

ONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE AND INDETERMINACY OF INTERPRETATION

LA DIFERENCIA ONTOLÓGICA Y LA INDETERMINACIÓN DE LA INTERPRETACIÓN

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Abstract: At issue in this paper is the unfinished dialogue between hermeneutic phenomenology and hermeneutic logic. The paper touches upon two historical contexts of this dialogue. In scrutinizing them I discuss the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and non-representationalist epistemology. The view gets spelled out that the norms of truthfulness, objectivity, empirical adequacy, and other epistemological characteristics of interpretation become generated within characteristic hermeneutic situations. By elaborating on Heidegger's nexus between projected understanding and interpretative articulation, the notion of hermeneutic fore-structuring of interpretative practices is introduced. Scrutinizing this notion allows one to circumscribe characteristic hermeneutic situations.

Key Words: Hermeneutic, Phenomenology, Epistemology, Interpretation.

Resumen: El tema de este artículo es el diálogo inacabado entre la fenomenología hermenéutica y la lógica hermenéutica. El artículo toma dos contextos históricos de este diálogo. Al investigarlos, discuto la relación entre la hermenéutica filosófica y la epistemología no-representacionista. Esta visión explica que las normas de veracidad, la objetividad, la adecuación empírica y otras características epistemológicas de la interpretación llegan a generarse dentro de situaciones hermenéuticas características. Al elaborar el nexo de Heidegger entre la comprensión proyectada y la articulación interpretativa, se introduce la noción de pre-estructuración hermenéutica de las prácticas interpretativas. Investigar esta noción permite circunscribir situaciones hermenéuticas características.

Palabras clave: Hermenéutica, fenomenología, epistemología, interpretación.

1. THE WEAK-STRONG HOLISM CONTROVERSY AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This paper is a reflection upon a recent controversy between two schools of phenomenological philosophy of the human sciences. Against the background of a critical appraisal of this controversy I will put forward a version of double hermeneutics that revises at the same time Heidegger's way of circumscribing

the ontological difference in hermeneutic phenomenology. It is a revision that is in line with the critique of the project of *Being and Time* offered by some of Dilthey's students. Thus, the outcome of the contemporary weak-strong holism controversy in phenomenology and philosophy of the human sciences promises to complete an important cycle of debates in the development of the post-Diltheyan philosophical hermeneutics.

There is a standard stance against ontologizing interpretation, i.e. against construing interpretation in terms of an existential phenomenon ascribed to the modes of being-in-the-world. According to its principal argument, the ontologization of hermeneutics is doomed to an irrecoverable skepticism. Making interpretation a dimension of Heidegger's "thrown project" (and ascribing to interpretative knowledge a "derivative status" in accordance with the scenario of the derivability of "apophantic as" from "hermeneutic as") precludes the possibility to treat interpretation as an autonomous cognitive procedure subordinated to epistemological norms and criteria for validity and objectivity. By admitting the priority of "ontological interpretation" over "epistemic interpretation" – so the argument from the standard position goes – one fails to defeat the skepticism about the validity and objectivity of particular interpretations, and to cope with the conflict of competing interpretations. In other words, there is a lack of rules in the ontological approach for singling out the best (or at least the more appropriate) interpretation. The standard stance is guided by a methodological imperative advocated by several prominent analytical philosophers. On this imperative, if a set of constraints fails to yield a unique interpretation, then one ought to search for further as yet unarticulated constraints on interpretation. For several reasons the ontological approach to interpretation cannot meet this methodological imperative. Therefore, it is ineffective and unreliable.

By implication, the ontological approach is accused for having no resources to settle disputes between competing interpretative research programs (i.e. programs based on alternative methodologies of interpretation in disciplines like cultural anthropology, literary criticism, micro-history, religious studies, or art history). It suffers from an incurable normative deficit. In stressing the total context-dependence of interpretation embedded in the modes of being-in-the-world, the supporters of the ontological approach fail to handle the problem of the indeterminacy of interpretation. On the standard stance's critique, the kind

of skepticism brought into play by the ontological-holistic-contextual portrait of interpretation can be only eliminated through supplying or combining the latter with (or at least restricting it by) a rational-comparative approach to interpretation that is capable to determine it epistemologically. An external normative reflection upon the context-dependent interpretation should overcome its normative deficit, thereby justifying epistemologically the interpretation's outcome. The ontological approach to interpretation has no potentiality to generate such a reflection.

The view that the ontological reformulation of interpretation avoids any epistemological specification in terms of validity, empirical adequacy, truthfulness, and objectivity is most cogently typified by James Bohman¹. On his account, this reformulation opens the door to heavy suspicions about the methodological value of interpretation. It implies "strong holism" (as an anti-normative counterpart of the ontological approach) about the contextual indeterminacy of interpretation that forecloses the application of norms and criteria. The transcendental argument for this holism involves four premises. According to the first two of them, interpretation is predicated on a part-whole circularity (the ineliminability of the hermeneutic circle), and it occurs only against the background of an unspecifiable interrelatedness of practices. For Bohman as a typical exponent of the standard stance, these premises are obligatory for each kind of interpretation: Circular and perspectival aspects are not extraneous features but transcendental conditions for having interpretative practices. However, strong holism is based on two further premises which are unacceptable. They stipulate the insurmountable limits of interpretation's epistemic characterization, and the impossibility to draw a demarcation between true and false interpretations. The only methodological recommendation that strong holism might provide is that one should follow the rationality of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) in the process of interpretation.

In order to "save" interpretative holism from skepticism and to subject interpretation's contextual indeterminacy to normative-epistemological rationality, Bohman suggests a modified transcendental argument. The premises of the inevitability of hermeneutic circularity and the unspecifiability of the back-

¹ See, in particular, James Bohman, *New Philosophy of Social Science*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991, pp. 102-144.

ground interrelatedness of practices remain preserved, while the other two premises get replaced by the assumptions that the background poses only an enabling condition that by no means limits the epistemic characterization of interpretation, and the later consists of knowledge claims that can be testified by intersubjectively accepted norms and criteria. The enabling condition is not to be confused with a "limiting condition" that makes impossible to decide and choose normatively between interpretations on the basis of evidence.

The revisited transcendental argument leads to what Bohman calls "weak holism" – a doctrine which is in harmony with the standard stance². What is meant by this expression is a generalized view about the epistemological nature of interpretation developed in line of post-empiricist philosophy of science. Weak holism is a view about interpretation's contextual indeterminacy and circularity that allows one to treat the outcomes of interpretations as knowledge (claims and beliefs) based on evidence. Treating interpretations in such a manner is a precondition for forging an epistemological framework of appraising interpretative knowledge. To establish a non-skeptical conclusion about the holist-circular-contextual nature of interpretation amounts to subordinating hermeneutics to normativity of getting empirically warrant knowledge. In Bohman's eyes, a universalizing of hermeneutics beyond the scope of (post-empiricist) epistemology and its normative rationality would imply universal philosophical skepticism.

In the final reckoning, what Bohman suggests can be formulated in terms of the following dilemma – either accepting epistemological skepticism as the ultimate philosophical position with regard to the nature of interpretation, or recasting hermeneutics as a special field of (weakly normative, post-empiricist) epistemology. For those who believe in the universalizing of hermeneutics (as an ongoing program) but repudiate any form of epistemological skepticism, there is the obligation to get rid of this depressing dilemma. To make some initial steps in that direction let me call the attention to the fact that in Bohman's formulation of the transcendental argument for strong holism wrong is the premise of background's unspecifiability. To stress again, Bohman retains this premise also in his formulation of the transcendental argument for weak ho-

² On the way in which the distinction between strong and weak holism is introduced and justified see, James Bohman, "Holism without Skepticism: Contextualism and the Limits of Interpretation", in: David R. Hiley et al. (eds.), *The Interpretive Turn*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, pp. 129-154.

lism. According to him, the background of practices and beliefs is an amorphous milieu. Interpretation is simply immersed in this milieu. Moreover, it is doomed to be normatively blind with regard to what should be counted as its pertinent background. From a hermeneutic point of view, however, the background is inseparable from the horizon of interpretation. The background that continually depends on the projection of horizon is the ongoing fore-structuring of interpretation. It is this projection in the interpretative process that makes the background possible. The way in which the horizon of possibilities becomes appropriated in this process delineates and specifies constantly the background. Yet the latter in its turn constantly provokes (through its variability) the projection of new possibilities. Thus, background of practices and projected horizon of possibilities are involved in an ongoing mutual reinforcement that progressively rules out the background's unspecifiability.

In failing to address the issue of how the projection of horizon and delineation of background are united in a relation of co-specification in the process of interpretation, the supporters of the standard stance are unable to transcend Bohman's dilemma. It is this relation that brings into being an important aspect of what I will call a hermeneutic fore-structure of the constitution of meaning. More specifically, I will argue that the background of practices in an interpretative process is specifiable as a hermeneutic fore-structure of generating knowledge claims and cognitive structures. Scrutinizing this notion helps one to come to grips with issue of how norms of epistemic truthfulness, objectivity and validity are engendered in this process, and accordingly, how the very process gets specified epistemologically. On a further claim that will be advocated, the ontological approach to interpretation is capable to revealing in the contextualized interpretative practices a potentiality to a successful dealing with the aspects of normative indeterminacy. My contention is that an ontological approach to interpretation grounded upon a theory of *double hermeneutics* allows one to hold strong (ontological) holism, while avoiding skepticism about the epistemological specifiability of interpretative practices³.

Bohman like many others spells out in a quite definite manner the standard stance against the ontological recasting of interpretation. His framework of ar-

³ See in this regard also Dimitri Ginev, "Rhetoric and Double Hermeneutics in the Human Sciences", *Human Studies*, 21(1998), pp. 259-271; and Dimitri Ginev, "Doppelte Hermeneutik und Konstitutionstheorie", *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 55(2007), pp. 679-688.

gumentation is provided by the theories of science's normative rationality. Yet this is not the standard stance's original framework of criticism. In fact, the standard stance is rooted in the first place in a quite tendentious reading of the history of modern hermeneutics. It is a reading that rejects the "post-Diltheyan turn" of interpretation theory. The main merit of Dilthey's (methodological) hermeneutics – a program that he developed parallel to (and to a certain extent in a competition with) his version of "descriptive psychology" – was the way of constituting "individual wholes" as the human sciences' objects of inquiry⁴. The individual wholes are neither "singulars" (particular cultural-historical facts) nor are they reducible to merely empirical data (and data-models)⁵. The methodology of their constitution is neither that of teleological reconstruction nor that of structural-functional explanatory models. The constitution of individual wholes proceeds by means of interplay between the self-understanding of the historical agents who are under study and the interpretative grasping of this self-understanding's objectifications. (Presumably, the agents' self-understanding becomes expressed in all cultural manifestations of the life-form under study⁶.)

