

---

# Wilhelm Dilthey's Hermeneutical Methodology in Understanding Text

Umaruddin Nasution

<sup>1</sup>State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

---

---

## Article Info

### Article history:

Received November 15, 2021

Revised June 7, 2022

Accepted June 25, 2022

---

### Keywords:

Hermeneutics

History

Intepretation

Text

---

## ABSTRACT

*The research aims to describe the methodology of hermeneutics Wilhelm Dilthey in understanding text. Dilthey was a philosopher who played an important role in developing hermeneutics as a scientific methodology. The study used library research which guides the hermeneutic books and other documents that give explanations of their thinking. This research also used a historical-philosophical approach and content analysis. The results of this study indicate that Dilthey thought of hermeneutics has three formulations in which the text's interpretation is experience, expression, and understanding. Dilthey's hermeneutics methodology is a process of interpreting text by understanding the author's history, which manifests into a text, language, and discourse.*

*This is an open-access article under the CC BY license.*



---

## Corresponding Author:

Umaruddin Nasution,

State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia,

Jl. Laksda Adisucipto, Papringan, Caturtunggal, Kec. Depok, Kabupaten Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

Email: [sinasuiton1507@gmail.com](mailto:sinasuiton1507@gmail.com)

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current scientific decade, the study of philosophical epistemology is one of the scientific research methodologies that aims to integrate scientific knowledge into the religious sciences (Purkon, 2013). Philosophical epistemology, as a method in scientific research, can provide answers to problems in texts and concepts by providing an interpretation of meaning (Saidi, 2008).

A hermeneutic methodology, a field of philosophical study, provides an interpretation of the meaning of texts or events from the past that is still abstract and makes it a broad understanding that is easy to understand (Supena, 2014). Ricard E. Palmer (2003) also said that hermeneutics is one of the fields of study for interpretation in theology, philosophy, and literature.

Several philosophical figures initiated the epistemology of hermeneutics as an interpretation of meaning. In general, these figures are divided into two ideas. First, romantic hermeneutics was initiated by two figures, namely Schleiermacher, who was the first to open up hermeneutics as an art of understanding, then continued by Wilhelm Dilthey by putting history in hermeneutics.

Both Philosophical Hermeneutics were initiated by two figures, Martin Heidegger, who used the *das sen* concept. He said that every author, text, and translator has an independent existence or has freedom from ownership rights, so that the translator is free to provide interpretations according to his understanding and the second character is Hans -George Gadamer, with his horizon concept assumes that tradition influences the author in producing texts so that he frees the translator to interpret according to his present horizon (Palmer, 2003).

Hermeneutics has two main components: the structure of the author's ideas and the author's actualization into a text or language (Supena, 2014). It is the adjustment of each element into each text so that it becomes a complete unit and is known as the hermeneutic circle (Lutfi, n.d.). Hermeneutics is one of the frameworks that can help problems in interpreting the value content in a text or text (Purwana, 2001).

Various studies on hermeneutics as an interpretation of meaning have been carried out by researchers such as Zuhdi (2012) who researched the Qur'an by using hermeneutics to explain solving problems of local culture in Indonesia. Alef (Rahmah, 2013) researched gender justice using hermeneutic methodology which explained legal alternatives to judges in giving fair decisions. Then, Ibrahim (2014), in researching the interpretation of the Qur'an used hermeneutics to interpret a text in Al-Qur'an.

From the explanation above, this study aims to describe Wilhelm Dilthey's thoughts on hermeneutic methodology in understanding a text that focuses on: How is Wilhelm Dilthey's thoughts on hermeneutics; How is the concept of Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutic methodology; and how the application of Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutic methodology in understanding a text.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The approach in this study uses qualitative research with the type of library research study. The researchers use a book or document-oriented study that explains this research. The sources of information in this study are from books and several journals that explain Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutic methodological perspectives.

The approach used in this study is a historical-philosophical approach that aims to obtain data on Wilhelm Dilthey's thoughts on hermeneutics. It also uses a content analysis approach to analyze, examine and describe the data found in Wilhelm Dilthey's thoughts on hermeneutics methodology.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Dilthey's Thoughts on Hermeneutics

Wilhelm Dilthey was born on November 19, 1833, with a father the Protestant minister Biebrich and a mother who was good at playing music. Dilthey is a figure who is good at playing music inherited from his mother. After completing his local education, Dilthey then continued his education at Wiesbaden and in 1852, continued his education in Heidelberg to study theology (Sumaryono, 1999).

