

BLAUSTEIN'S HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY IN A HERMENEUTICAL KEY

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Abstract

The article explores Blaustein's humanistic psychology as a form of hermeneutics. In particular, I analyze Blaustein's concept of "humanistic reality" (*rzeczywistość humanistyczna*) and "experiential wholes of higher order" (*całości przeżyciowe wyższego rzędu*) in light of Dilthey's and Spranger's hermeneutical ideas, taking the methodological emphasis on understanding as the background of my analyses. I argue that Blaustein's approach to psychic life through cultural artefacts adapts a

hermeneutic circle wherein individual human understanding and humanistic reality mutually constitute each other. In this respect, I discuss Blaustein's applications of this methodology in his accounts of Goethe's and Hebbel's literary works. Although Blaustein never explicitly employed hermeneutical terminology, his theoretical framework incorporates three key hermeneutical elements: methodological interpretation, literature as expression of inner life, and circular understanding between parts and wholes.

Keywords: humanistic psychology, interpretation, hermeneutic circle, hermeneutics, humanistic reality.

Blausteinova humanistična psihologija v hermenevtičnem ključu

Povzetek

240 Članek obravnava Blausteinovo humanistično psihologijo kot obliko hermenevtike. Posebej analiziram Blausteinovo pojmovanje »humanistične resničnosti« (*rzeczywistość humanistyczna*) in »izkustvenih celot višjega reda« (*całości przeżyciowe wyższego rzędu*) v luči Diltheyevih in Sprangerjevih hermenevtičnih idej, pri čemer si za temeljno ozadje analize jemljem njuno metodološko poudarjanje razumevanja. Zagovarjam mnenje, da Blaustein pri svojem pristopu k psihičnemu življenju s pomočjo kulturnih artefaktov privzema hermenevtični krog, znotraj katerega se individualno človekovo razumevanje in humanistična resničnost medsebojno konstituirata. Blausteinovo aplikacijo tovrstne metodologije obravnavam v kontekstu njegovih razmišljanj o Goethejevih in Hebblovih literarnih delih. Čeprav Blaustein hermenevtične terminologije nikdar ne uporablja na izrecen način, njegov teoretski okvir vsebuje tri ključne hermenevtične elemente: metodološko interpretacijo, literaturo kot izraz notranjega življenja in krožnost razumevanja delov in celote.

Ključne besede: humanistična psihologija, interpretacija, hermenevtični krog, hermenevtika, humanistična resničnost.

1. Introduction

The aim of the paper is to present a part of Leopold Blaustein's philosophy as a form of hermeneutics. By hermeneutics I understand, following Michael N. Forster and Kristin Gjesdal, "the *theory of interpretation and understanding*" (2019, 1). I will show that one of Blaustein's theories—called by him *humanistic psychology*—incorporates some topics that allows one to classify it as a theory of interpretation and understanding. Blaustein has often been characterized as a phenomenologist (Pokropski 2015), a psychologist (Czerkowski *et al.* 1998) or, more specifically, as a descriptive psychologist (Rzepa 1992; Citlak 2023; Płotka 2023); however, a classification of his work as hermeneutics is nearly unexplored in scholarly literature.¹ By reading Blaustein in a hermeneutical key, then, my ambition is to understand his philosophy in a relatively unexplored field. Next, as I will argue in the following, Blaustein's approach may shed more light on some basic terms of hermeneutics, including the idea of interpretation itself. In order to show this, I will focus on Blaustein's theory of humanistic psychology, which not only emphasizes understanding as a fundamental element of psychological investigations, but also postulates the

241

¹ In this context, a noteworthy exemption is Zofia Rosińska who attempts to read Blaustein from a hermeneutical point of view. She writes: "There is a recognizable similarity to hermeneutics in Blaustein's attitude. This similarity manifests itself in the consciousness of adopted prejudices." (Rosińska 2013, 76.) For her, in Blaustein's aesthetic theory this type of consciousness plays a crucial role in the process of constituting the aesthetic object (Rosińska 2013, 79–80). Rosińska (2013, 76) states that consciousness of adopted prejudices represents an "attitude that is characteristic of the whole of" Blaustein's philosophy. Of course, following István M. Fehér, the idea of prejudice is indeed important for hermeneutical traditions, since "without prejudices in terms of pre-understanding and pre-judgments, there is no understanding at all" (Fehér 2016, 383). I agree with Rosińska's standpoint; however, her analysis primarily focuses on Blaustein's psychology of cinemagoers and listening to the radio (Rosińska 2001, 62), which are absent in the present article.

use of interpretive methods in examining cultural artefacts, and, by claiming this, establishes a methodological framework that incorporates the logic of the hermeneutic circle.

