

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

The History of Hermeneutics

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Hermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and interpret texts, especially biblical texts, or those written in a different time, culture, or context from our own. It includes understanding, reading, and application. Hence it involves not only biblical studies and exegetical practice, but also philosophical questions about understanding; linguistic questions about meaning; questions in literary theory about reading, narrative, and genre; and sociological and historical questions about the situatedness of the self, including sometimes class, gender, and belief. It includes both theory and practice. In recent years it has become ever more crucial in theology, where so much is determined by how we read the Bible and even documents of history. Differences of interpretation appear to be more deeply questions of hermeneutics. It is also increasingly recognized that, as E. Betti suggested, hermeneutics can promote patience, tolerance, and respect for the other, as well as the understanding of a text and of other interpreters. On this ground Betti argued that hermeneutics should become an obligatory subject in universities.

In a more simplistic sense, hermeneutics in theory and practice occurred among the Greek Stoics and the Jewish rabbis of the ancient world. In the fifth and fourth centuries BC, many Greeks viewed Homer and Hesiod as sacred texts, but recognized the anthropomorphic difficulty of stories of pagan deities and their love affairs. Hence Theagenes of Rhegium and Hecataeus found that they could defend the text as sacred if they allegorized stories of the deities as forces of nature. Hephaestus was said to represent fire; Poseidon represented water; Hera represented air; and so on. Metrodorus of Lampsacus used allegory to denote parts of the body. Zeno, founder of the Stoic school, read Hesiod in this way, and most Stoics adopted this method. Not all Greeks, however, did this. Plato expressed serious reservations about it. By the first century it had become a matter of serious debate. Philo and many in Greek-speaking Judaism followed the Stoic method. But the Jewish rabbis tended to follow stricter rules. Rabbi Hillel formulated seven “rules” (*middōth*) of interpretation. These arose partly from questions about specific situations in life, for example, the respective priority of the Passover or the Sabbath. The first five “rules” remain largely matters of deductive logic, for example, that the greater includes the less. The sixth, however, concerns support from other passages in Scripture, and in effect the seventh recognizes the importance of context. Rabbi Ishmael Ben Elisha, Hillel’s pupil, expanded these seven into thirteen, and “rules” became more numerous. Rabbi Akiba interpreted the Song of Songs allegorically. Some Jewish apocalyptic

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literature applied references to “oppressors” directly to the Romans (cf. *Psalms of Solomon*, c. 50–40 BC).

The place of allegorical interpretation in the NT is still debated. Most believe that Paul used allegory in Galatians, but Otto Michel and others prefer to speak of typology, which involves historical parallels, rather than a simple parallel between ideas (see **Typology**). J. W. Aageson speaks of “correspondence.” (See **Allegory, Allegorical Interpretation**; on Judaism and the NT, see A. C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 60–94.) From the second century onward, however, allegory became more widely used, especially among the Alexandrian Church Fathers, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and their successors. It was less widespread among the fathers of the Antioch School, including John Chrysostom, but it is simplistic to categorize the differences between Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis entirely in this way. Augustine and Gregory of Rome formed a bridge to the medieval period, but the next hermeneutical debate in effect emerged at the Reformation.

In his early thought, Luther used allegorical interpretation. But he came to see that it allowed the teaching of the church to dominate and to shape the message of Scriptures. In his well-known “Tower Experience”, he came to understand Rom. 1:16–17 and “the righteousness of God” in a new way, which differed from normal church teaching. Whereas Erasmus had argued that the Bible was too complex to allow readily for action, Luther insisted that it was always clear enough to determine practical action at the next stage. He wrote many commentaries, however, which suggests that the Bible needs careful interpretation in the light of the meaning of words and sentences and their historical context. His commentaries and lectures included Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and many other books. Luther’s commentary on Galatians often applies the text to the pope and to contemporary situations. His respect for the power of Scripture was immense. He said of one of his conflicts with Roman opposition: “I did nothing.... The Word did it all.” Interpretation overlaps with translation, and one of Luther’s many legacies was the German Bible, in the language of the people. William Tyndale applied many of Luther’s insights to the English church. He saw the Bible as conveying God’s promise, and as performing various *actions* of commission, forgiveness, liberation, and so on. Nowadays these are called speech acts. Most important of all, he produced the English translation that largely lies behind the KJV/AV.

