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# UNIT 3 HERMENEUTICS

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## Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Philosophical Hermeneutics
- 3.3 Historical Development of Hermeneutics
- 3.4 Schleiermacher: Development from Exegetical to Epistemological Hermeneutics
- 3.5 Dilthey: Shift from Romanticist to Historicist Hermeneutics
- 3.6 Heidegger: From Epistemological to Ontological Turn
- 3.7 Gadamer: Hermeneutics of *Truth and Method*
- 3.8 Ricoeur: Language as Discourse.
- 3.9 Let us Sum up
- 3.10 Key Words
- 3.11 Further Readings and References
- 3.12 Answers to Check your Progress

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## 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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Philosophical Hermeneutics has captured the centre stage in the philosophical discussions of post-modernity. Until the end of the nineteenth century hermeneutics limited itself mostly to giving methodological directions to the interpretative sciences. The recent recognition of the universality of the interpretative phenomena has paved the way for a philosophical hermeneutics. Consequently, the hermeneutic task has become more ontological rather than methodological.

1. This course introduces philosophical hermeneutics as a well organised, systematic, historically based and independent discipline in philosophy. It will deal with the complex issues of interpretation and emphasize the historic and linguistic nature of our world-experience.
2. It intends to expose the students to the leading theories, influential positions, varying methods and important concepts of the discipline. It will follow the hermeneutic tradition by considering the path-breaking contributions of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur to the growing awareness of the universality of the hermeneutic problem and to the realization of the fundamentally interpretative character of our being in the world.
3. Inviting the students to delve deep into the art of understanding, the course will foster in them creative, critical, and insightful thinking and make them aware that understanding is not merely an activity of knowing but a way of being in the world.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Etymologically, the word, ‘hermeneutics’ is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* and the noun *hermeneia*, to mean ‘to interpret’ or ‘interpretation’. Mythologically, it is related to Hermes, the Greek winged-god, whose chief function was to render the incomprehensible divine messages comprehensible to the human minds. Traditionally, it is linked to the rules for interpretation of texts, especially the sacred and legal ones. The word was used in three directions of meaning, namely, expression (speaking), explication (explanation) & translation (interpretation). But the common denominator fundamental to all three activities is interpretation leading to understanding. It is an art of discovering meaning.

As theory and practice of interpretation, hermeneutics has grown from being traditional hermeneutics that dealt with the exegetical interpretation of written sacred/classical texts to modern hermeneutics that engages in a complex process of unravelling the hidden meaning of both verbal and non-verbal forms and factors of expressions. When Nietzsche said that “there are no facts but only interpretations,” he underlined the all-pervading and fundamental nature of the hermeneutic endeavour. It comprehends the universal human behaviour that is orientated towards making sense out of things.

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### 3.2 PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

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Philosophical hermeneutics owes its existence, to a great extent, to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who is considered to be its father. Situating himself in the hermeneutic tradition of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger, he developed in his masterpiece, *Truth and Method*, a complex theory of interpretation that advocates that the meaning of the text, linguistic or non-linguistic, goes beyond its author, and that a dialogical interaction between the horizons of the reader and the author will determine the meaning of a text. Like Heidegger, he saw in hermeneutics an experience that human beings undergo. Paul Ricoeur further enhanced the universal relevance of hermeneutic enterprise by integrating the insights of semantics, philology, linguistics and phenomenology. The following are the salient features of philosophical hermeneutics that distinguish it from traditional hermeneutics:

1. Hermeneutics that was primarily concerned with methodology of interpretation, has assumed the task of engaging the very phenomenon of understanding. Philosophical hermeneutics has surpassed normative and technical function of providing theoretical framework for textual interpretation, in order to show how understanding is practical and tied to human experience of being in the world.
2. The horizons of hermeneutics have moved beyond the regional domain of exegesis of sacred texts to universal concerns of human existence. What was once confined to ascertaining objective facts now focuses on the existential conditions and factors that influence the understanding of the reader. That is, a shift from a way of knowing to the way of authentic being in the world.
3. It is not only interested to understand what is before the text but also what is behind and beyond the text.
4. Now, far from being an auxiliary discipline, philosophical hermeneutics has come to be a full-fledged and prominent course in the philosophical curriculum.

