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Abstract

Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Humanities

Understanding Understanding in the Humanities

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The humanities at their core are creative expressions of importance and what it feels like to be here for human beings. Any such expression arises in the context of a meaningful sense of things which is a way of understanding. Philosophical hermeneutics is the attempt to understand understanding and as such is at the core of any attempt to understand the humanities. Humanities differ from the sciences in that the sciences produce knowledge whereas the humanities engender understanding and perhaps wisdom. All humanities, every work of art, all philosophy and literature are creations of an artist or author in the process of his or her Bildung's process of self-formation. This self-formation takes place as a process of self-overcoming, the overcoming of previous perspectives and understanding. The formation of self-identity is a co-creation within family, culture, and language (linguisticity). The expression of an artist's or author's co-created self-identity provides human communities perspectives from which they can continue the evolution of their collective meaningfulness and understanding in which individuals can pursue their emancipation in the struggle with human finitude, fallibility, and vulnerability. Human beings are beings to whom things matter. That is the basis of all understanding and that is the shared universal feature of all humans. Humans inhabit meaningful worlds including the meanings generated by the rigor and exactitude of the sciences. But it is the humanities in the form of seminal texts and works of art that provide the meaning context, vision, and purpose from which sciences and commerce or any other human activity can arise. The shifts in perspective and understanding that are provoked by the best art, literature, and philosophy are precisely the movement toward emancipation and reciprocity inherent in the basic features of human experience as revealed in phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics.