
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS

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1.0. OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to enable the student to have a general picture of the Western hermeneutical history and the themes built therein. It also aims to familiarize the historical development of the hermeneutical theories and their concerns with the meaning and interpretation. Student also needs to familiarize the philosophical position of different thinkers apart from the exposition here, to get the nuances of the descriptions here.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Human search for truth and knowledge is an unending enterprise. There are different ways of knowing and arriving at truth. Irrespective of the source and medium through which knowledge has come about, truth being arrived at, it is an undeniable fact that human experience and its analysis do point us in some direction. Since knowledge is mediated, it is in some way an interpretation. There is always a background in which perception takes place. The knowledge and truth are not an exception to these phenomena. Thus, epistemological enterprise extends to those levels of analysis where we interpret while knowing. Thus, hermeneutics becomes the understanding of the complex conditioning of human knowledge. The hermeneutical tendency is not limited to any one continent or nation or language stream. It is found in all peoples. In fact, it is one of the ways through which knowledge grows.

1.2. MEANING OF HERMENEUTICS

The Greek word *Hermeneuin* meant to express, explain, translate or interpret the sacred message. Originally, it was discussed in the Greek philosophy, later was used extensively in the interpretation of the Bible. As science of interpretation it became an important part of Christian theology in the West. This resulted in various schools of interpretations such as literal, allegorical, analogical, and anagogical (spiritual / mystical) etc. Beginning with scriptural interpretation, it was limited to the domain of Sacred Texts only. However, today it has grown into different domains of human life. It has come out of the theological domain and has entered into the spheres such as art, aesthetics, literature, architecture and to all the notions that govern human life. Hermeneutics through its methods and principles sees the text or the object of interpretation in the present context. Traditionally, hermeneutics has been divided into two categories. They are a. General Hermeneutics – concerned with generalities such as context, language, history, and culture; and b. Special Hermeneutics concerned with specifics such as figures of speech, symbols, poetry, prophecy, typology, doctrinal teachings and various literary forms.

1.3. DEVELOPMENT OF HERMENEUTICS

We find that there was a gradual development from the hermeneutics of the letter (historical) to the hermeneutics of the sense (grammatical). Historically, we can trace the growth of the term from classical understanding of the text to the advanced understanding of 'beyond the text'. In other words, hermeneutics has grown from textual analysis to the analysis of experience. To sharpen the distinction we can say that, hermeneutical growth can be divided into theological hermeneutics and Philosophical hermeneutics (methods). However, the recent classifications in

hermeneutics show some different light. As the interpretation leads to understanding and this understanding affects interpretation, interpretation can be understood as an activity that fills the gaps in our understanding. It means that interpretation always requires knowledge of one's own lack of comprehension – knowledge of the fact that one is puzzled about something that one wishes to understand. Another sense of the word interpretation is called elaborative interpretation which does not involve a self-conscious quest for understanding. This comes more in terms of cultural objects.

Limiting the interpretation to the texts only, interpretation can be divided into two kinds, depending on their aim to provide an understanding of the meaning of a text or to provide an understanding of the relation of a text or its meaning to something else. Based on this the hermeneutics can be divided into Meaning interpretation and Relational interpretation. Meaning interpretation mainly focuses on four different aspects. They are, 1) the meaning as understood by the author of the text; 2) the meaning as understood by particular audiences; 3) the meaning as understood independently of what authors or particular audiences understood; 4) the meaning as including both the meaning. The relational interpretation aims not to cause understanding of the meaning of a text in an audience, regardless of what conception of meaning is used, but rather something else that the interpreter selects.

1.4. THE THREE COMPONENTS OF HERMENEUTICAL ENTERPRISE.

The growth of hermeneutics attests that there is a movement from the interpretations of the text to the understanding of 'understanding', existence and life-world. Therefore, the author, the text and the reader are the three basic components of any hermeneutical enterprise. However, language, culture, and other elements cannot be ignored in the hermeneutics.