### 3.3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HERMENEUTICS

Although the word, ‘hermeneutics’, came to common usage in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Plato had already employed it several times in his works to designate religious knowledge, which is different from *Sophia*, the knowledge of truth. The first use of the word by Aristotle is sighted in his treatise, *Peri hermeneias*, which was later rendered as *De interpretatione* (On hermeneutics). It defined hermeneutics in a limited sense of determining the truth and falsity of logical propositions, which is different from the sense in which it is used today.

A systematic theory of interpretation was first developed by the Alexandrian School of Stoics. Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE—50 CE) employed a method to interpret the myths of the Bible as they contained deeper, non-literal and implicit meanings hidden in the literal meanings of the texts. The allegorical interpretation of myths was further necessitated in order to make them intelligible to people, as they possessed religious and moral significance. In the middle ages, with the arrival of Origen, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas on the scene, hermeneutic activity became an integral part of the theological reflection not only for understanding the different levels of meaning of the scriptures but also for a deeper self-understanding. The contributions of these stalwarts had a profound impact upon the thinkers of the Reformation period and paved the way for modern hermeneutics.

However, it was only during Reformation period that modern hermeneutics came into existence as a well-developed discipline. A group of Protestant scholars lead by Martin Luther contended that the scripture is self-sufficient and non-contradictory by nature and that it does not require the Church authority or tradition to interpret it. This claim of *Sola Scriptura* went counter to the position of the Catholic Church, which reaffirmed its stand in the Council of Trent in 1546. This marked the dawn of Protestantism and hermeneutic tradition. To prove its point, the group developed a mechanism for the interpretation of the Bible.

Matthias Flacius Illyricus, a protestant theologian, in his groundbreaking work, *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* (1567), established the following fundamental principles for protestant hermeneutics: first, if the scripture is not intelligible, it is because of our insufficient knowledge. By undertaking proper linguistic and hermeneutic study and equipping oneself with skills of interpretation, one can overcome this malady. He argued, “If God has given us scripture for our spiritual health, it is blasphemy to assert that it is dark and inadequate for the purpose of salvation.” Second, there is an internal coherence in the scripture. The apparent inconsistencies can be resolved if the interpretation of the individual passages is done in the light of the whole theme of the scripture.

The Renaissance movement with its influence on classical philology, jurisprudence and philosophy also contributed to the growth of hermeneutics. First of all, Humanist academicians, in their pursuit to establish the authenticity and correctness of the Greek and Roman classical texts, devised a philological critical method, which included various theories of interpretation. This again proved to be a boon for the growth of Humanist hermeneutic tradition.

Secondly, an increased interest during this period in the Roman law, especially the

efforts of Constantius Rogerius (1463) to explicate the Code of Justinian, gave birth to various forms of legal exegesis that gave rise to hermeneutics of jurisprudence. The German Jurist Johannes von Felde in his *Treatise on the Science of Interpretation* in 1689 went a step further to formulate principles of interpretation applicable for classical texts.

Thirdly, the Enlightenment movement's desire to systematise all human knowledge made hermeneutics a branch of philosophy. Thinkers like Christian Wolf and Johann Martin Chladenius were the first ones to give philosophical foundation to the theory of interpretation. Chladenius, for instance, in his *Introduction to the Correct Interpretation of Reasonable Discourses and Books* (1742), formulated a consistent Enlightenment theory of interpretation with its well-defined practical rules.

### Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is philosophical hermeneutics and how does it differ from traditional hermeneutics?

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2. Identify one major contribution each from the Reformation and Renaissance Movements.