The interplay is built upon the model of the part-whole hermeneutic circle. Consequently, an individual whole (for instance, an artistic style, an epoch's "cultural spirit", or a historical type of moral consciousness) constituted by this interplay gets never closed in itself and finalized in accordance with epistemological criteria for the research process's finality. Whether the hermeneutic circularity can be kept under a methodological (and normative) control remains an open question in Dilthey's work. However, the very idea of a circulative relationship between (the particular manifestations of the) life-forms' self-understanding and the interpretative constitution of meaningful wholes pro-

⁴ On the interrelations between hermeneutics and descriptive psychology in Dilthey's work see Rudolf Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Sciences*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975; Frithjof Rodi, *Das strukturierte Ganze. Studien zum Werk von Wilhelm Dilthey*, Velbrück: Weilerswist 2003.

⁵ See on this claim, for instance, Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften, Band VII: Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, hrsg. von Bernhard Groethuysen, Leipzig und Berlin, 1927, p. 212.

⁶ According to a core doctrine of Dilthey's program exposed in his seminal work *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, the human sciences are called into existence in order to elaborate on strategies for cognizing the historical world by interpreting the discursive and symbolic embodiments of historical agents' lived experience. In the production and expressivity of these embodiments the interpretative reflexivity plays an irreplaceable role. The paramount concept of *Wirkungszusammenhang* (productive nexus) conveys main aspects of the unavoidable situatedness of lived experience. Reflexivity is the interpretative production of cultural embodiments (in Dilthey's terms, *die Lebensäußerungen*, the life's expressivity) within the productive nexus. Thus, the human sciences achieve an interpretative cognizing of life's reflexive expressivity. This is the most succinct formula of the human sciences' double hermeneutics.

voked a profound change of the traditional theory of interpretation oriented toward methodical and logical problematic. To be sure, there was a strong tendency to ontologizing interpretation involved in this idea. (This tendency got established in Dilthey's school despite the fact that the master vehemently opposed an ontological reformulation of *Lebensphilosophie*.) This was the advent of philosophical hermeneutics. The post-Diltheyan turn consists in the development of versions of philosophical hermeneutics as a result of different approaches to the way in which Dilthey designed the interplay constituting meaningful wholes.

Philosophers like Georg Misch, Martin Heidegger, Hans Lipps, Helmuth Plessner, and Josef König, who in the 1920s undertook this turn in the aftermath of a (re)publication of Dilthey's basic works, have been accused by those who hold the arguments of the standard stance for not being preoccupied with the traditional hermeneutic problematic about the meaning of texts and discourses. On this accusation, the aforementioned philosophers were not interested in the original function of hermeneutics as the art of interpretation of author's intentions whose discursive and textual embodiment produces meaning. Thus, they ignored the philological aspects of hermeneutics, transforming it either into a theory of "life-forms' expressivity" (Misch and König), or existential analytic (Heidegger), or a phenomenological theory of the human finitude and situatedness (Lipps), or a prelude to philosophical anthropology as a theory of "eccentric positionality" (Plessner). By detaching hermeneutics from empirical science, they divorced it from the epistemological profile of scientific rationality. According to the critics of this detachment, the authors of the post-Diltheyan turn concentrated in their historical reflections exclusively on the theological side of traditional hermeneutics (for instance, anti-Enlightenment exegetical conceptions related to the interpretative dimensions of God's immanent transcendence). In so doing, they completely neglected those traditional conceptions which were preoccupied with the analytical (methodical and formal-logical) aspects of disclosing the authors' textually embodied intentions.

On a corollary to this criticism, the contemporary historians of modern hermeneutics who subscribe to the paradigm-change provoked by Dilthey's anti-naturalist philosophy of the human science and his program for a "critique of

historical reason" go on to justify the progressive divergence of philosophical hermeneutics from rationally reproducible procedures of interpretation⁷. The critique of the post-Diltheyan turn, however, aims not merely at a new historiography of interpretation theory. Its basic goal is rather to "de-legitimize" the philosophical projects developed along the lines of this turn. To put it in a quasi-Heideggerian parlance, the critique aims at destructing the tradition(s) of these projects in order to get the chance of repeating the authentic questions of interpretation theory⁸. In accomplishing this job, the critics believe to regain the status of hermeneutics as an auxiliary discipline of normative epistemology. (Accordingly, Continental philosophical hermeneutics will prove to be an extravagant deviation from the "rational development" of interpretation theory.) The critics are inclined to conceive of the development of the traditional (pre-Diltheyan) hermeneutics as a series of consecutive conceptions that are more or less predecessors of Quine's "radical translation", Davidson's "radical interpretation", and all versions of the "principle of charity" discussed and advocated in analytical philosophy. Hence, their "de-legitimizing" historiography of modern *hermeneutica generalis* (i.e. the traditional art of interpretation after the extension of the exegetical principle of *sola scriptura* as a general theory of texts' meaning) serves at the same time the task of legitimizing the authenticity of the way in which the problematic of interpretation is discussed in analytic philosophy.

I am not going to enter on this occasion the "historiographic battle" for hermeneutics. To be sure, the contemporary versions of the principle of charity have much in common with the pre-Kantian views about the *aequitas hermeneutica*. Yet the post-Diltheyan turn was also "prepared" by several de-

⁷ Notoriously, this kind of historiography of hermeneutics was launched by Dilthey himself. The point of departure is his celebrated essays *The Rise of Hermeneutics* of 1900. See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften, Band V: Die geistige Welt. Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens. Erste Hälfte: Abhandlungen zur Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften*, hrsg. von Georg Misch, Leipzig und Berlin, 1924, pp. 317-338.