John Calvin was in many ways more meticulous than Luther. He wrote commentaries on virtually all the books of the OT and NT, including Romans, in which he acknowledged the exegesis of Melancthon and Bucer. He saw the chief virtue of the commentator as “lucid brevity,” which expounds the mind of the biblical writer in its proper context. As such, he has rightly been called “the father of modern commentators.” He compared the

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Bible with the use of glasses with which to see more clearly, and strongly argued against the use of allegory. An overuse of allegory, he urged, was folly, and belittled God's acts in history. Apart from the relatively major hermeneutical insights from Chladenius on "point of view," and from Bengel on solid exegetical practice, the next major advance in hermeneutics came with Ast and Schleiermacher. The work of the English Deists had a negative effect on the status and authority of the Bible, and J. S. Semler, in effect, was the founder of biblical criticism.

F. D. E. Schleiermacher provided the first great turning point that introduced hermeneutics as a modern discipline. Before his work, hermeneutics was often described as "the science of interpretation." He defined it not as "rules" but as "the art of understanding" (*Hermeneutics* [Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977], 113 and 35–79). As well as being influenced by Pietism, the Enlightenment, and Kant, Schleiermacher also fell under the influence of Romanticism. He stressed the "divinatory" pole (*divinatorisch*) of understanding a text, which he described as "the feminine" or suprarational. This dimension of understanding could perceive a whole, sometimes intuitively. He did not, however, dismiss the rational: the comparative reflection and divinatory perception were entirely complementary, even if the "feminine" was perhaps more important. He illustrated this in his book *The Celebration of Christmas*, in which after Christmas Communion the men discussed conceptual difficulties of the incarnation while the women sang hymns to Jesus. Their understanding seemed more complete to him.

From Kant Schleiermacher grasped the importance of transcendental questions. In parallel with Kant, he asked, how is interpretation or understanding *possible*? Too often, he observed, interpretation or hermeneutics had become a merely retrospective exercise in which, where there is disagreement, each side appeals to hermeneutics to justify an *already arrived at* interpretation. This turns it into an instrumental or service discipline. We should ask about the *possibility* of understanding a text with an open mind. But this does *not* mean with an *empty* mind. We all approach texts with a reservoir of *preliminary* understanding (*Vorverständnis*). We come with assumptions about the meaning of words, the force of grammar, the purpose of the author, and so on. We should *not* suppress or dismiss these. We should allow them, however, to become corrected and reshaped in the light of the text itself. This could mean traveling between the preliminary understanding and the more mature one several times. Schleiermacher called this the hermeneutical circle. F. Ast had already formulated a version of this. But Schleiermacher's version was so definitive that it became central for Dilthey, Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and for modern hermeneutics. All these explain that this is more than a circle; G. Osborne calls it a hermeneutical spiral. The hermeneutical circle also means that understanding the *parts* can lead to understanding the *whole* (by the comparative method); and the *whole*

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(by divinatory method) can shed light on the *parts*. The two are interdependent and mutually corrective.

Schleiermacher established hermeneutics as an independent discipline in its own right. It enables one “to step out of one’s own frame of view” (*Hermeneutics*, 42). We must understand “how a way of speaking originated” (47); “the content of the text and its range of effects” (151); and in the NT, how to do justice “to the rootedness of the text” in history, and “the author’s way of thinking” (207). In this sense, interpretation can be “the reverse of composition” (69). We need to ask what set this stretch of language or speech going. Schleiermacher valued his regular preaching at Trinity Church, Berlin, no less than his professorship in the University of Berlin. The purpose of hermeneutics was to set the text alight, and to communicate it to the congregation with fire, freshness, imagination, understanding, and accuracy. He explains further: “The divinatory method seeks to gain an immediate comprehension of the author.... The comparative method proceeds by subsuming the author under a general type” (150). He adds: “If we follow only the divinatory method, we become ‘nebulists’; if we follow only the comparative, we risk pedantry” (205). Hermeneutics may share in the provisional and fallible nature of all human knowledge. But Schleiermacher shows how it is also capable of growth, expansion, and multidisciplinary inquiry. Human work and thought, he stresses, do not exclude the work of the Holy Spirit.

