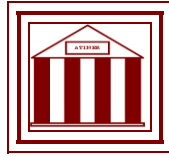


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**Universal Interpretation**

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## **Universal Interpretation**

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### **Abstract**

Hermeneutic interpretation entered modern thought with the Biblical exegesis of the Reformation, where it was employed to clarify and resolve the apparent incoherences, ambiguities and contradictions within and between scriptures. Subsequently it was employed in explicating the meaning or significance of classical works of antiquity, legal texts, political constitutions, and cultural and artistic artifacts and performances.

Still later hermeneutic interpretation was employed by those in the human and social sciences who, resisting the reductionist and neo-positivist claims that they should adopt the epistemologies and methodologies supposedly characteristic of the natural sciences, insisted that it was indispensable to understanding (and where appropriate explaining and predicting) human actions and interactions, as well as social relations and institutions and changes thereto. Moreover, cognitive psychology's empirical demonstration that even our most basic empirical perceptions or observations are always already the result of interpretations in light of our conceptions and/or preconceptions, raises the question as to whether the natural sciences themselves are not in fact hermeneutic.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutic, Interpretation, Epistemology

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*Universal Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutic interpretation, if not traceable to the god Hermes, is to be found as far back as Parmenides and Heraclitus. Entering modern thought with Schleiermacher's articulation of general principles of interpretation applicable to scriptures, it was also applied to legal, classical and literary works, and indeed texts in general, and subsequently to the understanding of cultural artifacts, such as paintings and sculpture, as well as to the performing arts. Later, Dilthey, insisting that the "objectivistic" epistemologies, *quantitative* methods and *causal* analyses, developed to study physical *objects* and *explain* their behavior and interactions, were singularly inappropriate to the human and social sciences, argued that the *qualities* of human *subjects*, as well as their supposedly *freely* chosen behavior and social interactions, relations and institutions, could best be understood by interpreting them hermeneutically, in terms of the intentions and contexts that gave rise to them, and/or within which they were to be found.

Now conflicting interpretations of texts, cultural artifacts and performances, all suggest that historico-socio-culturally relative conceptions shape our understanding of them, as well as of human behavior and social interactions and institutions.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, any understanding, by human or social scientists, of the meaning or significance that human subjects attach to their experiences, actions, relations, interactions and institutions is, of course a (second order) understanding of an understanding, dependent therefore upon an interpretation of an interpretation, or *double hermeneutic*.

Furthermore, as *Gestalt* psychologists as well as Ames and his school empirically demonstrate, even our basic empirical *perceptions* or *observations* are structured by, or *interpreted* in terms of, our *conceptions* and/or *preconceptions*, and therefore, as Heidegger notes, are hermeneutic.<sup>2</sup> While insofar as the *theoretical inferences* that the natural sciences deploy in attempting to explain and predict our experiences are *derived from just such perceptions or observations*, then they too are clearly hermeneutic, making the natural sciences *doubly hermeneutic* in their own manner.

In view of its obviously wide ranging application within such diverse fields of human inquiry, we may perhaps infer that hermeneutic interpretation is as indispensable to epistemological understanding in general, as Heidegger has argued it also is to our ontology or way of Being.

*Human and Social Sciences*

Let us begin with history. As is well known, Marx *interpreted* history in economic terms. Delineating six historical periods, "Eden," Slavery, Feudalism, Capitalism, Socialism and Communism, he *understood*, and concomitantly *explained* the transition between them, in terms of the change from, no private ownership, to private ownership of *labor*, *land* and *capital* (respectively), to state ownership of *land* and *capital*, to community ownership thereof. Indeed "Vulgar," (or reductive) Marxists, interpret, and thereby "understand," all history in economic terms.

