FREUD AND PHILOSOPHY

An Essay on Interpretation

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Chapter 2: The Conflict of Interpretations

At the end of the preceding study we asked, What is interpretation? This question governs the following one: How does psychoanalysis become involved in the conflict of interpretations? The question of interpretation, however, is no less perplexing than that of symbol. We thought we could arbitrate the differences concerning the definition of symbol by appealing to an intentional structure, the structure of double meaning, which in turn is brought to light only in the work of interpretation. But the concept of interpretation itself poses a problem.

THE CONCEPT OF INTERPRETATION

Let us first settle a difficulty which is still merely verbal and which has been implicitly resolved by our intermediate definition of symbol.

If we consult the tradition we meet with two usages; the one proposes to us a concept of interpretation that is too short, the other a concept that is too long. These two variations in the extension of the concept of interpretation reflect fairly closely the ones we considered in the definition of symbol. If we recall here the two historical roots of these discordant traditions, the Peri Herméneias of Aristotle and biblical exegesis, it is because they give a rather good indication of what corrections are to be made if one is to arrive at our intermediate concept of hermeneutics.

Start with Aristotle. As is well known, the second treatise of the Organon is called the Peri Herméneias, On Interpretation. From it stems what I call the overly “long” concept of interpretation, a concept somewhat reminiscent of symbol in the sense of the symbolic function of Cassirer and many of the moderns. It is legitimate to look for the origin of our own problem in the Aristotelian notion of interpretation, even though the connection with the Aristotelian “interpretation” seems purely verbal: the word itself figures only in the title; what is more, it designates not a science dealing with significations but signifies itself, that of nouns, verbs, propositions, and discourse in general. Interpretation is any voiced sound endowed with significance—every phônê sêmantikê, every vox significativa. In this sense nouns, and verbs also, are of themselves already interpretations, since in them we utter something. But the simple utterance or phasis is only a part taken from the total meaning of the logos; the complete meaning of hermêneia appears only in the complex enunciation, the sentence, which Aristotle calls logos and which covers commands, wishes, and questions as well as declarative discourse or apophasis. Hermêneia, in the complete sense, is the significance of the sentence. But in the strong sense of the logician it is the sentence susceptible of truth or falsity, that is, the declarative proposition. The logician leaves the other

1. In Aristotle, moreover, sumbolon designates the expressive power of voiced sounds with respect to the states of the soul (ta pathêmata). A symbol is a conventional sign for the states of the soul, whereas the latter are the images (homaîômata) of things. Interpretation has therefore the same extension as symbol; the two words cover the totality of conventional signs, either in their expressive value or in their significative value. The treatise On Interpretation does not again speak of symbols (except in 16a 28), seeing that the theory of expression does not come under this treatise but under the treatise On the Soul. The present treatise deals exclusively with signification. Pierre Aubenque, in his Le Problème de l’être chez Aristote (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 107, remarks that Aristotle sometimes takes the word “symbol” in the sense of signification. The dominant idea remains that of conventional sign; a symbol is the intermediary instituted between thought and being. Thus we are set on the path of Cassirer—through Kant, it is true!

2. “A noun is a voiced sound having a meaning by convention with no reference to time, while no part of it has any meaning when taken separately” (On Interpretation, Ch. 2, 16a 19).

3. “A verb is that which, in addition to its particular meaning, has a reference to time; no part of it has meaning by itself, and it is always a sign of something said of something else” (ibid., Ch. 3, 16b 5).

4. “An affirmation is a statement asserting something of something; a negation is a statement separating something from something” (ibid., Ch. 6, 17a 25).
types of discourse to rhetoric and poetics and retains only declarative discourse, the first form of which is the affirmation that “says something of something.”

Let us stop with these definitions: they suffice to clarify in what sense the “semantic voice”—the signifying word—is interpretation. It is interpretation in the sense that, for Cassirer, the symbol is universal mediation; we say the real by signifying it; in this sense we interpret it. The break between signification and the thing has already occurred with nouns, and this intervening distance marks the locus of interpretation. Not all discourse is necessarily within the true; it does not adhere to being. In this regard, nouns that designate fictitious things—the “goat-stag” of Ch. 1 of the Aristotelian treatise—clearly show that there can be signification without the positing of existence. But we would not have thought of calling nouns “interpretation” if we did not see their signifying import in the light of that of verbs and that of verbs in the context of discourse, and if, in its turn, the signifying import of discourse were not concentrated in declarative discourse that says something of something. To say something of something is, in the complete and strong sense of the term, to interpret.⁸

How does this “interpretation,” proper to the declarative proposition, orient us toward the modern concept of hermeneutics? The connection is not immediately evident. The “to say something of something” interests Aristotle only insofar as it is the locus of the true and the false. Hence the problem of the opposition between affirmation and negation becomes the central theme of the treatise; the semantics of the declarative proposition serves merely as an introduction to the logic of propositions which is essentially a logic of opposition, and the latter in turn leads to the Analytics, i.e. the logic of arguments. This logical aim prevents the development of semantics for its own sake. Further, the way to a hermeneutics of double-meaning significations appears blocked from another side. The notion of signification requires univocity of meaning: the definition of the principle of identity, in its logical and ontological sense, demands it. Univocity of meaning is ultimately grounded in essence, one and self-identical; the entire refutation of the sophistical arguments is based upon this recourse to essence: “Not to have one meaning is to have no meaning.”⁶ Thus communication between men is possible only if words have a meaning, i.e. one meaning.

A reflection that extends the properly semantic analysis of the “to say something of something” leads us back to the area of our own problem. If man interprets reality by saying something of something, it is because real meanings are indirect; I attain things only by attributing a meaning to a meaning. Predication, in the logical sense of the term, puts into canonical form a relation of signification that forces us to reexamine the theory of univocity. The study of sophistical reasoning poses not one problem but two: the problem of the univocity of meanings without which dialogue is impossible, and the problem of their “communication”—to use the expression of Plato’s Sophist—without which attribution is impossible. Without this counterpart univocity condemns one to a logical atomism, according to which a meaning simply is what it is. It is not enough to struggle against sophistic equivocity; a second front must be opened against Eleatic univocity. Nor is this second struggle without an echo in the philosophy of Aristotle. It breaks out even at the heart of the Metaphysics; the notion of being cannot be univocally defined: “being is said in several ways”; being means substance, quality, time, place, and so on. The famous distinction of the many meanings of being is not an anomaly in discourse, an exception in the theory of signification. The many meanings of being are the categories—or figures—of predication; hence this multiplicity cuts across the whole of discourse. Nor can it be overcome. Although it does not constitute a pure disorder of words, seeing that the different meanings of the word “being” are all ordered by reference to a first, original meaning, still this unity of reference—

⁵ The notion of interpretation comes to the fore in the verb. On the one hand the verb looks to the noun, since it “adds to the meaning of the noun the meaning of present existence.” On the other hand “it is always a sign of something said of something else”; Aristotle explains this formula thus: “Moreover, a verb is always a sign of something said of something else, i.e. of something predicated of a subject or contained in a subject” (ibid., Ch. 3, 16b 10). Thus a verb looks toward the sentence or declarative discourse; in this sense it is as it were an instrument of the attribution which it “interprets,” i.e. “signifies.”

