence in modern hermeneutics, pertains in principle to all the special interpretive disciplines. This is the case in juridical as well as in theological hermeneutics, and ultimately the ancient word *hermeneutics* connotes "translation" in the broadest sense.

When the age of metaphysics came to a close, and the modern sciences' claims to possess a monopoly on knowledge were consequently reduced, the attempt to develop a genuine universality could look to this ancient conception for a starting point. There were, however, deeper-lying reasons when, beginning in the Romantic age, hermeneutics expanded to the point that it comprehended the theory of the human sciences as a whole. Thus it came to include not only jurisprudence and theology but also philology and all its related disciplines.

It was above all Wilhelm Dilthey's descriptive psychology that marked an important step in this direction. But it was only when Dilthey and his school gained influence on the phenomenological movement, polemically with Husserl, but productively with the young Heidegger, that understanding was no longer merely juxtaposed with conceptualization and explanation, and that it was not limited to its use in the sciences. Quite the contrary, understanding came to be seen as constituting the fundamental structure of human *Dasein*, and thus it moved into the very center of philosophy.

Thereby subjectivity and self-consciousness—which, for Husserl, expressed themselves in the transcendental ego—lost their primacy. Now, instead, there is an Other, who is not an object for the subject but someone to whom we are bound in the reciprocations of language and life. So, too, understanding is no method but rather a form of community among those who understand each other. Thus a dimension is opened up that is not just one among other fields of inquiry but rather constitutes the praxis of life itself. This certainly does not exclude the possibility that the sciences go their own way and have their own method, which consists in objectifying the objects of their research. However, there is a danger here of limiting ourselves to a theory of science which, in the name of methodological rigor, robs us of certain experiences of other people, other expressions, other texts and their claim to validity.

One need only think of the great effort that structuralist poetics has put into shedding some light on myth—and yet without even coming close to realizing the aim of letting myth speak more clearly than before. The same could be said for the semantics that objectified the world of signs and the textuality that has made possible new and interesting steps toward scientific

knowledge. By contrast to these, hermeneutics encourages not objectification but listening to one another—for example, the listening to and belonging with (*Zuhören*) someone who knows how to tell a story. Here we begin to glimpse the *je ne sais quoi* that we mean when we refer to people's understanding one another. It is Grondin's special merit to have worked out this "inner" conversation as the real foundation of hermeneutics, which (as I indicated in *Truth and Method*) plays an important role in Augustine and in other contexts such as process theology.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Preface

In a preface, an author is permitted to say something about himself and his relation to what he has written. Alongside the text proper, the purely accidental impulse that motivated it can emerge more clearly.

As I worked on this book in the late fall of 1988, I found myself having difficulty conceptualizing the universal claim of hermeneutics. That phrase seems to mean so much, and to draw so much criticism, that I couldn't see my way through it. Wittgenstein remarks, "A philosophical problem has the form: I can't find my way around," and so at first I comforted myself in the knowledge that there might be something philosophical about my situation. Somewhat later I met with Hans-Georg Gadamer in a Heidelberg pub to discuss this and other matters with him. In a formulaic and unsophisticated way, I asked him to explain more exactly what the universal aspect of hermeneutics consisted in. After everything that I had read, I was prepared for a long

and rather vague answer. He thought the matter over and answered, concisely and conclusively, thus: "In the verbum interius."

I was astonished. This is nowhere emphasized in *Truth and Method*, let alone in the secondary literature. The universal claim of hermeneutics is to be found in the "inner word," which Augustine discussed and to which Gadamer had devoted a little-noticed chapter of his magnum opus? Somewhat nonplussed, I asked him to elaborate on what he meant. "This universality," he continued, "consists in inner speech, in that one cannot say everything. One cannot express everything that one has in mind, the logos endiathetos. That is something I learned from Augustine's *De trinitate*. This experience is universal: the actus signatus is never completely covered by the actus exercitus."

I was confused at first, because this seemed to run contrary to the basic tendency of Gadamer's philosophy, since he takes it as an absolute principle that hermeneutic universality consists in the fact that everything can be expressed in real language. Language can overcome all objections to its universality, because such objections themselves must be capable of being formulated linguistically. For Gadamer everything is supposed to be language: "Being that can be understood is language," as his most often cited maxim puts it in expressing this universality.

What did his gesture toward the verbum interius have to do with these matters? Does it represent a late self-interpretation, a self-correction, or only a passing thought to be ascribed no fundamental significance? For some months I remained without a clue in this respect, until I was reading through *Truth and Method*, along with the original version preserved in the University of Heidelberg library. There it occurred to me that the universal claim of hermeneutics could indeed be derived only from the doctrine of the verbum interius—that is, from the insight (stemming from Augustine read through Heidegger) that spoken discourse always lags behind what one wants or has to say, the inner word, and that one can understand what is said only when one derives it from the inner speech lurking behind it. That sounds outmoded and very metaphysical: alongside language there is also the world of the verbum interius behind or within it. As we will see, however, this insight alone is capable of undermining the metaphysical and logical priority assigned to propositions. According to the classical logic that nurtures the metaphysics of substance, everything is fully expressed in the proposition. What is expressed propositionally is self-sufficient and is to be judged on the basis of its own evidence.