In this study, I do not explore the historical context of Blaustein's connections with the hermeneutical tradition. Nonetheless, a few remarks can be helpful in this regard. Blaustein's humanistic psychology was significantly shaped by Wilhelm Dilthey's and Eduard Spranger's hermeneutical ideas.² There is also another historical reason to juxtapose Blaustein's approach of humanistic psychology with these scholars. Blaustein met Spranger during the time he spent in Berlin in 1927/28 (Płotka 2024, 65). Spranger was Dilthey's student and a proponent of his teacher's theory of *geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie*. To reiterate, I do not consider here the historical issue of Blaustein's encounter with Spranger, however, it can be noted that this meeting was not without importance for further development of Blaustein's philosophy. One may hold that Blaustein merely outlined a theoretical framework of humanistic psychology, but never applied it in practice. This is Witold Płotka's point who writes:

242

One can argue that Blaustein suspended the project he had discussed and left it in his writings as a mere research idea that was never developed; at best, it was applied in a limited scope, e.g., in regard to the cinema experience or to observing a theatre play. (Płotka 2024, 70.)

Płotka is right in holding that the idea of humanistic psychology was applied in a limited scope in Blaustein's work. However, even before the 1935

2 Terminological complexities arise regarding descriptive psychology, a term employed by both Brentano and Dilthey with distinct meanings, as Guillaume Fréchette (2020) notes. While Blaustein distinguishes between descriptive and humanistic psychology, employing the former in works like *Imaginative Presentations* (Blaustein 1930; Blaustein 2011), following Brentano's and Twardowski's approach, his 1935 work critically aligns Brentano's presentation-focused psychology with Wilhelm Wundt's investigations (Blaustein 1935, 48), positioning both outside the humanistic psychology's scope. The term "*psychologia humanistyczna*" is Polish translation of Spranger's "*geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie*," although Dilthey never employed this terminology (Blaustein 1935, 3). Effectively, Dilthey's descriptive psychology (in German: *beschreibende Psychologie*) corresponds to what Blaustein and Spranger term humanistic psychology. For more on the classification of Blaustein in the context of descriptive psychology, see: Płotka 2023, 2024.

text on humanistic psychology was published, Blaustein wrote texts that can be interpreted (albeit with some reservations) in the key of humanistic psychology. Here, one may point out Blaustein's book, *The Lived Experience of God in Hebbel's Dramas* (Blaustein 1929), and his essay "Goethe as a Psychologist" (Blaustein 1932). I will argue that these texts can be read in the key of Blaustein's humanistic psychology, and, as such, they also reveal the hermeneutical dimension of his philosophy.

Applying the term "hermeneutics" with regard to Blaustein's humanistic psychology may not seem self-evident, as he never employed this terminology. Nevertheless, I believe there are significant theoretical similarities between Blaustein's psychological project and hermeneutics. First and foremost, they both emphasize understanding as a key of their theories. Next, they underline the methodological idea of circular understanding that is spelled out as the hermeneutic circle. According to Jens Zimmermann, "the hermeneutic circle, the interpreting movement between a part and a whole, is intrinsic to human knowing" (2016, 473). Another point that connects both traditions is how literature is comprehended; namely, it is an expression of psychic life. I will focus on these three topics, and, by exploring them, I attempt to address the question: what does it mean to characterize Blaustein as a hermeneutical scholar?

243

To do this end, in section 2, I examine his project of humanistic psychology by focusing on the key idea of humanistic reality (*rzeczywistość humanistyczna*) and on the concept of experiential wholes of higher order (*całości przeżyciowe wyższego rzędu*) that constitute this reality. I argue that understanding humanistic reality invariably relates to understanding the individual human being, and *vice versa*; one can comprehend an individual person only in the context of humanistic reality itself. This connection introduces what can be called a kind of a hermeneutic circle in Blaustein's humanistic psychology. Next, in section 3, I analyze Blaustein's texts on Goethe and Hebbel in the key of humanistic psychology. I argue that Goethe's and Hebbel's works are read as manifestations of general psychological principles and experiences. In this context, Blaustein follows Dilthey and Spranger. Literature functions as the aesthetic materialization of inner life that can be elucidated through interpretive methodology. Furthermore, in section 4, I show that Blaustein's humanistic

psychology can be considered as hermeneutics that not only corresponds with Dilthey's and Spranger's ideas, but also anticipates some points of Martin Heidegger's, Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Paul Ricoeur's projects. In conclusion, I indicate a potential extension of Blaustein's hermeneutics that goes beyond humanistic psychology and encompasses the narrative dimension explored by Ricoeur in his later writings.

2. Humanistic reality and the circle of meaning

244 It is helpful to define Blaustein's humanistic psychology with its subject matter, and contrast it with a non-humanistic approach. And thus, *humanistic psychology* examines the psychic life of human beings living in humanistic reality. This theory focuses on experiences emerging in correlation with parts of humanistic reality. By contrast, a *non-humanistic psychology* examines experiences apart from their relationship to humanistic reality. It focuses rather on physical, chemical, and quantitative features of experiences that are comprehended as atomic entities, which do not emerge in relevant relations (Blaustein 1935, 56). Admittedly, both types of psychology examine the psychic life of human beings, but, as shown, account for it differently. The difference lies in taking into account or omitting what Blaustein called the humanistic reality. In what follows, I examine this concept on the basis of section 5 of Blaustein's "On the Tasks of Humanistic Psychology," and his 1933 talk entitled "On the Reality Examined by the Humanities" (see Blaustein 1935; 1935/37). Both texts present comparable approaches.

To begin with, for Blaustein (1935/37, 143a), the humanities refer to the same reality as natural sciences, but their perspectives are different. The humanities adopt an anthropocentric approach, and, by doing so, account for reality as constituted by human beings and grounded in historicity (Blaustein 1935/37, 143b; 1935, 44). Generally, objects in humanistic reality can be apprehended from *three* points of view (Blaustein 1935/37, 144a). First, the static point of view, which is classified as synchronic and non-temporal, and which consists in disconnecting parts from the processual whole. Second, the dynamic viewpoint, which is diachronic and perceives objects as interconnected temporal processes and parts of larger wholes. Finally, the typological point of

view examines elements in relation to general types that describe them. In this context, Blaustein holds that while psychology commonly employs the static approach, the dynamic perspective is more adequate for the humanities. He comprehends static and typological approaches as supplementary methods, wherein the dynamic approach serves as the foundational methodology (Blaustein 1935/37, 144b). This emphasis on dynamism was rooted in the nature of the psychology's subject matter, i.e., the human psyche.

The manner, in which Blaustein conceives psychic life, can be traced back to the hermeneutical tradition. After all, Dilthey (1977, 31) characterizes the psychic as a dynamic nexus of inner experiences that appears in a constant flux. Similarly, Spranger (1980, 10) describes psychic life as a subjective nexus of experiences. Blaustein concurs with both accounts, but he distinctively argues that humanistic psychology approaches the psychic nexus indirectly, namely through experiential wholes of higher order that he understands as intentional products of human actions (Blaustein 1935, 48). Certainly, the term of "experiential wholes of higher order" is one of the key terms in Blaustein, although the term itself remains relatively vague.

245

Blaustein's account of humanistic reality can be understood in the framework of parts and wholes. After all, Blaustein characterizes psychic life as fundamentally relational: "Psychic life, being a natural psychological whole, is most closely linked with human behavior and, from a biological perspective, appears rather as a part than as a whole." (1935, 34.) Conversely, the humanistic approach treats psychic life itself as the experiential whole of higher order, within which one can distinguish partial experiential wholes of higher order, since experiential wholes "remain in close dependence on the entirety of a given individual's psychic life, of which they constitute a fragment" (Blaustein 1935, 56). At the same time, these wholes emerge from elementary experiences.³ As a result, Blaustein operates with a complex mereological view of humanistic reality; for him, humanistic reality is a whole of (partial) wholes, and these parts are parts of larger wholes. Certainly, this mutual relationship between psychic life and humanistic reality manifests itself through concrete

3 For Blaustein, "one can distinguish various elementary experiences within the psychological wholes" (1935, 39).

human activities. Thus, human activities within humanistic reality represent manifestations of psychic life—specifically, these activities are founded on the experiential wholes of higher order that appear in the psychic flux. The activities, in turn, generate what Blaustein terms “products” (*wytwory*)—tangible and intangible outcomes of one’s engagement with one’s environment:

The human individual lives in the humanistic reality and relates to its components, to themselves and other people, to various groups of people, to various products and sets of products, as well as processes taking place on them, and to complexes of these processes. Against the background of this relation, experiential wholes of higher order appear in psychic life—namely experiences being the cause of existence of discussed products. (Blaustein 1935, 48.)

246 The significance of the products lies in their dual nature: they emerge from experiential wholes and constitute elements of humanistic reality, which, in turn, shapes one’s psychic life. This circular relationship refers to the mutual constitution of individual psychic life and collective humanistic reality through the mediated products. Given this foundational role of products in Blaustein’s theory, the question how to classify products arises. Blaustein (1935/37, 143b) divides products into *five* distinct groups:

1. utility objects (e.g., tools, buildings);
2. meaningful products (e.g., poems, paintings, scientific terms, maps);
3. products that serve to constitute aesthetic experience, but are without semantic role (e.g., musical pieces, mosaics);
4. habits (traditional actions);
5. state institutions and national structures.

Products can be connected within certain complexes that can be apprehended from specific points of view, forming, e.g., technology, literature, or religious rituals (Blaustein 1935/37, 144a). Furthermore, parts of humanistic reality encompass both individual human beings and groups of human beings; finally, there are products of their activity and groups of such products (Blaustein 1935/37, 143b).

One may note that Blaustein’s account of humanistic reality—as constituted on the activity of human beings and products that emerge on this basis—adopts

a kind of circularity connecting all the elements. For him, one approaches individual human beings as parts of humanistic reality. Next, the reality is composed of products that emerge with the relevant activity. At the same time, these products are necessary to understand human beings as such. To phrase it differently, products of humanistic reality constitute the basic term here, and all are essentially connected. As a result, one may argue that Blaustein adopts what can be called a kind of a hermeneutic circle that appears in understanding humanistic reality.

