

## **The Hermeneutical Circle or the Hermeneutical Spiral?**

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### **Abstract**

The problem of the hermeneutical circle is one of the contentious issues in philosophical hermeneutics. This paper, begins with focusing on the question as to whether what hermeneutists mean by a hermeneutical circle is in fact a real circle with no analogical sense involved. Recognizing that this problem is not confined to the relation between part and whole, this study confines itself to explore the problem of the hermeneutical circle with regard to the circularity between part and whole in a sentence. I will argue that, as far as the interdependence between part and whole of a sentence is concerned, there is no real circularity between them. This will be followed by scrutinizing the source of such a misunderstanding, i.e., the circular interdependence between understanding the part and the whole of a sentence. I will present my analysis through a critical reading of two contemporary hermeneutists, Eric Donald Hirsch and Graeme Nicholson, even though both are on the right track in questioning the existence of such a circle in the first place. The argument presented could apply to contexts well beyond that of the circularity between part and whole in a sentence.

**Keywords:** Philosophical Hermeneutics, Hermeneutical Circle, Sentence, Part and Whole, Frederick Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Eric Hirsch, Graeme Nicholson.

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### **Introduction**

When examining the works of scholars tackling the issue of circularity in understanding – with or without mentioning the term ‘hermeneutical circle’ – one realizes that their understanding of circularity, in terms of its reality, is not the same. For some, what is described as a circle is precisely a real circle and there is no analogical sense involved in calling the ‘hermeneutical circle’ a circle. For others, however, no real circle is involved when there is a mention of circularity. In this paper, I will first briefly discuss these two positions so as to clarify the distinctions between them. Then, by focusing on the problem of the hermeneutical circle in terms of the interdependence of the parts and the whole of a sentence, I will demonstrate why the circular dependence of the part and the whole in a text does not exist, or is illusory. I will present my analysis through a critical reading of two contemporary hermeneutists, Eric Donald Hirsch and Graeme Nicholson, even though both are on the right track in questioning the existence of such a circle at all. The argument presented could apply to contexts well beyond that of the circularity between part and whole in a sentence.

### **The Hermeneutical Circle: The Pre-Heideggerian Sense**

The issue of circularity in the process of understanding, or the hermeneutical circle, is

restricted neither to a text nor to the interdependence between part and whole. However, the discussion of circularity between parts and whole goes back to ancient times as far as we are aware. Referring to the principle of interdependence of understanding of the whole and the detail, Gadamer writes: "This principle stems from ancient rhetoric, and modern hermeneutics has transferred to it the art of understanding [1]." It is a true that not every one who has tackled this issue necessarily uses the term ‘hermeneutical circle’, for the classical formulation of the hermeneutical circle got its form for the first time in Johann Gustav Droysen’s work, and this form was repeated by other writers. It consists in the rule that “the whole can be understood only through its parts, but the parts can be understood only through the whole [2]."

Many scholars who have written about circularity in the process of understanding, do not explicitly indicate whether they use circularity in the real sense or merely in an analogical one. If that is the case, how can one find out whether or not a given thinker takes the hermeneutical circle as a real circle? I suggest that the way in which a hermeneut responds or attempts to resolve the problem of the hermeneutical circle helps in determining the degree of reality that he ascribes to the circle. If, for example, he talks about ‘breaking’ the circle, it implies that he holds the circle to be real.

Here, I briefly refer to few scholars from both sides, particularly with two aims: First, I intend to show that while the hermeneutical circle is real for some, for others it is not, serving at best as an apparent circle. Second, I hope to emphasize the importance of the circle by showing that the hermeneutical circle, in the sense of interdependence of part and whole, is still addressed in the post- Heideggerian era despite the new and peculiar sense it assumes in Heidegger's work [3].

The conception of circularity emerges in Wilhelm von Humboldt's hermeneutics in relation to the task of the historian. Although the term 'hermeneutical circle' had not been coined at that stage, Humboldt's idea of interdependent roles between individual phenomena and the whole in an interpretation offered by a historian has a similar sense. To put it another way, the historian interprets parts on the basis of the including whole while the whole is understandable through the parts. Explaining Humboldt's opinion, Kurt Muller Vollmer points out that "this apparent paradox is always overcome by the historian, because he begins his work with an intuition of the invisible coherence, which unites the individual event [4]." Overcoming the circle by invoking intuition indicates that for Humboldt the circle seems to be real.

Philip August Boeck raises the notion of circularity in relation to criticism. "Obviously,"

he indicates, "criticism shares in the *logical circle* [emphasis mine], which arises in the interpretive task: the single must be judged on the basis of the including whole, and this whole in turn on the basis of the single part [5]." He also points out that the circle in the interpretative task "can never be resolved." Talking about the circle as "logical circle" and also speaking so strictly of "never being resolved" are two indications that for Boeck the circle is a real one.

Looking at contemporary authors, Richard Palmer speaks of a 'leap' into the hermeneutical circle, thus testifying that he considers the circle a real one. He writes: "Is the concept of the hermeneutical circle invalid? No; rather we must say that logic can not fully account for the workings of understanding. Somehow, a kind of 'leap' into the hermeneutical circle occurs and we understand the whole and the part together [6]." These, then, are three examples of scholars for whom, the circle seems to be real. Indeed, that is why all three are focused on offering ways of getting out of the circle, which is allegedly at work in the process of understanding.

Bernard Lonergan seems to put forward a similar argument:

"Moreover, it is understanding that surmounts the hermeneutical circle. The meaning of a text is an intentional entity. It is a unity that is unfolded through parts, sections, chapters, paragraphs, sentences, words. We can grasp the unity, the

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whole, only through the parts. At the same time, the parts are determined in their meaning by the whole which each part partially reveals. Such is the hermeneutical circle. Logically, it is a circle. But coming to understand is not a logical deduction. It is a self-correcting process of learning that spirals into the meaning of the whole by using each new part to fill out and qualify and correct the understanding reached in reading the earlier parts [7]."

On the contrary, to most hermeneuts, the hermeneutical circle is not really a circle. Schleiermacher gives a great deal of attention to the hermeneutical circle specifically in terms of the relation between parts and whole. For Schleiermacher, circularity is operative on two sides: objective and subjective. Regarding the objective side he writes: "Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can be understood only out of the whole to which it belongs and vice versa." The word 'apparent', shows that in Schleiermacher's understanding of the circle, no real circle is involved. By 'part' or 'whole', he does not refer merely to a part or the whole of a sentence, rather, the rule is applicable to parts and the whole of a total work. A single word finds its meaning in light of the sentence, which finds its meaning in light of the whole work, which finds its meaning in light of other works of the same author, which finds their meaning in light of the literary genre or even literature as a whole. The application of this dialectical elaboration leads

Schleiermacher to consider the task of reading and understanding as an unlimited one. For him, this movement is inevitable because "nothing that needs interpretation can be understood at once [8]." In fact, he writes that "Only in the case of insignificant texts are we satisfied with what we understand on first reading [9]."

According to Schleiermacher, not just any sort of circularity, but a circularity not independent of whole and part, holds true on the subjective side: "To put oneself in the position of an author means to follow through with this relationship between the whole and the parts [10]." Gadamer criticizes Schleiermacher on both the objective and subjective accounts of the hermeneutical circle [11].

### **Heidegger and Gadamer on the Hermeneutical Circle**

Gadamer maintains that the hermeneutical circle *regains* the right direction in Heidegger – that is, its content-oriented meaning. He also observes that the hermeneutical circle gains a distinctly new meaning in Heidegger, marking a turning point. For Heidegger, the hermeneutical circle does not mean going back and forth between parts and whole in a text. Therefore, the circle is no longer primarily used to describe understanding of a text, rather it becomes a fundamental principle of man's understanding of his own nature and situation. To put it differently, "understanding, and with it the hermeneutical circle, becomes a

condition for the possibility of human experience and inquiry [12]." Heidegger writes: "What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. The circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential fore-structure of *Dasein* [13]."

