

Editors' Introduction

Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift

I know not what to say to it; but experience makes it manifest, that so many interpretations dissipate the truth, and break it . . . Who will not say that glosses augment doubts and ignorance, since there is no book to be found, either human or divine, which the world busies itself about, whereof the difficulties are cleared by interpretation. The hundredth commentator passes it on to the next, still more knotty and perplexed than he found it. When were we ever agreed among ourselves: "this book has enough; there is now no more to be said about it?" . . . do we find any end to the need of interpreting? is there, for all that, any progress or advancement toward peace, or do we stand in need of any fewer advocates and judges? . . . There is more ado to interpret interpretations than to interpret things; and more books upon books than upon any other subject; we do nothing but comment upon one another. Every place swarms with commentaries . . . Is it not the common and final end of all studies? Our opinions are grafted upon one another; the first serves as a stock to the second, the second to the third, and so forth . . .

—Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*¹

The "Experience" of Interpretation:
"there are only interpretations . . ."

Montaigne's comments on interpretation, cited here, appear in an essay entitled "Of Experience." In this essay, Montaigne begins with an allusion to Aristotle's famous dictum: "All men by nature desire to know."² Montaigne writes: "There is no desire more natural than that of knowledge. We try all ways that can lead us to it; where reason is wanting, we therein employ experience."³ What follows this paraphrase is a *gloss*; it is an interpretation of the thought that opens Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, introducing the single, very complex theme which, momentarily, orders Montaigne's musings. In short, the gloss "interprets" Aristotle while it simultaneously

“interprets” *itself*, inserting itself into the Aristotelian text and tradition. Beyond offering an exegesis of the thought that organizes Montaigne’s commentary, in a provisional fashion, there is a rewriting, indeed a reformulation, of a thought which eclipses the epistemological and metaphysical tradition that binds Montaigne.

By way of a *commentary* that turns away from itself, toward a different text, *and* that turns in on itself, Montaigne articulates a line of inquiry inextricably inscribed in a certain epistemological and metaphysical tradition of Western thought. Montaigne’s text, then, announces a sentiment that has come to regulate and provide a refuge for a particular current in contemporary philosophical analysis: “there are only interpretations of interpretations.” The name given to this inquiry, and the line(s) of thought it has produced, is “*hermeneutics*.” It is the purpose of the selections collected in this volume, under the title *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, to trace certain *paths* traversed within selected discourse(s) and tradition(s) of hermeneutics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To be sure, like Montaigne’s *Essays*, each of the selections presented in this volume can be seen as an interpretation of interpretations, announcing once again—rethinking and rewriting—hermeneutics and its fundamental motifs.⁴

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Where reason, in its different forms and capacities, takes into account the resemblance and similitude among ideas and objects, Montaigne claims that the conclusions which can be drawn from these comparisons are always “unsure” and incomplete. “There is no quality so universal in this image of things, as diversity and variety.”⁵ Resemblance and similitude simultaneously betray and employ difference(s). As such, dissimilitude, difference, and dissimulation intrude upon all of our works, judgments, and pronouncements. “Resemblance does not so much make one, as difference makes another. Nature has obliged herself to make nothing other, that was not unlike.”⁶

What promise does this condition hold for those analyses interested in explicating the “nature” of knowledge? If knowledge claims are “grounded” in the otherness of that point where resemblance and difference converge, the “nature” of knowledge can be neither certain nor uncertain. As a consequence, the authority as well as the legitimacy of epistemological claims, and those metaphysical and ontological claims made regarding the “nature” of understanding, and our understanding of nature, must be suspended. The only recourse we have, the only “law” to which we can turn to adjudicate the differences and legitimate our asser-

tions, is *interpretation*—to comment upon, to analyze the announcements, the discourses, the texts offered in behalf and in support of various theoretical and practical positions.

Resemblance, difference, and similitude converge in acts of interpretation; through individual *acts* of interpreting, our sensibilities are challenged, our expectations are confirmed or subverted. Thus, whatever claims to truth are advanced, even about the concept “truth” itself, the authority and the significance—the “truth”—of these claims is dispersed, placed in circulation through a proliferation of interpretations. “We exchange one word for another, and often for one less understood.”⁷ And so, Montaigne asks, is this not our common experience, in the end, in all fields of study?

In the idiom of contemporary, Western philosophical discourse, the exchange of “one word for another” is an analogue for the substitution of one interpretation for another. To invoke two technical terms taken from the grammatology of Jacques Derrida, we might say it is the “supplementation” or “reinscription” of interpretation by interpretation:⁸ that is to say, it is the grafting of one text to others, the “sharing” or “multiplication” of voices in dialogue, as identified by Jean-Luc Nancy.⁹ In fact, Montaigne’s gloss offers an apt description of the context in which, and the conditions out of which, today, one encounters the question of interpretation in philosophy, literary criticism, film studies, art criticism, the theories of “natural” and “social” science, jurisprudence, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, theology, and other fields. If “there are only interpretations . . . of interpretations,” then the systematic pursuit of “truth”—“truth” as the *object* of inquiry—or the search for axiological, epistemological, and metaphysical foundations, will never be brought to completion. Is this not *a* central consequence of the hermeneutical circle, or, at the very least, of the chain of discourses and interpretations which identify and determine the “hermeneutical circle”?¹⁰ The search after truth, as it were, is deferred, diverted, caught in a network of contextually bound and generated commentaries. Here we begin to see how the proposition that “there are only interpretations of interpretations” is intertwined with and conditioned by certain classical problems. In particular, one may consider the question of reference, especially as it emanates from what Hegel calls the desire for *absolute knowledge*.