Dilthey was more interested in history and philosophy than following in his father's footsteps as a priest. His hard work and perseverance demonstrate his interest, as he spends 12 to 14 hours a day studying Greek, Hebrew, and English and studies the works of previous philosophical figures such as Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, and other philosophical figures (Sumaryono, 1999).

During his time as a student, Dilthey was very interested in Schelairmacher's philosophical thoughts and admired his intellectual abilities. According to him, Schelairmacher is very competent in integrating theology with literature in philosophy. Thus, he adapted Schelairmacher's thoughts on hermeneutics and gave birth to the existence of Dilthey's hermeneutics (Sumaryono, 1999). Hermeneutics became famous and culminated with the tension between elements of aesthetics, hermeneutics, and historical philosophy (Gadamer, 2010).

Wilhelm Dilthey is a philosopher who pays attention to history (historical). So he laid out the basis of the hermeneutic methodology in the context of historical considerations. He interprets historical events from two points of view. First, the interior is an event that is seen from the basis of consciousness or conscious state. Second, the exterior is an event with a specific time and place (Sumaryono, 1999)). The states of these dimensions are interdependent with each other, for example, giving a value to the exterior of an event is the interior dimension.

His thinking results from criticism of positivism which views humans and society from an outward or material perspective and is only considered objectively (Hardiman, 2015). Positivism views history as history that only moves according to objective laws or mechanisms. Dilthey's hermeneutics result an encounter between the philosophy of French realism and positivism with German idealism. It gave rise to the term philosophy as lebensphilosophie (Hardiman, 2015).

The term refers not only to the principle of individual life but also to certain sects or community groups. Dilthey uses this term to understand inner forces and irrational forces such as feelings and lust. In developing his lebensphilosophie, he aims to fight the mechanistic image emptied by positivism. Hermeneutics, in his view, is an art that seeks to understand one's experience, which is lived concretely and historically (Hardiman, 2015).

His basic historical philosophy is a historical event that describes the human soul that is not visible in the change process at every time and period. He builds the foundation of hermeneutics with the term of Geisteswissenschaften to provide an interpretation of the human inner life expressions such as gesture expressions, historical behavior, legal codification, works of art, and literature (Palmer, 2003). His hermeneutic view distinguishes between the term "Naturwissenschaften" which is the science of nature, with the term "Geisteswissenschaften" which is the science of knowledge about the human mind (Poespoprodjo, 2004). For example, in capturing an object, Geisteswissenschaften uses the keyword understand (varstehen), while Naturwissenschaften uses the keyword by explaining (erklären).

The development of hermeneutics in obtaining valid objectivity from the inner human life is necessary from the reductionist and mechanistic transitions of natural science to find a good approach to a phenomenon (Hardiman, 2015). Therefore, finding an understanding of an event can not only be done by introspection but also with historical relevance.

### 3.2. Dilthey Hermeneutic Formulations

Dilthey's thinking tried to restore the position of the humanities which the understanding of previous philosophical figures had shattered. Philosophers say that anything that cannot be proven by experiment is not scientific. This prompted him to expand hermeneutics to avoid mass differences between the object under study and the interpreter (Shihab, 2019). In achieving this, Dilthey formulates hermeneutics and characterizes his philosophy, namely the relationship between experience, expression, and thought.

The first is the experience (Erlebnis) which is interpreted as a living experience. He believes that interpretation through hermeneutics is an experiential process still alive in a person's soul, which can represent direct contact with the author's life even though the experience has been long (Palmer, 2003). Therefore, he emphasizes experience into the meaning of temporality (the context of the relationship), which is not forced by consciousness and is also not something added, but something that is implicitly already in the experience. Hermeneutics as a text interpretation process requires a relationship between the researcher, the object text, and the author through internalized experiences, understandings concerning values, views of the performers of the work, and events that occurred at that time.

The two expressions (Astruduck) he interprets are not feelings but expressions of life that refer to ideas, laws, forms of language, and everything that reflects human life (Palmer, 2003). Dilthey said that when we read history, we restructure the framework made by the author to ensure that the events can be seen again according to actual events. This process can produce institutions that are communicated or conceptualized by themselves and reveal the meaning and purpose of the author's work through expressions of life that can only be understood internally and not from the five senses (Shihab, 2019).