Wilhelm Dilthey became in effect Schleiermacher’s successor. He was professor at Basel and Berlin. He aimed to make hermeneutics the foundation of the “human sciences” (*Geisteswissenschaften*), that is, the humanities, arts, letters, and social sciences. His complete writings take up twenty-six volumes in German. He greatly admired Schleiermacher but sought to add two further components to his work. First, following Hegel, he believed in the “historicity” (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of all human life and thought in time and place. The interpreter, the author, and the text are radically conditioned by how they are situated in history. Second, he aimed to extend hermeneutics from texts to human life (*Leben*), to society and to institutions. His central theme was *lived experience* (*Erlebnis*). He rejected positivism.

When he compared the work of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and even Kant, he argued that “in the veins of the knowing subject, *no real blood flows*” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5 [Leipzig: Teubner, 1924]). He also postulated a “connectedness” (*Zusammenhang*) behind social diversity and individual experience that bound together disparate individuals. This found expression in such shared phenomena as symbols. Subjective experience learns more from history and life than from introspection. The ultimate aim in hermeneutics is “to relive” (*nacherleben*) the other’s life experience (*Leben, Erlebnis*) by stepping out of his shoes and exercising “sympathy” (*Hineinversetzen*) or “transposition”

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(*Selected Writings* [Cambridge: CUP, 1976], 226–27). This brings us back to the core of Schleiermacher's concerns, but with the addition of "historicality" and social life and institutions.

It is not surprising that Heidegger, Bultmann, and Gadamer draw on Dilthey. What is surprising is the relatively minimal concern for hermeneutics and Dilthey in sociology. To be sure, he features in Z. Bauman, *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), and to some extent in P. Berger, J. Schutz, and P. Winch. He has made a small impact on sociology of knowledge. But some also lament the use of clinical and therapeutic models in pastoral psychology, when Dilthey's hermeneutics may have taken them much further. While Dilthey was writing, Bishop George Ridding of Southwell, England, was compiling a pastoral litany of prayer that suggested we should empathize with others but not measure their feelings entirely by our own.

Martin Heidegger is dominated by the concept of historicity. Hence he cannot begin his work *Being and Time* by speaking of "man" or "human beings" in the abstract, but by speaking of *Dasein*, "being-there." *Dasein* does not have a viewpoint outside history. He declares, "The phenomenology of *Dasein* is a hermeneutic" (*Being and Time* [London: SCM, 1962]). "An interpretation (*Auslegung*) is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (*eines Vorgegebenen*, 191–92). The "world" of *Dasein* is determined, shaped, and bounded by the horizons of practical concerns of the "I." Heidegger states, "The essence of *Dasein* lies in its existence (*Existenz*)" (67). "Things" may be merely present-at-hand (*vorhanden*), which is a *derived or secondary* mode of conceptualizing. On the other hand, *Dasein* apprehends what is "ready-to-hand" (*zuhanden*), that is, what plays a practical part in the world of the self, or in "my" world. We understand things *as* that which has a practical significance in our world. Thus Heidegger appropriates preliminary understanding (*Vorverständnis*) and the hermeneutical circle as Schleiermacher and especially Dilthey formulated it. He writes: "If we see this circle as a vicious one and look out for ways of avoiding it ... the act of understanding has been misunderstood from the ground up.... The 'circle' in understanding belongs to the structure of meaning" (194–95). This principle renders understanding a *process* conditioned by historicality.

