

## **Hermeneutics 'Reloaded': From Science/Philosophy Dichotomy to Critical Hermeneutics**

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### **Abstract**

*Currently, hermeneutics is no longer a koinè, yet it pervades the field of human knowledge on different and diverse levels. With the decline of philosophical hermeneutics, the inheritance of a rich tradition of thought, there remains some very important problematic and speculative cornerstones and a poorly ordered horizon of hermeneutical practices and procedures, more or less technical and/or speculative. From this composite picture the (negative) possibility of truths without method and methods without truth or validity emerges; and therefore, again, emerge the problems of consistency, rigour and philosophical legitimacy, and the risk of non-rational seductions and/or ideological distortions. From another point of view, philosophy and reflection within hermeneutical traditions have elaborated sufficient critical content and devices for the definition of an organised, rigorous and controlled model of a comprehensive procedure. From this perspective, Paul Ricoeur's philosophical work seems emblematic. From his philosophy it is possible to extract a general model of a non-philosophically-engaged hermeneutical method, which is valuable for the human and social sciences as well as a useful procedure for interdisciplinary work. This is critical hermeneutics: a specific form of speculative and theoretical hermeneutics whose methodological and epistemological foundation*

*mirrors the new form of the contemporary hermeneutic-scientific koinè.*

**Keywords:** critical hermeneutics, ontology, epistemology, fact, value, ideology

## **1. Introduction: Hermeneutics' Persistent Legitimacy and Its Paradoxes**

I am in full agreement with what David Pellauer says at the start of his 2014 paper, 'Work to Be Done', dedicated to hermeneutics and its current task. Indeed, even more, the hypothetical and circumstantial position according to which we can overlook the distinction between philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutic philosophy is *generalised* on the basis of the assumption that: 'hermeneutic philosophy is philosophy that takes seriously the question of interpretation in relation to understanding, where understanding is both the result of interpretation and, quite paradoxically, also what motivates interpretation in the first place' (Pellauer, 2014: 1). The only distinction that is necessary, and to which we will return later, is between hermeneutics as a technique and hermeneutics as philosophy. It is a distinction that has aspects of overlap and interrelation to the extent that, on the one hand, the technique is nourished by and involved in theoretical and methodological research, and on the other, philosophy is also exercised on a theoretical-methodological level. In fact, it is around the relationship between interpretation and comprehension that the legitimacy and speculative value of hermeneutics is at stake. This relationship defines the terrain of its problematicness and opens up the space to a series of quasi-paradoxical, if not fully paradoxical, aspects.

With Pellauer, I say: '(...) we exist as understanding, understanding ourselves, others, our world, things in that world, our

possibilities in that world' (3). Actually, Schleiermacher already explained that hermeneutics' role or end is not interpretation, but understanding: *Verstehen als die Aufgabe der Hermeneutik* (Die Aphorismen, 1805). This is the source of the epistemic, cognitive and speculative strength of hermeneutics, because it enables hermeneutics to move beyond the one-dimensionality of analytical-descriptive and scientific-explanatory knowledge, and to synthesise knowledge data, values, creation of meaning and inspiration in a unified theoretical practical synthesis, closer to both the human being and life-world reality than emerges by calculation and measurement only. However, this is also the source of the epistemic, cognitive and speculative weakness of hermeneutics, constantly driven to be articulate between truth and evaluation, knowledge and interest, reality and ideology. A discipline capable of actively supporting and nurturing both nihilistic and relativistic conceptions as well as positive and affirmative conceptions reveals all about its flexibility, ambivalence and ambiguity. On the other hand, however, some degree of mixtures of the same kind does not lack even the so-called 'analytic' and scientific knowledge, as above all, today, that much analytic thought advances a purely ideological pretence of purity and perfection, and much scientific knowledge conceals an idolatry of human intelligence, manipulability of nature and the possibilities of technology.

The problem is deep, and it is deeper than the problem of knowledge. In some way, hermeneutics establishes and maintains as radical and perpetual the problematicness of truth, value, goodness/rightness and legitimacy with regards to knowing, acting, doing and even existing. And everything is knotted on the point of (evident) precedence and the greater degree of completeness and significance of understanding on knowing.

Through this, I am not supporting the reasoning behind the ontological or ontological existential anchorage of understanding to the Being as intended by Heidegger and Gadamer, I am just suggesting that hermeneutical understanding is the form of human existence as *human existence* that is, in his/her relations with himself/herself, with his/her *Erlebnisse*, with others and the environmental context, with values and the world and even with abstract and transcendent ideas. (In fact, knowing is inevitably anchored to some guiding interest, and there is no need to bother the young Habermas to grasp this point). Even without embracing the ontological-existential idea of the grounding of understanding within the Being, one can grasp the truth, validity and scope of what Schleiermacher already pointed out: namely that *only* by means of hermeneutics does the child arrive at the meaning of words (*Jedes Kind kommt nur durch Hermeneutik zur Wortbedeutung; Die Aphorismen*, 1805). Conversely, without contravening this thesis, science is today able to identify with precision and in a structured formula the concatenation of neurobiological, cognitive and functional processes that make a child's interaction with the mother and the world possible and therefore leading to his/her mental and experiential evolution.

Thus, point of strength of hermeneutics is also its point of weakness, and this is not the only paradoxical element that characterises it:

(I) Philosophically, we no longer live in the season of hermeneutics, but that of analytic philosophy (of mind and of language). Today is the season of rooting (and radicalisation) on the naturalistic pragmatist paradigm. Hermeneutics no longer has the pervasiveness of a *koinè* (see Vattimo, 1987), except within a certain circle of followers and believers. Yet philosophical hermeneutics remains and continues to affect many disciplines and scientific

research: from dynamic and relational psychology to neurophenomenology, from social psychology to critical and qualitative-interpretative sociology, from theory of law to literature, and from history to political theory, etc. Today, hermeneutics is no longer *koinè*, and yet it persists in pervading the field of human knowledge.

(II) With the decline of philosophical hermeneutics, the teachings of an important tradition of thought remain, as well as it remains a series of speculative residuals, fertile problematic issues, and a not well-ordered horizon of hermeneutical practices and procedures.

From this variegated picture the (negative) possibility of truths without method and methods without truth or validity emerges; and therefore, again, there emerges the problem of consistency, rigour philosophical legitimacy, as well as the risk of non-rational and ideological seductions and distortions. However, from a different point of view, philosophy (in general) and hermeneutics (more specifically) have elaborated sufficient critical content and devices for the definition of an organised, rigorous and controlled model of a comprehensive procedure. The case of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical work seems emblematic from this point of view. A general and generalisable model of hermeneutical procedure can be extracted from his philosophy that does not implicate an ideological or a value-speculative personal engagement.

(III) The hermeneutical solution generates the problem, and the nature of the problem determines only one type of possible solution: that of a huge philosophical downsizing, in favour of a more meaningful theoretical practical generalisation. To renounce speculative dogmatism or school adherence is not the same as renouncing the truth; and renouncing hermeneutical radicalisation does not mean renouncing rigour, abandoning the primacy of philosophy, or suffering cultural diminution. Rather, more than ever

today, it is necessary to start from the datum that all forms of philosophical knowledge and philosophical practice not equipped with self-reflection and self-criticism disposals are *already* oriented towards radicalisation and dogmatisation. The solution is to keep and practice *problematically*. The solution is to seek aporia and conflictual difficulty, that is, to exercise philosophy as a perpetual cognitive-procedural tension and as a tensional mediation between paradigms and knowledge. This is not the expression of restlessness of thought or mind: it is philosophical research in *scientific* form. Critical hermeneutics in all disciplinary domains can be a critical procedure of philosophy exercised around truth, value and meaning.

## **2. Hermeneutics Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow**

In contrast with the idea of hermeneutics as a new koinè of contemporary philosophy, today, the field of hermeneutics is more fragmented than ever. However, it is not fragmented by the effect of an analogous sectorial hyperspecialism at work in analytic philosophy; it is fragmented because it is an 'exploded' field. Hermeneutics is currently practised in the most varied, as productive as vague and weak, ways, and in such strict modalities as in uncontrolled multidisciplinary melting pots. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the contemporary philosophical panorama forms a fragmentary multiverse.

Wide diffusion of analytic philosophy in different theoretical-speculative and practical fields and territories does not represent the alternative answer, but rather is causally implicated in the problem. In one way or another all analytic philosophies are focused on fragments of fragments. This new characterisation of current philosophy has an uneasy framing in the history of thought and speculative traditions. Here too, the theoretical ground assumes an orderly arrangement according to the cultural perspective 'from

which' or 'for which' it is observed. This is immediately seen trying to determine a reasoned collocation of critical hermeneutics in relation to traditional philosophical hermeneutics. It can not be done by demonstration, by trial or by argumentation; it can only be done by *argumented statement*.

