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HERMENEUTICS

Hermeneutics—“a term whose Greek looks, theological past, and Herr Professor pretentiousness ought not put us off because, under the homelier and less fussy name of interpretation, it is what many of us at least have been talking all the time.”

—Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (1983, p. 224)

Hermeneutics is the theory and philosophy of understanding and interpretation. The term derives from Hermes, a son of Zeus, who interprets messages

from the Greek gods. Hermes was not simply a messenger, however. He was also a trickster. It was not always easy to determine which role Hermes was playing.

As Hermes's story suggests, understanding and interpretation can be fraught. In education, for example, students sometimes struggle to understand the meaning of texts. Teachers try to understand students' questions and may wonder about the meaning of teaching for their own lives. Educational researchers who use qualitative and quantitative methods make interpretive judgments (albeit for different reasons) and must determine whether their interpretations are defensible. Hermeneutic theory recognizes that interpretive challenges such as these can be analyzed from various perspectives that posit different assumptions about what interpretation entails and what the goals of interpretation should be. Becoming familiar with debates in hermeneutic theory can help us appreciate the interpretive complexities we encounter every day and permit us to become more thoughtful interpreters.

A key debate concerns how interpretation is defined. One definition frames interpretation in terms of epistemology (the philosophy of knowing and knowledge). From this perspective, interpretation is a method or cognitive strategy we employ to clarify or construct meaning. The goal is to produce valid understanding of meaningful “objects,” such as texts, artifacts, spoken words, experiences, and intentions.

The second definition frames interpretation in terms of ontology (the philosophy of being and existence). In this view, interpretation is not an act of cognition, a special method, or a theory of knowledge. Interpretation, instead, characterizes how human beings naturally experience the world. Realized through our moods, concerns, self-understanding, and practical engagements with people and things we encounter in our sociohistorical contexts, interpretation is an unavoidable aspect of human existence.

The epistemological and ontological definitions of interpretation interact as sibling rivals. The hermeneutic “family split” arose more than a century ago when beliefs about the practice and aim of interpretation intersected with the success of physical science and the rise of social science. In the course of this entry, we will examine the German branch of the hermeneutic family tree beginning in the 19th century with Wilhelm Dilthey, who argued that interpretation is both (a) a method and a theory of

knowledge for the human sciences and (b) the pre-reflective mode of everyday lived experience. As will be shown, Dilthey could not reconcile his aspiration for an epistemology of interpretive social science with his realization that interpretation is an ontological feature of human experience that cannot easily be transformed into reflective scientific knowledge.

In the 20th century, Martin Heidegger argued that Dilthey was correct to intuit that “lived” understanding cannot be fully theorized or methodically regulated. Unlike Dilthey, however, Heidegger maintained that scientific knowledge *necessarily* remains indebted to lived understanding. We will explore why Heidegger argued for the primacy of lived understanding. We will also see how Hans-Georg Gadamer drew on Heidegger’s hermeneutics to develop an ontological model of social science, which posits that interpretation in social science is no different from interpretation in ordinary life.

Gadamer’s ideas have provoked a range of responses. We will look at two contemporary criticisms. One seeks to replace Gadamer’s ontological hermeneutics with epistemological hermeneutics. The other appreciates Gadamer’s ontological social science but argues that it must be supplemented by method and theory. In conclusion, the entry will briefly review how educational philosophers use hermeneutics to analyze educational practices, aims, and research.

Interpretive Social Science: Dilthey’s Dilemma

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), a Protestant theologian, devoted his life to developing the *Geisteswissenschaften* (German for social science, also translated as the human or moral sciences, or sciences of mind or of the human spirit). Dilthey thought that human beings express their understanding of life experience in the form of meaningful objects, such as texts, works of art, and various cultural expressions, and that interpreting these meaningful objects is fundamental for maintaining social life. Social science therefore requires a hermeneutic method, not the methods of physical science. It also requires an epistemology of interpretive knowledge, not a theory of knowledge concerned with causal explanation. The German word *Verstehen* (interpretation; commonly translated as *understanding*) captures Dilthey’s belief that the social sciences are interpretive and, therefore, are distinct from the physical sciences. Dilthey insisted that the two forms of scientific knowledge, while different, are equally rigorous.

