

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-59848-4 - Friedrich Schleiermacher: Hermeneutics and Criticism, And Other Writings

Edited by Andrew Bowie

Excerpt

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Hermeneutics and Criticism

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General introduction¹

1. Hermeneutics and criticism, both philological disciplines, both theories^a belong together, because the practice of one presupposes the other. The former is generally the art² of understanding particularly the written discourse³ of another person correctly, the latter the art of judging correctly and establishing the authenticity of texts and parts of texts from adequate evidence and data. Because criticism can only recognise the weight to be attached to evidence in its relationship to the piece of writing or the part of the text in question after an appropriate correct understanding of the latter, the practice of criticism presupposes hermeneutics. On the other hand, given that explication⁴ can only be sure of its establishing of meaning if the

¹ Summarised from various of Schleiermacher's marginalia in his notebook of 1828 and several transcripts of lectures from differing years.

² *Translator's note:* For Schleiermacher 'art' is any activity that relies on rules, for which there can be no rules for the applying of those rules. Schleiermacher uses 'art' (*Kunst*) both in the sense of the Greek '*techne*', meaning ability, capacity, and in a sense related to the new aesthetic notion, primarily associated with Kant, that something cannot be understood as *art* merely via the rules of the particular form of articulation. The differing senses of the word are decisive for the whole of his hermeneutics. It is vital to keep this in mind for the understanding of the rest of the text: I shall generally employ the word 'art' in translating all the words Schleiermacher uses which have to do with the '*Kunst*' of interpretation, as there is no obvious other English word to cover what he means.

³ *Translator's note:* I shall often use the rather artificial terms 'discourse', or 'utterance' for '*Rede*', rather than referring to 'speech', because Schleiermacher often uses the term '*Rede*' for both spoken and written language, and there is no obvious English equivalent which keeps this ambiguity. At other times I shall use 'speech', or other terms, depending upon the context: where there is any significant ambiguity I will specify the German.

⁴ *Translator's note:* The German is '*Auslegung*', and I shall generally use the English 'explication' for this word, as its links to 'unfolding' bring it closer to the German sense of 'laying out' the meaning of the text. This also differentiates it from '*Interpretation*', which Schleiermacher sometimes uses in different contexts.

^a *Kunstlehren*, literally 'theories of the art of'.

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authenticity of the text or part of the text can be presupposed, then the practice of hermeneutics presupposes criticism.

Hermeneutics is rightly put first because it is also necessary when criticism hardly takes place at all, essentially because criticism should come to an end [i.e. once the authenticity of the text is established], but hermeneutics should not.

2. In the same way as hermeneutics and criticism belong together, so too do they both belong together with grammar. Fr. A. Wolf and Ast already put all three together as philological disciplines, the former as philological preparatory sciences, the latter as an appendix to philology. Both, however, regard them in a too specialised manner, only in relation to classical languages of antiquity. The relationship of these three disciplines is rather one which is perennially valid, they are even inter-related by mutual determination when the language has not yet died out and still lacks a history of literature. Because of their inter-relatedness with each other the beginning of each individual discipline is admittedly difficult, although even children learn the three disciplines together in living communication. Hermeneutics and criticism can only be carried out with the help of grammar and they depend on grammar. But grammar can be established only by means of hermeneutics and criticism, if it does not wish to mix up the worst use of language with classical use, and mix up general rules of language with individual peculiarities of language. The complete solution of this three-fold task is only possible in an approximate manner when they are linked together, during a philologically developed era, and when the task is carried out by exemplary philologists.⁵

⁵ *Translator's note:* In the text that follows the numbered passages which follow the italicised main principles generally refer directly back to the italicised passages, so that an apparently unexplained 'it' will usually refer to the activity discussed in the main principle, such as the need for a cursory reading of the whole text before engaging in detailed interpretation. In some of the more difficult cases I have made it clear what is being referred to, in more obvious cases I have not done so.

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Hermeneutics

Introduction

1. *Hermeneutics* as the art of understanding *does not yet exist* in a general manner, *there are instead only several forms* of specific hermeneutics.

1. Only the art of *understanding*, not the *presentation* of understanding as well.¹ This would only be a special part of the art of speaking and writing, which could only depend on the general principles.

In² terms of the well-known etymology hermeneutics can be regarded as a name which is not yet fixed in a scientific manner: a) the art of presenting one's thoughts correctly, b) the art of communicating someone else's utterance to a third person, c) the art of understanding another person's utterance correctly. The scientific concept refers to the third of these as the mediator between the first and the second.

