

CONCEPTUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HERMENEUTICS

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In early 2025, the prestigious German publishing house LIT published Andrzej Przyłębski's monograph *Hermeneutik. Von der Kunst der Interpretation zur Theorie und Philosophie des Verstehens* (*Hermeneutics. From Art of Interpretation to Theory and Philosophy of Comprehension*).

Przyłębski is full professor of Philosophy at Adam-Mickiewicz University of Poznań, Poland. He was ambassador of Poland to the Federal Republic of Germany. From the beginning of his studies in philosophy he was captivated by the ideas of Martin Heidegger. As a student he studied German so that he could read Heidegger in the original. He wrote his master's thesis on the relation between being and truth. Delving deeper into the sources of Heidegger's thought, he defended his dissertation on the philosophical views of Emil Lask. He met Hans-Georg Gadamer, with whom he maintained a long correspondence. He studied the works of a number of hermeneutics. He does not share Richard Rorty's view that, while hermeneutics is a revolutionary kind of philosophizing that breaks down old schemata, it cannot be systematized. Proving the converse becomes Przyłębski's philosophical mission. He considers the monograph *Hermeneutik. Von der Kunst der Interpretation zur Theorie und Philosophie des Verstehens* as the culmination of his more than 20 years of research in the field of hermeneutic philosophy, which in its postmetaphysical typology satisfies the human striving for metaphysics. Hermeneutics expresses skepticism towards "Grand Narratives", while not losing important landmarks, not straying into postmodern correctives, not sinking into existential chaos and not falling into nihilism.

Przyłębski conceives of hermeneutic philosophy in a broader sense. According to him, it stands on anti-fundamentalist positions, but at the same time it asserts the necessity of metaphysics by including ontological, epistemological, ethical, aesthetic and anthropological reflections. Hermeneutics is a kind of "first philosophy" that is systematically constructed. It is based on society, culture and human existence and is constituted conceptually through comprehension. Przyłębski points to Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricœur as classics of the philosophical hermeneutics thus outlined.

The monograph consists of an introduction and nine chapters, the last of which is devoted to the critics of hermeneutic philosophy. This introduction presents in a concise way the development of philosophical hermeneutics from an art of interpretation through a philosophical differentiation of comprehension and interpretation to a systematic philosophical concept that focuses on existential comprehension and comprehensive interpretation. Przyłębski notes the fact that, although comprehension is a universal human faculty and a universal human act, philosophy is relatively late in making it its priority subject. Whether because it often seems like an automatic act, whether because one rarely questions the grounds and criteria of comprehension, whether because it is steeped in one's culture and existence, whether for other reasons – it is difficult to determine. In any case, the issues involved in biblical interpretations and the justification of legal practices facilitate a philosophical turn to the problem of the universality of comprehension and interpretation.

The first chapter of the monograph is devoted to the background of hermeneutics. Przyłębski provides a comprehensive overview of hermeneutical ideas in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modernism. He points to Johann Konrad Dannhauer as the progenitor of the independent discipline of Hermeneutics. He comments on the contributions of Johann Martin Chladenius, Johannes Clausberg, Christian Thomasius, Georg Friedrich Meier, Christian August Crusius and many others. He gives special attention to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic concept, which emphasizes individual creativity, while also showing comprehension as an independent object of philosophical reflection, not just a methodological construction. The latter he conceives as an art practiced within the broad scope of preaching, translation, philology, ethics, and dialectics. To Schleiermacher what is obvious is not comprehension but incomprehension. Comprehension must be achieved. He justifies hermeneutics through the proximity between philosophy and philology, or between consciousness and language, thinking and speaking. Therefore, according to Schleiermacher, the interpreter who masters the art of hermeneutics comprehends a text more fully than its author. And comprehension itself is a constantly fulfilling whole.

The second and third chapters examine the birth of hermeneutics, historically and conceptually. Przyłębski discusses in turn the work and developments of the four classics of twentieth-century hermeneutics: Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. He presents them in historical-philosophical aspect with their specific achievements. And then, in a rigorous conceptual way, he explores the problem of *comprehension* in their theories: the transition from a methodology of the sciences of the spirit to a hermeneutic philosophy of life, comprehension as a modality of human existence and a process in the horizon of prejudices, direct and deep comprehension.

In the next chapter, Przyłębski systematizes the concepts of *comprehension* and *interpretation* by delineating three stages: immediate comprehension (understand-

ing of texts, cultural, social and historical specificity), critical comprehension and interpretation. It is referred to as: key philosophical concept, consistent interpretation, philosophical construction, radical clarification and existential self-comprehension of man (as an alternative to introspection and psychoanalysis).

