

(2) Most human beings are not naturally altruistic; though they have any number of motives for pretending to themselves and to others that they are more altruistic than they really are.

(3) Belief in the truth of one of the great religions does provide a genuine motive to everyone for becoming more altruistic; and this is an indication that the great religions have a highly important and probably indispensable part to play in the life of societies, though it does not (at least by itself) provide grounds for thinking that any one of the great religions is true.

Scarcely any single point that I have made is other than obvious; together, however, they make a case which is perhaps rather hard to accept.

Signposts Through the Hermeneutical Labyrinth

by Peter Mann, O.S.B.

Introducing the hermeneutical problem

It is a pity that theological communication so often gets bogged down because a key concept is never satisfactorily and clearly explained. The key idea then degenerates to a kind of magical word, periodically invoked, temporarily perhaps exciting, but ultimately mystifying. A few years ago the word 'existential' underwent this process of degeneration. Although the word had a clear meaning in Heidegger's early philosophy, and indeed, as 'existential analysis', signified an enduringly valuable method, the basic insight represented by it failed to shape and illuminate the popular theological discussion. (A fine example of the kind of communication that *should have taken place* on a much wider scale regarding this word is still Cornelius Ernst's 1961 Introduction to Karl Rahner's *Theological Investigations*.) Instead, the word 'existential' became used indiscriminately for anything remotely 'relevant' or 'concrete'. This inflation ended by making the word worthless and unusable—where everything had to be 'existential', nothing could be any more. And the mystifying communicators and the befogged hearers concluded about the same time that the word had become meaningless. This need not have been the case: as so often before, a chance had been missed.

Perhaps something similar is happening now with the word 'hermeneutical'. Whereas 'existential' was used indiscriminately, 'hermeneutical' is often used in an almost gnostic fashion, as if allusion is being made to some arcane discipline allowing a privi-

leged few access to philosophical and theological mysteries. And before the general meaning of the word has been assimilated within theological discussion and satisfactorily communicated, particular 'hermeneutics' have begun to proliferate, producing a situation at once labyrinthine and mystifying. And yet the hermeneutical problem should be communicable, because it is simply the problem of theological *meaning*. And it is important to communicate on this problem, because the question of theological meaning has become the inescapable, central, definitive theological question.

But perhaps it is a mistake to begin the explanation in terms too narrowly theological. For the theological question is simply part of a much wider context and should not be considered outside this context. A *hermeneutical* approach is one concerned with the conditions for *understanding*—understanding anything, from a Freudian slip to a religious dogma. What is to be understood could be a text, a sign or symbol of any kind, a particular human activity in art or culture, a scientific-technological-political-religious complex. It could be the question of what goes on when someone uses his body to dance or be angry, uses a hammer to fix a nail, or a yellow circle of paint to fix the sun. It could be the way in which a particular language is used to transmit or conceal meaning. A hermeneutical approach to history, society, art, religion is concerned with the question of their *meaning*: how is meaning in all these areas constituted and projected, grasped and understood, controlled and shaped?

What is to be attempted here is no more than the providing of certain signposts through the hermeneutical labyrinth. The attempt begins with some concentrated notes on the aims and history of the hermeneutical movement. The historical interpretation is essentially derived from Paul Ricoeur's opening chapter 'Existence et herméneutique' of his book *Le conflit des interprétations* (du Seuil, 1969), to which has been added an assessment of Ricoeur's own work in the light of his theory, and a note on the hermeneutical importance of Lonergan. All this, of course, oversimplifies a vastly complex question, and is still only preparatory to actual theological work. But perhaps our theology would be more effective—and more devout—if it stayed longer with the prior human questions. As Heidegger says, asking questions is the piety of thinking.

Soundings in the hermeneutical tradition

Every decisive advance in the history of hermeneutics manifests the same pattern: technical problems of interpretation which arise within a particular discipline are seen to be related to wider questions of meaning and language. A particular method of interpretation already implies a theory of understanding: once confronted explicitly with general theories of signification and understanding, the particular method of interpretation begins to be transformed. Some soundings in the hermeneutical tradition can illustrate this.

1. *Exegesis and classical philosophy*¹

The hermeneutical problem first arose in the context of *exegesis*, that is, a discipline concerned with understanding the meaning and intention of texts. Exegesis brought about a *hermeneutical* problem, a problem of *interpretation*, because every reading of a text takes place within a particular context of interpretation, within a particular community, a tradition, a living current of thought, all of which develop particular presuppositions and demands regarding the text. The Christ-event brought about a new hermeneutical context for the interpretation of Old Testament texts, new over against the rabbinic interpretation, for example. Diverse exegetical methods implicitly raise the philosophical problem: a new approach to the text implies a theory of the sign, of the many significations contained in the single text; it bears witness to the search to assimilate a text from another cultural epoch within the present comprehension of the interpreter living in another age. With Augustine and Aquinas an explicit theory of sign and signification illuminates, and helps to transform, a current exegetical practice. But the history of hermeneutics can be seen as the continual confrontation of *specialist* hermeneutical techniques—from the interpretation of prodigies and oracles to the discipline of textual exegesis—with general theories concerned with the comprehension of signs. Already in Aristotle, *hermēneía* is more than allegory: it comprises every discourse which interprets reality by speaking meaningfully about it.