To classify Anglo-Saxon philosophy as 'analytic' in contrast to the European philosophy understood as 'Hermeneutical' still has certain diffusion. In his 1987 article, Gianni Vattimo noted since the 1980s in the U.S.A., hermeneutics has been used to qualify more or less all contemporary European-continental philosophy without distinctions between phenomenology, existentialism and hermeneutics. Thus, it has been considering Gadamer, Ricoeur, Derrida, Foucault, Apel and Habermas as members of the same hermeneutical family (see Vattimo, 1987: 4). In Europe, this is a still surprising simplification, even more surprising considering the growing number of areas and places in which analytic philosophy, not hermeneutic or phenomenology, is embraced and practised. There is no doubt: analytic philosophy is the new *koinè*.

Beyond this discourse, the framing of critical hermeneutics requires a specific determination about philosophical hermeneutics within the history of hermeneutics. The historical approach has been largely relevant, in this: in identifying in Schleiermacher's work the first starting point of hermeneutics as philosophy, and of a philosophical hermeneutics anchored to an exegetical tradition. In this sense, the work performed by Schleiermacher is significant and particular. His speculative developments on hermeneutical issues are closely intertwined with procedural and theoretical problems of hermeneutics as a technique. From here it has been possible to retrospectively anchor the whole philological, rhetorical and speculative tradition of Alexandrine hermeneutics to the advent of Judeo-Christian and patristic hermeneutics; from medieval exegesis

(Scoto Eriugena *et alii*) to Renaissance philology (Valla, Ficino, Luther *et alii*; according to Wilhelm Dilthey, scientific hermeneutics started with Protestantism; see. Dilthey, 1966: 597); from the seventeenth to eighteenth century biblical hermeneutics (Dannhauer, Ernesti, Vico *et alii*) to historical and (proper) philosophical hermeneutics (Vico, Herder).

Reflecting on critical hermeneutics in reference to contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, the first dilemma concerns the possibility of a specific intra-disciplinary framework or whether it refers not only to the historical diatribe between Gadamer, Bubner, Habermas, Apel, etc. but also to the models conceived for human and social sciences.

According to Javier Recas Bayón, the 'critical' adjective became paradigmatic and generalisable starting with Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (see Bayón, 2006: 22). According to him, despite being a broad and ambiguous concept, critical hermeneutics represents better than any other concept the perspectives of those who propose and require a critical extension of the hermeneutics of ontological affiliation. Human understanding is *critical*, and this critical understanding is ontologically rooted. Critical hermeneutics is a demystifying hermeneutics of the sense, and Ricoeur's idea of a hermeneutics of suspicion opposes the traditional idea of ontological hermeneutics as appropriation of meaning (see *Ib.*: 23).

This is the philosophical framework of critical hermeneutics according to Bayón. It is a wide frame, certainly interesting, but not without difficulties; above all, general historical philosophical difficulties due to a juxtaposition under the brand of 'critical hermeneutics' of philosophies as different as those of Gadamer and Habermas, Rorty and Derrida, Heidegger and Ricoeur.

According to Bayón, the *critical* element constitutes the cornerstone of a contemporary hermeneutic alternative with respect to the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics. Starting from Maurizio

Ferraris' articulation of contemporary hermeneutical philosophy in the three main areas of ontological, methodological and critical orientation, Bayón tries to reorganise, in an original way the speculative work of Gadamer, Habermas, Rorty, Derrida, Heidegger and Ricoeur, overcoming Ferraris' grid. He replaces these figures on the basis of the pre-eminence of the *critical* paradigm in contemporary philosophy. And within the framework of this enlarged conception of critical hermeneutics, Apel and Habermas are placed on the *foundationalist* front, while Ricoeur and others stay on the *anti-foundationalist* front.

This redetermination of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics certainly gives strength and significance to the critical line of hermeneutics. However, it places criticism along a mainly philosophical line. This is a *speculative* perspective that underestimates the specific potential of critical hermeneutics as a theoretical practical procedure. In addition, by extracting critical hermeneutics from Ricoeur's philosophy, the perspective appears different both speculatively and methodologically. It is true that Ricoeur's work explicitly mentions critical hermeneutics as a philosophy. In fact, the notion of 'critical hermeneutics' is used by him to define the field of his philosophical exercise of *tensional mediation* between Gadamer's hermeneutics of tradition and Habermas' critique of ideology. However, I am referring to the indirect qualification of Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics by considering his philosophical work as a whole and (then) by extracting from it his general procedural approach (see Ricoeur 1973; see Busacchi, 2013: 81–127; see Busacchi 2015).

