

HERMENEUTICAL TRUTH AND AUTHORIAL INTENTION: MODERN PROJECTS*

George BONDOR**

ABSTRACT. The aim of this text is to reconstruct the meanings of the concept of hermeneutical truth, as it has been defined and explained in the main projects of modern hermeneutics (Dannhauer, Chladenius, Meier, Schleiermacher, Fr. Schlegel). I will explore the epistemological side of this concept, different from its meaning in hermeneutic ontology. Understood as correctness by modern hermeneutics, truth has been related to the authorial intention. The thesis I am arguing is that the meanings of hermeneutical truth and, related to them, the modern theories of authorial intention differ according to the metaphysical presuppositions that define the thought paradigms of modernity (Cartesianism, Kantianism, Romanticism and German Idealism): the centrality and activism of the self, the rationality of the self, the dependence of knowledge on the ideal of method, the discovery of the unconscious. Some modern hermeneutical theories express the tensions between these philosophical paradigms. However, I will argue that the authorial intention remains a limit of interpretation that prevents the risks of arbitrariness and hermeneutic relativism.

Keywords: hermeneutical truth, authorial intention, interpretation, understanding, hermeneutics of suspicion, Modern metaphysics.

The concept of hermeneutical truth is rarely used in this form. However, it is widely accepted that the way in which the notion of truth is present in human sciences differs from the way in which truth appears in natural sciences. The appearance of truth in debates of ideas is precisely related to the distinction between these two types of sciences. Since hermeneutics was regarded, especially

* Translated by Mariana Constantinescu

** Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Bulevardul Carol I, Nr.11, 700506, Iași, România, bondor@uaic.ro



by Dilthey, as the method present in all *Geisteswissenschaften*, the truth claim of statements in these sciences can be fulfilled through the concept of hermeneutical truth. Obviously, hermeneutics has multiple meanings, and its designation as a method of all the human sciences is a generalization that seems to bring together heterogeneous methodological principles, techniques and procedures. In its modern history, hermeneutics has dealt both with the practice of interpreting obscure places and with the theory of interpretation, but also with the theory of understanding, and with its transformations due to phenomenology, it has become an ontology of understanding. If the first three situations designate the theoretical hypostases of truth – as we speak of truth in the case of the understanding and interpretation of texts, artistic phenomena or historical facts – the latter refers to more than mere methodology, it describes the human being in its essence, insofar as this essence is identified with understanding itself. This pre-theoretical hypostasis that phenomenology highlights starts from the central thesis of intentionality, but describes the orientation of the self towards the world as comprehensive. Thus, the four hypostases that define the history of hermeneutics actually refer to two philosophical paradigms: one epistemological and the other ontological. In both, truth has a methodological meaning, but the idea of method is signified differently: as a set of rules and steps to be followed in the first, or as the achievement of access to phenomena in the second. In the first case, we are dealing with predicative, propositional truth, while the second case deals with ante-predicative truth, as this distinction appears in phenomenology. The present analysis will be limited to the first case of hermeneutical truth, investigating the formulations given to it in several modern projects and evaluating both how some of them can still be supported today and how they have influenced later projects of hermeneutics.

Truth as correctness of interpretation

The concept of hermeneutical truth can be found in the search for a method of interpreting texts that would lead to results as rigorous as those in the natural sciences, which derived from the application of a method considered to be universal. Following Schleiermacher's sketch of the history of hermeneutics, Dilthey considered that in the Enlightenment there was only a *hermeneutica sacra*, aimed at identifying the necessary method for the correct interpretation of biblical texts. The thesis was far from accurate. The idea of a general hermeneutics already appears in Joseph Conrad Dannhauer, in his 1630 book *Idea boni interpretis*. In pietistic¹ circles,

¹ Cf. Douglas H. Shantz (ed.), *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660-1800*, Leiden, Brill Academic Publishers, 2014.

the author was more often cited with his work *Hermeneutica sacra*, which did not appear until 1654. The chronological distance between the two works shows that the principles and method of general hermeneutics are formulated independently of sacred hermeneutics, the latter applying the former to the special case of the Bible. The aim of general hermeneutics, which Dannhauer considers to be a part of philosophy closely connected with logic, and even included in it, is to identify those rules which will lead to the correct interpretation of any kind of text, not just religious ones, as were the rules of biblical hermeneutics. Obviously, the matter of the correctness of interpretation involves the idea of truth. But hermeneutics cannot pronounce itself on the truth or falsity of the author's propositions, and even less so in the case of the Bible. More precisely, the interpreter will not evaluate the truth value of the ideational content, but will seek to capture the authorial intention. A good interpreter is therefore the one who succeeds to correctly identify the author's intention.