2. But also not only [understanding] of difficult passages in foreign languages. Familiarity with the object and the language are instead presupposed.

¹ *Editor's note (Lücke)*: Against the dominant definition since [J.A.] Ernesti, *Institutio interpretis Novi Testamenti*, ed. Ammon, [Leipzig 1764], pp. 7 and 8: 'Est autem interpretatio facultas *docendi*, quae cujusque orationi sententia subjecta sit, seu, efficiendi, ut alter cogitet eadem cum scriptore quoque. – Interpretatio igitur omnis duabus rebus continentur, sententiarum (idearum) verbis subjectarum intellectu, earumque idonea *explicatione*. Unde in bono interprete esse debet, subtilitas intelligendi et subtilitas explicandi.' [But interpretation is the ability to *teach*, whether the meaning is articulated in speech or actions, so that the other person may think the same as the writer. – All interpretation, therefore, consists of two things, understanding of the meanings (ideas) articulated in the words and the proper *explication* of them. Whence in a good interpreter there must be delicacy of understanding and delicacy of explication.] Earlier J. Jac. Rambach, *Institutiones hermeneuticae sacrae*, [Jena 1723] p. 2 added a third, the sapienter applicare [wisdom of application] to this, which recent authors are unfortunately stressing once again.

² *Translator's note*: From the lecture of 1826. As opposed to Schleiermacher's hand-written manuscripts the additions and explanations from the notes taken at lectures are printed in a smaller font.

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If both are [presupposed] then passages become difficult only because one has also not understood the more easy passages. Only an artistic^a understanding continually accompanies speech and writing.

3. It has usually been thought that for the general principles one can rely on healthy common sense. But in that case one can rely on healthy feeling for the particular principles as well.³

2. *It is difficult adequately to situate general hermeneutics.*

1. For a time it was admittedly treated as an appendix to logic, but when everything to do with application was given up in logic, this had to cease as well. The philosopher has no inclination, as philosopher, to establish this theory, because he rarely wants to understand, but himself believes he is necessarily understood.

2. Philology has also become something positive via our history. This is why its manner of treating hermeneutics is only a collection of observations.

*Addition.*⁴ Special hermeneutics, both as a genre and in terms of language, is always only a collection of observations and does not fulfil any scientific demands. To carry out understanding without consciousness (of the rules) and only to have recourse in particular cases to rules, is also an uneven procedure. One must, if one cannot give up either of them, combine these two points of view with each other. This happens via a twofold experience. 1) Even where we think we can proceed in a manner which is most free of art [i.e. solely via the following of rules], often unexpected difficulties arise, the bases for the solution of which must lie in the earlier point of view [i.e. where there is no consciousness of rules]. We are therefore always obliged to pay attention to what can become the basis of a solution. 2) If we always proceed in an artistic manner, then we in the last analysis come anyway to an unconscious application of the rules without having left the artistic behind.

³ *Editor's note (Lücke):* In the lectures on hermeneutics last held in the winter of 1832–3 Schleiermacher sought to achieve the concept and necessity of general hermeneutics in a dialectical manner by a critique of the to some extent self-contradictory views, which were limited to the classical realm, of F. A. Wolf in the *Darstellung der Altertumswissenschaft* in the *Museum der Altertumswissenschaft*, Vol. 1, pp. 1–145, and Fr. Ast in the *Grundriß der Philologie*, Landshut 1808, 8.

But as everything which he says about this can be read in a much more developed version in the two academic articles on the 'Concept of Hermeneutics in relation to F. A. Wolf's Indications and Ast's Textbook' we have rightly refrained, with a few exceptions, from including here the incomplete spoken presentation from the books of notes taken at lectures.

⁴ Marginalia of 1828.

^a *kunstmäßiges*.

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3. *Just as the art of speaking and understanding stand opposite each other (and correspond to each other), and speaking is only the external side of thought, so hermeneutics is to be thought of as connected to art and is therefore philosophical. In such a manner, though, that the art of explication depends on the composition and presupposes it. The parallelism consists, however, in the fact that where speech is without art, no art is needed to understand it [i.e. understanding is wholly rule-bound].*

4. *Speech is the mediation of the communal nature of thought, and this explains the belonging together of rhetoric and hermeneutics and their common relationship to dialectics.*

1. Speech is admittedly also mediation of thought for the individual. Thought is prepared by inner discourse, and to this extent discourse is only the thought itself which has come into existence. But if the thinker finds it necessary to fix the thought for himself, then the art of discourse arises as well, the transformation of the original thought, and then explication also becomes necessary.