⁶ Metaphysics Γ(IV), 1006b 7.
pros hen legomenon—does not make one signification; the notion of being, it has recently been said, is but “the problematic unity of an irreducible plurality of meanings.”\(^7\)

I do not mean to draw from the general semantics of the *Peri Hermênètias* and from the particular semantics of the word “being” more than is allowed; I do not say that Aristotle raised the problem of plurivocal meanings in the way we shall elaborate it here. I merely suggest that his definition of interpretation as “to say something of something” leads to a semantics distinct from logic and that his discussion of the multiple meanings of being opens a breach in the purely logical and ontological theory of univocity. The task of founding a theory of interpretation, conceived as the understanding of plurivocal meanings, has not yet been accomplished. The second tradition will bring us closer to the goal.

The second tradition comes to us from biblical exegesis. Hermeneutics in this sense is the science of the rules of exegesis, the latter being understood as the particular interpretation of a text. There is no question that the problem of hermeneutics has to a great extent been constituted within the boundaries of the interpretation of Holy Scripture. The core of this hermeneutics lies in what has traditionally been called the “four senses of Scripture.” It cannot be emphasized too strongly that philosophers should be more attentive to those exegetical discussions in which a general theory of interpretation was operative.\(^8\) There in particular the notions of analogy, allegory, and symbolic meaning were elaborated—notions to which we shall frequently have to return. This second tradition, then, relates hermeneutics to the definition of symbol by analogy, although it does not entirely reduce hermeneutics to this definition.

What limits the definition of exegetical hermeneutics is, first, its reference to an authority, whether monarchical, collegial, or ecclesiastic, the latter being the case of biblical hermeneutics as practiced within the Christian communities. Most of all, however, it is limited by being applied to a literary text: exegesis is a science of writings.

Still, the exegetical tradition affords a good starting point for our enterprise, for the notion of text can be taken in an analogous sense. Thanks to the metaphor of “the book of nature” the Middle Ages was able to speak of an *interpretatio naturae*. This metaphor brings to light a possible extension of the notion of exegesis, inasmuch as the notion of “text” is wider than that of “scripture.” With the Renaissance the interpretatio naturae was completely freed from its properly scriptural references, with the result that Spinoza could use it to inaugurate a new conception of biblical exegesis. The interpretation of nature, he says in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, is to inspire a new hermeneutics ruled by the principle of the interpretation of Scripture by itself. This step of Spinoza’s, which does not interest us here from the strictly biblical point of view, marks a curious rebound of the interpretatio naturae upon the interpretation of Scripture: the former scriptural model is now called into question, and the new model is henceforward the interpretatio naturae.

This notion of text—thus freed from the notion of scripture or writing—is of considerable interest. Freud often makes use of it, particularly when he compares the work of analysis to translating from one language to another; the dream account is an unintelligible text for which the analyst substitutes a more intelligible text. To understand is to make this substitution. The title *Traumdeutung*, which we have briefly considered, alludes to this analogy between analysis and exegesis.

At this point we may draw an initial comparison between Freud and Nietzsche. Nietzsche borrowed the concept of Deutung or *Auslegung* from the discipline of philology and introduced it into philosophy. It is true that Nietzsche remains a philologist when he interprets Greek tragedy or the pre-Socratics, but with him the whole of philosophy becomes interpretation. Interpretation of what? We shall answer that question later, when we enter into the conflict of interpretation. For the present this point can be made: the new career opened up for the concept of interpretation is linked to a new problematic of representation, of *Vorstellung*. It is no longer the Kantian question of how a subjective representation or idea can have objective validity; this question, central to a critical philosophy, gives way to a more radical one. The problem of objec-

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7. Aubenque, p. 204.
tive validity still remained in the orbit of the Platonic philosophy of truth and science, of which error and opinion are the contraries. The problem of interpretation refers to a new possibility which is no longer either error in the epistemological sense or lying in the moral sense, but illusion, the status of which we will discuss further on. Let us leave aside for the moment the problem we shall turn to shortly, namely, the use of interpretation as a tactic of suspicion and as a battle against masks; this use calls for a very specific philosophy which subordinates the entire problem of truth and error to the expression of the will to power. The important point here, from the standpoint of method, is the new extension given to the exegetical concept of interpretation.

Freud's position lies at one of the ends of this extension. For him, interpretation is concerned not only with a scripture or writing but with any set of signs that may be taken as a text to decipher, hence a dream or neurotic symptom, as well as a ritual, myth, work of art, or a belief. Thus we return to our notion of symbol as double meaning, with the question still undecided whether double meaning is dissimulation or revelation, necessary lying or access to the sacred. We had in mind an enlarged concept of exegesis when we defined hermeneutics as the science of exegetical rules and exegesis as the interpretation of a particular text or of a set of signs considered as a text.

As may be seen, this intermediate definition, which goes beyond a mere scriptural science without being dissolved in a general theory of meaning, receives its authority from both sources. The exegetical source seems the closer, but the problem of univocity and equivocality to which interpretation in the Aristotelian sense leads us is perhaps still more radical than the problem of analogy in exegesis. We return to this in the next chapter. On the other hand, the problem of illusion, central to the Nietzschean Auslegung, brings us to the threshold of the key difficulty that governs the fate of modern hermeneutics. This difficulty, which we shall now consider, is not a mere duplicate of the one involved in the definition of symbol; it is a difficulty peculiar to the act of interpreting as such.

The difficulty—it initiated my research in the first place—is this: there is no general hermeneutics, no universal canon for exegesis, but only disparate and opposed theories concerning the rules of interpretation. The hermeneutic field, whose outer contours we have traced, is internally at variance with itself.

I have neither the intention nor the means to attempt a complete enumeration of hermeneutic styles. The more enlightening course, it seems to me, is to start with the polarized opposition that creates the greatest tension at the outset of our investigation. According to the one pole, hermeneutics is understood as the manifestation and restoration of a meaning addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation, or as is sometimes said, a kerygma; according to the other pole, it is understood as a demystification, as a reduction of illusion. Psychoanalysis, at least on a first reading, aligns itself with the second understanding of hermeneutics.

From the beginning we must consider this double possibility: this tension, this extreme polarity, is the truest expression of our “modernity.” The situation in which language today finds itself comprises this double possibility, this double solicitation and urgency: on the one hand, purify discourse of its excrescences, liquidate the idols, go from drunkenness to sobriety, realize our state of poverty once and for all; on the other hand, use the most “nihilistic,” destructive, iconoclastic movement so as to let speak what once, what each time, was said, when meaning appeared anew, when meaning was at its fullest. Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience. In our time we have not finished doing away with idols and we have barely begun to listen to symbols. It may be that this situation, in its apparent distress, is instructive: it may be that extreme iconoclasm belongs to the restoration of meaning.