Thus formulated, this issue will have a complicated history. How can this intention be identified? Does the text tell us enough about the authorial intention? Or does it constantly betray it? And in what way? Does the text say less than the author? Or more? Or, perhaps, does it generally say something other than the author intended? In other words, can *intentio auctoris* and *intentio lectoris* coincide, or are they fundamentally different?

Returning to modern hermeneutics, we must recall that for Dannhauer, from whom the discussion of hermeneutical truth originated, the stake of hermeneutics is to analyze the obscure places of texts, which can be clarified by elucidating the logical form of statements. Hermeneutics thus becomes a kind of therapeutics, aiming to identify the pathologies of the text and to cure them.² The relation of hermeneutics with logic, seen as a research on the linguistic structure of texts, is most likely the effect of the revival of Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, a text of logic and hermeneutics at the same time. For Dannhauer, if we succeed in making unclear passages intelligible, we will distinguish between their true and false meaning. But the true meaning is not located at the level of the statement as such, it does not derive from its content. It is therefore not equivalent to the factual truth of the statement, but to the meaning intended by the author and placed by him into the text. Obviously, obscure passages must be clarified by relating them to clear ones, but this comparative operation must be carried out within the horizon of the author's intention. For Dannhauer, the "true meaning" (or "truth of meaning") can only be found by identifying what exactly the author meant.

² Matthias Jung, *Hermeneutik zur Einführung*, Hamburg, Junius Verlag, 2001, p. 47.

But how exactly can we precisely know the author's intended meaning? To this question, the subsequent history of hermeneutics has given some answers that have clarified the question, but without providing the expected answer about the univocity of meaning. If there is only one meaning intended by the author, it means that of all the interpretations, only one will be correct. However, the practice of interpretation has always disproved this claim. No matter how closed a text may be (if we adopt Eco's distinction here between closed and open texts³), there is always a plurality of interpretations. Even the assumption that the authorial intention is identical to the literal meaning of the text does not find favor with interpreters. On the contrary, the emphasis that modern hermeneutics has placed on discovering the authorial intention has favored the search for this intention beyond the literal meaning. The reason for this is that the text does not fully and perfectly contain the authorial intention. This intention is present in the text, while also remaining, like an indeterminate remainder, in the interstices of the text and beyond it.

From correctness to perspectivism

The thesis that there is only one correct interpretation could not be unanimously accepted, as it uses a concept of truth that is far too restrictive to be applied to the situation of interpretation. In modern hermeneutics, a different thesis was advanced by Johann Martin Chladenius, who proposed the so-called theory of the „point of view“ in his *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernünftiger Reden und Schriften* (1742). By arguing that understanding is perspectivist in nature, this theory opposes the idea that there is only one correct interpretation⁴ for every state of affairs. For example, Chladenius points out, there is no single correct (and therefore true) description of a battle, since the descriptions of the participants in the event differ depending on their particular perspectives on the facts, the very different space-time circumstances in which they find themselves, and at the same time the subjective expectations that each of them has. For Chladenius, “the viewpoint consists of those *circumstances of our soul, body and whole person* that are the *cause* that we see something so and no other way.”⁵ If there is a plurality of points of view, then we must accept that there is a plurality of

³ Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula. Le rôle du lecteur*, transl. Myriem Bouzaher, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1993.

⁴ Johann Martin Chladenius, „Von Auslegung Historischer Nachrichten und Bücher“, in *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernünftiger Reden und Schriften*, § 308. In Hans-Georg Gadamer, Gottfried Boehm (Hg.), *Seminar: Philosophische Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1976, p. 71.

⁵ *Ibidem*, § 309, p. 72.

interpretations. Apparently, this theory affects the claim to truth that hermeneutics raised with Dannhauer's theory. However, if we apply a Kantian (or phenomenological) grid to this difficulty, we might see here the presence of the distinction between things as such and the access to them (i.e. phenomena). Thus, the idea of hermeneutic truth not only endures,⁶ but is given a very modern reformulation.