Where all philosophical hermeneutics seems outdated, or reduced and transfigured into some deconstructive, nihilistic or post-speculative formulation, the path of critical hermeneutics seems to remain open and extremely fertile even for philosophical research.

And this requires reconsidering the entire theoretical-speculative and practical field of philosophical hermeneutics, keeping the aim of reconsideration from the procedural point of view. The challenge of a rigorous interpretation, of an interpretation as a scientific process, is the same as that posed by Emilio Betti in his *Teoria generale dell'interpretazione* in 1955. However Betti's enterprise is in some way philosophically bound to and limited by Heidegger and Gadamer's ontological perspective to which it is opposed. Where the latter understand hermeneutics in the circular movement between the Being-there (or presence; *Dasein*) and the Being (*Sein*), and therefore hermeneutics as expression and production of the Being. Betti persists in considering hermeneutics philosophically, embracing the relationship between the subject and the world and indirectly between the subject and the Being. To him, hermeneutics is the clarification or, rather, the recognition of the Being and the world; and, therefore, hermeneutics is conceived as a clarification or, better, *recognition* of the Being through the world (see Ferraris, 1998: 96–97). The problem is that this alternative generates a partial rigidity (for objectification and historicisation) on an ontological conception that requires redefinition. It is not only ontology that can be defined in alternative ways, without an exclusive focus on the Being or the world, but the problem of rigour in interpretation is *one* among many other problems concerning critical hermeneutics validity. Moreover, validity and rigour are not the only decisive components for determining and recognising the significance and productivity of the critical and scientific applications of hermeneutics.

### **3. Hermeneutics and Ontology**

With critical hermeneutics, I do not intend to take the path of a methodology. This, in fact, would be a withdrawal on the technical matrix of hermeneutics and even an abandonment of critical

hermeneutics work as a philosophical commitment. The challenge consists in rigorously articulating a hermeneutic theory as a *theory* and as a *speculative procedure*. Ricoeur's philosophy shows the concrete possibility of this dual path: on the one hand, a tensional exercise of mediation between Gadamer's hermeneutics of tradition and Habermas' critique of ideology is an example of speculative use (and interpretation) of critical hermeneutics; on the other hand, his use of and approach to philosophy follows a non-speculative procedural model.

There is first an obstacle to be clarified that concerns the connection of this critical hermeneutics with the ontological problem. Obviously, because of its dual nature, critical hermeneutics can have a free hand in terms of philosophical use (ontology included). When used philosophically, critical hermeneutics can only introduce and implement elements of mediation and argumentative rigour, but within a philosophical space that remains freely passable (even from neo-Heideggerians, neo-Derridians, etc.). More interesting is, however, the extra-speculative application of hermeneutics as a critical procedure, particularly in its coordinated functioning with science. In no way does this constitute a negation of the relation between hermeneutics and ontology, nor is it a matter of redefining the nature of this relationship; rather it (re)establishes *what ontology is*. The ancient claim of a certain philosophical hermeneutics to establish itself as ontology is part of a determined history. Not all hermeneutics said, says and can say with Nietzsche: 'facts do not exist, only interpretations'; nor is all hermeneutics interested in the experience of the Being in a Transcendent or Pantheistic sense (as Heidegger and others did). Neither more nor less than scientific work, hermeneutics remains close to the ontological discourse insofar as it deals with facts and with the interpretation of facts. In this context, the downsizing of what is the content of ontology parallels critical

hermeneutics with scientific discourse, revealing at the same time its specificity.