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## 3.4 SCHLEIERMACHER: DEVELOPMENT FROM EXEGETICAL TO EPISTEMOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

Until now, hermeneutics, by and large, remained a discipline that plays a normative function of providing rules for interpretation of classical texts, confining itself to some specific areas, such as sacred scripture (*hermeneutica sacra*), law (*hermeneutica juris*), and classical literature (*hermeneutica profana*). Inspired by the Romantic thinkers like Schlegel, Schelling and Fichte on the one hand, and influenced by Immanuel Kant's Copernican revolution in human understanding on the other, Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher (1768—1834) attempts to synthesize the major trends of his time and lay a foundation for universal hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher, the German theologian and classical philologist, worthy to be called the ‘father of modern hermeneutics’, made a definite departure in the hermeneutic tradition by his unique contribution to the development of general hermeneutics. In his hands hermeneutics became more epistemological than exegetical. He elevated hermeneutics to a scholarly discipline by making it as an “art of understanding”. He defined understanding saying, “everything is understood when nothing nonsensical remains, and nothing is understood that is not construed.” According to him, the act of understanding should be studied on two levels, namely, grammatical and psychological or technical.

These two levels have their corresponding methodologies for interpretation. At the grammatical level, which concerns the system of language, the meaning is to be determined by the *sitz-im-leben* and by relating the passage of interpretation to the meaning of the textual work as a whole. The latter implies a hermeneutic circle of moving from the part of a given text to the whole of the text and back again, in order to ascertain the meaning of the passage in question. At the psychological level, which concerns the system of thought, the meaning is to be determined by divinatory and comparative methods. The divinatory method seeks to re-experience and reconstruct within the reader the mental process of the author. Schleiermacher supposed that behind every spoken or written word there is something else which is the real object of interpretation. This empathetic experience of the mental process of the author by the reader, for him, is the heart of understanding. The comparative method seeks to grasp the individuality of the author by the generic type of his work and his peculiarities.

Through the analysis of the act of understanding, Schleiermacher argues, hermeneutics should aim at “understanding an author as well as and even better than he understood himself.” For under the influence of Romantic philosophy he saw the mind as a creative unconscious at work in the gifted individuals. This psychological thrust was tempered with the epistemological thrust he gained from the influence of the *Critique* of Kant. It is this critical turn (epistemic) that made Schleiermacher popular among the next generation of hermeneutic philosophers who were interested in evolving a methodology for human sciences.

Schleiermacher’s treatment of hermeneutics as the art of understanding has elevated it to the level of a scholarly discipline. But he allowed the legacy of ambiguity between understanding and interpretation to continue in his work. He does not make a clear distinction between the two. Besides, there is the danger that the empathetic understanding of the author can lead to subjectivism.

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### 3.5 DILTHEY: SHIFT FROM ROMANTICIST TO HISTORICIST HERMENEUTICS

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After the death of Schleiermacher, the pursuit of finding a philosophical foundation for human sciences continued. Hermeneuticians like Johann Gustav Droysen, Leopold von Ranke and, notably, Wilhelm Dilthey made valiant efforts to justify humanities as a discipline in accordance with the rational framework of the university system. Dilthey (1833—1911), a student and biographer of Schleiermacher and who made known his master to the world through his works like “The Life of Schleiermacher,” “The Rise of Hermeneutics,” and *Critique of Historical Reason*, took up the challenge of providing an epistemological and methodological

foundation for human sciences, ensuring the justification of their knowledge like that of the natural sciences. Dilthey's hermeneutics is heading clearly for a shift from the hermeneutic concerns of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism.

One of the most significant insights of Dilthey is his conception of "understanding as a category of life". Understanding is a methodological concept that has its origin in the process of human life and situations. Like Droysen and Ranke, he conceived human sciences as historical documents, and the problem of hermeneutics as the problem of historical knowledge. Making a distinction between the methodologies of natural sciences and human sciences, Dilthey uses the term explanation (*erklärung*) to describe the method of the former and understanding (*verstehen*) to designate the method of the latter. While in the human sciences man grasps knowledge as being *part* of it, in the natural sciences man grasps knowledge as being *apart from* it. According to Dilthey, one mind is able to reconstruct the mental objectifications of another because human beings possess a primordial capacity to transpose oneself in the mental life of another and discover the 'I in the Thou'. These objectifications articulated through language and art are essential to human life as they are the only ways for human beings to know themselves.

By grounding hermeneutics in human life and expressions Dilthey not only dissociated it from its Romantic roots of human linguisticity but also sowed the seeds for ontological hermeneutics. Although Dilthey tried to liberate hermeneutics from the psychological method of Schleiermacher, he has not fully succeeded in it as his appeal to the human primordial ability to transpose oneself in the mental process of another amounts to empathy.

