

INTERPRETATION

1. Method

2. Functional Specialties

3. One of eight functional specialties: interpretation

Skip research: it is learnt in seminar, laboratory, doctoral dissertation

The art of interpretation is learnt in the same way

Method is concerned to articulate just what the interpreter does

4. Understanding the text

the thing spoken ~~mm~~ of in the text

the words used in the text

the author of the text

what is preventing one from getting at the meaning of the text

Judging the correctness of one's interpretation

Stating one's interpretation of the text

5. Understanding the Object

Distinction between exegete and student

Student comes to know object by studying the ~~m~~ text

Exegete can know all about object and yet have the whole task of exegesis to perform (*)

In practice the student is a bit of an exegete and the exegete can be a bit of student

but our concern is not ~~the~~ practice but theory

not the learning theory concerned with understanding students

but the learning theory concerned with understanding exegetes

(*) exegete has to learn now what the author should have said

but what was the object real or imaginary that he was speaking of

Still the more the exegete does know about objects, the better

at least he must know the language employed in the text

so he will know the objects referred by ~~that~~ words in the language

such knowledge is general and potential

exegesis is using the text to particularize what is general, actualize what is potential

* when meaning of text is obvious, transition to particular and actual is immediate

when meaning is obscure, the greater the exegete's resources, the

greater the likelihood that he will enumerate all possible interpretations

and assign to each its proper probability

The foregoing involves a rejection of what may be named the principle of the empty ^{/head}

If one is not to 'read into' the text what is not there

if one is not to settle in a priori fashion what the text must mean no matter what it says

if one is not to drag in one's own notions and opinions

then one must drop all preconceptions of every kind

attend simply to the text

see all that is there and nothing that is not there

let the author interpret himself, let him speak for himself

Both right and wrong

right: often happens that interpreters distort the author's meaning

by imposing on him views he never entertained

wrong: the remedy proposed is quite mistaken

a naive intuitionism

just looking at the text and seeing what is there can lead to no more

than re-issue of the same signs in the same order

anything over and above that re-issue is mediated by the exegete's

experience, understanding, judgement, honesty

the greater his experience, the more cultivated his understanding, the

more balanced his judgement, the more meticulous his honesty

the greater the likelihood that he will hit upon the author's meaning

On the other hand, the less his experience etc

the greater the likelihood that he will attribute to the author what the

author did not mean

Bultmann p. 158

6. Understanding the words

Understanding the object accounts for the plain meaning of the text,

the meaning that is obvious because both author and interpreter understand

the same thing in the same way and express themselves in similar fashion

However it can happen that when the author speaks of P the reader thinks of Q

Then sooner or later the interpreter will find himself in difficulties

Not all that is true of P also is true of Q

The interpreter, if a controversialist will begin to accuse the

author of his blunders and inconsistencies

But if he is a real interpreter, he will suspect that he himself is

at fault. He reads further. He rereads. He makes mistakes and inconsistencies

evidence that he himself is missing the point. Eventually he stumbles

on the possibility that the author was thinking not of Q but of P.

He checks this out and finds that now it all makes good sense.

Thus process can recur any number of times: it is the x self-correcting process of learning; it is the manner in which we grow in common sense, in the spontaneous development of human intelligence

Distinguish understanding, formulation, judgement, (even though not separate)

It is developing understanding that solves the hermeneutic circle
interdependence of words sentences paragraphs chapters books milieu
no logical solution

but meaning is an intentional entity

by gradually developing and ever self-correcting additions of insights
one has some understanding of the part and by adding some understanding of further parts and allowing these to interact one gradually works towards an exact understanding of both parts and whole

Rules of hermeneutics indicate the points worth attending to in order to arrive at an understanding of the text

But one does not understand because one has observed the rules
understanding is a matter of one's association, intelligence, whole development
rules do not increase your personal resources

7. Understanding the Author

It can happen that the first reading of a text yields a host of puzzles and very little understanding, that a second reading yields many more puzzles but little more understanding

Then the problem is that the author belongs to a very different world, that one has to learn to understand him, his nation, language, time, culture way of life.

Learning all this is essentially the same as discovering that he meant P when one was thinking of Q, but it is this process enormously enlarged
It is a matter of becoming a scholar and this is the work of a lifetime

8. Understanding oneself

The major texts, the classics in religion letters philosophy theology may be not only beyond the initial horizon of an interpreter. It can happen that they will be understood only if the interpreter himself undergoes an intellectual or moral or religious conversion or any 2 or all 3. This is the existential issue. It lies at the root of the perennial divisions of mankind in on the meaning of the real, the good, the holy.

It demands that the self-correcting process of learning be so protracted that it brings about a revolution in one's outlook

This existential aspect of the problem of interpretation has its social and its historical extension

The classics of a tradition are the vehicle by which the tradition is carried on. They are the vehicle of the process of education, socialization, acculturation. This process brings about the pre-understanding, the Vorverstandnis, within which the classics are understood and interpreted.

However this Vorverstandnis, this tradition may be authentic or unauthentic. When it is authentic, it is a long accumulation of insights, adjustments, re-interpretations, that repeats the original message afresh for each age. In the light of such a tradition one exclaims with the disciples on the way to Emmaus "Did not our hearts burn within us when he spoke of the way and opened to us the scriptures" (Lk 24 32)

When it is unauthentic, then the tradition consists in a watering down of the original message, in recasting it into terms and meanings that fit it into the assumptions and convictions of those that have dodged the issue of ~~xxx~~ radical conversion. In that case a genuine interpretation will be met with incredulity and ridicule, as was St Paul when in Rome he was led to quote Isaiah: "Go to this people and say: You will hear and hear and never understand; you will look and look but never see" (Acts 28, 26)

9. Judging the Correctness of one's Interpretation

Criteria: Remote and Proximate

Remote: the existential issue, intellectual moral religious conversion
more on this when we treat foundations chapter 11

Proximate: are there further relevant questions

man comes home, mess, Did ~~x~~ something happen? Where is my wife not f. r. q.
If no further ~~qx~~ relevant questions on given topic, then no further insights
if further relevant questions, then further insights possible, revision possible

Relevance: context, two meanings

heuristic, where one looks to find context, word in sentence, s in #, # in chap. &c.
actual, interweaving of qq. and answers

to answer any question gives rise to more qq., to answer them to still more
but eventually, if one sticks to a single topic, the stream of qq dries up
one can ask more qq by moving on to ~~ax~~ different topic

but on the topic with which one has been concerned there are just no more r qq.

Lord Acton: Study problems not periods

Collingwood: Knowledge consists not just in propositions but in answers to qq
to understand the answers one has to know the qq