2. The belonging together of hermeneutics and rhetoric consists in the fact that every act of understanding is the inversion of a speech-act,^b during which the thought which was the basis of the speech must become conscious.

3. The dependence of both [hermeneutics and rhetoric] on dialectics consists in the fact that development of all knowledge is dependent on both (speech and understanding).

*Addition.*⁵ General hermeneutics therefore belongs together both with criticism and with grammar.⁶ But as there is neither communication of knowledge, nor any fixing of knowledge without these three, and as at the same time all correct thought is directed to correct speech, then all three are also to be precisely connected with dialectics.

The⁷ belonging together of hermeneutics and grammar depends upon the fact that each utterance is grasped only via the presupposition of the understanding of

⁵ Marginalia of 1828.

⁶ *Translator's note:* Lücke here interposes a misleading footnote, suggesting that Schleiermacher subsumes rhetoric into grammar, which I omit. Manfred Frank has pointed out that Schleiermacher in fact makes a strictly functional distinction between rhetoric as the discipline concerned with the spoken word and grammar as the discipline concerned with language as a system of rules.

⁷ *Editor's note (Lücke):* From the lecture of 1832. From now on the date of the lecture will only be noted if it is not this lecture.

^b *Akt des Redens.*

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language. – Both are concerned with language. This leads to the unity of speech and thought; language is the manner in which thought is real. For there are no thoughts without speech. The speaking of the words relates solely to the presence of another person, and to this extent is contingent. But no one can think without words. Without words the thought is not yet completed and clear. Now as hermeneutics is supposed to lead to the understanding of the thought-content, but the thought-content is only real via language, hermeneutics depends on grammar as knowledge of the language. If we now look at thought in the act of communication through language, which is precisely the mediation for the shared nature of thought, then this has no other tendency than to produce knowledge as something which is common to all. In this way the common relationship of grammar and hermeneutics to dialectic, as the science of the unity of knowledge, results. – Every utterance can, further, only be understood via the knowledge of the whole of the historical life to which it belongs, or via the history which is relevant for it. The science of history, though, is ethics. But language also has a natural side; the differences of the human spirit are also determined by the physical aspect of humankind and by the planet. And so hermeneutics is not just rooted in ethics but also in physics. Ethics and physics lead, however, back again to dialectic, as the science of the unity of knowledge.

5. As every utterance has a dual relationship, to the totality of language and to the whole thought of its originator, then all understanding also consists of the two moments, of understanding the utterance as derived from language, and as a fact in the thinker.

1. Every utterance presupposes a given language. One can admittedly also invert this, not only for the absolutely first utterance, but also for the whole of the utterance, because language comes into being through utterance; but communication necessarily presupposes the shared nature of the language, thus also a certain acquaintance with the language. If something comes between the immediate utterance and communication, so that the art of discourse begins, then this rests in part on the worry that something might be unfamiliar to the listener in our use of language.

2. Every utterance depends upon previous thinking. One can also invert this, but in relation to communication it remains true, because the art of understanding only begins with advanced thought.

3. According to this every person is on the one hand a location in which a given language forms itself in an individual manner, on the other their discourse can only be understood via the totality of the language. But then the person is also a spirit which continually develops, and their

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discourse is only one act of this spirit in connection with the other acts.⁸

The individual is determined in his thought by the (common) language and can think only the thoughts which already have their designation in his language.⁹ Another, new thought could not be communicated if it were not related to relationships¹⁰ which already exist in the language. This is based on the fact that thinking is an inner speaking. But from this one can also positively conclude that language determines the progress of the individual in thought. For language is not just a complex of single representations, but also a system of the relatedness of representations. For they are brought into connection by the form of the words. Every complex word is a relation, in which every pre- and suffix has an individual significance (modification). But the system of modification is different in every language. If we objectify the language, then we find that all speech-acts are only a way in which the language appears in its individual nature, and every individual is only a location in which the language appears, so that we then direct our attention in relation to significant writers to their language and see a difference of style in them. – In the same way every utterance is to be understood only via the whole life to which it belongs, i.e., because every utterance can only be recognised as a moment of the life of the language-user in the determinedness of all the moments of their life, and this only from the totality of their environments, via which their development and continued existence are determined, every language-user can only be understood via their nationality and their era.

6. *Understanding is only a being-in-one-another of these two moments (of the grammatical and psychological).*

1. The utterance is not even understood as an act^c of the mind if it is not understood as a linguistic designation, because the innateness of language modifies the mind.

