

A PLEA FOR ECONOMIC HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract: *Starting from Schleiermacher's theories, who speaks about "special Hermeneutics" as foundation for Universal Hermeneutics, we consider that Economics, in order to progress, must assimilate the term of Economic Hermeneutics as a general theory of the interpretation rules, a meditation on the interpretation activity, with accents on the normative character (Schleiermacher), but also on the phenomenological aspect (Heidegger, Ricoeur, etc). Our scientific approach is intended as a plea for the interpretation of the economic phenomena and processes from an objective-and actual - historical perspective, intransitive, transitive, dogmatic, synchronic and diachronic one. We believe that the foundation of an economic hermeneutical approach can be built on what the Stoics called signification (semeiotike) to which we may add Semantics and Logical Pragmatics. By accepting Semiotics as a foundation for Economic Hermeneutics, we implicitly ought to accept its operational instruments: sign, symbol, symbolic language, semantic trees etc. A modern interpretation theory in economy which we call Economic Hermeneutics, in opposition to the classical theories of Heidegger, Schleiermacher or Gadamer, must, we think, also take over the perspective of Ilya Prigogine's dissipative structures. This is why we shall operate with terms such as: chance, necessity, determinism, nondeterminism, option, unexpected, foresight, visioning. We see it as a pioneering approach in the economic research. Many issues are for us still in the primary research stage and we would regard it as an achievement if others, starting from some of our hypotheses, could develop a better theory.*

Key terms: *Economic Hermeneutics, Pragmatics, Semantics, Economic Semiotics, Syntax*

Short history

For laymen, Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting biblical and literary texts. This leads to the similarity between Hermeneutics and Exegesis. The connection between the two sciences, Hermeneutics and Exegesis, was studied by Fee and Stuart. They emphasize that: "Although the word "hermeneutics" ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis, it is also used in the narrower sense of seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts" (Fee,Stuart 1998: 30). For

Heidegger, however, comprehension is not a result of exegesis but the basis of any interpretation or explanation, as a way of being of the interpreter (Dasein). The catalyst of the messages is the Dasein, namely the thinking, whereas the term truth is based on the Greek *termaletheia* (Clinci 2010) which he translates as “a state of unconcealedness”, of “dis- closure”. As a follower of philosophical Hermeneutics, Heidegger has as a main target of interpretation the transformation of the obscure elements into clear structures, this being the essence of any human activity. For the man, the “Umwelt“ is not essential as such, but important is his understanding and his integration in universality, at a certain historical moment, with his specific features. “This universality of the phenomenon of interpretation is the one which is at the basis of Hermeneutics as science” (Rambu 1998: 4). The nature of universality of Hermeneutics is a premise for the development of the hermeneutic approach in Economics.

Schleiermacher speaks about “special Hermeneutics” as foundation for Universal Hermeneutics, which is, in its turn, materialized into a plurality of forms, of types of Hermeneutics (Schleiermacher 1977: 75).

Nowadays, we can speak about a Hermeneutics of jurisprudence, of arts. Thus, there were developed applications of Hermeneutics in the legal sciences (Legal Hermeneutics), in Arts (Musical Hermeneutics) and so on.

A first conclusion would be that over time Hermeneutics becomes a general theory of the interpretation rules, a reflection on the interpretation activity. Without excluding other approaches, two directions are obvious here: Hermeneutics is an art which establishes clear rules of interpretation (Schleiermacher), a normative character; Hermeneutics is a reflection on the phenomenon of interpretation (Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur and others), phenomenology.

A second conclusion is that in modern approaches, Hermeneutics is no longer the interpretation itself, but the science of conditions, of the object, of the means of interpretation and of practical application. The finality of interpreting is the comprehension, which has contextuality as the main mediator. The interpretation is considered as an assembly of rules which gives arguments for the experience of interpretation and it is adapted to principles and general rules which Hermeneutics includes, theoretically.

The interpretation is intransitive, of acknowledgement, whose finality is self- understanding; transitive, whose finality is to be understood and also normative or dogmatic, such as the theological and the legal one, whose finality is the establishing of the norms of deeds. Hermeneutics is in the same time synchronic, when the prevalence of the search of systematic elements is given, and also diachronic, when the historic character is dominant.