What we seek to understand is necessarily also conditioned by its place in time and history, that is, by its historicality. Heidegger had originally hoped to arrive at some kind of anchorage in Being. But in his later work he sees human beings as "fallen out of Being" (*Introduction to Metaphysics* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959], 36–37; *Sein*). He traces this to the negative effects of dualism from Plato onward. We cannot fully

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understand our lost relation to Being, but we can understand existentially what is related to our interests as historically finite and situated beings. Heidegger gives no more than proleptic hints of “the call of Being” in such later works as *On the Way to Language* (Ger. 1960; Eng. 1971) and *Discourse on Thinking* (Ger. 1959; Eng. 1966). E. Fuchs and G. Ebeling offer their theological hermeneutics of “language event” (*Sprachereignis*) with affinities to this thought. Meanwhile in *Being and Time*, Heidegger explores time and temporality. *Temporality* (*Zeitlichkeit*) is the transcendental possibility of time. Temporality is experienced in understanding in a subjective and practical way, or in Heidegger’s language, “in an *existentiell* way” (357). This is bound up with the phenomena of “projection towards the future” and “authentic” existence. *Dasein* remains in each case my own (*die Jemeinigkeit*). If language concerns only the theoretical and “objective,” it becomes mere “idle talk” (213). Clearly, in Heidegger, *Dasein*’s understanding relates to authentic existence in history and in time.

Rudolf Bultmann utilizes the hermeneutics of Dilthey and Heidegger for his own purposes in theology. Following these authors, as well as Schleiermacher, he observes that preliminary understanding (*Vorverständnis*) is “not a prejudice, but a way of raising questions” (*Existence and Faith* [London: Collins, 1964], 346). The interpreter must not suppress his questions. In his essay “The Problem of Hermeneutics,” he explicitly appeals to Dilthey’s work more than a dozen times (*Essays Philosophical and Theological* [London: SCM, 1955], 234–61). For example, one cannot understand a text about mathematics, music, or love unless one knows at least *something* about mathematics, music, or love (*Faith and Understanding*, vol. 1 [London: SCM, 1969], 53). Bultmann asserts: “The ‘most subjective’ interpretation (*subjektivist*) is ... the ‘most objective’ (*objektivist*), that is, only those who are stirred by the questions of their own existence can hear the claim which the text makes” (*Essays*, 256). Here we can see clear echoes of both Dilthey and Heidegger. He concludes, “There cannot be any such thing as presuppositionless exegesis” (*Existence and Faith*, 344). Bultmann is explicit about this: “Heidegger’s analysis of existence has become for me faithful for hermeneutics” (in C. W. Kegley, *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* [London: SCM, 1966], 275). J. Macquarrie argues that this dependency extends not to content, but to “ways of raising questions” and to seeking a better scheme of concepts.

Hans-Georg Gadamer constitutes a second major turning point for hermeneutics, after Schleiermacher’s. Both, in effect, provided a new agenda for a new concept of hermeneutics, in relation to their times. At Marburg University Gadamer read philosophy under the neo-Kantians P. Natorp and N. Hartmann, and then turned to art, history, and Plato. In 1923 he moved to Freiburg and met Heidegger. Their common interest in art, history, philosophy, and (later) hermeneutics established a ready bond. Historical situatedness and finitude, or “historicality,” remained a central theme for both.

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Gadamer especially reacted against Enlightenment knowledge in the sciences and all fixed abstractions. He contrasted “problems” and “questions.” J. Grondin comments: “Problems are not real questions from the genesis of their meaning” (*Hans-Georg Gadamer* [New York: Yale University Press, 2003], 84). “Problems” are *fixed* points “like stars in the sky” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1989], 377). From 1923 to 1927 Heidegger collaborated with Natorp and Bultmann at Marburg, and with Gadamer, Arendt, and Jonas as younger scholars. Heidegger and Gadamer studied Dilthey and Schleiermacher in “the art of understanding,” and especially Dilthey’s preference for historicity over introspection as a source of knowledge. Increasingly Gadamer was convinced by Heidegger’s rejection of objectification and generality. In the 1930s he worked on Plato, the poets, and Kierkegaard, and in 1936 he lectured on art and history. He later lectured on Hegel and Plato.