In explaining Heidegger's standpoint, Gadamer points out that "the circle of whole and part is not dissolved in perfect understanding but, on the contrary, is most fully realized [14]." It seems that Gadamer tries to link the old meaning of the hermeneutical circle with the new one offered by Heidegger. If this were not the case, why would Gadamer use 'whole' and 'part', in the quote immediately above, to describe Heidegger's viewpoint on the hermeneutical circle despite the fact that Heidegger, himself, does not describe the circle on the basis of whole and part?

Heidegger states that the circle "is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle, which is merely tolerated [15]." In his book *Martin Heidegger*, John Macquarie notes that the hermeneutical circle "is not to be understood like the circular reasoning that begs the question." It is rather "a 'relatedness backward and forward' that is present in every act of interpretation [16]." On this account, it can be said that for Heidegger, the circle is not a real one. Gadamer, meanwhile, considers his own view of the hermeneutical circle to be the same as

Heidegger's, though this has been disputed [17].

One should not conclude, especially because of his criticism of Schleiermacher, that Gadamer rejects any basis for the hermeneutical circle in the sense of an interdependence of parts and the whole. For example, on numerous occasions, Gadamer explicitly accepts some sort of circularity between the parts and the whole. Explaining Schleiermacher's view of the hermeneutical circle, he writes: "This is familiar to us from learning foreign languages. We learn that we can only try to understand the parts of a sentence in their linguistic meaning when we have parsed or construed the sentence. But, the process of parsing is itself guided by an expectation of meaning arising from the preceding context [18]."

To summarize so far, we have seen that for scholars such as Humboldt, Boeck, Palmer and Lonergan, the hermeneutical circle seems to be a vicious circle. In contrast, for some other scholars such as Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer, there is no real circularity in the process of understanding.

In explaining the two views on the existence of the circle up to this point, I have dealt with circularity in understanding in general and not specifically with respect to part and whole, whether in a sentence or otherwise. In the rest of this paper, I will focus on the hermeneutical circle in the sense of mutual interdependence of the parts and the whole of a sentence. I will offer my argument through a critical reading of

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the hermeneutical circle as held by two contemporary hermeneuts, Eric Donald Hirsch and Graeme Nicholson.

#### **Hirsch and Nicholson's Views**

Despite serious disagreement over certain focal issues concerning the decidability or undecidability of interpretation – that is, the openness of the text to different readings – Nicholson and Hirsch, two prominent contemporary hermeneuts, make a similar point about the hermeneutical circle. Their positions are more critical of the circle than those of Schleiermacher, who sees an apparent circle in understanding the part and the whole. They question whether something circular, even *apparently* circular, is involved in so far as part and whole are concerned.

Hirsch writes: "[The hermeneutical circle] clouds some of the process of understanding in unnecessary paradox. It is true that an idea of the whole controls, connects and unifies our understanding of parts. It is also true that the idea of the whole must arise from an encounter with parts. But this encounter could not occur if the parts did not have an autonomy capable of suggesting a certain kind of whole in the first place. ... [T]he hermeneutic circle is less mysterious and paradoxical than many in the German hermeneutical tradition have made it out to be [19]."

Having explained Schleiermacher's

understanding of the circle, Nicholson, who is more accepting of the German tradition than Hirsch, offers his point of view in this way: "What concerns me is the question whether this should be described as a circle. There is a progressiveness in the process of our understanding that is really not circular at all. What one starts from is actually a sequence of words. Is it the case that each one needs the context of the whole sentence to be understood? I think not. ... It is not the case that the mere understanding of the sentence offers a basis for the finer interpretation of each part [20]."

We see that both Hirsch and Nicholson maintain that circularity between part and whole, as generally set forth by hermeneuts, is somewhat exaggerated. The relation between part and whole does not produce any paradox, not even an apparent paradox. As Nicholson puts it, "We can start from a sequence of words" which could as parts, in Hirsch's sense, "have an autonomy capable of suggesting a certain kind of whole."

We might explain Hirsch and Nicholson's position in another way on the basis of the word 'only' in the formula. If the hermeneutical circle means that "the whole can be understood *only* through its parts, but the parts can be understood *only* through the whole," the formulations of both Nicholson and Hirsch would find the second 'only' excessive. For both of them, parts can be, and are, understood independently of the whole – and,

consequently, there is no circularity involved in understanding.

It is worth mentioning that, by referring to the aforementioned definitions, we can see that sometimes the word 'only' is missing even in those cases where the writer is defending a real circularity between part and whole. As a matter of fact, if either one of the 'only' is removed from the formula, there remains no circularity between part and whole.

This last point provides a good place to suggest my own understanding of the part-whole hermeneutical circle. Like Nicholson and Hirsch, I am primarily concerned here with the relation between the parts and the whole of a sentence. Overall, I think that both are correct in asserting that there is no circle involved in the so-called interdependence of part and whole. Nonetheless, in my view there are two particular problems with the argument they offer. Firstly, their suggestion is not adequate for, or applicable to, all kinds of sentences. Secondly, although for the most part, we can start from parts without any involvement in circularity, the whole *does* have some sort of impact on any understanding of the part after the first one. I will try to explain my stance on this matter as clearly as I can.

### **A Key Source of Confusion**

In the discussion so far, we have frequently used phrases such as 'the hermeneutical circle between

part and whole' and 'interdependence between part and whole'. These expressions, which are used in hermeneutics books to mark the core issue of the hermeneutical circle in its classical form, can be quite misleading. Why? Because there is no interdependence between 'part' and 'whole' given that a part is completely independent of the whole. If there is an interdependence, as most hermeneuts believe, it is between '*understanding* a part' and '*understanding* the whole,' and *not* between 'part' and 'whole'. This point is not something hidden even to students of hermeneutics, much less to hermeneuts themselves. However, the frequent use of 'part' and 'whole' instead of 'understanding the part' and 'understanding the whole' has engendered the misleading idea that there is a back and forth movement between part and whole in a circular way. This point can be better explained through several examples.

To clarify the matter, I intentionally choose, as a first example, the following sentence, which contains an equivocal word: 'John was walking on the bank of the river'. When we try to understand the sentence, at least one meaning for each word occurs to us, as Hirsch and Nicholson explain. However, a word like 'bank' can be understood in multiple ways. When we look at the whole sentence we realize that a financial institution is not intended, but that 'bank' designates 'the raised earthly border of a body of water'. What route did we follow to arrive at such a conclusion regarding the word

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'bank'? Did we go from 'bank' to the whole sentence, and then from the whole sentence to the same 'bank'? Surely not! Instead, we began by granting that 'bank' has at least two different meanings, and referred to the whole in the light of this understanding. However, we then return to an understanding of 'bank' with one meaning and *not* to a continued understanding of 'bank' with two possible meanings. Given that the so-called circularity is really a relationship between 'understanding the part' and 'understanding the whole', there is no circularity here at all. This is not because we understood the parts independently of the whole sentence. To be sure, we remained unclear between the two possible meanings of 'bank' until we considered the whole. There is no circularity because we did not return to the same understanding of the part as we had initially – that is, prior to reference to the whole.

From latter above example, then, it can be concluded that, first, using the word 'back and forth' in describing the part-whole circle is *not* an exact description of the process because we do not return to the point of departure (with one exceptional case to be alluded to). The second conclusion we may draw is that it is not true to say that parts can always be understood independently of the whole. At first sight, a sentence such as 'I spring in the spring like a spring in spring' could prove quite confusing.

After long deliberation, we realize that the sentence means: 'I jump in the source of water like a coil in the season of spring'. If we follow our back and forth intellectual movement in understanding such a sentence, we notice that upon each deliberation we have a better understanding of the sentence than we did previously, and so on until we figure out the meaning. Thus, the process of understanding in such a sentence would be better described as a 'hermeneutical spiral' rather than a 'hermeneutical circle'. Here, the term 'spiral' serves as a good descriptor since the process of understanding is neither circular nor linear. It is not circular because, upon moving from part to the whole, we do not return to the same understanding of the part as before our departure. And it is not linear because we do return to the part in one respect or another, although not to the exact point of departure. Only if someone cannot figure out at all what a sentence means does he return to its starting point and is entrapped in a real circle. But such a circle would be best described as 'the circle of not understanding' rather than 'the circle of understanding'.