Also, the idea of interpretation, which is explored by Blaustein, connects him with hermeneutics. After all, his humanistic psychology applies methods of interpretation⁴ to humanistic reality. As is well known, Dilthey marks a methodological difference between natural sciences and the humanities. The former adopt the method of *explanation*, while the latter are based on *interpretation*. In hermeneutics, interpretation is the “process by which we intuit, behind signs given to our senses, that psychic reality of which it is the expression” (Dilthey 1972, 232). Thus, interpretation is the method that is primarily applied to study of cultural artefacts and texts, although Dilthey (1972, 236–238) holds that it relates to all manifestations of human spirit

247

4 Blaustein writes: “Humanistic psychology should embrace methodological pluralism, utilizing any approach that can advance understanding of its subject matter. This includes introspective and retrospective description, psychological analysis, self-understanding and understanding of others and products of their activity, *interpretive analysis of creative works*, experimental research, behavioral observation, questionnaires, statistical analysis, and comparative methods. Both insight-based methods (*einsichtige Methoden*) and inductive approaches can serve humanistic psychology in fulfilling its mission of understanding human experience.” (Blaustein 1935, 23; emphasis added.) Although Blaustein acknowledges that humanistic psychology employs various methods, he emphasizes that understanding is among the most important: “Given that humanistic psychology studies experiential wholes of higher order that are intentionally directed toward humanistic reality and its components, *its methodology is naturally dominated by internal experience* (introspection and retrospection), description and psychological analysis, and *the understanding of oneself, others, and products of their activity*.” (Blaustein 1935, 23; emphasis added.) The concept of understanding emphasized in this passage refers to the act of interpreting humanistic reality as mediated through experiential wholes of higher order, such as cultural artefacts that are products of mental activity.

(*Geist*).⁵ In turn, explanatory psychology uses the method of explanation, and therefore adapts the humanistic viewpoint (Dilthey 1977, 24, 120). While Spranger (1980, 34) shares these views, for Blaustein the situation is more nuanced. Blaustein holds that, while products emerge with individual psychic activity, they invariably contain traces of general psychic rules. By analyzing products, therefore, one also analyzes the psychic life that lies, so to speak, in the background. Generally, Blaustein uses this approach in his texts on Goethe and Hebbel that I will analyze in the following.

3. Personhood as a lived whole: From psychology to art, and back

248 To recapitulate, Blaustein's humanistic psychology postulates the use of the method of understanding in interpreting humanistic products, such as poems or novels, in order to shed light on general laws that govern psychic life.⁶ This methodological approach is exemplified in Blaustein's "Goethe as a Psychologist," where he examines Goethe's dramas and novels as humanistic products, and in *The Lived Experience of God in Hebbel's Dramas*, where Hebbel's dramatic works serve for studying specific kinds of experiences. Both texts account for art as a medium that enables one to access inner experience: Goethe's works reveal general psychological laws through poetic insights, while Hebbel's dramas represent the experience of God through fictional characters' activities. I claim that both Blaustein's texts can be read, though in a limited scope, as practical applications of the methods of humanistic

5 The concept of spirit is one of the key concepts in Dilthey's philosophy, although one can doubt, if it is defined clearly. As Rudolf Adam Makkreel states, this concept relates to the Hegelian idea of the objective spirit: "A productive nexus or system produces common products whose sense or value is taken for granted by its participants. By conceiving of history as itself a productive nexus, Dilthey allows himself to reappropriate Hegel's concept of objective spirit. History produces its own objectifications which provide the basis for retrospective understanding." (Makkreel 2003, 497.)

6 According to Płotka, we can interpret "selected (cultural) artefacts as products of related mental phenomena" (Płotka 2024, 57). The term "products of mental phenomena" refers to Kazimierz Twardowski's distinction between psychic products and actions or functions (Twardowski 1965, 243–244). In this approach, psychic products are understood as results of mental activity. As Płotka suggests, based on Twardowski's distinction, we can consider cultural artefacts in Blaustein's philosophy as examples of psychic products.

psychology. The examination of artistic products that are grounded in humanistic reality functions as a bridge to understanding inner experience. I think that this analytical approach reveals Blaustein's significant alignment with the hermeneutical tradition. He adopts the method of interpretation applied to literature, in order to reveal its hidden psychic traces. But, as we will see, Blaustein's approach to the role of the author's personhood differs from Dilthey's and Spranger's hermeneutics.

To begin with, both of Blaustein's texts seem to owe an intellectual debt to Dilthey and Spranger. In *Poetry and Experience*, Dilthey posits that vital forces manifest themselves through artistic imagination, arguing that Goethe's poetry emerges directly from lived experiences (Dilthey 1922, 179). Through poetic expression, each experience undergoes artistic transformation; as a result, the transformation creates a framework wherein individual life events assume universal form (see Dilthey 1922, 184, 196). These observations align with Dilthey's (1977, 105) assertion that biography constitutes "the most philosophical form of history," a thesis for which Goethe's work serves as the primary illustration in his essays on descriptive psychology. Spranger interrogates Goethe's worldview by interpreting his philosophical perspectives through his poetic works, while emphasizing their unsystematic nature (Spranger 1933, 19–22). Blaustein's interpretation of Goethe's novels and dramas exemplifies Dilthey's thesis, articulated in *Descriptive and Analytic Psychology*, that access to personal psychic nexus emerges through understanding individual human development (Dilthey 1977, 87, 94). In his works, Goethe presents the general, dynamic psyche based on his own lived experience (Blaustein 1932, 350). According to Blaustein, Goethe's "own personality contained all kinds of psychic types, being unique, versatile, and rich" (Blaustein 1932, 363). A comparable idea is formulated by Spranger, for whom the source of Goethe's philosophical insights derives not from theoretical studies, but from the richness of his lived experience (Spranger 1933, 2).