2. *Modern philosophy and the historical sciences* (Schleiermacher and Dilthey)²

A general hermeneutical theory only came into being, however, through the development of classical philology and the historical sciences at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. With Schleiermacher and Dilthey the hermeneutical problem becomes an explicitly philosophical problem. Dilthey wanted to give the human sciences a validity comparable to that of the natural sciences. He had to develop a critique of historical knowledge equivalent to Kant's critique of our knowledge of nature, and to this end he utilized the various procedures of classical hermeneutics—understanding via the internal connexion of the text, its context, social setting, etc. But as the objects investigated began to embrace more than texts and became the whole sphere in which life is objectified, the method for investigating these objects had to be modified, differentiated and multiplied also. The hermeneutical problem became for Dilthey predominantly a *psychological*

¹Cf. James M. Robinson, 'Hermeneutic since Barth', in *The New Hermeneutic* (New Frontiers in Theology, Vol. II), Harper & Row, 1964, pp. 1-77, esp. 1-19; H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (J. C. B. Mohr Tübingen, 1960), pp. 295-307 (on Aristotle).

²Gadamer, *op. cit.*, 172-185 (Schleiermacher), 205-228 (Dilthey); J. Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Suhrkamp, 1969), 178-203; *id.*: 'Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften' in *Philos. Rundschau*, Beiheft 5, Tbg. 1967, pp. 124ff.

problem: to understand is to 'transport yourself' into another life, to re-experience the objectified experience of another.

But this particular psychological method of interpretation led to a far more fundamental problematic involved in the philosophy of life Dilthey was searching for. This problematic could be called that of the basic relationship between life and meaning. It was obvious that no comprehension could take place unless life were itself primordially meaningful. But how could life, as the bearer of meaning, *objectify* this meaning in a comprehensible and determinable way? Must there not exist, within life itself, a logic of immanent development, something equivalent in fact to Hegel's *concept*? And how is another historical being able to overcome his particular historical situation and grasp for himself this meaning objectified in life? Is not a philosophy of the spirit demanded, if a philosophy of life is to make sense?: a form of intelligence capable of connecting together life and meaning in a coherent way? The way forward would be through recourse to that philosophical movement concerned with the understanding of things themselves (and also ideas, values, and persons), phenomena in fact, in their manner of appearing. Hermeneutics was to advance via phenomenology.

3. *The grafting of hermeneutics on phenomenology* (Husserl and Heidegger).¹

What Ricoeur has called the grafting of hermeneutics on phenomenology is, of course, ambiguous. The phenomenology actually employed in a particular hermeneutical problem could be derived from Kant, Hegel or Husserl (Ricoeur has, at different times, himself used all three). What will be considered here is only the development on hermeneutics associated with Husserl and Heidegger. The early Husserl (from *Logical Investigations* to *Cartesian Meditations*) developed a theory of intentionality and signification which, in its turning to the subject, in fact carried forward Dilthey's aim of overcoming 'objectivism'. What this early phenomenology called 'phenomena' were first of all realities correlative to our intentional life—they were the unities of meaning derived from this intentional life. But there was an idealism in this approach which had to be surpassed if the meaning of human existence were to be disclosed.

¹On Phenomenology, cf. Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement, A Historical Introduction* Vol. I and II (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1960). On Husserl, esp. pp. 73-167 (lit.); on Heidegger, pp. 271-357 (lit).

Apart from Husserl's and Heidegger's own writings (esp. *Being and Time*, SCM, 1962. E.T. of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*), recommended are W. J. Richardson's Heidegger book *Through Phenomenology to Thought* (Haag, 1963); Vol 1 of *New Frontiers in Theology, The later Heidegger and Theology*, (Harper & Row, 1964); Gadamer, *op. cit.* 240-250; Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-232, 'Heidegger et la question du sujet'.

An introduction to aspects of Husserl's thought is given by Quentin Lauer in his edition and translation of Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (Harper Torchbooks, 1965).

The later Husserl himself (the Husserl of *Die Krisis*) went part of this way. He contested Dilthey's attempt to provide the human sciences with a method as objective as that of the natural sciences. Further, he drew attention to a stratum of experience, the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*) prior to the relationship between subject and object.