Hermeneutics examines the correct structure of an interpretation, of meaning, of context, the order and the connection between different parts, the identification of critic, rhetoric and logical ways, communication, giving arguments and the theoretic and practical use¹.

A third conclusion is that in order to achieve the leap of economics into knowledge, which is necessary, because this science has to evolve in the same way as the other sciences have done, the hermeneutic step has become a necessity. This intervention would give more substance to the economic discourse and more strictness to the explanation and the building of scientific theories. In Economics, as it happens in social sciences in general, the natural language is prevalent. This language has to be handled with care because the imprecision and the ambiguity can become vicious for the reasoning or for the conclusions. Therefore, Economics, as well as the other sciences, has to follow the stage of studying the language, of creating a symbolic language, which has to be integrated into a modern interpretative theory, based on Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics and Semiotics. Thus, Economic Hermeneutics can be useful. We believe that it is time for the Economic Hermeneutics to build its own principles and rules which will guide the interpretation, on one hand and their methods of application in the interpretation of the economic phenomena, on the other hand. All these principles, concepts and methods will be named the foundation of Economic Hermeneutics.

The Foundation of Economic Hermeneutics – FEH

The classic writers of the Antiquity defined Hermeneutics as the art of interpretation which is used in decoding the message beyond the text. From an economic perspective, this definition can be rephrased in the following way: the interpretation of the messages given by the economic phenomena and processes. A first element which leads us to FEH is the signification. The Stoics named *semeiotike* the doctrine about signification. In the modern philosophy, the term was reintroduced as Semiotics (Băileşteanu 2005).

¹ The development of these ideas can be found in: Băileşteanu, Gheorghe. 2009. *Hermeneutica și experimenul economic*. Timișoara: Mirton; Coordonescu, Ion. *Curs de hermeneutică*. <http://facultate.regielive.ro>; Puente, Mauricio Beuchot. 2007. *Hermeneutica analogică*. București:Paideia; Heidegger,Martin. 1995. *Ontologie. Hermeneutica factității*, Bucuresti: Humanitas; Eco,Umberto. 2007. *Limitele interpretării*. Iași: Polirom; Georgescu, Ștefan. 1978. *Epistemologie*. București: Didactică și Pedagogică.

In our hermeneutic operation we will use Logical Semiotics and Economic Semiotics. Logical Semiotics is a part of the metatheory where people study the language of logic systems from three perspectives: syntactical (logical syntax), semantic (Logical Semantics) and pragmatic (Logic Pragmatics) (Enescu 2003). Economic Semiotics is a part of the metatheory where people study the language of economic systems following two targets: the extent of the use of signs in economic theory and practice and in the building of axiomatic systems, able to assure the logic increase of the economic science. From our point of view, the Economic Semiotics, as the general theory of the signs, of creating and using signs, of the signification of the signs, allows the hermeneutic operation an interpretation in “form” and in “content/ substance”, thus facilitating the logical argumentation, another FEH which we take into account. By symbol, the people go from perceiving to understanding, from feeling something to thinking, from surface to essence, from temporary to permanent. (Wald 1979/42) The Economic Semiotics which is based on symbols creates the premises for the development of Economic Hermeneutics, as a science for the interpretation of the phenomena, for the economic and the theoretic processes. Hermeneutics has obtained special results in the field of arts, of literature and it is absolutely necessary wherever we have symbols, signs, as it happens in the economic research and practice. Interpretation is a toil which consists in the decoding of the hidden meaning of economic texts, a meaning which is behind different symbols. Naturally, the economic science includes a scientific field, its object being the interpretation, namely the economic analysis. But the domain, the methods and the results which are obtained by this are far from satisfying the contemporary requirements of a real hermeneutics, because often in the economic sciences, the symbols, the demonstrated theses are so cryptic that it is necessary to have their scientific decline, but not based on common thinking, intuition or chance. As P. Botezatu shows there are several levels of logical understanding of scientific texts, which we can meet in economic sciences (Botezatu 1997: 120): extensional or formal understanding, at the level of symbols only; systematical or contextual understanding, when a criterion of relativity has to be introduced; structural understanding, which follows the elements of the analyzed system, the correlations between them and the meanings which result; intentional understanding, where the notions are interpreted through the prism of the used arguments, abyssal or hidden understanding which takes into consideration the psychic aspects of the subject.