The Capacity of The Text

The text in the strict sense of hermeneutics is the key component. Text generally understood as that stretch of written language which has a beginning and end. In a metaphorical sense text can be extended even to include messages generated by sign-systems of various religious, economic, social etc. structures, non-verbal body indicators etc. Text is the basis on which the operations of hermeneutics take place. One of the definition states that, "A text is a group of entities, used as signs, selected, arranged, and intended by an author to convey a specific meaning to an audience in a certain context". It can be a written, printed text or the text of mental images too. Text has many uses such as expressing emotions, issuing commands, eliciting answers, making requests, causing actions etc. Texts cause understandings. The meaning of the text is different from the text and the understanding.

The author and the reader both are part of the text but both are eclipsed in some sense for reader is absent in the act of writing and the author is absent in the act of reading. The text therefore assumes greater role in transforming its readers. Hermeneutics therefore, entails a study of the processes and operative conditions of transforming texts. When the necessary conditions for interpretation become operational, an event of communication takes place within the temporal flow of the reader's life and experience. This sort of textual potency, capacity to influence the reader can be seen from three different angles. These angles are from the part of speech – act, narrative world, and interpersonal understanding. Despite the 'horizon of expectation', the text can surprise, contradict or even reverse such horizon of expectation. The text possesses meaning of itself, the meaning of the author and the meaning projected by the reader.

The Capacity of The Reader / Interpreter

Like the text, the reader too has an impact on the text: being influenced by the text and influencing the text. Every reader brings a horizon of expectation to the text. Horizon of expectation is a mind-set, or system of references, which characterizes the reader's finite view-point amidst his or her situatedness in time and history. From the reader's point of view, there is always an attempt to understand the intentions of the author at the same time, and to understand the text in itself. However, the reader cannot undo the situation or background on which he bases his reading. This interplay exists in understanding the text always. There are six different levels where the reader influences the text and its meaning. They are: Inter-textual, situational, horizontal, semiotic, hermeneutical, and theoretical frameworks. The interpreter in four ways changes the object of interpretation be it text or anything that can be interpreted. They are done through idealizing the object of interpretation, re-segmenting the object of interpretation, reconceiving the object of interpretation and through recovering an underlying object.

The Capacity of The Author

The author cannot be ignored in the hermeneutics. It is his worldview, unconsciously comes into the text and affects the text. An author cannot detach himself fully from his historical condition. He feeds both the actual meaning and intended meaning into the text. However, the text has traces of his world view and his times, which can be traced through hermeneutics.

1.5. HISTORICAL ASPECT

While analyzing the history of hermeneutics we can divide it into different major phases. They are:

1. Interpretative stage (regional hermeneutics)
2. Stage of Methodological development (general hermeneutics)
3. Ontological hermeneutics
4. Contemporary hermeneutical trends

It is worth noting in this regard that, there was gradual development from the initial stages of interpretation of myths to the interpretation of the texts. Further hermeneutics grew towards the methodological developments, hermeneutics of experience or the ontology.

Interpretative Stage (Regional Hermeneutics)

Act of interpretation is implicit in human consciousness since the very beginning of human history. Gradual development of human consciousness made humans to realize their own self, others and nature and express them with understanding, expression and application. At this stage of hermeneutics, it involved the interpretation of myths, legends, symbols, texts. The time period of this stage we can find in the ancient Greece and Rome. Hermeneutics was not understood as a discipline at this stage. It was deciphering of oracles, omens and divine messages.

Stage Of Methodological Development

Hermeneutics as a discipline developed during the middle ages specially during the renaissance and reformation period. The development in jurisprudence, philology and philosophy brought great impact on hermeneutics during this period. The main contributors during this period are Johannes Von Felde, Chladenius (1710 - 1759), Friedrich August Wolf (1759 - 1824), Friedrich Ast (1778 - 1841), Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Humboldt, and others.