In order to adequately grasp the place of this hermeneutical theory in modern thought, we must bear in mind that the texts that can become the object of interpretation are, according to Chladenius, only the rational ones. This limitation of the field of hermeneutics to rational texts belongs, in fact, to the Cartesian paradigm of modern philosophy. The origin of the methodological project to which this description of the field of hermeneutics belongs is the same as that which Descartes prescribed for all knowledge. More precisely, the condition of possibility of knowledge resides in a certain type of arrangement of reality before the subject, so that reality becomes orderable, measurable and calculable. Only in this way does the world become knowable, that is, it becomes an object-type phenomenon. Such an understanding of Cartesianism, which has its origins in Heidegger's interpretations and in Marion's continuations, can also be found in hermeneutics. This is why the restriction regarding the rationality of texts is supplemented by the idea, also of Cartesian origin, according to which the correct interpretation can only be found by knowing the authorial intention (or even *mens auctoris*), which is the only way to constitute an *organon* of interpretation as rigorous as the method of natural knowledge.

Hermeneutics and semiotics

Cartesianism continues to be a determining factor for hermeneutics in the project of Georg Friedrich Meier, whose main work, a handbook on correct interpretation, is titled *Versuch einer allgemeinen Auslegungskunst* (1757). The universality of hermeneutics takes the form of a general art of interpretation, considered to be a purely rational activity. Thus, the principle of rationality extends from texts to the interpretive activity itself, whose principles must be rational in order to be applied to the interpretation of any kind of text. Discovering and ordering these general principles is the main purpose of Meier's hermeneutics. The most important of these is that of "hermeneutic equity", which finds an interesting contemporary continuation in the "principle of charity", discussed by authors such as Quine, Davidson, and Wilson.

⁶ Matthias Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Meier defines the art of interpretation as „the science of the rules according to which meanings can be known from their signs“. The concept of sign is defined in such a way that everything can be conceived as a world of signs. Thus, the sign is not exclusively linguistic. According to Meier, “the sign (signum, character) is a means whereby the reality of something else can be known”.⁷ Therefore, hermeneutics is concerned with reality in its entirety. The universality of Meier’s hermeneutics is therefore semiotic. According to him, there are two types of signs: arbitrary and natural. Since every sign must have an author, it means that the author of arbitrary signs is man, and the author of natural signs is God himself. The world is a whole of signs precisely because its author is God. For this reason, it is perfectly legible and comprehensible down to the smallest detail.

This thesis leads Meier to continue, in his own way, the project of author-centered hermeneutics. The true meaning lies in the authorial intention, Meier points out, whether he is the human author or the divine creator. It is achieved when the interpreter thinks exactly the same thing as the author of the signs.⁸ There is a fundamental difference between the divine and the human author, but Meier draws more than an analogy between the two author figures. Viewed as a whole of signs, the world has not only multiple punctual truths, created by human authors, but also a true global meaning, the one that God intended during its creation.⁹ The Cartesianism of modern hermeneutics is yet again visible: God is the ultimate guarantor of all truths, the ultimate justification of the intelligibility of the whole world. A Cartesianism, we might say, combined with Leibinization, if we think of the thesis of the pre-established harmony that exists between all the parts that make up the whole world (even in its semiotic variant).

Despite the distinction between the two types of signs, as well as the difference between hermeneutic and factual truth, Meier defends the thesis of the continuity between divine and human creation. So, we do not yet have a split between natural and cultural reality. The argument is obvious: both types of signs have God as their direct or only indirect author. The idea of the discontinuity between nature and culture only appears in the 19th century, and is emphasized by the distinction between the natural sciences and those of the spirit. Dilthey, Rickert, Windelband, and others make a decisive contribution to the construction of a logic of the human sciences, which is entirely different from the method of the natural sciences, but the presupposition of this logic is precisely that of the discontinuity of

⁷ Georg Friedrich Meier, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Auslegungskunst*, hg. von Axel Bühler & Luigi Cataldi Madonna, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1996, § 7, p. 7.

⁸ Matthias Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

reality. In other words, despite the Kantianism of these philosophers, or perhaps precisely because of it, the distinction between the two types of science derives not only from two types of phenomenality completely different from each other, but also from the postulation of the dogmatic distinction between natural and cultural objects. If we explain this distinction starting from the hermeneutics of the Enlightenment, we can argue that the split between the natural and spiritual sciences originates in the elimination of the theory of semiotic harmony (due to Leibnizianism), according to which God is the creator of all the signs in the world and also of their order.