Semantics and Hermeneutics and not the economic analysis can, we say, answer a certain interpretative requirement of the subject, according to Petre Botezatu’s vision. If we accept Semantics as a basis for an Economic

Hermeneutics, we will implicitly accept FEH and the tools it uses, such as: signs- symbols, symbolic tree, semantic trees.

Language is a system of signs. The sign has three dimensions: the sign for another sign with whom it associates; the sign for the object which it signifies; a sign for a person who uses it. Thus, we have the necessity for Semiotics as a general science for the system of signs and their laws of functioning. Semiotics, in its turn is divided in: syntax: the theory of the relations between the signs; Semantics: the research of the relations between the signs and the objects they refer to; Pragmatics: the study of the signs reported to the subject who uses the language. Generally and fairly, we have a difference between the signal, which has a communicative purpose and therefore it is studied by the theory of information and the sign-symbol, which replaces something (a signifier which is precisely established), which has a role of signification and it is studied by Semiotics. Taking into account the structural- semantic features, Ch. Peirce, in the late 19th century, classifies the signs in: icons, which are characterized by an exterior, a topologic or a geometric resemblance with the signified objects, with the objects they stand for (for instance, a photograph); indexes, which show the signified objects through the means of some relations of spatial, temporal or causative contingency with the designated objects (for instance, the smoke which indicates the presence of fire); symbols, which do not have anything in common with the essence or the shape of the signified objects (scientific language) (Eco 1982: 19).

The language is a system of signs, controlled by certain rules for the consolidation, the processing and the transmission of information. The natural language is the common language, the spoken one, while the symbolical language is the language which uses symbols.

The semantic trees have the role of organizing the phenomena and the economic processes into a logical structure. A development of this matter can be found in the following book: Economic Semiotics (Băileşteanu 2005: 115- 137).

Another foundation of Economic Hermeneutics is considered to be the Logical Economy, with all the elements used by it: judgment, logical reasoning, tautology, validity, consistence, axioms, and axiomatic systems².

We intent to have a hermeneutic intervention from the perspective of dissipative structures according to Ilya Prigogine's approach³, a reason for

² Additional information on this subject can be found in Băileşteanu, Gheorghe. 2002. *Logică economică*. Timişoara: Mirton.

which we will use other FEH, such as: chance, necessity, determination, indetermination, unexpected, option. Regarding the interpretation of the future, we choose the concepts of foresight and visioning. In such a vision, the projection of the future (the prospective intervention) is done regarding the redesigned present (which gives a certain tendency), the chosen option and the successful critical forces which are supposed to appear in the future. Even if there is only one future, there are several future cycles. By foresight we interpret or read the future from the perspective of present tendencies, regarding things from present to the future. The visioning is an approach from the future to the present, by options and cyclical corrections which are imposed by the unpredictable and by realities.

From a synthetic approach, these would be the main fundamentals of an Economic Hermeneutics. To these, others are added, which are going to be taken into account and developed in the present thesis.

Conclusions

Our attempt to put the basis of an Economic hermeneutics began from the realization that in Economics, in general in the social sciences, the natural language is prevalent and it has to be handled with care because the imprecision and the ambiguity can become vicious for the human reasoning or for conclusions. Therefore, Economics, as well as the other sciences, has to follow the stage of studying the language, of creating a symbolic language, able to give a complex and a coherent interpretation of the processes and the phenomena. For achieving this target, an Economic Hermeneutics is necessary. This has to be based on other fundamentals than on analysis, but mostly on Semiotics. This happens, because Semiotics is both a science and a tool for each science and it helps them to analyze their language and to use it for various axiomatic constructions. The logical transformation of the economic sciences allows the rebuilding of the theories as a deductive system, with undefined terms and initial sentences, which will later assure the deduction of other sentences with their corresponding theorems.

³ Ilya Prigogine's theory is presented by Olteanu, Ion. 1982. *Dialoguri despre viitor*. București: Politică, and further developed in Băileșteanu, Gheorghe, Burz, Răzvan. 2008. *Viitorul, mari provocări și megatendințe*. Timișoara: Mirton.

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