Ontological Hermeneutics

The theoretical framework which was developed earlier up to the 19th century paved way to deeper hermeneutics. Hermeneutics took a leap from the textual analysis to the life experiences or towards the ontology. The growth in phenomenology as a science by Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) and later on followed by Martin Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas, Betti, Paul Ricoeur, Derrida, Richard Rorty paved way to much more analysis of the human existence leading even further to a scientific realm.

Contemporary Trends

In the 20th century, hermeneutics is no longer a methodology or doctrine concerned with decoding the meaning and truth claims of texts, but was a broader methodology and a philosophical approach to experience that was sensitive to the limits of language and history. The contemporary trends show directions in liberation hermeneutics, Feminist hermeneutics, Black hermeneutics etc.

1.6. SCHOOLS OF HERMENEUTICS / THEORETICAL MODELS

1. Hermeneutics of understanding – Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Betti – Focus on flow-of-life as the hermeneutical key.
2. Existentialist hermeneutics – Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Bultman – focus on the self-involvement and subjective understanding.
3. Hermeneutics of meta-criticism – Gadamer, Pannenberg – Question the rationality of our beliefs and of our social practices.
4. Hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval – Paul Ricoeur – Suspicion of explanation and retrieval of understanding / possibility
5. Socio-critical hermeneutics – Habermas, Richard Rorty – Search for a transcendental basis of hermeneutics.

6. Liberation hermeneutics – Latin American theological enterprise, specially concerned with the emancipation and reading of Bible from the liberation perspective from the oppressive structures (economic-poverty and political-powerlessness). Juan Luis Segundo, J. Severino Croatto, Gustavo Gutierrez, and others are important contributors here.
7. Black hermeneutics – focus on the colonial history and apartheid, slavery. James Cone, John S. Mbiti, Desmond Tutu etc.
8. Feminist hermeneutics – focus on the women’s emancipation – Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Mary Ann Tolbert, T. Dorah Setel, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Marks, Rosemary Radford etc.

Check your Progress I

Use the space provided for your answer

1. What is hermeneutics?
2. Briefly write about reader-text relationship.
3. Mention three contemporary trends in hermeneutics with its contributors and their focus.

1.6. PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS HERMENEUTICS

Friederich Schleiermacher (1786 -1834)

Friederich Schleiermacher belongs to the Romantic Movement and the Moravian Pietism. For Schleiermacher, the hermeneutics has the complete domain of speaking and language, and not merely the biblical hermeneutics or the interpretation of the classics. His hermeneutics can be divided into major themes such as, a. Understanding consists in re-experiencing the mental processes of the author of a text, b. it is grasping the meaning of the parts through diving the whole, and understanding the whole through grasping of the parts, c. it involves perceiving the individuality of the author as a human user of shared language, d. to go beyond the world of the author. He held the view that hermeneutics is a connection of thoughts from the speaker to the listener. There is an entire living context for every utterance.

After the Kantian *Critiques*, his contribution in hermeneutics can be put into two major themes. They are; a. possibility of Christian theology, b. possibility of the process of understanding. The task of hermeneutics, therefore, for him was finding out, in the first place, how does the ‘divine truths’ (trans-rational) dimensions interact with the critical, rational patterns? Secondly, how does understanding the elements / components of texts relate to a more intuitive anticipation of the text as a whole? Thirdly, how does understanding links with the ‘pre-understanding’ to which the subject matter of the text relates?

In this context he divides the hermeneutical enterprise into two major fields such as:

- a. Historical / grammatical hermeneutics
- b. Psychological / technical hermeneutics.

