

Simply in living as we all do, we find ourselves engaged in trying to understand one another because we are each engaged even more fundamentally in trying to understand something else—namely, things themselves, in the sense of our own existence as human beings together with others, human and nonhuman, as all alike parts of the encompassing whole. Because others, also, have the same vital interests in things and are faced with the same vital questions about them that concern us, we have the best of reasons for wanting to understand their understandings of existence in its immediate and ultimate settings. Aside from always having to reach a common understanding with at least some of them if we are to act, as we must, in cooperation with them, we need to inform and, quite possibly, correct our own understandings of things by theirs. Only so, in fact, are we likely to find the valid answers we need to any of our vital questions, including our existential question about the meaning of our own existence in its ultimate setting as a part of the whole.

But if understanding of others, of their understandings of things, is already familiar to all of us on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, we all also have some acquaintance with it on the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory. We have all learned, at least, that some of our understandings of others' understandings of things, like our understandings of things themselves, are only too apt to be *misunderstandings* and that our first attempts at interpreting what others say and mean are, as likely as not, to be unsuccessful. To this extent, we understand why interpreting the meaning of what someone says both can and may need to become as much a matter of critical reflection as validating any claims to validity that she or he may make or imply in saying it. In this way, we are all able to make use not only of the general concept of "interpretation," in the sense of understanding and, possibly, also explaining the meaning of what others say, but also of the further general concept of "*critical* interpretation," in the sense of doing exactly this, only at the level of critical reflection, by asking the properly theoretical question about the meaning of what they say.

If, then, biblical interpretation, in the sense of thus trying to understand and explain the meaning of the biblical writings, is a special case

of interpretation in general, it presumably includes not only all of the pre- and post-critical ways of interpreting these writings on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, but also all of the properly critical ways of interpreting them on the secondary level of living understandingly.

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