Dilthey based his ideas on the *hermeneutic circle*, a method of interpretation that became prominent during the Reformation, when Protestant theologians sought to interpret the Bible without appealing to the Catholic Church to determine the meaning of problematic passages or resolve interpretive disputes. As its name suggests, the hermeneutic method assumes that interpretation is circular. Because the meaning of the Bible was thought to be unified and self-consistent, the meaning of any specific passage could be determined by referring to the text as a whole. But since understanding the text as a whole presumes understanding its problematic passages, determining the meaning of a problematic passage depends on a preliminary intuitive grasp of the text’s entire meaning. Biblical exegesis thus revolves in a continuous cycle of anticipation and revision. Interpreting the meaning of any part of the Bible depends on having already grasped the meaning of the Bible as a whole, even as one’s understanding of the entire Bible will be reshaped as one clarifies the meaning of its constituent parts.

Another Protestant theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), maintained that the hermeneutic circle could ensure understanding not only of the Bible but also of all written and oral expressions. Using this method correctly, interpreters could understand the meaning of linguistic expressions better than the authors who produced them. Schleiermacher transformed the hermeneutic circle from a method of Biblical exegesis into a general theory of interpretation that explained how understanding could be achieved in ordinary circumstances.

Extending Schleiermacher, Dilthey contended that the hermeneutic circle not only helps people reflectively interpret others’ meaningful expressions but also enables people to understand themselves and their own lived experience. This is because life experiences do not unfold in linear fashion but, instead, are related to one another as parts are related to wholes. On the one hand, we understand specific life experiences in terms of how we understand the meaning of our life as a whole. At the same time, the way we understand our life as a whole depends on how we understand specific life experiences. Understanding specific experiences thus shapes and also is shaped by understanding the overall meaning of our lives, even as understanding our life’s overall meaning both shapes and is shaped by how we understand specific life experiences.

Applying the hermeneutic circle to life, Dilthey realized that understanding is temporal. Past experiences constitute the “parts” of one’s biography. The future makes it possible to fathom one’s life in toto. Interpreting the meaning of the future depends on and reshapes one’s understanding of the past, even as interpreting the meaning of the past anticipates and revises one’s understanding of the future.

Interpreting the meaning of time therefore is integral to interpreting the meaning of lived experience. It is important to note that at the prereflective level of interpreting lived experience, time is not an *object* for interpretation. It is impossible to freeze or objectify the past in order to interpret it. Neither is the future a stationary target at which interpretation aims. One rather interprets the meaning of time as one moves through time. Where lived experience is concerned, interpreting time and experiencing time arise together.

Dilthey drew two conclusions from this insight. First, the meaning of life experience is fluid. With the passage of time, the meaning of the past and the future shifts. At different points in the future, one’s past will mean different things. The meaning of the future also changes, depending on the particular stage of life from which the future is anticipated.

Second, interpreting lived experience does not produce understanding that is abstracted from the experience of living. We cannot escape our situation to interpret it. Nor can we interpret our life and *then* experience it. Rather, we are practically engaged in living the life that we interpret. Prereflective interpretation, in short, is situated, partial, practical, and personal.

Dilthey believed that prereflective understanding of one’s own lived experience could evolve into reflective theoretical knowledge of how other people understand their life experience. Theoretical knowledge thereby extends and refines pretheoretical practical understanding. But Dilthey recognized that because theoretical knowledge is rooted in pretheoretical understanding, knowledge in the social sciences, particularly in history, differs from knowledge in the physical sciences. The historian who reflectively examines the meaning of historical events himself is a historical being. The meaning of the past therefore cannot be established once and for all but instead varies with the perspective of the historian who studies it. Moreover, theoretical understanding remains rooted in the pretheoretical understanding it aims to clarify, even as pretheoretical understanding is changed by the theoretical understanding that

it grounds. Interpretation consequently revolves in a never-ending circle, rendering historical knowledge provisional and incomplete.

Although Dilthey believed that the interpretive social sciences could be as rigorous as the physical sciences, the character of knowledge in interpretive social science nonetheless vexed him. What kind of scientific knowledge is possible when the meaning of that which is studied constantly changes? Such knowledge is relativistic, not general and valid. Moreover, insofar as the historian “belongs” to the history he studies, historical knowledge cannot be objective. Historical knowledge instead is subjective, provisional, and partial. The circularity of interpretation raises the possibility that historical “knowledge” simply proves what it presupposes.

