

## Conference Paper

# Understanding the Core Ideas of Hermeneutics Figures

T. Prakoso<sup>1</sup> and V. Khasanah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Terbuka, Jalan Cabe Raya, South Tangerang, Banten 15418, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>State University of Jakarta, Jalan Rawamangun Muka, East Jakarta 13220, Indonesia

## Abstract

This article will talk about core ideas of hermeneutics figures bearing many concepts in the interpretation discipline. Those core ideas are crucial because the scope, postulation, and hypotheses are very comprehensive due to philosophical language making it hard work to understand them. The research methodology applied in this article is qualitative library research. Based on the analysis, it was found that Friederich Schleiermacher was the founding father of hermeneutics. His well-known theory is about intuitive interpretation or intuition-based interpretation. The other problem with this article is about highlighting the other figures' contribution. Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, Betti, and Hirsch have opposing ideas, albeit somehow identical in some senses, in regard to hermeneutics. Nevertheless, they had an enormously significant impact in hermeneutics. On the other hand, Ricoeur and Habermas impacted hermeneutics differently by introducing new concepts. Ricoeur popularized hermeneutic phenomenology while Habermas claimed the importance of dialogue in understanding a meaning that had three crucial aspects in this world: an objective, social, and subjective world.

**Keywords:** core ideas, hermeneutics figures, intuition-based interpretation

Corresponding Author:

T. Prakoso  
 teguh3t@gmail.com

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## 1. Introduction

Hermeneutics is basically a branch of a discipline closely related to language [1]. We think, interpret, talk, and write using language. Put simply, life cannot be separated from using language activities. As a consequence, we need hermeneutics to live in society; we need a language interpretation [2]. Moreover, there are things requiring deeper and more intensive interpretation, for example interpreting why the dance form of "Bedaya Ketawang Jogjakarta" is firmer than "Bedaya Ketawang Surakarta" or why Jumenengan Dalem Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X gets on his golden chariot without his empress and sits on the right. In these two contexts, hermeneutics works

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as a basis to interpret the ancient script describing the reasons for the two phenomena [3]. There must be reasons underlying the mentioned phenomena.

Realizing the complex relationship between thought, feeling, utterance, and action, we will always be in a continual process of interpreting and understanding. In dealing with this relationship, hermeneutics emerges as a new way to cope with language despite its limited scale [4]. Some figures, bearing or working with hermeneutics theories, have various descriptions to analyze what hermeneutics is and how it works. In order to understand the key figures better, this paper will provide some of the core ideas of important hermeneutics figures, from Friederich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emilio Betti, Hirsch Jr, and Jurgen Habermas, to Paul Ricoeur.

## 2. Methods

A qualitative descriptive research methodology is applied in this article [5]. Data about the hermeneutics figures were collected from websites and relevant books. In every reference, crucial data regarding the essential ideas were collected in the form of a description of the perspective scope. Then, the description is compared with the core ideas of the hermeneutics figures. The methodology is simple but matched with the objectives of this article.

## 3. Results

Based on the data analysis, the descriptions of the highlighted figures are as follows.

### 3.1. Friederich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)

Schleiermacher was a hermeneutics figure who introduced the concept of intuition [6]. Schleiermacher, considered to be the father of hermeneutics, attempted to understand life by constructing imaginatively the situation of an era, the psychological condition of the author, and providing self-empathy. He thought that hermeneutics was a means to raise philology and every branch of interpretation to the level of *Kunstlehre*, a collection of methods that is an unrestricted only partial interpretation by bringing this discipline into general interpretation principles.

Schleiermacher's core ideas are as follows [7]:

1. In interpreting texts

Schleiermacher introduced two crucial concepts of hermeneutics: grammatical and psychological interpretation. The most vital principle of grammatical interpretation is divided into two aspects. The first is that everything requiring accuracy of meaning can be done only in a language context—another term for “culture”—used in the author and public context. The second aspect is about determining to mean from a body of text by referring to its consistency with the words around it.

2. In relation to grammatical comprehension

Schleiermacher states that readers can combine words and sentences because they are described from language lexicons and follow grammatical rules. However, readers can also understand the intensity besides words with the shadow of existence and the same situation. Furthermore, readers can separate general truth known by common people and speakers. Schleiermacher’s concept covers empathy as intuitive linguistic analysis. It is one of the sources in communication theory proposing that ideas in modern communication theory are only based on decoding understanding to restrict information.

3. An interpreter must construct imaginatively authors’ mental condition from their linguistic competence and background.

4. Grammatical interpretation derives from the general discourse of a certain language, culture, or psychological interpretation based on an author’s subjectivity. Readers attempt to construct the subjectivity so that they know the author’s intention. The construction should be better than how they know their literary works.

5. An interpreter is always either holistic or partial. The interpreter is unlikely to understand an object as a particular part without referring to the whole context. This concept later became famous as the concept of the hermeneutics circle with no start or end. This concept cannot be solved by structural logic, but by using intuitive or psychological interpretation.