In Blaustein's eyes, Goethe captures the psychological unity of the person through introspection and observation (Blaustein 1932, 350, 364). For him, Goethe portrays external human actions as a mirror that enables self-realization of one's mistakes (Blaustein 1932, 355). This observation points to the connection between inner life and human action, the latter being the

manifestation of wrongly directed power. Blaustein claims that experiential wholes of higher order serve as tools, allowing us to redirect our psychic strength toward certain goals, and in this sense their role aligns with Alfred Adler's theory of power (Blaustein, 1935, 40).⁷ Blaustein reads Goethe's works—primarily his dramas and novels—as sources of penetrating psychological insights about the nature of human motives and actions. According to Plotka, "Goethe's writings were of interest for Blaustein as the basis of the psychological description of complex psychic structures—not because of Goethe's private life" (Plotka 2024, 59). Like Spranger, Blaustein emphasizes the unsystematic nature of Goethe's psychological observations (Blaustein 1932, 349–350), while noting their remarkable accuracy and anticipation of scientific psychology's findings (Blaustein 1932, 350). According to Blaustein, Goethe is not a psychologist in the strict sense of the term. Rather, he possesses extraordinary intuition and a remarkable capacity for both introspection as well as observation of others' lives (Blaustein 1932, 364). Significantly, Goethe's primary concern centers on personhood as a developmental and existential whole (Blaustein 1932, 350–355, 362). For Blaustein, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Goethe 1995) illustrates that personhood constitutes itself through the integration of character, tendencies, desires, habits, and environmental factors. Through his artistic work, Goethe presents the general dimensions of individual psychic life.

The experience of life emerges as a central topic also in Blaustein's analysis of Hebbel's dramas. As already noted, Blaustein is particularly interested in

7 According to Blaustein, Goethe's approach to the relationship between the lived experience and psychology can be perceived through lenses of Adler's and Władysław Witwicki's theories (Blaustein 1932, 355). Adler's psychological theory rests on "the unity of the individual, an attempt is made to obtain a picture of this unified personality regarded as a variant of individual life-manifestations and forms of expression" (Adler 1925, 2). The similarities between Goethe's psychological insights and Witwicki's theory of cratism are particularly salient. Witwicki's cratism posits movement as the externalization of internalized psychic will (Witwicki 1933, 290): an individual's psychic character manifests through regularities in their actions (Witwicki 1933, 323). According to Teresa Rzepa, Witwicki's psychological theory exemplifies a humanistic approach (Rzepa 1990, 225). Although Witwicki develops his theory independently of Adler, their psychological frameworks share similar assumptions regarding the role of power in psychic life (Witwicki 1933, 231).

different types of lived experiences of God, and, in order to examine these phenomena, he holds that lived experiences are illustrated through the examples of fictional characters presented by Hebbel in his dramas. While Blaustein does not portray Hebbel as a psychologist, he approaches Hebbel's works similarly to his analysis of Goethe's works. Thus, Hebbel's texts, in Blaustein's eyes, offer insights into human psyche. Płotka claims that Blaustein's "[...] aim was not to interpret Hebbel's work as such or his personal faith" (Płotka 2024, 58). In *The Lived Experience of God in Hebbel's Dramas*, Blaustein openly claims that he focuses on the noematic analysis of the experience of God where God is understood as an intentional object experienced by various dramatic characters (Blaustein 1929, 1).⁸ Thus, for Judith—the main character in the drama of the same title—the experience of God manifests as a psychoanalytical study of unconscious erotic drives (Blaustein 1929, 9). Marianne—a character from a different drama—centers her relationship with God on trembling (Blaustein 1929, 20), while Benjamin from *The Diamond* instrumentalizes his fear of God (Blaustein 1929, 55). Furthermore, Frigga from *Nibelung* perceives God as a non-polytheistic force of nature (Blaustein 1929, 23). In a similar way, Blaustein portrays other characters from Hebbel's works. To reiterate, Blaustein's primary focus remains, not on religion itself, but on subjectivity manifested through religious experience (Blaustein 1929, 2).

251

If one reads Blaustein's book about Hebbel's dramas through the lens of humanistic psychology, it is easier to understand Blaustein's central task. He is clear that biographical analysis should be excluded from the humanistic psychology's scope (Blaustein 1935, 50). Blaustein even refers to his own text about Goethe, in order to underline that the poet is not a psychologist (Blaustein 1935, 50–51, fn. 34). His hesitation to equate artistic expression with authorial personhood reflects a justified methodological caution. Such direct equation would lead to the psychologistic fallacy, exemplified in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics.⁹ As Dilthey (1966, 244) notes, Schleiermacher's approach

⁸ It can be noted that Blaustein has in mind the intentional attitude toward God gained through intentionally grasped fictional object, which are the characters of Hebbel's dramas. In this context, one may observe the occurring problem of intentional identity that was analyzed by Peter Geach (1967). Blaustein does not discuss this issue.