In both the types he recognized certain amount of uncertainty and wanted to develop certainty in both the fields. When there is uncertainty on texts, there needs to be guessing, conjecture, knowing the historical situation of the author etc. needs to be taken into consideration. On certainty he had two views; certainty as a demonstrative, a method for historical / grammatical hermeneutics and the other as the divinatory certainty, a method for psychological / technical hermeneutics. Neither grammatical nor the psychological have hold over each others’ domain but are interdependent. In the hermeneutical circle the objectivity and the subjectivity of the person contribute to the fuller understanding of the text. Schleiermacher had the view that the word has to be understood as a part of a whole leading to complete illumination.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911)

Dilthey is famous for his contribution on understanding and interpretation. Dilthey held that interpretation is a process of coming to know. What we come to know through interpreting the products of human spirit is the full scope of psychic and spiritual life. Accordingly, psychic life cannot be abstracted from historical consciousness. It is part of social and cultural systems. Hermeneutics begins from the objective spirit (whole range of objective specifications) and not merely from individual spirit. Objective spirit is the embodiment of human thought and action. This is the framework of communal meaning to which elementary understanding is oriented. Dilthey's focus was to understand the author better and not understanding him as exactly he is. Therefore, the original context of the author and the entire situational nexus had to be taken into consideration.

His notions of understanding can be traced to his differentiation between natural sciences and social sciences. While natural sciences are descriptive, social sciences need to be understood in the context of human life. Life for him represents the shared flow of human activities and experiences which together constitute human experience both in its social diversity and in its individual particularity. There is an interaction between expressions of the other based on experience and self-understanding. Therefore, hermeneutics goes beyond the natural science methodology. In this process of understanding there is a tracing of universal in the particular and the whole in the part. This type of hermeneutics leads into history, because both the author and the interpreter share a common dimension of the meaning of being human. There is a transcendence of narrow concerns to the horizon of universal history, which gradually becomes the hermeneutic field. There is a merging of the individual with the knowledge of the universal history. This process of hermeneutics leads to the understanding of history as the expression of human life. Diltheyan notion of category of life (human life) was later on transformed by Husserl and Heidegger into an existential category.

Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976)

To understand the Heideggerian hermeneutics, we must understand his basic positions. In Heideggerian writings, hermeneutics denotes both a process of human interpretation or understanding from within a particular orientation, and also a transcendental or meta-critical discipline which seeks to explore the foundations on which the possibility of understanding is based. His basic assumptions are, firstly, the horizon for the understanding of being is time, Secondly, the distinction between scientific categories and existential categories, and third the givenness of our world. Human is at the root of hermeneutics. It is the human person who is both the subject and the object of interpretation. The complexities of human person demand the diversities of explanations. This fact has been emphasized by hermeneutic phenomenology and existentialism. Heideggerian attempt in this regard is to understand and interpret all human existence in a reciprocal reflection of human nature. Heideggerian attempt is to interpret Dasein in its historicity, concrete situation. The Dasein, being-in-the-world understands itself in its facticity, temporality and horizon. The meaning emerges in Dasein's relationship with everything else in the given world. In this circular process of meaning discovery, Being, human person is understood and interpreted.

Having discovered this ontological analysis of the Dasein in the early writings of Heidegger, we find refined views in the second and third phases of Heidegger, where in, there is a movement from rigorous analysis of being to the gentle unfolding of the Being through poetry and art. In the broader context of Heideggerian analysis of the ontology of Dasein we find that, such understanding of Dasein itself is an interpretation. Departing from the western traditional metaphysics which had imprisoned the Being, Heidegger wanted to give a reorientation of ontology of Being. His approach was existential, as the Being emerges from the fore-ground of other entities and ontological as it is a phenomenon of interpretation. The analytical approach only provides the Dasein's existence structure in its existence in space and time. However, the meaning of Being cannot be arrived through analytics; rather it is through interpretation, which is fundamental concept of ontology, a basis for transcendental enquiry. In this process of meaning and understanding of Dasein, 'Being-in-the-world' is the pre-understanding. This pre-understanding allows for the possibility of making sense of what entities are. Therefore, hermeneutics is a clarification of pre-understanding, which is a structure of our 'Being-in-the-world'. Along with the understanding these existential structures include 'state-of-mind' and 'talk' which provides the conditions for the new knowledge. They also find their total expression in *sorge* (care) as the being of Dasein. The aim of fundamental ontology therefore is the condition of temporality for the possibility of original care and as the ultimate horizon of the interpretation of Being-in-the-world. Therefore, the Heideggerian attempt in the initial phase was to discover the meaning of being. However, there is a movement from this phase to the next phase of existential circle or the ontological circle.