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### 3.6 HEIDEGGER: FROM EPISTEMOLOGICAL TO ONTOLOGICAL TURN

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Martin Heidegger (1889—1976), a student of Edmund Husserl and a reader of Dilthey, made an immortal impact in the hermeneutic tradition by effecting a radical transformation in understanding hermeneutics. In his famous work, *Being and Time* (1927), he goes beyond Dilthey to declare that hermeneutics is not about providing a rational foundation for human sciences but about the most fundamental conditions of man's being in the world. The hermeneutic question for Heidegger is not 'how does one know?' but 'what is the mode or condition of being of the one whose being is to understand'?

Introducing his favourite German concept of *Dasein*, the English rendering of which is 'being there' or 'being thrown in the world', Heidegger makes a forceful point that we are factually thrown into existence in the world and we try to make sense out of it. Therefore, understanding becomes an essential aspect of our being in the world. *Dasein* relates to his immediate world with familiarity, which is constitutive of his being in the world. This basic intelligibility is brought to awareness through interpretation. Understanding, for Heidegger, arises out of the fact of our being situated.

For Heidegger, interpretation can take place only within a given horizon of pre-understanding. There can be no understanding and interpretation on the part of *Dasein* without such pre-understanding. With this, Heidegger redefines the concept

of hermeneutic circle. In the conceptual framework of Schleiermacher, it is referred to the mutual relationship between the text as a whole and its individual parts. Whereas in the Heideggerian thinking, it points to the relationship between our self-understanding and our understanding of the world. *Dasein* is recognised by its self-interpretatory projects. But because *Dasein* is being in the world, the being cannot be understood without making detour through the world and latter cannot be understood without referring to *Dasein*'s way of life.

Understanding, as a constitutive dimension of man's being in the world, has a temporal dimension as well. That is the reason why he titled his book as *Being and Time*. Although his lived horizon includes past, present and future, he begins to project himself primarily towards future. Understanding of these projected possibilities also calls for their fulfilment. This act of understanding of *Dasein* leading to self-realisation is what Heidegger called 'explication'. In that sense, understanding is both existential and hermeneutical. This insight that 'interpretations are grounded in understanding and they are explications of what has been already understood' has greatly influenced the later thinkers like Gadamer.

### Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How does Schleiermacher present hermeneutics as the "art of understanding"?

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2) Highlight Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*.

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## 3.7 GADAMER: HERMENEUTICS OF *TRUTH* AND *METHOD*

Han-Georg Gadamer (1900—2002), the proponent of philosophical hermeneutics, is the best-known student of Heidegger. Gadamer's efforts to see Dilthean methodological foundation of human sciences within the framework of Heidegger's ontological structure of *Dasein*, and his subsequent claim of truth in human sciences evoked almost an instant response from the intellectuals of his time. Gadamer's main contention is that hermeneutics is not about constructing a method for understanding but about what are the conditions that influence the understanding. In his seminal work, *Truth and Method*, he outlines a philosophical hermeneutics that hinges around the historical and linguistic nature of human understanding.

## Historical Nature of Human Understanding

For Gadamer, any interpretation of the past, literary or non-literary creation, is not aimed at producing objectivity of that past but to derive a significance that will transform not only the interpreter but the past (tradition) as well. Just as a given historical phenomenon is a production of its own historical context, so does the interpreter rooted in his historical tradition. Reinstating the concept of **prejudice** (*Vorurteil*), which was rejected by the Enlightenment thinkers, Gadamer asserts, “Prejudice is a component of understanding, linked to the finite historical character of the human being.” It is a person’s cultural horizon, which makes itself felt in every act of his understanding. It is not something negative but a necessary condition for all historical understanding.

At this point, Gadamer introduces a difficult yet very significant concept called **effective historical consciousness**. It is the outcome of the interplay between the historical or the temporal distance of the object to be interpreted and the interpreter’s experience of a sense of belonging to that cultural tradition. The historical distance between the interpreter and the text that was once considered as an obstacle for understanding has now come to be treated as a necessary condition that makes understanding possible. Effective historical consciousness is the consciousness that is shaped and determined by the various shades of meaning of the text that emerged in history. When my understanding of a text is shaped by different meanings of the text that emerged in history, there emerges the possibility for objectivity.