⁹ Traditionally, psychologism is considered as a standpoint in the field of logic.

aimed to understand the author better than he understood himself.¹⁰ Since humanistic psychology aims to grasp general psychic rules, it should focus neither on individual biography nor on the sensitivity of the author of the artistic work. This shift in focus marks a divide that can be drawn between Blaustein and the hermeneutics of Dilthey (or Schleiermacher).

To summarize, *The Lived Experience of God in Hebbel's Dramas* and "Goethe as a Psychologist" present Blaustein's general approach to the study of psychic life. In both texts, art functions as a mediative expression of personhood, operating on two distinct levels within humanistic psychology. Firstly, by examining individual human experience, Goethe's characters embody general psychological tendencies, while Hebbel's characters manifest the inherent religious dimension of human existence. Secondly, by analyzing cultural artefacts, both works exemplify literature's role within what Blaustein terms humanistic reality. Based on the example of these two texts, one can observe that Blaustein's approach to literature is comparable (though, surely, not identical) with the approach adopted in hermeneutics. In what follows, I am going to determine to what extent Blaustein's humanistic psychology should be considered as a hermeneutical project.

4. On the hermeneutical background of humanistic psychology

Given the results of sections 2 and 3, it is not an exaggeration to hold that there are (at least) *three* hermeneutical topics that can be traced back to Blaustein's humanistic psychology: (1) a methodological emphasis put on interpretation; (2) the use of literature as the expression of inner life; and, finally, (3) the hermeneutic circle. Threads 1 and 2 are already present in Dilthey's project of descriptive psychology, while thread 3 appears there in a preliminary form, although it was developed later by, for instance, Heidegger

However, as Vladimir N. Bryushinkin observes, "psychologism and antipsychologism are not true or false answers to a certain epistemological question, but more likely are research programmes" (Bryushinkin 2000, 39). In that sense, one can also talk about psychologism in the hermeneutical tradition.

10 There is disagreement among hermeneutical authors regarding the role of the author in the process of textual interpretation. However, I am referring here specifically to Dilthey's and Schleiermacher's approaches.

and Gadamer. Now, step by step, I will examine these three topics in Blaustein's project.

First, let me look at the concept of interpretation in Blaustein's humanistic psychology. While hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation,

[the] philosophical hermeneutics is usually taken to indicate a more specific mode of hermeneutics that looks either to questions that arise regarding the understanding of interpretation as such (and so as they arise independently of any particular domain of interpretive practice) or else to questions of interpretation as they are seen to be central to philosophical inquiry. (Malpas 2015, 1.)

As shown in section 2, Blaustein's humanistic psychology certainly contributes to the issue of interpretation and understanding, and can thus be classified as a form of hermeneutics. Here, Blaustein's approach is akin to Dilthey's and Spranger's humanistic approaches. For Dilthey, interpretation is a psychological notion (Ricoeur 1991, 105). Its function is to understand the inner life of a human being; it "describes the main types of the course of emotional events" (Dilthey 1977, 68). In general, for Dilthey, descriptive psychology serves to understand "the great types of human life as they are directed toward goals, and individualities" (Dilthey 1977, 72). This approach is taken by Spranger (1980, 21). However, Dilthey points out the importance of the "general biography of the type" (Dilthey 1977, 94) that is essential for understanding the "matured and completed human type" (Dilthey 1977, 94). Blaustein is skeptical about Dilthey's concept of the typical man and the involvement of biography in psychology. According to him, a humanistic psychologist cannot ignore individual differences between people (Blaustein 1935, 50). Still, humanistic psychology has to make a certain generalization of type, and therefore: "by a 'typical man' humanistic psychology generally means an adult, civilized person, abstracting only from more subtle differences, such as the level of education, gender, disposition, etc." (Blaustein 1935, 50). For this reason, Blaustein cannot be put in line with Dilthey's approach.

Second, as shown in section 3, Blaustein's humanistic psychology uses literature, while studying the psychic life. How this point can be accounted for within hermeneutics? According to Jonathan Culler, hermeneutics initially

focused on a mimetic model based on generic norms. In the 19th century, there occurred, as Culler puts it, a psychological shift in hermeneutics that lied in the conceptualization of “literature as expression of an author” (Culler 2019, 308). Culler holds that the 20th-century hermeneutics was confronted by the following dilemma:

Once the mimetic model of literature is displaced by an expressive model, the question arises, what does the work express: the thinking of the author, the spirit of the age, the historical conjuncture, the conflicts of the psyche, the functioning of language itself? (Culler 2019, 311.)

254 Blaustein’s humanistic psychology offers a distinctive response to the question posed by Culler. According to Blaustein, humanistic psychology provides a basis for analyzing cultural artefacts, while the study of specific cultural artefacts is the subject for “the theory and history of literature, art, customs, state, etc.” (Blaustein 1935, 51–52). For Dilthey, hermeneutics is primarily interested in the study of cultural artefacts, since the text is the most coherent expression of inner life (Dilthey 1972, 238). Blaustein adapts this approach, but calls it a psychological analysis. Nevertheless, his approach cannot be classified as a method that is used by an explanatory, behavioral, or even developmental psychology. None of these disciplines account for texts as meaningful expressions of the subjective psychic life. By contrast, this is one of the aims of Blaustein’s humanistic psychology.