Critical hermeneutics does not have an idea of the primacy of interpretation because it is an exercise that (as we will see it) is articulated between description, explanation and comprehension, under a properly interpretive linking functioning. Here is the operation of critical hermeneutics: *to describe, to know, to understand* and *to evaluate* how a state of things is or must be, by considering as 'a state of things' the following cases: natural objects, social elements, cultural products, psychic (or internal) states, dispositions, actions and values. Here a functioning at both theoretical and practical level is involved. In addition, there is a meta-theoretical plan for the application of critical hermeneutics; and it is here that a first specificity aspect emerges. To the extent that knowing, understanding and evaluating things and states of things involves language, conceptual networks and a (pre-)theoretical framework, critical hermeneutics can work flexibly to adapt its procedures and functioning to the form and logic of a given descriptive construction, of a given legitimated system, etc. This is not a relativistic or *debole* approach in a philosophical sense. It is a principle of rigour in relation to a due referential paradigm or a transcendental ideal, as well as a further possibility of support for scientific and non-scientific knowledge. The possibility and effectiveness of a truth as truth remains: there is, in fact, a state and reality of the world beyond the historical-cultural framework of our way of living and knowing, as well as there is a true state of the past, about how things have happened, that is independent from means and the cognitive, reconstructive, interpretative and representative resources we have today. Certainly, there are those who *believe* that we are nothing more than 'brains in a bath', but where not understood in the original sense of a mental experiment (Putnam)

this discourse is just valid as a mythology, as a thesis without consistency and is useful for nihilistic believers only.

Critical exercise of hermeneutics also concerns science at a more philosophical level, insofar as the latter is becoming increasingly involved with metaphysics. I say more: that today science is tightening more dangerously with a certain radicalised ontology, contributing to the strengthening of a metaphysic credo around *only biological and natural data*. To illustrate this point, it is opportune to set the problem in the Husserlian formulation (as Husserl's *Krisis* suggests), to which critical hermeneutics offers elements of correlation and alternative. 'Correlation', because the phenomenological point of view introduces the discourse on the life-world, which is an application field for both eidetic-descriptive and hermeneutic philosophy; 'alternative', because the phenomenological approach remains trapped in a philosophical *a priori*, where critical hermeneutics can operate without or, rather, can take into account, an *a priori* in a non-exclusive way. The pre-eminence (or even radicalised antecedency) of a subject's point of view is this philosophical *a priori* of phenomenology. On the one hand, we have the paradigmatic model of science process as organised according to a categorial logic (in a more or less sophisticated Aristotelian sense), that is a categorism with a substantialist tendency. And here lies the root of the Parmenidism which, according to Enrico Nicoletti, forms metaphysics, and also science (see Nicoletti, 1989). In his re-reading of Husserl's *Krisis*, he points out how the German philosopher considered the correlation of philosophy and science within European or Western crisis of reason. Furthermore, he recalls that this crisis does not concern science as a methodologically constructed knowledge, but science as a global interpretation of life and reality (see Id.: 246). 'Science faces a crisis (...) when it elevates its own objectiveness to the authentic representation of the world and of life.

It is a dilation of the sense of science in which the true face of reality and life, from which science itself springs, remains concealed. In this context, science acquires a universal and necessary value: that is to say, it becomes philosophical. This is the fall of science into objectivism; it is becoming philosophy' (*Ib.*).

On the other hand, we have phenomenology, whose alternative system is expressive of a metaphysics of subjectivity, where the substantiality of the Cogito is opposed to the categorial substantiality: the subject is substance, therefore the life-world itself is transformed into a new metaphysical field. Phenomenology aims to play the role of liberator of science from its objectivism and representationism, which is a sick reflection of the crisis of modern rationality. At the same time, it aims to safeguard the methodology of science-technique; but it contrasts science's radicalisation with a new metaphysics of the subjective or a conscientialist metaphysics. It is certainly still significant that the phenomenological aim is exemplified by the eidetic motto *zurück zu den Sachen selbst!* The 'returning to the things themselves' is, in fact, a sign of the *return to the world*, which establishes and recognises the pre-eminent value of the world with respect to an objectivising and radicalised science. In Husserl's perspective, the fundamental operation that phenomenology must perform with respect to science is to define a foundation of a rigorous science of the life-world from which sciences are born, and with respect to which sciences owe relate in order to not lose the sense and limitation of their work. Therefore, the principle of scientific objectivity becomes *relative* to the transcendental foundation of the life-world, which is the only possible foundation, according to Husserl (see *Id.*: 245).