According to Gadamer, effective historical consciousness culminates in **fusion of horizons**. The fusion of horizons is a central concept in Gadamer’s theory of understanding. It is a dialogue between two worlds (Worldviews). That is, the merger of the horizon of the text and that of its reader. One of Gadamer’s unassailable convictions is, “truth discloses itself in dialogue.” He compares this fusion with the “buoyance of a game” or a “dialogical conversation”.

Just as the player loses oneself in the back and forth movement of the game, and that the subject matter becomes the game itself, so also the interpreter gets caught up with self presenting and self renewing structure of the game of dialogue with the text. The back and forth movements point to the interpreter asking questions to which the text is the answer, and the text in turn questioning the interpreter. When all pertinent questions are exhausted, Gadamer states, one has reached a relatively adequate interpretation. The dialectical nature of understanding analogous to the game, transforms both text and the interpreter. This dialogical interplay between the two horizons is Gadamer’s extended notion of hermeneutic circle.

Another important ingredient of the fusion is that it is an attempt to find the relevance of the past to the present. Just as a preacher relates the scripture to the situation of his audience, interpretation of a text should be an attempt to discover its relevance to the context of the interpreter. Gadamer clarifies that understanding the meaning of a text is not subjective or arbitrary but should address the concerns and context of the reader.

## Linguistic Nature of Human Understanding

One of the marked departures of Gadamer from the Romantic hermeneutics is his conception of the **linguisticity of understanding**. Gadamer is convinced that



one can understand only to the extent that he or she can find words to express that understanding. My think-ability cannot be separated from my language-ability. I think and understand to the extent language enables me to do. Fusion of horizons is mediated by language.

Gadamer's insightful reasoning that truth discloses itself in dialogue, which is analogous to play or conversation and that the truth so derived from the historical texts has a transformative appeal is a major breakthrough in the understanding of the texts. But his theory of interpretation is not critical enough to check power and violence that are part of the very tradition, which the interpreter is trying to make sense out of.

### 3.8 RICOEUR: LANGUAGE AS DISCOURSE

Paul Ricoeur (1913—2005) has taken the hermeneutic tradition to its pinnacle in his attempt to overcome the ontological problems faced by Heidegger and Gadamer, and the epistemological difficulties that confronted Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Deeply influenced by the phenomenology of Husserl and existentialism of Gabriel Marcel, he transformed hermeneutic tradition by his innovative understanding of language as discourse. His interpretation theory, as explicated in his book, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (1976), rejects the structuralists' static understanding of language as a system, and focuses on the functional and dynamic aspects of language.

#### Language as Discourse

According to Ricoeur, language has two units, namely, signs and sentences. Semiotics, which is science of signs, deals with signs that have fixed meaning while Semantics is the science of meaning of language at the level of sentences. Sentence is a new synthetic entity whose meaning is irreducible to the sum total of its signs. Ricoeur conceives discourse as dialectic of event and meaning. Language is an event. It is fleeting. Once it is spoken, it disappears. But the meaning of it, captured in the prepositional content of the sentence, remains, and confers certain stability and communicative power to the discourse. The meaning of the event has two aspects: the utterer's meaning, which is the intention of the speaker, or the utterance meaning, which is the prepositional content.

Ricoeur unearths two aspects of the utterance meaning, namely, the sense, which is the "what" (*sinn*) of the utterance, and the reference, which is the "about what" (*bedeutung*) of the utterance. The sense of the discourse (utterance) is immanent and objective, while the reference of the discourse is transcendent. The referential aspect of the discourse relates to the language of the world. The dialectic of sense and reference is significant to Ricoeur's theory of discourse.

#### Concept of Text

Ricoeur's interpretation theory will be incomplete without his idea of text. For him, a text should have three salient features. Firstly, it is a work; its sequence is longer than a sentence. It is arranged in a specific genre, such as poem, fiction, narrative, etc.