The question arises here as to whether the above explanation holds true concerning sentences, which do not contain any ambiguous words. I shall try to answer this question on the basis of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics – that is, in a way that will not necessarily be acceptable



to a Gadamerian thinker like Nicholson. I draw on two points in particular from Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. The first, quoted above, is most helpful and profound: "Nothing that needs interpretation can be understood at once." The second is Schleiermacher's belief that "interpretation does not serve to 'indicate the true understanding of a passage'. Rather, it is expressly intended to remove obscurities that hinder the student from achieving 'full understanding [21]". Before responding to the question raised at the beginning of the paragraph, I have to add a third point. There are some stages in our understanding, which happen so quickly that we think they happen all at once when, in fact, they happen through a specific process, as will be explained in the example below. Considering these three points, we may say that interpretation – in the sense of "full understanding" of a sentence not containing any ambiguous words – does not happen all at once, so that moving between "understanding the part" and "understanding the whole" is still at work. Nonetheless, that is not the case for "true understanding." For example, to have a true understanding of the sentence, "John is going to school," it is enough, as Hirsch and Nicholson have suggested, to understand each word in order to understand the sentence. As such, the whole is understood through the parts and not vice versa. For full understanding, however, there is again a movement from 'understanding

the whole' to 'understanding the part'. This is because, at our initial level of understanding of 'John', we do not yet know anything specific about him whereas after referring to the whole sentence and then referring back to the part, we now know that John: 1.) is capable of moving, and 2.) has some relation with school and so on. Thus, in terms of full understanding – that is, understanding as much as possible – our subsequent understanding of the part is different from the initial one. Accordingly, full understanding of the part, as opposed to true understanding of the part, is not independent of the whole, even when the sentence does not include an ambiguous or equivocal word.

On this account, Gadamer's assertion with respect to Schleiermacher's hermeneutical circle, that "it is always in this movement that we learn to understand an unfamiliar meaning, a foreign language or a strange past [22]," is not fully correct, if he means that in other cases, like when we read a text in our own language, the movement is not at work. For full understanding, as Schleiermacher uses the term, or more complete understanding, the movement is still at work for almost any sentence, although we may remain oblivious to it because it happens so quickly.

In a nutshell, for both true and full understanding of a sentence, all or some of whose words are ambiguous, and also for full understanding of the sentence whose words are

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unambiguous, a finite or infinite (if one sees the task of full understanding as unattainable) hermeneutical *spiral* is at work.

As far as I am aware, none of the previous descriptions of the circle are in full agreement with what I have set forth here. Nonetheless, certain points from various scholars are worth serious consideration and may encourage further reflection on what has up to now been called 'the hermeneutical circle'. These include Boeck's notion of "new and ever new circles," [23] Gadamer's explanation of Schleiermacher's view as involving a "constant expanding of the circle," [24] and Gadamer's own suggestion that "the movement of understanding always runs from whole to part and back to whole. The task is to *expand in concentric circles* [italics mine] the unity of the understood meaning [25]." In all these descriptions, one can see the trace of the notion of spiral.

To conclude, we can assert that contrary to what is commonly suggested – that there is at the very least an *apparent* circle in so-called part-whole circle – there is no circle at all when it comes to understanding the part and the whole of a sentence. Rather, there is, in Nicholson's words, a "progressiveness in the process of our understanding" [26] in the understanding of the part and the understanding of the whole that can best be described, perhaps, as a *finite spiral*. Real circularity rarely occurs, and in those exceptional cases

when it does, it is a sign of the utter lack of success in figuring out what a sentence means, despite going back and forth between the part and the whole. The attempt to understand a Chinese sentence for someone who knows absolutely nothing about Chinese would constitute a case of 'real circularity' which in fact occurs in the process of not understanding. A similar argument questioning the existence of the hermeneutical circle can be offered concerning the relationship between understanding any part and whole, for example in literary works or in the examination of various histories. The above analysis, then, is not confined merely to understanding of the parts and the whole of sentences, and suggests that in other fields as well, the so-called 'hermeneutical circle' may in fact be more illusory than real.