In understanding, Being is considered as existing. Therefore, it is as potentially-for-being. In the very terms of Heidegger it is the 'Projection'. But it is inauthentic if it is considered as the meaning intended by other, in a

methodical interpretation. In this context, being doesn't acquire new knowledge; rather it interprets the world which it has already understood. In this process of disclosing there is the possibility of interpretation. Therefore, the understanding is directed 'in-order-to' which has the structure of something as something. The fore-structure and the as-structure do play an important role in the interpretation. The interpretation of something as something, i.e., the 'as-structure of interpretation' is founded on the 'fore-structure of understanding'. That is to say, that anything we understand is interpreted by either deriving concepts used from fore-sight or fore-conception (world-view), or by forcing it into pre-existing categories which do not correspond to its being. Meaning is the 'upon which' of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, fore-sight and a fore-conception. In this context of emergence of new meaning of the Dasein, the hermeneutical circle or the existential circle cannot be avoided. It can only be understood that by placing the being properly, one can get the new possibility of the meaning of Dasein. There is no objective understanding in the sense of scientific objectivity; rather it is in the fore-structure of the Being in much of its existential sense.

Hans George Gadamer

The hermeneutical ideas of Gadamer are found in his famous book 'Truth and Method' (1975). He was a student of Heidegger. He placed himself in the traditions of western philosophy and raised new questions about the nature of traditions and their transformation. Gadamerian hermeneutics is an attack on the role of method in hermeneutics. Gadamerian hermeneutics can be understood as an integration of the interpreter into the history / tradition. He believed that in the process of interpretation, the interpreter cannot transcend one's own historical setting. The very aspect of experience is integral with cognition which is part of historical nature of man. It is in our language that we express our experiences as humans when we participate in a tradition. This experience in a historical setting cannot be exempted. At the same time, it is through the very expression in language that we participate in a tradition through the interpretations of sign, works, texts etc. In a constant dialogue and language, hermeneutic experience becomes one with one's own existence. He was alert to the riddle of language and was aware of the limits of what can be said. Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is not a philosophical method. He held that no method can ever be sufficient for the disclosure of truth and that truth belongs so essentially to history that it can never be disclosed fully.

When the world was growing towards the certainty of science as the mark of judgment, he held that human life needs reflective and practical judgment. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is not limited to aesthetic experience, jurisprudence, and translation only. He held that after the Kantian limits of reason, it has a universal sway. Hermeneutics doesn't deal with the isolated modes of experience but represents the mode of experience itself. Giving importance to history he held that, tradition / history has been preserved and transmitted through the language but is confined to the logic of language itself. Therefore, hermeneutics is the conversation between history and human affairs. The struggle is therefore, of understanding between the participants of that conversation.

Fusion of horizons

Gadamer bases himself on the linguistic constitution of the world, where understanding is language bound. At the same time language also provides positive hermeneutical conditions for understanding because the linguistic world is the inter-subjective world which opens up the possibility of communication and has a universal dimension. In the transmission of tradition through language, the fusion takes place. The human finitude is manifest in the tradition. The task of tradition is to engage the openness of history and to illuminate the way in which traditions form and deform themselves in the infinite process of fusion. Language, the medium of transmission is present in literature. Self-reflexivity of language is found in the poetry, because poetry is always language that is about language. Here the language returns to itself with greatest density, which is similar to the experience of finitude found in the history. Finitude is the concept he derived from Heidegger which is against the background of releasement / meditation than objective or calculative thinking of the being. Language conceals as well as reveals and thus language becomes the medium of hermeneutic experience. Through the limits of language, translation becomes the supreme form of hermeneutic experience of language. For Gadamer, language not only brands experience as finite, but opens its transcendent possibilities. The finitude, the limits of experience through language opens up the possibility of solidarity and true communication. For the present world, Gadamer doesn't find the possibility of a future world through the lenses of science and technology, rather through the art, poetry, where there can be no expertise, no authority and where there is infinite openness of interpretation.