In an effort to reconcile understanding lived experience with scientific knowledge, Dilthey turned to his younger contemporary Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Husserl demonstrated that science grows out of particular “lifeworlds” and necessarily presupposes nonscientific understandings. But while Husserl demonstrated that scientific knowledge depends on prereflectively understanding particular lifeworlds, he also subjected the lifeworld to phenomenological analysis to discover “essences” in lived experience that make theoretical knowledge of the lifeworld possible. In so doing, Husserl encountered a contradiction. On the one hand, pretheoretical understandings are relative to particular lifeworlds. On the other hand, phenomenological analysis aims to produce knowledge of the lifeworld that is universal and unconditionally valid. It was unclear how phenomenological analysis could both transcend and also remain indebted to pretheoretical understanding. Phenomenological analysis seemed both necessary and also impossible. Husserl did not solve Dilthey’s dilemma but instead exposed another aspect of it.

Ontological Hermeneutics: Heidegger and Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) believed that Dilthey was stymied by a false assumption. Dilthey assumed that prereflective understanding is subjective. It therefore is biased and unreliable and cannot be the basis for interpretive social science. Gadamer countered that prereflective understanding is not subjective but instead is intimately and necessarily tied to critical reflection. The intimate necessary relation between prereflective understanding and critical reflection provides an opening for the disclosure of truth.

Gadamer based his ideas on the work of his teacher, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). In his book *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger probed two of Dilthey's important insights: (1) we experience the life that we prereflectively interpret and (2) prereflective understanding exhibits a circular temporal structure. Dilthey believed that these two conditions are contingent and apply only to prereflective understanding. Heidegger demonstrated that both conditions are necessary and characterize all understanding, including critical reflection.

Heidegger began by considering the question of existence. To exist, Heidegger reasoned, is to live in the present. As Dilthey showed, the present does not arise in a historical vacuum but instead always implicates the future and the past. Living in the present, we cannot help anticipate the future based on where we have been, even as our expectations for future experience color our understanding of the life we have lived. Heidegger used the term *historicity* to underscore the idea that human understanding is an *inescapably* temporal experience.

Insofar as understanding is an inescapably temporal experience, we do not choose to start (or stop) understanding at a particular point in (or out of) time. Rather, understanding is *a way of being* that always is already going on (to use Heidegger's phrase). It is true that understanding sometimes is mistaken. But breakdowns in understanding signify *misunderstanding*, not an *absence* of understanding according to Heidegger.

As an experience that is always happening, understanding does not grasp the meaning of objects that are "present-at-hand," distinct from our interests and concerns. Understanding instead signifies being intimately involved with people and things. Our world is composed of implements that are "ready-to-hand," tied to our purposes, moods, interests, and so on. Heidegger described engaged practical ongoing understanding in terms of "fore-having," "fore-sight," and "fore-conception." The prefix *fore-* signifies that we are able to engage with implements in our world because we prereflectively sense how they are implicated with our interests and how they fit within the context of meaningful relations in which we find them.

The fact that we prereflectively understand meaning does not imply that understanding is stuck in the past. Prereflective understanding can change as human beings move into the future, reconsider prior understanding, and anticipate new possibilities. Heidegger insisted that prereflective understanding

could become critical and reflective. But critical reflection does not produce understanding where none had previously existed. Critical reflection instead remains indebted to the preunderstandings it clarifies and corrects.

Heidegger coined the term *thrown-projection* to describe understanding as an experience of being involved in the world. The term *thrown* indicates that we do not construct the meaningful context(s) in which we live. Rather, we are born into a social world that is inherently meaningful and that has already been interpreted by others. Interpretation is possible, because the world discloses meaning through the medium of language. We inherit this social web of meaning as a linguistic "horizon" within which the construal of meaning for our own lives becomes possible. The term *projection* is not synonymous with *planning*, according to Heidegger. Projection instead indicates that understanding is a dynamic experience of anticipating future possibilities. Because expectations for the future necessarily arise in the present, we cannot see them in their entirety or with absolute clarity. Moreover, while future possibilities are open, they nonetheless are partially circumscribed by possibilities that already have been fulfilled.

Heidegger said that the human being who experiences understanding as a cycle of thrown-projection is *Dasein*. *Dasein* means "there-being." Unlike the autonomous epistemological subject who leverages interpretation to grasp the meaning of objects (including objectified experiences), *Dasein* is not an independent agent who confronts discrete objects, the meaning of which he must deliberately choose to discover or construct. *Dasein* rather is "there" in the world, spontaneously involved with things that *Dasein* understands prior to any distinction between subjects and objects. *Dasein* does not initiate understanding and does not regulate the production of meaning. The fact of existing in an inherently meaningful and already interpreted world—not *Dasein's* own initiative—is the condition that makes both prereflective and reflective understanding possible.

Heidegger's claim that understanding is a temporally conditioned way of experiencing the world carries profound implications for social science, Gadamer concluded. He developed these implications in his magnum opus *Truth and Method* (1960/1975). Before sketching Gadamer's ontological view of social science, it is helpful to clarify two points. First, while Gadamer challenged the "science" in social science, he nonetheless used the term

social science (moral science and human science). According to Gadamer, science does not refer exclusively to natural science or exclude the humanities. Like many Continental European thinkers, science for Gadamer refers to systematic study in fields as diverse as theology, archaeology, and politics.

Second, Gadamer did not dismiss natural science. On the contrary, he believed that natural science is necessary and important. But Gadamer wanted to decenter the hegemony of scientific method in social science. He feared that when we rely on method to reflectively understand the social world, we tend to emphasize understanding that we regulate and consciously produce. Consequently, we may delegitimize, occlude, or ignore understanding that we do not control and cannot divorce from our self-understanding and historical situation. Insofar as social science relies on method, Gadamer believed that it alienates us from important dimensions of our ordinary life experience. Overemphasizing method also warps natural science, Gadamer claimed. While method has a place in natural science, magnifying its role conflates natural science with instrumental procedures that negate the importance of interpretive judgment and modesty in scientific practice.

Gadamer thus was not hostile to science. Nevertheless, he sought to significantly reframe *social science*. Following Heidegger, Gadamer argued that interpretation in social science is a temporally conditioned experience or “event” that we live through, not a kind of knowledge that we achieve by methodologically regulating our life experience or by abstracting and justifying critical reflection outside of ordinary understanding. Understanding and interpretation in social science are no different from understanding and interpretation in daily life. In both cases, Gadamer maintained, we experience understanding and interpretation as a dialogue or conversation.

The notion that social science is a conversation might seem startling. We typically think that social scientists collect and analyze data. But the people and texts that concern social scientists are not sources of data according to Gadamer. They are conversation partners.

Texts for Gadamer are conversation partners no less than people. Texts are not inanimate objects in which an author’s intended meaning is permanently congealed. Texts are rather dynamic linguistic horizons that disclose meaning over time. Gadamer’s social scientist starts to understand a text when she recognizes that it raises a question or issue

that does not belong exclusively to the text (or its author) or the question or issue that the text voices comes down through tradition and also concerns the social scientist. Similarly, the social scientist starts to understand another person not because she empathizes with him or is able to leap out of her own body to get inside his head but because understanding begins when the social scientist recognizes the question or issue that concerns the other person and realizes that this question concerns her as well.

Of course, neither party in the conversation can escape the situation into which each has been “thrown.” Understanding therefore does not aim to capture *the* meaning of a question. The meaning of a question rather is codetermined by the horizons of the people who interpret it. People who inhabit different horizons will understand the “same” question differently. Insofar as horizons are temporal and change over time, the “same” question will be understood differently every time it is interpreted.

If we necessarily bring our own horizon to understanding an issue, how can we recognize the horizon of our partner? What prevents us from appropriating our partner’s perspective or conflating it with our own? Gadamer proposes two answers. First, he notes that horizons are porous, not self-enclosed. In principle, therefore, horizons can interpenetrate.

Gadamer’s second answer concerns the disposition of conversation partners. In a successful conversation, each party is open to the possibility that the other’s perspective is true and may challenge and even refute one’s own understanding. Gadamer insists that one’s own understanding cannot be clarified or corrected as long as one entertains the other’s perspective from afar and continues to maintain the truth of one’s own position. Change instead requires one to *risk* one’s assumptions and to actually experience the negation of one’s understanding. Gadamer acknowledges that negative experiences are uncomfortable, nevertheless negative experiences can be openings for genuinely reflecting on prior understanding and arriving at new insight into an issue.

Thus, like prereflective understanding, critical reflection for Gadamer is an experience we undergo. In successful conversations, both parties are open to risking their assumptions. As a consequence of being challenged, the understanding of both parties can become more encompassing, perspicacious, critical, and reflective. Gadamer calls the reflective dimension of conversation a “fusion of horizons.”