⁸ See in this regard, Axel Bühler (Hrsg.), *Unzeitgemässe Hermeneutik. Verstehen und Interpretation im Denken der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994; Lutz Danneberg, "Philosophische und methodische Hermeneutik", *Philosophia Naturalis*, 32(1995), pp. 249-269; Oliver Scholz, "Zur systematischen Bedeutung der Aufklärungshermeneutiken", *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 21(1996), pp. 156-162; Oliver Scholz, "Die Vorstruktur des Verstehens. Ein Beitrag zur Klärung des Verhältnisses zwischen traditioneller Hermeneutik und „philosophischer Hermeneutik“, in: *Die Geschichte der Hermeneutik und die Methodik der textinterpretierenden Disziplinen*, hrsg. von Jörg Schönert und Friedrich Vollhardt, Berlin und New York: de Gruyter, 2005, pp. 443-462. Denis Thouard, "Wie Flacius zum ersten Hermeneutiker der Moderne wurde. Dilthey, Twisten, Schleiermacher und die Historiographie der Hermeneutik", in: *Die Geschichte der Hermeneutik und die Methodik der textinterpretierenden Disziplinen*, hrsg. von Jörg Schönert und Friedrich Vollhardt, Berlin und New York: de Gruyter, 2005, pp. 265-280.

velopments in the traditional hermeneutics. More specifically, it was prepared by those conceptions which were not succumbed to the paradigm of interpreting the author's intentionality incorporated in texts and discourses⁹. (Cases in point are the conceptions which emphasized the irreducibility of the "hermeneutic truth" to empirical or logical truth.) The message of these developments and conceptions is that hermeneutics is something more than a sub-discipline of (normative or naturalized) epistemology. However, the irreducibility of "ontological hermeneutics" to an epistemological enterprise does not imply (*pace* Heidegger and many others) an anti-epistemological position.

By spelling out the concept of a "characteristic hermeneutic situation" (as a further specification of the notion of hermeneutic fore-structure)¹⁰, I will argue for the possibility of an epistemologically specifiable ontological hermeneutics in the remainder. Strangely enough, all post-Diltheyan versions of philosophical hermeneutics draw heavily on the distinction between the natural and the human sciences, stressing the interpretative-dialogical nature of the latter and the objectivist-monological specificity of the former. This is strange because the claim of the universality of hermeneutics requires demonstrating the interpretative-constitutive dimension of the natural-scientific inquiry as well. (If one fails to address this dimension properly, one would be committed to a universal hermeneutics that is not combating scientism as a wrong ideological identification of science's profile but science itself. In short, this would be a hermeneutics struggling not for anti-scientism but for anti-science.)

More recent versions of philosophical hermeneutics (like that of Charles Taylor) acknowledge the interpretative character of practices like experimentation, calibration of instruments, construction of theory's data-models, construction of theory's mathematical formalism, and so on. They do not deny science's interpretative dimension. Nonetheless they insist on the doubly hermeneutic organization of the human-scientific research as an irremovable distinctive feature. On their view, the interpretative character of natural-scientific practices do not imply the need for a double hermeneutics. Though I am not striving for

⁹ On reconstruction of the history of modern hermeneutics as preparing the rise of philosophical hermeneutics see, for instance, Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994; Harald Schnur, *Schleiermachers Hermeneutik und ihre Vorgeschichte*, Stuttgart und Weimar: Metzler, 1994.

¹⁰ On the notion of hermeneutic fore-structure see Dimitri Ginev, "On the Hermeneutic Fore-Structure of Scientific Research", *Continental Philosophy Review*, 32(1999), pp. 143-168.

undoing the philosophically significant distinction between the natural and the human sciences, I believe that the phenomena involved in the double hermeneutics cannot provide the necessary criterion for carrying out this distinction effectively. Albeit operating in a quite different manner as compared with the human sciences, the double hermeneutics is to be established by a theory of natural-scientific practices too. This theory will occupy a central place in the remainder.

In what follows I shall proceed in three steps: (1) examining the existential analytic of meaning constitution as a mediator between the methodological and the ontological theory of interpretation; (2) elaborating on concept of the hermeneutic fore-structure of science's interpretative practices as a specification of existential analytic's nexus of understanding-interpretation; (3) refuting the arguments for subordinating hermeneutics to epistemology by working out the concept of the characteristic hermeneutic situation.

2. ONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE AND DOUBLE HERMENEUTICS

The double hermeneutics (qua a methodology of the interpretative sciences) might be developed independently of the ontological approach as this is illustrated, in particular, by the conceptions of Mary Hesse and Anthony Giddens. The reverse however is not valid: the ontological theory of interpretation involves necessarily a double hermeneutics. To demonstrate the original motivation for introducing double hermeneutics, let me take up the discussion of Dilthey's interplay of a life-form's self-understanding and the interpretative constitution of life-form's meaningful whole as an object of inquiry. Following the claims of ungroundability, unfathomability, and inscrutability of "life's dynamics", Dilthey elaborates on this interplay in order to prevent a superimposition of extraneous interpretative schemes upon the life-forms as individual wholes. The double hermeneutics allows one an intrinsic interpretation of life-form's meaningful self-articulation. Yet the double hermeneutics does not imply a lack of epistemic distance in this intrinsic interpretation. Dilthey tried to address the distance issue by introducing the distinction between the "reflexive awareness" (*Innewerden*) of the life-forms and the "reflective interpretation" within human-scientific experience. The way of devising such an interpretation implies at the same time a transition to a kind of transcendental reflection

specifying the constitution of individual wholes as research objects. It is this reflection that reveals conditions for possibility of a life-form's expressivity within (what Dilthey calls) the life-form's "productive nexus" (*Wirkungszusammenhang*). The interpretative research's attitude proves to be both hermeneutic (predicated on the circularity of the constitution of an individual whole) and transcendental. By serving a transcendental function, the hermeneutic circle of interpretative constitution of objects of inquiry effectuates an epistemic distance. The same overlapping of hermeneutic and transcendental circularity will take place in the existential analytic as well¹¹.