The underlying reason for initially posing the problem in the above way is to bring into the open the crisis of language that today makes us oscillate between demystification and restoration of meaning. To my mind, an introduction to the psychoanalysis of culture has had to proceed in this roundabout way. In the next chapter we will try to probe deeper into these prolegomena and relate the crisis of language to an ascetic of reflection whose first movement is to let itself be dispossessed of the origin of meaning.
To finish locating psychoanalysis within the general discussion of language, the terms of the conflict need to be sketched.

INTERPRETATION AS RECOLLECTION OF MEANING

This section is concerned with hermeneutics as the restoration of meaning. The point at issue in the psychoanalysis of culture and the school of suspicion is better understood if we first contrast what is radically opposed to them.

The contrary of suspicion, I will say bluntly, is faith. What faith? No longer, to be sure, the first faith of the simple soul, but rather the second faith of one who has engaged in hermeneutics, faith that has undergone criticism, postcritical faith. Let us look for it in the series of philosophic decisions that secretly animate a phenomenology of religion and lie hidden even within its apparent neutrality. It is a rational faith, for it interprets; but it is a faith because it seeks, through interpretation, a second naïveté. Phenomenology is its instrument of hearing, of recollection, of restoration of meaning. "Believe in order to understand, understand in order to believe"—such is its maxim; and its maxim is the "hermeneutic circle" itself of believing and understanding.

We will take our examples from the phenomenology of religion in the wide sense, embracing here the work of Leenhardt, Van der Leeuw, and Eliade, to which I add my own research in The Symbolism of Evil.

It will be our task to disengage and display the rational faith that runs through the purely intentional analysis of religious symbolism and "converts" this listening analysis from within.

The first imprint of this faith in a revelation through the word is to be seen in the care or concern for the object, a characteristic of all phenomenological analysis. That concern, as we know, presents itself as a "neutral" wish to describe and not to reduce. One reduces by explaining through causes (psychological, social, etc.), through genesis (individual, historical, etc.), through function (affective, ideological, etc.). One describes by disengaging the (noetic) inten-

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tion and its (noematic) correlate—the something intended, the implicit object in ritual, myth, and belief. Thus, in the case of the symbolism of the pure and the impure alluded to in Chapter I, the task is to understand what is signified, what quality of the sacred is intended, what shade of threat is implied in the analogy between spot and stain, between physical contamination and the loss of existential integrity. In my own research, concern for the object consisted in surrender to the movement of meaning which, starting from the literal sense—the spot or contamination—points to something grasped in the region of the sacred. To generalize from this, we shall say that the theme of the phenomenology of religion is the something intended in ritual actions, in mythical speech, in belief or mystical feeling; its task is to dis-implicate that object from the various intentions of behavior, discourse, and emotion. Let us call this intended object the "sacred," without determining its nature, whether it be the tremendum numinosum, according to Rudolf Otto; "the powerful," according to Van der Leeuw; or "fundamental Time," according to Eliade. In this general sense, and with a view to underlining the concern for the intentional object, we may say that every phenomenology of religion is a phenomenology of the sacred. However, is it possible for a phenomenology of the sacred to stay within the limits of a neutral attitude governed by the epoché, by the bracketing of absolute reality and of every question concerning the absolute? The epoché requires that I participate in the belief in the reality of the religious object, but in a neutralized mode; that I believe with the believer, but without positing absolutely the object of his belief.

But while the scientist as such can and must practice this method of bracketing, the philosopher as such cannot and must not avoid the question of the absolute validity of his object. For would I be interested in the object, could I stress concern for the object, through the consideration of cause, genesis, or function, if I did not expect, from within understanding, this something to "address" itself to me? Is not the expectation of being spoken to what motivates the concern for the object? Implied in this expectation is a confidence in language: the belief that language, which bears symbols, is not so much spoken by men as spoken to men, that men are
born into language, into the light of the logos “who enlightens every man who comes into the world.” It is this expectation, this confidence, this belief, that confers on the study of symbols its particular seriousness. To be truthful, I must say it is what animates all my research. But it is also what today is contested by the whole stream of hermeneutics that we shall soon place under the heading of “suspicion.” This latter theory of interpretation begins by doubting whether there is such an object and whether this object could be the place of the transformation of intentionality into kerygma, manifestation, proclamation. This hermeneutics is not an explanation of the object, but a tearing off of masks, an interpretation that reduces disguises.

Second, according to the phenomenology of religion, there is a “truth” of symbols; this truth, in the neutral attitude of the Husserlian epoché, means merely the fulfillment—die Erfüllung—of the signifying intention. For a phenomenology of religion to be possible, it is necessary and sufficient that there be not only one but several ways of fulfilling various intentions of meaning according to various regions of objects. Verification, in the sense of logical positivism, is one type of fulfillment among others and not the canonical mode of fulfillment; it is a type required by the corresponding type of object, namely, the physical object and, in another sense, the historical object—but not by the concept of truth as such, or, in other words, by the requirement of fulfillment in general. It is in virtue of this multiplicity of types of fulfillment that phenomenology, in a reduced, neutralized mode, speaks of religious experience, not by analogy, but according to the specific type of object and the specific mode of fulfillment in that field.

We encountered this problem of fulfillment in the order of symbolic meanings in our investigation of the analogical bond between the primary or literal “signifier” and the secondary “signified”—for example, the bond between spot and stain, between deviation (or wandering) and sin, between weight (or burden) and fault. Here we run up against a primordial, unfeigned relationship, which never has the conventional and arbitrary character of “technical” signs that mean only what is posited in them.

In this relationship of meaning to meaning resides what I have called the fullness of language. The fullness consists in the fact that the second meaning somehow dwells in the first meaning. In his Traité d’histoire générale des religions, Mircea Eliade clearly shows that the force of the cosmic symbolism resides in the nonarbitrary bond between the visible heavens and the order they manifest: thanks to the analogical power that binds meaning to meaning, the heavens speak of the wise and the just, the immense and the ordered. Symbols are bound in a double sense: bound to and bound by. On the one hand, the sacred is bound to its primary, literal, sensible meanings; this is what constitutes the opacity of symbols. On the other hand, the literal meaning is bound by the symbolic meaning that resides in it; this is what I have called the revealing power of symbols, which gives them their force in spite of their opacity. The revealing power of symbols opposes symbols to technical signs, which merely signify what is posited in them and which, therefore, can be emptied, formalized, and reduced to mere objects of a calculus. Symbols alone give what they say.