The problem of reference arises in this context for the following reasons. The desire for absolute knowledge is the desire to make present the fundamental unity or ground of knowledge and understanding through the unveiling of *self-evident* first principles and truths. But there is a more significant presumption which involves reference and signification. The ideal

object of this desire—"truth," metaphysical "first principles" of "self" and "God," the Kantian "thing in-itself," or Husserlian transcendental conditions—is presumed to stand outside or independent of the linguistic framework, the interpretive context in which it is "*re-presented*." Here interpretation—"hermeneutics," more appropriately—intervenes; it must come to terms with certain questions regarding the status of its *object*, the representation of that object, and the relation(s) between our commentaries, "interpretations," and the object *itself*.

Does interpretation lead or extend beyond itself? Does it refer to an "external" world, a specific field of objects that stands outside the linkage of interpretations? Is there a necessary connection assumed between interpretation and its object, a "text" or *the* ("intended") meaning of a text? Does interpretation exhaust itself in its attempt to reveal *its* object? Does it exhaust its object in this attempt? In the language of semiology, we might ask, analogously, if there is a necessary connection assumed between signifier and signified.¹¹ If interpretation *is* connected to the world in varying ways, what conditions make this connection possible? Is language not the medium for making such links and references? If so, is language anything other than a system of signs, coherent and systematic marks for representation and communication? What would allow for any kind of reference outside the system? Or is language to be understood as an open-ended system of signs and traces that refer only to other signs and traces *ad infinitum*? Does not the determination of referential conditions and possibilities itself introduce the question of interpretation? Is this determination not an interpretive intervention?

As these questions indicate, interpretation, hermeneutics, and the attendant claim that "there are only interpretations . . ." are not merely conditioned by the desire for absolute knowledge and the problem of reference. The act of interpreting—always and already bound to a chain of interpretations, which is not to say a predetermined meaning or set of possible meanings—stands in complicity with the desire for absolute knowledge: interpretation works on behalf of absolute knowledge *and* it struggles to free itself from the all-encompassing framework of the desire for absolute knowledge. Interpretation, or what Montaigne calls "the need to interpret," mediates, and, in effect, is mediated by this desire. As a consequence of this complicity, the act of interpreting, especially if comprehended as an act of *creating connections*, reintroduces the question of unity and harmony, that is to say, *totality*. Creating connections could be understood in accordance to Wilhelm Dilthey's notion of *Zusammenhang*,¹² as well as Julia Kristeva's reformulation of the (Aristotelian and) Stoic conception of interpretation, where "to interpret" means "to make a connection."¹³ It reformulates, it translates, if you will, the question of the unity of knowledge

and understanding into questions concerning the unity of sign and signified, of word and object, the harmony of language and reality, of thought and reality, of thought and action. Given this set of conditions, we might answer Montaigne's question "Do we find any end to the need of interpreting?" by asking "How could we find an end to this need when interpretation disguises itself in so many ways, when interpretation masks itself and its desire for absolute knowledge in the drive toward satiety?" How could we find an end to this need to interpret when, apparently, by its very production and introduction, interpretation defers and transforms its object, and the path it follows (or blazes) in its desire to reveal its object? Is this not a condition which perpetuates the need to interpret?

"Like everything metaphysical," writes Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Zettel*, "the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language."¹⁴ Like Montaigne's gloss on the Aristotelian metaphysical text and tradition, Wittgenstein's remark points directly to a general issue emanating from the question of interpretation: the congruence and compatibility of discourse (language, interpretation) and the "meaning" of human-being, thereby raising the question of understanding the discourse of others. If, in general, the condition of discourse is one where we are unable to thwart the need to interpret, then it should come as no surprise that finally, today, "after two thousand years" of submission to the axiom "the Word became flesh,"¹⁵ we are coming to recognize the far-reaching implications in having "achieved a discourse on discourse, an interpretation of interpretation."¹⁶ And yet, to recognize this achievement is to acknowledge our quandary: the word, propositions, words on words, interpretations mediate and betray our understanding, our acts, the experience of interpretation.¹⁷

With the recognition of this condition, what fascinates the imagination, and what provokes the critical skills and sensibilities of our discourse today, is the *difference* of interpretation, that is to say, the conflict(s) that arises in and through the attempts to offer a commentary on another text, discourse, or analysis. However, one might ask: "What hangs on this difference—the difference of interpretation?" Here the difference, the conflict, the incommensurability of interpretation(s) (or Wittgensteinian "language-games") demonstrates, ironically, how the proposition "there are only interpretations . . ." cannot be granted the status of law, cannot be taken as a first principle nor as the last word. Stated otherwise: interpretation cannot be taken for granted; meaning is not a given with interpretation; its path(s) must be determined.¹⁸ The proposition is, itself, an announcement of the conditions which make interpretation possible as the interpretation of interpretation. It subverts its own claim to "truth." But this is only one concern among many, and the fascination with interpreta-

tion theory or hermeneutics does not end here, nor is it to be limited to the issues addressed in this discussion.

Today, one can imagine a contemporary Montaigne asking whether there is a book, any text, that presents *the* word, *another* gospel, a "new" testament regarding a particular subject matter or thematic complex. Is there a text, today, that espouses a certain critical perspective or theory, about which one could say it has offered the last word, about which one could assert that a consensus has been reached? At the very least, can one agree with its proclamation about how to reach consensus in order to resolve certain philosophical and political dilemmas? Is there a philosophical or political position, for example, taken toward specific questions which would bring one to the point of claiming that "there is now no more to be said about it"? By advancing any one of these claims, would we not do so both in opposition to the desire for absolute knowledge *and* in its name, both against the desire of *philo-sophia and* in its name as well?