Neither party can predict in advance how its horizons will be fused. When one party tries to direct the conversation or claims to know what the other is thinking, “talk” becomes something other than conversation, Gadamer observes. But when a fusion of horizons genuinely happens, both parties come to understand a truth about life’s meaning that neither could know outside of participating in the conversation.

In sum, Gadamer’s reframing of social science in terms of a conversation that we experience with others differs from the way we typically characterize social science. Gadamer’s researcher does not try to empathize with those whom she studies. Neither does she regard them and their cultures as exotic and distant. Rather, she endeavors to recognize a question or issue that she and her partner share. The meaning of the question cannot be determined “objectively” but instead is codetermined by the horizon of both the researcher and her partner and changes with each interpretive event. The self-understanding of Gadamer’s researcher is not controlled or kept out of play but instead is affected by allowing her partner to challenge her understanding of the question that is of mutual concern. The researcher cannot direct this experience or predict the new insight that the conversation will disclose. Instead, she participates in an event that transforms both herself and her partner in ways that neither party can imagine in advance.

Insofar as method helps researchers regulate understanding, Gadamer contends that it distances them from their lived experience. Relying on method seduces people to underplay and even discount the experiential dimension of critical reflection. Social science becomes an intellectual exercise, not an opportunity for personal transformation. In place of honing methodological skill, Gadamer wants social scientists to cultivate the disposition to be open, take risks, and trust that they may have something to learn from their interlocutors. Framing social science as a conversation we experience with others can rehabilitate the moral dimension of social science, Gadamer concludes.

Responses to Gadamer

A number of contemporary scholars are developing the philosophical and practical implications of Gadamer’s social science. In his influential essay, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man” (1971), Charles Taylor (1931–) argues that social scientists are

“self-interpreting animals” who always prereflectively understand their theoretical conclusions and who inevitably appeal to intuitions and self-understanding to justify their findings. Ruth Behar (1956–) provides a practical example of ontological social science. Behar’s book, *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996), does not explicitly reference hermeneutics or Gadamer. Nonetheless, she argues in it that anthropological insight necessarily implicates the anthropologist’s self-understanding; the anthropologist’s self-understanding, moreover, is vulnerable to (and affected by) the people whom she studies.

While a number of practitioners and scholars embrace Gadamer, his work also provokes criticism. Thinkers such as Emilio Betti (1890–1968), E. D. Hirsch Jr. (1928–), and Dagfinn Føllesdall (1932–) epitomize one line of response. According to these critics, Gadamer’s claim that the interpreter’s situation influences meaning and that meaning is construed differently in each interpretive event leads to relativism. Moreover, Gadamer provides no basis for adjudicating conflicting interpretations. Adjudication must appeal to an extracontextual criterion, which Gadamer believes is impossible. In short, these critics conclude that hermeneutics should remain under the umbrella of epistemology. They endeavor to show how interpretation is or can become a rigorous method and theory of knowledge for producing valid objective understanding of texts.

Jürgen Habermas (1929–) articulates a second response. Unlike the critics noted above, Habermas appreciates Gadamer’s insight into the ontological nature of social science. Presuppositions are always operating, Habermas notes. Understanding is irreducibly contextual, historical, and bound up with the interpreter’s self-understanding. The social scientist consequently belongs to the social world that he interprets. Social science theories issue from the pretheoretical practices they strive to explain.

But despite these points of agreement, Habermas questions Gadamer’s faith in the power of language and conversation to disclose truth and promote critical reflection. Language is not simply a communicative medium for understanding meaning, Habermas argues. Material conditions and power interests can systematically and insidiously distort meaning in ways that language does not make apparent. Hence, reflection must do more than simply *clarify* lived understanding by means of conversation. Reflection must also help people *distinguish* lived understanding from ideology. Becoming liberated from ideology

requires a theory that can methodically explain the genesis of distortion by appealing to rationally self-evident causes.