For instance, the rise of Fascism may be understood as the result of large war reparations extracted from Germany at the end of WWI which, by handicapping economic recovery, progressively delegitimized the ruling Junkers, therefore leaving a power vacuum into which the National Socialists, upon whom the Junkers had increasingly relied to maintain order and power, stepped. However an alternative, *psychological, interpretation*, understands the rise of the Nazis and Hitler's as deriving from a population which felt its insecurity and self-doubt -- resulting from their defeat in WWI and exacerbated by the economic collapse of the late

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<sup>1</sup> See Z. Bauman, *Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences* (London: Hutchinson, 1978) p.9.

<sup>2</sup>On this issue, see for example, M. Heidegger, "What is a Thing" reprinted in part as "Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics" in D. Krell ed. & trans. *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1976) and M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1962) Section 32, pp. 188-95.

1920's and after – could be assuaged by embracing an authoritarian political system and *Fuhrer* or father figure who, in return for unquestioning acceptance of his authority, would insure order, security and empowerment to his “family,” which is to say to members of the “Fatherland.” While from a “Vulgar,” (or reductive) Freudian perspective, all wars may be interpreted in terms of Thanatos, or the death instinct, or perhaps, alternatively, in terms of Eros; the old men sending the younger men off to war so that they would have unobstructed access to those young women left behind, and eventually, if victorious, access to those of the vanquished nation also.

Here then we see history interpreted and understood from both economic and psychological perspectives, and also that psychological states (e.g. insecurity) may in turn be understood by interpreting them economically (debt burden and lack of economic empowerment) or even politically (loss of war).

And as with *historical* and *political* events, so too human *experiences* and *behavior* can also be understood by interpreting them in terms of the *contexts* from or in which they *arise* and/or *exist* and/or are *perceived*.

Turning then to human *experience*, and specifically to that of Marnie, from the Alfred Hitchcock film of the same name, who experienced extreme anxiety when perceiving the color red. It transpires that Marnie’s mother, a prostitute, had worn red shoes and a red dress when going out to attract men who she brought back with her to their apartment. One night Marnie had observed her mother struggling with a client, who she killed by bloodily splitting his skull, with a blow to the head, with a fire iron. Marnie’s experience of anxiety when perceiving the color red was *interpreted*, and thereby *understood* or *explained*, in terms of the context of the repressed memory of a painful event, which it threatened to revive via association. Thus affirming Schutz and Luckmann’s claim, that “Living experiences first become meaningful when they are explicated...in respect to their position in a reference schema,”<sup>1</sup> it is clear how eventual access, perhaps via hypnotic regression, to the wider *context* of an unconscious, repressed, past, not to mention the *perspective* afforded by an understanding of psychoanalytic theory, provides a reference schema, *which enables the inquirer to understand the meanings or significance of the subject’s experience better than s/he understood it her/himself*.

And like *experiences*, human *behavior* also derives meaning and/or significance, *contextually*. Take, for example, a foreign invasion. Perhaps initially intended to increase a nation’s security by preempting an attack, or by setting an example of the retribution that might follow an attack, and/or by destroying or otherwise incapacitating any future potential threat etc., or to topple a despot and/or spread democracy etc., or perhaps alternatively to facilitate a resource grab, let us imagine that instead this invasion demonstrates the relative impotency of, and economically impoverishes, the invader. Further it undermines the previously widespread perception of the invader’s moral rectitude, and results in widespread civilian casualties, which fuel anti-invader sentiment and recruitment to the resistance. In thereby decreasing the invader’s security, the act of invasion clearly transcends the actor’s intentions, to the point that its significance may be, and will perhaps remain, beyond the actor’s comprehension.