The themes and questions identified in this all-too-provisional-and-all-too-brief exegesis of Montaigne's text are announced, suspended from a specific historical epoch and cultural and intellectual context. The issues and questions posed in Montaigne's essay, as they relate to the question of interpretation, have been translated into a foreign context and idiom, and displaced and rewritten for a purpose completely different from what may have given rise to their expression in Montaigne's *Essays*. In this regard, the displacement and translation of "Montaigne"—the proper name, the text, the questions, the interpretations, and so forth—illustrate some of the *consequences* engendered by the proposition that "there are only interpretations . . . of interpretations." "We come to what is tangible and conceivably practical," writes Charles Sanders Peirce, as the "ground" for the determination of meaning(s). Is this not what hangs on the difference of interpretation, or the difference of interpretation, to reiterate Derrida's neologism? Groundings? Foundations? Privileged sources? The practice of interpretation, or "active interpretation," is this ground. It provides its *own* condition of possibility, but one which always shifts under one's feet, and one which is fissured and fails to secure certainty. "[T]here is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice."¹⁹

Like Montaigne's gloss of Aristotle, the reading of Montaigne's text is a reading between the lines, the insertion of disparate, different assumptions and interests between the lines of another text. If "there are only interpretations . . .," then each gloss, each reading, becomes a textual intervention and provocation. Such a reading withdraws the "unity" of a text—here the totality of Montaigne's "thought"; it is always and already

working toward other purposes, already attempting to achieve other ends. Like Montaigne's gloss, the reading of Montaigne's text, as it relates to the conditions surrounding the question of interpretation in a particular tradition of contemporary Western thought, is always selective, fragmentary, and incomplete, while remaining constitutive of its object and itself. As Michel Foucault remarks, an interpretation "always has to interpret itself . . . [it] cannot fail to return to itself."²⁰ This is the "experience" of interpretation to which Montaigne refers: interpretation finds itself always positioned, as it comments on other "texts," to comment on itself endlessly, "always correcting itself."²¹ This is the "life of interpretation,"²² and this "experience," this practice, this "life," constituting the complex domain of hermeneutics, is the subject for the essays included in this volume.

To advance the proposition that "there are only interpretations of interpretations," or to focus, however provisionally, on the "life of interpretation," then, is to survey one site, among many, in the field of hermeneutics whereby the question of interpretation (both as a problematic and as the subject of an interrogation) can be isolated. It is not an attempt to reduce the question of interpretation or hermeneutics to any one specific theme or set of issues. It is, however, to take account of the heterogeneity of the so-called "hermeneutic tradition."

Moreover, to advance this proposition, to provide this focus, is not an attempt to perpetuate or to give primacy of place to an aloof or disengaged academic debate (though one cannot prohibit this as a possible consequence). At the most rudimentary level of comprehension, interpretation—the exchange of words for words, what others might call "dialogue"—is concerned with the "world," "reality," the historical, cultural, political, economic, technological context or setting into which it is inserted, and against which it is asserted. Interpretation does not release or disengage us from the world. To the contrary, it is through interpretation that we engage the world, our surroundings; through the act of interpretation the world becomes what it *is*, a "text."²³ Interpretation sets the stage for engagement: we draw the world closer to us through words and language. As with any text, we represent its heterogeneity to ourselves and others; we demonstrate our comprehension of this world through words and language; we articulate our needs and desires, our joys and disappointments, our questions and insights, on the basis of interpretation(s).²⁴ On the basis of this kind of engagement, these interpretive interventions, we seek and determine, again provisionally, the rules which regulate our actions. But, if our interpretive interventions and provocations lead in these directions, do they not already engage certain assumptions regarding basic categories of

thought, and their attendant dichotomies—categories that regulate our efforts to comprehend action and discourse? Is the determination of these presumed categories not itself an *issue* of interpretation?

Furthermore, to advance the proposition that “there are only interpretations . . . ,” to insist upon the “experience” of interpretation as a transitory point of focus, is one way to bring into relief a complex set of issues which traverses the history of hermeneutics. The concern with interpreting the words or speech of an other, for example, in light of the duplicitous character of language, is given one of its earliest treatments by Plato’s Socrates in the *Cratylus*. Hermes, as his *name* indicates (herald and messenger of other gods, the god of science and cunning, the protector of boundaries, or so the story goes), is an interpreter, “or messenger, or thief, or liar, or bargainer; all that sort of thing has a great deal to do with language.” (408a–b).²⁵ Hermes is represented as a “contriver of tales or speeches.” That “speech signifies all things, and is always turning them round and round” (408c), as Socrates announces somewhat ironically, has little to do with Hermes himself. What is important, in this context, is not that Hermes is responsible for the duplicitous character of language and interpretation, except that he “invented language and speech.” It is more to the point to note that if Hermes is responsible, it is because he “invents” through the *use* of language. Throughout the dialogues of Plato, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out through his reading of *Ion*,²⁶ it is “the word” which mediates the experience of “all things.” *Use* creates, ordering the linguistic field which it engages and the interpretive boundaries of that field. Thus, it is the self-production, the self-effacement of language, in this case the dialogue, which twists and turns words through their use, that determines (1) *how* one understands the ideas and objects one encounters, (2) *what* one understands *about* these ideas and objects, and (3) *that* understanding is possible. Linguistic meaning is determined in and through the dialogue, itself the scene or stage on which the experience of interpretation is played out.²⁷