Dilthey emphasized successfully the need of double hermeneutics in the interpretative sciences. Yet his philosophy of these sciences does not suffice to approaching closer the double hermeneutics' ontological and methodological aspects. In his late essay "Abstractions from the life of our wills" Dilthey tries to work out some of these aspects in the perspective of an extension of traditional logic as "logic of life" (the logic of life-forms' formation). The project of this extension was accomplished by Georg Misch whose "hermeneutic logic of discursivity (*Diskursivität*)" managed to integrate the methodology of doubly hermeneutic constitution of human-scientific objects of inquiry in a general theory of life's discursive expressivity¹².

In what follows, however, I will restrain from dealing further with the Diltheyan tradition. Instead, the attention will be concentrated entirely on the road to double hermeneutics via a re-reading of existential analytic's understanding-interpretation nexus and the ontic-ontological difference. Leaning on the existential analytic, one realizes that the double hermeneutics is not simply an "interpretation of interpretation" but rather a process of unfolding on two levels the interpretative self-understanding of the agents under study as they constitute their form of life (and life-worlds). On each level one is dealing with specific interpretative circularity, and the task of the double hermeneutics as a methodology is to figure out an integral hermeneutic circularity of the research

¹¹ In existential analytic, however, the overlapping in question proceeds in a twofold manner: on ontic as well as on ontological level. In his criticism on Dilthey from the mid 1920s Heidegger stresses the impossibility to defend the need of transcendental reflection while holding the "ontological in-difference of life". See, in this regard, Martin Heidegger, „Wilhelm Diltheys Forschungsarbeit und der gegenwärtige Kampf um eine historische Weltanschauung. 10 Vorträge (Gehalten in Kassel vom 16. IV. – 21. IV. 1925)“, in: *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften*, Band 8, 1992-1993, 143-180, hier: 158.

¹² See Dimitri Ginev, *Das hermeneutische Projekt Georg Mischs*, Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2011.

process. My principal disagreement with the standard stance (as discussed in the previous section) can be epitomized by the following claim: By devising the integral circle of the interpretative constitution of meaning, one will be able to specify epistemological constraints on ontic level's interpretation. This task requires to addressing in the first place the issue of meaning constitution in hermeneutic phenomenology.

Notoriously, in *Being and Time* interpretation as an existentials is assigned to the meaning of being. Yet the access to that ("fundamental-ontological") meaning is through the analysis of the interpretative constitution of meaning and the articulation of the world. The analysis takes into account the dual status of meaning with respect to the ontological difference. On ontic level, all entities that can be thematized are laden with meaning. Even the purely natural objects are not an exception since the practice of scientific thematization makes them meaningful and culturally contextualized. By contrast, the meaning of being (i.e. the ontological meaning of the existentials) is never given to the "positive experience" of scientific thematization. The ontological meaning is a pure "nothingness" for this experience. The constitution of meaning in cultural existence is a process that mediates between the ontological and the ontic meaning. This is why an analysis of the constitution of meaning makes possible the transition from the ontic (empirical) to the ontological (transcendental) level. The constitution involves at once the modes of empirical manifestation of meaning and the a priori conditions for a meaningful articulation of the world. The analysis presupposes that interpretation has an "ontic universality" in all practices within-the-world since the constitution of meaning and the articulation of cultural worlds take place inevitably in these practices. Thus, interpretation is at once an ontological moment that characterizes the meaning of being, and a universal ontic (i.e. empirically accessible) event. The empirical accessibility to the ontic universality is to be attained, in particular, by (what after Bourdieu is called) a "theory of practices".

In the existential analytic, the expression of "concernful dealings" stays for the concept of practices. Speaking in Heidegger's terms, "care" that unites ontologically existentiality, facticity, and being-fallen of Dasein's being-in-the-world is organized as an interrelatedness of concernful dealings. Care is not a special attitude towards the self, but the phenomenological totality of being-in-the-world, whereas existence absorbed in the interrelatedness of the dealings

with things that are ready-to-hand is defined as "concern". Both the existential totality of care and the concern with what is ready-to-hand are essentially interpretative. Yet the former is distinguished by ontological universality while the latter by ontic universality of interpretation. Every concrete (specified by cultural patterns) attitude of interpretative concern is grounded in care. In another formulation, the modes of interpretative concern are ontic possibilities of being-as-care. The things that are ready-to-hand within the interrelatedness of practices "have been interpreted in the horizon of the they"¹³. Heidegger makes the case that the everyday-routine interpretation of the they constrains the possible options of (the inauthentic) interpretative-deliberative choice within-the-world. One chooses possibilities projected by they's routine practices ("the average everydayness of concern"). The interpretative concern within-the-world becomes blind to alternative possibilities.

