

Schleiermacher defined hermeneutics as the art of avoiding misunderstanding. To exclude by controlled, methodical consideration whatever is alien and leads to misunderstanding - misunderstanding suggested to us by distance in time, change in linguistic usages, or in the meanings of words and modes of thinking - that is certainly far from an absurd description of the hermeneutic endeavour. (1976: 7)⁴

In Schleiermacher's hands the hermeneutical task moves beyond the mere philological considerations of textual exegesis and towards a more philosophical concern with the possibility of understanding. By grounding hermeneutics on the concept of understanding, Schleiermacher initiated the shift of the problem of hermeneutics to its present philosophical level. This shift contains, in his conceptualization, echoes of the Kantian impulse in its attempt to reach beyond particular interpretations in order to comprehend the general, universal act of understanding, which Kant construes as an expression of reason in his *Critique*.

This transcendental turn toward the process of understanding in Schleiermacher is complemented by his linguistic interpretation of it. Conceiving understanding as analogous to the act of speaking, he underlines the linguistic basis of both activities. Linguistic competence underpins the ability to understand and to speak, and the act of understanding is the reverse of the act of speaking. But 'proper understanding is a coalescence of two 'moments': the grammatical, aimed at the comprehension of language of the utterance but excluding authorial intentions, and the psychological, which is geared towards identifying the speaker's individuality, intentions within the utterance, which operates on a deeper, 'divinitory' level than the merely verbal

1. Psychological interpretation is higher when one regards language exclusively as a means by which a person communicates his thoughts. Then grammatical interpretation is employed only to clear away initial difficulties.

⁴Gadamer of course, is concerned with more than preventing possible misunderstandings: 'But the question rises as to whether the phenomenon of understanding is defined appropriately when we say that to understand is to avoid misunderstanding. Is it not, in fact, the case that every misunderstanding presupposes a "deep common accord"?' (1976: 7)