For hermeneutics, by contrast, the proposition is something secondary and derivative, to put it in the hyperbolic language of *Being and Time*. Clinging to

propositions in their disposability conceals the struggle with language comprising the verbum interius, the hermeneutic word. By the inner word, however—and this should be made emphatically clear—is meant no private or psychological inner world existing prior to its verbal expression. Rather, it is that which strives to be externalized in spoken language. Externalized language is the site of a struggle which must be heard as such. There is no "pre-verbal" world, only world oriented to language, the world which is always to be put in words, though never entirely successfully. This is the uniquely hermeneutic dimension of language.

The present introduction is an attempt to depict philosophical hermeneutics from this point of view. My reference to the conversation with Gadamer is not meant to imply any presumptuous claim that my interpretation is "authentically" Gadamerian. Such references are highly problematical, and so I hesitated for a long while before mentioning it in this connection. Finally, however, I was encouraged to do so by the example of Walter Schultz, who referred to his own talks with Heidegger, since they had contributed substantially to the formulation of his interpretation of Heidegger.¹ The same may have occurred in my discussions with Gadamer. Yet an interpretive orientation occasioned in this manner can succeed only at a certain cost and risk. Specifically, my concern—independent of Gadamer, on my own responsibility, and in the context of the present state of philosophical conversation—is to introduce readers to the philosophical dimension of hermeneutics. (Hence I shall disregard the particularities of individual hermeneutic disciplines such as philology, theology, history, and the social sciences.) Within the context of the verbum interius, I shall attempt to reconstruct the historical problematics of philosophical hermeneutics as faithfully as possible and so will be referring to authors seldom read today. Of course, this makes it necessary to show that the perspective of the verbum interius is in fact central.

I am deeply indebted to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Canadian Council for Research in the Humanities for making this work possible. Meetings with colleagues have given decisive impetus to the present investigations. I am grateful to Ernst Behler, Otto Friedrich Bollnow, Luc Brisson, Rüdiger Bubner, Hans-Georg Gadamer (who permitted me to refer to our conversation), Hans-Ulrich Lessing, Manfred Riedel, Frithjof Rodi, Josef Simon, Alberto Viciano, and Joel Weinsheimer. Let me end these acknowledgments by expressing the admiration in which I have long held their work. However philosophy tries to purify itself critically and argumentatively, without *thamazein* before what it brings to thought, it would never even begin.

**Introduction to
Philosophical
Hermeneutics**

Introduction

Since its emergence in the seventeenth century, the word *hermeneutics* has referred to the science or art of interpretation. Until the end of the nineteenth century, it usually took the form of a theory that promised to lay out the rules governing the discipline of interpretation. Its purpose was predominantly normative, even technical. Hermeneutics limited itself to giving methodological directions to the specifically interpretive sciences, with the end of avoiding arbitrariness in interpretation as far as possible. Virtually unknown to outsiders, it long maintained the status of an "auxiliary discipline" within the established disciplines that concerned themselves with interpreting texts or signs. Thus the Renaissance formulated a theological hermeneutics (*hermeneutica sacra*) and a philosophical hermeneutics (*hermeneutica profana*), as well as a juridical hermeneutics (*hermeneutica juris*). The idea of an art of interpretation can, of course, be traced much farther back, at least to the patristic period, if not the Stoic philosophy (which developed an allegorical interpretation of myth), or

Philosophical hermeneutics, by comparison, is of very recent date. In the ordinary, narrow sense, this term refers to the philosophical position of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and sometimes that of Paul Ricoeur. Significant forms of hermeneutics undoubtedly existed before then, but they hardly presented themselves as fully developed philosophical conceptions. Even if Schleiermacher, Droysen, and Dilthey—the fathers of contemporary hermeneutics—did make decisive contributions to the growing awareness of hermeneutic problems, they did not pursue the work they initiated primarily under the rubric of hermeneutics. Even though Gadamer's philosophical endeavors would have been impossible without Heidegger, Heidegger nevertheless could not help stating: "Hermeneutic philosophy—that's Gadamer's business."¹ No really ground-breaking innovations in hermeneutics have appeared since Gadamer's, though his philosophy has stimulated numerous debates, especially with ideology critique and Derridean deconstruction.²

Although Gadamer's hermeneutics defined the field, for the purpose of introducing philosophical hermeneutics, it is advisable to take a somewhat broader view of the matter. Gadamer's expressly Heideggerian origins indicate that Heidegger's thought belongs within the parameters of a philosophically motivated hermeneutics. The entire career of Heidegger's thought—his late philosophy after the "turn," as well as the early lectures published only recently—had a path-breaking influence on Gadamer. In his highly significant essay "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," which initiated the debate with Habermas, Gadamer mentioned that he called his perspective "hermeneutic" in "connection with a manner of speaking that Heidegger had developed early on"³—that is, earlier even than *Being and Time*. Heidegger's "hermeneutics" cannot be understood by reference to *Being and Time* alone. It would not be substantially incorrect to infer that Gadamer's hermeneutics was much more deeply influenced by the early lectures than by *Being and Time*, even if Gadamer had not admitted that he viewed Heidegger's work of 1927 as a "hurry-up job done for extraneous reasons," if not "a let-down."⁴ Without falling into the exaggerations implicit in a degrading classification of Heidegger's main philosophical work, Gadamer's admission might well imply that only now is it possible to undertake an appropriate evaluation of Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics as developed in his earlier lectures and elaborated by Gadamer.