### **References**

- [1] Hans-Georg Gadamer (2000), *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company), 263.
- [2] Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed (2000), *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company), 50.
- [3] As further evidence for the importance of the hermeneutical circle in its classical sense it is worth mentioning that Josef Bleicher, in

his book *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy, and Critique* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) elaborates the difference between the three strands of hermeneutics by reference to the conceptions of the relationship between whole and part.

[4] Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, 16.

[5] Ibid., 144.

[6] Richard Palmer (1969), *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), 88.

[7] Bernard Lonergan (1990), *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 159. As we see, Lonergan makes use of the notion of 'spiral'. His analysis differs, however, from what I will offer in the last part of this article.

[8] Quoted in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 192.

[9] Ibid., 84.

[10] Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, 84.

[11] In his article "On the Circle of Understanding," Gadamer sets the subjective side completely aside because "when we try to understand a text, we do not place ourselves in the author's inner state; rather, if one wants to speak of 'placing oneself', we place ourselves in his point of view. ... [T]he task of interpretation ... is not a mysterious communication of souls, but rather a

participation in shared meaning." (Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Circle of Understanding" in *Hermeneutics Versus Science: Three German views*, eds. John Connolly and Thomas Keutner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 69-70). He evaluates the objective side of the circle in relation to the subjective side as "equally wide of the mark" (Ibid.). Gadamer makes a similar point in *Truth and Method* and follows this with criticism of Schleiermacher's view of the objective side of the circle, contending that it "does not get to the heart of the matter" (*Truth and Method*, 255).

[12] David Couzens Hoy (1978), *The critical circle: literature, history, and philosophical hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press), vii.

[13] Martin Heidegger (1962), *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row), 195.

[14] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 293.

[15] Ibid.

[16] John Macquarie (1968), *Martin Heidegger* (Richmond: John Knox Press), 10.

[17] Graeme Nicholson writes: "We have seen that Heidegger's hermeneutical circle resulted from the primacy of *Verstehen*, projection, over *Auslegung*, interpretation. But when we look at Gadamer's account, we find out that what is operative in his argument is not

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precisely the influence of projection upon interpretation, but rather the influence of historical finitude upon the projection." Nicholson follows the above objection with the noteworthy assertion that "Gadamer's circle exists only in the cases where a scholar is interpreting the formative materials of his own tradition"; (Graeme Nicholson, *Seeing and Reading* ( Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press Inc. 1984), 202.

[18] Gadamer "Circle of Understanding," 79.

[19] Eric Donald Hirsch (1967), *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven:Yale University Press),77-8.

[20] Nicholson, *Seeing and Reading*, 169-70.

[21] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 183.

[22] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 183.

[23] Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, 147.

[24] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 190.

[25] Gadamer, "Circle of Understanding," 68.

[26] Nicholson, *Seeing and Reading*, 169.

## دور هرمنوتیکی یا ماریچ هرمنوتیکی؟

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این مقاله که کاوشی است در حقیقت "دور هرمنوتیکی" با این پرسش آغاز می‌شود که آیا مراد علمای هرمنوتیک از «دور» یک دور واقعی است یا خیر؟ دغدغه اصلی این نوشتار منعطف به یکی از انواع دورهرمنوتیکی یعنی دور میان فهم جزء و کل یک جمله و در پی پاسخ به این پرسش است که آیا اساساً فهم جزء و فهم کل یک جمله مستلزم دور است؟ در پاسخ، ابتدا بر این مطلب استدلال شده است که چرا بر خلاف رای بسیاری از دانشمندان هرمنوتیک اساساً چنین دوری وجود ندارد و سپس نشان داده شده است که منشأ این گمان از کجا نشئت می‌گیرد. در این تحلیل، توجه ویژه‌ای به نقد آرای دو تن از دانشمندان معاصر هرمنوتیک، اریک هرش و گرامه نیکولسون شده است گرچه هیچ‌کدام دور هرمنوتیکی را یک دور حقیقی نمی‌دانند.

واژگان کلیدی: هرمنوتیک فلسفی، دور هرمنوتیکی، فردریک شلایرماخر، مارتین هایدگر، هانس گئورگ گادامر، اریک هرش، گرامه نیکولسون، جمله، جزء و کل.

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