*However, regardless of whether or not it facilitates an understanding of the ultimate significance of the act, an understanding of actors’ intentions remains important because it may nevertheless facilitate the prediction of future acts.* And while, if actors are available, an investigator may attempt to understand such intentions by asking what they were, this is far from unproblematic. For i) actors may seek to *mislead* investigators regarding their intentions, or ii) the intentions may have been to some degree truly *ambiguous* even to the actors, or iii) the actors *may not be (entirely) cognizant of their intentions*, perhaps because they have forgotten them, or because they were never entirely clear about them. In which case, in order to understand their own intentions, the actors must engage in acts of interpretation. As Bauman confirms, “There is no essential difference ... between the sense actors make of their

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<sup>1</sup>A. Schutz and T. Luckmann, *The Structure of the Life-World*, trans. R. Zaner and H. Engelenhardt Jr. (London: Heinemann, 1974) p.16.

actions and the meaning assigned to this action by an... external observer for that matter; all of them are equally in a basically similar process of meaning-construction-through-interpretation.”<sup>1</sup> Assuming that actors are able, through such a process, to become fully cognizant of unambiguous intentions, which they honestly articulate to the investigator, such *communications* may nevertheless, whether intentionally or not, *qua communications*, be cryptic, ambiguous and/or misleading etc. While, even if they are not, the investigator’s understanding of the meanings of such communications, no less than that of the significance of the acts they are supposed to illuminate, will itself be dependent upon acts of interpretation.

It is then by way of an interpretively derived *understanding of actors’ communications of their understanding* of the intentions underlying their actions, or *double hermeneutic*, that social scientist may attempt to derive an understanding of them. As Schutz explicates the same point, “...the concepts formed by the social scientist are constructs of the constructs formed in the commonsense thinking by actors on the social scene...constructs formed at the second level.”<sup>2</sup>

However, resting upon interpretation as such understanding must, it necessarily is and remains problematic insofar as other interpretations remain possible. And while supplementary communications – such as may be provided by further communication with living actors, or by the availability of subsidiary writings by, and histories of, constitutional authors for example – may, by providing additional contextualization, allow investigators to filter out or reject provisional interpretations incoherent therewith, the coherence of an investigator’s interpretation, though a *necessary* condition of its corresponding to the significance of the act or the actor’s intentions etc., remains *insufficient* to definitively establish such correspondence.

And the same may be said of the actor’s understanding of his/her, perhaps unconscious, intentions. Which raises the fascinating possibility that -- analogously with the earlier insight regarding the unconscious meaning or significance of some human experiences -- by seeing the actor’s behavior in or from a different, and perhaps wider, context or perspective than s/he is able, it may be possible, as Ricoeur contends, for the investigator to "...understand an author/actor (and his/her intentions) better than s/he understood (them) her/himself.”<sup>3</sup>

And as with human *experiences* and social *actions*, so too with *cultures*. That is to say that while anthropologists who belong to a culture will tend to share the conceptions, preconceptions and presuppositions prevalent therein, and will consequently understand that culture as it understands itself, if on the other hand they are outsiders, the critical distance and different perspective or context this may afford, may, by enabling them to escape certain of the preconceptions and presuppositions endemic to the culture being considered, facilitate their understanding it better than it understands itself. Take for example the story told about the space probes, sent by the Martians and the Venusians respectively to earth. The first, arriving on a Los Angeles freeway, proceeds to send images to Mission Control Mars, where the Martians conclude that Earthlings are three or four feet high, ten or eleven feet long, go around at about fifty to seventy miles per hour, and at night their eyes light up! The second, arriving in a Hollywood cemetery, proceeds to probe the earth, and observing that a number of the otherwise biodegrading corpses still have well preserved breast implants the Venusians conclude that these are the corpses of deceased members of a fertility cult! Now although our initial reaction might be to dismiss both interpretations as equally absurd, further consideration may lead us to conclude that while the first is evidently so, the second may have something to it, offering an insight into our own culture that has hitherto eluded us!

In the first case then, *participation* in a culture enables us to reject obviously spurious interpretations, while in the second it is precisely the Venusians’ *detachment* from the culture that facilitates what may be genuine insight. Synthesizing these apparently contradictory

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<sup>1</sup>Z. Bauman, *op. cit.* p181.