In order to contextualize this new hermeneutics, we will need to return to the older—as it were, pre-philosophical—tradition of hermeneutics to which

Gadamer continually refers and from which he distinguishes himself. Rich in tradition and receptive to it, hermeneutics must itself be deduced from its own origins. We need to trace the connection not only to its classic beginnings in Schleiermacher, Droysen, and Dilthey but also to the often underestimated hermeneutics of the Enlightenment, the initial theories of interpretation originating in early Protestant theology, and the pioneering work of the patristic period.

In doing so, we need to avoid presenting the history of hermeneutics as a teleological process, which, starting in antiquity and proceeding through the Reformation and Romanticism, was brought to consummation in philosophical hermeneutics. This is the way hermeneutic history has in fact often been presented, beginning with Dilthey's path-breaking essay "The Rise of Hermeneutics" and then radicalized by Gadamer and the overviews influenced by him. It always follows something like this pattern: During antiquity and the patristic period, there were at first fragmentary hermeneutic rules. Then Luther and Reformation theologians fashioned a systematic hermeneutics, which first became a universal theory of understanding in Schleiermacher. Dilthey broadened this hermeneutics into a universal methodology of the human sciences, and Heidegger located hermeneutic inquiry on the still more fundamental ground of human facticity. Gadamer ultimately reformulated universal hermeneutics as a theory of the ineluctable historicity and linguisticity of our experience. Universal hermeneutics, finally, was extended into such fields as critique of ideology, theology, literary theory, theory of science, and practical philosophy.

This universal history of hermeneutics, conceived quasi-teleologically, however, has aroused considerable skepticism, especially among philologists and literary critics.⁵ Objections arose to the unitary conception of hermeneutic history initiated by Dilthey and Gadamer and then repeated in compendiums and overviews, a history supposedly coming to fruition "in a sequence of teleologically related steps or phases."⁶ What is correct in the classical representation of hermeneutic history, however, is the idea that early hermeneutics resembled a technical theory, and as a rule such theory was of much less universal application than present-day philosophical hermeneutics. Yet the skeptics about traditional hermeneutic history are right to suggest that the two projects, theoretical and philosophical, have little to do with each other and that hermeneutic history has unfolded in anything but a teleological manner.

Modern history of hermeneutics, like every other, is written after the

fact—that is, it is a construction. For the most part, this history proceeded without taking much cognizance of itself. As late as the seventeenth century it still had no name. What was earlier called *ars interpretandi* was taken up and furthered by various branches of knowledge, such as criticism, exegesis, and philology. Even modern hermeneutics has not developed in a linear manner toward a philosophical telos. Luther is customarily considered responsible for discovering or revitalizing hermeneutics. This is the view taken by the Protestant Dilthey (which Gadamer considers compelling), as well as by the Luther scholar, Gerhard Ebeling.⁷ The principle of *sola scriptura* does indeed suggest the existence of a fully worked-out hermeneutics, but Luther did not himself develop such a program. Rather, he wrote exegeses and delivered lectures without specifying any hermeneutical *theory*. It was rather his collaborator, Flacius Illyricus, who conceptualized this specifically modern principle of scriptural interpretation, a theory that remained the fundamental basis of exegesis until the late eighteenth century.

During the seventeenth century, in the meantime, an embryonic universal hermeneutics was developed along rationalist lines by such authors as J. Dannhauer, G. F. Meier, and J. M. Chladenius.⁸ These general theories of interpretation broke through the limits of the regional hermeneutics—that is, the manuals—that were specifically designed to help in elucidating Scripture or classical authors. Consequently, the development of the first supraregional art of interpretation cannot be justly ascribed to Schleiermacher. The place of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic theory is anything but patent. This is due first of all to the fact that Schleiermacher, who thought of himself primarily as a theologian, never published his hermeneutics himself. The single piece of hermeneutic work that he saw through the press, the lectures "On the Concept of Hermeneutics" (1829), offers a discussion of Wolf and Ast's contributions rather than a comprehensive conception of hermeneutics. He treated his hermeneutics, which was to be articulated within the horizon of dialectics, in lectures that F. Lücke first published in 1838 under the title *Hermeneutik und Kritik*. Beyond the confines of theological hermeneutics, Schleiermacher's fragmentary sketches enjoyed little attention.⁹

August Böckh, who attended these lectures, was strongly influenced by them. Böckh based his *Enzyklopädie und Methodenlehre der philologischen Wissenschaften* on the lectures he gave after 1816 (that is, before they were published by Lücke). Following his mentor's example, Böckh did not himself publish the encyclopedia; that was left to his student Bratuschek, who brought it out in 1877.¹⁰ Böckh wanted to present a methodology of the

philological sciences based on Schleiermacher's hermeneutics of understanding. By so doing he tied hermeneutics to the methodological demands of the inexact sciences—a connection which, though foreign to Schleiermacher's intentions, was furthered by Droysen and Dilthey. Droysen likewise endeavored to formulate a methodology for historiography, and he, too, presented it in lectures never published in their entirety. In 1868, however, he printed his compact *Grundriß der Historik*, which was widely influential. In 1937, Rudolf Hübner published Droysen's lectures on history. Incidentally, in neither the *Grundriß* nor the published lectures is the name of Schleiermacher or the word hermeneutics once mentioned.