The hermeneutical tradition—from Schleiermacher, through Dilthey and Spranger, to Gadamer and Ricoeur—treats texts as the primary subjects for interpretation. However, the notion of interpretation differs among hermeneutical scholars. While for Schleiermacher and Dilthey it is a psychological notion, for Gadamer it is primarily a dialogical act that connects text and reader (Römer 2016, 136–137). Ricoeur underlines the semantic independence of the text and through that argues that interpretation is not solely a psychological process. The text is involved in symbolic structures, and these structures cannot be reduced to psychological expressions of intentions and desires (Piercey 2016, 541). In this context, Blaustein seems to align more closely with later hermeneutical thinkers than with Dilthey and Schleiermacher. He underlines the independence of psychological laws

from the individual human being. The primary role of interpretation is not to understand the individual human being as an incorporation of general rules that govern psychic life. Nevertheless, to grasp these rules, following Blaustein, one has to treat texts as an expression of hidden subjective laws that need to be interpreted, in order to manifest themselves.

Finally, the last topic I want to discuss here is the idea of the hermeneutic circle. This concept was developed by Heidegger and Gadamer, but it was present in Dilthey's hermeneutics in a preliminary form as well (Grondin 2016). Georgia Warnke holds:

The classical hermeneutic circle refers to the process of understanding a text and describes that process as an activity of understanding its initial parts in terms of anticipating the meaning of the whole of the text and continually revising this anticipation of meaning on the basis of an accumulating understanding of its parts. (Warnke 2019, 245.)

Originally, the idea of the hermeneutic circle was used to describe how the understanding of texts proceeds. However, this idea can be used in a broader context outside the scope of literature. Charles Guignon noticed that “life understood as meaningful in turn makes it possible to see that the hermeneutic circle structures human existence in much the same way that understanding a text has a circular structure” (Guignon 2016, 203). Essentially, the idea of the hermeneutic circle was elevated to the level of methodological self-awareness by Heidegger's hermeneutics for whom: “Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted.” (Heidegger 2001, 194.) This circular logic lies at the heart of the hermeneutic circle, and, at the same time, describes the structure of all understanding. The act of interpretation always presupposes a possible meaning that can be interpreted. In this context, Gadamer holds that “a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something” (2004, 271). The concrete meaning, which emerges within the act of interpretation, is not *a priori* determined, but remains in front of the reader, resembling the vast openness of the horizon extending along the landscape line. According to Gadamer, the hermeneutic circle involves the prejudice of completeness that “implies not only this formal element—that a text should completely express its

meaning—but also that what it says should be the complete truth” (Gadamer 2004, 294).

In Blaustein’s humanistic psychology, the idea of the hermeneutic circle does not appear directly. Blaustein’s framework follows Dilthey’s analysis of the relationship between subjective parts of experience and the wholeness of the psychic nexus. However, Blaustein directly examined the correlation between parts of the psychic and the lived wholeness of experience. For him, general description of lived experiences is deduced from individual lived experiences, while general psychic rules allow one to understand this experience. Furthermore, artefacts or humanistic products serve as parts of the lived experience in correlation with the wholeness of psychological rules, which is called a psychological type. In this sense, one can point to the prototype of the hermeneutic circle in Blaustein’s humanistic psychology. Jussi Backman claims that:

256

[...] the basic dynamic of the hermeneutic circle [...] implies that the context is itself never static but dynamic, always in the state of temporal and historical becoming. Every meaningful experience is approached in terms of a “preunderstanding” consisting of earlier interpretations and articulations of relevant earlier experiences. There is no experience without “presuppositions.” (Backman 2016, 56.)

In section 2, I have shown that the dynamic approach focused on the temporal correlation between parts and the whole is the proper attitude for humanistic psychology. According to Backman, the temporal dynamism of the given context is the essential feature of the hermeneutic circle. Similarly, in Blaustein’s humanistic psychology, general psychic rules and artefacts offer a preunderstanding in the context of individual human being’s experiences.

Interestingly, one can also consider a more nuanced implementation of the idea of the hermeneutic circle, which resembles (to some extent) Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s positions. From this point of view, one can account for Blaustein’s humanistic reality by analogy with the open horizon of interpretation. According to Blaustein, all the artefacts and individuals exist within humanistic reality. Therefore, this reality is the point of reference for all acts of interpretation. Each and every artefact should be interpreted in context

of the greater whole, the latter being humanistic reality itself. One may say that completeness of interpretation is presupposed in the horizon of humanistic reality. Therefore, humanistic reality plays a comparable role as Gadamer's prejudice of completeness. Furthermore, in this sense, interpretation of any artefact is already understood in the context of humanistic reality, which resembles Heidegger's observations about the circularity of all understanding.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to read selected writings by Blaustein in a hermeneutical key. To conclude, Blaustein's humanistic psychology clearly includes three hermeneutical topics. His project of humanistic psychology is aimed at comprehending the wholeness of a person based on the analysis of fragmented psychic flux, navigating the circle of meaning. Furthermore, Blaustein's approach to inner life is based on the method of interpretation. External expressions serve to elucidate the psychological principles guiding individual human beings. However, in this respect, Blaustein diverges from the Schleiermacher–Dilthey tradition and proceeds in the direction explored by the 20th-century hermeneutical scholars. According to Blaustein, the interpretation of human actions performed within humanistic reality is not directed toward understanding individual human beings *per se*, but rather in light of general psychological typologies of lived experiences. Finally, Blaustein's humanistic psychology can be applied to the interpretation of literature and, as one may assume, other cultural artefacts, such as musical compositions, cinematic works, or theatrical performances. In this context, Blaustein's project clearly follows the classical Diltheyan hermeneutic trajectory, integrating the act of interpretation with textual expressions of human consciousness.¹¹ By and large, one can consider Blaustein as a hermeneutical philosopher. Therefore, one can discern that Blaustein's affiliation with the hermeneutical tradition is not