Secondly, it is a written work. He defines a text as "discourse fixed in writing." According to Ricoeur, a text fixed in writing effectively distanciates itself from the

conditions of original discourse. These characteristics are encapsulated in his key notion of “distanciation” in its four forms. They are:

- a) The surpassing of the event of speaking by the meaning of what is said
- b) The dissociation of the meaning of the text from the mental intention of the author
- c) The liberation of the written text from the original audience and context
- d) The emancipation of the text from the limits of “ostensive reference”.

Once fixed in writing, a text is open to a wide variety of readership in different existential situations. It assumes, what Ricoeur calls, “semantic autonomy”. Now the author’s intention or the original dialogical situation is not the determining factor of the meaning of the text but the text speaks to the reader in the reader’s context.

Thirdly, the text reveals a world. The concept of the “world of the text” is Ricoeur’s another important concept, which means the referential aspect or the “about what” of the text. To understand the text would mean to understand the world projected by the text. Interpretation is a form of engagement with the text that would amount to taking hold of the disclosure of the text by the reader in such a way that it enhances self-understanding without being subjectivistic.

The process of interpretation unfolds itself in the Ricoeurian dialectic of explanation and understanding, which brings together the epistemological pole (explanation) and the ontological pole (understanding). It consists of two movements, namely, a simple movement from understanding to explanation and a complex movement from explanation to comprehension.

In the first, understanding takes place in the form of a guess. That is, construing the meaning of the text as a whole, treating it as a particular literary type as it influences the meaning, and, carefully considering of the possible secondary symbolic meanings a text may possess. It should then be subjected to a process of validation by providing logical support.

In the second movement from explanation to comprehension, which is very crucial to all interpretations, the reader attempts to appropriate the meaning by plunging into the world of the text and allowing the disclosure of the text to become part of the interpreter’s world. This is similar to Gadamer’s concept of fusion of horizons.

Ricoeur aimed at articulating a hermeneutic theory that would answer the questions faced by his predecessors like Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer, and succeeded in elevating it to a higher and comprehensive level by synthesizing their insights. In Ricoeur’s conceptual framework, a text is subject to plurality of inexhaustive (surplus) interpretations. Can there be an objective criterion to assess which one of them is most appropriate or more adequate than the other? The question remains.

**Check Your Progress III**

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
 b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Explain briefly Gadamer's key concept of "fusion of horizons".

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2. Summarize Ricoeur's concept of text.

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**3.9 LET US SUM UP**

This course has attempted to establish how philosophical hermeneutics had been shaped and transformed into a full-fledged discipline in philosophy. We began our discussion on the meaning of hermeneutics and proceeded to see how it was developed into a tradition, nurtured by the Reformation, Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. We found that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the struggle of hermeneutic philosophers was to give a philosophical foundation to it rather than providing a set of rules for interpretation. However, in the final analysis, we discovered hermeneutics maturing into a central discipline in philosophy by bringing together both ontological and epistemic aspects under the purview of hermeneutics and by grounding it in the historical and linguistic nature of human understanding.

**3.10 KEY WORDS**

<b>Allegory</b>	: A method of analogy in which each part or aspect of the story or narrative is compared to something else that is more profound.
<b>Intelligible</b>	: The quality or the ability of an object to make itself present to the mind of the knower.
<b>Jurisprudence</b>	: A science that deals with the legal system, its interpretation and application.
<b>Exegesis</b>	: A historico-critical and analytical method that is used to understand the objective meaning of a classical text.
<b>Sitz-im-leben</b>	: <i>It is a German expression used to indicate the life context or the existential situation.</i>

**Ostensive** : What is apparent, direct or explicit.  
Something is said to be ostensive when the  
meaning of it can be understood obviously.