In the interpretative sciences, applying double hermeneutics proceeds from the ontic investigation of meaningful cultural diversities – think on a cultural-anthropological investigation based on "thick description", for instance – to disclosing structures of meaning constitution within the cultural worlds. (A case in point is the changing structures of identity's narrative construction of an ethnic or a confessional community. These structures involve configurations of historical self-understanding, cultural memory, intersubjective states-of-mind, symbolic expressivity, and techniques of narration.) From a Heideggerian point of view, disclosing such structures is by no means an ontological study. Yet in this hermeneutic investigation, one employs transcendental arguments in interpreting the factual outcome of the ontic investigation. In so doing, one ascribes to the disclosed structures existential-ontological moments. Thus, the human-scientific double hermeneutics creates a definitive methodical order of moving from ontic issues to an ontologically relevant problematic. In the existential analytic the ontico-ontological order becomes reversed as regards this methodical order. The interpretative articulation of the world (the ontological status of interpretation) proves to be not an explication of interpretation's empirical universality by means of transcendental arguments, but the fore-structure of its ontic universality.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco: Harper, 1962, p. 239.

The same conclusions are to be held with regard to understanding which also is distinguished by an ontic and an ontological status. To be sure, the existential-analytic construal of this term runs against the commonsensical conceiving of it. Leaning on the linguistic intuition, the primary connotation of the term "understanding" is related to the contextualized mental activity. (One understands something by having recourse to the context in which this something is placed, or by grasping intentions incorporated in speech acts or actions.) There is, however, even in the commonsensical meaning of understanding a hidden connotation that differs significantly from the meaning of a cognitive event. This connotation, which lays bare the intuitive base of the existential-phenomenological construal of meaning, becomes clear when one says that one understands oneself upon the possibilities one can appropriate in one's mode of being-in-the-world. Applied to an interpretative research process, this means, in particular, that a scientific community understands itself as being projected upon possibilities of articulation of what is disclosed by community's practices as a domain of research¹⁴.

Ontologically understanding is self-projective being towards its potentiality-for-being. In scrutinizing understanding as an existentielle, Heidegger manages to show the priority of the potentiality-for-being over being as actual presence. This ontological conclusion presupposes that an analogous priority takes place also on ontic level: human beings' cultural (meaningful) existence is primordial-ly projected upon horizons of possibilities which get gradually actualized. The actualization does not imply a detachment from the potentiality-for-being since the actualized remains always already within open horizons. By implication, each actual state of existence is always beyond itself. By the same token, those who understand themselves with respect to the possibilities they can appropriate have a cultural existence that is always ahead-of-itself. Ontically understanding is that characteristic of cultural existence which refers to the capability

¹⁴ Significant changes in the projected horizon of possibilities entail a new self-understanding of a scientific community as an interpretative community. Thus, for instance, by the mid 1960s scientists in the fields of classical enzymology and protein structure were looking for establishing a reliable mechanism of how enzymes change shape upon interaction with their substrates. This was a new research situation in both fields – a situation that opened many novel research possibilities. The massive experimental confirmation (through atomic resolution structures of protein) of the assumption about enzymes' changing shape during the metabolic reactions provoked an essentially new understanding of being researcher in the fields of enzymology and protein structure. (The assumption that enzymes change shape upon interaction with their substrates is known as the "induced-fit hypothesis" in biochemistry.)

of practices to project in their interrelatedness horizons of possibilities, thereby making cultural existence itself a practical projection upon possibilities.

In Section 32 of *Being and Time* Heidegger introduces the concepts of the “fore-structure of understanding” and the “as-structure of interpretation”. They refer to the principal ontological features of meaning. A particular task of the existential analytic is to reveal the nexus between the two concepts. On a narrower definition, understanding is the horizon whose projection discloses *entities in their possibility*. More specifically, an entity within-the-world is projected upon the totality of its possible involvements in the world. Thus considered, *entities have meaning* within the projected horizon of understanding (the world) which is in a state of ongoing interpretative articulation. The latter consists in a constant appropriation and actualization of projected possibilities. Roughly speaking, this is the paradigm of the constitutional analysis of meaningful entities suggested in *Being and Time*. It postulates that the interpretative articulation of understanding through appropriation of possibilities is the constitution of meaning. In this constitution – so Heidegger’s argument goes – the existential-ontological nexus of the fore-structure of understanding and the as-structure of interpretation gets circumscribed in terms of the triad of fore-having, foresight, and fore-conception of “something that becomes meaningful as something”. I call this circulative nexus the *hermeneutic fore-structure* of the constitution of meaning. In their fore-structuring entities within-the-world may exist both as objects thematically present-at-hand and as instrumental equipments in their readiness-t-hand. (Moreover, one and the same entity may exist in both ways, depending on its contextual involvements. This is exemplified most of all by the entities involved in scientific research.)

On Heidegger’s ontological construal of the nexus under discussion, in interpretation, understanding as a horizon of possibilities appropriates that which is projected by it. Understanding and interpretation are the two sides of one existential phenomenon. The projected horizon of possibilities is the world which always already transcends what gets articulated within it. Understanding is the projected horizon, while the interrelatedness of practices within-the-world reveals itself as an ongoing appropriation of possibilities. The appropriation has a character of interpretation since it takes on the form of hermeneutic circularity – the projection of the meaningful whole and the articulation of contextual meanings are mutually presupposing each other.