But it was Heidegger who went furthest in this direction, that namely of discovering the primordial relationship between life and meaning. In his analysis of human existence (*Daseinsanalytik*) in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger replaced the 'idealist subject, closed up within his system of significations' (Ricoeur) with a living being who, prior to any particular objective activity, has as the horizon of all his aims and views, a world, the world. Heidegger disclosed a field of significations prior to the constitution of mathematized nature, prior, for the knowing subject, to all objectivity. Being-in-the-world provides the horizon for any particular analysis: understanding becomes now a mode of being before it is a form of knowledge: the historicity of the subject is no longer conceived of in terms of historical knowledge considered as a method—it is now a way of being 'with-others-in-history' in a radical and primordial sense. For Heidegger, human existence is the place where meaning shows itself, because man, as the 'there' of being (*Da-sein*) is the place where being shows itself and is disclosed. This disclosure is given in a complete reorientation of the self, in a conversion. From here it becomes evident that particular forms of reference to the world (handling objects, using tools, etc.) are dependent on this primordial being-in-the-world-with-others as the medium and horizon of all understanding. (Only the 'continental' hermeneutical tradition will be considered here, not its Anglo-Saxon counterpart: compare, however, with the above, Wittgenstein's notion of entering a language community with its own language games as signifying entry into a particular way of seeing the world: that is, there is a horizon of understanding corresponding to a particular language community.)

4. *Linguistic hermeneutics and meta-method* (Ricoeur and Lonergan)

The final stage of the hermeneutical tradition I want to mention here could be called the post-Heideggerean phase. From the various thinkers who have contributed to this further development (Gadamer, Apel, Habermas, Merleau-Ponty, etc.), two can be singled out as being of particular significance for the theologian, Ricoeur and Lonergan. Ricoeur¹ has criticized Heidegger's radical attempt to graft hermeneutics on phenomenology, not as being a false attempt, but as being too 'unmediated'. For despite the radical nature of Heidegger's solution to the hermeneutical problem (the connexion

¹On Ricoeur, apart from the essay already mentioned, 'Existence et herméneutique', cf. also the concluding section of his Freud book, *Freud and Philosophy* (Yale, 1970), 'Hermeneutics: The Approaches to the Symbol', pp. 494-552. Also the conclusion to his book, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, 1969), 'The Symbol gives rise to Thought', pp. 347-357.

between life and meaning), with its positing of an original comprehension of being as the root of all other understanding, the problems which gave rise to the hermeneutical tradition are not thereby solved. This analysis of human existence does not solve the problem of understanding texts, gives no methodical basis for the human sciences, cannot decide between rival interpretations of phenomena. There remains, in fact, a gap between this original ontological understanding and historical understanding as practised methodically in the historical sciences. Nor is there a reflection on the *linguistic* mediation of understanding. (The philosophy of language given by the later Heidegger does not seem to me to answer the critique of Ricoeur because the function of language indicated in this philosophy remains global, undifferentiated and 'mystical': in fact, it remains an ontological and not a historical understanding of language—'language is the dwelling-place of being', etc.)

Ricoeur has suggested that the way out of this impasse is to be found via the analysis of language (as against the immediate analysis of Dasein, human existence), but of language as given in the various languages operative within the diverse hermeneutical disciplines and in terms of the concept of interpretation common to all the hermeneutical disciplines. This concept of interpretation can be expressed as the elucidation *via* language of a certain 'architecture of meaning'. The central theme here is that of signs which contain multiple and symbolic significations. The understanding of these signs takes place in language and this semantic approach provides an axis of reference to the whole hermeneutical field. In this way the problems posed by the hermeneutical tradition are tackled systematically. This tradition had always concerned itself with the many meanings given in the one text, and the various ways a particular meaning could be hidden, transposed or distorted—exegesis, Dilthey's transposition from one psychic life to another, Nietzsche's analysis of the relationship between force and meaning, Freud's discovery of the transposing mechanisms operative in dreams—these all bear witness to this common problem. A common element, therefore, from exegesis to psychoanalysis, is the notion of a certain architecture of meaning, a multiple meaning or multivocal meaning, the role of which is, in various ways, to reveal by hiding. Linguistic analysis becomes a semantic of this 'revealed-hidden' structure.