<sup>2</sup>A. Schutz “Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences” in *Collected Papers* Vol. I, p. 246. See also p. 243.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by P. Ricoeur, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Science*, J. B. Thompson ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP., 1981) p.151. My additions in brackets.



requirements, that we should both gain familiarity with, yet retain critical distance from, the "object" of our study, Plessner has pointed out, "Understanding is not the identification of the self with others, so that distance is eliminated; it is becoming familiar at a distance."<sup>1</sup>

Clearly then, while inquirers, be they anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists or cultural critics etc., should attempt to engage with, and adopt the perspective of, those whose cultures, experiences, acts and/or artifacts etc. they wish to study, nevertheless they should also attempt to remain or become estranged outsiders, thereby adopting alternative, perhaps supplementary or complimentary, perspectives and concomitant understandings. It is after all surely precisely to the degree to which, upon returning from genuinely foreign travel<sup>2</sup> for instance, we feel ourselves, to have become inculcated with other cultures, and thus to have become (albeit temporarily and to a limited extent) strangers in our own land, that we regard ourselves as having gained a better understanding of our own culture and everyday existence.

Not that it is always necessary to be removed from a culture in order to gain a different perspective. Rather, all that may be required is a little *imagination*; a view which gains support from an example Plessner derives from another sphere: "...the estranged vision of the artist fulfils an indispensable condition of all genuine understanding. It lifts what is invisible in human relations because it is familiar, the counterfoil which puts the familiar into perspective as foreground and background and makes it comprehensible..."<sup>3</sup>

Similarly the entry into a culture by Simmel's "Stranger"<sup>4</sup> for instance, results in those in the culture attempting to adopt what they *imagine* to be the perspective of the Other in order to see the culture as they imagine the stranger must see it. An act of self distancing which may provide a sufficient critical perspective upon the culture to enhance the participants' understanding of it. <sup>5</sup>While in light of such considerations Ricoeur is driven to conclude that, "It is ... the growth of his [sic] own understanding of himself that he pursues through his understanding of the other. Every hermeneutics is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self understanding by means of understanding others."<sup>6</sup>

Nor should this surprise us, for it is, of course, the rule of the hermeneutic circle that, as with the meanings of words in a dictionary, each individual, as well as each shared world-view, human intention, action, experience or artifact etc., is to be understood in terms of their/its relations to the others, to which in turn – and here we come full hermeneutic circle – the same applies.

### *The Natural Sciences: The Hermeneutics of Empiricism*

But notwithstanding all we have seen regarding the arts, humanities and social sciences, it is widely held that the natural sciences, at least, are based upon presuppositionless observation of the empirically given facts, thereby achieving a disinterested, value free, objectivity, which, in escaping the presuppositions, prejudices and subjective interpretations that may indeed be characteristic of other fields, provide a last bastion for die hard Positivist.

Yet as Max Scheler has observed, "To conceive of the world as value-free is a task which men [sic] set themselves on account of a value: the vital value of mastery and power over

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<sup>1</sup>H.Plessner, "With Different Eyes" in Thomas Luckmann ed., *Phenomenology and Sociology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) p.39.

<sup>2</sup>As opposed to those "tourists" who typically move from one Holiday Inn, Hilton or Ritz Carlton resort to another, and, like visitors to Disney's Epcot "World Showcase," make occasional forays from there into "alien" cultures.

<sup>3</sup>H. Plessner, *op cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>See G. Simmel, *Grundfragen der Soziologie*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970)

<sup>5</sup>See for example K-P. Koepping, "Leib und Leiben, Sprach und Spiel, Schweigen und Scham", in H-P. Duerr ed. *Der Wissenschaftler und des Irrationale*, (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1981) Vol.2.