6. There is three steps required to comprehend hermeneutics: (i) scale of interpretation and mechanical understanding: daily understanding and interpretation of activities related to common topics; (ii) scientific scale: experience- and observation-based interpretation; (iii) artistic scale: rule-free interpretation liberating the use of imagination.

Finally, Schleiermacher stated that the success of an interpreter is in understanding the true intention of authors, or in a further context, authors understand themselves as interpretation highlights their hidden motivation and strategy. Therefore, it needs “inner insight” (Anschauung) or obvious intuition to comprehend a text.

### 3.2. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911)

Wilhelm Dilthey was a hermeneutics figure from Germany. His beliefs differed from his predecessor, Schleiermacher. Dilthey argued that the historical factor was a vital part of hermeneutics. He developed an integrally comprehensive philosophical belief that was not restricted by metaphysical dogma or dimmed by assumption. His core ideas include the following [8]:

1. Hermeneutics is basically historical. This means that meaning does not stop for a certain period, but keeps changing based on the historical modification. Thus, the interpretation seems liquid as it has no fixed rules and laws to follow.
2. Due to its historical aspect and nonmental activity, authors do not have authority over text, but the history determines the meaning.
3. Hermeneutics is regarded as the foundation of *Geisteswissenschaften*. It is the core of all social and humanistic disciplines: all disciplines interpreting mental and psychological expressions of human life in the form of attitude expression, historic act, law codification, and literary work or literature.
4. Interpreting is considered the same as understanding, so it is different to explaining. Interpreting in the scope of understanding is a process of comprehending text as a part of the historical expression. Thus, what is produced are meanings that bear texts, not the psychological condition of authors.
5. Historical events can be apprehended from three different ways. They are understanding the point of view or the idea of the original author, understanding their activity purposes related directly to historical events and investigating those events based on ideas employed when the historians were alive.
6. The meaning of history is found in overlapping dynamic systems in the historical process. Therefore, all historical events should be reinterpreted every generation.

### 3.3. Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)

Heidegger was one of the hermeneutics figures who specialized in the idea of objective phenomenology. He developed Edmund Husserl's idea supporting the notion that interpretation, objectively, is likely to use his transcendental phenomenology method. It requires a subjective connection between the interpreter's life world, one's experience of the world, and will [9]. Heidegger's main concepts include the following:

1. The situation of understanding is not only mediated by future knowledge or the sensitivity of a situation but is also compared to the interpreter's life world.
2. As a need for humans, being in the world, a certain thing is accepted based on how it is compiled and used together with other daily routines. This kind of understanding should be completed historically in the construct of understanding from future knowledge accumulation (horizon of hope).
3. Heidegger brings hermeneutics from the theory of interpretation to existential theory because recent understanding is regarded as no longer a conscious component of the bigger design. This is realized without a planned and special situational context in the effect of a limited calculation source.

Despite the facts, interpretation (*Auslegung*) depending on existential understanding (*Verstehen*) based on a common logical method is not found in classical philology. However, it refers to the cognitive consciousness of a certain world. Based on Heidegger, the knowledge horizon is accumulated with the time approaching its end and makes self-conscious experience unable to decide what aspects of knowledge based on the knowledge horizon are put back in the self-process specialization.

### 3.4. Hans-Georg Gadamer

Gadamer was one of the hermeneutics figures who introduced circular understanding. He also assumed that readers understand the history of a text (text, historical experience). He rejected an opinion as reconstructing the past by omitting interpreters' personality in the interpreting process [10]. Some of Gadamer's basic ideas regarding hermeneutics are listed below.

1. Interpreters and texts are always tied to each other's tradition.
2. The interpreters always have a pre-understanding knowledge of the texts they are going to interpret. Moreover, it is unlikely that they will interpret from a

neutral viewpoint. Interpretation can work only from the fusion of horizon. It is about matching the pre-understanding knowledge and horizon of meaning in the texts.

3. A proper interpretation should maintain its openness to the content of the text, let the assumption of interpreters change, and be evaluated in relation to the preconception of the interpreters. By letting the past, texts communicate with the interpreters known as the logic of question and answer.
4. Interpreters must be situated outside the relation and tradition produced by texts (effective consciousness about history). This is to bring the situation to the level of interpreters' horizon consciousness.
5. Text horizons are open and separated. Gadamer argues that the text horizon can be found from its metrics distance and meaning production.
6. Correct/proper understanding is an illusion because it is against the essence of understanding. Therefore, the pre-understanding labeled negative in theoretical hermeneutics is regarded as being vital due to its capacity to enrich the interpreted objects.
7. Four important factors play a vitally significant role in interpreting: (i) *Bildung*: constructing a way of thinking; (ii) *sensus communis*: the same practical consideration; (c) consideration: classifying certain things based on universal assumption; and (iii) taste: the balance between sense instinct and intellectual freedom.

In the end, Gadamer revealed that interpreting is no longer reproductive but is productive. For him, hermeneutics is a reflection of the whole way in which humans understand the world and expressions of that understanding.