Part 1 of Gadamer’s magisterial work on hermeneutics, *Truth and Method*, expounds the limits of “technical reason” and of the Enlightenment for all but the sciences. In place of the individualist appeal to inner consciousness by R. Descartes, he appeals to the communal and historical tradition found in G. Vico, and the *sensus communis* of ancient Rome. He argues that hermeneutics began “from the experience of art and historical tradition” (xxiii). He traces this method of history, tradition, and historicity through Droysen, Dilthey, and others, urging the importance of formation (*Bildung*) over technical knowledge or mere information. *Bildung* teaches one to be “open to the other” (17). The whole of part 1 constitutes a blistering attack on Enlightenment rationalism, much of which is repeated in part 2. By contrast, Gadamer writes: “All encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event” (99).

Part 2 explicates this further, under the theme of “the ontology of the work of art.” He offers the paradigmatic illustration of play: “Play fulfils its purpose only if the player loses himself in the play” (102); “It is the game that is played—it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it” (103). He stresses: “The primacy of the play over the consciousness of the player is fundamentally acknowledged” (104). Players lose themselves in the aims of the game; the rules of the game determine how the players act and rank their priorities. They are determined by the “world” of the game: “Play draws him into its domain” (109). “Objectivity,” if we can use this term, is found in the game, not in the consciousness of the player, as Descartes had imagined. Similarly, a festival, like a game, *exists* in its celebration. The center of gravity of the game or festival is also *present* in experience. Gadamer criticizes Schleiermacher for giving too much privilege to the origination of the text. Gadamer writes: “Historical interpretation in Schleiermacher’s sense is too subjectivist. Question and answer receive minimal attention” (185). According to Gadamer, Schleiermacher is too influenced by the Romanticism of his time.

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The central place given to “historicality” in Dilthey and in Gadamer owes much to Hegel and his work on historical reason. In part 2 Gadamer expresses his disillusion with Husserl’s phenomenology, except for his coining of the useful term “horizon.” Although human beings begin from a given situation and viewpoint, this given horizon may expand and change, and provide a fresh viewpoint. The term “lifeworld” is also useful in this respect. Gadamer agrees with Heidegger: “A person who ‘understands’ a text ... has not only projected himself ... toward a meaning... [It] constitutes a new state of intellectual freedom” (260). He examines “prejudice” or prejudgment (*Vorurteile*): “The fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice (prejudgment) itself; which denies tradition its power” (270). Our prejudices “constitute our being” (*Philosophical Hermeneutics* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], 9), or “the historical reality of our being” (*Truth and Method*, 277). Hence he explores “the rehabilitation of authority and tradition” (277–85). Authority, he argues, “rests on ... an act of reason itself, which, aware of its own limitations, trusts in the better insight of others” (279).

This leads Gadamer to consider *effective history*, or *the history of effects* (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). This entails asking appropriate questions. Toward the end of this second part he argues, “Understanding always involves ... *applying* the text to be understood to the interpreter’s present situation” (308). This applicatory dimension is not some “third thing” after explanation and understanding, but is integral to understanding. Legal hermeneutics offers a parallel. In legal hermeneutics, we “understand” when we see how a law embodied in a text is applied: application “is the central problem of hermeneutics” (315). This is one reason why hermeneutics transcends “science” and “rules.” We build up an *expectation*, which may be reversed, fulfilled, or suppressed. This approach will later lead to reception theory, and be developed further by H. R. Jauss. Meanwhile Gadamer urges “*the priority of the question* in all knowledge and discourse” (363). He illustrates this point from Socrates, and from H. G. Collingwood. “Problems” become part of rhetoric; “questions” remain part of philosophy. Hermeneutics leads back to understanding the questions that arise (377).