The three thoughts he interprets are not rational but indicate operational activities. Understanding is the operation of empty thinking that achieves a pre-reflective transposition from one person to another or finds its life in the lives of others (Palmer, 2003). In the humanities, understanding is an effort to understand the various human activities that aim to find the intentions, goals, hopes, and intentions behind a person in his work (Shihab, 2019).

### 3.3. Dilthey Hermeneutic Method of Operation

Interpretation, in his view, is only used to understand human history and the process of knowing the inner state described through signs that can be captured by the senses of others so that it is manifested (Sumaryono, 1999). For example, when we want to understand Anis Baswedan's thoughts, we must interpret his activities, paintings, images, and writings to conclude that Anis Baswedan has a high intellectual capacity based on his scientific work. To give definite conclusions, the researcher must continuously involve the ups and downs of his life.

Dilthey's hermeneutics is historical. The meaning of a text will never stop at one time, but constantly changes according to historical modifications. The author's history can be understood into three processes: understanding the author's point of view and insight, understanding the author's activities directly with historical events, and assessing events based on ideas when the author lived (Sumaryono, 1999). Thus, interpretation is also a meaning that can always change because no one author writes a text-only to apply in his time, but is written to apply in the future (Shihab, 2019).

Dilthey's hermeneutical methodology can be concluded as an understanding of the text that depends on three related components. The text is a life experience and a container of life values, the interpreter's insight that must be open to variations in the author's life, and the existence of a strong relationship between the two components. When the conditions for understanding a text have been met, a definite and final interpretation of the meaning of an object will be achieved (Shihab, 2019). For example, the three elements above can be likened to a reader, a writer, and a book. All of them must be understood by a reader; so, his assessment of the book and the author is correct and straight.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Through the explanation above, the writer concludes that in using Dilthey's hermeneutics in understanding a text, it is necessary to emphasize the historical essence. It can be done through three aspects: experience, expression, and thought. These three aspects cannot be separated from the use of Dilthey's hermeneutics because to see the author's history requires these three aspects. Thus, Dilthey's hermeneutical methodology in understanding the text is an interpretation of the author's intentions and goals expressed by text, language, and discourse so that it is manifested through the author's historic essence.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to thank all who have supported in the form of material, time, thoughts, and prayers. To both parents who always provide strings of words as advice in motivating the author. However, this paper is not in perfect form because there are still many mistakes and shortcomings in this paper.

## REFERENCES

- Gadamer, H.-G. (2010). *Kebenaran dan metode: pengantar filsafat hermeneutika, Terj.* (2nd ed.). Pustaka Pelajar.
- Hardiman, F. B. (2015). *Seni Memahami Hermeneutik Dari Schleiermacher Sampai Derrida*. Kanisius.
- Ibrahim, S. (2014). Hermeneutika Teks: Sebuah Wacana dalam Metode Tafsir Alquran. *Jurnal Studia Islamika*, 11(1).
- Lutfi, M. (n.d.). *Hermeneutika: Pemahaman Konseptual dan Metodologis*. 5.
- Palmer, R. E. (2003). *Hermeneutika: teori baru mengenai interpretasi, Terj.* Pustaka Pelajar.
- Poespoprodjo, W. (2004). *Hermeneutika*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Purkon, A. (2013). Pendekatan Hermeneutika dalam Kajian Hukum Islam. *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v13i2.930>
- Purwana, B. H. S. (2001). *Pendekatan Hermeneutik dalam Penafsiran Teks Sastra Islam Melayu*. 1, 8.
- Rahmah, A. M. (2013). Hermeneutika hukum sebagai alternatif metode penemuan hukum bagi hakim untuk menunjang keadilan gender. *Jurnal Dinamika Hukum*, 13(2), 293–306.
- Saidi, A. I. (2008). Hermeneutika, Sebuah Cara untuk Memahami Teks. *Jurnal Sosioteknologi*, 7(13), 376–382.
- Shihab, M. Q. (2019). *Kaidah Tafsir*. Lentera Hati.
- Sumaryono, E. (1999). *Hermeneutik, Sebuah Metode Filsafat*. Kanisius.
- Supena, I. (2014). *Hermeneutikan Al-Qur'an Dalam Pandangan Fazlur Rahman*. Ombak.
- Zuhdi, N. (2012). Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an: Tipologi Tafsir Sebagai Solusi Dalam Memecahkan Isu-Isu Budaya Lokal Keindonesiaan. *ESENSIA*, 13(2), 211–247.