The experience of interpretation, as Montaigne’s text insinuates, finds itself on the recognition that language, in a general and systematic fashion, and individual acts of interpretation, in particular, generate the conditions and limits of and for the possibility of understanding. As already noted, Plato’s dialogues—specifically, the *Cratylus* and *Ion*—take into account this feature of interpretation and understanding. In a concomitant fashion, Aristotle’s *Peri hermēneias* (*De Interpretatione*, *On Interpretation*), a text which by *name* alone, if not by content, has become the ostensible source for many of the themes and questions addressed in the discourse of hermeneutics, argues for the “linguistic” determination of meaning.²⁸

On Interpretation is one of six treatises included in Aristotle's *Organon*. The *Organon*, in general, deals with issues of logic: the principles of argumentation and the techniques of proof or demonstration. Within this domain, *On Interpretation* holds an *intermediary* position among the first three of the six treatises; its subject—*hermēneia*, interpretation—mediates the concerns of *Categories*, which precedes it in the *Organon*, and the *Prior Analytics*, which follows it. Where the *Categories* articulates the classical notion of Substance (chapter 5), the differentiation of substance according to the categories of objects of thought (chapter 4), and uncombined simple terms (chapter 2), the subject of *On Interpretation* is the combination of terms in propositions, the relation of terms, and how any understanding of propositions includes the expression of “truth” or “falsity” (4 17a 1–8). The *Prior Analytics*, then, is concerned with the derivation of inference based upon a set or combination of propositions that, in the end, is expressive of the relation between thought and what it predicates (1 24b 5–20).

The subject of *On Interpretation* is decidedly linguistic, even though at the outset its problematic overlaps with that of *De Anima* (*On the Soul*) (1 16a 7–8). But for Aristotle's purposes, *hermēneia* is to be separated from rhetoric and poetry. *On Interpretation* analyzes the character of propositions: a proposition is a sentence that expresses something true or false about the world. According to Aristotle, “propositions correspond with facts” (9 19a 33–34). Other kinds of sentences or statements, such as, a prayer (4 17a 4), poetry, and a question and an answer (*Poetics* 19 1456b 8–10), are subsumed by the study of rhetoric or poetics.

All propositions, according to Aristotle, simple or complex, indicate a fact or facts, by way of universal and particular affirmation or negation. Propositions are significant because they are presentations of either “mental experience” or “spoken words,” depending on whether they are expressed as spoken words or written words. “Spoken words are the symbols [representations] of mental experience and written words are the symbols [representations] of spoken words” (*On Interpretation* 1 16a 3–4). Thus, every proposition has meaning because it is the function of the *combination* and *disjunction* of symbols. As Socrates' depiction of Hermes' “invention” of language points out, meaning is created by use, by “the limitation of convention” (2 16a 19–29). A noun or a name, a sentence or a proposition, has meaning, or is part of meaningful discourse, because it *represents*, *expresses* something about some-thing. The connections, the relations that exist between the symbol and that which it represents, between spoken words and mental experience, between written words and spoken words, are not natural, but the products of “convention.”²⁹

In the idiom of Montaigne's discourse on interpretation, we can see how Aristotle's concern with understanding propositions, which are themselves "symbols," "representations," "interpretations" of facts, and as such "correspond" with facts, can be comprehended according to another proposition, "there are only interpretations . . ." The proposition makes an announcement; it announces the experience, the life of interpretation, through the interpretation of the other.

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The point here is not to gloss over the differences that distinguish the ancient texts of Plato and Aristotle from each other and the texts of Montaigne, or for that matter any of the texts selected for this volume. Indeed, if there is one moment in the experience or life of interpretation which we would hope to celebrate and to embrace, it is the *différence/différance* of interpretation (reading, writing, understanding) that makes possible the continued reiteration of terms, ideas, and concepts from one philosophical epoch to another. We are situated within certain historically and linguistically different contexts, and the repetition of terms, ideas, and concepts entails the transformation of their force and significance. As the epigraph from Montaigne notes, "Our opinions [interpretations] are grafted upon one another; the first serves as a stock to the second, the second to the third, and so forth." When we reinscribe these hermeneutic motifs, when we trace the paths blazed in their formulation, we interpret, we translate, these motifs according to a different set of desires and interests. And yet, "Whatever and however we may try to think, we think within the sphere of tradition."³⁰ This interpretive transformation involves the displacement of old concepts; it involves leaping, as Wittgenstein says, "from one level of thought to another."³¹ The task, then, is to record the difference(s)/*différance* of interpretation, the experience of interpretation, not by blurring the conflicts and confrontations but by affirming the differences and points of divergence and appropriation as making possible a preliminary articulation of the proposition "there are only interpretations . . . of interpretations."