Schleiermacher's significance for hermeneutics and its "history," only now becoming manifest, was displayed above all by Wilhelm Dilthey. As a student of Böckh's, Dilthey became acquainted with Schleiermacher's work at an early age. In 1860, at twenty-seven, he received the Schleiermacher Foundation prize for his essay titled "The Hermeneutic System of Schleiermacher in Comparison with Earlier Protestant Hermeneutics," an essay that probably represents the first and most important history of hermeneutics, though he never published it. Dilthey's preoccupation with Schleiermacher later intensified: in 1864 he wrote a Latin dissertation under Trendelenburg on Schleiermacher's ethics, and he followed this in 1867 with the first volume of his Schleiermacher biography. He never published the second volume, which was to have presented a systematic view of Schleiermacher's philosophy and theology, including his hermeneutics, probably by appropriating materials from his prize essay of 1860. (Work pertinent to that project was gathered from the posthumous remains and published in 1966 by M. Redeker.) In the decades that followed, Dilthey devoted himself to his life-long project: a methodology of the human sciences that was to bear the ambitious title "A Critique of Historical Reason." Of this project, only the first, predominantly historical part appeared in 1883 with the title *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*. In this work, remarkably, Schleiermacher and hermeneutics are absent. Whether they were to receive treatment in the second volume, as girders in the "foundation" of the human sciences, remains open to speculation. Apparently Dilthey envisioned the foundation of the sciences of man as belonging to descriptive psychology, not hermeneutics. Throughout his whole life (though this is a matter of debate in Dilthey scholarship), he seems to have maintained the foundational status of psychology. To be sure, we can trace important insights that can be called "hermeneutical" everywhere in Dilthey's work—for instance in the treatise of 1895, "Über erk-

lärende und beschreibende Psychologie"; but hermeneutics, specifically so called, reappears in the foreground only in the brief study of its rise dating from 1900.

This piece marked the rise of the history of hermeneutics as well. To chart the rise of hermeneutics Dilthey reached back, almost literally, to his longer article of 1860, as if nothing had happened in the intervening forty years. There, for the first time, occurs the idea that hermeneutics should disclose all the general rules of interpretation that underlie the human sciences, for all of these sciences depend on interpretive knowledge. So conceived, hermeneutics—as universal guarantor of validity—could serve something like the function of grounding the interpretive sciences (Dilthey doesn't spell out the details). It is important to mention, however, that this intuition occurs primarily in the handwritten additions to the 1900 essay, and these remained unpublished until the fifth volume of the collected works appeared in 1924. The view, now become standard, that Dilthey's hermeneutics was to offer a methodological basis for the human sciences is, as we will see, *less Diltheyan* than is often thought, and so is in need of revision.

Hermeneutics was laden with heavy philosophical importance primarily by Dilthey's student and stepson, Georg Misch. In the preface to the fifth volume of his edition of Dilthey's works, Misch portrayed the path of Dilthey's thought as a logical series of steps, beginning from the early projection of a positivistic and psychological grounding of the human sciences up to the complete development of a universal philosophy of historical life, in which hermeneutics was to play a decisive role, and which was even to be called hermeneutics. Thereby Misch was of great help in clarifying conceptually where the late Dilthey was headed. Suddenly, hermeneutics became the catchword of a philosophical generation that began to deviate from the straight and narrow confines of the dominant neo-Kantianism and that gladly took Dilthey as the prophet of a nonpositivistic philosophy open to the historical facticity of life. What all this enthusiasm concealed, however, was Dilthey's own positivistic starting point and the de facto secondariness of hermeneutics in his texts. Under the influence of Misch's life philosophy, the systematic and theoretical starting point to which Dilthey gave his full attention retreated behind the hermeneutic motif, and this finally tended to conceal his methodological ambitions.¹¹ A useful monograph by O. F. Bollnow (1936) fixed the image of a coherent path of Diltheyan thought that departed from an epistemologically laden psychology and ultimately opened up the possibility of grounding the human sciences hermeneutically.¹²