Returning to the question of the authorial intention, we must emphasize the subtlety with which Meier discusses the question of true meaning and false meaning of the statements we interpret. The idea he supports completes, from new positions, the limitation of Dannhauer's hermeneutics to correctly interpreting the author's statements, but without knowing whether they are true or false. However, Meier argues that only true statements, or those that the author does not know could be false, should be interpreted. His reasoning starts, of course, from the idea that all signs ultimately have a divine author. While natural signs, created by God, can only produce true statements, artificial signs can, however, also produce false statements, given the fallibility of their human author. The divine guarantee of truth does not therefore eliminate the possibility of falsehood. In the practice of interpretation, the hermeneuticist cannot know all the things to which the author refers. In order not to violate the desideratum of rationality, which requires that an interpretation be made only of true statements, Meier proposes a hermeneutical principle that is extremely relevant in that context, called the principle of hermeneutical equity. According to it, our interpretation must be made as if the author were always right. Or, in the terms of his time, we must behave hermeneutically as if hermeneutical truth and factual truth coincided, at least as long as no evidence emerges to disprove this charitable assumption. To today's reader, who has gone through the school of suspicion, this principle may seem overly neutral, even devoid of any commitment to the actual search for truth, or even downright foreign to the critical spirit that must define philosophical activity. However, if we consider, for example, fictional or autobiographical texts, in which subjective experience is irreducible to the experiences of others, we realize the validity and usefulness of this principle. Obviously, its universal adoption is not desirable. The principle of charity of the reading public can easily be exploited by authors interested in imposing their own ideologies, falsifying reality through discourse, and manipulating others.

Authorial intention, more complex than the author himself

In his lectures on hermeneutics in the early 19th century, F.D.E. Schleiermacher shows that the purpose of hermeneutics is understanding, defined as the reconstruction (*Nachkonstruieren*) of the thought from which the discourse arose. To achieve this goal, of course, methodical interpretation is necessary, but the new emphasis on the problem of understanding will pave the way for hermeneutical projects with a much deeper philosophical tone than the previous ones, which were limited to the ordering of a set of rules of interpretation. Discourse, Schleiermacher points out, presupposes both a prior thought and an already formed language, without which thought would not exist and could not be communicated. Thus, any discourse relates both to the totality of the language in which the author writes and to the totality of the author's thought.¹⁰ For this reason, there must also be two sides to interpretation. According to Schleiermacher, grammatical interpretation aims to reconstruct both the objective (grammatical) side of a given language and the way in which the author transforms the already constituted language, which is a whole of possibilities, into an individualized discourse;¹¹ psychological (or technical) interpretation, on the other hand, presupposes understanding a foreign life in its entirety by transposing into the interiority of the other (divination, empathy) and by comparison to this interiority, which is necessary to reconstruct the unique moment of creation. The part-whole circularity is defining here. In both language and thought, the author transforms the infinity of possibilities into something finite, limited, determined. The interpreter has to retrace this path, but in the opposite direction: starting from something determined, he has to reconstruct the whole of the language and the whole of the thought from which the author's discourse arose.

Let us first note that Schleiermacher does not thematize the text as such, considering it to be a mere translation of the spoken discourse. Next, it is worth pointing out that reconstructing the two wholes of possibility is an infinite task. At the same time, the invocation of the circularity of understanding is closely linked to several presuppositions of the era. Conceived as a transition from an indeterminate whole to a determinate discourse, creation is similar to the way philosophers such as Fichte, Schelling, or Hegel described the manifestation of the self in the form of the world. At the same time, the idea that the part is evil if it is separated from the whole, that it has meaning only because the whole gives it meaning, is widespread

¹⁰ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Manfred Frank, 6. Aufl., Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995, pp. 77, 93.

¹¹ Cf. Jean Grondin, *L'universalité de l'herméneutique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1993, pp. 89-90.

in German Romanticism (Franz von Baader, Hölderlin, Hamann, Oken, Novalis)¹², but also in speculative mysticism (Meister Eckhart) and even in other hermeneutical projects of the time (Friedrich Ast, Friedrich Schlegel).