Toward this end, we have divided the selections included in this collection into two parts: I. The Hermeneutic Legend, and II. Hermeneutics and Critical Theory: Dialogues on Methodology. Part I includes selections from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that help to identify the tradition of hermeneutics according to a definite line of thought and style of discourse. In effect, the selections from Friedrich Ast, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Martin Heidegger create the "historical"

background against which the issues and themes pursued in part II will be configured.³²

Part II brings together certain post-Heideggerian lines of debate that surround the hermeneutic project inaugurated in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. Assembled in this section are selections by Gadamer, Emilio Betti, Jürgen Habermas, and Paul Ricoeur that address two intertwining points of contention: (1) the "universality" and methodology of the hermeneutic project, as it is stated in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, and the "objective status" of interpretation argued for by Betti, as it pertains to the Diltheyan notion of *Geisteswissenschaften*; and (2) how the hermeneutic claim of "universality" contends with or accommodates the critique of ideology, as articulated by Habermas. In terms of their historical and philosophical import, the debates contained in part II are germinal. They incorporate and cast anew certain fundamental concerns expressed in the writings of Ast, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger. The textual exchanges between Gadamer and Betti, Gadamer and Habermas, and Ricoeur and Gadamer and Habermas can be cast not only against the historical context of the selections that appear in part I. These texts demonstrate once more, in a different context, in their respective ways, the force of Montaigne's remark regarding the experience of interpretation. Part I focuses on the historical and conceptual foundations, broadly construed, for modern hermeneutics. Part II offers a concentrated look at the leitmotifs of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics, isolated by their articulation in several "dialogues" and "debates" regarding hermeneutical method and universality, and the objectivity and critical force of interpretation.

Part I: The Hermeneutic Legend

The modern use of the term "hermeneutics" can be traced to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. In general, Schleiermacher is credited with taking the first steps toward establishing a *general* hermeneutic methodology in contrast to a variety of *regional* hermeneutic approaches. Prior to Schleiermacher, the task of textual interpretation was thought to require different methods as determined by the type of text to be interpreted. Thus, legal texts gave rise to a juridical hermeneutic, sacred scripture to a biblical hermeneutic, literary texts to a philological hermeneutic, and so on. Friedrich Ast's work in philology, along with the writings of Friedrich August Wolf, exemplifies the sort of regional hermeneutics that provides the foundations for Schleiermacher's speculations on a "general hermeneutic."

The first selection in part I is by Friedrich Ast, whose *Basic Elements of Grammar, Hermeneutics, and Criticism* (1808) is cited by Schleierma-

cher for asserting the basic principles of the hermeneutic circle.³³ According to Ast, the aim of philology is to comprehend the spirit (*Geist*) of antiquity as transmitted through literary texts. To achieve this goal, a knowledge of the language ("Grammar") is necessary. In addition, we require principles for understanding antiquity and explaining its written works. Hermeneutics will supply these principles, and Ast offers a three-part framework for understanding ancient authors and their works: (1) historical understanding of the content of their works; (2) grammatical understanding of their language and style; and (3) spiritual understanding of the total *Geist* of the individual and their age (section 74). With this third form of understanding, one recognizes the significance of Ast's contributions to hermeneutics.

In his discussion of spiritual understanding, Ast identifies the circular structure of understanding. Because of what Ast terms the "original unity of all being" (section 72), which we call "spirit," understanding must be forged in the context of a dialectical relation between part and whole: "the basic principle of all understanding and knowledge is to find in the particular the spirit of the whole, and to comprehend the particular through the whole" (section 76). Through this circular framework, hermeneutics seeks to extract and to illuminate the inner meaning and spirit of the text through its own internal development. As such, the elucidation of the internal textual meaning must take into account the work's relation to the historical epoch in which it appears.

The threefold conception of understanding leads Ast to distinguish between three corresponding forms of explication (*Erklärung*): (1) the hermeneutics of the letter (section 83); (2) the hermeneutics of meaning (section 84); and (3) the hermeneutics of the spirit (sections 85ff.). The hermeneutics of the letter involves an explanation of the particular words (grammatical understanding), subject matter (historical understanding), and, in general, a knowledge of the grammar and history of antiquity. The hermeneutics of meaning explains a particular meaning intended by the author with reference to the historical context in which the author's works first appeared. As such, this hermeneutic requires a knowledge of literary history as well as knowledge of the author's life. It is the task of the hermeneutics of meaning to explain, for example, why a passage from Aristotle's *Politics* might bear a very different meaning from the "same words" which might have appeared in Plato's *Republic*. The hermeneutics of textual spirit explains the textual passage in terms of the "one idea" that guides the text as a whole. Great art is unified, Ast says, around a foundational, controlling idea (*Grundidee*) (section 88), and an understanding of this idea will expose its presence in every aspect of the work. Lesser works exhibit a lesser unity, but, nevertheless, it is the task of spiritual hermeneutics to

seek out the guiding idea in the case of literary writers, the *intuition* (*Anschauung*) in the case of empirical-historical writers, the *concept* (*Begriff*) in the case of logical-philosophical writers (section 85).

Expressed in the Romantic language of Herder and Hegel, and open to charges of idealism and psychologism, Ast's deliberations set the stage for the development of contemporary hermeneutics. With this inaugural articulation of (1) the hermeneutic circle (sections 75–76), (2) the dialectic of understanding and explication (section 77), (3) understanding as reproduction (section 80), and (4) the importance of literary history (section 84) and genre criticism (section 91), Ast provides the background for Schleiermacher to pursue the development of a *general* hermeneutics.