In the course of their own emancipation from neo-Kantianism, the early Heidegger and young Gadamer found in Dilthey a precursor in their search for an existential or hermeneutic reconceptualization of philosophy. Heidegger revealed his revolutionary intentions under the rubric of a hermeneutics of facticity. For some reason, however, Heidegger declined to publish the germinal hermeneutic ideas that so fascinated audiences of that time.¹³ Nevertheless, in *Being and Time* his conception arrived at its first published expression and caused vast reverberations. His insights into the ontological circularity and fore-structure of understanding marked a new beginning for hermeneutics. Yet, because *Being and Time* offered only meager remarks on this theme, it remained difficult to understand what Heidegger meant, exactly, by hermeneutics. Indeed, in *Being and Time*, a mere half-page at the end of Heidegger's otherwise elaborate Section 7 on phenomenology is devoted to situating and systematically defining hermeneutics as a philosophical program.¹⁴ There we learn only that the word *hermeneutics* derives from *hermeneuein* and that Heidegger's usage corresponds to "the primordial signification of this word, where it designates the business of interpreting." After further explaining the secondary significations of the word, Heidegger adds that hermeneutics in the *primary* sense will mean an "analytic of the existentiality of existence," though he offers no more detailed clarification of the relation between hermeneutics and analytic(s). In the years that followed, the analytic of existence, hermeneutics of facticity, and ontology of Dasein all came to function as vague synonyms for what *Being and Time* was doing. Whether Heidegger intended the word *hermeneutics* to designate some specific meaning—and therefore to situate it in a tradition relatively unknown outside theology and the school of Dilthey—could not be immediately ascertained.

At first, the purely "hermeneutic" character of Heidegger's thought remained overshadowed by his other concerns. It seemed, at least in comparison, as if his hermeneutic preoccupations had given way to the ontological and related transcendental claims of the whole. This is what Gadamer may well have been feeling when, as mentioned above, he described *Being and Time* as a "publication very quickly thrown together," one in which "Heidegger, contrary to his deepest intentions, once again assimilated himself to the transcendental self-conception of Husserl."¹⁵ In spite of the respect for Heidegger's philosophical accomplishments of 1927 that Gadamer expresses elsewhere, these words evidence a certain disappointment, as if Heidegger had betrayed his more genuine and fundamental insights. Other members of

Heidegger's audience, we know, thought so, too—for instance, O. Becker, K. Löwith, and later O. Pöggeler.¹⁶ Yet whether Heidegger really concealed his earlier hermeneutics of facticity in *Being and Time* or just moved beyond it, we will not finally be able to determine until the early lectures and manuscripts have been published in their entirety.

At present we can be sure only that a reconstruction of Heidegger's hermeneutics has to begin with the early program of a hermeneutics of facticity, especially because Gadamer's usage of the word *hermeneutics* accords with the meaning prevailing at that time, and he has tied his own hermeneutics in *Truth and Method* far more closely to the hermeneutics of facticity than to that of *Being and Time*.¹⁷ The retreat from a hermeneutically understood philosophy that began in *Being and Time* intensified in the late works, which virtually never refer to the concept of hermeneutics at all. Nevertheless Heidegger's late thought concerning the historicity of being swarms with hermeneutical insights—for example, the dependence of previous philosophy and history on metaphysics—though such insights are not called “hermeneutical.” Nevertheless, in Heidegger's thought after the “turn,” Gadamer brilliantly discerned nothing less than his teacher's return to his earlier hermeneutic ideas.¹⁸

In retrospect we can see that it was thanks to Gadamer that the hermeneutic insights of the turn, on which *Truth and Method* is based, were connected to the hermeneutic inquiry of the early Heidegger.¹⁹ Thereby, as the classic formula has it, Gadamer thought with Heidegger against Heidegger—that is, against Heidegger's apparent abandonment of hermeneutic thought, but with his program for a hermeneutics of our historical facticity, now to be followed through consistently. Gadamer's achievement consists in having shown how the historicity of being pertains to understanding our historically situated consciousness and the human sciences in which that consciousness expresses itself. The present introduction proposes to survey the development of this hermeneutics as understood by Heidegger and the older tradition.

It is always difficult to orient oneself in the vast field of present-day philosophy. For just this reason we need to make the attempt again and again. More than twenty years ago K.-O. Apel began with the premise that philosophy proceeds in three primary directions: Marxism, analytic philosophy, and phenomenological-existential-hermeneutical thought.²⁰ Among these three “schools,” philosophical Marxism has certainly suffered some loss of currency. The tradition of critical social theory deriving from Marx and Lukács hardly

represents itself as Marxism anymore or, at least, not as historical Marxism. In the eighties, after Apel proposed his tripartite division, the appeal to Marx (then still a common denominator for the German and French traditions that set the tone for Continental philosophy) became suspect for historical reasons that need not concern us here. An author like Habermas, for example, who during the seventies was still engaged in the reconstruction of historical materialism, now supports his critical theory (apart from its sociological and juridical aspects) with arguments drawn from hermeneutics, analytic philosophy, and pragmatics. And K.-O. Apel too presents his normative theory as transcendental hermeneutics or transcendental pragmatics.