A theory of practices that draws on the existential-analytic paradigm of meaning constitution should be predicated on the claim that the contextual arrangement of actions enacted by a particular practice is neither determined by norms external to practice nor created by an already existing order of the milieu in which the arrangement occurs. It is the hermeneutic circularity of horizon of understanding and interpretative articulation that creates a *dynamic order projected upon possibilities*. Nothing gets hypostatized in this hermeneutic circularity. By ruling out any causal or normative determination in the constitution of meaning, the persistence on the projection-articulation hermeneutic circularity avoids essentialism in a radical manner. Practice's own normativity is to be derived from the triad of fore-sight, fore-having and fore-conception of the meaningful entities constituted within practice's arranged actions. In other words, practice's normativity is generated by (and embedded in) the hermeneutic circularity of meaning constitution. This *proto-normativity* contextualizes the constitution of meaningful objects (including objects of inquiry in scientific research)¹⁵. Proto-normativity is constantly produced by the hermeneutic fore-structuring of interpretation. Now the question arises as what consequences the making proto-normativity explicit would have for the process of interpretation.

3. THE CONCEPT OF CHARACTERISTIC HERMENEUTIC SITUATION

Let me summarize the considerations of the preceding section. The ontological theory of interpretation (as inspired by Heidegger's existential analytic) assumes that interpretation is a dimension of all practices within-the-world. The agents are interpreting themselves and the particular contexts and situations of their activities and practices. The ontic level of (the universality of) interpretation takes into consideration the fact that human beings are doomed to be interpretative creatures¹⁶. *The ontic level addresses first and foremost the con-*

¹⁵ On the notion of "proto-normativity" as related to the hermeneutic fore-structure of scientific research, see Dimitri Ginev, *The Context of Constitution. Beyond the Edge of Justification*, Dordrecht, Boston: Springer, 2006, pp. 161-194.

¹⁶ The claim that the agents' self-reflective stance conditions the active appropriation of possibilities as an ongoing construction of identity takes a central place in all versions of ethnomethodology as well. On Garfinkel's celebrated view, because the agents are constantly interpreting their situatedness in the world they are articulating, they are not "cultural dopes". This view, however, involves the wrong assumption that the life-forms internal (vernacular) interpretative methods and practices can be only subjected to a pure description. Just because the interpretative being-in-the-world characterizes the life-forms' modes of being as a potentiality-for-being, a pure description of agents' interpretative self-

tinuous construction of identity of a life-form's participants. Those who are involved in (the historical re-production of) a life-form are constructing their identity by appropriating possibilities that are contextually projected. Studies on this level take on the form of interpretative inquiries into the changing regimes of interpretative communities' self-understanding upon possibilities that are projected as contextually changing horizons. The construction of identity is a never-ending process since the horizon of possibilities remains always open. In interpreting themselves within their situatedness in the world, human beings are disclosing the interpretative nature of their being-in-the-world.

In reaching this conclusion, one is approaching the ontological level of interpretation. On this level interpretation is to be attributed to the meaning as facticity, existentiality, and being-fallen. The two levels are intertwined. The relationship between the levels is one of fore-structuring. The double hermeneutics involves a transcendental reflection that has to establish the conditions of having interpretative articulation of a certain kind. The circularity of understanding and interpretation that constitutes meaning takes place in scientific research as well. My contention is that by scrutinizing the hermeneutic fore-structuring of scientific research, one can apply the transcendental reflection involved in the double hermeneutics to specifying epistemological conditions of (and constrains on) scientific research as an interpretative process. A hermeneutic theory of scientific research should portray the process of research in terms of changing configurations of interrelated practices¹⁷. Each particular configuration defines a situation in the development of this process. The situation's outcome is the articulation of the domain of research in a certain way (for instance, creating new empirical models of domain's central theory). The articulation brings into being a range of meaningful entities that exist within the situation's contextualized spaces of representation. (Examples of such spaces are a phase diagram, a statistical ensemble of experimental results, a network of quantifiable data achieved by calibrated instruments, an algebraic model of measurements, a particular solution of a system of differential equations, or a semantic model of a theory's formalism. To make use of Nelson Goodman's cel-

understanding (i.e. a description that presupposes a pure presence of methods and practices as something that is present-at-hand) is to be rejected from a hermeneutic point of view.

¹⁷ On a detailed discussion of this theory see, Dimitri Ginev, *The Tenets of Cognitive Existentialism*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011.

ebredated distinction, in all of these cases one has in mind “representation as” and not “representation of”¹⁸.) In representing meaningful entities, one constantly reads them within the horizon projected by the situation’s configuration of practices. Thus, the entities’ actual presence in the situation is contextually relative, being subjected to their projection upon possibilities (i.e. to their potentiality-for-being).

The concept of the “hermeneutic fore-structure of scientific research” comes to the fore as a result of the efforts to specify the circular nexus of understanding and interpretation with regard to the constitution of scientific objects and the articulation of domains of research. Following the preceding portrayal, the manifolds of activities in scientific research become organized as interpretative practices by means of their capacity to serve the function of (what Patrick Heelan calls) “readable technologies”¹⁹. Scientific research is a process of reading within particular spaces of representation. In this process one reads instruments, theoretical concepts, experimental results, measurements, partial differential equations, diagrams, etc. Interpretative practices of scientific research should be distinguished by a potentiality to constitute through readable technologies the relevant objects of inquiry within the milieu of the situation’s meaningful entities. By contextualizing the research process within a configuration of practices, one calls into existence entities that retain their status to be at instrumental disposal (within normal science’s laboratory everydayness), and nevertheless become (under certain conditions) isolable from the context as “thematically given objects” whose identification depends totally on epistemological norms and criteria.