In the third part of *Truth and Method* Gadamer turns to language, which he sees as “the medium” of understanding (384). Admittedly he speaks of the linguistics of E. Cassirer, but there is no engagement with contemporary “names” in linguistics from Ferdinand de Saussure onward, especially in the Anglo-American tradition. Gadamer has much outdated discussion of language as “names.” The two serious advances are his approval of John’s “the Word became flesh” (419, 429) and his agreement with Plato that language is far more than a second-class imitation of inner thought. He rightly implies that language and speech facilitate formation of character, and form concepts: “Concept-formation ... occurs in language” (428). Language, he urges, is creative, not merely

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instrumental. Not surprisingly, the profound influences on hermeneutics have come mainly from parts 1 and 2; much less has come from part 3. The lasting legacy is “how questions arise”; the priority of the game over consciousness, the rehabilitation of tradition and the concept of historicity and the history of effects. This last theme has encouraged further work on reception theory. Finally, to risk a generalization, in biblical hermeneutics Gadamer’s work leads to a reappraisal of the Enlightenment and an emphasis on *listening to texts* as the active “subject” to which the reader assumes the role of a more passive “object,” although Gadamer aims to transcend the subject-object division. Gadamer writes, “Hermeneutics is above all a practice.... In it what one has to exercise above all is the ear” (“My Philosophical Journey,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. E. Hahn [Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1997], 17).

Paul Ricoeur was a French Protestant, although primarily a philosopher. He was influenced by G. Marcel and M. Merleau-Ponty, but as a prisoner of war in Germany he studied Jaspers, Husserl, and Heidegger. Briefly after the war, J. Derrida became his assistant. In 1960 he published *Fallible Man*, on the problem of the will, finitude, and guilt, and also *The Symbolism of Evil*. The human will, subjectivity, and symbol remained lifelong concerns. The turning point to hermeneutics appears in his book *Freud and Philosophy* (Fr. 1965; Eng. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). From Freud he learned the special importance of interpretation. In one of the most important statements ever made on hermeneutics, he declared. “Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigour, vow of obedience. In our time we have not finished doing away with *idols*, and have largely begun to listen to *symbols*” (*Freud and Philosophy*, 27). When patients recounted their dreams to him, Freud distinguished between the dream as dreamed (dream thoughts) and the dream as recounted. “Overdetermination” means both suspicion and care in interpreting *dreams as actually dreamed*. Reports could not be accepted at face value. The psychiatrist had to use interpretation based on hermeneutics.

Ricoeur does not accept the *materialist* aspects of Freud’s language. Like H. Küng, however, he sees Freud as helpful on specific issues, including those of disguise and interpretation of layered texts. The self, Freud argues, seeks defensively to hide from itself forces and wishes of which it might feel ashamed, and often represses these into the unconscious. Conversely, thoughts or wishes arise from the unconscious that may invite disguise. Hence interpretation of desires and dreams must be undertaken with care. Often a concealed text lies beneath the reported text. Ricoeur is well aware of the narcissism of the self. His next book, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Fr. 1969; Eng. 1974), examines a variety of topics. These include Descartes on consciousness, double-meaning expressions, structuralism, Freud, and faith. He examines the work of R. Barthes and A. J. Greimas. In 1975 Ricoeur called attention to the multilayered functions of language in

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The Rule of Metaphor. What symbols are to words, metaphors seem to be for sentences. This book is almost an encyclopedia of metaphor, exploring models, figures, and the theory of Max Black, as well as R. Jakobson and J. Ladrière.

From 1983 to 1985 Ricoeur wrote his magisterial *Time and Narrative* (3 vols. [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988]). In volume 1 he compares Aristotle and Augustine on time. Augustine sees time as extension or “discordance”; Aristotle explores the logic of “plot,” which brings coherence or “concordance.” Ricoeur comments, “Through the experience of human time (memory, attention and hope) we came to understand the world ... and our own present” (16). Aristotle’s *Poetics* shows how this is brought together as “plot” (*mythos*) through the concordance or “organisation” of events (33). The third part of volume 1 explores “emplotment” through “temporality” (*Zeitlichkeit*) as a condition of understanding that gives to events their unity. Hermeneutics “makes present” this plot, and provides narrative understanding. This leads to a discussion of narrative and history.