In fact, of Apel's three strands, only two—analytic philosophy and the phenomenological-existential-hermeneutical tradition—remain. The triple designation of the latter is meant to represent a historical development. If Continental philosophy was first described as phenomenology broadly understood (Husserl, Scheler, Lipps, Heidegger, and in substance N. Hartmann), immediately after the war it came to be designated by the term existentialism (Jaspers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre), defined as the concretization of the phenomenological viewpoint. Thereafter, having acquired the reputation of being faddish, existentialism gave way to hermeneutics (Heidegger again, Gadamer, and more broadly the transcendental hermeneutics of Habermas and Apel, as well as postmodernism). The term *hermeneutics* came to comprehend things as various as Gadamerian philosophy itself, the rehabilitation of practical philosophy—often caricatured as “neo-Aristotelianism”²¹—that arose under Gadamer's influence (H. Arendt, J. Ritter, M. Jonas, M. Riedel, R. Bubner, and others),²² the historical and relativist wing of theory of science (Kuhn, Feyerabend) and of philosophy of language (Rorty, Davidson), and also Nietzschean postmodernism and the neostructuralist avant-garde.²³ Nowadays, all of these are conceived as belonging to “hermeneutics.” Here, however, we will need to define hermeneutic philosophy more strictly and circumscribe it within narrower limits.

Along with Continental hermeneutic philosophy, analytic philosophy remains dominant, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, though it has endured fundamental changes affecting its self-understanding. Following the steps of the late Wittgenstein and under the auspices of the older pragmatic tradition (Peirce, James, Dewey), Quine, Goodman, Rorty, and Davidson have gradually detached analytic philosophy from its early program of logical critique of language. In doing so, they reoriented it toward general questions such as the possibility—given perspectivism and cultural relativity—

of binding truth, as well as of responsible behavior and knowledge, a task that had been entrusted to Continental philosophy since the advent of historicism. Today, quite unlike formerly, it seems that analytic philosophy stands for no precisely formulable program. In the very pursuit of its own tradition, analytic philosophy came to the recognition that it is faced with the same challenges as is transcendental hermeneutics on the Continent. Both are impelled toward a pragmatic philosophy of finitude that must take its chances and weigh its risks. That is one way of describing the dissolution of philosophical analysis, or at least its convergence with hermeneutic philosophy.²⁴

Such a convergence, of course, does not lend itself to being easily identified with any particular philosophical problematic. For that very reason, our task here must be to work out a special form of hermeneutic philosophy, one that can legitimate philosophy's classical claim to universality under today's conditions—that is, under the banner of historical consciousness. Only thus can we speak of a hermeneutic contribution to present-day philosophy.

Yet what is meant by universality? Although the word is in constant use, it cannot be said that the concept of a "universal claim" (either of hermeneutics or of philosophy) is very clear. Neither the Gadamerian claim to universality—which seems to pertain to language, historicity, and his own philosophy as well—nor its denial by Habermas and Derrida has achieved any final clarity. One might well suppose that "universality" refers to the universal validity of some proposition. If so, it would be easy to show that hermeneutics is stuck in a logical or pragmatic contradiction. Some have tried to construe the universal claim of hermeneutics as climaxing in the thesis that everything is historically conditioned, a thesis supposed to be universally valid. If this thesis is meant to apply universally, then it must apply to its own claim, which must itself be historically limited and therefore not universal. The universal claim of hermeneutics is thus considered self-contradictory.

This argumentative strategy creates the impression that historical consciousness could be somehow eluded by showing that its universalization involves an untenable aporia. Thus the supposedly saving world of logic is reinstated: not everything is historical because universal historicism is self-contradictory. As Heidegger remarked early on, however, these formalist arguments that try to outsmart genuine historicity with the help of logic have something of an "attempt to bowl one over."²⁵ Elaborating Heidegger's thought, Gadamer discerns in such arguments a "formalist illusion" that misses the truth of the matter: "That the thesis of skepticism or relativism refutes itself to the extent that it claims to be true is an irrefutable argument.

But what does it achieve? The reflective argument that proves successful here rebounds against the arguer, for it renders the truth value of reflection suspect. It is not the reality of skepticism or of truth-dissolving relativism but the truth claim of all formal argument that is affected."²⁶

As philosophical hermeneutics can show, to appeal to the logical contradictoriness of universal historicity is to remain in the rut of historicism. Historicism, one could affirm with good reason, is the central and most crippling problem facing philosophy since Hegel, namely, the question concerning the possibility of binding truth and thus conclusive philosophy within the horizon of historical knowledge. Are all truths and rules of conduct dependent on their historical context? If so, the specter of relativism and nihilism lurks nearby. The fundamental question must undoubtedly be taken seriously. If the cultural horizon is the final determinant of acceptability, then how can a perverse way of life (and for German philosophy after the war, the extreme example of National Socialism became paradigmatic) be defined or criticized by comparison to what is only another lifestyle? Metaphysical inquiry into historicism tried to solve this problem by claiming to transcend historicity. This it did by way of an appeal to a supratemporal authority, either secular or sacred, intended to guarantee the validity of allegedly unhistorical norms, or by recourse to the ultimacy of logic, or sometimes by certifying its own foundational status. What all these attempted solutions share with historicism is their common metaphysical cornerstone, namely, the idea that in the absence of absolute truth everything is irredeemably relative. Ultimately, however, these solutions were themselves overtaken by historicism: they, too, showed themselves to be historically conditioned, since they were continually being outmoded and the particularities of their perspectives superseded.