The fifth chapter is devoted to the development of hermeneutic philosophy in the twenty-first century. It basically follows Gadamer, but also deviates from his views. Ferdinand Fellmanns stands closer to Dilthey, developing hermeneutics as a universal experiential and behavioral theory characterized in his words as “symbolic pragmatism.” It is a user hermeneutic that emphasizes the mediating role of symbolic forms in human relation to the world. Markus Gabriel and Maurizio Ferraris work towards a new realism that opposes the total subjectivation of being and existence due to the dominant constitutive power of meaning. Przyłębski commented on the alternative figures proposed by Ferraris: Foucault (Foucault and Kant) versus Descartes (Descartes and Kant), defending the position that one does not construct reality, but only the meaning it can have. Hermeneutics of Wolfgang Detel is presented by Przyłębski in the context of naturalization. Detel designs comprehension as Parsing, which involves synoptic mastery of mental states and actions in their holistic palette: from the physiological through the psychological, behavioral and communicative to the semantic and interpretive and metarepresentational levels. The chapter concludes with an assessment of Günter Abel’s philosophy that foregrounds interpretation conceived beyond its specialized representation in hermeneutics, analytic philosophy, sociology, and elsewhere. Abel’s generalized philosophy of interpretation positions itself beyond essentialism and relativism, including in practical, ethical, and political terms.

Chapters six and seven are highly conceptual in nature. In them Przyłębski thoroughly analyzes the main philosophical disciplines in the perspective of hermeneutic philosophy. The focus is on metaphysics, ontology, theory of knowledge, ethics, aesthetics, philosophical anthropology, political science and philosophy of language. Special attention is paid to hermeneutic logic (the term is Georg Misch’s), mainly associated with the names of Hans Lipps, Georg Misch and Josef König, which today has evolved into linguistic and symbolic pragmatics. Hermeneutic logic does not describe concrete facts from an abstract formal distance, but situates itself in the language of the speaker and the understanding one. The monograph follows the exposition of the basic concepts and principles of hermeneutic philosophy. Przyłębski discusses the Principle of Charity, psychological interpretation, grammatical exposition, elementary understanding, higher, hermeneutically deepened comprehension, the prestructure of comprehension, the hermeneutic circle, the hermeneutic “as,” prejudice, and the principle of the fusion of horizons.

Przyłębski explores postmodern attempts to radicalize hermeneutic philosophy in a separate chapter of the monograph. He definitely thinks that postmodernism is not a hermeneutical concept, but rather is related to the late philosophy

of Heidegger, which retreats from hermeneutics. However, Przyłębski discusses three main theses within postmodern philosophizing that are relevant to the hermeneutic philosophical project. John S. Caputo insists on a definitive break with the metaphysical and cultural foundations of man's existence in favor of a leftist and essentially ideological appeal for man's emancipation from the shackles of tradition. Hugh J. Silverman develops a specific semiological hermeneutics that builds on textual hermeneutics (the concept of "textual" belongs to the Bulgarian Julia Kristeva). Przyłębski is skeptical of the philosophical potential of textuality, but still sees it as a particularly interpretive space. He is most circumspect about the views of Gianni Vattimo, whom he considers a true disciple of Gadamer. Vattimo, however, essentially abandons both strict hermeneutic and typical philosophical paradigm, replacing them with cultural analytics from the perspective of nihilism. It carries an anti-metaphysical but also positive charge. It is expressed as a broader consideration of the essence of man beyond his subjectivity – man is a being in which reality shows itself. On this relativistic field, which is projected in contingent questions, Przyłębski comments on Vattimo's ideas of "weak thought" and "dissolution as the destiny of Being". In a style close to hermeneutics, his philosophy presents itself as the Koiné of contemporary culture.

As I have noted, fully in the spirit of hermeneutics, the last chapter of the monograph is devoted to trenchant conceptual critiques of hermeneutic philosophy. Przyłębski discusses some critical productions of Hans Albert, Jochen Hörisch, Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas. In these, hermeneutics is philosophically confronted with critical rationalism, its naturalistic and absolutist misconception, Deconstruction, and a more general theoretical stance towards it that, alongside socially understood communication (it is a type of hermeneutics), also includes the specifics of empirical-analytic sciences, psychoanalysis, and the critique of ideology, with Przyłębski nevertheless discursively yet insistently defending a consistent hermeneutic position.

REFERENCES

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