Hermeneutics and Education

Contemporary scholars employ hermeneutics to analyze a range of educational issues, including children's rights, teaching and teacher education, science education, medical education, curriculum theory, inquiry-based learning, and validity in educational assessment. Some scholars contrast epistemological and ontological hermeneutics. Others focus on ontological hermeneutics as a framework for critiquing and reframing educational practices and aims. These scholars develop ideas articulated by Heidegger and Gadamer, who sought to interrupt utilitarian, technical, and market-based influences on education that emphasize developing skills and mastering knowledge. Heidegger and Gadamer countered that education is "*Bildung*"—an ongoing experience of self-formation and transformation—in which one learns to become receptive to ways of being that differ from and even challenge one's own horizon. Conceived as *Bildung*, education aims to help students become more reflective and humble as their horizons expand in ways that neither they nor their teachers can foresee.

Hermeneutics also resounds in normative debates about qualitative inquiry. From an epistemological perspective, the central issue for qualitative research is the dilemma that vexed Dilthey: Given that interpretation necessarily presupposes prior understanding that is personal, temporal, and situated within particular sociocultural contexts, how can interpretive conclusions be objective, generalizable, and valid? From an ontological perspective, the aim of qualitative inquiry is not simply to produce knowledge about educational questions. Qualitative research also should aim to *be* educative, catalyzing people to challenge their current understanding of education in order to arrive at new, more encompassing insights and questions concerning education and the human condition.

Debates about specific issues appeal to both Dilthey and Gadamer. For example, Dilthey and Gadamer maintained that interpretation necessarily implicates one's self-understanding and sociohistorical situation. While this idea is axiomatic among qualitative researchers, it nevertheless raises questions about the self-understanding of researchers in relation to the people they study.

Epistemologically oriented qualitative researchers wrestle with how they can control or at least reflectively account for their *own* "positionality" and self-understanding so that they can accurately interpret how their subjects make sense of the world. A key question concerns whether and how self-reflection on the part of researchers can be methodically achieved. Are there methods that can help researchers address challenges to self-reflection that arise in the field? If so, which methods should researchers adopt and under which circumstances?

An ontological view of self-understanding raises different issues. Some collaborative action researchers maintain that research questions should be of mutual interest to both "subjects" and researchers. Reflective insight into these questions cannot arise if researchers keep their understanding out of play. Both parties—subjects and researchers—must allow their understanding to be *critically engaged* by the other so that they might become aware of assumptions they might otherwise fail to notice. From an ontological perspective, the key question is, "How can researchers risk their self-understanding and be open to being challenged by their subjects (and vice versa)?" Learning to risk one's self-understanding is not a methodological achievement. It rather requires researchers to cultivate a certain disposition.

Debates about research as conversation illustrate another set of hermeneutic concerns. Some conclude that while conversation is an ideal to which qualitative researchers should aspire, it is unclear whether and how this ideal can be enacted. Institutional review board regulations assume that the rights of research subjects must be protected. This epistemological assumption makes it difficult, if not impossible, to approach research as a Gadamerian conversation that regards subjects and researchers as equal partners.

Some qualitative researchers adopt a Habermasian view of conversation. They point to a legacy of privilege and marginalization and warn that seemingly openhearted conversations can exploit subjects. Scholars of color who conduct qualitative research in their home communities discuss how their university status distances them from people with whom they were able to easily converse before they became university researchers. For these scholars, the unforeseen insights that arise during research conversations are experiences of alienation, not Gadamerian solidarity.

Finally, hermeneutics figures in debates about the scientific status of educational research. D. C. Phillips

has pursued this issue, arguing for the centrality of interpretation in postpositivist science. While the postpositivist embrace of interpretation came by way of Popper and Kuhn, not Dilthey, Heidegger, or Gadamer, the two views of interpretation are remarkably similar. For example, postpositivists acknowledge that research is mediated by the researcher's historical/cultural situation; observation necessarily is theory laden. With respect to social science, postpositivists recognize that researchers struggle to understand themselves as they endeavor to interpret others. Failing to acknowledge the need for interpretive judgment in science and social science results in a phenomenon that Phillips (2006) calls "methodolatry." Methodolatry conflates research with technical method (specifically, randomized field trials) and discounts research as a uniquely human practice.

Phillips's critique of methodolatry sounds Gadamerian. Unlike Gadamer, however, Phillips takes an epistemological view of social science and distinguishes claims about the empirical world from insights into the meaning of lived experience. The latter implicate self-understanding. The former do not. Openness to being challenged may help social scientists recognize when their conclusions are wrong. But claims about the empirical world can be wrong, *whether or not social scientists acknowledge that they are wrong*. Claims about the empirical world can and must be assessed on their own merit, Phillips stresses, irrespective of their origin or the self-awareness of the researcher who produced them. Assessing the validity of empirical claims and clarifying lived understanding are two different projects, Phillips concludes.