But in saying this have we not already broken the phenomenological neutrality? I admit it. I admit that what deeply motivates the interest in full language, in bound language, is this inversion of the movement of thought which now addresses itself to me and makes me a subject that is spoken to. And this inversion is produced in analogy. How? How does that which binds meaning to meaning bind me? The movement that draws me toward the second meaning assimilates me to what is said, makes me participate in what is announced to me. The similitude in which the force of symbols resides and from which they draw their revealing power is not an objective likeness, which I may look upon like a relation laid out before me; it is an existential assimilation, according to the movement of analogy, of my being to being.

This allusion to the ancient theme of participation helps us make a third step along the path of explication, which is also the path of intellectual honesty: the fully declared philosophical decision animating the intentional analysis would be a modern version of the ancient theme of reminiscence. After the silence and forgetfulness made widespread by the manipulation of empty signs and the construction of formalized languages, the modern concern for symbols expresses a new desire to be addressed.

This expectancy of a new Word, of a new tidings of the Word, is
the implicit intention of every phenomenology of symbols, which first puts the accent on the object, then underscores the fullness of symbol, to finally greet the revealing power of the primal word.

**INTERPRETATION AS EXERCISE OF SUSPICION**

We shall complete our assigning of a place to Freud by giving him not just one interlocutor but a whole company. Over against interpretation as restoration of meaning we shall oppose interpretation according to what I collectively call the school of suspicion.

A general theory of interpretation would thus have to account not only for the opposition between two interpretations of interpretation, the one as recollection of meaning, the other as reduction of the illusions and lies of consciousness; but also for the division and scattering of each of these two great “schools” of interpretation into “theories” that differ from one another and are even foreign to one another. This is no doubt truer of the school of suspicion than of the school of reminiscence. Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. It is easier to show their common opposition to a phenomenology of the sacred, understood as a propaedeutic to the “revelation” of meaning, than their interrelationship within a single method of demystification. It is relatively easy to note that these three figures all contest the primacy of the object in our representation of the sacred, as well as the fulfilling of the intention of the sacred by a type of analogy of being that would engraft us onto being through the power of an assimilating intention. It is also easy to recognize that this contesting is an exercise of suspicion in three different ways; “truth as lying” would be the negative heading under which one might place these three exercises of suspicion. But we are still far from having assimilated the positive meaning of the enterprises of these three thinkers. We are still too attentive to their differences and to the limitations that the prejudices of their times impose upon their successors even more than upon themselves. Thus Marx is relegated to economics and the absurd theory of the reflex consciousness; Nietzsche is drawn toward biologism and a perspectivism incapable of expressing itself without contradiction; Freud is restricted to psychiatry and decked out with a simplistic pansexualism.

If we go back to the intention they had in common, we find in it the decision to look upon the whole of consciousness primarily as “false” consciousness. They thereby take up again, each in a different manner, the problem of the Cartesian doubt, to carry it to the very heart of the Cartesian stronghold. The philosopher trained in the school of Descartes knows that things are doubtful, that they are not such as they appear; but he does not doubt that consciousness is such as it appears to itself; in consciousness, meaning and consciousness of meaning coincide. Since Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, this too has become doubtful. After the doubt about things, we have started to doubt consciousness.

These three masters of suspicion are not to be misunderstood, however, as three masters of skepticism. They are, assuredly, three great “destroyers.” But that of itself should not mislead us; destruction, Heidegger says in *Sein und Zeit*, is a moment of every new foundation, including the destruction of religion, insofar as religion is, in Nietzsche’s phrase, a “Platonism for the people.” It is beyond destruction that the question is posed as to what thought, reason, and even faith still signify.

All three clear the horizon for a more authentic word, for a new reign of Truth, not only by means of a “destructive” critique, but by the invention of an art of *interpreting*. Descartes triumphed over the doubt as to things by the evidence of consciousness; they triumph over the doubt as to consciousness by an exegesis of meaning. Beginning with them, understanding is hermeneutics: henceforward, to seek meaning is no longer to spell out the consciousness of meaning, but to decipher its expressions. What must be faced, therefore, is not only a threefold suspicion, but a threefold guile. If consciousness is not what it thinks it is, a new relation must be instituted between the patent and the latent; this new relation would correspond to the one that consciousness had instituted between appearances and the reality of things. For Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, the fundamental category of consciousness is the relation...
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sight” which victoriously counterattacks the mystification of false consciousness. What Nietzsche wants is the increase of man’s power, the restoration of his force; but the meaning of the will to power must be recaptured by meditating on the ciphers “superman,” “eternal return,” and “Dionysus,” without which the power in question would be but worldly violence. What Freud desires is that the one who is analyzed, by making his own the meaning that was foreign to him, enlarge his field of consciousness, live better, and finally be a little freer and, if possible, a little happier. One of the earliest homages paid to psychoanalysis speaks of “healing through consciousness.” The phrase is exact—if one means thereby that analysis wishes to substitute for an immediate and dissimulating consciousness a mediate consciousness taught by the reality principle. Thus the same doubter who depicts the ego as a “poor creature” in subjection to three masters, the id, the superego, and reality or necessity, is also the exegete who rediscovers the logic of the illogical kingdom and who dares, with unparalleled modesty and discretion, to terminate his essay on The Future of an Illusion by invoking the god Logos, soft of voice but indefatigable, in no wise omnipotent, but efficacious in the long run.

This last reference to Freud’s “reality principle” and to its equivalents in Nietzsche and Marx—eternal return in the former, understood necessity in the latter—brings out the positive benefit of the ascesis required by a reductive and destructive interpretation: confrontation with bare reality, the discipline of Ananke, of necessity.

While finding their positive convergence, our three masters of suspicion also present the most radically contrary stance to the phenomenology of the sacred and to any hermeneutics understood as the recollection of meaning and as the reminiscence of being.

At issue in this controversy is the fate of what I shall call, for the sake of brevity, the mytho-poetic core of imagination. Over against illusion and the fable-making function, demystifying hermeneutics sets up the rude discipline of necessity. It is the lesson of Spinoza: one first finds himself a slave, he understands his slavery, he rediscovers himself free within understood necessity. The Ethics is the first model of the ascetic that must be undergone by the
libido, the will to power, the imperialism of the dominant class. But, in return, does not this discipline of the real, this ascesis of the necessary lack the grace of imagination, the upsurge of the possible? And does not this grace of imagination have something to do with the Word as Revelation?

This is what is at issue in the debate. Our question now is to determine to what extent such a debate can still be arbitrated within the limits of a philosophy of reflection.

Chapter 3: Hermeneutic Method and Reflective Philosophy

We assigned ourselves the task, in these beginning chapters, of placing Freud within the movement of contemporary thought. Before becoming involved with its technical language and specific problem we wanted to reconstruct the context in which psychoanalysis is set. We first fixed its hermeneutics of culture upon the background of the problematic of language. From the outset we have looked upon psychoanalysis as throwing light upon and contesting human speech; Freud belongs to our time just as much as Wittgenstein and Bultmann. The place of psychoanalysis within the general debate on language might be more precisely described as an episode in the war between the various hermeneutics, though this does not tell us whether psychoanalysis is but one hermeneutic sect among others or whether, in a manner we shall have to discover, it encroaches upon all the others. In this chapter we would like to go further and discern in psychoanalysis, in the hermeneutic war itself, and in the problematic of language as a whole, a crisis of reflection—that is to say, in the strong and philosophic sense of the term, an adventure of the Cogito and of the reflective philosophy that proceeds therefrom.