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### 3.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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### 3.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Answers to Check your Progress I

1. Hermeneutics as a discipline deals with the theory and practice of interpretation. The version of hermeneutics that emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was propounded mainly by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his book, *Truth and Method*, has come to be recognised as philosophical hermeneutics. Far from being a normative science that gave methodological directions to interpretative sciences, it has taken up the task of making interpretative phenomena universal. It is a complex theory that believes that the meaning of a text goes beyond the intention of the author and that a dialogical interaction between the horizons of the reader and the writer of the interpretative object can only determine its meaningfulness. It assumes that the task of understanding is tied to human experience of being in the world. It has now become a central discipline in philosophy with its universal and rational foundation.
2. Hermeneutics received its status as a discipline for the first time when the Reformist theologian Matthias Flacius Illyricus provided two keys to the interpretation of the sacred scripture that formed the foundation for protestant hermeneutics. Firstly, if the sacred text is not intelligible, it's because our human knowledge is insufficient. Therefore, equip oneself with the knowledge of interpretation. Secondly, the inherent consistency of scripture can be understood when the apparent inconsistency is related to the spirit and matter of the whole text. The Renaissance period, with its renewed interest to determine the genuineness of classics, its eagerness to interpret the Roman law and the desire to systematise all forms of human knowledge, necessitated the devising of various exegetical and interpretative methods, which in turn gave impetus to the growth of hermeneutics.

## Answers to Check your Progress II

1. According to Schleiermacher, the art of understanding includes two levels. They are grammatical and psychological. The first belongs to the system of language and second to the system of thought. At the first level the objective sense of the linguistic expression is constructed following the rules of the language. At the second level the expression is to be understood as part of the speaker's creative mind. The meaning of an expression as part of a system of language will depend on its context and how it relates itself to the text as whole. At the level of the system of thought, it is important to enter empathetically into the mental process of the author. Besides, the author's originality of thought can be grasped by taking into consideration his distinctive traits and the generic type of his work. Schleiermacher's art of understanding is aimed at understanding the author as well as and even better than he understood himself. This epistemological thrust raised hermeneutics to the level of a scholarly discipline. At the same time it is exposed to the danger of subjectivism.
2. Heidegger's most favourite concept *Dasein* literally means, "being there". By introducing the concept, he underlines the facticity of human existence in the world and the way humans make sense out of such situations. As Heidegger ventures to restructure hermeneutics, he sees hermeneutic problem as ontological. And so he attempts to know the mode of being of the one (*Dasein*) whose being is to understand. Understanding being the constitutive element of *Dasein*, his initial relationship with his world is one of familiarity, and when familiarity is brought to awareness, understanding takes place. But there can be no understanding on the part of *Dasein* without pre-understanding. Which means, *Dasein*'s acts of understanding will lead to self-understanding as well. He is recognised by his self-interpretative projects. In order to understand *Dasein*, one should make a detour of the world of *Dasein* and one cannot understand world without referring to *Dasein*'s way of life.

## Answers to Check your Progress III

1. Gadamer's central concept of "fusion of horizons" refers to the dialogical process of merger between two worlds with their respective worldviews and traditions, and between the past and the present. It is the merger of the horizon of the interpretative phenomenon and that of the interpreter. For, he is convinced that truth discloses itself in dialogue. The "fusion of horizons", for Gadamer, is analogous to the buoyance of a game or dialogical conversation. In the buoyance of the game, in the back and forth movement of the ball, a player loses his self and subsequently permits the game to play the player. Similarly, in the interpretation of text, the interpreter tosses questions to which the text is the answer and permits the text to challenge his prejudices. The text in turn will question the interpreter. In all these process, the subject matter is the focus of attention. When all pertinent questions are exhausted, one reaches a relatively adequate interpretation. What is significant to the "fusion of horizons" is the mutual transformation it effects.
2. Ricoeur's concept of text plays a prominent role in his interpretation theory. According to him, a text has three important characteristics. First, it is a

work, longer than a sentence, constructed in a specific literary composition. Secondly, it is a “discourse fixed in writing”. A written text distances itself from the event of speaking, the intention of the author, the original context and its explicit references. Because it’s fixed in writing, the text becomes available to all sorts of audiences, and the author’s intention cannot determine the text’s meaning. It becomes autonomous and assumes, what Ricoeur calls, hermeneutic authorship, opening up to inexhaustive interpretations. Thirdly, the text reveals a world of which it is product. To understand a text would mean to understand the world projected by the text and appropriate it, the process of which will facilitate self-understanding. To make the exercise free from being subjective, Ricoeur introduces the dialectic of explanation and understanding that included the epistemological and ontological aspects of hermeneutics. However, according to Ricoeur, there is no objective understanding but only relatively adequate understandings.