

3.4 Insight and Verstehen

Since the days of Schleiermacher German writers on hermeneutics and history have been employing the word, Verstehen. While their usage of the word has developed down the years, notably with Heidegger, it still is far more limited in scope than my use of "insight" or "understanding." Accordingly, it will serve both to clarify my position and to draw attention to its affiliations if I proceed to draw upon the learning and penetration of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Wahrheit und Methode.

Schleiermacher generalized the notion of hermeneutics. It had existed in bible study and in classical philology as a set of helpful observations provided by teachers for their pupils. He extended its relevance to every instance in which ~~misunderstanding was possible, and so was concerned with understanding as something common to all cases of understanding interpretation, now is the time for all good~~ which another's speech or writing might be "misunderstood, and so was concerned with understanding as something common to all cases of interpretation. Moreover, he attended not to the understood object but to the procedures of understanding, and he distinguished between grammatical interpretation, which grasped the meaning of the words and, on the other hand, psychological (or technical) interpretation, which aimed at penetrating to the individuality of the speaker or writer and, indeed, not so much to the sequence of his thoughts as ~~to the outbreak of a living moment now is the time for all~~ to <sup>a</sup> the revelatory moment of <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>A</sup> life, to a deed intertwined with many others even of a different kind.

162

173

167

174

Scheler<sup>1</sup>macher's psychological interpretation is ~~that~~  
 "a divinatory procedure, an entry into a writer's whole mentality,  
 an apprehension of the inner genesis of the composition of a work,  
 a recapture of the creative act. So Verstehen is a reproduction  
 related to  
~~the original production~~ an original production, a knowing of the known,  
 a reconstruction that begins from the living moment of the  
 conception, the germinal decision, as the point from which the  
 composition was organized."

175

Such psychological interpretation is, of course, superfluous  
 as long as writers are proceeding in accord with accepted rules  
 and customs. But creative writers set new standards and give  
 rise to new rules; they bring about new uses of words and new  
 forms of composition; they are to be understood only through  
 divination, through the immediacy of surmise; and that supposes  
 that the interpreter is congenial to the creative genius.  
 Further, since there are no hard and fast lines separating  
 routine and creative writing, since at any time the individuality  
 of a writer may break through in a manner that goes beyond  
 everyday usage and common rules, it follows that the ultimate  
 ground of all Verstehen will be the act of divination that,  
 for Scheler<sup>1</sup>macher, rests on congeniality that somehow enables  
 one to find the other in oneself..

177

Hermeneutics accordingly is not some mechanical performance  
 in accord with rules but an art. While the individuality of  
 a writer cannot be pinned down in concepts and reasons still  
 it can be reached by feeling, by an immediate, ~~empathetic~~  
 sympathetic, congenial Verstehen. Again, just as there is  
 the hermeneutic circle to grammatical interpretation, so too  
 there is in psychological interpretation. In both cases the  
 whole is reached through the parts and the parts are to be understood

179

from their role within the whole. But in grammatical interpretation this reciprocal dependence is between words and sentences, sentences and paragraphs, paragraphs and chapters, and so on, while in psychological interpretation the parts are the revelatory moments of individuality ~~whom~~ but the whole is the interconnection of all such moments in the genesis of a character.

178

Finally, just as hermeneutics is held to be an art, so its criteria are artistic. Just as the artist knows when ~~avverkningsmomentet~~ his inspiration has found its ~~adequate~~ adequate expression, so too the interpreter knows when his art has reached its goal, when Verständnis is achieved.

179 cf 175

It was Wilhelm Dilthey that first explicitly observed that historical interpretation, no less than grammatical and psychological, was a matter of understanding the whole through the parts and the parts through the whole. But if he was the first to extend Schelermacher's Verstehen ~~in~~ into an account of historical knowledge, he was no more than interpreting the mind of the German Historical School. What Dilthey formulated, was what Ranke and Droysen basically thought.

186

Boec kh

The charter of the German Historical School was its protest against the a priori construction of world history. The meaning of history comes out of history itself. For a standard is set by success. The importance of the past is settled by what follows from it. That something succeeds or fails, not only decides the meaning of an action and grants it ~~either~~ <sup>either</sup> a lasting efficacy or consigns it to oblivion, but the same success or failure settles whether a whole network of deeds and events is significant or insignificant. So Ranke's notion of truly world-historical performance is that it makes history, that it has effects that give ~~lasting~~

188

191

it a lasting historical significance. There is then to history an intelligible web of interconnections that includes within history its significant events and excludes those that are not historically significant.

198

Still this empiricist garb is far from the whole of Ranke's thought. For him historical thought was ~~the~~ God's creation coming to self-consciousness. Such consciousness was not conceptualized. The end result of historical study was feeling with and knowing with the All. On this pantheistic background is to be understood Ranke's desire ~~for~~ for extinction, an extinction that was a form of real participation, an entry into the life of the All.

199

How metaphysical Ranke can be, is revealed by the statement that ~~the~~ clear, full, ~~and~~ experienced insight (Einsicht) ~~is~~ is the criterion of being that has become transparent and sees itself through and through. So what justifies Ranke's consciousness of himself as an historian, turns out to be very like the transparency of being to itself which Hegel attributed to the absolute knowledge of philosophy. But where the philosopher sought God through concepts, Ranke found him the form of outer representation. The historian as Ranke understands him belongs to the form of absolute spirit which Hegel attributed to the religion of art (Kunstreligion).