Critical hermeneutics, insofar as it is also exercised in problematic reference to its phenomenological anchorage, can remedy this risk of 're-sacralisation' and metaphysical relapse

precisely by exploiting the critical-reflexive function. In this way, it does not float on the surface of questions and problems, nor does it keep implicit or hidden any uncomfortable and 'powerful' truth. It simply operates under a domain of prevailing contingent commitment, and it can suspend its argumentative-demonstrative commitment concerning *last things*, which can be so much as not a motive of philosophical interest. To do and not be engaged on it does not imply an emptying of philosophical work value and meaning. Critical hermeneutics can support it as it can also evade it. And a similar argument is valid with respect to the (Husserlian) objective concerning the phenomenological reflective clarification lacking in science that is the sense of its own procedure. Here, hermeneutics can give a productive critical contribution without self-interpreting in the role of a re-foundational discipline and without entering into the field of ultimate implications. To give an example, the cosisation or dehumanisation determined by a radical scientist approach in the field of human relationships can be the subject of an effective criticism of the distortion of public communication or of psychological impoverishment or social alienation without 'inconveniencing' the ontological-existential discourse of an authentic or inauthentic existence as explained in Heidegger's early work, *Being and Time* (1927).

#### **4. Hermeneutics and Epistemology**

The renewed interest of the last 40 years of epistemological research for interpretation and the use of hermeneutical models and procedures in science is due, in particular, to the crisis of the neo-empiristic conception of scientific theories (Kuhn, Hanson, Feyerabend *et alii*; see Parrini 1998). The current scenario still remains fragmented and magmatic, with certain strongly polarised proposals (new scientism or new Parmenidism vs. relativism). It is

interesting to note how in all cases the problematic node remains the determination of what is objectivity and what are the possibilities and forms of valid knowledge.

And it is interesting to note how the distance between the alleged rigourism of natural science's methodologies and the 'problematically rigorous' character of the social and historical-hermeneutical sciences has now been reduced. There is an explicit hermeneutical problematisation (on truth, evaluation, procedure and interpretation) that is internal to the natural sciences' different methodologies (hypothetical-deductive, inductive, falsificationist methodology, etc.). And much methodological research in the social, historical and psychological fields aims at the application of non-hermeneutical models and therefore has an approach to the problem of interpretation under *determined procedural or epistemic aspects*. Paolo Parrini remarks the methodological parallelism that characterises the interpretative sciences and the natural sciences (Parrini, 1998: 15), by thematising the detailed comparison between the empirical process and the hermeneutical procedure that Adolf Grünbaum developed by studying Habermas and Ricoeur's interpretation of psychoanalysis (Grünbaum 1984). The methodological link is intertwined and strengthened through a redefinition of objectivity according to the critical-analytical analysis developed by Mary Hesse (Hesse, 1980), namely: (1) non-separability of data from theory; (2) theories not as hypothetical-deductive schemes but as a perceptive-cognitive classification of the facts themselves; (3) logical-theoretical synthesis in constituting facts and logical-causal correlations between facts; (4) metaphorical dimension of all the scientific language and of the representative constructions through which science interprets nature; and (5) terminological value given by the reference to the theory and not to the reality of the facts (170, 172–173; see Parrini, 1998: 15). Parrini

is able to strongly highlight the parallelism recalling (according to Gadamer) the two general and characteristic traits of the hermeneutic work: (1) the role attributed to the prejudices as conditions for understanding; and (2) the hermeneutic circle, that is the dependence of the whole comprehension from the single components (of a text) and vice versa the understanding of the single components starting from the whole. As Parrini explains, 'there is therefore a substantial similarity between the empirical and the hermeneutical method. Science also has to do with an equipped nature of conceptual assumptions and uses these same assumptions and experience data to develop hypotheses on specific issues' (17). Undoubtedly, this recognition is not limited to the interest represented by the parallel in itself, but it implies the implementation of a certain degree of *epistemic relativism*, both in the (prevalently) interpretative sciences and in the (prevalently) descriptive-explicative sciences. It is in this way that the problem arises of the compatibility of relativism with the possibility of objectivity and truth as the fundamental objective of scientific and hermeneutical practices (see Id.: 18). For Parrini, the alternatively viable ways are as follows: (1) the abandonment of the epistemological project for the hermeneutical one (that is the way exemplified by Richard Rorty's conversational position; see Id.: 20–22); (2) the awareness of subjective points of reference and intrasystemic value of objectivity (that is, the recognition of partial autonomy of cognitive experience with respect to epistemic conditioning: this is the way indicated by Hans Reichenbach and considered by Gadamer; see Id.: 23–24); (3) objectivity and truth as trans-regulatively transcendental ideals (see Id., 25–26). The latter, which is Parrini's privileged position, can be understood as a criterion applicable to the ambit of both the descriptive-explanatory and hermeneutical disciplines. At the same time, it is an *ideal* theoretical-philosophical position, since the