The Recourse of Symbols to Reflection

I will begin by retracing the path of my own inquiry. It was as a requirement of lucidity, of veracity, of rigor, that I encountered what I called, at the end of *The Symbolism of Evil*, "the passage to reflection." Is it possible, I asked, to co-
herently interrelate the interpretation of symbols and philosophical reflection? My only answer to this question was in the form of a contradictory resolve: I vowed, on the one hand, to listen to the rich words of symbols and myths that precede my reflection, instruct and nourish it; and on the other hand to continue, by means of the philosophical exegesis of symbols and myths, the tradition of rationality of philosophy, of our western philosophy. Symbols give rise to thought, I said, using a phrase from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Symbols give, they are the gift of language; but this gift creates for me the duty to think, to inaugurate philosophic discourse, starting from what is always prior to and the foundation of that discourse. I did not conceal the paradoxical character of this promise; on the contrary, I accentuated it by affirming first that philosophy does not begin anything, since the fullness of language precedes it, and second that it begins from itself, since it is philosophy which inaugurates the question of meaning and of the foundation of meaning.

I was encouraged along these lines by what appeared to me to be a prephilosophical richness of symbols. Symbols, it seemed to me, call not only for interpretation, as we said in the first chapter, but for philosophic reflection. If this did not become apparent to us sooner, it is because we have restricted ourselves up to now to the semantic structure of symbols, that is, to the excess of meaning due to their "overdetermination."

That symbols call for reflection, however, is due to a second trait of symbols which we have left in the shadows; the purely semantic aspect is merely their most abstract aspect. Linguistic expressions are embodied not only in rituals and emotions, as was suggested above when we mentioned the symbolism of the pure and the impure, but also in myths, that is, in the great narratives about the beginning and the end of evil. I have studied four cycles of these myths: the myths of the primal chaos, the myths of the wicked god, the myths of the soul exiled in an evil body, and the myths concerning the historical fault of an individual who is both an ancestor and a prototype of humanity. New traits of symbol appear here, and with them new suggestions for a hermeneutics. First, these myths introduce exemplary personages—Prometheus, Anthropos, Adam—who begin to generalize human experience on the level of
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How can a philosophy of reflection nourish itself at the symbolic source and become hermeneutic?

It must be admitted that the question seems quite perplexing. Traditionally—since Plato, that is—it is put in the following terms: What is the place of myth in philosophy? If myth calls for philosophy, is it true that philosophy calls for myth? Or, in the terms of the present work, does reflection call for symbols and the interpretation of symbols? This question precedes any attempt to move from mythical symbols to speculative symbols, whatever the symbolic area being dealt with. One must first make sure that the philosophic act, in its innermost nature, not only does not exclude, but requires something like an interpretation.

At first sight the question seems hopeless. Philosophy, born in Greece, introduced new demands in contrast to mythical thought; first and foremost it established the idea of a science, in the sense of the Platonic epistêmé or the Wissenschaft of German idealism. In view of this idea of philosophical science, the recourse to symbols has something scandalous about it.

In the first place, symbols remain caught within the diversity of languages and cultures and espouse their irreducible singularity. Why begin with the Babylonians, the Hebrews, the Greeks—be they tragic or Pythagorean? Because they nourish my memory? In that case I put my singularity at the center of my reflection; but does not philosophical science require that the singularity of cultural creations and individual memories be reabsorbed into the universality of discourse?

Secondly, philosophy as a rigorous science seems to require univocal significations. But symbols, by reason of their analogical texture, are opaque, nontransparent; the double meaning that gives them concrete roots weights them down with materiality. This double meaning is not accidental but constitutive, inasmuch as the analogous sense, the existential sense, is given only in and through the literal sense; in epistemological terms, this opacity can only mean equivocity. Can philosophy systematically cultivate the equivocal?

Thirdly, and this is the most serious point, the bond between symbol and interpretation, in which we have seen the promise of an
organic connection between *mythos* and *logos*, furnishes a new motive for suspicion. Any interpretation can be revoked; no myths without exegesis, but no exegesis without contesting. The deciphering of enigmas is not a science, either in the Platonic, Hegelian, or modern sense of the word "science." Our preceding chapter gave a glimpse of the gravity of the problem: there we considered the most extreme opposition imaginable within the field of hermeneutics, the opposition between the phenomenology of religion, conceived as a remythicizing of discourse, and psychoanalysis, conceived as a demystification of discourse. By the same token our problem becomes graver in becoming more precise. The question now is not simply why an interpretation, but why *these* opposed interpretations? The task is not only to justify the recourse to some kind of interpretation, but to justify the dependence of reflection upon pre-constituted hermeneutics that are mutually exclusive.

To justify the recourse to symbols in philosophy is ultimately to justify cultural contingency, equivocal language, and the war of hermeneutics within itself.

The solution of the problem hinges on showing that reflection, in principle, requires something like interpretation; starting from that requirement one can then justify, also in principle, the detour through the contingency of cultures, through an incurably equivocal language, and through the conflict of interpretations.

Let us begin at the beginning. Up to the present we have only been considering the recourse of symbols to reflection; what makes that recourse intelligible is reflection's recourse to symbols.

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handling any hermeneutic conflict. Therefore, what does Reflection signify? What does the Self of self-reflection signify?

I assume here that the positing of the self is the first truth for the philosopher placed within that broad tradition of modern philosophy that begins with Descartes and is developed in Kant, Fichte, and the reflective stream of European philosophy. For this tradition, which we shall consider as a whole before setting its main representatives in opposition to one another, the positing of the self is a truth which posits itself; it can be neither verified nor deduced; it is at once the positing of a being and of an act; the positing of an existence and of an operation of thought: *I am, I think*; to exist, for me, is to think; I exist inasmuch as I think. Since this truth cannot be verified like a fact, nor deduced like a conclusion, it has to posit itself in reflection; its self-positing is reflection; Fichte called this first truth the *thetic judgment*. Such is our philosophical starting point.

