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Summary

Meister Eckhart understands that human beings are thrown into meaning, that we live out our lives in meaning and that the source of this meaning is beyond our understanding. We always have an understanding of the world in which we live but we do not determine this understanding and we do not have the ability to understand the source of this understanding. This is the basic principal of philosophical hermeneutics which we also find in the work of Heidegger and Gadamer. However, there did come a time when human beings became arrogant enough to view the world as 'n collection of objects which can be fully and finally known by manking. During the age of enlightenment man understood himself as the source of meaning and asserted his power over understanding. This arrogance would not last long. During the nineteenth century scalars like Dilthey recognized the fundamental historicity of human being. Dilthey understood that man is bound to the meaning of his age. However, he could not reject the arrogance of the scientific worldview which staked a claim on the possibility of absolute knowledge. Thus he chose to carry this prejudice into the sphere of the human sciences and constructed a new foundation for man's power over meaning.

We who study hermeneutics enjoy praising Heidegger for his insight and contribution towards hermeneutics. It is said that Heidegger discovered the absolute finitude and historicity of human being. This may well be true, but it is a shame that scholars mostly ignore the contribution of Edmund Husserl. In this document I claim that it was Husserl who laid the foundation for the new movement in hermeneutics in Germany of which Heidegger and Gadamer has been the major exponents. In the words of Gadamer, this movement may be called "Philosophical Hermeneutics" since it does not only include a method for understanding but also encompasses a way of thinking about human being in general. In my view the current discourse on the origin and development of philosophical hermeneutics represents a great injustice since the philosophy of Husserl is neglected in this discourse.

In this writing I shall try to rectify this injustice by illuminating the contribution that Husserl has made to philosophical hermeneutics. Firstly I will show that Husserl's philosophy is fundamentally about meaning. In his early distributive psychology he struggles with the question of the origin of concepts. With his concept of intentionality he rejects the traditional ontology of the object in order to make place for the ontological integrity of meaning. Unlike his predecessors he claim that objects are determined by meaning instead of the other way around. In his transcendental phenomenology he goes a step further by proclaiming that the Ego is nothing but pure existence and that consciousness in nothing but he existence of meaning. These insights are easy to overlook due to Husserl's obsession with epistemology. His philosophy is all but consistent. But it is especially by means of this inconsistency that Husserl makes his contribution to philosophical hermeneutics. We may compare Husserl with Moses. Like Moses he reaches the top of the mountain Sinai where he can look upon the Promised Land. But, unlike Moses, he turns his back on this new land and stares back at the desert of epistemology.