relativistic oscillation is not reducible to a threshold of neutrality. In other words, it is a referential transcendentalism, a *transcendental ideal*. Here is the transversality of hermeneutics and the indispensable hermeneutic-epistemological connection. Today, even for the empirical sciences has become impossible to formulate historical and purely formal criteria of scientificity. However, it is possible to compare theories with respect to the canons or values (Kuhn) that shape the scientific process according to its own progressive historical-knowing refinement (see Parrini, 2002: 156). Certainly, this can also take the path of a strong relativism, so that 'truth' and 'objectivity' are strongly conceived as inevitably connected and dependent on cultural adhesion and intersubjective participation, as it is at work within the procedural context of accreditation-recognition from a community of scientists.

Parrini does not have this in mind. He rather conceives the historical-cultural progress of methodological and epistemological knowledge as transcendent from a due historical-cultural context to the extent that it is *progressive*. This transcendentalist path aims to limit the relativistic drift and can be interestingly correlated with the analysis that Luigi Perissinotto proposes regarding the Donald Davidson vs. Michael Dummett diatribe on the objectivity of knowing or understanding. Dummett (Dummett, 1986: 464; see Perissinotto, 2002: 93–117) goes back to Ludwig Wittgenstein to refute Davidson's thesis that every understanding is inevitably interpretation. Dummett points out, as a Wittgenstein's central observation (around how to follow a rule), that 'there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation' (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, section 201); and, analogously, 'there is a way of understanding a sentence or an utterance that does not consist in putting an interpretation on it'. There is no absolute freedom or a completely decontextualised or ahistorical operating: to know and to follow the rules are intertwined

*with* the specific reality of a *form of life*. As Perissinotto remarks, if Platonism reifies and mythises the rules, who maintains the idea that between the rule and its particular applications there is always an interpretation he/she is denying and dissolving them. And with respect to these two outcomes, Wittgenstein's move consists in emphasising that it is in its *use* that a rule is a rule (see Id.: 114) As stated in section 202 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, 'obeying a rule is a practice'. The linguistic game is not a system of propositions to the foundation of which there would be certain propositions that are true in an evident, immediate and incontrovertible way. A foundation of the linguistic game is neither seeing nor knowledge but our acting. And this acting is not a blind acting that awaits a justification, nor an uncertain acting until the alternative basis for exclusion is found; nor is it an acting that can be chosen or abandoned in radical and absolute freewill (see Id.: 116–117). It is not the claim of eternity and absoluteness of the rules of scientific play that allows the rigour and certainty of advancement in knowledge; but rather the stability, consistency and continuity in life experience and within a due historical-cultural context of the rules given in a scientific game that determine its degree of truth, legitimacy and value. Change is possible but rules are not arbitrary. They are the result of the sedimentation of knowledge and know-how from generation to generation. They have become that canon or transcendental ideal on which we build a scale of certainty of knowledge and a scale of greater or lesser relativity, correctness, validity, credibility of a certain interpretation and knowledge.

## **5. Critical Hermeneutics**

Certainly, the *critical* determination of hermeneutics was a passage of secondary importance in Ricoeur's philosophical-hermeneutical evolution. He progressed from the paradigm of interpretation of

symbols and myths to the interpretation of symbols within psychic inner life, from the interpretation of metaphor and the text to narrative hermeneutics, from a description-interpretation of action and Self to the philosophy of translation and hermeneutics of recognition. However, within Ricoeur's work there are intrinsic possibilities to extract and develop a procedural methodology that are able to work both in/for a theoretical field and in/for a speculative field.

Today's specialisation and articulation of knowledge concerning the human being has determined a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, there is an increase in complexness and deepening of the universe of discourses referred to the human being, and these discourses are fragmented, not-harmonised and in different case are even contradictory; on the other hand, thanks to the human advancement in science, philosophy, culture and art, 'perhaps for the first time', it is concretely possible 'to encompass in a single question the problem of the unification of human discourse' (Ricoeur, 1970: 3).

In his 1965 essay on *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur expressed an ambivalent position towards such a problem: on the one hand, he expresses the clear position of a perspective of resolution of it via a (non-exactly determined) philosophy of language; on the other hand he expresses the effective possibility to apply and experience such an interdisciplinary-comprehensive-universalised knowledge or such a 'comprehensive philosophy of language' (4). He writes, in fact: 'I doubt (...) that such a philosophy could be elaborated by any one man. A modern Leibniz with the ambition and capacity to achieve it would have to be an accomplished mathematician, a universal exegete, a critic versed in several of the arts, and a good psychoanalyst' (*Ib.*).

Through his work, Ricoeur has explored and put in connection many different fields of scientific and non-scientific knowledge. His vast work, which is defined as fragmented, but somehow unified or continuous, touches and traverses hermeneutics, epistemology, religion, myth, rhetoric, linguistics, literature, history, political theory, psychology, psychopathology, neurobiology, law, anthropology, social science and more. He even puts in connection and intertwines different traditions and approaches: phenomenology, philosophical hermeneutics, reflective philosophy, psychoanalysis, structuralism, philosophy of language, philosophy of action, and more. Ricoeur's work offers in itself an example of how philosophy can play the mediatory role of an interdisciplinary analysis, theoretical synthesis and theoretical-practical correlation. Philosophy has a vast tradition or series of traditions. It has a vast, rich and varied conceptual and theoretical patrimony. It has a flexibility for theoretical-practical uses and applications that other disciplines do not / can not have.

In addition, Ricoeur's work, which is not a type of comprehensive philosophy of language but an interdisciplinary hermeneutical research based on description, interpretation and critical reflection, offers the concrete example of the potential of critical hermeneutics as a methodology and epistemology for culture and science (especially for human and social sciences).

In the important introductory essay entitled *From Text to Action* (1986), Ricoeur summarises the methodological set of reflective philosophy, phenomenology and hermeneutics that he followed in his research. Without any doubt, Ricoeur has followed this methodological perspective, but other aspects of his research and particularly his epistemological-procedural model called 'hermeneutic arc', has played an additional, important role. This model or theory suggests more than a reflective-based interpretative description, it suggests the idea of a hermeneutic-based philosophy exercised as a

theoretical and critical practice. Many explanatory and anchoring points are already present in Ricoeur's 1970 paper, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un texte? Expliquer et comprendre' (Ricoeur, 1970b). First, he encourages the connection between critical hermeneutics to the epistemology of the hermeneutic arc. Among Italian scholarly experts on philosophical hermeneutics, Franco Bianco was the one to have grasped the epistemological centrality of the hermeneutic arc theory, especially in reference to the broader contemporary debate around the philosophical discourse and its uses among the natural and the human-social sciences (see Bianco, 2002).

Secondly, there is an already indirect-but-established connection of critical hermeneutics to Freud's psychoanalysis. Because both the epistemological and methodological constitution of Ricoeur's theory of the hermeneutic arc is realised thematising the theories of text, action and history, but *even* by considering Freud's psychoanalysis problematic case as a productive example of a multi-epistemic and multi-methodological discipline; and thus, as a paradigmatic example of an *explanatory and interpretative* discipline and procedure.

Critical hermeneutics is an interdisciplinary engaged philosophy, exercised in theoretical-practical fields and as practical theory (see Busacchi, 2015). It is a methodological model that is descriptive as well as explanatory, interpretative as well as reflective and analytical as well as comprehensive. This is not a mixture of confusing free-functions but an articulated series of disposals coordinated with a certain degree of rigour and argumentative logic under the work of critical hermeneutics.

To conclude, by considering the more general and typical uses, factors and characteristics of Ricoeur's applications, we can summarise its main functions as follows: (1) the dialectical and dialogical approach as an ideal of theoretical and interdisciplinary research, as able to put different theories and disciplines in

productive connections; (2) the interdisciplinary approach as a method (which is mirrored in critical hermeneutics' open and transversal methodology and epistemology); (3) the mediatory function of an explicative-comprehensive argumentative approach on a theoretical and practical level; (4) the articulation and differentiation of the philosophical procedure by analytic-reflective *degrees*, theoretical and practical *levels*, thematic and disciplinary *domains*, and methodological *registers*; (5) the neutral-value use(s) of critical hermeneutics as an interdisciplinary approach; (5bis) the possibility to an evaluative use of critical hermeneutics as an applied, interpretative-argumentative philosophy of tension *and* mediation; (6) the reflective-hermeneutic work from non-philosophical dimensions to philosophical dimension and vice versa; (7) the prevalence in considering and using philosophy as a theoretical practice; and (8) the philosophical *engagement* within the real life, at a(n) cultural, ethical, civic, social and political level.

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