The philosophical achievement of hermeneutics lies perhaps less in having solved the problem of historicism than in its departure from it. Heidegger and Gadamer folded historicism back upon itself, so to speak, and thereby they manifested its own historicity—that is, its secret dependence on metaphysics: the dogmatic thesis of historicism that everything is relative can be made meaningful only against the horizon of a nonrelative, absolute, supratemporal, metaphysical truth. Only by supposing absolute truth possible and using it as a criterion could an opinion be judged merely relative. What does this absolute truth look like, however? There can never be an answer that all will acknowledge and accept. Philosophical hermeneutics suggests that historicism's pretension to supratemporal truth derives precisely from the denial of its own historicity. Significantly, the truth considered to be

absolute has only a negative definition: the nonfinite, the nontemporal, and so forth. What expresses itself in these terms is the self-negation of human temporality. The search for absolute norms, measures, and criteria testifies to the metaphysical origins of historicism, its subservience to the logic of thought that represses time.

Repudiating the metaphysical obsession with the supratemporal, whose covert historicity we have shown, philosophical hermeneutics situates the paradigmatically fundamental problem of temporality within the framework of a hermeneutics of facticity. How this regression articulates itself philosophically we will see in the pages that follow. Here we can already see, however, that such thought about finitude is anything but uncritical. It would be presumptuous to suppose that a temporal being has no means of critique at its disposal. The fallacy lies, rather, in thinking, along metaphysical and historicist lines, that credible criticism can derive only from supratemporal authorities or norms. The fact is just the opposite. Human beings are fundamentally critical *because* they are temporal, and they oppose evil by appeal to their own interests and aspirations, which can only be understood temporally. We need no supratemporal laws in order to denounce Hitler's dictatorship or other lesser evils. Such madness is criticized primarily in the name of the pain and suffering it causes. This critique can dispense with the support of non-temporal principles. Suffering, whether felt or anticipated, whether of a greater or lesser degree, always makes the best critical argument; and hermeneutics can increase sensitivity to it. One might object that evil cannot always be prevented in this way. True enough, but if principles could be found that would prevent injustice, no discussion of the means and ends of social justice would ever be necessary.²⁷ The call for vigilance and critical thinking, coupled with a warning against metaphysical utopias, is not the least significant contribution hermeneutics has made to this important discussion.

The universal claim of hermeneutics has still not been clarified, however. What is the point of trying to erect such a claim? In what follows we shall consider this question at length. The history of hermeneutics is disjointed in just this respect, for the universal claim has manifested itself in various forms. Thus it would be worthwhile to inquire into hermeneutic history by investigating the universal claims that constitute it. Such will be the guiding thread of the present introduction: What kinds of universality are claimed by the various forms that hermeneutics has taken in the past, and what kind can be claimed by that of today? This question will need to be directed to the whole corpus that has been constituted over time by hermeneutical self-reflection.

The claim to universality must de facto have already been immense for such modes of inquiry as those practiced by the early Middle Ages, when all knowledge derived from the interpretation of a single (holy) book; and the same must be true of the Enlightenment, as exemplified in the universalist hermeneutics of Chladenius and Meier, which in the spirit of Leibniz portrayed all knowledge as the explication of signs. In all probability, such claims prepared the way for modern forms of hermeneutics—for example, the semiotic.

By way of beginning, it seems advisable to view the universality of hermeneutics as a universal *problem*. What has raised hermeneutics in our time to the status of *prima philosophia* is probably the omnipresence of interpretive phenomena. Beginning at least with Nietzsche's insight into universal perspectivism ("there are no facts, only interpretations"), addressing the problem posed by this omnipresence has been the order of the day for philosophy. Nietzsche is probably the first modern author to have made us conscious of the fundamentally interpretive character of our experience of the world. Hardly limited to such purely interpretive sciences as scriptural exegesis, classical philology, and law, the horizon of interpretation comprehends all the sciences and modes of orienting one's life. The interpretive tendency was furthered by a revaluation of empiricism and inductivism within theory of science, a revaluation that found consequences of hermeneutic significance in Kant's distinction between phenomena and things in themselves: knowledge is not a reflection of things as they are, independent of us; it is a schematized and interested construction of phenomena. For Kant this fact presented no danger to objectivity, since all humankind is equipped with fundamentally the same categories of understanding. It became a philosophical as well as universal problem, however, when with Nietzsche people discovered that these categories—that is, reason and its verbal embodiments—could be subject to historical, cultural, and even individual perspectivism. This perspectivism is no ultimate for Nietzsche, however; it has its foundation in the will to power. Every perspective stands under suspicion of being not an adaptation to the world's own order but an attempt to control it in the sense of a will to power. Nietzsche's panhermeneuticism feeds into a certain pragmatism that looks forward to the renewal of pragmatic thought in analytic philosophy as well as Continental hermeneutics. What legitimates any given perspective is the value it has for life, its contribution to stimulating or stabilizing a given form of the will to power. This doesn't necessarily lead to defeatism, nihilism, or disorientation, however. The perspectives are not all

of equal value, since some prove to be more fruitful than others. The mistake, in Nietzsche's view, lies rather in equating what is merely a fruitful perspective with the thing itself.²⁸