<sup>6</sup> P. Ricoeur, *op cit.*, p.17.

things.”<sup>1</sup> As Bacon, recognized, “...human knowledge and human power meet in one ...truth and utility are here the very same thing.”<sup>2</sup> Thus so far from being disinterestedly objective, enlightenment science is animated and guided by human interests, and its conception of knowledge is, as ultimately is its commitment to reason also, pragmatic.<sup>3</sup> While likewise, so far from being disinterestedly objective, our perception of the facts reflects our preconceptions, which is to say our presumptions and prejudices. Indeed, as Gadamer has insisted such preconceptions or “Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world.”<sup>4</sup> Heidegger affirms: “The greatness and superiority of the natural sciences during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries rests in the fact that all the scientists were philosophers. They understood that there are no mere facts but that a fact is only what it is in the light of the fundamental conception...”<sup>5</sup>

Thus beginning with our most fundamental perceptions, so far from experiencing William James’ “...blooming, buzzing, confusion” of *incoherent* impressions, rather, as Husserl noted, in everyday experience “I do not see color sensations, but colored things, I do not hear sensations of sound, but the song a woman is singing etc.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed “...in immediate givenness, one finds anything but color data, tone data, other “sense” data ..... instead .... I see a tree which is green; I hear the rustling of its leaves, I smell its blossoms etc.”<sup>7</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty affirms, “Pure sensation ... corresponds to nothing in our experience...,” “...there is no experience of sensation...”<sup>8</sup>

On the face of it then, this is evidence that such perceptions are already conceptually mediated. However, insofar as *all* of our perceptions really were conceptually mediated in this way, we could never be certain of this. For insofar as we experience what we take to be objects and events rather than undifferentiated sensations, then while this *might* be taken to imply the mediation of such sensations by conceptions, equally such experiences could be taken as reflections, and therefore evidence, of the existence of just such objects and events.

However there are other grounds for concluding that everyday experiences of objects and events are indeed the product of interpretation. Thus drawing upon *Gestalt* experiments, Thomas Kuhn notes that “The duck-rabbit shows that two men [sic] with the same retinal impressions can see different things; the inverting lenses show that two men with different retinal impressions can see the same thing.”<sup>9</sup> While if those who only perceive, say, the “rabbit,” to begin with, are told that the picture may also be seen as a “duck,” then they will often be able to see the “duck.” Furthermore “Ames and his school have shown that when a ball set against a featureless background is silently and rapidly inflated (by an air hose obscured from the observer by the ball itself) it is seen as if it retains its size and was coming nearer,” for the reason, as Polanyi explains, that on the basis of most of our past experiences we “...construct() a universal interpretive framework that assumes the ubiquitous existence of

<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, “*Weissesformen*” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bern: Verlag, 1960) p. 122, FN 2, as quoted by W. Leiss in *The Domination of Nature* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974) p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Bacon as quoted in T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973) p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> For *knowledge* see, for instance, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Munich: Hansar, 1970) 5:526, and for *reason* 3: 726.

<sup>4</sup> H.G Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. and trans. D.Linge (Berkley: U California Press, 1976) p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger “What is a Thing” in D. Krell ed. & trans., *op. cit.*, pp. 247-8.

<sup>6</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, (revised edition, Halle, 1913) Vol.2, Part I, p. 374 quoted by H. Lubbe in “Positivism and Phenomenology: Mach and Husserl,” in Thomas Luckman ed. *Phenomenology and Sociology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, (hereinafter *Krisis*) trans. D. Carr (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970) p. 233.