2. The utterance is also not understood as a modification of language if it is not also understood as an act of the mind, because the ground of all influence of the individual lies in the mind, which itself develops by utterance.

⁸ *Translator's note:* Schleiermacher often uses *Tatsache* and *Tat* interchangeably, in order to stress the aspect of doing in a fact concerning a person.

⁹ *Translator's note:* I use the masculine third-person pronoun where Schleiermacher uses the masculine gender – here '*der Einzelne*' – even though the reference is clearly not only to the masculine gender.

¹⁰ *Translator's note:* *Beziehungen*, though the context suggests that Schleiermacher may have actually meant '*Bezeichnungen*', 'designations'.

^c *Tatsache*.

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7. Both are completely equal, and it would be wrong to call grammatical interpretation the lower and psychological interpretation the higher.

1. Psychological interpretation is the higher when one regards language only as the means whereby the individual communicates his thoughts; grammatical interpretation is in this case just the removal of passing difficulties.

2. Grammatical interpretation is the higher when one looks at language to the extent to which it determines the thought of all individuals, but one looks at the individual person only as the location of language and his utterance only as that in which language reveals itself. Then the psychological is completely subordinated, like the existence of the individual person.

3. From this duality complete equality follows as a matter of course.

In relation to criticism we find the use of the terms higher and lower criticism. Does this difference also occur in the area of hermeneutics? But which of the two sides should be subordinated? The business of understanding an utterance in relation to language can to a certain extent be mechanised, thus be reduced to a calculus. For if difficulties are present these can be regarded as unknown quantities. The issue becomes mathematical, is therefore mechanised, because I have reduced it to a calculus. Should this, as a mechanical art, be the lower interpretation, and the aspect based on the intuition^d of living beings be the higher because individualities cannot be rendered numerical? But as the individual appears from the grammatical side as the location where language shows itself to be alive, then the psychological appears subordinated; his thought is determined by language and he by his thought. The task of understanding his utterance therefore includes both in itself, but the understanding of language appears to be higher. But if one now regards language as originating every time in particular speech-acts, then it also, because it goes back to individuality, cannot be subordinated to calculation; the language itself is an individual in relation to others and the understanding of the language, in the perspective of the particular mind of the speaker is an art like that other side, therefore is not something mechanical, therefore both sides are equal. – But this equality is again to be limited in relation to the particular task. Both sides are not equal in every particular task, neither in relation to what is achieved in each, nor in what is demanded. There are texts in which one of the sides, one of the interests predominates, and others where the opposite is the case. In one text one of the sides of the task will be able to be completely accomplished, the other not at all. One finds, for example, a fragment by an unknown author. There one can well recognise the period and place of the text by the language. But only if one is certain of the author via the language can the other task, the psychological, begin.

^d *Anschauung*.

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8. *The absolute solution of the task is when each side is dealt with on its own in such a way that dealing with the other side produces no change in the result, or, when each side, dealt with on its own, completely replaces the other, but the other must equally be dealt with on its own.*

1. This duality is necessary if each side replaces the other because of § 6 [above].

2. But each is only complete if it makes the other superfluous and makes a contribution to constructing the other side, precisely because language can only be learned by understanding utterances, and the inner constitution of a person, together with the way the outer world affects them can only be understood via their utterances.

9. *Explication (das Auslegen) is an art.*

1. Each side on its own. For in every case there is construction of something finitely determinate from the infinite indeterminate. Language is infinite because each element is determinable in a particular manner via the rest of the elements. But this is just as much the case in relation to the psychological side. For every intuition of an individual is infinite. And the effects on people from the outside world are also something which gradually diminishes to the point of the infinitely distant. Such a construction cannot be given by rules which would carry the certainty of their application within themselves.

2. For the grammatical side to be completed on its own there would have to be a complete knowledge of the language, in the other case [the psychological] a complete knowledge of the person. As there can never be either of these, one must move from one to the other, and no rules can be given for how this is to be done.

The complete task of hermeneutics is to be regarded as a work of art, but not as if carrying it out resulted in a work of art, but in such a way that the activity only bears the *character* of art in itself, because the application is not also given with the rules, i.e. cannot be mechanised.

10. *The successful practice of the art depends on the talent for language and the talent for knowledge of individual people.*

1. By the former we do not mean the ease of learning foreign languages, the difference between mother tongue and foreign tongue does not matter for the moment, – but rather the living awareness of language, the sense of analogy and difference, etc. One might think that in this way rhetoric