This is only the first stage in a hermeneutic. Linguistic analysis must proceed to an *enumeration* of these various symbolic forms—cosmic symbols in the phenomenology of religion, oniric symbolism in psychoanalysis, legends, myths, the verbal creations of the poet, and so on—inasmuch as all these, though perhaps rooted in non-linguistic levels of experience, nevertheless come to expression in language. The enumeration of these symbolic forms must be followed by a *criteriology* of these same forms, showing that the form of interpretation is relative to the theoretical structure of the her-

meneutical system being considered. The phenomenology of religion would decipher the religious object, present in rite, myth and belief, in terms of the problematic of the *Sacred*; psychoanalysis interprets in terms of the *semantic of repressed desire*; a phenomenology of the spirit in terms of a progression via the sign towards a *future meaning*. This threefold focus of interpretation can be applied—of course with varying success—to any reality, a religious object, a dream, a work of art and so on. The criteriology discloses, then, a threefold theoretical structure determining the form of interpretation: there is a regressive or *archaeological* theory, interpreting the sign as dependent on the past, and specifically on past desire; there is a progressive or *teleological* theory, interpreting the sign as dependent on the spirit, and specifically on the spirit in its historical, evolutionary dynamism; there is, finally, an *eschatological* theory, interpreting the sign in terms of a dependence on the Sacred, and pointing to an origin prior to all archaeology and an end beyond all teleology. One thinks, of course, immediately of Freud and Hegel when considering the first two methods: but the theoretical structure is applicable, with modifications, to many other thinkers and the hermeneutics they have developed.

The semantic approach leads to a *reflexive* approach. The comprehension of these multivocal symbolic expressions is only possible as a moment within the comprehension of the self. In fact, the three 'dimensions' of the symbol correspond to three interacting 'dimensions' of human existence—its archaeology, teleology and eschatology. But it must be emphasized again that these dimensions of human existence are attained in language and refer throughout to an existence which is 'interpreted', in fact linguistically interpreted. The subject who interprets himself in interpreting the signs, is no longer the Cogito (here Heidegger's insight remains completely valid): it is an existant, who discovers via the exegesis of his life, that he is posited in being before he posits and possesses himself. Hermeneutics discovers a manner of existing which is from start to finish 'interpreted-being'. The turn to the subject has now become the turn to the *linguistic* subject.

Through this approach, Ricoeur maintains he has brought hermeneutics into contact with the theme of language as the central reference point of philosophical and theological thought today. Hermeneutics can focus on the work of Wittgenstein and Anglo-Saxon analysis of ordinary language, on Husserl's theory of signification and Heidegger's earlier and later philosophy, on Bultmann and post-Bultmannian exegetical work, on the philosophy of myth, on psychoanalysis and semiology. 'If we possess a symbolic logic, an exegetical science, an anthropology and psychoanalysis, then we have become capable for the first time of embracing as one single question the reintegration of human discourse' (Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 19).

The work of Lonergan² is better known in the English context and need be summarized only briefly here. Lonergan's greatest contribution to hermeneutics would seem to consist in his having grounded hermeneutics in the dynamic patterns of human understanding. To understand what it is to understand—and Lonergan's transcendental method aims at disclosing the basic patterns and dynamic structures in all human cognitional activity—would provide the irreversible inner pattern and dynamic structure for all particular cases of understanding, whether these take place in the area of science, in theology, or in the interpretation of literature. A hermeneutics grounded on transcendental method could establish a universal viewpoint which would provide conditions for the constitution of meaning and the control of meaning. But this universal viewpoint—something often misunderstood—is in no way an imperialism, concerned with subordinating to itself the particular disciplines and techniques used to interpret documents of the past or understand scientific and political problems in the present. As Lonergan has shown, a universal viewpoint is neither a Hegelian dialectic nor a Kantian *a priori*. 'It is simply a heuristic structure that contains virtually all the various ranges of possible alternatives of interpretations' (*Insight*, p. 564). The appearance of Lonergan's *Theological Method* next year should provide further insight on the transcultural categories of meaning and the methodological grounding of the human sciences towards which he is working, and the relevance these would have for theological method today. Lonergan's meta-method, like Ricoeur's linguistic hermeneutics, is a further step forward in the hermeneutical tradition we have sketched in here; the relationship between particular disciplines of interpretation and wider questions of meaning and language is now given a scientific, explanatory understanding.

Conclusion

This has been an exercise in theological communication. The attempt has been made to supply an introduction to a key idea, the 'hermeneutical problem', in the current theological (and philosophical) discussion. The fruitfulness of the method would have to be shown in the form of concrete theological analyses, as Ricoeur has done in his *Symbolique du Mal*. But it may be that the key idea has already degenerated during this exposition to a magical word periodically invoked, temporarily perhaps exciting, but ultimately mystifying.

²On Lonergan, *Insight* (Longmans, 1958), esp. pp. 562-594, 'The Truth of Interpretation'; *Collection* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), esp. 14; 'Cognitional Structure', pp. 221-239 and 16; 'Dimensions of Meaning', pp. 252-267. Cf. also David W. Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York, 1970), also Philip McShane, S. J. (ed.), *Foundations of Theology* (Gill and Macmillan, 1971), Papers from the International Lonergan Congress, 1970.