Because of Dilthey's sketch of the history of hermeneutics, Schleiermacher's main contribution has been considered to be the psychological side of interpretation, which involves understanding the other by a transposition into his interiority, achievable through empathy. This reception was taken up by Gadamer and Jean Grondin,¹³ but was criticized by historians of hermeneutics such as Manfred Frank and Matthias Jung, for whom empathy is closely linked to grammatical interpretation,¹⁴ and is only useful for understanding the author's style in comparison with other styles and with the main trends of the language.¹⁵

Because Romanticism discovers that the individual carries within himself the spirit of the time, the concept of authorial intention is expanded by Schleiermacher to include both the conscious side of the author's thought and the elements that remained unconscious to him, but without which his creation cannot be understood. The psychological interpretation therefore consists of understanding the creative act through the understanding of the historical context in which the author lived, using the personal histories (biographies and autobiographies), an idea which historicism has raised to the rank of a hermeneutic principle (August Boeckh, Johann Gustav Droysen, Wilhelm Dilthey, etc.). The interpreter must thus first aim to understand the author as well as he understood himself, in order to then understand him better than he understood himself.¹⁶ The discovery of the unconscious at that time must have played a decisive role in defining understanding as *besser Verstehen*. There is, however, an obvious inequality between the two tasks of interpretation (that of interpreting language and that of interpreting the psyche). The understanding of language has a real chance of success, whereas the complete understanding of the psyche is in principle unattainable. Moreover, there is an incongruity between the aim of elaborating a *Kunstlehre*, i.e. a set of rules of interpretation, a project which transfers the Cartesian-Kantian ideal of philosophy into hermeneutics, and the attempt to reconstruct the author's will to meaning, which remains largely unconscious even to him, a desire specific to Romanticism. Schleiermacher seems undecided about this dilemma. We can discover clear and

¹² Cf. Albert Beguin, *L'âme romantique et le rêve. Essai sur le romantisme allemand et la poésie française*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1993.

¹³ Jean Grondin, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-97.

¹⁴ Matthias Jung, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁵ Manfred Frank, „Einleitung“, in F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, ed. cit., pp. 52-53.

¹⁶ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

distinct rules for understanding language, but understanding the other requires rather an aesthetic capacity, an art defined by empathy and hermeneutic talent.

If for Schleiermacher the author must first be understood as he understood himself, and only later better than he understood himself, Fr. Schlegel spectacularly reverses this relationship. According to him, understanding the author better than he understood himself is more easily achievable, while understanding the author as he understood himself remains in fact unachievable. True understanding occurs when we identify the reasons why the author has understood himself only partially or not at all, and for this we must catch the errors and confusions he makes.¹⁷ For Fr. Schlegel, misunderstanding is present in all understanding, since there is no absolute understanding and no absolute truth.

Disappearances of the author: Some radical positions

The entry of the problem of the unconscious into hermeneutics opens up several possible theories that the histories of this discipline record under various names. One of them is the so-called hermeneutics of suspicion. In analyzing it, Foucault refers to Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, authors that Paul Ricoeur also considers in a similar approach. Mircea Eliade, in his turn, also includes Freud, Marx and the structuralism in this interpretative practice.¹⁸ What these authors have in common is the presupposition – derived from the Romantic discovery of the unconscious and its first uses in hermeneutics – that the interpreter has access to the structure from which the author's thought and discourse originate, a structure that remains completely unknown to him. A double suspicion settles in this type of hermeneutics, as Foucault pointed out. First, the signs are no longer credible, their supposed fixity proving to be illusory. We must therefore investigate their origins, the interpretative process from which they arose, which includes distortions, concealments, errors. The interpretation of signs is, in this case, an unmasking of these falsifications, of the lies that man has come to consider truths (Nietzsche). For example, the fact that reason is nothing but an instinct which became stronger, as Nietzsche points out. By presenting itself as something other than what it really is, reason conceals the corporeality to which it actually belongs. Rational ideas

¹⁷ Cf. Ernst Behler, „Friedrich Schlegels Theorie des Verstehens: Hermeneutik oder Dekonstruktion?“, in Ernst Behler, Joche Hörisch (Hg.), *Die Aktualität der Frühromantik*, Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich, Ferdinand Schöningh, 1987, pp. 148 sq.