257

11 Indeed, Blaustein analyzed different aesthetic phenomena, e.g., the cinemagoer's experiences or the phenomenon of listening to the radio. However, he did not classify these considerations in the key of humanistic psychology, but instead included his studies in the field of descriptive psychology. For more on this issue, see: Rosińska 2013; Płotka 2024.

merely historical in nature. The presence of Dilthey and Spranger in Blaustein's writings resulted in a theoretical project with an extensive scope of interests, represented by the concept of humanistic reality. In this approach, Blaustein not only adopts the method of interpretation, but also consciously navigates the contours of the hermeneutic circle, while analyzing cultural artefacts.

Finally, it is worth considering the following question: how can we define Blaustein's hermeneutics? According to Rosińska, one can interpret Blaustein's account of media as an example of what she calls "hermeneutical resistance" (Rosińska 2001, 32). This attitude consists in inquiring about the deeper meaning of cultural objects. Blaustein's interest in the experience of media surely represents this attitude. I think that it is justified to hold the same for his humanistic psychology. Blaustein's general approach toward humanistic reality consists in searching for the deeper meaning of cultural artefacts and human lived experiences. Blaustein's theory is ultimately focused on the reconstruction of meaning hidden both in the psychic nexus and in the humanistic reality as such. In this sense, it is closer to hermeneutics than to a descriptive-psychological approach.

258

At the end, it may be worth pushing my reading further by a contextualization of Blaustein's humanistic psychology with regard to the development of today's hermeneutics. Of course, I already determined some affinities with Gadamer and Ricoeur. However, Blaustein's interests both in literature as well as the psychic life encourage one to ask about the role of narrative in the study of humanistic reality. After all, Ricoeur's later conception of narrative identity and his method of narrative understanding (see Ricoeur 1984, 4; 1992, 113–115) seem to be a natural extension of Blaustein's humanistic psychology understood as hermeneutics. It is even more justified to examine these issues given the fact that "[t]he structure of narrativizing is that of the hermeneutic circle" (Keane and Lawn 2016, 201). The concept of the narrative appears not only in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, but also in contemporary psychology, where it is interpreted as a cognitive scheme organizing human cognition (Trzebiński 2002, 6). Given this divide between Ricoeur's hermeneutics and contemporary psychology, the concept of the narrative appears to be a bridge that connects both fields. With this idea in mind, a further examination of Blaustein's humanistic psychology can focus on its relationship to the narrative-oriented

hermeneutics. The concept of the narrative focuses on dynamism in psychic life, allowing us to understand the process of personal development. Blaustein's emphasis on the dynamic approach as being the primary method for analyzing humanistic reality seems to naturally correspond with the concept of the narrative.

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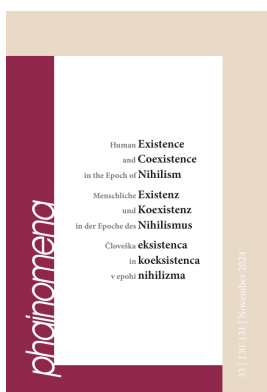
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Phainomena 34 | 132-133 | June 2025

Transitions | Prehajanja

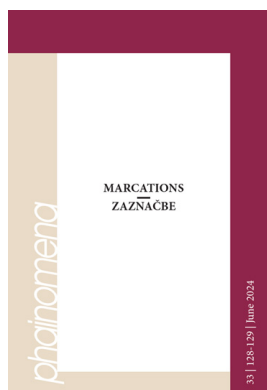
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Phainomena 33 | 130-131 | November 2024

Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism

Damir Barbarić | Jon Stewart | Cathrin Nielsen | Ilia Inishev | Petar Bojanić | Holger Zaborowski | Dragan D. Prole | Susanna Lindberg | Jeff Malpas | Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani | Josef Estermann | Chung-Chi Yu | Alfredo Rocha de la Torre | Jesús Adrián Escudero | Veronica Neri | Žarko Paić | Werner Stegmaier | Adriano Fabris | Dean Komel



Phainomena 33 | 128-129 | June 2024

Marcations | Zaznačbe

Mindaugas Briedis | Irfan Muhammad | Bence Peter Marosan | Sazan Kryeziu | Petar Šegedin | Johannes Vorlauffer | Manca Erzetič | David-Augustin Mândruț | René Dentz | Olena Budnyk | Maxim D. Miroshnichenko | Luka Hrovat | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Bernhard Waldenfels | Damir Barbarić