In other words, these objects are at once ready-to-hand in their manipulability and present-at-hand in their objectifying identification by means of epistemic procedures. This dual status corresponds to the duality inherent in each configuration of scientific practices that manages both to provide a leeway of possible involvements of what is ready-to-hand in its own context and to disentangle what is constituted from the context, thereby representing the disentangled things as relatively stable objects amenable to a characterization by math-

¹⁸ On the notion of science’s spaces of representation see, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a history of epistemic things: synthesizing proteins in the test tube*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

¹⁹ See Patrick Heelan, “Natural Science as Hermeneutic of Instrumentation,” *Philosophy of Science*, 50(1983), pp. 181-204.

ematically idealized predicates. In the natural sciences, each scientific practice is at once a device of reading something ready-to-hand and a means for objectifying something (as an experimental outcome, a formalized object characterized by the possible values of parameters expressible by measurement scales, an idealized replica of a phenomenal system, a data-model, a physical system's behavior that consists in changing states over time and so on). Thus, the employment of readable technologies within spaces of scientific representation correlates necessarily with objectifying something that is characterized by a stable semantic (for instance, the empirical content of a theoretical concept, or the possible models of a theory's mathematical formalism).

More generally, the interpretative process of reading is always complemented by a process of semantic codification of what gets read. Yet the entities and structures which are objectified and semantically codified remain within horizons of possible further reading. Their semantic content is always predicated on a contextual underdetermination that is to be related to Quine's criteria of the existence of science's objects. The objectified entities are distinguished by verifiable predicates in a manner that allows their identification through procedures subjected to epistemological norms. In this regard, interpretative fore-structuring means anticipating (seeing, having and grasping in advance) the ascertainment of a formalizable and verifiable predicate of an entity that is "always already" within the configuration of practices which gives rise to the predication. In addressing the hermeneutic fore-structuring with regard to the predicates assigned to the epistemologically identifiable objects, one is preoccupied with the contextual reading/representing that delineates those phenomena which are to be included in the predicate's extension. Scientific practices manage to read something-*as*-something (thereby retaining its status of something ready-to-hand) while the reading process singles out verifiable predicates. Here the "*as*" has the character of a "hermeneutic *as*". It is the modes of employing readable technologies that work against increasing the contextual underdetermination, without destroying the primacy of the "hermeneutic *as*" of interpretation.

On this account, the way in which the semantic codification (of what is actualized in a configuration of scientific practices) complements the interpretative openness of reading proves to be a derivate of a more general complementarity within the reading process of scientific research – that between contextu-

alizing interpretation and objectifying predication that makes present. By means of this complementarity the reading process of scientific research succeeds in reducing not only the contextual underdetermination, but most of all its epistemological indeterminacy. The modes of employing readable technologies in scientific research bring into play a participants' reflexivity about the fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception of their reading within contextualized spaces of representation. In engaging in such reflexivity they constantly make explicit the proto-normativity embedded in the hermeneutic fore-structure. This proto-normativity comes to the surface as explicit epistemological norms and criteria, whereby one is able to set up constraints on the indeterminacy of interpretation.

It is the complementarity between contextualizing interpretation and objectifying predication that specifies the hermeneutic fore-structuring as a *characteristic hermeneutic situation*. Making proto-normativity explicit helps one to define the balance between interpretation and objectification within the research process' reading. This balance transcends the particular situations (configurations of practices) of scientific research. The hermeneutic fore-structure is inevitably situationally circumscribed. It is palpable through the fore-having, fore-seeing, and fore-grasping the research objects which become constituted by actualizing possibilities projected by the situation's configuration of practices. The triad of fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception is "inscribed" in the readable technologies and the spaces of representation put forward by the configuration. The particular hermeneutic fore-structure gets changed when the configuration of practices is modified, and the research process is accordingly re-contextualized. The new regime of contextual reading is projected upon new possibilities. Yet, in contrast to the particular interpretative fore-structures of reading, the hermeneutic fore-structuring of a research process is potentially ceaseless. The reading taking place in a research process is characterized by constitutive hermeneutic features that persist in the particular situations, contexts, and changing configurations. A characteristic hermeneutic situation encompasses these features, and refers to the research process *en bloc*. It characterizes the continuous hermeneutic fore-structuring of this process.

Let me finally change slightly the perspective. Thanks to the complementarity between contextualizing interpretation and objectifying predication the contextually operative "hermeneutic as" in the research process fore-structures the

structure of objectification by means of which something acquires the status of *an epistemologically identifiable object*. Thus considered, the objects exist in accordance with the epistemological norms and criteria of its identification. Quine's celebrated dictum that to exist means to be a value of quantifiable variable provides the standard criterion for identifying and authenticating objects' existence within a theoretical framework. On another Quinean formulation, closer to the doctrine of ontological commitment, scientists use variables ranging over mathematical entities and are committed to their existence. Such criteria give answers to the question as to how to identify the existence of (mathematical, theoretical, experimental and other) objects within the discursive framework by means of which the respective objectification has been put into play.

Granted that the objectifying predication is at the same time a de-contextualization of entities that have been read in contextualized spaces of representation, a characteristic hermeneutic situation is defined by a balance between contextualization and de-contextualization as well. Idealization, formalization, and deductive-nomological explanation are typical practices of de-contextualization. Yet these practices are always contextualized by being involved in configurations with other practices. De-contextualization in scientific research is indispensably contextualized, and fore-structured. By implication, the epistemological norms and criteria tied up to de-contextualizing practices can only constrain the interpretative contextualization by being at the same time interpretatively fore-structured. To sum up, elaborating on the concept of characteristic hermeneutic situation promises a philosophical universalizing of hermeneutics that leaves enough room for a non-representationalist epistemology.