¹⁸ Mircea Eliade, *L'Épreuve du labyrinthe. Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet*, Paris, Pierre Belfond, 1978, p. 155.

conceal an economic infrastructure (Marx) or a drive infrastructure (Freud). The virtues of this type of interpretation lie in the awareness of the illusions of the self, a necessary step towards self-understanding,¹⁹ but also in opening the subject to the multiple experiments that he makes on himself.²⁰ After Foucault, hermeneutics is only now detaching itself from semiotics.²¹ The consequence is that hermeneutic truth is no longer equivalent to the correctness of interpretation and adequate understanding, but is combined with the phenomenon of power. Interpretation is achieved when the interpreter identifies the field of power in which the author is situated, one constituted by discourses, texts and signifying practices. From this point of view, the author himself is formed within such a field. His autonomy and centrality are mere illusions derived from modern individualism, reason enough to announce the “death of the author” (Barthes). The author is nothing more than a random knot of a vast network of meanings, quotations, discourses, but also of bodily elements deformed by the interference of values, especially nihilistic ones (Nietzsche). The disappearance of the author in contemporary discourses has been compared to the thesis of the death of God, but also to that of the end of man. Instead of being explained by features such as the originality and authenticity of the author, all discourses “would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur.”²² The old questions about the authorial intention no longer make sense. “And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?”²³

If exercised indiscriminately, the hermeneutics of suspicion can lead to an uncontrolled proliferation of interpretations, in which case limits must be imposed. Returning to the authorial intention can then be a saving solution. At the same time, we may witness the emergence of exaggerations of those ideological interpretations that use texts conveniently instead of interpreting them. The meaning can then be completely turned upside down with the purpose of manipulating the audience, the consequence of which can be the “colonization of the public sphere.”²⁴ By

¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique II*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1986, pp. 147-148.

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, transl. by R.J. Hollingdale, London, Penguin Books, 2003, § 39.

²¹ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” transl. by Jon Anderson and Gary Hentzi, in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Two), ed. by James D. Faubion, transl. by Robert Hurley and others, New York, The New Press, 1998, pp. 269-278.

²² Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in Paul Rabinow (editor), *Foucault Reader*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 119.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

²⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, transl. by William Rehg, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1996.

giving the impression that he knows much better than the author what the main function of speech is and what the structures are from which the speech originates, the interpreter ends up simply having a condescending attitude. This happens exactly as in the critical approach of historiography, when the past is judged only from the point of view of the present (Nietzsche). At other times, the interpreter adopts a detective attitude, simultaneously assuming the role of accuser, judge and committed observer. Last but not least, there is the situation where texts are seen as mere tools for a better self-description, and can be cut up and mixed according to the interests of the interpreter, as is the case with neopragmatism (Rorty). These interests, however, still represent the point of view of the present, the texts of the past being recontextualized according to the problems and solutions of our time, the authors themselves being able to be reeducated, metaphorically speaking, so that their ideas can be expressed in the language of our current theories.²⁵

In the late history of this theme, the presence of *intentio lectoris* is therefore increasingly felt. In relinquishing the hermeneutic modesty which characterized him in the earlier history, the interpreter shows an ever-increasing willingness to participate in the making of meaning, whether it is simply a matter of filling in the gaps of the text or of the construction of meaning itself, when the interpreter has the ambition to aggressively impose his own meaning. A moderate position is the dialogical one, similar to Socratic maieutics, when the interpreter, going beyond the author's statements, "will push through to what [the author] implicitly had to have in mind".²⁶ The unsaid of the text, that which the author intended to say but failed to say because of the prejudices of the time or his inability to think it through, must be brought out by using a tempered interpretive violence, one "animated and guided by the power of an illuminative idea" and through which the interpreter manages to connect to "the secret élan of a work".²⁷ In this hermeneutic scenario, the author and the interpreter are both equally finite, while sharing in the finitude of the text. The boundary that separates moderate interpretations, which are guided by an enlightening idea, from arbitrary or aberrant interpretations is difficult to specify. From a pragmatic point of view, both can have beneficial effects on the interpreter. And correctness has proven to be a good criterion in theory, but impossible to put into practice. The reason is illustrated by the previous historical sketch: the

²⁵ Richard Rorty, "Texts and lumps," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth (Philosophical Papers, Volume 1)*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 78-92.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Logic: the question of truth*, transl. by Thomas Sheehan, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010, § 24, p. 257.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, transl. by James S. Churchill, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1965, § 35, p. 207.

authorial intention is not an exact idea, but a limiting idea whose meaning differs from one era to another and from one paradigm to another, depending on the guiding philosophical theses, metaphysical par excellence, which decisively mark every era and every paradigm of thought. Despite its various meanings, this limit-idea should have a regulative meaning, to use Kant's terms. Regardless of the function that the author's name may still have today, his will to express a meaning must remain a model for what is meant by the circulation of meanings and ideas in the public sphere, as well as a limit that the interpreter has no right to overcome in his seemingly increasingly aggressive desire to impose his own meaning.

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