Conclusion

Hermeneutics addresses a range of enduring philosophical questions concerning how human beings understand themselves and the social world. Questions about interpretation are not simply theoretical, however. As hermeneutic analyses of education make plain, questions about interpretation are eminently practical. Questions of practice complicate interpretive theories, generating new questions for theory to clarify and explain.

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See also *Bildung*; Continental/Analytic Divide in Philosophy of Education; Critical Theory; Dialogue; Heidegger, Martin; Phenomenology; Philosophical

Issues in Educational Research: An Overview; Qualitative Versus Quantitative Methods and Beyond; Schleiermacher, Friedrich

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HIDDEN CURRICULUM

A curriculum is a program consisting of a series of learning activities intended to realize some set of educational objectives. The mission of a school or other educational agency is understood to be the delivery of a curriculum to some group of students or other learners. Generally, the content of a curriculum is announced so that students and other stakeholders are aware of what learning opportunities are available at a given school or set of schools. It is the case, however, that not all of a school's learning opportunities are advertised—schools also feature a hidden curriculum whose objectives and learning activities are seldom spelled out. This hidden curriculum is implemented via routines and attitudes instilled through students' experiences with the explicit curriculum and its milieu; these experiences may be consonant or dissonant with the explicit curriculum. In any case, the instructional outcomes generated by these routines and attitudes are often judged by scholars and social critics to be more significant than those generated by the explicit curriculum. Therefore, ignoring the hidden curriculum is a stumbling block to disclosing the true character and outcomes of any curriculum. This entry discusses how the term *hidden curriculum* is used to refer to a variety of aspects of schooling, including collateral learning, socialization, and perpetuation of advantages based on gender or class.

In the education literature, the term *hidden curriculum* has been used in a number of different ways that are not always consistent. While all senses of the expression imply that it is somehow obscured from general notice, commentators otherwise define it variously and explain the intentions of its creators differently. Hidden curricula are often singled out to identify some educational ill, although it sometimes is argued that they can also take benign or positive forms.

John Dewey wrote about one meaning of hidden curriculum in *Experience and Education* (1938). He drew attention to how "collateral learning" (e.g., of habits and attitudes) affects what students take away from their encounters with subject matter.

This collateral learning, he argued, holds equal or greater educational significance than the explicit curriculum because the habits and attitudes instilled have more lasting effects on students than the subject matter itself. There is now persuasive empirical evidence in support of Dewey's view, such as *The Subject Matters: Classroom Activity in Math and Social Studies* (1988) by Susan S. Stodolsky.

Philip W. Jackson is often credited with coining the term *hidden curriculum*. In his influential book *Life in Classrooms* (1968), Jackson portrays hidden curriculum in a manner related to, yet discernible from, collateral learning as described by Dewey. Rather than being focused on the subject matters of the curriculum, such as spelling and history, Jackson is more concerned with how classroom life socializes students to certain norms, expectations, and routines, such as working in a solitary fashion among a crowd of other students. In a similar vein, he points out how schools reward certain behaviors, such as compliance and patience. Jackson affords more significance to these types of factors than to the particular subject matter under study. One way of summing up Jackson's thesis is that patterns of repeated behavior over thousands of hours of classroom life, although seldom remarked on as the salient feature of schooling, may have a bigger cumulative effect on students than the formally announced curriculum. In a later book, *Untaught Lessons* (1992), Jackson further explored the implicit long-term effects teachers have on students.

The attitude Jackson adopts toward the hidden curriculum in *Life in Classrooms* could be considered neutral. Nonetheless, his book and other works with related themes, such as Robert Dreeben's *On What Is Learned in Schools* (1968), appeared during an era of widespread criticism of dominant societal values. Part of this criticism was directed at schools, particularly their role in perpetuating educational inequities. This context seems to have contributed to the keen interest educators took in hidden curriculum at the time. Whereas traditionally answers to what students take away from school referenced the objectives and content of the explicit curriculum, this type of response became regarded as discordant with reality when outcome measures showed that some groups benefited far more from school programs than other groups. In particular, attention was now drawn to how the hidden curriculum discriminated among students on grounds of gender, race, social class, and, in time, sexual orientation.