Habermas

Habermas is one of the most important and influential contemporary theorists of socio-critical hermeneutics. Socio-critical hermeneutics may be defined as an approach to texts which seeks to penetrate beneath their surface-function

to expose their role as instruments of power, domination or social manipulation. Hermeneutics for him is a meta-critique of power which aims to achieve the liberation of those over whom this power or social manipulation is exercised. His major contribution can be seen through his theory of communicative action, which deals with the relation between social practice, inter-subjectivity, language and system. Habermas understands language having the function of reaching understanding and coordinating action and socializing actors as well. It is in these two functions of language the communication takes place as through understanding communicative acts serve as the transmission of culturally stored knowledge and through coordinating action, the communicative acts serve the fulfillment of norms appropriate to a given context.

Paul Ricoeur

Ricoeur's hermeneutics too is centered on explanation and understanding. Hermeneutics for him is a meta-critical discipline which embodies the task of unmasking of explanation and the creative function of understanding. He understood that understanding works at a post-critical level when explanation is critical, socio-critical, or meta-critical. Explanation entails the willingness to expose and to abolish idols which are merely projections of the human will; understanding requires a willingness to listen with openness to symbols and to 'indirect' language. Thus, the two major areas of hermeneutics, explanation and understanding, invite respectively meta-critical or socio-critical suspicion which in turn bring about re-valuations, and also post-critical retrieval embodying openness towards new possibility which may entail renewal or change. Since he based his theory on Freudian understanding his hermeneutics is known as hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval.

Paul Ricoeur held the view that the existence itself is a mode of hermeneutics / interpretation. According to him the social sciences fall outside philosophy, wherein it has to exchange with them, dialogue with them for the meaning to emerge in a broader understanding. The meaning is mediated through an endless process of interpretation - cultural, religious, political, historic, and scientific. Hermeneutics for him is the art of deciphering indirect meaning. Ricoeur opposed the idealist view that the self is transparent to itself. The self is always as another. The self discovers itself through linguistic mediation of signs, symbols stories, ideologies, metaphors, and myths. The self returns to itself through the language of the others enriched and enlarged. His effort was to find a mid-way between rationalism of Kant and transcendental idealism of Husserl. In deciphering the indirect meaning, there is scope for speculative thought, where in we enter into symbolic meaning. Thus, the encounter is with symbols and their meanings. Symbols have expressions of double meaning, wherein a primary meaning refers to beyond itself to a second meaning which is never given directly.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics is not confined to myths and symbols. It moved from reflective consciousness to the subjective will and later on his hermeneutics was extended to the interpretation of all phenomena of a textual order, narratives and ideologies. It is at this juncture he encountered the social sciences. Moving away from the traditional categories of explanation and understanding, he moved from speech to text; wherein he acknowledged the alterity and distantiating of meaning as essential dimensions of hermeneutic field. In the process of going beyond the text, we encounter the ontological horizon of world-meaning opened up by the text. Thus a world is disclosed by the text, brings us beyond epistemology to ontology where the being is constantly interpreted and never finally completed. The most radical view of Ricoeur is privileging of the text as model of interpretation. Meaning is no longer an intuitive one, nor a transcendental condition. The text breaks the circuit of internal reflection and exposes us to inter-subjective horizons of language and history. Meaning involves someone saying something to someone about something. Interpretation thus, explodes the confines of the timeless reflective subject and discloses us as language-using beings in a world with others. It brings in the complexities of meaning in an inter-subjective situation, in the horizons of history and tradition. The meaning gets extended because the text functions as a mediator between the reader and the author. Hermeneutics produces second order reference even though it enjoys the autonomy of authors meaning. In this context hermeneutics discloses a hermeneutic circle of historical inter-subjectivity. To interpret meaning is to arrive in the middle of an exchange which has already begun in which we seek to orient ourselves in order to make new sense out of it. There is no hermeneutic-subject which intends meaning, rather it responds to the proposal of meaning which the matter of text unfolds. There is a transcendence of subjective consciousness of the possible new worlds of meaning. This self-hood which is open to the unfolding of meaning is at one end of the hermeneutic circle, makes the second order reference beyond the first order reference of the author. Therefore, it is going beyond egology and ideology. Working of the text itself is a process of semantic innovation. In the case of a symbol, this involves a crossing of internationalities at the level of the word. In the case of metaphor it is a production of new meaning at the level of sentence. In the case of narrative it is the form of an emplotment which synthesizes heterogeneous temporal elements at the level of language as a whole.