But this first reference of reflection to the positing of the self, as existing and thinking, does not sufficiently characterize reflection. In particular, we do not yet understand why reflection requires a work of deciphering, an exegesis, and a science of exegesis or hermeneutics, and still less why this deciphering must be either a psychoanalysis or a phenomenology of the sacred. This point cannot be understood so long as reflection is seen as a return to the so-called evidence of immediate consciousnes. We have to introduce a second trait of reflection, which may be stated thus: reflection is not intuition; or, in positive terms, reflection is the effort to recapture the Ego of the Ego Cogito in the mirror of its objects, its works, its acts. But why must the positing of the Ego be recaptured through its acts? Precisely because it is given neither in a psychological evidence, nor in an intellectual intuition, nor in a mystical vision. A reflective philosophy is the contrary of a philosophy of the immediate. The first truth—*I am, I think*—remains as abstract and empty as it is invincible; it has to be "mediated" by the ideas, actions, works, institutions, and monuments that objectify it. It is in these objects, in the widest sense of the word, that the Ego must lose and find itself. We can say, in a somewhat paradoxical sense, that a philosophy of reflection is not a philosophy of consciousness, if by
to the theory of objectivity; it is purely and simply transposed into the second critique; the objectivity of the maxims of the will rests on the distinction between the validity of duty, which is a priori, and the content of empirical desires. It is in opposition to this reduction of reflection to a simple critique that I say, with Fichte and his French successor, Jean Nabert, that reflection is not so much a justification of science and duty as a reappropriation of our effort to exist; epistemology is only a part of this broader task: we have to recover the act of existing, the positing of the self, in all the density of its works. Why must this recovery be characterized as appropriation and even as reappropriation? I must recover something which has first been lost; I make “proper to me” what has ceased being mine. I make “mine” what I am separated from by space or time, by distraction or “diversion,” or because of some culpable forgetfulness. Appropriation signifies that the initial situation from which reflection proceeds is “forgetfulness.” I am lost, “led astray” among objects and separated from the center of my existence, just as I am separated from others and as an enemy is separated from all men. Whatever the secret of this “diapora,” of this separation, it signifies that I do not at first possess what I am. The truth that Fichte called the thetic judgment posits itself in a desert wherein I am absent to myself. That is why reflection is a task, an Aufgabe—the task of making my concrete experience equal to the positing of “I am.” Such is the ultimate elaboration of our initial proposition that reflection is not intuition; we now say: the positing of self is not given, it is a task, it is not gegeben, but aufgegeben.

At this point one may wonder whether we have not overly stressed the practical and ethical side of reflection. Is this not a new limitation, like that of the epistemological stream of the Kantian philosophy? Moreover, are we not farther than ever from our problem of interpretation? I do not think so; the ethical stress put on reflection does not mark a limitation, if we take the notion of ethical in its wide sense, as in Spinoza, when he calls the total process of philosophy “ethical.”

Philosophy is ethical to the extent that it leads from alienation to freedom and beatitude. In Spinoza this conversion is achieved when the knowledge of self is made equal to the knowledge of the unique

2. In Husserlian language: the Ego Cogito is apodictic, but not necessarily adequate.
 substance; but this speculative process has an ethical significance, inasmuch as the alienated individual is transformed by the knowledge of the whole. Philosophy is ethics, but ethics is not simply morality. If we follow Spinoza's use of the word "ethical" we must say that reflection is ethical before becoming a critique of morality. Its goal is to grasp the Ego in its effort to exist, in its desire to be. This is where a reflective philosophy recovers and perhaps also saves the Platonic notion that the source of knowledge is itself Eros, desire, love, along with the Spinozistic notion that it is conatus, effort. Such effort is a desire, since it is never satisfied; but the desire is an effort since it is the affirmative positing of a singular being and not simply a lack of being. Effort and desire are the two sides of this positing of the self in the first truth: I am.

We are now in a position to complete our negative proposition—reflection is not intuition—by a positive proposition: Reflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be, through the works which bear witness to that effort and desire. That is why reflection is more than a mere critique of knowledge and even more than a mere critique of moral judgment; prior to every critique of judgment it reflects upon the act of existing that we deploy in effort and desire.

This third step leads us to the threshold of our problem of interpretation: the positing or emergence of this effort or desire is not only devoid of all intuition but is evidenced only by works whose meaning remains doubtful and revocable. This is where reflection calls for an interpretation and tends to move into hermeneutics. The ultimate root of our problem lies in this primitive connection between the act of existing and the signs we deploy in our works; reflection must become interpretation because I cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world. That is why a reflective philosophy must include the results, methods, and presuppositions of all the sciences that try to decipher and interpret the signs of man.  

Such is, in its principle and widest generality, the root of the hermeneutic problem. The problem is posed both by the factual existence of symbolic language which calls for reflection and, conversely, by the indigence of reflection which calls for interpretation. In positing itself, reflection understands its own inability to transcend the vain and empty abstraction of the I think and the necessity to recover itself by deciphering its own signs lost in the world of culture. Thus reflection realizes it does not begin as science; in order to operate it must take to itself the opaque, contingent, and equivocal signs scattered in the cultures in which our language is rooted.

**Reflection and equivocal language**

By thus placing the hermeneutic problem within the movement of reflection we are enabled to meet the objections that would seemingly invalidate a philosophy that presents itself as a hermeneutics. In the foregoing we have reduced these objections to three main ones: Can philosophy derive its universality from contingent cultural productions? Can it build its rigor upon equivocal significations? Can it subject its vow of coherence to the fluctuations of an indecisive conflict between rival interpretations?

The aim of these introductory chapters is not so much to resolve the problems as to show their legitimacy when they are rightly posed, to assure ourselves that they are not meaningless but are inscribed in the nature of things and in the nature of language. That philosophical discourse achieves universality only by passing through the contingency of cultures, that its rigor is dependent upon equivocal languages, that its coherence must traverse the war between hermeneutics—all this can and must be seen as the necessary pathway, as the triple aporia rightly formed and rightly posed. At the end of this first series of investigations, deliberately called a "Propermatic," one point should be assured: the aporias of interpretation are those of reflection itself.

I will say very little here about the first difficulty, since I have discussed it in the introduction to *The Symbolism of Evil*. To start from a pre-given symbolism, I objected, is to give oneself something
to think about; but at the same time a radical contingency is brought into discourse, the contingency of the cultures of one's acquaintance. My answer was that the philosopher does not speak from nowhere: every question he can pose rises from the depths of his Greek memory; the field of his investigation is thereby unavoidably oriented; his memory carries with it the opposition of the "near" and the "far." Through this contingency of historical encounters we have to discern reasonable sequences between scattered cultural themes. I should now add that it is only abstract reflection which speaks from nowhere. To become concrete, reflection must lose its immediate pretension to universality, to the extent of fusing together its essential necessity and the contingency of the signs through which it recognizes itself. This fusion can be achieved precisely in the movement of interpretation.

We must now come to grips with the more formidable objection, that the recourse to symbolism hands thought over to equivocal language and fallacious arguments that are condemned by a sound logic. The difficulty in avoiding this objection is increased by the fact that logicians have invented symbolic logic with the express aim of eliminating equivocation from our arguments. For the logician, the word "symbol" means precisely the contrary of what it means for us. The important status of symbolic logic obliges us to say something about this encounter, which at the very least constitutes a strange homonymy; the obligation is all the more pressing in view of the fact that we have constantly alluded to the duality of univocal and equivocal expressions and have implicitly assumed that the latter can have an irreplaceable philosophical function.

