

The Role of Preunderstanding

The term *preunderstanding* describes the phenomenon of perspective which the observer of any event brings to its meaning. This term is chosen because it is comprehensive and includes within its scope a number of other words and phrases which have a similar but on occasion slightly different and more specific and limited meaning. *Preunderstanding* may be defined as *a body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality or any aspect of it.*

Whenever anyone attempts to “hear” what the text has to say, that person inevitably hears and identifies the sounds from within a prior structure of experiences or preunderstanding. To doubt one’s own capacity to be free from preunderstanding which necessarily colors the perceptions and interpretations of reality is the beginning of epistemological wisdom...

(Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction by Duncan S. Ferguson, Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986, 6)