With Schleiermacher, hermeneutics addresses, for the first time, the phenomenon of understanding itself. In the first aphorism from 1805, Schleiermacher indicates his departure from Johann August Ernesti's (and Ast's) inclusion of explication within the scope of hermeneutics, conceived as the art of understanding. Schleiermacher's project of a "general hermeneutics," as announced in the opening sentence of his 1819 lecture on hermeneutics, seeks to uncover the interpretive techniques which operate universally within understanding. To make hermeneutics an art requires methodological formalization, and his early writings, as the selections included here reveal, oscillate between the exhortational and the programmatic.³⁴ On the one hand, we have his pleas to bring the tools of philology, biblical hermeneutics, and juristics together to create a universal art of understanding based on more or less formalized rules. On the other hand, we have his distinction between grammatical interpretation (with several "*canones*," including the hermeneutic circle: "the meaning of every word in a given passage must be determined in relation to its coexistence with the words surrounding it")³⁵ and technical interpretation. Because discourse is composed of two "elements"—the whole of language and the mind of the thinker—the art of understanding must grasp their interaction (pp. 86–7). Thus, this art will proceed by working out the dialectic between a grammatical interpretation, which lays out (*legt aus*) the objective rules for understanding a language in terms of its original audience, and a technical interpretation, which suggests ways to apprehend the thoughts of the author.

Whereas Schleiermacher's focus on language (p. 66) was to be his lasting contribution, his own hermeneutic theory subordinates the understanding of language to the goal of understanding as the reconstruction of an author's mental life. His hermeneutics, thus, takes on what some regard to be an overtly "psychologicistic" tone: the goal of hermeneutics is to understand the "original" meaning of a text, "to understand the discourse just as well as and even better than its creator." (p. 93)³⁶ This goal will be attained through a psychological reconstruction of the author; the inter-

preter must project oneself "inside" the author and re-construct the original imposition of a univocal sense (p. 81). Conceived in this way, hermeneutics is bound by a basic limitation: the author's intended meaning must guide the interpretation, the sole aim of which is to appropriate this original authorial intent.³⁷

Wilhelm Dilthey follows Schleiermacher's call for a general hermeneutic method. Like Schleiermacher, Dilthey sees hermeneutics as the "methodology of the understanding of recorded expressions."³⁸ But he is critical of Schleiermacher for limiting hermeneutics to the analysis of "understanding as a reexperiencing or reconstruction in its vital relationship to the process of literary production itself" (p. 110). Dilthey regards hermeneutics as having a broader epistemological application than that acknowledged by Schleiermacher, and he attempts to broaden the scope of hermeneutic methodology to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge of *all* aspects of mental (*geistige*) life. The aim of hermeneutics is to concern itself with all objects in which human life is expressed. So, Dilthey writes, in addition to the "philological procedures" delineated in Schleiermacher's work, hermeneutics has

a further purpose behind such theorizing, indeed its *main* purpose: to preserve the general validity of interpretation against the inroads of romantic caprice and skeptical subjectivity, and to give a theoretical justification for such validity, upon which all the certainty of historical knowledge is founded. Seen in the context of the theory of knowledge, of logic, and the methodology of the human studies, the theory of interpretation becomes an essential connecting link between philosophy and the historical disciplines, an essential component in the foundation of the human studies themselves (p. 114).

In this remark, we see Dilthey's central task: as a response to the anti-Hegelian positivism of his day, Dilthey's hermeneutic method will provide a philosophical foundation for the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) that will be as secure as the foundation provided by the scientific method for natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). To do so requires a definitive answer to the question "How is historical knowledge possible?" For Dilthey, the possibility of historical knowledge raises the question of how the knowing subject comes to know *objectively* that which has been subjectively created. Dilthey's answer to this question involves the process of understanding: although the facts of nature can be explained, facts concerning human life, both social and psychological, need to be understood. Dilthey's formulation of hermeneutic methodology is introduced in terms of the relation between lived experience, expression, and understanding. In

lived experience (*Erlebnis*), human beings express themselves in meaningful ways and the task of the historical observer is to understand these experiences. What is expressed in lived experience is *Geist*, and, thus, expression (*Ausdruck*) is, strictly speaking, the objectification of the human mind or spirit. As the succession of these objectifications, history will be understood when "the individual processes which combine in the creation of this system can be sorted out and it can be shown what part each of them plays, both in the construction of the historical course of events in the mind-constructed world and in the discovery of its systematic nature."³⁹

Understanding is, for Dilthey, the process in which one mind reconstructs the mental objectifications of another. It is "a rediscovery of the I in the Thou: the mind rediscovers itself at ever higher levels of complex involvement: this identity of the mind in the I and the Thou, in every subject of a community, in every system of a culture and finally, in the totality of mind and universal history, makes successful cooperation between different processes in the human studies possible."⁴⁰ Where Schleiermacher construed this reconstructive process in psychological terms, as the reproduction of the psychic state of the author, Dilthey directs understanding toward the reconstruction of the historical product, whether it is an event or an object. In emphasizing the objects or events produced by the mind rather than the mind per se, Dilthey avoids the problems of psychologism that have been associated with Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. He also makes it necessary to expand the perimeter(s) of the hermeneutic circle, for now the parts, in terms of which the whole is to be understood, must include a range of phenomena (historical background, social customs, cultural and political institutions, and so forth) ignored by Schleiermacher.

With the writings of Martin Heidegger a fundamental shift in the approach to and discourse of hermeneutics takes place. To overcome the epistemological limitations and methodological prohibitions which emerge in the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, Heidegger turns hermeneutic analysis toward the question of Being. Hermeneutics is no longer directed toward discovering the epistemological foundations of the human sciences, or the methodological principles which lead to objective knowledge in the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Instead, emphasis is placed on the disclosure of the ontological conditions which underlie such knowledge or claims to knowledge. As a methodology for the human sciences, Heidegger views the hermeneutic projects of Schleiermacher and Dilthey as derivative of hermeneutics' primordial signification, "through which the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possesses, are *made known* to Dasein's understanding of Being."⁴¹ The hermeneutic of Dasein, "as an analytic of *existence*," is thus, for Heidegger, the point of departure for philosophy conceived as "universal phenomenologi-

cal ontology."⁴² In other words, the first step on the way to fundamental ontology, as the uncovering of the meaning of Being, will be a hermeneutic inquiry into the structures of Being implicated in the activities of understanding and interpretation.