The only radical way to justify hermeneutics is to seek in the very nature of reflective thought the principle of a logic of double meaning, a logic that is complex but not arbitrary, rigorous in its articulations but irreducible to the linearity of symbolic logic. This logic is no longer a formal logic, but a transcendental logic established on the level of the conditions of possibility; not the conditions of objectivity of nature, but the conditions of the appropriation of our desire to be. Thus the logic of double meanings, which is proper to hermeneutics, is of a transcendental order.

We have now to establish this connection between the logic of double meaning and transcendental reflection.

If the advocate of hermeneutics does not carry the discussion to this level, he will soon be driven into an untenable position. Any effort to maintain the debate on the level of the semantic structure of symbols will be to no purpose. He may of course appeal, as we ourselves have done up to now, to the overdetermination of meaning in symbols and thus defend a theory of two types of symbolism whose respective fields of application must be kept from any overlapping.

But the idea that there can exist two logics on the same level is strictly untenable; a pure and simple juxtaposition can only lead to the elimination of hermeneutics by symbolic logic.

For what advantages can the hermeneutician adduce when faced with formal logic? To the artificiality of logical symbols, which can be written and read but not spoken, he will oppose an essentially oral symbolism, in each instance received and accepted as a heritage. The man who speaks in symbols is first of all a narrator; he transmits an abundance of meaning over which he has little command. This abundance, this density of manifold meaning, is what gives him food for thought and solicits his understanding; interpretation consists less in suppressing ambiguity than in understanding it and in explicating its richness. It may also be said that logical symbolism is empty, whereas symbolism in hermeneutics is full; it renders manifest the double meaning of worldly or psychical reality. This was suggested earlier when we said that symbols are bound; the sensible sign is bound by the symbolic meaning that dwells in it and gives it transparency and lightness; the symbolic meaning is in turn bound to its sensible vehicle, which gives it weight and opacity. One might add that this is also the way symbols bind us, viz. by giving thought a content, a flesh, a density.

These distinctions and oppositions are not false; they are merely unfounded. A confrontation which restricts itself to the symbolic texture of symbols and does not face the question of their foundation in reflection will soon prove embarrassing to the advocate of hermeneutics. For the artificiality and emptiness of logical symbolism are simply the counterpart and condition of the true aim of this logic, viz. to guarantee the nonambiguity of arguments; what the hermeneutician calls double meaning is, in logical terms, ambi-
guity, i.e. equivocity of words and amphiboly of statements. A peaceful juxtaposition of hermeneutics and symbolic logic is therefore impossible; symbolic logic quickly makes any lazy compromise untenable. Its very "intolerance" forces hermeneutics to radically justify its own language.

We must therefore understand this intolerance in order to arrive 
*a contrario* at the foundation of hermeneutics.

If the rigor of symbolic logic seems more exclusive than that of traditional formal logic, the reason is that symbolic logic is not a simple prolongation of the earlier logic. It does not represent a higher degree of formalization; it proceeds from a global decision concerning ordinary language as a whole; it marks a split with ordinary language and its incurable ambiguity; it questions the equivocal and hence fallacious character of the words of ordinary language, the amphibolous character of its constructions, the confusion inherent in metaphor and idiomatic expressions, the emotional resonance of highly descriptive language. Symbolic logic despairgs of natural language precisely at the point where hermeneutics believes in its implicit "wisdom."

This struggle begins with the exclusion from the properly cognitive sphere of all language that does not give factual information. The rest of discourse is classified under the heading of the emotive and hortatory functions of language; that which does not give factual information expresses emotions, feelings, or attitudes, or urges others to behave in some particular way.

Reduced thus to the informative function, language still has to be divested of the equivocity of words and the amphiboly of grammatical constructions; verbal ambiguity must be unmasked so as to eliminate it from arguments and to employ coherently the same words in the same sense within the same argument. The function of definition is to explain meaning and thereby eliminate ambiguity: the only definitions that succeed in doing this are scientific ones. These are not content with pointing out the meaning words already have in usage, independently of their definition; instead they very strictly characterize an object in light of a scientific theory (for example, the definition of force as the product of mass and acceleration in the context of Newtonian theory).

But symbolic logic goes further. For it, the price of univocity is the creation of a symbolism with no ties to natural language. This notion of symbol excludes the other notion of symbol. The recourse to a completely artificial symbolism introduces in logic a difference not only of degree but of nature; the symbols of the logician intervene precisely at the point where the arguments of classical logic, formulated in ordinary language, run into an invincible and, in a way, residual ambiguity. Thus the logical disjunction sign \( \lor \) eliminates the ambiguity of words that express disjunction in ordinary language (Eng., or; Ger., oder; Fr., ou): \( \lor \) expresses only the partial meaning common to the inclusive disjunction (the sense of the Latin *vel*) according to which at least one of the terms of the disjunction is true although both may be true, and to the exclusive disjunction (the sense of the Latin *aut*) according to which at least one is true and at least one is false; \( \lor \) resolves the ambiguity by formulating the inclusive disjunction as the part common to the two modes of disjunction. Likewise the symbol \( \supset \) resolves the ambiguity inherent in the notion of implication (which may denote formal implication, either logical, definitional, or causal): the symbol \( \supset \) formulates the common partial meaning, namely, that any hypothetical statement with a true antecedent and a false consequent must be false; the symbol is thus an abbreviation of a longer symbolism which expresses the negation of the conjunction of the truth value of the antecedent and the falsity of the consequent: \( \sim (p \cdot \sim q) \).

Thus the artificial language of logical symbolism enables one to determine the validity of arguments in all cases where a residual ambiguity can be ascribed to the structure of ordinary language. The precise point where symbolic logic cuts across and contests hermeneutics, therefore, is this: verbal equivocity and syntactical amphiboly—in short, the ambiguity of ordinary language—can be overcome only at the level of a language whose symbols have a meaning completely determined by the truth table whose construction they allow. Thus the sense of the symbol \( \lor \) is completely determined by its truth function, inasmuch as it serves to safeguard the validity of the disjunctive syllogism; likewise the sense of the symbol \( \supset \) completely exhausts its meaning in the construction of the
truth table of the hypothetical syllogism. These constructions guarantee that the symbols are completely unambiguous, while the non-ambiguity of the symbols assures the universal validity of arguments.

As long as the logic of multiple meaning is not grounded in its reflective function, it necessarily falls under the blows of formal and symbolic logic. In the eyes of the logician, hermeneutics will always be suspected of fostering a culpable complacency toward equivocal meanings, of surreptitiously giving an informative function to expressions that have merely an emotive or hortatory function. Hermeneutics thus falls under the fallacies of relevance which a sound logic denounces.