<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) p. 3 & p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1970) pp. 126-7.

objects, retaining their size and shape...<sup>1</sup> However the experimenter then demonstrates to the observer that what s/he previously interpreted as an *apparent* increase in size due to the ball's *approaching*, was in fact a *real* increase in size due to its *inflation*. Consequently, when the now fully inflated ball (suspended by thin, and therefore invisible, wires) is slowly propelled, at uniform speed and with a linear trajectory, directly towards the observer, who has adopted the inflation "framework" or conception, s/he interprets the now *apparent* increase in size of the ball due to its *approaching*, as a *real* increase in size due to its continued *inflation!*

Certain conflicts in even our most basic experiences or perceptions then reveal them to be mediated by, and subject to interpretation in terms of, our conceptions or preconceptions; and this regardless of whether or not there is in fact an objective reality, which, as supposedly existing *beyond* the realm of experiences or appearances, is clearly empirically undeterminable on *a priori* grounds. Indeed as Husserl affirms, "The contrast between the subjectivity of the life-world and the "objective," the "true" world, lies in the fact that the latter is a theoretical-logical substruction, the substruction of something that is in principle not perceivable, in principle not experienceable..."<sup>2</sup> An interpretively inferred hypothetical substruction based, as Hume explains, upon certain *intrinsic continuities, resemblances and similarities*, displayed by our *bundles of constantly changing, interrupted and different perceptions*, on account of which we *interpret* them as *mere appearances* of, relatively *unchanging, or self-identical and continuously existing*, objects; hypothesized objects which, with breathtaking (hermeneutic) circularity, we subsequently take to *explain* or be the *cause* of our very experiences of the *continuities, resemblances and similarities*, from which we inferred their existence.<sup>3</sup> Theorized objects which enable us to *explain*, and indeed, further, make *law like predictions regarding the future nature or properties of, our perception*.

Einstein concurs. "...the formation of the word, and hence the concept "ball," is (he tells us) a kind of thought economy enabling the child (or adult) to combine very complicated sense impressions in a simple way.... Mach also thinks ... the formulation of scientific theories ... takes place in a similar way. We try to order the phenomena to reduce them to simple form, until we can describe (and explain and predict) what may be a large number of them with the aid of a few simple concepts."<sup>4</sup>

That is to say that, as with the interpretive inference of objects on the basis of certain experiential patterns, which they are subsequently deployed to explain, and even to predict, so too, *mutatis mutandis*, scientific theories are interpretively derived from patterns displayed by the properties of and relations between such "objects," which they too are subsequently deployed to explain and predict. For instance, observing an unsupported ink stand, apple, musket ball and cannon ball all fall down, or close with the earth, I explain this in terms of the theory of gravity which, like objects or "things-in-themselves" supposedly existing beyond and independently of our experiences, is inexperienceable in and of itself, being derived from the very phenomena which it is, again with breathtaking (hermeneutic) circularity, subsequently taken to explain. As C.S. Pierce has so succinctly put it, "...the force of gravity is the cause of the ink stand and other objects falling- although the force of gravity will consist merely in the fact that the ink stand and other objects will fall."<sup>5</sup> And like supposed objects or "things-in-themselves," the theory of gravity also enables law like predictions; in this case that under similar circumstances all such objects will fall. Thus as we can now see, the natural sciences too deploy a *double hermeneutic* of their own.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958) p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> E. Husserl, *Krisis*, p. 127. See also 128-9.

<sup>3</sup> See David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967) pp. 204-8, 211-12 & 215.

<sup>4</sup> A. Einstein quoted in W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond*, trans. A. Pomerans, ed. R. Anshen (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) pp.64-5. My additions in brackets.

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Pierce, "Lectures on Pragmatism" in *Collected Papers*, eds. C. Hartshorne & P. Weiss (Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1931-5) Vol. VII, p. 344.