Volume 2 considers change or “configuration” in fictional narrative, examining *mimēsis* in Plato, Aristotle, and Auerbach. Here he discusses Gérard Genette’s view of order, duration, and frequency in narrative time. This sheds a flood of light on the arrangement and sequence of the four canonical Gospels. Flashbacks and *prolepses*, or flash-forwards, may be used, just as they are constantly in detective stories. Ricoeur examines Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, and Marcel Proust. Volume 3 addresses the relation between narrative time and chronological time. If the Gospels, for example, use narrative rather than chronological time, this casts “chronological” problems in a different light (my example). Ricoeur examines Heidegger’s *Dasein* and historicity. Anticipation and expectation are more authentic than bare futurity, especially in terms of subjectivity. Like Dilthey, Ricoeur has a special interest in *lived* time. His notion of “world” comes close to Gadamer’s. He explores tradition further.

Ricoeur’s last genuinely magisterial work is *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Here he returns to his earlier concerns about the self, will, and identity. Descartes merely suggests “*what*” I am. Even P. F. Strawson does not, he claims, entirely escape this problem. J. L. Austin, F. Recanati, and J. R. Searle advance to a “speaking subject,” but not far enough beyond this. E. Anscombe and Davidson go further, but still not far enough. H. L. A. Hart’s “ascribing” provides only a partial solution. When he finally sets out positive criteria for personal identity and narrative identity, Ricoeur introduces *ethical* factors. He writes: “Keeping one’s word in a promise is a basic sign of ... continuity and stability ... keeping one’s word in faithfulness to the word that has been given” (123). Ricoeur has addressed one of the most long-standing problems of philosophy, that of the self and its continuity and identity. Locke and Hume

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had addressed this without success. Ricoeur argues that the good life is “with and for others in just institutions” (180). Where philosophers will speak of justice, Christians will speak of love (219). We come near to Gadamer’s emphasis when Ricoeur similarly speaks of the place of practical wisdom. He concludes, “Otherness is not added to selfhood ... but belongs to the ontological constitution of selfhood” (317).

Finally, we must go behind this work to note that in hermeneutics Ricoeur values *both* “*explanation*” (*Erklärung*) and “*understanding*” (*Verstehen*). This is quite different from Gadamer, who stakes everything on *understanding alone*. Gadamer is hostile to anything that smacks of “science” or rationalism. Ricoeur recognizes, as Schleiermacher did, that comparative explanation (*Erklärung*) performs necessary linguistic tasks, even if “*explanation*” may prevent distortion or illusion; “*understanding*” grasps the deeper meaning and appropriation of the text.

Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Ricoeur remain the key thinkers behind contemporary hermeneutics. Nevertheless, other contributors deserve note. E. Betti offers a more carefully critical and controlled alternative to Gadamer. Many regard Gadamer as too relative and “open,” offering no genuine *criticism* for understanding. So, too, does J. Habermas. J. L. Austin, J. R. Searle, and F. Recanati offer the additional hermeneutical tool of speech act theory, while D. D. Evans also produces many insights in his *Logic of Self-Involvement* (London: SCM, 1963). Fresh progress has also been made in reception theory, which owes its impetus to Gadamer and to H. R. Jauss. Furthermore, great strides have been made in literary theory, including G. Genette’s theory of narrative, R. Alter on OT narratives, and many others. B. Lonergan has produced relevant material in the theory of knowledge, and Habermas and Z. Bauman on the interface between hermeneutics and social theory or sociology. Hermeneutics has become a demanding multidisciplinary subject area, which is now of growing importance for theology, for biblical studies, and for the church.¹

¹ Thiselton, A. C. (2015). “Hermeneutics.” In *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (pp. 414–424). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.