The only thing that can come to the aid of equivocal expressions and truly ground a logic of double meaning is the problematic of reflection. The only thing that can justify equivocal expressions is their a priori role in the movement of self-appropriation by self which constitutes reflective activity. This a priori function pertains not to a formal but to a transcendental logic, if by transcendental logic is meant the establishing of the conditions of possibility of a domain of objectivity in general. The task of such a logic is to extricate by a regressive method the notions presupposed in the constitution of a type of experience and a corresponding type of reality. Transcendental logic is not exhausted in the Kantian a priori. The connection we have established between reflection upon the I think, I am qua act, and the signs scattered in the various cultures of that act of existing, opens up a new field of experience, objectivity, and reality. This is the field to which the logic of double meaning pertains—a logic we have qualified above as complex but not arbitrary, and rigorous in its articulations. The principle of a limitation to the demands of symbolic logic lies in the structure of reflection itself. If there is no such thing as the transcendental, there is no reply to the intolerance of symbolic logic; but if the transcendental is an authentic dimension of discourse, then new force is found in the reasons that can be opposed to the requirement of logicism that all discourse be measured by its treatise of arguments. These reasons, which seemed to us to be left hanging in air for want of a foundation, are as follows:

1. The requirement of univocity holds only for discourse that presents itself as argument; but reflection does not argue, it draws no conclusion, it neither deduces nor induces; it states the conditions of possibility whereby empirical consciousness can be made equal to thetic consciousness. Hence, "equivocal" applies only to those expressions that ought to be univocal in the course of a single "argument" but are not; in the reflective use of multiple-meaning symbols there is no fallacy of ambiguity: to reflect upon these symbols and to interpret them is one and the same act.

2. The understanding developed by reflection upon symbols is not a weak substitute for definition, for reflection is not a type of thinking that defines and thinks according to "classes." This brings us back to the Aristotelian problem of the "many meanings of being." Aristotle was the first to see clearly that philosophical discourse is not subject to the logical alternative of univocal-equivocal, for being is not a "genus"; and yet, being is said; but it "is said in many ways."

3. Let us go back to the very first alternative considered above: a statement that does not give factual information, we said, expresses only the emotions or attitudes of a subject. Reflection, however, falls outside this alternative; that which makes possible the appropriation of the I think, I am is neither the empirical statement nor the emotive statement, but something other than either of these.

This case for interpretation rests entirely on the reflective function of interpretative thought. If the double movement of symbols toward reflection and of reflection toward symbols is valid, interpretative thought is well grounded. Hence it may be said, at least negatively, that such thought is not measured by a logic of arguments; the validity of philosophical statements cannot be arbitrated by a theory of language conceived as syntax; the semantics of philosophy is not swallowed up by a symbolic logic.

These propositions concerning philosophic discourse do not enable us, however, to say positively what a philosophical statement is; such an affirmation could be fully justified only by its actually being said. At least we can affirm that the indirect, symbolic lan-
guage of reflection can be valid, not because it is equivocal, but in spite of its being equivocal.

REFLECTION AND THE HERMENEUTIC CONFLICT

But the reply of hermeneutics to the objections of symbolic logic is liable to be an empty victory. The challenge comes not only from without, it is not only the voice of the “intolerant” logician; it comes from within, from the internal inconsistency of hermeneutics, torn by contradiction. As we already know, not one but several interpretations have to be integrated into reflection. Thus the hermeneutic conflict itself is what nourishes the process of reflection and governs the movement from abstract to concrete reflection. Is this possible without “destroying” reflection?

In our attempt to justify the recourse to hermeneutics that are already constituted—that of the phenomenology of religion and that of psychoanalysis—we suggested that their conflict might well be not only a crisis of language but, deeper still, a crisis of reflection: to destroy the idols, to listen to symbols—are not these, we asked, one and the same enterprise? Indeed, the profound unity of the demystifying and the remythicizing of discourse can be seen only at the end of an ascension of reflection, in the course of which the debate dramatizing the hermeneutic field shall have become a discipline of thinking.

One trait of this discipline is already clear to us: the two enterprises which we at first opposed to one another—the reduction of illusions and the restoration of the fullness of meaning—are alike in that they both shift the origin of meaning to another center which is no longer the immediate subject of reflection: “consciousness”—the watchful ego, attentive to its own presence, anxious about self and attached to self. Thus hermeneutics, approached from its most opposed poles, represents a challenge and a test for reflection, whose first tendency is to identify itself with immediate consciousness. To let ourselves be torn by the contradiction between these divergent hermeneutics is to give ourselves up to the wonder

that puts reflection in motion: it is no doubt necessary for us to be separated from ourselves, to be set off center, in order finally to know what is signified by the I think, I am.

We thought we had resolved the antinomy of myth and philosophy by appealing to interpretation itself for the mediation between myth and philosophy or, in a broader sense, between symbols and reflection. But that mediation is not given, it is to be constructed.

It is not given like a ready-made solution. The dispossession of the ego, which psychoanalysis more than any other hermeneutics demands of us, is the first achievement of reflection that reflection does not understand. But the phenomenological interpretation of the sacred, to which psychoanalysis seems to be diametrically opposed, is no less foreign to the style and fundamental intention of the reflective method; does it not oppose a method of transcendence to the method of immanence of reflective philosophy? Does not the sacred, manifested in its symbols, seem to pertain to revelation rather than to reflection? Whether one looks back to the will to power of the Nietzschean man, to the generic being of the Marxist man, to the libido of the Freudian man, or whether one looks ahead to the transcendent home of signification which we designate here by the vague term the “sacred,” the home of meaning is not consciousness but something other than consciousness.

Both hermeneutics pose therefore the same crucial question: Can the dispossession of consciousness to the profit of another home of meaning be understood as an act of reflection, as the first gesture of reappropriation? This is the question that remains in suspense; it is more radical than the question of the coexistence of several styles of interpretation, or the whole crisis of language in which the hermeneutic conflict is set.

We suspect that these three “crises”—crisis of language, crisis of interpretation, crisis of reflection—can only be overcome together. In order to become concrete, i.e. equal to its richest contents, reflection must become hermeneutic; but there exists no general hermeneutics. This aporia sets us in movement: would it not be one and the same thing to arbitrate the war of hermeneutics and to enlarge reflection to the dimensions of a critique of interpretations? Is it not by one and the same movement that reflection can become
concrete reflection and that the rivalry between interpretations can be comprehended, in the double sense of the term: justified by reflection and embodied in its work.

For the moment our perplexity is great. What is offered to us is a three-term relation, a figure with three heads: reflection, interpretation understood as restoration of meaning, interpretation understood as reduction of illusion. No doubt we shall have to penetrate quite deeply into the conflict between interpretations before we see appear, as a requirement of the very war of hermeneutics, the means of grounding the three together in reflection. But in its turn reflection will no longer be the positing, as feeble as it is peremptory, as sterile as it is irrefutable, of the I think, I am: it will have become concrete reflection; and its concreteness will be due to the harsh hermeneutic discipline.