In its universality such perspectivism may appear extreme. Nonetheless, Nietzsche has thereby indicated an essential characteristic of our modern world-picture. What distinguishes the modern understanding of the world, as Habermas has most recently pointed out,²⁹ is its "reflexivity"—that is, it reflexively recognizes itself to be an interpretation. Our knowledge knows about itself as knowledge and interpretation of the world as well. It does not identify itself with the world itself or its mere reflection. The mythic interpretation of the world, by contrast, is not aware of itself *as* interpretation. It equates itself, so to speak, with the world in itself. Habermas catches myth's reflective deficiency in the happy phrase: "the reification of the world-picture."³⁰ It is in the modern, demythologized world-picture that our interpretations of reality have first emerged *as* interpretations, exposing themselves as such for discussion and critique. Habermas and Nietzsche are at one concerning the fundamentally hermeneutical—that is, interpretive and ultimately pragmatic—horizon of our world-picture. Both bear witness to the universality of the hermeneutic problem, though, to be sure, without taking it to its ultimate conclusion. In the face of this thoroughgoing perspectivism, Habermas considers it appropriate to discuss our worldviews, although or even because they are known to be perspectives, and to hold those viewpoints to be (pragmatically) legitimate that have proved themselves capable of consensus. The fact that a given consensus can be artificially produced—for example, by force—makes Habermas hesitate to identify any actual consensus with the true one. He must resign himself to the idea that truth is tied to the contrafactual anticipation of an *ideal* consensus. At best this contrafactual idealization functions as a goad spurring us on to further critique,³¹ and so it finally remains problematical what, if anything, can be deemed true or legitimate.

Nietzsche refuses to use such metaphysical idealization to escape the agnostic conflict of fundamentally heterogeneous, power-based perspectives. But how can we be sure that everything is perspectival? Isn't perspectivism itself only one perspective among others? We can answer first that the *suspicion* of perspectivity is certainly universalizable. That a given view of the world is merely a perspective conditioned by interests serving the will to power is a suspicion that can be used to criticize any conception.³² The position under suspicion has the burden of proving, if it can, that it is *not* a one-

sided perspective. The perspective of perspectivism, then, does not necessarily lead to resignation and the belief that "anything goes." It is a critical and hermeneutical perspective espoused by a philosophy whose job is to protect us from knowledge claims that cannot be proven.³³

Within the spectrum of present-day hermeneutics, Nietzsche can be considered a representative of the "hermeneutics of suspicion." This is a phrase coined by Paul Ricoeur to characterize the interpretive strategy that distrusts immediate meaning, tracing it back to an unconscious will to power.³⁴ Along with Nietzsche as representatives of the hermeneutics of suspicion, Ricoeur names Freud, who reduces meaning to unconscious drives, and Marx, who links it to class interests. On the other side, and exhausting the spectrum, he places the hermeneutics of faith, confidence, or attestation which takes meaning phenomenologically, as it is given. Whereas the hermeneutics of suspicion looks backward, thereby reducing claims to meaning to the economy or energies that function behind them (impulses, class interests, will to power), the hermeneutics of confidence is oriented in a forward direction, toward the world that presents us with meaning to be interpreted. Such faith does not surrender to the lure of immediate meaning, however. Rather, it learns from the hermeneutics of suspicion and cooperates in destroying the illusions of false consciousness, insofar as they can be demonstrated. This destruction leaves the question of meaning completely open. The consciousness that has been freed of its illusions strives to orient itself just as it always has. That is, critically informed faith concerns itself with truth claims that disclose the possibility of meaning—and thus with the *verbum interius* behind every explicit meaning. This faith in meaning, without which language would remain empty of significance, can lay claim to universality. The hermeneutics of suspicion must be subordinate to that universality insofar as suspicious hermeneutics performs its destructions by appeal to a "true" consciousness, even if this truth functions only as a regulative idea.

Thus it is that the problem of universality manifests itself within the horizon of hermeneutic thought. Reflection on interpretation has allowed present-day philosophy to renew its concern with the universal. By thematizing the fundamentally hermeneutic character of our relation to the world, hermeneutics by no means relinquishes philosophical universalism. It realizes it.

I

On the Prehistory of Hermeneutics

1. Linguistic Delimitations

The development of explicit hermeneutical reflection bears the signature of modernity. As shown above with reference to Nietzsche and Habermas, what distinguishes the modern world-picture is its consciousness of being perspectival. As soon as it becomes evident that worldviews do not merely duplicate reality as it is in itself, but are instead pragmatic interpretations embraced by our language-world, then hermeneutics comes into its own. Only with the advent of modernity has this occurred. For this reason, it is hardly accidental that the Latin word *hermeneutica* first emerges in the seventeenth century. Yet modern insights can be traced back to antiquity, where the cosmos was much less univocal than the common platitudes would have it. Along with the rationalist Eleatics and Platonists there was also a host of relativistic Sophists who were thoroughly familiar with the conditioned and perspectival nature of