

Hermeneutics:Preface
Theoria and Praxis
Paul Brienza

The influence of hermeneutics on modern forms of social thought is widely acknowledged. However, the practical implications of a theory that takes *interpretation* as a serious indicator of how we view and understand the world is often left out of account. Not only the philosopher but the sociologist, political scientist, anthropologist and economist have been more greatly inclined, in recent years, to acknowledge that all research and textual engagement involves a strong commitment to placing ourselves in the *place of the other*. In fact, this importance of the 'other', as an ethical-interpretive component of theory, practice and everyday life, may be seen as the cornerstone of the hermeneutic task. The ethical call of hermeneutics is interlaced with the task of interpretation. The reading of texts is never a solitary task; in fact, it is an open and engaged element of a full life. Texts are interwoven with all forms of social practice. Therefore, the movement between text and world, between what we write and read, is an ethical call to interpret and to think. Further, it is clear that interpretation is an active component of professions that engage with texts, rules, and laws. Jurists, for instance, must constantly engage with the law as a text open to interpretation. In doing so, they must both respect the integrity of the text as well as push the boundaries, edges and limits of that same text. Law changes, in other words, because different interpretations emerge and these changes are always historically contextual. Even the scientist, as the supposed purveyor of a pure empiricism and the self-evident revelation of the facts, is dependent on her interpretation on what is seen through the lens of the microscope and in the ways that this raw data is interpreted and gathered into the context of a theory of what is seen. In sum, hermeneutics is a tool for all who seek to interpret the world and for all who believe that our view of the world is as important as any pure attempt to see what 'is there.'

Hermeneutics, then, is an approach that asks us to open and engaged ethical readers not of the text in isolation but of the text as a social artifact full of phenomenological meaning. The articles gathered here reflect this *hermeneutic turn* as an active engagement with some of the deepest concerns of the modern age. It is our hope that readers will gain inspiration and insight from these reflections.