But some will surely object that so far from being inexperienceable, and thus an interpretively derived “occult force,”<sup>1</sup> (as members of the Royal Society disparagingly dubbed it) gravity can in fact be directly experienced, in aching outstretched arms for instance. However this merely demonstrates the degree to which our *theoretical assumptions or preconceptions* pervade our *perceptions* or experiences themselves. For just as Newtonians will “perceive” such experiences as being experiences of gravity, Aristotelians -- believing that, by their very nature, entities removed from their “natural” place on earth strive to return there -- will “perceive” the same experiences, as well as the motions of unsupported objects, as earthly bodies striving to reach their earthly homes. As Popper affirms, “...observations ...are always *interpretations ...in the light of theories.*”<sup>2</sup>

And as with gravity, or indeed gravitons also, so too with anti-matter, curved space, or even such mundane “entities” as electrons, atoms and molecules, which, as inexperienceable “in themselves,” are therefore clearly reified hypotheses, which similarly owe their supposed existence to the *conceptions and preconceptions or theoretical assumptions* underlying our *interpretation* of the very phenomena -- such as the behavior of material bodies, tracks across cloud or bubble chambers, lines across photographic emulsions, etc. -- which we derive them from, and, again, subsequently take them to *explain*.

If light of all of this then, quite clearly, as Imre Lakatos insists “...clashes between theories and factual propositions are not “falsifications” but merely inconsistencies”<sup>3</sup> between the *explicitly deployed theoretical hypotheses of the sciences*, and the often *implicitly employed* interpretive preconceptions informing our supposedly immediate perceptions of the “*facts;*” which explains why, when scientific theories purporting to explain and predict such “*facts*” are found to be inconsistent with them, so far from such theories always being abandoned, the “*facts*” are not infrequently re-interpreted so that they fit the theories.

Furthermore, while inconsistencies or incoherences between the scientific theories and the “fact” may indicate that one or the other must be rejected or revised, on the other hand (as *per* the previously discussed interpretation of the significance of acts) coherence, though *necessary*, is never *sufficient* to insure their veridicality, and can do no more than provide a degree of verisimilitude. While indeed, the complete coherence of this ramification of a hermeneutic understanding of the natural sciences with Popper’s notion of falsification serves as further evidence, if it were needed, that hermeneutic interpretation is, in addition to its already well established applications, central to the natural sciences also.

### *Ontological Hermeneutics*

From all we have seen above, it seems not unreasonable to speculate that human inquiry and understanding generally, including that into existence itself -- which is grounded upon reflective consciousness-- is hermeneutic. Indeed Heidegger suggests that “...man [sic] should be understood, within the question of being (which is to say from an *ontological* perspective) as *the* site which being requires in order to disclose itself. Man is the site of the Openness of the there”;<sup>4</sup> the reflective being or *entity* which Being or *existence* in general, requires in order to reflect upon, and thereby come to understand, itself. Thus “...to work out the question Being” or understand what it means to Be “... is an entity’s mode of *Being*... this entity we

<sup>1</sup> See T. Roszak, *op cit.*, p. 362 ff.

<sup>2</sup> K. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1959) p. 107, Fn. 3. My addition in brackets.

<sup>3</sup> Imre Lakatos “The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes” in I. Lakatos & A. Musgrove eds. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970) p.99.

<sup>4</sup>M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) p. 205. My addition in brackets.

shall denote by the term “*Dasein*”.”<sup>1</sup> “*Understanding of Being is a defining characteristic of Dasein’s Being.*”<sup>2</sup>

It is then ultimately within or upon this most general of all, or *ontological*, hermeneutics, the quest to understand the meaning of existence or Being, that *epistemological* hermeneutics, the quest to understand the totality of particular entities or modes of being, is subsumed or grounded. As Heidegger affirms, “Philosophy is Universal Phenomenological Ontology and takes its departure from the hermeneutics of *Dasein*, which as an analytic of *existence*, has made fast the guiding line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it *arises* and to which it *returns*.”<sup>3</sup> In which case, as Ricoeur concludes, “... the properly *epistemological* concerns of Hermeneutics...are subordinated to ontological preconceptions ... *understanding* ceases to appear as a simple *mode of knowing* in order to become a *way of being*.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>M. Heidegger, *Being & Time*, p.27. My addition in brackets.

<sup>2</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being & Time*, p.32. See also p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.62.

<sup>4</sup> P. Ricoeur *op cit.*, p.44