### 3.5. Emilio Betti

Emilio Betti was an Italian hermeneutics figure worked as a historian in the law sector. Betti was a follower of Dilthey who intended to explain a general theory about how human objectification can be interpreted. Betti proposed a concept of interpretation object autonomy and the possibility of historical objectification to make a valid interpretation. Betti's conception is the opposite to Gadamer's view [11]. Gadamer, a follower of Heidegger, emphasized his hermeneutics orientation in a more philosophical question regarding what is meant by understanding itself. Some of Betti's important key ideas are listed below.

1. Betti intended to differentiate between methods or styles of various interpretations of human discipline and to formulate a foundational framework of principles employed to interpret humans' intention and behavior.
2. Betti's hermeneutics focus was on the objective essence of interpretation. He did not aim to eliminate the subjective aspect of interpretation but only affirmed any possible function of subjectivity in interpretation. He emphasized that an object will remain an object and objective interpretation is worth attempting and finishing.
3. An interpretation object is the objectification of the human spirit expressed in the form of feeling.

As well as the latter key concepts, Betti also delivered some hermeneutics norms as follows:

1. Interpreters' subjectivity should illuminate the unfamiliarity of objects.
2. There is an inner relation between an individual's utterance part caused by limited meaning totality, meaning constructed from individual parts (meaning context).
3. There is a topicalization process. This is an aspect related to interpreters' integrity and present purpose and is involved in every interpretation process.

### 3.6. E.D. Hirsch Jr

Hirsch Jr is one of the hermeneutics figures who disagree with Gadamer's ideas. He is a Dilthey follower countering Heideggerian hermeneutics and new hermeneutics. He formulates some key ideas as follows [12]:

1. Authors' intention must be norms placing measured validity of interpretation (an explanation of the verbal meaning of texts).
2. Authors' intention is a deciding entity. It causes objective collectable acts. Thus, when those facts are gathered, meaning will be born and admitted as something universal. Verbal meaning of texts determined by incentive analysis and the significance of identical works are two different cases at the present.
3. Hermeneutics is not aimed at obtaining the present significance of texts, but in describing the verbal meaning because hermeneutics is a philology discipline constructing basics so the requirements of an event's verbal meaning can be reached.

4. It is believed that text meaning, in the scope of verbal meaning, is changeable. Because of this, there is no fixed rule to identify whether an event can be interpreted well.

Hirsch claims that verbal meaning factually cannot be separated from significance because (a) we can differentiate what is intended in a work/text for the author and reader; and (b) on the contrary, the repeated objective meaning is impossible.

### 3.7. Paul Ricoeur

Ricoeur was a hermeneutics figure who introduced hermeneutics phenomenology. This kind of hermeneutics combines general hermeneutics with continental philosophy covering phenomenology and structuralism. He attempted to do an influential synthesis of phenomenology and hermeneutics. The basic reason is that both of the disciplines have closely related aspects.

Ricoeur differentiates two approaches to discovering hidden meaning [13]. They are:

1. Demitologisasi is an approach to reveal hidden meaning and symbols without damaging them. This approach comes from Bultmann, a modern theologian. This approach treats symbols as a window of pure reality and they try to reach it.
2. Demistisasi is an approach to reach hidden meaning by breaking symbols to show their existence as a wrong reality based on Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. This approach assumes that symbols are a wrong reality. Therefore, illusion needs to be exposed and reread, so the emerging point of view is a childish illusion in teenagers' period of thinking.

Basically, Ricoeur plans to combine hermeneutics and phenomenology to show the hermeneutics problem. It develops from epistemology to ontology scope. Furthermore, they are about concepts to understand history and historical experience. Ricoeur thought of two ways to combine them. The first is from ontology understanding as formulated by Heidegger and Gadamer in phenomenology design. The second is to adopt Husserl's phenomenology and apply phenomenology understanding to humans' daily life.

### 3.8. Jurgen Habermas

Habermas is a hermeneutics figure who has stated that basic understanding needs dialogue because understanding is a process of cooperation requiring its participants to



connect with each other in real life [14]. There are three aspects in this world: objective, social, and subjective world.

Habermas affirms that understanding will be experiential if it is connected to four concepts of action. They are as follows.

1. A theological act is understandingly depicting purpose with the basic concept lying on the decision.
2. A normative act is understanding marking normative notions. The action is aimed at social group members with the fulfilling norm as the basic concept.
3. An act of Dramaturgik is understanding through artificial actions to deceive common society, so the main concept is in the surface image.
4. A communicative act treats understanding as a connecting event between languages in the context of time and space. To reach understanding through language, the instruction is required, a kind of coordinated action mechanism.

## 4. Conclusion

In explaining their views, these hermeneutics figures have their own strengths and weaknesses. The strengths and weaknesses will trigger clashes between Diltheyian and Heideggerian groups. Both of them have their own arguments to formulate hypotheses. However, from the different ideas of the figures, some of whom lived decades or a hundred years ago, it should be understood that those figures have a deep and dedicated focus and attention towards the development of hermeneutics as a discipline. Therefore, we can see the advantages in the study of interpretation nowadays.

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