Understanding is revealed as one of our primordial ways of being-in-the-world. As understanding, Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities. Interpretation (*Auslegung*), as a possibility of understanding, is the working out, the laying out (*legt aus*) of possibilities projected by understanding. Interpretation is the articulation of what is projected in the understanding; it discloses what is already understood. To comprehend the relation between understanding and interpretation (the hermeneutic circle), we need to explicate the fore-structures of understanding, the as-structure of interpretation, and meaning as an existiale of Dasein. As the laying out of what is already understood, interpretation takes place within the totality of our involvements with the world: that is to say, interpretation, as the articulation of understanding, involves seeing something *as* something. Even though this articulation may not be expressed, we do not perceive pure sense-data. We do not first perceive redness, roundness, glossiness and then, subsequently, impose the interpretation "apple." In one move, we appropriate the apple *as* red, *as* glossy, and so forth. All perception is always already interpretation, which is to say that interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehension of what is presented to us. Rather, interpretation functions as the disclosive articulation of what we already understand through the fore-structures of understanding.

According to Heidegger, interpretation is always founded on a fore-having (*Vorhabe*), a fore-sight (*Vorsicht*), and a fore-conception (*Vorgriff*). By fore-having, Heidegger refers to the totality of involvements with Being that we already have and that we bring with us to each interpretive act. Fore-sight refers to the point of view that we have in advance of appropriation, the perspective we bring to the interpretive act. Fore-conception designates the conceptual reservoir that we hold in advance and bring to the interpretive act. To try to make this more concrete, consider the following example: your task is to interpret a short story by Kafka. Your fore-having would be your knowledge of language, your involvement with literature, and so on. Your fore-sight might include your understanding of literary genre, your political ideology, and so on. Your fore-conception might be your familiarity with other works by Kafka, your general conception of Kafka as a writer, and so on. Each fore-structure would play a part in the way you interpret the story. Thus, Heidegger claims that although we like to appeal to what "stands there" when we offer an interpretation, "one finds that 'what stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the

obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpreting'' (p. 123).

Meaning (*Sinn*), then, is articulated in the interpretive disclosure of understanding. Meaning is articulated when something becomes intelligible *as* something; deriving its structure from the fore-structures of understanding, meaning is disclosed as the interpretation lays bare that which makes possible what has been projected—the Being of the there—Dasein. Dasein alone has meaning, for meaning is an existiale of Dasein rather than a property imposed on things. Only Dasein can be meaningful or meaningless, filled with meaning or without meaning. In other words, meaning is not an epistemological category—it is part of the ontological structure of Dasein which emerges as Dasein comes to articulate the *as*-structure of its Being *as* understanding.

Heidegger summarizes these points in his discussion of Dasein's structure as ontologically circular with respect to understanding, interpretation, and meaning. Dasein articulates meaning in the form of an interpretation. This interpretation is always grounded in a prior understanding, which is itself constituted by the fore-structures. Thus, what can be contributed to understanding by interpretation has already been understood. The circle, Heidegger claims, is not a vicious one. The point is not to avoid the circle but to recognize one's involvement in the circle already, thus revealing the way the fore-structures work in their genuine apprehension of Dasein's possibilities in relation to the things themselves which Dasein confronts.

The primordial status of understanding and interpretation in the analytic of *Being and Time* leads Heidegger to conclude that assertion (*Aussage*) is a derivative mode of interpretation. Assertion, like interpretation, is grounded in discourse (*Rede*) as the articulation of intelligibility. But assertions, by which Heidegger means predicative statements of the forms "S is p" (his example is "The hammer is heavy"), are derivative because although, like interpretations, they are grounded in the fore-structures of understanding, they, unlike interpretations, leave these fore-structures unarticulated. As "a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates" (p. 129), assertion modifies the *as*-structure. For Heidegger, then, there is a difference between the "existential-hermeneutic *as*" of interpretation and the "apophantic *as*" of assertion. The "hermeneutic *as*" interprets something *as* something in the context of the totality of involvements which constitute the "world," whereas the "apophantic *as*" indicates a particular property of an object as present-at-hand and ready for use. Assertion lets an entity to be seen from itself as having a definite property which can be communicated, and, as such, it is derivative

of the "hermeneutic as" of interpretation, which allows an entity to be seen *as something* in its totality of involvements.

Part II: Hermeneutics and Critical Theory:
Dialogues on Methodology

Although Heidegger stopped speaking of his project as "hermeneutical" shortly after the publication of *Being and Time*, the importance and influence of (his) situating hermeneutics within ontology rather than within epistemology should not be underestimated. In fact, many points of contention within hermeneutics involve debates regarding the placement of hermeneutics in one or the other of these realms of discourse. The readings that constitute part II chronicle certain post-Heideggerian debates that surround the hermeneutic project inaugurated by Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*.

Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics" elaborates Heidegger's phenomenological approach to hermeneutics by developing the Heideggerian insight into the "linguisticity" (*Sprachlichkeit*) of understanding. For Gadamer, "language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized and the mode or realization of language is interpretation."⁴³ Like Heidegger, Gadamer rejects limiting the scope of hermeneutical inquiry to problems "proper to the methodology of the human sciences" (p. 198). Hermeneutics is conceived as the study of "the phenomenon of understanding and of the correct interpretation of what has been understood." Insofar as all understanding is mediated by language, the task of hermeneutics is seen as a descriptive ontological analysis of the linguistically mediated dialogue between the tradition and the reflective appropriation of it.⁴⁴ Thus, Gadamer concludes that "language constitutes the hermeneutical event proper not as language, whether as grammar or as lexicon, but in the coming into language of that which has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once assimilation and interpretation."⁴⁵ Within language Gadamer locates a "universal ontological structure" insofar as language is a central point where "I" and world "manifest their original unity." For Gadamerian hermeneutical reflection, the universal ontological significance of linguisticity cannot be overestimated: "Being that can be understood is language."⁴⁶

Gadamer's articulation of the universal scope of hermeneutics has led to several significant "dialogues" that incorporate and recast the fundamental concerns announced and analyzed by Ast, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger. From a historical perspective, the first of these dialogues took place between Gadamer and Emilio Betti, the Italian jurist and legal historian whose *Teoria generale della interpretazione* appeared in 1955.

Betti's response to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics centers on questions concerning the "objective" status of interpretation. Following the appearance of *Truth and Method*, Betti objected to Gadamer's rejection of method on the grounds that such a lack of methodology threatens the objective standing and standards of interpretation.

Betti returns to the Diltheyan notion of mental objectifications and meaningful forms to identify interpretation as a triadic process in which the interpreter (subject) apprehends the object—the meaningful form as an objectification of mind—in a way that reproduces the original creative activity of the author. Betti explicates four canons that will guide the interpreter in the task of objectively reproducing the original meaning. First and foremost is the "canon of the hermeneutical autonomy of the object." According to Betti, for the object to be regarded as autonomous means that it "should be judged in relation to the standards immanent in the original intention: the intention, that is, which the created forms should correspond to from the point of view of the author and his formative impulse in the course of the creative process" . . . (p. 164).

The second canon Betti calls "the canon of the coherence of meaning" or the "principle of totality." According to this canon, there is an internal relationship between the individual parts of a speech or text and between these parts and the whole. In this canon, Betti formulates his version of the circularity of understanding: "the meaning of the whole has to be derived from its individual elements, and an individual element has to be understood by reference to the comprehensive, penetrating whole of which it is a part" (p. 165). Third is the "canon of the actuality of understanding," by which Betti acknowledges that the interpreter, in the process of reconstructing the author's creative process and intended meaning, will necessarily appropriate these processes and this meaning in terms of his or her own subjectivity. Fourth is the "canon of the hermeneutical correspondence of meaning" or "meaning-adequacy in understanding," which encourages the interpreter to bring his or her own subjectivity into the "closest harmony with the stimulation" received from the interpreted object: that is to say, while recognizing that the interpreter will understand things in terms of his or her own experiences, every effort must be made to control one's "prejudices" and to subordinate one's experiences to the meaningfulness that the interpreted object seeks to communicate.

In arguing for the essential autonomy of the object to be interpreted, Betti criticizes Gadamer's dialogical approach for inserting the subject into the hermeneutical circle. Such an introduction, in his view, inevitably leads to both subjectivism and relativism, with the consequence that hermeneutics is unable to adjudicate between correct and incorrect interpretations.⁴⁷ For Betti, Gadamer's subjectivist position

tends toward the confounding of interpretation and meaning-inference [*Sinngebung*] and the removing of the canon of the autonomy of the object, with the consequence of putting into doubt the objectivity of the results of interpretive procedures in all the human sciences. It is my opinion that it is our duty as guardians and practitioners of the study of history to protect this kind of objectivity and to provide evidence of the epistemological condition of its possibility. . . . The obvious difficulty with the hermeneutical method proposed by Gadamer seems to lie, for me, in that it enables a substantive agreement between text and reader—i.e., between the apparently easily accessible meaning of a text and the subjective conception of the reader—to be formed without, however, guaranteeing the correctness of understanding; for that it would be necessary that the understanding arrived at corresponded fully to the meaning underlying the text as an objectivation of the mind. Only then would the objectivity of the result be guaranteed on the basis of a reliable process of interpretation (pp. 177–78, pp. 182–83).

Betti concludes that Gadamer concerns himself with a *quaestio facti*, that of “ascertaining what actually happens in the activity of thought apparent in interpretation.” Against this purely descriptive concern, Betti claims that the proper task of hermeneutics is to provide a solution to the *quaestio juris*, “i.e., what one should aim for in the task of interpretation, what methods to use and what guidelines to follow in the correct execution of this task” (p. 187).

Gadamer’s reply to Betti’s objections operates on two levels. On the one hand, he distinguishes the goal of his theory from Betti’s goal of working out a methodology for a general theory of interpretation. Gadamer conceives his project as descriptive and “philosophical” rather than prescriptive and methodological. He wants (1) to discover what is common to all modes of understanding and (2) to put to this the Kantian transcendental questions: What are the conditions of such understanding? and How is understanding possible? In other words, his response reaffirms the ontological dimension of hermeneutics: understanding is the primordial way of Being human, not a task that, once methodologically purified, will lead to truth.

The second line of Gadamer’s reply concerns Betti’s charge of subjectivism. Gadamer responds that the validity of this charge depends on its being posed within a dualistic framework. Only if understanding is construed, as it is apparently by Betti, as the project of a subject confronting an alien object, is the activity of understanding a “subjective behavior.” If one construes understanding dialogically and dialectically, as a process of question and answer (what Gadamer calls the “hermeneutical *Urphä-*