Derrida

“Deconstruction” is the most famous of Derrida's terms. He seems to have appropriated the term from Heidegger's use of “destruction” in *Being and Time*. Derrida has provided many understandings of deconstruction. Some of these understandings are classical. The *first* is the early one, making reversal of platonic emphasis of essence over appearance being reversed, and appearance being given predominance. The *second* definition is less metaphysical and more political. Derrida says that deconstruction is practiced in two styles. There is the genealogical style of deconstruction, which recalls the history of a concept or theme. On the other hand, there is the more formalistic or structural style of deconstruction, which examines a-historical paradoxes or aporias. Derrida calls the *first* aporia, “the *epoche* of the rule” (law must be conserved and also destroyed or *suspended*, suspension being the meaning of the word “*epoche*”), the *second* aporia “the ghost of the undecidable” (“deconstructs from the inside every assurance of presence, and thus every criteriology that would assure us of the justice of the decision”), *third* is called “the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge” (a horizon is both the opening and limit that defines an infinite progress or a period of waiting.”). It is a kind of thinking that never finds itself at the end.

1.7. ISSUES INVOLVED

After analyzing the hermeneutics in its theories and practice, we can cluster the few questions which can still be discussed. They are,

1. What is the objective meaning of the text and how can we determine it? Is it only literal or more than literal?
2. What is objectivity when there is vagueness around neutrality of the text?
3. What is objective in the way of fixing meaning and how this objectivity is related to cultures?
4. What is the structure of those ‘things / texts / ’ which can be interpreted?
5. How does the logic of interpretation differ from that of natural sciences?
6. How does paradigm shifts in understanding and social experience affect the ‘objective’ interpretation?
7. Is every hermeneutic process relativises text and how can we justify it?

It is worth noting in the modern world the problem of pluralism, one of the basis of pluralism is hermeneutics. The authenticity and fixing of meaning more than one way comes in terms with the metaphysics of interpretation. The separation between the objects of interpretation and the interpretation itself is a crucial question in this connection.

Secondly, the question of representation at the background of language, culture, belief system etc. arises in the context of interpretation. When we look from the realistic and idealistic viewpoints, it becomes difficult to fix the meaning than falling into the relativistic trap.

1.8. LET US SUM UP

After understanding the basics of hermeneutics, we can say that, hermeneutics as a discipline has given rise to varied meanings based on the interpreter. The insights read into the text and the response of the text to its reader points out the fact that the understanding changes according to the times. It is through deeper reflection, we are able to determine to some extent the meaning at the time of the text and to our times. We cannot limit to the world of text alone for it involves the world of reader too.

Check your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

Give the meaning of deconstruction?

Highlight the contribution of Heidegger to the hermeneutics.

What are the issues involved in the hermeneutics?

1.9. KEY WORDS

Hermeneutics: The art of interpretation, based on some principles or canons of interpretation which help us in interpreting the text or event or an action. It can also refer to the act of interpretation

Pre-Understanding: The condition that the interpreter already has some understanding, irrespective of its vagueness and marginality. It is assumed to be present in any interpretation.

Hermeneutical Circle: A notion which shows the circularity involved in the process of understanding. The circularity between pre-understanding and emergent understanding is known as hermeneutical circle.

1.10. FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES

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